

The Infallible Word of God

Sermons on the Truth of the Word of God

C.H. Spurgeon

1834-1892

THE INFALLIBILITY OF SCRIPTURE

by C. H. SPURGEON

“The mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.”—Isaiah 1:20

WHAT Isaiah said was, therefore, spoken by Jehovah. It was audibly the utterance of a man; but, really, it was the utterance of the Lord himself. The lips which delivered the words were those of Isaiah, but yet it was the very truth that “The mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.” All Scripture, being inspired of the Spirit, is spoken by the mouth of God. However this sacred Book may be treated nowadays, it was not treated contemptuously, nor negligently, nor questioningly by the Lord Jesus Christ, our Master and Lord. It is noteworthy how he revered the written Word. The Spirit of God rested upon him personally, without measure, and he could speak out of his own mind the revelation of God, and yet he continually quoted the law and the prophets, and the Psalms; and always he treated the sacred writings with intense reverence, strongly in contrast with the irreverence of “modern thought.” I am sure, brethren, we cannot be wrong in imitating the example of our divine Lord in our reverence for that Scripture, which cannot be broken. I say, if he, the anointed of the Spirit, and able to speak himself as God’s mouth, yet quoted the sacred writings, and used the holy Book in his teachings, how much more should we, who have no spirit of prophecy resting upon us, and are not able to speak new revelations, come back to the law and to the testimony, and value every single word which “The mouth of the Lord hath spoken”? The like valuation of the Word of the Lord is seen in our Lord’s apostles; for they treated the ancient Scriptures as supreme in authority, and supported their statements with passages from Holy Writ. The utmost degree of deference and homage is paid to the Old Testament by the writers of the New. We never find an apostle raising a question about the degree of inspiration in this book or that. No disciple of Jesus questions the authority of the books of Moses, or of the prophets. If you want to cavil or suspect, you find no sympathy in the teaching of Jesus, or any one of his apostles. The New Testament writers sit reverently down before the Old Testament and receive God’s words as such, without any question whatever. You and I belong to a school which will continue to do the same, let others adapt what behaviour they please. As for us and for our house, this priceless Book shall remain the standard of our faith and the ground of our hope so long as we live. Others may choose what gods they will, and follow what authorities they prefer; but, as for us, the glorious Jehovah is our God, and we believe concerning each doctrine of the entire Bible, that “The mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.”

I. Coming closely, then, to our text, “The mouth of the Lord hath spoken it,” our first head shall be—THIS IS OUR WARRANT FOR TEACHING SCRIPTURAL TRUTH. We preach because “The mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.” It would not be worth our while to speak what Isaiah had spoken, if in it there was nothing more than Isaiah’s thought; neither should we care to meditate hour after hour upon the writings of Paul, if there was nothing more than Paul in them. We feel no imperative call to expound and to enforce what has been spoken by men; but, since “The mouth of the Lord hath spoken it,” it is woe unto us if we preach not the gospel! We come to you with, “Thus saith the Lord,” and we should have no justifiable motive for preaching our lives away, if we have not this message.

The true preacher, the man whom God has commissioned, delivers his message *with awe and trembling*, because “The mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.” He bears the burden of the Lord and bows under it. Ours is no trifling theme, but one which moves our whole soul. They called George Fox a Quaker, because when he spoke he would quake exceedingly through the force of the truth which he so thoroughly apprehended. Perhaps, if you and I had a clearer sight and a closer grip of God’s Word, and felt more of its majesty, we should quake also. Martin Luther, who never feared the face of man, yet declared that when he stood up to preach he often felt his knees knock together under a sense of his great responsibility. Woe unto us if we dare to speak the Word of the Lord with less than our whole heart, and soul, and strength! Woe unto us if we handle the Word as if it were an occasion for display! If it were our own word, we might be studious of the graces of oratory; but if it be God’s Word, we cannot afford to think of ourselves; we are bound to speak it, “not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect.” If we reverence the Word, it will not occur to us that we can improve upon it by our own skill in language. Oh, it were far better to break stones on the road than to be a preacher, unless one had God’s Holy Spirit to sustain him; for our charge is solemn and our burden is heavy. The heart and soul of the man who speaks for God will know no ease, for he hears in his ears that warning admonition: “If the watchman warn them not they shall perish; but their blood will I require at the watchman’s hands.” If we were commissioned to repeat the language of a king, we should be bound to do it decorously lest the king suffer damage; but if we rehearse the revelation of God, a profound awe should take hold upon us, and a godly fear lest we mar the message of God in the telling of it. No work is so important or honourable as the proclamation of the gospel of our Lord Jesus, and for that very reason it is weighted with a responsibility so solemn that none may venture upon it lightly, nor proceed in it without an overwhelming sense of his need of great grace to perform his office aright. We live under intense pressure who preach a gospel of which we can assuredly say, “The mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.” We live rather in eternity than in time; we speak to you as though we saw the great white throne and the divine Judge before whom we must give in our account, not only for what we say, but for how we say it.

Dear brethren, because the mouth of the Lord hath spoken the truth of God, we therefore endeavour to preach it with *absolute fidelity*. We repeat the Word as a child repeats his lesson. It is not ours to correct the divine revelation, but simply to echo it. I do not take it to be my office to bring you new and original thoughts of my own; but rather to say, “The word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father’s which sent me.” Believing that “The mouth of the Lord hath spoken it,” it is my duty to repeat it to you as correctly as I can after having heard it and felt it in my own soul. It is not mine to amend or adapt the gospel. What! Shall we attempt to improve upon what God has revealed? The Infinitely Wise—is he to be corrected by creatures of a day? Is the infallible revelation of the infallible Jehovah to be shaped, moderated, and toned down to the fashions and fancies of the hour? God forgive us if we have ever altered his Word unwittingly; wittingly we have not done so, nor will we. His children sit at his feet and receive of his words, and then they rise up in the power of his Spirit to publish far and near the Word which the Lord has given. “He that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully,” is the Lord’s injunction to

us. If we could abide with the Father, according to our measure, after the manner of the Lord Jesus, and then come forth from communion with him to tell what he has taught us in his Word, we should be accepted of the Lord as preachers, and accepted also of his living people far more than if we were to dive into the profound depths of science, or rise to the loftiest flights of rhetoric. What is the chaff to the wheat! What are man's discoveries to the teachings of the Lord! "The mouth of the Lord hath spoken it"; therefore, O man of God, add not to his words lest he add to thee the plagues which are written in his Book, and take not from them, lest he take thy name out of the Book of Life!

Again, dear friends, as "The mouth of the Lord hath spoken it," we speak the divine truth with *courage and full assurance*. Modesty is a virtue; but hesitancy when we are speaking for the Lord is a great fault. If an ambassador sent by a great king to represent his majesty at a foreign court, should forget his office and only think of himself, he might be so humble as to lower the dignity of his prince, so timid as to betray his country's honour. He is bound to remember not so much what he is in himself, but whom he represents; therefore, he must speak boldly and with the dignity which befits his office and the court he represents. It was the custom with certain Oriental despots to require ambassadors of foreign powers to lie in the dust before them. Some Europeans, for the sake of trade interests, submitted to the degrading ceremony; but when it was demanded of the representative of England, he scorned thus to lower his country. God forbid that he who speaks for God should dishonour the King of kings by a pliant subservience. We preach not the gospel by your leave; we do not ask tolerance, not court applause. We preach Christ crucified, and we speak boldly as we ought to speak, because it is God's Word, and not our own. We are accused of dogmatism; but we are bound to dogmatize when we repeat that which the mouth of the Lord hath spoken. We cannot use "ifs" and "buts," for we are dealing with God's "shalls" and "wills." If he says it is so, it is so; and there is an end of it. Controversy ceases when Jehovah speaks.

Those who fling aside our Master's authority may very well reject our testimony: we are content they should do so. But, if we speak that which the mouth of the Lord hath spoken, those who hear his word and refuse it, do so at their own peril. The wrong is done, not to the ambassador, but to the King; not to our mouth, but to the mouth of God, from whom the truth has proceeded.

We are urged to be charitable. *We are* charitable; but it is with our own money. We have no right to give away what is put into our trust and is not at our disposal. When we have to do with the truth of God we are stewards, and must deal with our Lord's exchequer, not on the lines of charity to human opinions, but by the rule of fidelity to the God of truth. We are bold to declare with full assurance that which the Lord reveals. That memorable word of the Lord to Jeremiah is needed by the servants of the Lord in these days: "Thou therefore gird up thy loins, and arise, and speak unto them all that I command thee: be not dismayed at their faces, lest I confound thee before them. For, behold, I have made thee this day a defenced city, and an iron pillar, and brazen walls against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, against the princes thereof, against the priests thereof, and against the people of the land. And they shall fight against thee; but they shall not prevail against thee; for I am with thee, saith the Lord, to deliver thee." When we speak for the Lord against error, we do not soften our tones; but we speak thunderbolts. When we come across false science, we do not lower our flag: we give place by subjection—no, not for an hour. One word of God is worth more than libraries of human lore. "It is written" is the great gun which silences all the batteries of man's thought. They should speak courageously who speak in the name of Jehovah, the God of Israel.

I will also add, under this head, that, because "The mouth of the Lord hath spoken it," therefore we feel bound to speak his Word *with diligence*, as often as ever we can, and *with*

perseverance, as long as ever we live. Surely, it would be a blessed thing to die in the pulpit; spending one's last breath in acting as the Lord's mouth. Dumb Sabbaths are fierce trials to true preachers. Remember how John Newton, when he was quite unfit to preach, and even wandered a bit by reason of his infirmities and age, yet persisted in preaching; and when they dissuaded him, he answered with warmth, "What! Shall the old African blasphemer leave off preaching Jesus Christ while there is breath in his body?" So they helped the old man into the pulpit again, that he might once more speak of free grace and dying love. If we had common themes to speak about, we might leave the pulpit as a weary pleader quits the forum; but as "The mouth of the Lord hath spoken it," we feel his Word to be as fire in our bones, and we grow more weary with refraining than with testifying. O my brethren, the Word of the Lord is so precious that we must in the morning sow this blessed seed, and in the evening we must not withhold our hands. It is a living seed and the seed of life, and therefore we must diligently scatter it.

Brethren, if we get a right apprehension concerning gospel truth—that "The mouth of the Lord hath spoken it"—it will move us to tell it out with *great ardour and zeal*. We shall not drone the gospel to a slumbering handful. Many of you are not preachers, but you are teachers of the young, or in some other way you try to publish the Word of the Lord—do it, I pray you, with much fervour of Spirit. Enthusiasm should be conspicuous in every servant of the Lord. Let those who hear you know that you are all there; that you are not merely speaking from the lips outwardly; but that from the depths of your soul, your very heart is welling up with a good matter when you speak of things which you have made, touching the King. The everlasting gospel is worth preaching, even if one stood on a burning faggot and addressed the the crowd from a pulpit of flames. The truths revealed in Scripture are worth living for and dying for. I count myself thrice happy to bear reproach for the sake of the old faith. It is an honour of which I feel myself to be unworthy; and yet most truly can I use the words of our hymn—

"Shall I, to soothe th' unholy throng,
Soften thy truths and smooth my tongue?
To gain earth's gilded toys, or flee
The cross endured, my God, by thee?
"The love of Christ doth me constrain
To seek the wandering souls of men;
With cries, entreaties, tears, to save,
To snatch them from the fiery wave.
"My life, my blood I here present,
If for thy truth they may be spent:
Fulfil thy sovereign counsel, Lord!
Thy will be done, the name adored!"

