



THE WITHERING
WORK OF THE
SPIRIT

CHARLES H. SPURGEON (1834-1892)

THE WITHERING WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

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THE WITHERING WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

*The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field: the grass withereth, the flower fadeth; Because the spirit of the LORD bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: But the word of our God shall stand forever.
—Isaiah 40:6-8*

*Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever. For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: but the word of the Lord endureth forever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you.
—1 Peter 1:23-25*

The passage in Isaiah which I have just read in your hearing may be used as a very eloquent description of our mortality, and if a sermon should be preached from it upon the frailty of human nature, the brevity of life, and the certainty of death, no one could dispute the appropriateness of the text. Yet I venture to question whether such a discourse would strike the central teaching of the prophet. Something more than the decay of our material flesh is intended here. The carnal mind, the flesh in another sense, was intended by the Holy Ghost when He bade His messenger proclaim those words. It does not seem to me that a mere expression of the mortality of our race was needed in this place by the context. It would hardly keep pace with the sublime revelations which surround it, and would in some measure be a digression from the subject in hand. The notion that we are here, simply and alone, reminded of our mortality does not square with the New Testament exposition of it in Peter, which I have also placed before you as a text. There is another and more spiritual meaning here, beside and beyond that which would be contained in the great and very obvious truth, that all of us must die.

Look at the chapter in Isaiah with care. What is the subject of it? It is the divine consolation of Zion. Zion had been tossed to and fro with conflicts. She had been smarting under the result of sin. The Lord, to remove her sorrow, bids His prophets announce the coming of the long-expected Deliverer, the end and accomplishment of all her warfare and the pardon of all her iniquity. There is no doubt that this is the theme of the prophecy. And further, there is no sort of question about the next point, that the prophet goes on to foretell the coming of John the Baptist as the harbinger of the Messiah. We have

no difficulty in the explanation of the passage, "Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God" (Isa 40:3); for the New Testament again and again refers this to the Baptist and his ministry. The object of the coming of the Baptist and the mission of the Messiah, Whom he heralded, was the manifestation of divine glory. Observe the fifth verse: "The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it." Well, what next? Was it needful to mention man's mortality in this connection? We think not. But there is much more appropriateness in the succeeding verses, if we see their deeper meaning. Do they not mean this? In order to make room for the display of the divine glory in Christ Jesus and His salvation, there would come a withering of all the glory wherein man boasts himself; the flesh should be seen in its true nature as corrupt and dying, and the grace of God alone should be exalted. This would be seen under the ministry of John the Baptist first, and should be the preparatory work of the Holy Ghost in men's hearts, in all time, in order that the glory of the Lord should be revealed and human pride be forever confounded.

The Spirit blows upon the flesh, and that which seemed vigorous becomes weak; that which was fair to look upon is smitten with decay. The true nature of the flesh is thus discovered. Its deceit is laid bare, its power is destroyed, and there is space for the dispensation of the ever-abiding Word, and for the rule of the Great Shepherd, Whose words are spirit and life. There is a withering wrought by the Spirit which is the preparation for the sowing and implanting by which salvation is wrought.

The withering before the sowing was very marvelously fulfilled in the preaching of John the Baptist. Most appropriately he carried on his ministry in the desert, for a spiritual desert was all around him; he was the voice of one crying in the wilderness. It was not his work to plant, but to hew down. The fleshy religion of the Jews was then in its prime. Pharisaism stalked through the streets in all its pomp; men complacently rested in outward ceremonies only, and spiritual religion was at the lowest conceivable ebb. Here and there might be found a Simeon and an Anna, but for the most part men knew nothing of spiritual religion, but said in their hearts: "We have Abraham to our father" (Luk 3:8), and this is enough. What a stir he made when he called the lordly Pharisees a generation of vipers! How he shook the nation with the declaration, "Now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees" (Mat 3:10)! Stern as Elias, his work was to level the mountains, and lay low every lofty imagination. That word, "Repent," was as a scorching wind to the verdure¹ of self-righteousness, a killing blast for the confidence of ceremonialism. His food and his dress called for fasting and mourning. The outward token of his ministry declared the death amid which he preached, as he buried in the waters of Jordan those who came to him. "Ye must die and be buried, even as He Who is to come will save by death and burial." This was the meaning of the emblem which he set before the crowd. His typical act was as thorough in its teaching as were his words. And as if that were not enough, he warned them of a yet more searching and trying baptism with the Holy Ghost and with fire, and of the coming of One Whose fan was in His hand, thor-

