

Spurgeon on Joshua

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Joshua 1:7 Joshua's Obedience

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DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest.” Joshua 1:7.

Joshua was very highly favored in the matter of promises. The promises given him by God were broadly comprehensive and exceedingly encouraging. But Joshua was not therefore to say within himself, “These covenant engagements will surely be fulfilled, and I may therefore sit still and do nothing.” On the contrary, because God had decreed that the land should be conquered, Joshua was to be diligent to lead the people onward to battle. He was not to use the promise as a couch upon which his indolence might luxuriate, but as a girdle wherewith to gird up his loins for future activity.

As a spur to energy, let us always regard the gracious promises of our God. We should sin against him most ungratefully and detestably were we to say within ourselves, “God will not desert his people; therefore let us venture into sin;” and we are almost equally wicked if we whisper in our own minds, “God will assuredly fulfill his own decrees, and give the souls of his redeemed as a reward to his Son Jesus. therefore let us do nothing, and refrain altogether from zealous Christian service.” This is not proper language for true children. This is the talk of the indolently ignorant, or of mere pretenders, who do but mock God while they pretend to reverence his decrees. By the oath, by the promise, by the covenant, and by the blood which sealeth it, we are exhorted continually to be at work for Christ, since we are saved in order that we may serve him, in the power of the Holy Ghost, with heart, and soul, and strength.

Joshua was especially exhorted to continue in the path of obedience. He was the captain, but there was a great Commander-in-chief who gave him his marching orders. Joshua was not left to his own fallible judgment, or fickle fancy, but he was to do according to all that was written in the book of the law. So is it with us who are believers. We are not under the law, but under grace; yet still there is a gospel rule which we are bound to follow, and the law in the hand of Christ is a delightful rule of life to the believer. We are not to follow, in the service of God, our own fancies. We are not allowed to frame regulations according to our own conceptions, but our direction is, “whatsoever He saith unto you, do it.” His servants shall serve him, his sheep follow his footsteps, his disciples obey their Lord, his soldiers fulfill his pleasure: “By their fruits ye shall know them.” If we are not obedient unto Christ, we may rest assured that we have not the spirit of Christ, and are none of his.

I. In speaking upon the obedience which was enjoined upon Joshua.

I would remind you that Obedience Is The Highest Practical Courage.

Read the text, “Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee.” You supposed when you heard the words, “Only be thou strong and very courageous,” that some great exploit was to be performed, and the supposition was correct, for all exploits are comprehended in that one declaration, “That thou

mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee.” The highest exploit of the Christian life is to obey Christ. This is such an exploit, my brethren, as shall never be performed by any man, except he has learned the rule of faith, has been led to rest upon Christ, and to advance upon the path of obedience in a strength which is not his own, but which he has received from the work of the indwelling Holy Ghost. The world counts obedience to be a mean-spirited thing, and speaks of rebellion as freedom. We have heard men say, “I will be my own master; I shall follow my own will.” To be a free thinker and a free liver seems to be the worldling’s glory, and yet if the world could but have sense enough to convict itself of folly, upon indisputable proof being afforded it, it were not difficult to prove that a reviler of the obedient is a fool. Take the world’s own martial rule. Who is accounted to be the boldest and the best soldier but the man who is most thoroughly obedient to the captain’s command? There is a story told of the old French wars which has been repeated hundreds of times. A sentinel is set to keep a certain position, and at nightfall, as he is pacing to and fro, the emperor himself comes by. He does not know the pass word. Straightway the soldier stops him. “You cannot pass,” says he. “But I must pass,” says the emperor. “No,” replies the man, “if you were the little corporal in grey himself you should not go by,” by which, of course, he meant the emperor. Thus the autocrat himself was held in check by order. The vigilant soldier was afterwards handsomely rewarded, and all the world said that he was a brave fellow. Now, from that instance, and there are hundreds of such which are always told with approbation, we learn that obedience to superior commands, carried out at all hazards, is one of the highest proofs of courage that a man can possibly give; to this the world itself gives its assent. Then surely it is not a mean and sneaking thing for a man to be obedient to him who is the Commander-in-chief of the universe, the King of kings, and Lord of lords. He who would do the right and the true thing in cold blood in the teeth of ridicule, is a bolder man than he who flings himself before the cannon’s mouth for fame; ay, and let me add, to persist in scrupulous obedience throughout life may need more courage than even the martyr evinces when once for all he gives himself to burn at the stake.

In Joshua’s case, full obedience to the divine command involved innumerable difficulties. The command to him was, that he should conquer the whole of the land for the favored tribes, and to the best of his ability he did it; but he had to besiege cities which were walled up to heaven, and to fight with monarchs whose warriors came to battle in chariots of iron, armed with scythes. The first conflicts were something terrible. If he had not been a bold and able soldier, he would have put up his sword and desisted from the strife; but the spirit of obedience sustained him. Though you and I have no Hivites and Jebusites to kill, no cities to pull down, no chariots of iron to encounter, yet we shall find it no easy thing to keep to the path of Christian consistency. Count well the cost, you who have just enlisted under my Lord’s banner: you shall not find it to be child’s play to “follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth.” To put on the pilgrim’s dress of white linen, and then carelessly to bespatter it with unholiness, and anon to profess repentance only to fall again, and bemire it in the dirt, and then time after time to wash it, or say you have washed it — this is easy enough. Fits and starts of godliness many have who end their lives in despair. The Christianity of some people costs them little cross-bearing, much less any “resisting unto blood, striving against sin.” A merely nominal profession is easy enough to make and to maintain after the manner of the times; but to be a Christian indeed, through and through, to eat, and drink, and sleep eternal life, to live the life of God on earth — this is the work, this is the difficulty. You will need to have the strength of Samson, and something more, to pluck up the gates which block up your onward road: a strength divine must be yours if you are to keep the crown of the causeway against all comers.

Moreover, Joshua had not only difficulties to meet with, but he made a great many enemies through his obedience. This was naturally so. As soon as it was known that Jericho had been taken, that Ai had been carried by assault, then we read of first one confederation of kings, and then of another, their object being to destroy the power of Joshua, since these kings well knew that he would crush them if they did not crush him. Now, the Christian man is in a like plight. He will be sure to make enemies. It will be one of his objects to make none; but, on the other hand, if to do the right, and to believe the true, and to carry out the honest, should make him lose every earthly friend, he will count it but a small loss, since his great Friend in heaven will be yet more friendly and reveal himself to him more graciously than ever. O ye who have taken up his cross, know ye not what your Master said? “I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man’s foes shall be they of his own household.” Christ is the great Peacemaker; but before peace, he brings war. Where the light cometh, the darkness must retire. Where truth is, the lie must flee; or, if it abideth, there must be a stern conflict, for the truth cannot and will not lower its standard, and the lie must be trodden under foot. If you follow Christ, you shall have all the dogs of the world yelping at your heels. If you mince matters, and hold with the hare and run with the hounds, you may be a Christian and a worldling too, after a sort; but if you would live so as to stand the test of the last tribunal, depend upon it the world will not speak well of you. He who has the friendship of the world will find that he is an enemy to God; but if you are true and faithful to the Most High, men will resent your unflinching fidelity, since it is a testimony against their iniquities. Fearless of all consequences, you must do the right. You will need the courage of a lion unhesitatingly to pursue a course which shall turn your best friend into your fiercest foe, but for the love of Jesus you must do it. For the truth’s sake to hazard reputation and affection, is such a deed that to do it constantly you will need a degree of moral principle which only the Spirit of God can work in you; yet turn not your back like a coward, but play the man.