I cannot speak out my whole heart upon this theme which is so dear to me, but I would stir you all up to be instant in season and out of season in telling out the gospel message. Specially repeat such a word as this—"God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." And this: "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." Tell it out boldly, tell it out in every place, tell it out to every creature, "For the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it." How can you keep back the heavenly news? "The mouth of the Lord hath spoken it"—shall not your mouth rejoice to repeat it? Whisper it in the ear of the sick; shout it in the corner of the streets; write it on your tablets; send it forth from the press: but everywhere let this be your great motive and warrant—you preach the gospel because "The mouth of the Lord hath spoken it." Let nothing be silent that hath a voice when the Lord hath given the Word by his own dear Son.

"Waft, waft, ye winds his story,
And you, ye waters roll,

Till like a sea of glory
It spreads from pole to pole.”

II. Let us now row in another direction for a moment or two. In the second place, “The mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.” THIS IS THE CLAIM OF GOD’S WORD UPON YOUR ATTENTION.

Every word which God has given us in this Book claims our attention, because of the *infinite majesty of him that spake it*. I see before me a Parliament of kings and princes, sages and senators. I hear one after another of the gifted Chrysostoms pour forth eloquence like the “Golden-mouthed.” They speak, and they speak well. Suddenly, there is a solemn hush. What a stillness! Who is now to speak? They are silent because God the Lord is about to lift up his voice. Is it not right that they should be so? Doth he not say, “Keep silence before me, O islands”? What voice is like his voice? “The voice of the Lord is powerful; the voice of the Lord is full of majesty. The voice of the Lord breaketh the cedars; yea, the Lord breaketh the cedars of Lebanon. The voice of the Lord shaketh the wilderness; the Lord shaketh the wilderness of Kadesh.” See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. O my hearer, let it not be said of you that you went through this life, God speaking to you in his Book, and you refusing to hear! It matters very little whether you listen to *me* or not; but it matters a very great deal whether you listen to God or not. It is he that made you; in his hands your breath is; and if he speaks, I implore you, open your ear, and be not rebellious. There is an infinite majesty about every line of Scripture, but especially about that part of Scripture in which the Lord reveals himself and his glorious plan of saving grace, in the person of his dear Son Jesus Christ. The cross of Christ hath a great claim upon you. Hear what Jesus preaches from the tree. He says, “Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live.”

God’s claim to be heard lies, also, in *the condescension which has led him to speak to us*. It was something for God to have made the world and bid us look at the work of his hands. Creation is a picture-book for children. But for God to speak in the language of mortal men is still more marvellous, if you come to think of it. I wonder that God spoke by the prophets; but I admire still more that he should have written down his word in black and white, in unmistakable language, which can be translated into all tongues, so that we may all see and read for ourselves what God the Lord has spoken to us; and what, indeed, he continues to speak; for what he has spoken he still speaks to us, as freshly as if he spake it for the first time. O glorious Jehovah; dost thou speak to mortal man? Can there be any that neglect to hear thee? If thou art so full of lovingkindness and tenderness that thou wilt stoop out of heaven to converse with thy sinful creatures, none but those who are more brutal than the ox and the ass will turn a deaf ear to thee!

God’s Word has a claim, then, upon your attention because of its majesty and its condescension; but yet, futher, it should win your ear because of *its intrinsic importance*. “The mouth of the Lord hath spoken it”—then it is no trifle. God never speaks vanity. No line of his writing treats of the frivolous themes of a day. That which may be forgotten in an hour is for mortal man, and not for the eternal God. When the Lord speaks, his speech is God-like, and its themes are worthy of one whose dwelling is infinity and eternity. God does not play with thee, man: wilt thou trifle with him? Wilt thou treat him as if he were altogether such a one as thyself? God is in earnest when he speaks to thee: wilt thou not in earnest listen? He speaks to thee of great things, which have to do with thy soul and its destiny. “It is not a vain thing for you; because it is your life.” Thy eternal existence, thy happiness or thy misery, hang on thy treatment of that which the mouth of the Lord hath spoken. Concerning eternal realities he speaks to thee. I pray thee, be not so unwise as to turn away thine ear. Act not as if the Lord and his truth were nothing to you. Treat not the Word of the Lord as a secondary thing, which might wait thy leisure and receive attention when no other work was before thee: put all else aside, but hearken to thy God.

Depend upon it, if "The mouth of the Lord hath spoken it," there is an *urgent, pressing necessity*. God breaks not silence to say that which might as well have remained unsaid. His voice indicates great urgency. To-day, if ye will hear his voice, hear it; for he demands immediate attention. God does not speak without abundant reason; and, O my hearer, if he speaks to thee by his Word, I beseech thee, believe that there must be overwhelming cause for it! I know what Satan says: he tells thee that thou canst do very well without listening to God's Word. I know what thy carnal heart whispers: it says, "Listen to the voice of business, and of pleasure; but listen not to God." But, oh! if the Holy Spirit shall teach thy reason to be reasonable, and put thy mind in mind of true wisdom, thou wilt acknowledge that the first thing thou hast to do is to heed thy Maker. Thou canst hear the voices of others another time; but thine ear must hear God first, since he is first, and that which he speaks must be of first importance. Without delay do thou make haste to keep his commandments. Without reserve answer to his call, and say, "Speak, Lord; for thy servant heareth." When I stand in this pulpit to preach the Gospel, I never feel that I may calmly invite you to attend to a subject which is one among many, and may very properly be let alone for a time should your minds be already occupied. No; you may be dead before I again speak with you, and so I beg for immediate attention. I do not fear that I may be taking you off from other important business by entreating you to attend to that which the mouth of the Lord hath spoken; for no business has any importance in it compared with this: this is the master theme of all. It is your soul, your own soul, your ever-existing soul which is concerned, and it is your God that is speaking to you. Do hear him, I beseech you. I am not asking a favour of you when I request you to hear the Word of the Lord: it is a debt to your Maker which you are bound to pay. Yea, it is, moreover, kindness to your own self. Even from a selfish point of view, I urge you to hear what the mouth of the Lord hath spoken, for in his Word lies salvation. Hearken diligently to what your Maker, your Saviour, your best friend, has to say to you. "Harden not your hearts, as in the provocation," but "incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live." "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God."

Thus I have handled my text in two ways: it is warrant and motive for the preacher; it is a demand upon the attention to the hearer.

III. And now, thirdly, THIS GIVES TO GOD'S WORD A VERY SPECIAL CHARACTER. When we open this sacred Book, and say of that which is here recorded, "The mouth of the Lord hath spoken it," then it gives to the teaching a special character.

In the Word of God the teaching has *unique dignity*. This Book is inspired as no other book is inspired, and it is time that all Christians avowed this conviction. I do not know whether you have seen Mr. Smiles' life of our late friend, George Moore; but in it we read that, at a certain dinner-party, a learned man remarked that it would not be easy to find a person of intelligence who believed in the inspiration of the Bible. In an instant George Moore's voice was heard across the table, saying boldly, "I do, for one." Nothing more was said. My dear friend had a strong way of speaking, as I well remember; for we have upon occasions vied with each other in shouting when we were together at his Cumberland home. I think I can hear his emphatic way of putting it—"I do for one." Let us not be backward to take the old-fashioned and unpopular side, and say outright, "I do, for one." Where are we if our Bibles are gone? Where are we if we are taught to distrust them? If we are left in doubt as to which part is inspired and which is not, we are as badly off as if we had no Bible at all. I hold no theory of inspiration; I accept the inspiration of the Scriptures as a fact. Those who thus view the Scriptures need not be ashamed of their company; for some of the best and most learned of men have been of the same mind. Locke, the great philosopher, spent the last fourteen years of his life in the study of the Bible, and when asked what was the shortest way for a young gentleman to understand the Christian religion, he bade him read the Bible, remarking: "Therein are contained the words of eternal life. It has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any admixture of error, for its

matter.” There are those on the side of God’s Word whom you need not be ashamed of in the matter of intelligence and learning; and if it were not so, it should not discourage you when you remember that the Lord has hid these things from the wise and prudent, and has revealed them unto babes. We believe with the apostle that “the foolishness of God is wiser than men.” It is better to believe what comes out of God’s mouth, and be called a fool, than to believe what comes out of the mouth of philosophers, and be, therefore, esteemed a wise man.

There is also about that which the mouth of the Lord hath spoken an *absolute certainty*. What man has said is unsubstantial, even when true. It is like grasping fog, there is nothing of it. But with God’s Word you have something to grip at, something to have, and to hold. This is substance and reality; but of human opinions we man say, “Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.” Though heaven and earth should pass away, yet not one jot or tittle of what God has spoken shall fail. We know that, and feel at rest. God cannot be mistaken. God cannot lie. These are postulates which no one can dispute. If “The mouth of God hath spoken it,” this is the judge that ends the strife where wit and reason fail; and henceforth we question no more.

Again: if “The mouth of the Lord hath spoken it,” we have in this utterance the special character of *immutable fixedness*. Once spoken by God, not only is it so now, but it always must be so. The Lord of Hosts hath spoken, and who shall disannul it? The rock of God’s Word does not shift, like the quicksand of modern scientific theology. One said to his minister, “My dear sir, surely you ought to adjust your beliefs to the progress of science.” “Yes,” said he, “but I have not had time to do it to-day, for I have not yet read the morning papers.” One would have need to read the morning papers and take in every new edition to know where about scientific theology now stands; for it is always chopping and changing. The only thing that is certain about the false science of this age is that it will be soon disproved. Theories, vaunted to-day, will be scouted to-morrow. The great scientists live by killing those who went before them. They know nothing for certain, except that their predecessors were wrong. Even in one short life we have seen system after system—the mushrooms, or rather the toadstools, of thought—rise and perish. We cannot adapt our religious belief to that which is more changeful than the moon. Try it who will: as for me, if “The mouth of the Lord hath spoken it,” it is truth to me in the year of grace 1888; and if I stand amongst you a grey-headed old man somewhere in 1908, you will find me making no advance upon the divine ultimatum. If “The mouth of the Lord hath spoken it,” we behold in his revelation a gospel which is without variableness, revealing “Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.” Bothers and sisters, we hope to be together for ever before the eternal throne, where bow the blazing Seraphim, and even then we shall not be ashamed to avow that same truth which this day we feed upon from the hand of our God.