¹ **verdure** – greenness, especially of fresh, flourishing vegetation.

oughly to purge His floor. The Spirit in John blew as the rough north wind, searching and withering, and made him to be a destroyer of the vain gloryings of a fleshly religion, that the spiritual faith might be established.

When our Lord Himself actually appeared, He came into a withered land, whose glories had all departed. Old Jesse's stem was bare, and our Lord was the branch which grew out of his root. The sceptre had departed from Judah, and the lawgiver from between his feet, when Shiloh came. An alien sat on David's throne, and the Roman called the covenant-land his own. The lamp of prophecy burned but dimly, even if it had not utterly gone out. No Isaiah had arisen of late to console them, nor even a Jeremiah to lament their apostasy. The whole economy of Judaism was a worn-out vesture; it had waxed old, and was ready to vanish away. The priesthood was disarranged. Luke tells us that Annas and Caiaphas were high priests that year—two in a year or at once, a strange setting aside of the laws of Moses. All the dispensation which gathered around the visible, or as Paul calls it, the “worldly” sanctuary, was coming to a close. And when our Lord had finished His work, the veil of the temple was rent in twain, the sacrifices were abolished, the priesthood of Aaron was set aside, and carnal ordinances were abrogated, for the Spirit revealed spiritual things. When He came Who was made a priest, “not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life” (Heb 7:16), there was “a disannulling of the commandment going before for the weakness and unprofitableness thereof” (Heb 7:18).

Such are the facts of history; but I am not about to dilate² upon them. I am coming to your own personal histories—to the experience of every child of God. In every one of us it must be fulfilled that all that is of the flesh in us, seeing it is but as grass, must be withered, and the comeliness thereof must be destroyed. The Spirit of God, like the wind, must pass over the field of our souls, and cause our beauty to be as a fading flower. He must so convince us of sin, and so reveal ourselves to ourselves, that we shall see that the flesh profiteth nothing; that our fallen nature is corruption itself, and that “they that are in the flesh cannot please God” (Rom 8:8). There must be brought home to us the sentence of death upon our former legal and carnal life, that the incorruptible seed of the Word of God, implanted by the Holy Ghost, may be in us, and abide in us forever.

The subject of this morning is the withering work of the Spirit upon the souls of men, and when we have spoken upon it, we shall conclude with a few words upon the implanting work, which always follows where this withering work has been performed.

1. Seven Observations Regarding this Work

First. Turning then to the work of the Spirit in causing the goodliness of the flesh to fade, let us, first, observe that the work of the Holy Spirit upon the soul of man in withering up that which is of the flesh, is *very unexpected*. You will observe in our text that even the speaker himself, though doubtless one taught of God, when he was bidden to cry, said “What shall I cry?” Even he did not know that in order to the comforting of

² **dilate** – to describe or set forth at length or in detail.