Yet, again, Joshua, in his obedience, needed much courage, because he had undertaken a task which involved, if he carried it out, long years of perseverance. After he had captured one city, he must go on to attack the next fortress. The days were not long

enough for his battles. He bids the sun stand still, and the moon is stayed; and even when that long day has passed, yet the morning sees him sword in hand still. Joshua was like one of those old knights who slept in their armor. He was always fighting. His sword must have been well hacked, and often must his armor have been blood-red. He had before him a lifelong enterprise. Such is the life of the Christian, a warfare from cud to end. As soon as you are washed in Christ's blood and clothed in his righteousness, you must begin to hew your way through a lane of enemies, right up to the eternal throne. Every foot of the way will be disputed; not an inch will Satan yield to you. You must continue daily to fight. "He that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved;" not the beginner who commences in his own strength, and soon comes to an end, but he who, girt about with divine grace, with the Spirit of God within him, determines to hold on till he has smitten the last foe, and never leaves the battlefield till he has heard the word, "Well done, good and faithful servant!" Let the man who says that the Christian's life is mean, and devoid of manliness, let him go and learn wisdom before he speaketh; for of all men the persevering believer is the most manly. Thou who boastest of thyself, of thy courage in sinning, thou yieldest to the foe; thou art a cringing cur; thou turnest tail upon the enemy; thou courtest the friendship of the world; thou hast not courage enough to dare to do the right and the true; thou hast past under the yoke of Satan and thine own passions, and to conceal thine own cowardice, thou art base enough to call the brave Christian man a coward. Out on thee, for adding lying to thine other vices!

Oftentimes, if we follow Christ we shall need to be brave indeed in facing the world's customs. You will find it so, young man, in a mercantile house. You will find it so, husband, even in connection with your own wife and children, if they are unsaved. Children have found this so in the school. Traders find it so in the market-place. He that would be a true Christian had need wear a stout heart. There is a story told of Dr. Adam Clarke, which shows the courage which the youthful Christian sometimes needs. When he was in a shop in the town of Coleraine, they were preparing for the annual fair, and some rolls of cloth were being measured. One of them was too short, and the master said, "Come, Adam, you take that end, and I will take the other, and we will soon pull it, and stretch it till it is long enough." But Adam had no hands to do it with, and no ears to hear his master's dishonest order, and at last he flatly refused, whereupon the master said, "You will never make a tradesman; you are good for nothing here; you had better go home, and take to something else." Now, that thing may not be done now, for men do not generally cheat in that open downright kind of way nowadays, but they cheat after more roguish fashions. The records of the bankruptcy court will tell you what I mean. Bankruptcies one after another of the same person are doubled-distilled thieving, generally; not old-fashioned thieving like that which once brought men to transportation and to the gallows, but something worse than highway robbery and burglary. The genuine Christian will every now and then have to put his foot down, and say, "No, I cannot, and I will not be mixed up with such a thing as that," and will have to say this to his master, to his father, to his friend, whose respect he desires to gain, and who may be of the greatest possible assistance to him in life. But if it be your duty, my dear brother and sister, thus to do the right, do it if the skies fall. Do it if poverty should stare you in the face. Do it if you should be turned into the streets to-morrow. You shall never be a loser by God in the long run; and if you have to suffer for righteousness' sake, blessed are you! Count yourselves to be happy that you have the privilege of making any sacrifice for the sake of conscience, for in these days we have not the power to honor God as they did who went to prison, and to the rack, and to the stake; let us not, therefore, cast aside other opportunities which are given to us of showing how much we love the Lord, and how faithfully we desire to serve him. Be very courageous to do what the Lord Jesus bids you in all things, and let men judge you to be an idiot if you will, you shall be one of the Lord's champions, a true Knight of the Cross.

II. Secondly, I learn from the text that The Exactness Of Obedience Is The Essence Of Obedience.

"That thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left."

The world saith, "We must not be too precise." Hypocritical world! The world means that it would be glad to get rid of God's law altogether, but as it scarcely dares to say that point-blank, it cants with the most sickening of all cant, "We must not be too particular, or too nice." As one said to an old Puritan once, "Many people have rent their consciences in halves: could not you just make a little nick in yours?" "No," he said, "I cannot, for my conscience belongs to God." "We must live, you know," said a money-loving shopkeeper, as his excuse for doing what he could not otherwise defend. "Yes, but we must die," was the reply, "and therefore we must do no such thing." There is no particular necessity for any of us living. We are probably better dead, if we cannot live without doing wrong.

The very essence of obedience, I have said, lies in exactness. Probably your child, if sometimes disobedient, would still, as a general rule, do what you told him. It would be in the little things that thoroughgoing and commendable obedience would appear. Let the world judge of this for itself. Here is an honest man. Do people say of him, "He is such an honest man that he would not steal a horse"? No, that would not prove him to be very honest; but they say, "He would not even take a pin that did not belong to him." That is the world's own description of honesty, and surely when it comes to obedience to God it ought to be the same. Here is a merchant, and he boasts, "I have a clerk, who is such a good accountant that you would not find a mistake of a single penny in six months' reckoning." It would not have meant much if he had said, "You would not find a mistake of ten thousand pounds in six