“For he’s the Lord, supremely good,
His mercy is for ever sure;
His truth, which always firmly stood,

To endless ages shall endure.”

Here let me add that there is something unique about God’s Word, because of the *almighty power which attends it*. “Where the word of a king is, there is power”; where the word of a God is, there is omnipotence. If we dealt more largely in God’s own Word as “The mouth of the Lord hath spoken it,” we should see far greater results from our preaching. It is God’s Word, not our comment on God’s Word, that saves souls. Souls are slain by the sword, not by the scabbard, not by the tassels which adorn the hilt of it. If God’s Word be brought forward in its native simplicity, no one can stand against it. The adversaries of God must fail before the Word as chaff perishes in the fire. Oh, for wisdom to keep closer and closer to that which the mouth of the Lord hath spoken!

I will say no more on this point, although the theme is a very large and tempting one; especially if I were to dwell upon the depth, the height, the adaptation, the insight and the self-proving power of that which "The mouth of the Lord hath spoken."

IV. Fourthly, and very briefly, THIS MAKES GOD'S WORD A GROUND OF GREAT ALARM TO MANY. Shall I read you the whole verse? "But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it." Every threatening that God hath spoken, because he hath spoken it, has a tremendous dread about it. Whether God threateneth a man or a nation, or the whole class of the ungodly, if they are wise they will feel a trembling take hold upon them, because "The mouth of the Lord hath spoken it." *God has never yet spoken a threatening that has fallen to the ground.* When he told Pharaoh what he would do, he did it; the plagues came thick and heavy upon him. When the Lord at any time sent his prophets to denounce judgments on the nations, he carried out those judgments. Ask travellers concerning Babylon, and Nineveh, and Edom, and Moab, and Bashan; and they will tell you of the heaps of ruins, which prove how the Lord carried out his warnings to the letter. One of the most awful things recorded in history is the siege of Jerusalem. You have read it, I do not doubt, in Josephus, or elsewhere. It makes one's blood run cold to think of it. Yet it was all foretold by the prophets, and their prophecies were fulfilled to the bitter end. You talk about God as being "love," and, if you mean by this that he is not severe in the punishment of sin, I ask you what you make of the destruction of Jerusalem. Remember that the Jews were his chosen nation, and that the city of Jerusalem was the place where his temple had been glorified with his presence. Brethren, if you roam from Edom to Zion, and from Zion to Sidon, and from Sidon to Moab, you will find, amid ruined cities, the tokens that God's words of judgment are sure. Depend on it, then, that when Jesus says, "These shall go away into everlasting punishment," it will be so. When he says, "If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins," it will be so. The Lord never plays at frightening men. His Word is not an exaggeration to scare man with imaginary bugbears. There is emphatic truth in what the Lord says. He has always carried out his threatenings to the letter, and to the moment; and, depend upon it, he will continue to do so, "For the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it."

It is of no avail to sit down, and draw inferences from the nature of God, and to argue, "God is love, and therefore he will not execute the sentence upon the impenitent." He knows what he will do better than you can infer; he has not left us to inferences, for he has spoken pointedly and plainly. He says, "He that believeth not shall be damned," and it will be so, "For the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it." Infer what you like from his nature; but if you draw an inference contrary to what he has spoken, you have inferred a lie, and you will find it so.

"Alas," says one, "I shudder at the severity of the divine sentence." Do you? It is well! I can heartily sympathize with you. What must he be that does not tremble when he sees the great Jehovah taking vengeance upon iniquity! The terrors of the Lord might well turn steel to wax. Let us remember that the gauge of truth is not our pleasure nor our terror. It is not my shuddering which can disprove what the mouth of the Lord hath spoken. It may even be a proof of its truth. Did not all the prophets tremble at manifestations of God? Remember how one of them cried, "When I heard, my belly trembled; my lips quivered at the voice; rottenness entered into my bones." One of the last of the anointed seers fell at the Lord's feet as dead. Yet all the shrinking of their nature was not used by them as an argument for doubt.

O my unconverted and unbelieving hearers, do remember that if you refuse Christ, and rush upon the keen edge of Jehovah's sword, your unbelief of eternal judgment will not alter it, not save you from it. I know why you do not believe in the terrible threatenings. It is because you want to be easy in your sins. A certain sceptical writer, when in prison, was visited by a Christian man, who wished him well, but he refused to hear a word about religion. Seeing a Bible in the

hand of his visitor, he made this remark, "You do not expect me to believe in that book, do you? Why, if that book is true, I am lost for ever." Just so. Therein lies the reason for half the infidelity in the world, and all the infidelity in our congregations. How can you believe that which condemns you? Ah! my friends, if you would believe it to be true and act accordingly, you would also find in that which the mouth of the Lord hath spoken a way of escape from the wrath to come; for the Book is far more full of hope than of dread. This inspired volume flows with the milk of mercy, and the honey of grace. It is not a Doomsday Book of wrath, but a Testament of Grace. Yet, if you do not believe its loving warnings, nor regard its just sentences, they are true all the same. If you dare its thunders, if you trample on its promises, and even if you burn it in your rage, the holy Book still stands unaltered and unalterable; for "The mouth of the Lord hath spoken it." Therefore, I pray you, treat the sacred Scriptures with respect, and remember that "These are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name."

V. And so I must finish, for time fails, when I notice, in the fifth place, that THIS MAKES THE WORD OF THE LORD THE REASON AND REST OF OUR FAITH. "The mouth of the Lord hath spoken it," is the foundation of our confidence. There is forgiveness; for God has said it. Look, friend; you are saying, "I cannot believe that my sins can be washed away, I feel so unworthy." Yes, but "The mouth of the Lord hath spoken it." Believe over the head of your unworthiness. "Ah," says one, "I feel so weak I can neither think, nor pray, not anything else, as I should." Is it not written, "When we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly"? "The mouth of the Lord hath spoken it"; therefore, over the head of your inability still believe it, for it must be so.

I think I hear some child of God saying, "God has said, 'I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee,' but I am in great trouble; all the circumstances of my life seem to contradict the promise": yet, "The mouth of the Lord hath spoken it," and the promise must stand. "Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed." Believe God in the teeth of circumstances. If you cannot see a way of escape or a means of help, yet still believe in the unseen God, and in the truth of his presence; "for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it." I think I have come to this pass with myself, at any rate for the time present, that when circumstances deny the promise, I believe it none the less. When friends forsake me, and foes belie me, and my own spirit goes down below zero, and I am depressed almost to despair, I am resolved to hang to the bare word of the Lord, and prove it to be in itself and all-sufficient stay and support. I will believe God against all the devils in hell, God against Ahithophel, and Judas, and Demas, and all the rest to the turncoats; yea, and God against my own heart. His purpose shall stand, "For the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it."

By-and-by we shall come to die. The death-sweat shall gather on our brow, and perhaps our tongue will scarcely serve us. Oh that then, like the grand old German Emperor, we may say, "Mine eyes have seen thy salvation," and, "He hath helped me with his name." When we pass through the rivers he will be with us, the floods shall not overflow us; for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it." When we walk through the valley of the shadow of death we shall fear no evil, for he will be with us; his rod and his staff shall comfort us. "The mouth of the Lord hath spoken it." Ah! what will it be to break loose from these bonds and rise into the glory? We shall soon see the King in his beauty, and be ourselves glorified in his glory; for "the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it." "He that believeth hath everlasting life"; therefore a glad eternity is ours.

Brethren, we have not followed cunningly devised fables. We are not "wanton boys that swim on bladders," which will soon burst under us; but we are resting on firm ground. We abide where heaven and earth are resting; where the whole universe depends; where even eternal things have their foundation: we rest on God himself, If God shall fail us, we gloriously fail with the whole

universe. But there is no fear; therefore let us trust and not be afraid. His promise must stand; for “The mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.” O Lord, it is enough. Glory be to thy name, through Christ Jesus! Amen.

Portion of Scripture read before sermon. Isaiah 1:1-20
Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Vol.34, No.2013

THE BIBLE TRIED AND PROVED

By C. H. SPURGEON

“The words of the Lord are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times.”—Psalm 12:6

IN this psalm our text stands in contrast with the evil of the age. The Psalmist complains that the “godly man ceaseth; the faithful fail from among the children of men.” It was a great grief to him, and he found no consolation except in the words of the Lord. What if men fail: the Word of the Lord abides! What a comfort it is to quit the arena of controversy for the green pastures of revelation! One feels like Noah, when, shut within the ark, he saw no longer the death and desolation which reigned outside. Live in communion with the Word of God, and, in the absence of Christian friends, you will not lack for company.

Furthermore, the verse stands in fuller contrast still with the words of the ungodly when they rebel against God and oppress his people. They said, “With our tongue will we prevail; our lips are our own: who is Lord over us?” They boasted, they domineered, they threatened. The Psalmist turned away from the voice of the boaster to the words of the Lord. He saw the promise, the precept, and the doctrine of pure truth, and these consoled him while others spake every man vanity with his neighbour. He had not so many of the words of the Lord as we have: but what he had made his own by meditation he prized above the finest gold. In the good company of those who had spoken under divine direction, he was able to bear the threats of those who surrounded him. So, dear friend, if at any time your lot is cast where the truths you love so well are despised, get you back to the prophets and apostles, and hear through them what God the Lord will speak. The voices of earth are full of falsehood, but the word from heaven is very pure. There is a good practical lesson in the position of the text; learn it well. Make the Word of God your daily companion, and then, whatever may grieve you in the false doctrine of the hour, you will not be too much cast down; for the words of the Lord will sustain your spirit.

Looking at the text, does it not strike you as a marvel of condescension, that Jehovah, the infinite, should use words? He has arranged for us, in his wisdom, this way of communicating with one another: but as for himself, he is pure spirit and boundless: shall he contract his glorious thoughts into the narrow channel of sound, and ear, and nerve? Must the eternal mind use human words? The glorious Jehovah spake worlds. The heavens and the earth were the utterances of his lips. To him it seems more in accordance with his nature to speak tempests and thunders, than to stoop to the humble vowels and consonants of a creature of the dust. Will he in very deed communicate with man in man’s own way? Yes, he stoops to speak to us by words. We bless the Lord for verbal inspiration, of which we can say “I have esteemed the words of thy mouth more than my necessary food.” I do not know of any other inspiration, neither am I able to conceive of any which can be of true service to us. We need a plain revelation upon which we can exercise faith. If the Lord had spoken to us by a method in which his meaning was infallible, but his

words were questionable, we should have been rather puzzled than edified; for it is a task indeed to separate the true sense from the doubtful words. We should always be afraid that the prophet or apostle had not, after all, given us the divine sense: it is easy to hear and to repeat words; but it is not easy to convey the meaning of another into perfectly independent words of your own: the meaning easily evaporates. But we believe that holy men of old, through using their own language, were led by the Spirit of God to use words which were also the words of God. The divine Spirit so operated upon the spirit of the inspired writer, that he wrote the words of the Lord, and we, therefore, treasure up every one of them. To us “every word of God is pure,” and withal full of soul nutriment. “Man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live.” We can heartily declare with the Psalmist, “Thou art my portion, O Lord: I have said that I would keep thy words.”

