Spurgeon on Romans-Pt1

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SPURGEON
ON ROMANS
Part 1

Romans 2:4 Concerning the Forbearance of God

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"Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?" — Romans 2:4 (note).

IT is a great sign, of love on God's part that he condescends to reason with men. When they had offended against him, he might have said to them, "I will punish you for your offenses," and he might have gone his way until the day for carrying out his threat arrived. But instead of doing so, he is unwilling that any should perish, according to his own declaration, he has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but would rather that he should turn unto him, and live; and therefore he pauses and expostulates. When a man has been greatly offended by another, and is very angry with him, he does not usually stay to reason with his opponent, his anger is too hot for that. But if he, is of a meek and gentle spirit, and anxious that the quarrel should be ended, he begins to reason with the other man, and says to him, "Why did you act so unkindly towards me? Why did you treat me thus? You have acted most unjustly; have you no sense of right? I have not deserved this at your hands; why then did you thus deal with me? Come now, do you utterly hate or despise me, or why do you thus continue to annoy and provoke me?" In such a fashion as this, but with infinite tenderness, the Lord reasons with sinners. So, dear friend, if thou art still unconverted, regard it as a clear proof of God's lovingkindness toward thee that he again sends to thee the word of expostulation. Take it for granted that he desires thy good, and wishes thee well, otherwise he would not have bidden his servant say to thee, "Despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?"

From the connection of our text, it would appear that there were some, in Paul's day, as there are in ours, who, seeing the great wickedness of mankind, and observing that God did not at once destroy the ungodly, gathered from that fact that they themselves might sin with impunity. Seeing that God did not launch his thunderbolts at even very gross sinners, and strike them with immediate and total destruction by pestilence, famine, or sword, these people wickedly said, "What does it matter what sins or crimes we commit? Evidently God is asleep, or winks at such deeds as these; or perhaps there is no God at all. Anyhow, let us live in sin, and take pleasure therein, for there will be no evil consequences to us if we do so; we may eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and enjoy ourselves to our hearts' content, and there will be no one to call us to account." So that, from the very fact, that God was merciful and gracious, they inferred that they might be sinful and rebellious; and because God's foot was slow to come in vengeance, they imagined that God's hand would not be heavy when he did come, and they said, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die!" It was to a sinner of this sort that Paul put the question, "Despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering?" I am going to put that question to you who are here; and I pray that the Holy Spirit may put it to the conscience of every unconverted man and woman.

I. Now, first Let Us Honor The Goodness, Forbearance, And Longsuffering Of God.

The description given by the apostle is threefold: "the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering." I shall probably not be wrong in saying that God's "goodness" may refer to the way in which he has overlooked all our past sins, so that he has not yet dealt with us in justice concerning them; that his forbearance may refer to our present sins, the transgressions of this day and hour, and that his longsuffering may refer to our future sins, for he knows that we shall continue to sin, yet he does not destroy us, but bears with us still. What a heavy weight is upon my mind and heart as I think of the forbearance of God towards the impenitent with regard to their past sins! Why, there are some of you who have committed sins that you would be ashamed to have mentioned, sins against light and knowledge too, which you knew to be sins, not merely one or two, but very many. It would have been the easiest possible thing in the world for God to have destroyed you; yet he has not done so. How long can you keep your temper when you are provoked? Five minutes? Half an hour? "That is a long time," say you. Suppose, you were insulted to your face, how long would you hold your peace and bear it? An hour? I fear there are not many of you who would do that, but that you would soon give an answer to the man who had dared thus to challenge you. What then shall I say of God, who has borne, with some here thirty, forty, fifty, sixty, seventy, perhaps eighty years, in which the mere, fact of their living has been an insult to him, for they have lived in opposition to his will and his law, and have often defied him to his face, and in their provoking blasphemy, have even invited him, to damn their bodies and souls! Oh, the amazing mercy of a God who can bear with a sinner for twelve months, who can even bear with him for fifty times twelve months, and can still stand, and in tones of pity and entreaty say, "Come now, come even now, and let, us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."