God's people, there must first be experienced a preliminary visitation. Many preachers of God's Gospel have forgotten that the Law is the schoolmaster to bring men to Christ. They have sown on the unbroken fallow ground, and forgotten that the plough must break the clods. We have seen too much of trying to sew without the sharp needle of the Spirit's convincing power. Preachers have labored to make Christ precious to those who think themselves rich and increased in goods; and it has been labor in vain. It is our duty to preach Jesus Christ even to self-righteous sinners, but it is certain that Jesus Christ will never be accepted by them while they hold themselves in high esteem. Only the sick will welcome the physician. It is the work of the Spirit of God to convince men of sin, and until they are convinced of sin, they will never be led to seek the righteousness which is of God by Jesus Christ. I am persuaded that wherever there is a real work of grace in any soul, it begins with a pulling down; the Holy Ghost does not build on the old foundation. Wood, hay, and stubble will not do for Him to build upon. He will come as the fire, and cause a conflagration³ of all proud nature's Babels. He will break our bow and cut our spear in sunder, and burn our chariot in the fire (Psa 46:9). When every sandy foundation is gone, then, but not till then, behold He will lay in our souls the great Foundation-stone, chosen of God and precious. The awakened sinner, when he asks that God would have mercy upon him, is much astonished to find that, instead of enjoying a speedy peace, his soul is bowed down within him under a sense of divine wrath. Naturally enough he inquires: "Is this the answer to my prayer? I prayed the Lord to deliver me from sin and self, and is this the way in which He deals with me? I said, 'Hear me,' and behold He wounds me with the wounds of a cruel one. I said, 'Clothe me,' and lo! He has torn off from me the few rags which covered me before, and my nakedness stares me in the face. I said, 'Wash me,' and behold He has plunged me in the ditch till mine own clothes do abhor me. Is this the way of grace?" Sinner, be not surprised: it is even so. Perceivest thou not the cause of it? How canst thou be healed while the proud flesh is in thy wound? It must come out. It is the only way to heal thee permanently. It would be folly to film over thy sore, or heal thy flesh, and leave the leprosy within thy bones. The great Physician will cut with His sharp knife till the corrupt flesh be removed, for only thus can a sure healing work be wrought in thee. Dost thou not see that it is divinely wise that before thou art clothed thou shouldst be stripped! What, wouldst thou have Christ's lustrous righteousness outside whiter than any fuller can make it, and thine own filthy rags concealed within? Nay, man; they must be put away; not a single thread of thine own must be left upon thee. It cannot be that God should cleanse thee until He has made thee see somewhat of thy defilement; for thou wouldst never value the precious blood which cleanses us from all sin if thou hadst not first of all been made to mourn that thou art altogether an unclean thing.

The convincing work of the Spirit, wherever it comes, is unexpected, and even to the child of God in whom this process has still to go on, it is often startling. We begin again to build that which the Spirit of God had destroyed. Having begun in the spirit, we act as if we would be made perfect in the flesh; and then when our mistaken upbuilding has to

³ **conflagration** – destructive fire, usually an extensive one.

be leveled with the earth, we are almost as astonished as we were when first the scales fell from our eyes. In some such condition as this was Newton when he wrote:

*I asked the Lord that I might grow
In faith and love and every grace,
Might more of His salvation know,
And seek more earnestly His face.*

*'Twas He who taught me thus to pray,
And He, I trust has answered prayer;
But it has been in such a way
As almost drove me to despair.*

*I hoped that in some favour'd hour,
At once He'd answer my request,
And by His love's constraining power
Subdue my sins, and give me rest.*

*Instead of this, He made me feel
The hidden evils of my heart;
And let the angry powers of hell
Assault my soul in ev'ry part.*

Ah, marvel not, for thus the Lord is wont to answer His people. The voice which saith, "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people" (Isa 40:1) achieves its purpose by first making them hear the cry, "All flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field."