Our condescending God is so well pleased to speak to us by words, that he has even deigned to call his only-begotten Son “The Word.” “The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.” The Lord useth words, not with reluctance, but with pleasure; and he would have us think highly of them, too, as he said to Israel by Moses, “Therefore shall ye lay up these my words in your heart and in your soul.”

We believe that we have the words of God preserved for us in the Scriptures. We are exceedingly grateful that it is so. If we had not the words of the Lord thus recorded we should have felt that we lived in an evil time, since neither voice nor oracle is heard to-day. I say, we should have fallen upon evil days if the words that God spake of old had not been recorded under his superintendence. With this Book before us, what the Lord spake two thousand years ago he virtually speaks now: for “He will not call back his words” (Isaiah 31:2). His word abideth for ever; for it was spoken, not for one occasion, but for all ages. The Word of the Lord is so instinct with everlasting life and eternal freshness, that it is as vocal and forceful in the heart of the saint to-day as it was to the ear of Abraham when he heard it in Canaan; or to the mind of Moses in the desert; or to David when he sang it to his harp. I thank God that many of us know what it is to hear the divine word re-spoken in our souls! By the Holy Ghost the words of Scripture come to us with a present inspiration: not only has the Book been inspired, *it is* inspired. This Book is more than paper and ink, it talks with us. Was not that the promise, “When thou awakest, it shall talk with thee”? We open the book with this prayer, “Speak, Lord; for thy servant heareth”; and we often close it with this feeling, “Here am I; for thou didst call me.” As surely as if the promise had never been uttered before, but had been spoken out of the excellent glory for the first time, the Lord had made Holy Scripture to be his direct word to our heart and conscience. I say not this of you all, but I can say it assuredly of many here present. May the Holy Spirit at this hour speak to you yet again!

In trying to handle my text, there will be three points to dwell upon. First, *the quality of the words of God*—“The words of the Lord are pure words”; secondly, *the trials of the words of God*— “As silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times”; and then, thirdly, *the claims of these words* derived from their purity and the trials which they have undergone. Eternal Spirit, help me to speak aright concerning thine own Word, and help us to feel aright while we hear!

I. First, then, beloved friends, consider THE QUALITY OF THE WORDS OF GOD: “The words of the Lord are pure words.”

From this statement I gather, first, *the uniformity of their character*. No exception is made to any of the words of God, but they are all described as “pure words.” They are not all of the same character; some are for teaching, others are for comfort, and others for rebuke; but they are so far of a uniform character that they are all “pure words.” I conceive it to be an evil habit to make preferences in Holy Scripture. We must preserve this volume as a whole. Those sin against Scripture who delight in doctrinal texts, but omit the consideration of practical passages. If we

preach doctrine, they cry, "How sweet!" They will hear of eternal love, free grace, and the divine purpose; and I am glad they will. To such I say—Eat the fat, and drink the sweet; and rejoice that there are fat things full of marrow in this Book. But remember that men of God in old time took great delight in the commands of the Lord. They had respect unto Jehovah's precepts, and they loved his law. If any turn on their heel, and refuse to hear of duties and ordinances, I fear that they do not love God's Word at all. He that does not love it all, loves it not at all. On the other hand, they are equally mistaken who delight in the preaching of duties, but care not for the doctrines of grace. They say "That sermon was worth hearing, for it has to do with daily life." I am very glad that they are of this mind; but if, at the same time, they refuse other teaching of the Lord, they are greatly faulty. Jesus said, "He that is of God heareth God's words" I fear you are not of God, if you account a portion of the Lord's words to be unworthy of your consideration.

Beloved, we prize the whole range of the words of the Lord. We do not set aside the histories any more than the promises.

"I'll read the histories of thy love,
And keep thy laws in sight,
While through the promises I rove

With ever fresh delight."

Above all, do not drop into the semi-blasphemy of some, who think the New Testament vastly superior to the Old. I would not err by saying that in the Old Testament you have more of the bullion of truth than in the New, for therein I should be falling into the evil which I condemn; but this I will say, that they are of equal authority, and that they cast such light upon each other that we could not spare either of them. "What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder." In the whole Book, from Genesis to Revelation, the words of Jehovah are found, and they are always pure words.

Neither is it right for any to say, "Thus spake Christ himself; but such-and-such a teaching is Pauline." Nay, it is not Pauline; if it be here recorded, it is of the Holy Ghost. Whether the Holy Ghost speaketh by Isaiah, or Jeremiah, or John, or James, or Paul, the authority is still the same. Even concerning Jesus Christ our Lord this is true; for he says of himself, "The word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me." In this matter he puts himself upon the level of others who were as the mouth of God. He says again, "For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak." We accept the words of the apostles as the words of the Lord, remembering what John said—"We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error" (I John iv. 6). A solemn judgment is thus pronounced upon those who would set the Spirit of Jesus against the Spirit which dwelt in the apostles. The words of the Lord are not affected in their value by the medium through which they came. Revealed truth is all of the same quality even when the portions of it are not of the same weight of metal.

Abiding by the text, we observe, next, *the purity of the words of the Lord*: "The words of the Lord are pure words." In commerce there is silver, and silver, as you all know: silver with alloy, and silver free from baser metal. The Word of God is the silver without the dross; it is as silver which has been purified seven times in a crucible of earth in the furnace, till every worthless particle has been removed: it is absolutely pure. David said truly, "Thy word is truth."

It is truth in the form of goodness, *without admixture of evil*. The commandments of the Lord are just and right. We have occasionally heard opponents carp at certain coarse expressions used in our translation of the Old Testament; but the coarseness of translators is not to be set to the account of the Holy Spirit, but to the fact that the force of the English language has changed, and modes of expression which were current at one period become too gross for another. Yet, this I

will assert, that I have never yet met with a single person to whom the words of God have of themselves suggested any evil thing. I have heard a great many horrible things said, but I have never met with a case in which any man has been led into sin by a passage of Scripture. Perversions are possible and probable; but the Book itself is pre-eminently pure. Details are given of very gross acts of criminality, but they leave no injurious impress upon the mind. The saddest story of Holy Scripture is a beacon, and never a lure. This is the cleanest, clearest, purest Book extant among men; nay, it is not to be mentioned in the same hour with the fabulous records which pass for holy books. It comes from God, and every word is pure.

It is also a book pure in the sense of truth, being *without admixture of error*. I do not hesitate to say that I believe that there is no mistake whatever in the original Holy Scriptures from beginning to end. There may be, and there are mistakes of translation; for translators are not inspired; but even the historical facts are correct. Doubt has been cast upon them here and there, and at times with great show of reason—doubt which it has been impossible to meet for a season; but only give space enough, and search enough, and the stones buried in the earth cry out to confirm each letter of Scripture. Old manuscripts, coins, and inscriptions, are on the side of the Book, and against it there are nothing but theories, and the fact that many an event in history has no other record but that which the Book affords us. The Book has been of late in the furnace of criticism; but much of that furnace has grown cold from the fact that the criticism is beneath contempt. “The words of the Lord are pure words”: there is not an error of any sort in the whole compass of them. These words come from him who can make no mistake, and who can have no wish to deceive his creatures. If I did not believe in the infallibility of the Book, I would rather be without it. If I am to judge the Book, it is no judge of me. If I am to sift it, like the heap on the threshing-floor, and lay *this* aside and only accept *that*, according to my own judgment, then I have no guidance whatever, unless I have conceit enough to trust to my own heart. The new theory denies infallibility to the words of God, but practically imputes it to the judgments of men; at least, this is all the infallibility which they can get at. I protest that I will rather risk my soul with a guide inspired from heaven, than with the differing leaders who arise from the earth at the call of “modern thought.”

Again, this Book is pure in the sense of reliableness: it has in its promises *no admixture of failure*. Mark this. No prediction of Scripture has failed. No promise that God has given will turn out to be mere verbiage. “Hath he said, and shall he not do it?” Take the promise as the Lord gave it, and you will find him faithful to every jot and tittle of it. Some of us are not yet entitled to be called “old and grey-headed,” though the iron-grey is pretty conspicuous upon our heads; but hitherto we have believed the promises of God, and tested and tried them; and what is our verdict? I bear my solemn testimony that I have not found one word of the Lord fall to the ground. The fulfilment of a promise has been delayed sometimes beyond the period which my impatience would have desired; but to the right instant the promise has been kept, not to the ear only, but in deed and in truth. You may lean your whole weight upon any one of the words of God, and they will bear you up. In your darkest hour you may have no candle but a single promise, and yet that lone light shall make high noon of your midnight. Glory be to his name, the words of the Lord are without evil, without error, and without failure.

Futhermore, on this first head, the text not only speaks of the uniform character of God’s words, and of their purity, but of *their preciousness*. David compares them to refined silver, and silver is a precious metal: in other places he has likened these words to pure gold. The words of the Lord might have seemed comparable to paper-money, such as our own bank-notes; but no, they are the metal itself. I recollect the time when a friend of ours used to go into the western counties, from one farm to another, buying cheese, and he was in the habit of taking quite a weight of coin with him, for he found that the farmers of that period did not care for bank-notes, and would not look at cheques; but they were more ready to sell when they saw that they would

be paid in metal, down on the nail. In the words of God you have the solid money of truth: it is not fiction, but the substance of truth. God's words are as bullion. When you have them in the grip of faith, you have the substance of things hoped for. Faith finds in the promise of God the reality of what she looks for: the promise of God is as good as the performance itself. God's words, whether of doctrine, of practice, of comfort, are of solid metal to the man of God who knows how to put them in the purse of personal faith. As we use silver in many articles within our houses, so do we use God's Word in daily life; it has a thousand uses. As silver is current coin of the merchant, so are the promises of God a currency both for heaven and earth: we deal with God by his promises, and so he deals with us. As men and women deck themselves with silver by way of ornament, so are the words of the Lord our jewels and our glory. The promises are things of beauty which are a joy for ever. When we love the Word of God, and keep it, the beauty of holiness is upon us. This is the true ornament of character and life, and we receive it as a love-gift from the Bridegroom of our souls.

Beloved, I need not enlarge in your presence upon the preciousness of the Word of God. You have, many of you, prized it long, and have proved its value. I have read of a German Christian woman who was accustomed to mark her Bible whenever she met with a passage which was specially precious to her; but towards the end of her life she ceased from the habit, for she said, "I find it unnecessary; for the whole of the Scripture has now become most precious to me." To some of us the priceless volume is marked from beginning to end by our experience. It is all precious, and altogether precious.

"No treasures so enrich the mind,
Nor shall thy word be sold
For loads of silver well refined,

Nor heaps of choicest gold."