months' reckoning." And yet if a man stands to little things, and is minute and particular, worldlings charge him with being too stringent, too strict, too straitlaced, and I know not what besides; while all the time, according to their own showing, the essence of honesty and of correctness is exactness in little things. If I profess to obey the Lord Jesus Christ, the crucial test will not be in great actions, but in little ones. My dear brethren, I wish the Christian church really thought this. There is so much in many churches of trifling with words — I mean by people professing to believe what is not believed — putting another meaning upon words than what is the plain natural sense, which is nothing better, I conceive, than lying in the sight of God. I know, too, members of churches who say, "I do not approve of a great deal that is in our creed," and yet they remain members of such a church. I do not understand it. I cannot comprehend how a man can bear to partake in the doings of any church, whatever that church may be, when he knows those doings to be wrong — making it a part of his religion to do wrong; winking at and shutting his eye to what his own conscience tells him is not according to the will of God. If I thought that in any of our proceedings in this place we did not do according to God's mind, I would humbly desire to alter at once; and I do pray that we, as a church, whenever we err, or in anything may not have acted according to Scripture, may be willing to bring ourselves to holy Scripture, and to be always schooling our minds to the will of the Lord Jesus Christ, so that we may do that will in all things. The church may be wrong in a great many points, and yet be accepted before God, because the conscience of the church may not be enlightened; but what I plead for is, that so far as our conscience is enlightened, we are bound to act up to it, and that we have no right to do anything about which we cannot be sure that we are right, and no right to be uniting ourselves to any body of professors who are not carrying out the Lord's commands and laws in all things so far as we can judge. Not in some things, but in all things we are to be observant of the divine will. Is there any ordinance of Christ which some of you have never attended to? Have you attended to baptism and the Lord's Supper? I charge you, before the living God, see to it as you value your own peace of mind. "He that knoweth his master's will, and doeth it not, shall be beaten with many stripes." I am not now speaking of the discipline of the law — the Christian is not under that — I am speaking, however, of the discipline of Christ's own house, over which Christ is the Master, and this is the law of Christ's house — if we will not be obedient we shall not abide in the comfortable enjoyment of his love, but we shall be chastened, and scourged, and smitten, until we become willing to yield ourselves up to the Lord's mind. Through thick and thin, through fair and foul, through poverty or wealth, through shame or honor, Christian, cling close to your Master, Be you among those virgin-souls, who —

**"Withersoe'er the Lamb doth lead,
From his footsteps ne'er depart."**

these are the men who shall be honored of heaven, who have peace with God unspeakable within their souls to-day, and shall have the brightest crowns of immortality upon their brows to-morrow. The exactness of obedience is the very essence of obedience; let us keep to it, then.

III. But now, thirdly, The Path Of Obedience Is Generally A Middle Path. "Turn not from it, to the right hand or to the left."

There is sure to be a right hand, there is sure to be a left hand, and both are probably wrong. There will be extremes on either side. I believe that this is true in ten thousand things in ordinary life, and also true in spiritual things in very many respects.

The path of truth in doctrine is generally a middle one. There are certain tremendous truths, such as divine sovereignty, the doctrine of election, covenant transactions, and so forth; and some men cast such a loving eye upon these truths that they desire to be, and are, quite blind to all other truths besides. These great and precious doctrines take up the whole field of their vision, and another and equally valuable part of God's word is either left unread, or else twisted round into some supposed reconciliation with the first-named truths. Then, again, there are others who think much of man. They have deep sympathy with the human race. They see man's sin and ruin, and they are much charmed with the mercy of God and the invitations of the gospel which are given to sinners, and they become so entranced with these truths in connection with the responsibility of man, and man's free agency, that they will see nothing else, and declare all other doctrines, except these, to be delusions. If they admit the doctrines of grace to be true, they think them valueless, but they generally consider them to be untrue altogether. It seems to me that the path of truth is to believe them both; to hold firmly that salvation is by grace, and to hold with equal firmness that the ruin of any man is wholly and entirely his own fault; to maintain the sovereignty of God, and to hold the responsibility of man also; to believe in the free agency of both God and man; neither to dishonor God by making him a lacquey to his creatures' will, nor, on the other hand, to rid man of all responsibility, by making him to be a mere log or a machine. Take all that is in the Bible, dear friends, to be true. Never be afraid of any text that is written by the sacred pen. Dear brethren, when you turn the pages over, I do hope you never feel as if you wish that any verse could be altered, I trust you never desire that Any text might be amended so as to read a little more Calvinistic, or a little more like the teaching of Arminius. Always stand to it that your creed must bend to the Bible, and not the Bible to your creed, and dare to be a little inconsistent with yourselves, if need be, sooner than be inconsistent with God's revealed truth. You will find the path of duty there, I think, to be neither to the right hand nor to the left.

So I think it is in another respect, in which the tendency is to one of two extremes. Some people say of ministers, "These are God's

priests; they can distribute grace to us.” Others cry out, “No, they do not, and cannot; we are all equally able to dispense the truth; we need none to instruct us; we are all of us to be pastors, or rather, to be sheepish enough to think we are.” Now, there, I think, the safe path lies between the two. The minister is no priest, but still, God does enable some men by his Spirit to teach others. He does raise up pastors after his own heart. We will magnify the office, but we will not magnify it too much. We will not suffer any to speak against it, for we believe it to be a God-sent gift. On the other hand, we will not slavishly prostrate ourselves before any man, however gifted he may be.

You will notice, in connection with the ordinances of God’s house, one extreme about sacraments is that they are channels of grace. Baptism and the Lord’s Supper are saving ordinances, according to certain ignorant people. The opposite extreme is to leave ordinances alone altogether, and to say there is nothing in them, and that it is of no use to attend to them. Surely the proper thing is to believe that, as acts of obedience, they are acceptable to God; and as signs and tokens of great spiritual truths, they are instructive and edifying to the saints, and therefore not to be neglected. In this matter, I would have you “turn neither to the right hand nor to the left.”

So, too, I think it should be in our general conduct. With regard, for instance, to our words; the course of speech generally is, on the one hand to say too much, or on the other hand to say too little; to be silent when the wicked are before us, or else to be rash with our lips and betray a good cause through our rashness in defending it. There is a time to speak, and there is a time to be silent, and he that judgeth well will mark his opportunities and take the middle course. He will neither be garrulous with advice that is not required, nor will he be cowardly and dumb when he ought to bear testimony for his Master. The same holds good with regard to zeal. We have some abroad nowadays whose heads are very hot. They will be doing this, and that, and I know not what beside, all in the twinkling of an eye. They talk as if they would turn the world upside down, whilst it is their own brains that need first to be turned into a right condition. They foment revivals, but not revivals such as we should approve of — their revivals are blown up like bladders with mere human excitement and playing upon men’s passions, and this brings true zeal into contempt. Theirs is a fire which burns down the house instead of burning in the grate and warming the household. But shall we therefore not be zealous? God forbid! Shall we fall into the opposite extreme of those who fold their arms and say, “Why make this noise? God will do his own work; things will go well enough; let us be quiet; let us sleep as do others”? Brethren, there is a middle course of true, sensible, prudent zeal — adhering to the truth and never believing that people can be converted by lies, however earnestly bawled into their ears; walking within the bounds of God’s truth, and being persuaded that the best seed to sow is that which God puts into the basket of his word, and that sinners are not to be saved by rash statements nor by extravagant declamation, but that they are brought to Christ, as they were of old, by the simple telling out of the story of the cross affectionately, and by the power of the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. Here, again, “turn neither to the right hand nor to the left.”