Second. Furthermore, *this withering is after the usual order of the divine operation.* If we consider well the way of God, we shall not be astonished that He beginneth with His people by terrible things in righteousness. Observe the method of creation. I will not venture upon any dogmatic theory of geology, but there seems to be every probability that this world has been fitted up and destroyed, refitted and then destroyed again, many times before the last arranging of it for the habitation of men. "In the beginning God created the heaven and earth." Then came a long interval, and at length, at the appointed time, during seven days, the Lord prepared the earth for the human race. Consider then the state of matters when the great Architect began His work. What was there in the beginning? Originally, nothing. When He commanded the ordering of the earth how was it? "The earth was without form and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep" (Gen 1:2). There was no trace of another's plan to interfere with the great Architect. "With whom took he counsel, and who instructed him, and taught him in the path of judgment, and taught him knowledge, and showed to him the way of understanding?" (Isa 40:14). He received no contribution of column or pillar towards the temple which He intended to build. The earth was, as the Hebrew puts it, *Tohu* and *Bohu*, disorder and confusion—in a word, *chaos*. So it is in the new creation. When the Lord new-creates us, He borrows nothing from the old man, but makes all things new. He does not repair and add a new wing to the old house of our depraved nature, but He builds a new

temple for His own praise. We are spiritually without form and empty, and darkness is upon the face of our heart, and His Word comes to us, saying, "Light be," and there is light, and, ere long, life and every precious thing.

To take another instance from the ways of God: When man had fallen, when did the Lord bring him the Gospel? The first whisper of the Gospel, as you know, was, "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head" (Gen 3:15). That whisper came to man shivering in the presence of his Maker, having nothing more to say by way of excuse; but standing guilty before the Lord. When did the Lord God clothe our parents? Not until first of all He had put the question, "Who told thee that thou wast naked?" (Gen 3 11). Not until the fig-leaves had utterly failed did the Lord bring in the covering skin of the sacrifice, and wrap them in it. If you will pursue the meditation upon the acts of God with men, you will constantly see the same thing. God has given us a wonderful type of salvation in Noah's ark. But Noah was saved in that ark in connection with death; he himself, as it were, immured alive in a tomb, and all the world besides left to destruction. All other hope for Noah was gone, and then the ark rose upon the waters. Remember the redemption of the children of Israel out of Egypt. It occurred when they were in the saddest plight, and their cry went up to heaven by reason of their bondage. When no arm brought salvation, then with a high hand and an outstretched arm the Lord brought forth His people. Everywhere before the salvation there comes the humbling of the creature, the overthrow of human hope. As in the backwoods of America, before there can be tillage, the planting of cities, the arts of civilization, and the transactions of commerce, the woodman's axe must hack and hew. The stately trees of centuries must fall: the roots must be burned; the old reign of nature disturbed. The old must go before the new can come. Even thus the Lord takes away the first, that He may establish the second. The first heaven and the first earth must pass away, or there cannot be a new heaven and a new earth. Now, as it has been outwardly, we ought to expect that it would be the same within us; and when these witherings and fadings occur in our souls, we should only say, "It is the Lord: let him do what seemeth him good" (Isa 3:18).

Third. I would have you notice, thirdly, that we are taught in our text *how universal this process is in its range* over the hearts of all those upon whom the Spirit works. The withering is a withering of what? Of part of the flesh and some portion of its tendencies? Nay, observe, "*All* flesh is grass; and *all* the goodness thereof"—the very choice and pick of it—"is as the flower of the field," and what happens to the grass? Does any of it live? "The grass withereth," all of it. The flower, will not that abide? So fair a thing, has not that an immortality? No, it fades; it utterly falls away. So, wherever the Spirit of God breathes on the soul of man, there is a withering of every thing that is of the flesh, and it is seen that to be carnally minded is death. Of course, we all know and confess that where there is a work of grace, there must be a destruction of our delight in the pleasures of the flesh. When the Spirit of God breathes on us, that which was sweet becomes bitter; that which was bright becomes dim. A man cannot love sin and yet possess the life of God. If he takes pleasure in fleshly joys wherein he once delighted, he is still what

he was. He minds the things of the flesh, and therefore he is after the flesh, and he shall die. The world and the lusts thereof are to the unregenerate as beautiful as the meadows in spring, when they are bedecked with flowers, but to the regenerate soul they are a wilderness, a salt land, and not inhabited. Of those very things wherein we once took delight we say, "Vanity of vanities; all is vanity" (Ecc 1:2). We cry to be delivered from the poisonous joys of earth; we loathe them, and wonder that we could once riot in them. Beloved hearers, do you know what this kind of withering means? Have you seen the lusts of the flesh, and the pomps and the pleasures thereof, all fade away before your eyes? It must be so, or the Spirit of God has not visited your soul.