Then, next, it is no soul mercy that God bears with your present sins, so despise not the riches of his forbearance to you now. Most of you have long been hearers of the gospel; you are sitting in the place where you have sat and heard the gospel preached hundreds of times, and the very pew you are sitting in might witness against you that, although you have so long heard it, you have refused to obey it. You have promised better things, but you have never performed them; you have lied, not unto men, but unto God. You have lulled your conscience to sleep when God has spoken to you through it, and you have even quenched his Holy Spirit when he has striven with you; yet, up to this moment, God who, without uttering a word could send your guilty soul to hell, forbears to do so. He cries "How can I give thee up?" He looks the rebel in the face, and says to him, "How can I damn thee? How can I cast thee into hell? My compassions are moved towards thee; my repentings are kindled together." It is indeed great grace for God to do this; and he is doing it now. Every moment that an unconverted man is out of hell, God is manifesting towards him the riches of his forbearance, and it is no small strain upon divine mercy when men continue to sit notwithstanding this forbearance. The Roman lictors used to carry on their shoulders the rods with which prisoners were condemned to be beaten, and in the center of the rods was the axe for the final punishment of death; those who were bound round with cords having many knots, and the lictors would untie the knots slowly while the judge waited to see if the prisoner would say something that should prevent him from being beaten; but when the last knot was untied, they bared his back to scourge him. The judge still looked at him to see if there was any sign of repentance; and if there was not any, then came the axe. So, with regard to some of you, God has been undoing the knots one by one,-ay, and he has beaten you with more than one of his rods; you have, suffered from sickness and poverty, and many other tribulations. God's rods are smiting you now, but he is slow to take up the axe. He is stern in his judgment upon the impenitent, but he is very pitiful and compassionate, and unwilling to deal the death-blow if it can be prevented. "Turn ye," saith he, "turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?" and with all the eloquence of words he cries to men that they would turn unto him; and live.

Then there is the longsuffering of God with regard to sins that are yet to be committed. O sinner, thou canst not promise that thou wilt not sin in the future! Thou mayest foolishly say, "I will not;" but the Ethiopian might sooner change his skin, and the leopard his

spots as that thou, who art accustomed to do evil, mightest begin in thine own strength to do well. The fountain of thy heart is foul, so polluted streams must continue to flow from it. Thou art, born of such a race, and thou hast so added to thy natural depravity by thy constant sinfulness that thou wilt, still go on to sin until grace changes and renews thee. How is it that God, who knows this, does not strike thee out of existence? Is he going to spare thee for another year still to set, they hard heart against his love? Sinner, does God mean to spare you for another seven years fornication and lust? Will he permit you to live another ten years to be still a thief? Shall you have another twenty years in which every Sabbath shall be spent in sin, and in which almost every night shall see you reeling as a drunkard through the streets? Oh, if God knows that you will sin like this, how is it that he bears with you? If the destroying angel is told what you will be, he will stand with his sword drawn, or with his hand upon its hilt, and say, “Commission me, dread Sovereign, to cleanse the earth of those who blaspheme thy name, and break thy law, and it shall be, done!” But, God says, “Put up thy sword into its sheath, and wait a little longer! They shall have another appeal, another invitation, and another entreaty.” Oh, that these might be of avail to them, and that they might turn unto God, and live!

Beside this threefold appeal in the text, God’s goodness is manifested in great abundance: “Despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering?” Truly God’s mercy to us has been like a mine of riches. What has God not done for some of us? If I were not, at this moment, a believer, I should be of all here present one of the most ungrateful. I will state my own case knowing it to be similar to that of many others who are present. Cradled in the home of piety, nurtured with the tenderest care, taught the gospel from my youth up, with the holiest example of my parents, the best possible checks all around to prevent me running into sin; yet, notwithstanding all that, sinning and revolting more and more; but checked by conscience, as when a steed tries to leap forth, but its rider reins it in; yet still resolved to sin, determined to go further and yet further into it, and even being angry with God for checking sin; trying to get the bit between one’s teeth, and to run away from God, and sin worse than before; then struck down by the hand of God in sickness, alarmed, terrified, resolving to live differently, but being raised up to health again, shaking off serious impressions: with a laugh, and going back to the follies of sin again; then once more rebuked, made, to tremble, thunderstruck, and awed before God; hearing of the precious Savior, yet putting him off, and saying that another day would be soon enough to be a Christian. That is my sad story until sovereign grace met with me, and that is also the story of many others present here.