Brethren, this is a point we must take care to observe in the matter of our confidences. Neither to the right hand nor to the left must the Christian turn, with regard to the reliance of his soul, in the matter of his eternal salvation. “None but Jesus” must be the constant watchword of our spirit. Some will call us in this direction, and some in that. The wrecker’s beacons would entice us upon the rocks in a thousand directions, but let us steer by the sun or by the pole-star, and not trust to the treacherous guides of human fancy. Keep close to this, that “other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, Jesus Christ the righteous.” Rest in the finished work of the Lord Jesus, and put all your reliance upon him as crucified, risen, and pleading for his people. Settle it in your hearts that you are not to be led away from Jesus.

**“Should all the forms that men devise,
Assault my faith with treacherous art,
I’d call them vanity and lies,
And bind the gospel to my heart.”**

So in the matter of faith itself, let us keep the middle place. Let us not be as some are — presumptuous, and refusing to examine themselves, declaring that they must be right. Let us remember that

“He who never doubted of his state, He may — perhaps he may too late.”

Let us not fall, on the other side, into constant doubting, imagining that we never can be fully assured, but must always be raising the question-

**“’Tis a point I long to know,
Oft it causes anxious thought;
Do I love the Lord or no?
Am I his, or am I not?”**

Let us ask God to guide us into the middle path, wherein we can say, “I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him until that day;” careful, watchful, prayerful, as much as if our salvation depended

upon our own vigilance; relying upon the sure promise, and the immutable oath, knowing that we stand in Christ, and not in ourselves, and are kept by the mighty God of Jacob, and not by any power of our own. This middle path, wherein we turn not to the right hand of presumption, nor to the left hand of unbelief, is the path which God would have us tread.

This rule, too, for I might continue to apply it in scores of ways, will also hold good with you in your daily life in the matter of your general cheerfulness or otherwise. Some people never smile. Dear souls! They pull the blinds down on Sunday. They are sorry that the flowers are so beautiful, and think that they ought to have been whitewashed; they almost believe that if the garden beds were of a little more serious color, it would be advisable. I have known some, and some whom I very greatly respect, talk in this way. One good brother, whose shoe-latchet I am not worthy to unloose, said, on one occasion, that when he went up the Rhine, he never looked at the rocks, or the old castles, or the flowing river, he was so taken up with other things!

Why, to me nature is a looking-glass in which I see the face of God.

**I delight to gaze abroad, and
“Look through nature up to nature’s God.”**

But that was all unholiness to him. I confess I do not understand that kind of thing; I have no sympathy with those who look upon this material world as though it were a very wicked place, and as if there were here no trace whatever of the divine hand, and no proofs of the divine wisdom, nor manifestations of the divine care. I think we may delight ourselves in the works of God, and find much pleasure therein, and get much advanced towards God himself by considering his works. That to which I have thus referred is one extreme. There are others who are all froth and levity, who profess to be Christians, and yet cannot live without the same amusements as worldlings; must be now at this party, and then at that; never comfortable unless they are making jokes, and following after all the levities and frivolities of the world. Ah! the first is a pardonable weakness, in which there is much that is commendable, but this is a detestable one, of which I can say nothing that is good. The Christian, I think, should steer between the two. He should be cheerful, but not frivolous. He should be sustained and happy under all circumstances; have a friendly and a kindly word for all, and be a man among men as the Savior was, willing to sit at the banquet, and to feast and rejoice with those that do rejoice; but still heavenly-minded in it all, feeling that a joy in which he cannot have Christ with him is no joy, and that places of amusement where he cannot take his Lord with him are no places of amusement, but scenes of misery to him. He should be constantly cheerful, happy, and rejoicing, and yet at the same time he should evince a deep solemnity of spirit which removes far from him everything that is sacrilegiously light and trifling.

By the same rule, arrange your business. Some men in business act in such a way that from morning till night they can think of nothing but business. I have had to mourn over some Christians who, when they have had enough, did not know it — when they were doing as much as they could do with health to their souls, and had no more need of gain, yet they must needs launch out into something else that would take away all opportunities of serving God’s cause, and all time for reflection and thought, and that would thus bring barrenness and leanness into their souls. Others we have to complain of, who do not work enough at their callings. They are at a sermon when they ought to be behind the counter, or they are enjoying a prayer-meeting when they ought to be mending their husbands’ stockings. They go out preaching in the villages when they had better be earning money to pay their creditors. There are extremes, but the true Christian is diligent in business, and is also fervent in spirit, seeking to combine the two. The believer would be like one of old, “a just man and devout;” not having one duty smeared with the blood of another duty.

Having a due proportion of all the graces, he seeks in his life to follow out his calling as a man, as a parent, as a member of the church, or whatever else he may be.

IV. Now we shall close, and our last remark is, that The Path Of Right Is The Path Of True Prosperity.

Observe, the last paragraph of the text: “That thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest.” Let no man be deceived with the idea that if he carries out the right, by God’s grace he will prosper in this world as the consequence. It is very likely that, for a time at least, his conscientiousness will stand in the way of his prosperity. God does not invariably make the doing of the right to be the means of pecuniary gain to us. On the contrary, it frequently happens that for a time men are great losers by their obedience to Christ. But the Scripture always speaks us to the long run; it sums up the whole of life — there it promises true riches. If thou wouldst prosper, keep close to the word of God, and to thy conscience, and thou shalt have the best prosperity. Thou wilt not see it in a week, nor a month, nor a year, but thou shalt enjoy it ere long. Hundreds have I seen, and I speak within bounds when I speak of that number, who in different times of dilemma have waited upon me, and asked my advice as to what they should do. Now, brethren, I have almost always noticed that those persons who temporise, or attempt to find out a policy of going between, and doing as little wrong as possible, but still just a little, always blunder out of one ditch into another, and their whole life is a life of compromises, of sins, and of miseries; if they do get to heaven they go there slipshod, and with thorns piercing their feet all the way. But I have noticed others who have come right straight out, and rent away the cords which entangled them, and they have said, “I

will do the right, if I die for it;" and though they have had to suffer (I could mention some cases where they have suffered for years, very much to the sorrow of him who gave them the advice upon which they acted, not because he regretted giving them the advice, but regretted that they had to suffer), yet always there has been a turn somewhere or other, and by-and-by they have had to say, "I thank God after all, notwithstanding all my crosses and losses, that I was led to be faithful to my convictions, for I am a happier man, if not a richer man." In some cases they have absolutely been richer men, for after all, even in this world, "honesty is the best policy." It is a very low way of looking at it, but right and righteousness do in the end, in the long run, get the respect and the esteem of men. The thief though he takes a short way to get rich, yet takes such a dangerous way that it does not pay; but he who walks straight along the narrow road shall find it to be the shortest way to the best kind of prosperity, both in this world and in that which is to come.