Furthermore, this text sets before us, not only the purity and preciousness of the Lord's words, but *the permanence* of them. They are as silver which has passed through the hottest fires. Truly, the Word of God has, for ages, stood the fire—and fire applied in its fiercest form: "tried in a furnace of earth"—that is to say, in that furnace which refiners regard as their last resort. If the devil could have destroyed the Bible, he would have brought up the hottest coals from the centre of hell. He has not been able to destroy one single line. Fire, according to the text, was applied in a skilful way: silver is placed in a crucible of earth, that the fire may get at it thoroughly. The refiner is quite sure to employ his heat in the best manner known to him, so as to melt away the dross; so have men with diabolical skill endeavoured, by the most clever criticism, to destroy the words of God. Their object is not purification; it is the purity of Scripture which annoys them. They aim at consuming the divine testimony. Their labour is vain; for the sacred Book remains still what it always was, the pure words of the Lord; but some of our misconceptions of its meaning have happily perished in the fires. The words of the Lord have been tried frequently, ay, they have been tried perfectly—"purified *seven* times." What more remains I cannot guess, but assuredly the processes have already been many and severe. It abides unchanged. The comfort of our fathers is our comfort. The words which cheered our youth are our support in age. "The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever." These words of God are a firm foundation, and our eternal hopes are wisely built thereon. We cannot permit any one to deprive us of this basis of hope. In the olden time men were burned rather than cease to read their Bibles; we endure less brutal oppositions, but they are far more subtle, and difficult to resist. Still let us always abide by the everlasting words, for they will always abide by us.

Unchanged, unchangeable are the words of the Ever Blessed. They are as silver without dross, which will continue from age to age. This we do believe, and in this we do rejoice. Nor is it a tax upon our faith to believe in the permanence of the Holy Scripture, for these words were spoken

by him who is Omniscient, and knows everything; therefore there can be no mistake. They were spoken by him who is Omnipotent, and can do everything; and therefore his words will be carried out. Spoken by him who is immutable, these words will never alter. The words which God spake thousands of years ago are true at this hour, for they come from him who is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. He that spake these words is infallible, and therefore they are infallible. When did he ever err? Could he err, and yet be God? "Hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?" Rest you sure of this—"the words of the Lord are pure words."

But time hastens to the next point.

II. Secondly, and carefully, let us consider THE TRIALS OF THE WORDS OF GOD. They are said to be as silver, which has been tried in a furnace. The words of God have been tested by blasphemy, by ridicule, by persecution, by criticism, and by candid observation. I shall not attempt an oratorical flight while describing the historical tests of the precious metals of divine revelation, but I shall mention trials of a common-place order which have come under my own notice, and probably under yours also. This may be more homely, but it will be more edifying. The Lord help us!

In dealing with *the sinner's obstinacy*, we have tested the words of the Lord. There are men who cannot be convinced or persuaded; they doubt everything, and with closed teeth they resolve not to believe, though a man declare it unto them. They are encased in the armour of prejudice, and they cannot be wounded with the sharpest arrows of argument, though they profess great openness to conviction. What is to be done with the numerous clan who are related to Mr. Obstinate? You might as well argue with an express-train as with Mr. Obstinate: he runs on, and will not stop, though a thousand should stand in his way. Will the words of God convince him? There are some in this place to-day of whom I should have said, if I had known them before their conversion, that it was a vain task to preach the gospel to them; they so much loved sin, and so utterly despised the things of God. Strangely enough, they were among the first to receive the Word of God when they came under the sound of it. It came to them in its native majesty, in the power of the Holy Ghost; it spoke with a commanding tone to their inmost heart; it threw open the doors that had long been shut up and rusted on their hinges, and Jesus entered to save and reign. These, who had defiantly brandished their weapons, threw them down and surrendered unconditionally to almighty love, willing believers in the Lord Jesus. Brethren, we have only to have faith in God's Word, and speak it out straight, and we shall see proud rebels yielding. No mind is so desperately set on mischief, so resolutely opposed to Christ, that it cannot be made to bow before power of the words of God. Oh that we used more the naked sword of the Spirit! I am afraid we keep this two-edged sword in a scabbard, and somewhat pride ourselves that the sheath is so elaborately adorned. What is the use of the sheath? The sword must be made bare, and we must fight with it, without attempting to garnish it. Tell forth the words of God. Omit neither the terrors of Sinai, nor the love-notes of Calvary. Proclaim the word with all fidelity, as you know it, and cry for the power of the Highest, and the most obstinate sinner out of hell can be laid low by its means. The Holy Spirit uses the word of God: this is his one battering-ram with which he casts down the strongholds of sin and self in those human hearts with which he effectually deals. The Word of God will bear the tests furnished by the hardness of the natural heart, and it will by its operations prove its divine origin.

Here begins another trial. When you have a man fairly broken down, he has but come part of the way. A new difficulty arises. Will the words of the Lord overcome *the penitent's despair*? The man is full of terror on account of sin, and hell has begun to burn within his bosom. You may talk to him lovingly, but his soul refuses to be comforted. Until you bring the words of the Lord to bear upon him "his soul abhorreth all manner of meat." Tell him of a dying Saviour;

dwell on free grace and full pardon; speak of the reception of the prodigal son, and of the Father's changeless love. Attended by the power of the Spirit, these truths must bring light to those who sit in darkness. The worst forms of depression are cured when Holy Scripture is believed. Often have I been baffled, when labouring with a soul convinced of sin, and unable to see Jesus; but I have never had a doubt that in the end the words of the Lord would become a cup of consolation to the fainting heart. We may be baffled for a season, but with the words of the Lord as our weapons, Giant Despair will not defeat us. O ye that are in bondage under fear of punishment, you shall come forth to liberty yet: your chains shall be broken, if you will accept the words of God. My Master's word is a great opener of prison doors: he has broken the gates of brass, and cut the bars of iron asunder.

That must be a wonderful word, which, like a battle-axe, smashes in the helmet of presumption, and at the same time, like the finger of love, touches the tender wound of the bleeding, and heals it in an instant. The words of the Lord, for breaking down or lifting up, are equally effectual.

In certain instances, the words of God are tried *by the seeker's singularity*. How frequently have persons told us that they were sure there was nobody like themselves in all the word! They were men up in a corner; strange fish, the like of which no sea could yield. Now, if these words be indeed of God, they will be able to touch every case—but not else. The words of God have been put to that test, and we are amazed at their universal adaptation. There is a text to meet every remarkable and out-of-the-way case. In certain instance, we have heard of an odd text, concerning which we could not before see why it was written; yet it has evidently a special fitness for a particular person, to whom it has come with a divine authority. The Bible may be compared to the whitesmith's bunch of keys. You handle them one by one, and say of one—"That is a strange key, surely it will fit no lock that ever was made!" But one of these says the smith is sent for to open a very peculiar lock. None of his keys touch it. At last he selects that singular specimen. See! it enters, shoots back the bolt, and gives access to the treasure. The words of this book are proved to be the words of God, because they have an infinite adaptation to the varied minds which the Lord has made. What a gathering of locks we have here this morning! I could not describe you all: Bramah and Chubb, and all the rest of them, could not have devised such a variety: yet I am sure that in this inspired volume, there is a key in every way suited to each lock. Personally, when I have been in trouble, I have read the Bible until a text has seemed to stand out of the Book, and salute me, saying, "I was written specially for you." It has looked to me as if the story must have been in the mind of the writer when he penned that passage; *and so it was* in the mind of that divine Author who is at the back of all these inspired pages. Thus have the words of the Lord stood the test of adaptation to the singularities of individual men.

We frequently meet with people of God who have tested the words of God *in time of sore trouble*. I make here an appeal to the experience of the people of God. You have lost a dear child. Was there not a word of the Lord to cheer you? You lost your property: was there a passage in the Scriptures to meet the disaster? You have been slandered: was there not a word to console you? You were very sick, and withal depressed; had not the Lord provided a comfort for you in that case? I will not multiply questions: the fact is that you never were high, but the Word of the Lord was up with you; and you never were low, but what the Scripture was down with you. No child of God was ever in any ditch, pit, cave, or abyss, but the words of God found him out. How often do the gracious promises lie in ambush to surprise us with their lovingkindness! I adore the infinity of God's goodness, as I see it mirrored in the glass of Scripture.

Again, the Word of God is tried and proved as *a guide in perplexity*. Have we not been forced, at times, to come to a pause and say, "I do not know what to think about *this*. What is the proper course?" This book is an oracle to the simple-hearted man in mental, moral, and spiritual

perplexity. Oh, that we used it more! Rest assured that you never will be in a labyrinth so complicated that this book, blessed of the Spirit, will not help you through. This is the compass for all mariners upon the sea of life: by its use you will know where lies the pole. Abide by the words of the Lord, and your way will be clear.

Beloved, the words of God endure another test; they are *our preservatives in times of temptation*. You can write a book that may help a man when he is tempted in a certain direction; will the same volume strengthen him when he is attracted in the opposite direction? Can you conceive a book which shall be a complete ring-fence, encircling a man in all directions? keeping him from the abyss yonder, and from the gulf on the other side? Yet such is this Book. The devil himself cannot invent a temptation which is not met in these pages; and all the devils in hell together, if they were to hold parliament, and to call in the aid of all bad men, could not invent a device which is not met by this matchless library of truth. It reaches the believer in every condition and position, and preserves him from all evil. "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word."

Lastly, on this point, here is a grand test of the Book: *it helps men to die*. Believe me, it is no child's play to die! You and I will find ourselves in that solemn article or ever we are aware, and then we shall need strong consolation. Nothing upon earth ever gives me so much establishment in the faith as to visit members of this church when they are about to die. It is very sad to see them wasting away, or racked with pain; but, nevertheless, the chief effect produced upon the visitor is gladsome rather than gloomy. I have this week seen a sister well known to many of you, who has a cancer in her face, and may, in all probability, soon be with her Lord. It is a dread affliction, and one knows not what it may yet involve; but the gracious patient knows neither murmurs nor fears. No one in this place, though in the flush of health, could be more calm, more restful, than our sister is. She spoke to me with full confidence that living or dying she is the Lord's, and she had bright anticipations of being for ever with the Lord. The little she could say with her voice was supplemented by a great deal which she expressed with her eyes, and with her whole demeanor. Here was no excitement, no fanaticism, no action of drugs upon the brain; but a sweetly reasonable, quiet, and assured hope of eternal joy. Brethren, it is not hard to pass out of this world when we are resting on that old and sure gospel which I have preached to you these many years. Personally, I can both live and die on the eternal truths which I have proclaimed to you; and this assurance makes me bold in preaching. Not long ago I sat by a brother who was near his end. I said to him, "You have no fear of death?" He replied cheerfully, "I should be ashamed of myself if I had, after all that I have learned of the glorious gospel from your lips these many years. It is a joy to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better." Now, if this inspired volume, with its wonderful record of the words of God, helps us in the trials of life, directs us in our daily paths, and enables us to weather the last great storm, surely it is precious beyond description, "as silver tried in a furnace of earth purified seven times."