But mark, wherever the Spirit of God comes, He destroys the goodliness and flower of the flesh; that is to say our righteousness withers as our sinfulness. Before the Spirit comes, we think ourselves as good as the best. We say, "All these things have I kept from my youth up," and we superciliously⁴ ask, "What lack I yet?" (Mat 19:20). Have we not been moral? Nay, have we not even been religious? We confess that we may have committed faults, but we think them very venial,⁵ and we venture, in our wicked pride, to imagine that, after all, we are not so vile as the Word of God would lead us to think. Ah, my dear hearer, when the Spirit of God blows on the comeliness of thy flesh, its beauty will fade as a leaf, and thou wilt have quite another idea of thyself. Thou wilt then find no language too severe in which to describe thy past character. Searching deep into thy motives, and investigating that which moved thee to thine actions, thou wilt see so much of evil, that thou wilt cry with the publican, "God be merciful to me a sinner" (Luk 18:13).

Where the Holy Ghost has withered up in us our self-righteousness, He has not half completed His work. There is much more to be destroyed yet, and among the rest, away must go our boasted power of resolution. Most people conceive that they can turn to God whenever they resolve to do so. "I am a man of such strength of mind," says one, "that if I made up my mind to be religious, I should be without difficulty." "Ah," saith another volatile spirit, "I believe that one of these days I can correct the errors of the past, and commence a new life." Ah, dear hearers, the resolutions of the flesh are goodly flowers, but they must all fade. When visited by the Spirit of God, we find that even when the will is present with us, how to perform that which we would, we find not; yea, and we discover that our will is averse to all that is good, and that naturally we will not come unto Christ that we may have life. What poor, frail things resolutions are when seen in the light of God's Spirit!

Still the man will say, "I believe I have, after all, within myself an enlightened conscience and an intelligence that will guide me aright. The light of nature I will use, and I do not doubt that if I wander somewhat, I shall find my way back again." Ah, man! Thy wisdom, which is the very flower of thy nature, what is it but folly, though thou knowest it not? Unconverted and unrenewed, thou art in God's sight no wiser than the wild ass's colt. I wish thou wert in thine own esteem humbled as a little child at Jesus' feet, and made to cry, "Teach thou me" (Job 34:32).

⁴ **superciliously** – with haughty contempt.

⁵ **venial** – excusable; trifling; minor; not seriously wrong.

When the withering wind of the Spirit moves over the carnal mind, it reveals the death of the flesh in all respects, especially in the matter of power towards that which is good. We then learn that Word of our Lord: “Without me ye can do nothing” (Joh 15:5). When I was seeking the Lord, I not only believed that I could not pray without divine help, but I felt in my very soul that I could not. Then I could not even feel aright, or mourn as I would, or groan as I would. I longed to long more after Christ; but, alas! I could not even feel that I needed Him as I ought to feel it. This heart was then as hard as adamant,⁶ as dead as those that rot in their graves. Oh, what would I at times have given for a tear! I wanted to repent, but could not; longed to believe, but could not. I felt bound, hampered and paralyzed. This is a humbling revelation of God’s Holy Spirit, but a needful one; for the faith of the flesh is not the faith of God’s elect. The faith which justifies the soul is the gift of God and not of ourselves. That repentance which is the work of the flesh will need to be repented of. The flower of the flesh must wither; only the seed of the Spirit will produce fruit unto perfection. The heirs of heaven are born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of man, but of God. If the work in us be not the Spirit’s working, but our own, it will droop and die when most we require its protection; and its end will be as the grass which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven.