If not, beloved, if we get no outward prosperity here, I trust you and I, if we love Christ, and, are filled with his Spirit, can do without it. Well, if we must be poor, it will soon be over, and in heaven there shall be no poverty. Well, if we must fight for it, in order to maintain our conscience, we did not expect to come into this world that we might

**"Be carried to the skies
On flowery beds of ease."**

If it must come to this, that we must suffer hunger and even nakedness itself, we shall not be worse off than the apostles — better men than we; we shall not be brought lower than the martyrs — with whose names we are not worthy to have ours coupled. Let us, then, run all risks for Christ. He is no soldier who cannot die for his country; he is no Christian who cannot lose life itself for Christ. We must be willing to give up all things rather than sell the truth or sell the right, and if we come to this, we shall have such courage within our spirits, such a quiet consciousness of the presence of God the Holy Ghost, and such sweet smiles from the once suffering, but now reigning Savior, that we shall have to bless God all our days for these light afflictions, which are but for a moment, which shall work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

I may not have spoken much to the comfort of God's people, but I shall be glad if I have said only half a word that may tend to nurture in the midst of our church earnest obedience, practical piety, real positive godliness carried out in ordinary life. We have plenty of doctrine, plenty of thinking, plenty of talking, but oh, for more holy acting! It is sickening to see the inconsistencies of some professors. It is enough, indeed, to make the world ridicule the church to see how many profess to follow Christ, and then keep any rule rather than God's rule, and obey anybody sooner than the Lord Jesus Christ.

Brethren, let us pray to God that our hearts may be sincere in the Lord's ways, and that we may be guided by his Spirit even to the end.

Joshua 17:14 Retrospect - The Lord Hath Blessed

NO. 1882
DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Forasmuch as the Lord hath blessed me hitherto." — Joshua 17:14.

IT is not an easy task to divide land amongst different claimants. Joshua divided Canaan with strict impartiality. He was a man of God, and he was also shrewdly wise, as you may gather from many of his speeches. But, for all that, he could not satisfy everybody. He who would please all attempts the impossible. God himself is quarrelled with. If it be the design of providence to please men, it is a melancholy failure. Do we not find men everywhere dissatisfied with their portions? This man would like his lot if it were not where it is, and that man would be perfectly satisfied if he had a little more. One would be contented with what he has if he could keep it always, while another would be more pleased if life could be shortened. There is no pleasing men. We are like the sons of Joseph in the chapter before us, ready to complain of our inheritance. It should not be so. We who have pined in the wilderness of sin should rejoice that we have entered the land of promise, and we ought to be glad to have a portion among the people of the Lord. Contentment should be natural to those who are born of the Spirit of God; yea, we ought to go beyond contentment, and cry, "Blessed be the Lord, who daily loadeth us with benefits."

Brethren, the best advice that I can give to each man among you is, that he should endeavor to make the best of the portion which God has given him: for after all, Joshua had not arbitrarily appointed Ephraim and Manasseh their lots, but they had fallen to them by the decree of God. Their portions had been marked out by a higher hand than Joshua's long before. You and I ought to believe that

**“There’s a divinity that shapes our ends,
Rough-hew them how we will.”**

Let us fall back upon predestination, and accept the grand truth that “The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord.” An all-wise God disposes his people according to his sovereign will. Let us not seek to alter our destiny, but let us try to make the best of our circumstances. This is what Joshua exhorted Ephraim and Manasseh to do. “You have a hill country crowned with forests: hew them down. You have fat valleys occupied by Canaanites: drive out the present inhabitants.” O sirs, if we would but thoroughly enjoy what God has freely given us, we should be happy to the full, and even anticipate the joys of heaven. We have a deep river of delights in the covenant of grace, yet we are content to paddle about its shores. We are only up to our ankles, the most of us, whereas the waters are “waters to swim in.” A great sun of everlasting love shines upon the globe of our life with tropical force, but we get away to the North Pole of doubt and fear, and then complain that the sun has such little heat, or that he is so long below the horizon. He who will not go to the fire ought not to complain that the room is cold. Did we heartily feed upon what the Lord has set on our table, accept the ring which he has prepared for our finger, and wear the garments which he has provided for our comfort, we might here on earth make music and dancing before the Lord.

I am going to speak upon my text thus: First, here is a confession, which I think many of us will be very happy to make: “Forasmuch as the Lord hath blessed me hitherto.” Secondly, here is an argument, which is stated after the manner of logic: “Forasmuch as the Lord hath blessed me hitherto, therefore,” so and so.

I. We look at our text, then, first of all, as A Confession — “The Lord hath blessed me hitherto.”

I will not at present speak to those of you upon whom the blessing of God has never rested. Remember, my dear hearers, that every man is either under the curse or under the blessing. They that are of the works of the law are under the curse. Those upon whom their sin is resting are under the curse, for a curse always attends upon sin. Though we read no commination service; though we do not speak to you from Ebal and Gerizim, with the blessing and the curse; yet rest assured that there is before the living God a separation of the precious from the vile, and each day there is a judgment which, in God’s apprehension, puts some upon the right hand with the “Come, ye blessed,” and others upon the left hand with the “Depart, ye cursed.” This will be finally done in “that day of days for which all other days were made.” At this hour, my hearer, if you are not the blessed of the Lord, you are resting under the dark shadow of a curse from which I pray God you may at once escape. Faith in him who was made a curse for us is the only way to the blessing.

But I speak to as many as have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the Lord saith, “Surely, blessing I will bless thee.”

You can say at this time, “God hath blessed me hitherto.” He has blessed you with those blessings which are common to all the house of Israel. Ephraim and Manasseh had received a blessing when God blessed Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, seeing they were in the loins of Abraham. You and I, who are in Christ, are partakers of all covenant blessings in Christ Jesus. “If children, then heirs;” and if we are children of God, then we are heirs of all things. I like to think of the old Scotchwoman, who not only blessed God for the porridge as she ate it, but thanked God that she had a covenant-right to the porridge. Daily mercies belong to the Lord’s household by covenant-right; and that same covenant-right which will admit us into heaven above also gives us bread and water here below. The trifles in the house, and the jewels of the house, equally belong to the children. We may partake of the common mercies of providence, and the extraordinary mercies of grace, without stint. None of the dainties of the royal house are locked up from the children. The Lord says to each believer, “Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine” “Ye are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s,” and therefore “all things are yours.”