III. Now, thirdly, what are THE CLAIMS OF THESE WORDS OF THE LORD?

The claims of these words are many. First, *they deserve to be studied*. Beloved, may I urge upon you the constant searching of inspired Scripture? Here is the last new novel! What shall I do with it? Cast it on the ground. Here is another piece of fiction which has been greatly popular! What shall I do with it? Throw it on one side, or thrust it between the bars of the grate. This sacred volume is the freshest of novels. It would be, to some of you, an entirely new book. We have a society for providing the Bible for readers, but we greatly need readers for the Bible. I grieve that even to some who bear the Christian name, Holy Scripture is the least read book in their library. One said of a preacher, the other day, "How does he keep up the congregation? Does he always give the people something new?" "Yes," said the other, "he gives them the gospel; and in these days, *that* is the newest thing out." It is truly so; the old, old gospel is always

new. The modern doctrine is only new in name; it is, after all, nothing but a hash of stale heresies and mouldy speculations. If God has spoken, listen! If the Lord has recorded his words in a Book, search its pages with a believing heart. If you do not accept it as God's inspired word, I cannot invite you to pay any particular attention to it; but if you regard it as the Book of God, I charge you, as I shall meet you at the judgment-seat of Christ, study the Bible daily. Treat not the Eternal God with disrespect, but delight in his Word.

Do you read it? Then *believe it*. Oh, for an intense belief of every word that God has spoken! Do not hold it as a dead creed, but let it hold you as with an almighty hand. Have no controversy with any one of the Lord's words. Believe without a doubt. The brother of the famous Unitarian, Dr. Priestly, was permitted to preach for his brother, in his chapel in Birmingham; but he was charged to take no controversial subject. He was obedient to the letter of his instructions, but very rebellious against their spirit, seeing he took for his text, "Without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh." Assuredly there is no controversy among spiritual men upon the glorious truth of the incarnation of our Lord Jesus. So, also, all the words of the Lord are out of the region of debate: they are to us absolute certainties. Until a doctrine becomes an absolute certainty to a man, he will never know its sweetness: truth has little influence upon the soul till it is fully believed.

Next, *obey the Book*. Do it freely, do it heartily, do it constantly. Err not from the commandment of God. May the Lord make you perfect in every good work, to do his will! "Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it. You that are unconverted, may you obey that gospel word: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." Repentance and faith are at once the commands and the gifts of God; neglect them not.

Furthermore, these words of God are *to be preserved*. Give up no line of God's revelation. You may not know the particular importance of the text assailed, but it is not for you to assess the proportionate value of God's words: if the Lord has spoken, be prepared to die for what he has said. I have often wondered whether, according to the notions of some people, there is any truth for which it would be worth while for a man to go to the stake. I should say not; for we are not sure of anything, according to the modern notion. Would it be worth while dying for a doctrine which may not be true next week? Fresh discoveries may show that we have been the victims of an antiquated opinion: had we not better wait and see what will turn up? It will be a pity to be burned too soon, or to lie in prison for a dogma which will, in a few years, be superseded. Brethren, we cannot endure this shifty theology. May God send us a race of men who have backbones! Men who believe something, and would die for what they believe. This Book deserves the sacrifice of our all for the maintenance of every line of it.

Believing and defending the Word of God, *let us proclaim it*. Go out this afternoon, on this first Sunday of summer, and speak in the street the words of this life. Go to a cottage-meeting, or to a workhouse, or to a lodging-house, and declare the divine words. "Truth is mighty, and will prevail," they say: it will not prevail if it be not made known. The Bible itself works no wonders until its truths are published abroad. Tell it out among the heathen that the Lord reigneth from the tree. Tell it out among the multitude, that the Son of God has come to save the lost, and that whosoever believeth in him shall have eternal life. Make all men know that "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." This thing was not done in a corner: keep it not a secret. Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature; and may God bless you! Amen.

Portions of Scripture read before sermon. Psalm 12; 119:137-152

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Vol. 35, No. 2084

INFALLIBILITY— WHERE TO FIND IT AND HOW TO USE IT

BY C. H. SPURGEON

“*It is written.*”—Matthew 4:4

THOUGHTFUL minds anxiously desire some fixed point of belief. The old philosopher wanted a fulcrum for his lever, and believed that if he could only obtain it he could move the world. It is uncomfortable to be always at sea; we would fain discover *terra firma*, and plant our foot upon a rock. We cannot rest till we have found out something which is certain, sure, settled, decided, and no longer to be questioned. Many a mind has peered into the hazy region of rationalism, and has seen nothing before it but perpetual mist and fog, and, shivering with the cold chill of those arctic regions of scepticism, it has yearned for a clearer light, a warmer guide, more tangible belief. This yearning has driven men into strange beliefs. Satan, seeing their ravenous hunger, has made them accept a stone for bread. Many have held, and still do hold, that it is possible to find your infallible foundation in the Pope of Rome. I do not wonder that they would rather have an infallible man than be altogether without a standard of truth; yet is it so monstrous that men should believe in papal infallibility, that did they not themselves avow it we should think it most insulting to accuse them of it. How any mind can by any possible contortion twist itself into a posture in which it will be capable of accepting such a belief is one of the mysteries of manhood. Why, the popes err in trifles, how much more in great matters? In Disraeli's "Curiosities of Literature" is the following amusing incident, under the head of "Errata":—"One of the most egregious of all literary blunders is that of the edition of the Vulgate, by Sixtus V. His Holiness carefully superintended every sheet as it passed through the press; and, to the amazement of all the world, the work remained without a rival—it swarmed with errata! A multitude of scraps were printed to paste over the erroneous passages, in order to give the true text. The book makes a whimsical appearance with these patches; and the heretics exulted in this demonstration of papal infallibility! The copies were called in, and violent attempts made to suppress it; a few still remain for the raptures of biblical collectors; at a late sale the Bible of Sixtus V. fetched above sixty guineas—not too much for a mere book of blunders! The world was highly amused at the bull of the editorial pope prefixed to the first volume, which excommunicates all printers who in reprinting the work should make any alteration in the text!" The notion of infallibility residing in mortal man is worthy of a madhouse, and scarcely deserves to be seriously discussed. You can scarcely read a page of such history as even Catholics admit to be authentic without discovering that popes have been men, and not gods, and their bulls have been as blundering and erroneous as the decrees of worldly princes. So long as a clear understanding remains to a man he cannot repose in the imaginary infallibility of a priest.

Others, however, linger hopefully around the idea of an infallible church. They believe in the judgment of general councils, and hope there to find the rock of certainty. Apparently this is more easy, for in the multitude of counsellors there is wisdom, but in reality it is quite as preposterous; for if you mass together a number of men, each one of whom is fallible, it is clear that you are no nearer infallibility. It is quite as easy to believe that *one* man is inspired as that five of six hundred are so. The fact is that churches have made mistakes as well as individual

men, and have fallen into grievous errors both in practice and doctrine. Look at the churches of Galatia, Corinth, Laodicia, Sardis, and so on; nay we find that the first disciples of our Lord, who made up the truly primitive and apostolic church, were not infallible, they made a great mistake about a simple saying of our Lord. He said concerning John, "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?" "Then went this saying abroad among the brethren, that that disciple should not die: yet Jesus said not unto him, He shall not die; but, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?" Even the apostles themselves could blunder, and did blunder. They were infallible in what they wrote when they were under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, but at no other time. Yet, brethren, I marvel not that in the sore distress to which the mind is often brought, it is found better to believe in an infallible church than to be left to mere reason, to be tossed to and fro, a desolate waif, driven by ever changeful winds over the awful leagues of questionings which are found in the restless ocean of unbelief. Longing as I do for a sure foundation, and rejecting both popes and councils, where shall I look?

We have a more sure word of testimony, a rock of truth upon which we rest, for our infallible standard lies in, "It is written." The Bible, the whole Bible, and nothing but the Bible, is our religion. Of this inspired Book we say—

"This is the judge that ends the strife

When wit and reason fail."

It is said that it is hard to be understood, but it is not so to those who seek the guidance of the Spirit of God. There are in it great truths which are above our comprehension, placed there on purpose to let us see how shallow are our finite minds, but concerning vital and fundamental points the Bible is not hard to be understood, neither is there any excuse for the multitudes of errors which men pretend to have gathered from it. A babe in grace taught by the Spirit of God may know the mind of the Lord concerning salvation, and find its way to heaven by the guidance of the word alone. But be it profound or simple, that is not the question; it is the word of God, and is pure, unerring truth. Here is infallibility, and nowhere else.

I wish to speak this morning upon this grand, infallible book, which is our sole court of appeal: and I desire to speak especially to the young converts who during the last few days have found the Saviour, for by them this book must be used as the sword of the Spirit in the spiritual conflicts which await them. I would zealously exhort them to take to themselves this part of the whole armour of God, that they may be able to resist the great enemy of their souls.

"It is written." I shall commend this unfailing weapon to the use of our young soldiers by noting that *this is our Champion's own weapon*; secondly, I shall urge them to note *to what uses he turned this weapon*; and thirdly, we shall watch him to see *how he handled it*.

I. I commend to every Christian here the constant use of the infallible word, because IT WAS OUR CHAMPION'S CHOSEN WEAPON when he was assailed by Satan in the wilderness. *He had a great choice of weapons* with which to fight with Satan, *but he took none but this sword of the Spirit*—"It is written." Our Lord might have overcome Satan by angelic force. He had only to pray to his Father and he would presently have sent him twelve legions of angels, against whose mighty rush the arch-fiend could not have stood for a single moment. If our Lord had but exercised his godhead, a single word would have sent the tempter back to his infernal den. But instead of power angelic or divine he used, "It is written"; thus teaching his church that she is never to call in the aid of force, or use the carnal weapon, but must trust alone in the omnipotence which dwells in the sure word of testimony. This is our battle-axe and weapon of war. The patronages or the constraints of civil power are not for us; neither dare we use either bribes or threats to make men Christians: a spiritual kingdom must be set up and supported by spiritual means only.

Our Lord might have defeated the tempter by unveiling his own glory. The brightness of the divine majesty was hidden within the humility of his manhood, and if he had lifted the veil for a moment the fiend would have been as utterly confounded as bats and owls when the sun blazes in their faces. But Jesus deigned still to conceal his excellent majesty, and only to defend himself with "It is written."

Our Master might also have assailed Satan with rhetoric and logic. Why did not he discuss the points with him as they arose? Here were three different propositions to be discussed, but our Lord confined himself to the one argument, "It is written." Now, beloved, if our Lord and Master, with all the choice of weapons which he might have had, nevertheless selected this true Jerusalem blade of the Word of God, let us not hesitate for a moment, but grasp and hold fast this one, only weapon of the saints in all times. Cast away the wooden sword of carnal reasoning; trust not in human eloquence, but arm yourselves with the solemn declarations of God, who cannot lie, and ye need not fear Satan and all his hosts. Jesus, we may be sure, selected the best weapon. What was best for him is best for you.