Fourth. You see, then, the universality of this withering work within us, but I beg you also to notice *the completeness of it*. The grass, what does it do? Droop? Nay, wither. The flower of the field: what of that? Does it hang its head a little? No, according to Isaiah it fades; and according to Peter it falleth away. There is no reviving it with showers; it has come to its end. Even thus are the awakened led to see that in their flesh there dwelleth no good thing. What dying and withering work some of God’s servants have had in their souls! Look at John Bunyan, as he describes himself in his *Grace Abounding!* For how many months and even years was the Spirit engaged in writing death upon all that was the old Bunyan, in order that he might become by grace a new man fitted to track the pilgrims along their heavenly way. We have not all endured the ordeal so long, but in every child of God there must be a death to sin, to the Law, and to self, which must be fully accomplished ere he is perfected in Christ and taken to heaven. Corruption cannot inherit incorruption. It is through the Spirit that we mortify the deeds of the body, and therefore live. But cannot the fleshly mind be improved? By no means; for “the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be” (Rom 8:7). Cannot you improve the old nature? No; “Ye must be born again” (Joh 3:7). Can it not be taught heavenly things? No. “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1Co 2:14). There is nothing to be done with the old nature but to let it be laid in the grave. It must be dead, and buried, and when it is so, then the incorruptible seed that liveth and abideth forever, will develop gloriously; the fruit of the new birth will come to maturity, and grace shall be exalted in glory. The old nature never does improve. It is as earthly, and sensual, and devilish in the saint of eighty years of age as it was when first he came to Christ. It is unimproved and unim-

⁶ **adamant** – any impenetrably or unyieldingly hard substance.

provable; towards God it is enmity itself. Every imagination of the thoughts of the heart is evil, and that continually (Gen 6:5). The old nature called “the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other” (Gal 5:17); neither can there be peace between them.

Fifth. Let us further notice that all *this withering work in the soul is very painful*. As you read these verses do they not strike you as having a very funereal⁷ tone? “All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field: the grass withereth, the flower fadeth.” This is mournful work; but it must be done. I think those who experience much of it when they first come to Christ have great reason to be thankful. Their course in life will, in all probability, be much brighter and happier, for I have noticed that persons who are converted very easily, and come to Christ with but comparatively little knowledge of their own depravity, have to learn it afterwards. And they remain for a long time babes in Christ, and are perplexed with matters that would not have troubled them if they had experienced a deeper work at first. No sir; if grace has begun to build in your soul and left any of the old walls of self-trust standing, they will have to come down sooner or later. You may congratulate yourself upon their remaining, but it is a false congratulation, your glorying is not good. I am sure of this, that Christ will never put a new piece upon an old garment, or new wine in old bottles. He knows the rent would be worse in the long run, and the bottles would burst. All that is of nature’s spinning must be unravelled. The natural building must come down, lath and plaster, roof and foundation, and we must have a house not made with hands. It was a great mercy for our city of London that the great fire cleared away all the old buildings which were the lair of the plague. A far healthier city was then built. And it is a great mercy for a man when God sweeps right away all his own righteousness and strength, when He makes him feel that he is nothing and can be nothing, and drives him to confess that Christ must be in all, and that his only strength lies in the eternal might of the ever-blessed Spirit. Sometimes in a house of business an old system has been going on for years, and it has caused much confusion, and allowed much dishonesty. You come in as a new manager, and you adopt an entirely new plan. Now, try if you can, and graft your method on to the old system. How it will worry you! Year after year you say to yourself, “I cannot work it. If I had swept the whole away and started afresh, clear from the beginning, it would not have given me one-tenth of the trouble.” God does not intend to graft the system of grace upon corrupt nature, nor to make the new Adam grow out of the old Adam, but He intends to teach us this: “Ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God” (Col 3:3). Salvation is not of the flesh, but of the Lord alone. That which is born of the flesh is only flesh at the best; and only that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. It must be the Spirit’s work altogether, or it is not what God will accept.