Can you not say — “The Lord hath blessed me hitherto it?” Has he ever denied you one of the blessings common to the covenanted family? Has he ever told you that you may not pray, or that you may not trust? Has he forbidden you to cast your burden on the Lord? Has he denied to you fellowship with himself and communion with his dear Son? Has he laid an embargo on any one of the promises? Has he shut you out from any one of the provisions of his love? I know that it is not so if you are his child, but you can heartily exclaim “The Lord hath blessed me hitherto.” “Such honor have all the saints.” By his gracious past of love the Lord guarantees to his redeemed a future of equal blessedness, for his loving-kindness never departs from those on whom it lights.

But then, dear friends, besides this, Ephraim and Manasseh had special blessings, the peculiar blessing of Joseph, which did not belong to Judah, or Reuben, or Issachar. In the end of the Book of Genesis, you will see how Jacob blessed the two sons of Joseph, and you will observe with what prodigality of benediction he enriched them amongst his sons. “Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall.” Moses also, ere he died, seemed to glow with a divine fervor when he came to the tribe of Joseph, and blessed him in some respects above his brethren. Now, I think that many of you may say, “Though I am least of all his saints, yet in some respects the Lord hath specially blessed me hitherto.” I believe that every flower in a garden, which is tended by a wise gardener, could tell of some particular care that the gardener takes of it. He does for the dahlia what he

does not for the sunflower; somewhat is wanted by the rose that is not required by the lily; and the geranium calls for an attention which is not given to the honey-suckle. Each flower wins from the gardener a special culture. The vine has a dressing all its own, and the apple-tree a pruning peculiar to itself. There is a blessing of the house of Manasseh, and a blessing of the house of Ephraim; and so is there a special benediction for each child of God. All the names of the tribes were written on the breastplate, but there was a different color in the jewel allotted to each tribe; and I believe that there is a specialty of grace about every child of God. There is not only an election from the world, but an election out of the elect. Twelve were taken from the disciples; three were taken out of the twelve; one greatly beloved was taken out of the three. Uniformity of love does not prevent diversity of operations. As a crystal is made up of many crystals, so is grace composed of many graces. In one ray of the light of grace there are seven colors. Each saint may tell his fellow something that he does not know; and in heaven it will be a part of the riches of glory to hold commerce in those specialties which each one has for himself alone. I shall not be you, neither will you be me; neither shall we twain be like another two, or the four of us like any other four, though all of us shall be like our Lord when we shall see him as he is. I want you each to feel at this hour — “The Lord hath blessed me hitherto.” Personally, I often sit me down alone, and say, “Whence is this to me?” I cannot but admire the special goodness of my Lord to me. Sister, have you never done the same? Have you not said to yourself, in deep humility, “Surely, I have been a woman highly favored?” Do you not, my brother, often feel that the name given to Daniel might be given to you, “O man greatly beloved?” Perhaps you are greatly tried; but then, you have been graciously sustained. Perhaps you are free from troubles; then you are bound to bless the Lord for a smooth path. A peculiarity of love colors each gracious life. As God is truly everywhere, yet specially in certain places, so does he manifest his love to all his people, and yet each one enjoys a specialty of grace. “The Lord hath blessed me hitherto.”

I think, besides this, that these two tribes which made up the house of Joseph, also meant to say that, not only had God blessed them with the common blessings of Israel, and the special blessing of their tribe, but also with actual blessings. As far as they had gone they had driven out the Canaanites, and taken possession of the country. They had not received all that was promised; but God had blessed them hitherto. Come, brethren, we have not driven out all the Canaanites yet, but we have driven out many of them. We are not what we hope to be, but we are not what we used to be. We cannot yet see everything clearly, but we are not blind, as once we were. We have not overcome every sinful propensity, but no sin has dominion over us, for we are not under the law, but under grace. We do not know all that the Lord will yet teach us, but what we do know we would not lose for ten thousand worlds. We have not seen our Lord as he is, but we have seen him; and the joy of that sight will never be taken from us. Therefore, before the Lord and his assembled people, we joyfully declare that “The Lord hath blessed us hitherto.”

Let us expand this confession a little, and speak thus:

First, all the blessings that we have received have come from God. Do not let us trace any blessing to ourselves, or to our fellow-men; for though the minister of God may be as a conduit-pipe to bring us refreshing streams, yet all our fresh springs are in God, and not in men. Say, “The Lord hath blessed me hitherto.” Trace up every stream to the fountain, every beam to the sun, and say “I will bless the Lord as long as I live, for he has blessed me. Every good gift which has come to me has come from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. Trite as the thought is, we have often to recall God’s people to the confession — that all the blessings of the covenant come from the God of the covenant.

The Lord has given each one of us a great multitude of blessings. He has blessed us in his promises. Oh, that we did but know how rich we are! He has blessed us in his providence, — in the brightness and in the darkness of it, in its calms and in its storms, in its harvests and in its famines. He has blessed us by his grace. I shall not dwell upon these themes; I should want a century for my sermon, if I did. But he has blessed you, beloved, who are in Christ, with all heavenly blessings in Christ Jesus, according as he hath chosen you in him from before the foundation of the world. Never will you be able to reckon up, even in eternity, the total sum of the benedictions which God has bestowed upon you in promise, in providence, and in grace. He has given you “all blessings” in Christ, and that is the short way of putting it. He has given you more than you know of, more than you have asked for, more than you can estimate. He has given you not only many things, but all things, in Christ Jesus, and he has declared that “No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.” The Lord hath, indeed, blessed us hitherto.

And, mark you, there has been a continuity of this blessing. God has not blessed us, and then paused; but he has blessed us “hitherto.” One silver thread of blessing extends from the cradle to the grave. “He hath blessed us hitherto.” When we have provoked him; when we have backslidden from him; when we have been making an ill use of his blessings; yet he has kept on blessing us with a wondrous perseverance of love. I believe in the perseverance of the saints, because I believe in the perseverance of the love of God, or else I should not believe in it. The Lord himself puts it so — “I am God, I change not; therefore, ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.” There is an unconquerable pertinacity in the love of God: his grace cannot be baffled or thwarted, or turned aside; but his goodness and his mercy follow us all the days of our lives.

In addition to that continuity, there is a delightful consistency about the Lord’s dealings. “The Lord hath blessed us hitherto.” No curse has intervened. He has blessed us, and only blessed us. There has been no “yea” and “nay” with him; no enriching us with spiritual blessings, and then casting us away. He has frowned upon us, truly; but his love has been the same in the frown as in the smile. He

has chastened us sorely; but he has never given us over unto death.