This weapon, it is to be noted, our Lord *used at the outset of his career*. He had not yet come into the public ministry, but, if I may use the expression, while his young hand was yet untried in public warfare, he grasped at once the weapon ready forged for him, and boldly said "It is written." You young Christians lately converted have probably already been tempted, or ere long you will be, for I remember that the very first week after I found the Saviour I was subjected to a very furious spiritual temptation, and I should not wonder if the like happens to you. Now, I charge you do as Jesus did, and grasp firmly—"It is written." It is the child's weapon as truly as it is the defence of the strong man. If a believer were as tall as Goliath of Gath, he need have no better sword than this, and, if he be a mere pigmy in the things of God, this sword will equally befit his hand and be equally effectual for offence and defence. What a mercy it is for you, young Christian, that you have not to argue but to believe, not to invent but to accept. You have only to turn over your Bibles, find a text, and hurl that at Satan, like a stone from David's sling, and you will win the battle. "It is written," and what is written is infallible; here is your strength in argument. "It is written;" God has said it; that is enough. O blessed sword and shield which the little child can use to purpose, fit also for the illiterate and simple-hearted, giving might to the feeble-minded, and conquest to the weak.

Note next, that as Christ chose this weapon out of all others, and used it in his earliest conflict, so, too, *he used it when no man was near*. The value of Holy Scripture is not alone seen in public teaching or striving for the truth, its still small voice is equally powerful when the servant of the Lord is enduring personal trial in the lone wilderness. The severest struggles of a true Christian are usually unknown to any but himself. Not in the family do we meet the most subtle temptations, but in the closet; not in the shop so much as in the recesses of our own spirit do we wrestle with principalities and powers. For these dread duels, "It is written" is the best sword and shield. Scripture to convince another man is good; but Scripture is most required to console, defend, and sanctify our own soul. You must know how to use the Bible alone, and understand how to meet the subtlest of foes with it; for there is a real and personal devil, as most Christians know by experience, for they have stood foot to foot with him, and known his keen suggestions, horrible insinuations, blasphemous assertions, and fiendish accusations. We have been assailed by thoughts which came from a mind more vigorous, more experienced, and more subtle than our own and for these there is but one defence—the infallible "It is written." Conflicts have taken place full many a time between God's servants and Satan which are more notable in the unpublished annals of the sacred history which the Lord recordeth, than the bravest deeds of ancient heroes whom men praise in their national songs. He is not the only conqueror who is saluted with blast of trumpet, and whose statue stands in the public square; there are victors who have fought with angels and prevailed, whose prowess even Lucifer must grimly

own. These all ascribe their victories to the grace which taught them how to use the infallible word of the Lord. Dear friend, you must have "It is written" ready by your side at all times. Some, when a spiritual conflict begins, run to a friend for help; I do not condemn the practice, but it would be much better if they turned to the Lord and his sure promise. Some at the first onslaught are ready to give up all hope. Do not act in so dastardly a manner; seek grace to play the man. You must fight if you are to enter into heaven; look to your weapon, it cannot bend or grow blunt, wield it boldly and plunge into the heart of your enemy. "It is written" will cut through soul and spirit, and wound the old dragon himself.

Note, that *our Lord used this weapon under the most trying circumstances*, but he found it to be sufficient for his need. He was alone; no disciple was there to sympathise, but the word was the man of his right hand, the Scripture communed with him. He was hungry, for he had fasted forty days and nights, and hunger is a sharp pain, and oftentimes the spirits sink when the body is in want of food; yet "It is written" held the wolf of hunger at bay; the word fed the champion with such meat as not only removed all faintness, but made him mighty in spirit. He was placed by his adversary in a position of great danger, high on the pinnacle of the lofty house of the Lord, yet there he stood, and needed no surer foothold than that which the promises of the Lord supplied him. "It is written," enabled him to look down from the dizzy height and baffle the tempter still. He was placed also where the kingdoms of the world were stretched beneath his feet, a matchless panorama which has full often dazzled great men's eyes and driven them onward to destruction; but "It is written" swept aside the snares of ambition and laughed at the fascination of power. Or in the desert, or on the temple, or on an exceedingly high mountain, no change in his mode of warfare was required; the infallible "It is written" availed in every position in which he found himself, and so shall it be with us.

Earnestly do I commend the word of God to you who have lately enlisted beneath the banner of my Lord. As David said of Goliath's sword, "there is none like it," even so say I of the Holy Scriptures. Our Lord was tempted in all points like as we are, and therein he sympathises with us, but he resisted the temptations, and therein he is our example; we must follow him fully if we would share his triumphs.

Observe that our Saviour *continued to use his one defence*, although his adversary frequently shifted his point of attack. Error has many forms, truth is one. The devil tempted him to distrust, but that dart was caught upon the shield of "It is written, man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God shall man live." The enemy aimed a blow at him from the side of presumption, tempting him to cast himself down from the temple; but how terribly did that two-edged sword fall down upon the head of the fiend, "It is written, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." The next impudent blow was levelled at our Lord with the intent of bringing him to his knee—"Fall down and worship me;" but it was met and returned with crushing force by—"It is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve." This smote leviathan to the heart. This weapon is good at all points; good for defence, and for attack, to guard our whole manhood or to strike through the joints and marrow of the foe. Like the seraph's sword at Eden's gate, it turns every way. You cannot be in a condition which the word of God has not provided for; it has as many faces and eyes as providence itself. You will find it unfailing in all periods of your life, in all circumstances, in all companies, in all trials, and under all difficulties. Were it fallible it would be useless in emergencies, but its unerring truth renders it precious beyond all price to the soldiers of the cross.

I commend to you, then, the hiding of God's word in your heart, the pondering of it in your minds. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom." Be rooted and grounded, and established in its teaching, and saturated with its spirit. To me it is an intense joy to search

diligently in my Father's book of grace. It grows upon me daily. It was written by inspiration in old times, but I have found while feeding upon it, that not only *was* it inspired when written, but it is so still. It is not a mere historic document, it is a letter fresh from the pen of God to use. It is not a sermon once delivered, and ended: it speaks still. It is not a flower dried and put by in the *hortussiccus*, with its beauty clouded and its perfume evaporated; but it is a fresh blooming flower in God's garden, as fragrant and as fair as when he planted it. I look not upon the Scriptures as a harp which once was played by skilful fingers, and is now hung up as a memorial upon the wall: no, it is an instrument of ten strings still in the minstrel's hand, still filling the temple of the Lord with divine music, which those who have ears to hear delight to listen to. Holy Scripture is an Eolian harp, through which the blessed wind of the Spirit is always sweeping and creating mystic music, such as no man's ears shall hear elsewhere, nor hear even there indeed, unless they have been opened by the healing touch of the great Physician. The Holy Spirit is in the word, and it is, therefore, living truth. O Christians, be ye sure of this, and because of it make you the word your chosen weapon of war.

II. Our Lord Jesus Christ teaches us TO WHAT USES TO PUT THIS "IT IS WRITTEN." Notice first that he used it to *defend his sonship*. The fiend said, "If thou be the Son of God," and Jesus replied, "It is written." That was the only answer he deigned to give. He did not call to mind evidences to prove his Sonship; he did not even mention that voice out of the excellent glory which had said, "This is my beloved Son." No, but "It is written." Now, my dear young brother, converted but newly, I do not doubt but that you have been already subjected to that infernal "if." Oh, how glibly it comes from Satan's lip. It is his darling word, the favourite arrow of his quiver. He is the prince of sceptics, and they worship him while he laughs in his sleeve at them, for he believes and trembles. One of his greatest works of mischief is to make men doubt. "If"—with what a sneer he whispers this already in the ear of the newly-converted. "If," says he,—"if." "You say you are justified and pardoned, and accepted; but *if!* May you not after all be deceived?" Now, dear friends, I beseech you never let Satan get you away from the solid ground of the word of God. If he once gets you to think, that the fact of Christ being the Saviour of sinners can only be proved by what you can see within yourself, he will very soon plunge you into despair. The reason why I am to believe in Jesus, lies in Jesus and not in me. I am not to say, "I believe in the Lord Jesus because I feel so happy," for within half an hour I may feel miserable; but I believe in Christ for salvation, because it is written, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." I believe in the salvation provided by Jesus Christ, not because it comports with my reason or suits my frame of mind, but because it is written, "He that believeth in him is not condemned," "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believeth in me hath everlasting life." Nothing can alter this truth, it stands, and must stand for ever. Believer, abide by it, come what may. Satan will tell you "You know there are many evidences; can you produce them?" Tell him to mind his own business. He will say to you, "You know how imperfectly you have behaved, even since your conversion." Tell him that he is not so wonderfully perfect that he can afford to find fault with you. If he says, "Ah, but if you were really a changed character you would not have those thoughts and feelings"; argue not at all with him, but dwell upon the fact that it is written, "Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, and whosoever believeth in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life." If you believe in him, you cannot perish, but you have everlasting life, for so it is written. "It is written," stand you there, and if the devil were fifty devils in one, he could not overcome you. On the other hand, if you leave "It is written," Satan knows more about reasoning than you do, he is far older, has studied mankind very thoroughly, and knows all our sore points, therefore the contest will be an unequal one. Do not argue with him, but wave in his face the banner "It is written." Satan cannot endure the infallible truth, for it is death to the falsehood of which he is the father. So long as God's word is true, the believer is

safe; if that is overthrown our hope is lost, but blessed be God, not till then. Flee ye to your stronghold, ye tempted ones.

Our Lord next used the Scripture *to defeat temptation*. He was tempted to distrust. There lay stones at his feet, for all the world like loaves; there was no bread, and he was hungry, and distrust said, "God has left you; you will starve; therefore leave off being a servant, become a master, and command that these stones be made bread." Jesus, however, met the temptation distrustfully to provide for himself by saying, "It is written." Now, young Christians or old Christians, you may be placed by providence where you think you will be in want, and then if you are afraid that God will not provide for you, the dark suggestion will arise, "I will deal after the way of the unjust, and so put myself in comfortable circumstances." True, the action would be wrong, but many would do it, and therefore Satan whispers, "Necessity has no law; take the opportunity now before you." In such an hour, foil you the foe, with "It is written, thou shalt not steal." We are bidden never to go beyond or defraud our neighbour. It is written, "Trust in the Lord and do good so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed." It is written, "No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly." In that way only can you safely meet the temptation to distrust.

Then Satan tempted the Lord to presumption. "If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down," said he; but Christ had a Scripture ready to parry his thrust. Many are tempted to presume. "You are one of God's elect, you cannot perish; you may therefore go into sin; you have no need to be so very careful, since you cannot fall finally and fatally,"—so Satan whispers, and it is not always that the uninstructed convert is ready to answer the base sophistry. If we are at any time tempted to yield to such specious special pleadings, let us remember it is written, "watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation." It is written, "Keep thine heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life." It is written, "Be ye holy, for I am holy. Be ye perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect." Begone, Satan, we dare not sin because of the mercy of God; that were indeed a diabolical return for his goodness; we abhor the idea of sinning that grace might abound.