Sixth. Observe, brethren, that although this is painful *it is inevitable*. I have already entrenched upon this, and shown you how necessary it is that all of the old should be taken away; but let me further remark that it is inevitable that the old should go, because it is in itself corruptible. Why does the grass wither? Because it is a withering

⁷ **funereal** – mournful; dismal; of or suitable for a funeral.

thing. “Its root is ever in its grave, and it must die.” How could it spring out of the earth, and be immortal? It is no amaranth.⁸ It blooms not in Paradise; it grows in a soil on which the curse has fallen. Every supposed good thing that grows out of your own self is like yourself, mortal, and it must die. The seeds of corruption are in all the fruits of manhood’s tree. Let them be as fair to look upon as Eden’s clusters, they must decay.

Moreover, it would never do, my brother, that there should be something of the flesh in our salvation and something of the Spirit; for if it were so there would be a division of the honor. Hitherto the praises of God; beyond this my own praises. If I were to win heaven partly through what I had done, and partly through what Christ had done, and if the energy which sanctified me was in a measure my own, and in a measure divine, they that divide the work shall divide the reward, and the songs of heaven while they would be partly to Jehovah must also be partly to the creature. But it shall not be. Down, proud flesh! Down, I say! Though thou cleanse and purge thyself as thou mayest, thou art to the core corrupt. Though thou labor unto weariness, thou buildest wood that will be burned, and stubble that will be turned to ashes. Give up thine own self-confidence, and let the work be, and the merit be where the honor shall be, namely, with God alone. It is inevitable, then, that there should be all this withering.

Seventh. This last word by way of comfort to any that are passing through the process we are describing, and I hope some of you are. It gives me great joy when I hear that you unconverted ones are very miserable, for the miseries which the Holy Spirit works are always the prelude to happiness. *It is the Spirit’s work to wither*. I rejoice in our translation: “Because the Spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it.” It is true the passage may be translated, “The wind of the Lord bloweth upon it.” One word, as you know, is used in the Hebrew both for “wind” and “Spirit,” and the same is true of the Greek; but let us retain the old translation here, for I conceive it to be the real meaning of the text. The Spirit of God it is that withers the flesh. It is not the devil that killed my self-righteousness. I might be afraid if it were. Nor was it myself that humbled myself by a voluntary and needless self-degradation, but it was the Spirit of God. Better to be broken in pieces by the Spirit of God, than to be made whole by the flesh! What doth the Lord say? “I kill.” But what next? “I make alive” (Deu 32:39). He never makes any alive but those He kills. Blessed be the Holy Ghost when He kills me, when He drives the sword through the very bowels of my own merits and my self-confidence, for then He will make me alive. “I wound, and I heal” (ibid.). He never heals those whom He has not wounded. Then blessed be the Hand that wounds; let it go on wounding; let it cut and tear. Let it lay bare to me myself at my very worst, that I may be driven to self-despair, and may fall back upon the free mercy of God, and receive it as a poor, guilty, lost, helpless, undone sinner, who casts himself into the arms of sovereign grace, knowing that God must give all, and Christ must be all, and the Spirit must work all. And man must be as clay in the potter’s hands, that the Lord may do with him as seemeth Him good. Rejoice, dear brother, however low you are brought, for if the Spirit humbles you He means no evil, but He intends infinite good to your soul.

⁸ **amaranth** – a genus of plants thought not to decay when cropped.

2. That Which Withers Not

Now, let us close with a few sentences concerning the implantation.