And, what is more, when my text says, "The Lord hath blessed me hitherto," there is a kind of prophecy in it, for "hitherto" has a window forward as well as backward. You sometimes see a railway carriage or truck, fastened on to what goes before; but there is also a great hook behind. What is that for? Why, to fasten something else behind, and so to lengthen the train. Any one mercy from God is linked on to all the mercy that went before it; but provision is also made for adding future blessing. All the years to come are guaranteed by the ages past. Did you ever notice how the Bible ends? It closes with that happiest of conclusions, marriage and happiness, The marriage of the Lamb is come, and his bride hath made herself ready. Infinite felicity closes the volume of revealed history. Earthquakes, and falling stars, and the pouring out of vials, follow with terrible speed; but it all ends in everlasting bliss and eternal union. Even thus shall it be with us, for the Lord hath blessed us hitherto.

Hitherto — hitherto — he has blessed us; and it implies that he always will bless us. Never will the silver stream of his love cease to flow. Never will the ocean of his grace cease to wash the shores of our life. He is, he must be, to his people the blessed and blessing God. "Surely blessing I will bless thee," is a word of Jehovah that stands fast for ever and ever. Thus far is our confession of gratitude.

II. Now we come to The Argument, which I wish to press home upon all my dear brethren and sisters in Christ.

The tribe of Joseph says, "Forasmuch as the Lord hath blessed me hitherto."

What is the inference from that fact? The argument that the sons of Joseph wanted to draw was peculiarly Jewish; it was the inference of business. It was the plea that they should have more because they had so much: because they had one lot, therefore they were to have two portions in the promised land. I want no man to infer that, because God has blessed him in providence, he is to expect to have still more riches, and still more pleasure. Ah, no! Do not wish to have your portion in this life, lest you get it; for thee you will be as the ungodly.

Their argument, again, was one of grumbling. They said, "God has blessed us hitherto;" as much as to say, "If we do not get two portions, we shall not say that God is still blessing us; but we will draw a line, and say hitherto." God has many very naughty children; they fall into quarrels with their heavenly Father. "Ever since that dear child died," says one, "I never felt the same towards God." "Ever since my mother was taken away," cries another, "I have always felt that I could not trust God as I used to do." This is shocking talk. Have done with it. If you quarrel with God, he will say to you, "It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks." There is no happiness but in complete submission. Yield, and all will end well; but if you stand out against the Most High, it is not God's rod that makes you smart; it is a rod of your own making. End this warfare by saying, "It is the Lord: let him do what seemeth him good." Do not say, "He blessed me up to a certain point, and then he changed his hand." This is a most slanderous falsehood.

Let us say rather, "The Lord has blessed me hitherto, and this is cause for holy wonder and amazement. Why should the Lord have blessed me?"

"Pause, my soul! Adore and wonder! Ask, 'Oh, why such love to me?' Grace hath put me in the number Of the Savior's family: Hallelujah! Thanks, eternal thanks to Thee."

We read in 2 Samuel 7:18, 19, "Then went king David in, and sat before the Lord, and he said, Who am I, O Lord God? and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto? And is this the manner of man, O Lord God?" Thus let each one of us be amazed at the great loving-kindness of the Lord.

Be full of holy gratitude. Do not say, "I will look on the bright side." Beloved, the Lord's ways to us are all bright. Do not say, "I will trust God where I cannot trace him," but rather trace God everywhere. Get into the state of that poor man who was so greatly blessed to pious Tauler. He wished the man a good day. The man replied, "Sir, I never had a bad day." "Oh, but I wish you good weather." Said he, "Sir, it is always good weather. If it rains or if it shines, it is such weather as God pleases, and what pleases God pleases me."

Our sorrows lie mainly at the roots of our selfishness, and when our self-hood is dug up, our sorrow to a great extent is gone. Let us, then, utter this text to-night, "Forasmuch as the Lord hath blessed me hitherto," with hearty gratitude for all his holy will. Summing up gains and losses, joys and griefs, let us say with Job, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, and blessed be the name of the Lord."

Say also, with holy confidence, "The Lord hath blessed me hitherto." Speak as you find. If any enquire, "What has God been to you?" answer, "He hath blessed me hitherto." The devil whispers, "If thou be the son of God;" and he then insinuates, "God deals very hardly with you. See what you suffer. See how you are left in the dark!" Answer him, "Get thee behind me, Satan, for surely goodness and mercy have followed me all the days of my life; and if God takes from me any earthly good, shall I receive good at the

hand of the Lord, and shall I not receive evil?" He who can stand to this stands on good ground. "In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly." But he that gets away from this drifts I know not where. Come, let us each one bless the Lord, and say, "If he should treat me hardly in the future, I will still praise him for what he has done hitherto." I remember saying to myself, when I was in sorrow for sin, that if God would only forgive me my sin, and give me rest from my despair, if I had to live in a dungeon on bread and water, all the rest of my life, I would do nothing else but sing to his praise." I am afraid that I have not fulfilled that promise; but I confess my wrong in not having done so. You, my brethren, I dare say, made much the same spiritual covenant with God, and you have not stood to it. Let us unite our sincere confessions, and say, each one, "The Lord hath blessed me hitherto; therefore blessed be his name."

Furthermore, if this be true, let us resolve to engage in enlarged enterprises. If the Lord has blessed us hitherto, why should he not bless us in something fresh? I want to say somewhat to you as a church, dear friends, for the text is a church-text, and the "me" here comprehends all the tribe of Joseph. Let us joyfully say as a church, "The Lord hath blessed us hitherto." Strangers will excuse us if we have a little mutual joy in what the Lord has done for us during a considerable period of time. Those who have been with me from our earliest days, when we were a mere handful of people, may well rejoice that the Lord taught us to pray, and to trust, when we were so few and feeble, and then he visited us with favor, and greatly multiplied us; and since then he has continued to bless us without pause or stint. These thirty-three years he has been with us, we have never been without conversions, never without fresh labor for Christ, and fresh projects, and never a failure, never a schism, or a division of heart. I am amazed and humbled by the Lord's goodness. We have gone from strength to strength in the Lord's work. I have been feeble, and I fear I may be so still; but the Lord has not ceased to work by you who are with me. Well what then? College, Orphanage, Colportage, Evangelists, Mission Halls — thirty-four of them, Sunday-schools, and so forth. What then? "Stop," says the devil. You would like us to stop, would you not, foul fiend? But we shall do nothing of the kind. Wherever you are, O fiend, in this city, it is our business and our desire to fight with you, and drive you out! We cannot cease to be active; for the Lord has blessed us hitherto. "You will get meddling with too much, and get too many irons in the fire." None of them in your fire, O Satan! Brethren, we must have more fire, and more irons in it! I beseech you, do not slacken in any way, but press on. Let us do more. Have I an alabaster-box anywhere? Is it lying by? Perhaps the odours may begin to ooze out. It is not safe in the drawer. It may get cracked and broken. Let me have the privilege of breaking it myself, and pouring it on my Master's feet, that I may anoint them with the most precious thing I have. Can you not think of something you could do for Jesus, each one of you personally? Cannot the whole church say to itself, "We must keep our institutions going at a greater rate for Christ's sake?" The world is very dark, and wants more light; the poor are very hungry, and need bread; and the ignorant are very faint to know more.