Yet, all the while, God has kept you supplied with the blessings of providence so that you have never suffered want; he has preserved you from the dangers and trials and troubles which a great many others have had to endure; he has placed you where an earnest gospel ministry never lets you rest in your sin; he has put you where faithful friends importune you with tears to care about your immortal soul; he has raised you up from sickness, perhaps preserved you in the day of battle, delivering you when many others died all around you. Has God done all this for you, and are there in your mind no tender thoughts toward him, no grateful memories of his great mercy? Oh, think of where you might have been long ago! Might they not have said over your dead body, “Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust?” Ay, long ago there might have been a portion for you in that dread place where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. Think of the gracious promises that are still proclaimed in your hearing, that, if you return unto the Lord, he will have mercy upon you, and will forgive you all your trespasses. Think of the Christ of God who died for sinners on the cross. Think of the Spirit of God who has come down to earth to strive and plead with sinners. Think of the Father’s almighty love, which is bestowed upon all those who put their trust in Jesus Christ his Son. Oh, there have indeed been riches of mercy, riches of goodness, riches of forbearance, riches of longsuffering, and, man, dost thou despise all this? Woman, away yonder, dost thou despise all this? All this mercy has passed before thee in one long panorama for many years; what dost thou say about it? Dost thou not say, “My God, forgive me that I have so long slighted thee?” Or wilt thou still despise the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering?

I might, if I had time, try to measure the longsuffering of God; and if I did, I should need four lines. The excellence of God’s goodness is manifested by four considerations. First consider the Divine Person who manifests it. Remember who God is; think how great he is. No one likes to be insulted by his inferiors, then how can God bear to be insulted by the creatures whom he has made, the creatures who owe him their very breath? How can God endure to be opposed and defied by one so utterly insignificant and unworthy as man is? Yet he does not crush his rebellious creature as he well might.

Think next of his omniscience. We sometimes bear with people because we forget much of what they have said or done; but what would it be to have before your mind’s eye all the evil speaking of twenty years ago, and all the hard sayings and unkind acts of a long life of enmity against you? Yet, though God has all our sins ever before him, and our most secret sins in the light of his countenance, he doth still forbear to smite and destroy us.

Think, too, how powerful he is; none can escape from him when he pursues them. Moses could run away from Pharaoh, and hide in the land of Midian, but where could we flee to escape from the vengeance of God if he had resolved at once to punish all those who had rebelled against him? How could we have stood up against him? Where are the bars of brass that could resist the omnipotence of the besieging God? None of his creatures can stand against him, any more than the stubble can stand against the flame, or the tow against the fire. And yet he has such forbearance that he has put up with us all these years. O thou blessed God, I love thee for thy wondrous patience to me and to my fellow sinners that thou dost still spare us though we have so sorely

provoked thee!

Then take another measuring line, and consider the being to whom God's goodness is manifested; that is, man. Think of what man is, and then ask yourself if such a little insignificant creature dares to proclaim war against God! Has he the audacity to defy God, and to say, "I will not do what thou hast bidden me do?" Why, the ant that crosses your path, on a summer evening, is not half so insignificant in comparison with you as you are when compared with the almighty God. And it is man, who has received so much from God,-man, who could not live an instant without God's permission and support, who stands up and says that he will not be God's servant, and that he will not accept the Savior whom God has appointed! O ye heavens, how is it that ye do not fall and crush the miscreant? Great God, it is only because thou art God that thou dost put up with sinful men so long!