According to Peter, although the flesh withers, and the flower thereof falls away, yet in the children of God there is an unwithering something of another kind. "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever." "The word of the Lord endureth forever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you." Now, the Gospel is of use to us because it is not of human origin. If it were of the flesh, all it could do for us would not land us beyond the flesh; but the Gospel of Jesus Christ is super-human, divine and spiritual. In its conception it was of God. Its great gift, even the Saviour, is a divine gift; and all its teachings are full of deity. If you, my hearer, believe a gospel which you have thought out for yourself or a philosophical gospel which comes from the brain of man, it is of the flesh and will wither, and you will die and be lost through trusting in it. The only word that can bless you and be a seed in your soul must be the living and incorruptible Word of the eternal Spirit. This is the incorruptible Word, that God "was made flesh, and dwelt among us" (Joh 1:14); that "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them" (2Co 5:19). This is the incorruptible Word, that "whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God" (1Jo 5:1). "He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God" (Joh 3:18). "God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son" (1Jo 5:11). Now, brethren, this is the seed; but before it can grow in your soul, it must be planted there by the Spirit. Do you receive it this morning? Then the Holy Spirit implants it in your soul. Do you leap up to it, and say, "I believe it! I grasp it! On the incarnate God I fix my hope. The substitutionary sacrifice, the complete atonement of Christ is all my confidence. I am reconciled to God by the blood of Jesus"? Then you possess the living seed within your soul.

And what is the result of it? Why, then there comes according to the text, a new life into us, as the result of the indwelling of the living Word, and our being born again by it. A new life it is. It is not the old nature putting out its better parts; not the old Adam refining and purifying itself, and rising to something better. No; have we not said aforetime that the flesh withers, and the flower thereof fades? It is an entirely new life. Ye are as much new creatures at your regeneration, as if you had never existed, and had been for the first time created. "Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2Co 5:17). The child of God is beyond and above other men. Other men do not possess the life which he has received. They are but duplex—body and soul have they. He is of triple nature—he is spirit, soul and body. A fresh principle, a spark of divine life has dropped into his soul. He is no longer a natural or carnal man, but he has become a spiritual man, understanding spiritual things, and possessing a life far superior to any thing that belongs to the rest of mankind. Oh that God, Who has withered in the souls of any of you that which is of the flesh, may speedily grant you the new birth through the Word.

Now observe, to close, wherever this new life comes through the Word, it is incorruptible; it lives and abides forever. To get the good seed out of a true believer's heart and to destroy the new nature in him is a thing attempted by earth and hell, but never yet achieved. Pluck the sun out of the firmament, and you shall not even then be able to pluck grace out of a regenerate heart. It "liveth and abideth forever," saith the text; it can neither corrupt of itself nor be corrupted. "He cannot sin, because he is born of God" (1Jo 3:9). "I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand" (Joh 10:28). "The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life" (Joh 4:14). You have a natural life—that will die, it is of the flesh. You have a spiritual life—of that it is written: "Who-soever liveth and believeth in me shall never die" (Joh 11:26). You have now within you the noblest and truest immortality; you must live as God liveth, in peace and joy, and happiness. But oh, remember, dear hearer, if you have not this, you "shall not see life" (Joh 3:36). What then—shall you be annihilated? Ah! No, but the wrath of the Lord is upon you. You shall exist, though you shall not live. Of life you shall know nothing, for that is the gift of God in Christ Jesus. But of an everlasting death, full of torment and anguish, you shall be the wretched heritor—"the wrath of God abideth on him" (Joh 3:36). You shall be cast into "the lake of fire," which "is the second death" (Rev 20:14). You shall be one of those whose "worm dieth not," and whose "fire is not quenched" (Mar 9:44). May God, the ever-blessed Spirit, visit you! If He be now striving with you, oh, quench not His divine flame! Trifle not with any holy thought you have. If this morning you must confess that you are not born again, be humbled by it. Go and seek mercy of the Lord, entreat Him to deal graciously with you and save you. Many who have had nothing but moonlight have prized it, and ere long they have had sunlight. Above all, remember what the quickening seed is, and reverence it when you hear it preached, "for this is the word by which the gospel is preached unto you." Respect it and receive it. Remember that the quickening seed is all wrapped up in this sentence: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (Act 16:31). "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mar 16:16).

The Lord bless you, for Jesus' sake. Amen.



A sermon delivered on
Lord's Day Morning, July 9th, 1871.