Did you say, "Now, do not project anything?" I do not know that I shall, but at the same time, I am not sure that I shall not. If the Lord has blessed us hitherto, let us go a little further. When certain brethren raise a stone of Ebenezer, they sit down on it. That is not what the stone is meant for. I have a commission to put spikes on the top of those stones. You must not dream of sitting down upon, — "Hitherto hath the Lord helped us." The voice from the throne saith "Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward." Though the sea roll before you, forward! Forward, in God's name! Amen.

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Joshua 24:19

Moral Inability

Sermon Notes C H Spurgeon

And Joshua said unto the people, Ye cannot serve the Lord. — Joshua 24:19

In answer to Joshua's challenge, the people had said, "We will serve the Lord, for he is our God." But Joshua knew them too well to trust them, and reminded them that they were undertaking, what they could not perform. They did not believe him, but cried, "Nay, but we will serve the Lord"; but their after history proved the truth of Joshua's warning. God's word knows us better than we know ourselves. God's omniscience sees each part of our being as an anatomist sees the various portions of the body, and he therefore knows our moral and spiritual nature most thoroughly. A watchmaker is the best judge of a watch; and he who made man has the best knowledge of his condition and capacity. Let us dwell upon his verdict as to human ability.

I. THE CERTAINTY OF THE TRUTH THAT UNRENEWED MEN CANNOT SERVE GOD.

It is not a physical but a moral inability, and this is not in their nature, but in their fallen nature; not of God, but of sin. It may be said that they could serve God if they liked; but in that "if" lies the hinge of the whole question. Man's inability lies in the want of moral

power so to wish and will as actually to perform. This leaves him with undiminished responsibility; for he ought to be able to serve God, and his inability is his fault (Jer. 13:23).

1. The nature of God renders perfect service impossible to depraved men. "Ye cannot serve the Lord, for he is a holy God, he is a jealous God." See context.
2. The best they could render as unrenewed men would lack heart and intent, and therefore must be unacceptable. Without love and faith men cannot please God. What are the prayers, alms, and worshippings of a Christless soul (Isa. 1:15)?
3. The law of God is perfect, comprehensive, spiritual, far-reaching: who can hope to fulfill it? If a look may commit adultery, who shall in all points keep the law (Matt. 5:28)?
4. The carnal mind is inclined to self-will, self-seeking, lust, enmity, pride, and all other evils. "It is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be" (Rom. 8:7).
5. Let men try to be perfectly obedient. They will not try it. They argue for their ability, but they are loth enough to exert it.

II. THE DISCOURAGEMENT WHICH ARISES FROM THIS TRUTH.

It is alleged that this will drive men to despair, and our reply is that the kind of despair to which it drives men is most desirable and salutary.

1. It discourages men from an impossible task.

They might as well hope to invent perpetual motion as to present a perfect obedience of their own, having already sinned. If a man should try to hold up a ladder with his own hand, and at the same time climb to the top of it, he would have less difficulty than in causing his evil nature to attain to holiness.

2. It discourages from a ruinous course.

Self-righteousness is a deadly thing; it is a proud refusal of mercy, and a rebellion against grace. Self-confidence of any sort is the enemy of the Savior.

3. It discourages reliance upon ceremonies or any other outward religiousness, by assuring men that these cannot suffice.

4. It discourages from every other way of self-salvation, and thus shuts men up to faith in the Lord Jesus. Nothing better can befall them (Gal. 2:22-23).

III. THE NECESSITIES OF WHICH WE ARE REMINDED BY THIS TRUTH.

Unregenerate men, before you can serve God you need:

A new nature, which only the Spirit of God can create in you: the old man cannot serve the Lord. An impure fountain must pour out foul streams. The tree must be made good, or the fruit will not be good.

Reconciliation. How shall an enemy serve his king? There must be forgiveness, friendship, mutual delight. God and you must be made friends through the Mediator, or else you cannot be the servant of God.

Acceptance. Till you are accepted, your service cannot please God. Only a perfect righteousness can make you accepted of a holy and jealous God; and none but Jesus can give you a complete justification.

Continued aid. This you must have to keep you in the way when once you are in it (1 Sam. 2:9; Jude 24:25).

If you cannot serve God as you are, yet trust him as he manifests himself in Christ Jesus; and do this just as you are.

This will enable you to serve him on better principles.

This change of your nature will be effected by the Holy Spirit, who will come and dwell in you.

This will fit you for heaven, where "his servants shall serve him."

Striking Pieces

No wasp will make honey; before it will do that it must be transformed into a bee. A sow will not sit up to wash its face like the cat before the fire; neither will a debauched person take delight in holiness. No devil could praise the Lord as angels do, and no unregenerate man can offer acceptable service as the saints do.

Their inability was wholly of the moral kind. They could not do it because they were not disposed to do it, just as it is said of Joseph's brethren (Gen. 37:4) that they "could not speak peaceably unto him" so strong was their personal dislike to him ... But an inability arising from this source was obviously inexcusable, on the same grounds that a drunkard's inability to master his propensity for strong drink is inexcusable. In like manner, the "cannot" of the impenitent sinner, in regard to the performance of his duty, is equally inexcusable. — George Bush, in Notes on Joshua

The existence of sin within us entails on us certain consequences which we have no more power to evade than the idiot has power to change his look of idiocy; or the palsied hand has power to free itself from its torpor. — B. W. Newton

"A little girl when reproved by her mother for some fault, and told that she should teach her little brothers to do right, replied, 'How can I do right when there is no right in me?' Did not Paul make the same confession" (Rom. 7:18)?

"Man cannot be saved by perfect obedience, for he cannot render it; he cannot be saved by imperfect obedience, for God will not accept it"

A man deeply exercised about his soul was conversing with a friend on the subject, when the friend said, "Come at once to Jesus, for he will take away all your sins from your back." "Yes, I am aware of that;" said the other, "but what about my back?" I find I have not only sins to take away, but there is myself; what is to be done with that? And there is not only my back, but hands and feet, and head and heart are such a mass of iniquity that it's myself I want to get rid of before I can get peace. — British Evangelist

It is possible I may do an occasional service for one whose servant I am not, but it were mean that a great person should be served only by the servants of another lord. — John Howe

Run, run, and work, the law commands,
But gives me neither feet nor hands;
But sweeter sounds the gospel brings,
It bids me fly, and gives me wings.