Then will Satan attack us with the temptation to be traitors to our God and to worship other gods. "Worship me," says he, "and if thou do this thy reward shall be great." He sets before us some earthly object which he would have us idolise, some selfish aim which he would have us pursue. At that time our only defence is the sure word, "It is written, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy strength." "Ye are not your own, ye are bought with a price." "Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." "Little children keep yourselves from idols." Quoting such words as those with all our hearts, we shall not be suffered to fall. Beloved, we must keep from sin. If Christ has indeed saved us from sin, we cannot bear the thought of falling into it. If any of you can take delight in sin, you are not the children of God. If you are the children of God you hate it with a perfect hatred, and your very soul loathes it. To keep you from sin, arm yourselves with this most holy and pure word of God, which shall cleanse your way, and make your heart obedient to the voice of the thrice-holy God.

Next our Lord used the word as *a direction to his way*. This is a very important point. Too many direct their ways by what they call providences. They do wrong things and they say, "It seemed such a providence." I wonder whether Jonah, when he went down to Joppa to flee to Tarshish, considered it a providence that a ship was about to sail. If so, he was like too many now-a-days, who seek to lay their guilt upon God by declaring that they felt bound to act as they did, for providence suggested it. Our Lord was not guided as to what he should do by the circumstances around him. Any one but our holy Lord would have obeyed the tempter, and then have said, "I was very hungry, and I was sitting down in the wilderness, and it seemed such a

providence that a spirit should find me out and courteously suggest the very thing that I needed, viz., to turn the stones into bread.” It was a providence, but it was a testing providence. When you are tempted to do evil to relieve your necessities, say to yourself, “This providence is testing me, but by no means indicates to me what I ought to do; for my rule is, ‘It is written.’” If you make apparent providence your guide, you will make a thousand mistakes, but if you follow “It is written” your steps will be wisely ordered.

Neither are we to make our special gifts and special privileges our guide. Christ is on the pinnacle of the temple, and it is possible, nay, it is certain, that if he had chosen to cast himself down he could have safely done so; but he did not make his special privileges a reason for presumption. It is true that the saints shall be kept: final perseverance I believe to be undoubtedly the teaching of God’s word: but I am not to presume upon a doctrine, I am to obey the precept. For a man to say “I am a child of God, I am safe, therefore I live as I list,” would be to prove that he is no child of God at all, for the children of God do not turn the grace of God into licentiousness. It were only according to the devil’s logic to say, “I am favoured more than others, and therefore I may provoke the Lord more than they.” “It is written, we love him because he first loved us, and by this we know that we love God, if we keep his commandments.”

Then Satan tried to make his own personal advantage our Lord’s guide. “All these things will I give thee,” said he, but Christ did not order his act for his own personal advantage, but replied, “It is written.” How often have I heard people say, “I do not like to remain in a church with which I do not agree, but my usefulness would be quite gone if I were to leave it.” On this system, if our Lord had been a mere man he might have said, “If I fall down and perform this small act of ritualism I shall have a noble sphere of usefulness. All the kingdoms of the earth will be mine! There are all those poor oppressed slaves; I could set them free. The hungry and the thirsty, how would I supply their wants; and with me for a King, earth would be happy. Indeed, that is the very thing I am about to die for, and if it is to be done so easily, and in a trice, by bowing the knee before this spirit, why not do it?” Far, far removed was our Lord from the wicked spirit of compromise. Alas, too many now say, “We must give and take in little points; it is of no use to stand out and to be so absurdly wedded to your own ideas; there is nothing like yielding a little to carry your point in greater things.” Thus many talk now-a-days, but not so spoke our Lord. Though the whole world would be at his disposal if he did but once bow his head before the fiend, he would not do it. “It is written” was his guide; not his usefulness or personal advantage. My dear brother, it will sometimes happen that to do the right thing will appear to be most disastrous; it will shipwreck your fortune and bring you into trouble, but I charge you do the right thing at any cost. Instead of your being honoured and respected, and accounted a leader in the Christian church, you will be regarded as eccentric, and bigoted, if you speak straight out; but speak straight out, and never mind what comes of it. You and I have nothing to do with what becomes of us, or our reputations, or with what becomes of the world, or becomes of heaven itself; our one business is to do our Father’s will. “It is written” is to be our rule, and with dogged obstinacy, as men call it, but with resolute consecration as God esteems it, through the mire and through the slough, through the flood and through the flame, follow Jesus and the word infallible. Follow the written word wholly, and never mar the perfection of your obedience to him on account of usefulness, or any other petty plea, which Satan would put in your way.

Note, further, that our Lord used “It is written” *for maintaining his own Spirit*. I love to think of the calmness of Christ. He is not one whit flurried. He is hungry, and he is told to create bread, and he answers, “It is written.” He is lifted to the temple’s summit, but he says, “It is written,” just as calmly as you or I might do sitting in an easy chair. There he is with the whole world beneath his feet, gazing on its splendour, but he is not dazzled. “It is written” is still his quiet answer. Nothing makes a man self-contained, cool, and equal to every emergency like always

falling back upon the infallible Book, and remembering the declaration of Jehovah, who cannot lie. I charge you, brethren, see to this.

The last thought on this point is that our Lord teaches us that the use of Scripture is to *vanquish the enemy and chase him away*. “Go,” said he to the fiend, “for it is written.” You too shall chase away temptation if you keep firmly to this, “God hath said it, God hath promised it; God that cannot lie, whose very word of grace is strong as that which built the skies.”

III. As our Lord chose the weapon, and taught us its uses, so HE SHOWED US HOW TO HANDLE IT. How are we to handle this sword of “It is written”? First, *with deepest reverence*. Let every word that God has spoken be law and gospel to you. Never trifle with it; never try to evade its force or change its meaning. God speaks to you in this book as much as if again he came to the top of Sinai and lifted up his voice in thunder. I like to open the Bible and to pray, “Lord God, let the words leap out of the page into my soul, thyself making them vivid, quick, powerful, and fresh to my heart.” Our Lord himself felt the power of the word. It was not so much the devil who felt the power of “It is written” as Christ himself. “No,” saith he, “I will not command stones to be made bread; I trust in God who can without bread sustain me. I will not cast myself down from the temple; I will not tempt the Lord my God. I will not worship Satan, for God alone is God.” The manhood of Christ felt an awe of the word of God, and so it became a power to him. To trifle with Scripture is to deprive yourself of its aid. Reverence it, I beseech you, and look up to God with devout gratitude for having given it to you.

Next *have it always ready*. Our Lord Jesus Christ as soon as he was assailed had his answer prepared— “It is written.” A ready reckoner is an admirable person in a house of business; and a ready textuary is a most useful person in the house of God. Have the Scriptures at your fingers’ end; better still, have them in the centre of your heart. It is a good thing to store the memory with many passages of the Word—the very words themselves. A Christian ought no more to make a mistake in quoting a text of Scripture, than a classic does when he quotes from Virgil or Homer. The scholar likes to give the *ipsissima verba*, and so should we, for every word is precious to us. Our Saviour knew so much of Holy Scripture that out of one single book, the book of Deuteronomy, he obtained all the texts with which he fought the wilderness battle. He had a wider range, for the Old Testament was before him; but he kept to one book, as if to let Satan know that he was not short of ammunition. If the devil chose to continue the temptation, the Lord had abundant defence in reserve. “It is written” is an armoury wherein do hang a thousand bucklers, all shields of mighty men. It is not merely one, but a thousand, nay, ten thousand weapons of war. It has texts of every kind, suitable for our aid in every emergency, and effectual for repelling every attack. Brethren, study much the Word of God, and have it ready to hand. It is no use treating the Bible as the fool did his anchor, which he had left at home when he came to be in a storm: have the infallible witness at your side when the father of lies approaches.

Endeavour also to *understand its meaning*, and so to understand it that you can discern between its meaning and its perversion. Half the mischief in the world, and perhaps more, is done, not by an ostensible lie, but by a perverted truth. The devil, knowing this takes a text of Scripture, clips it, adds to it, and attacks Christ with it; but our Lord did not therefore despise Scripture because the devil himself might quote it, but he answered him with a flaming text right in his face. He did not say “The other is not written, you have altered it;” but he gave him a taste of what “It is written” really was, and so confounded him. Do you the same. Search the Word, get the true taste of it in your mouth, and acquire discernment; so that when you say “It is written,” you may not be making a mistake; for there are some who think their creed scriptural, and yet it is not so. Texts of Scripture out of their connection, twisted and perverted, are not “It is written,” but the plain meaning of the word should be known and understood. On, read the word,

and pray for the anointing of the Holy Spirit, that you may know its meaning, for so will you contend against the foe.

Brethren, *learn also to appropriate Scripture to yourselves*. One of the texts our Lord quoted he slightly altered. “Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.” The original text is, “Ye shall not tempt the Lord your God.” But the singular lies in the plural, and it is always a blessed thing to be able to find it there. Learn so to use Scripture that you take home to yourself all its teaching, all its precepts, all its promises, all its doctrines; for bread on the table does not nourish; it is bread which you eat that will really sustain you.

When you have appropriated the texts to yourself, *stand by them whatever they may cost you*. If to give up the text would enable you to make stones into bread, do not give it up; if to reject the precept would enable you to fly through the air like a seraph, do not reject it. If to go against the word of God would make you emperor of the entire world, do not accept the bribes. To the law and to the testimony, stand ye there. Be a Bible man, go so far as the Bible, but not an inch beyond it. Though Calvin should beckon you, and you esteem him, or Wesley should beckon, and you esteem him, keep to the Scripture, to the Scripture only. If your minister should go astray, pray that he may be brought back again, but do not follow him. Though we or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel than this book teaches you, do not, I pray you, give any heed to us—no, not for a single moment. Here is the only infallibility;—the Holy Ghost’s witness in this book.

Remember, lastly, that your Lord at this time was *filled with the Spirit*. “Jesus, being filled with the Spirit,” went to be tempted. The word of God, apart from the Spirit of God, will be of no use to you. If you cannot understand a book, do you know the best way to reach its meaning? Write to the author and ask him what he meant. If you have a book to read, and you have got that author always accessible, you need not complain that you do not understand it. The Holy Spirit is come to abide with us for ever. Search the Scriptures, but cry for the Spirit’s light, and live under his influence. So Jesus fought the old dragon, “Being filled with the Spirit.” He smote Leviathan through with this weapon, because the Spirit of God was upon him. Go you with the word of God like a two-edged sword in your hand, but ere you enter the lists pray the Holy Ghost to baptise you into himself, so shall you overcome all your adversaries, and triumph even to the end. May God bless you, for Jesus’ sake.

Portion of Scripture read before sermon. Matthew 4
Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Vol. 20, No. 1208