Another measuring line is this,-consider the conduct to which God's goodness is a reply; in other words, consider what sin is. There is not a person here who has ever seen sin as it really is in God's sight. In the least sin there is more evil than there is even in hell; for hell is at least the vindication of divine justice, but sin defies that justice. Sin is an unlimited and unmitigated evil; and there are some sins that are so wanton, so aggravating, so wilful, and men go so much out of their way to commit them,-there are some sins that are repeated so often, even in spite of chastisement,- there are some sins that are so polluting, so defiling, in which a man degrades and ruins others as well as himself, and there are some sins so infamous that it is marvellous that God still bears with the men who commit them, and that, while he holds back the thunderbolts of justice, he holds out the silver scepter of mercy, and says even to the chief of sinners, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."

Then if we wanted one other measuring line, it should he the consideration of the boons which God's goodness brings. Our common mercies, daily bread, raiment to put on, health for necessary labor, rescue from peril, preservation from death, the institution of the Sabbath, the gift of the Bible, the gospel of salvation,-these are immeasurable boons; who then can calculate, the riches of the goodness and forbearance and longsuffering of God?

I cannot help feeling ashamed of myself while I am talking to you upon this theme, for I have a case to plead for God that I think I ought to plead much better than I do; and if I knew how to do it, I would do it, my gracious, blessed God. Alas! alas! there are some of you who treat God so ill, yet he has never done you any harm, and he is always doing you good. If his service were slavery, I should not wonder if you did not serve him. If to be his children were to be tortured and made unhappy I could not so much blame you; but as his service is perfect freedom, as his love is bliss ineffable, as his presence is heaven begun below, why do ye flee from that which is for your own highest happiness, and run away from that which is all of God's mercy to you? O sin, thou hast made men insane; thou hast given them over to a madness which makes them see no beauty in God, no charms in the person of the Redeemer, and no attraction in the salvation which he has bought with his own most precious blood! O Divine Spirit, I cannot plead as I fain would; come thou, and make men value as they ought the riches of the goodness and forbearance and longsuffering of God!

II. Now let me briefly try to show you How Men May Despise The Goodness, Forbearance, And Longsuffering Of God.

First, many persons do it by never considering that they do receive goodness from God. They take all that God gives them as a matter of course, and never think about it. If you have been very generous to some, poor man, and have relieved his wants for several years, I think you must sometimes feel grieved if you find that he takes it quite as a matter of course, and never shows any gratitude to you, but expects you still to do just as you have so long done. You think to yourself, "I am not bound to help him, it is entirely an act of favor on my part." You do not like to say, "I will not give, him any more," but you are strongly tempted to say so. Now if you have been ungrateful to your God for all his goodness to you, I pray you not to continue so. The swine walk under the oak, and eat up the acorns that fall from it, but never grunt out their thanks for them; will you be such swine as that? Oh, be not so! Rather imitate the little chicken, which drinks out of the stream, and then raises its head as if to thank God. I know that there are many here who would not like to be considered ungrateful, neither are they so to their fellow-men. I know you would scorn such a character; yet you are ungrateful to your best Friend, who has done far more, for you than all the rest of your friends put together. Do not despise his goodness, and forbearance, and longsuffering by allowing it to remain unnoticed.

Some despise the longsuffering of God by opposing his design in it. The design of God's goodness is to make bad men into good men; the design of God's mercy to impenitent sinners is to make them penitent. You say to God, "I will not have thee for my God;" and he replies, "I will prolong thy life; I will prosper thee in business; I will multiply my favors to thee." Yet you still say, "But I am not going to be moved by all this." God comes to your bedside when you are lying there very ill; the cold sweat of death is standing on your brow, and he draws the fever from your system, and again prolongs your life, and gives you another ten years here, yet you say to him, "I love thee none the better even after doing all this for me." Is that right? God has been gently leading thee, not driving thee, but drawing thee towards himself out of love towards thee; so do not despise his lovingkindness by pulling the other way.

There are some who do even worse than this, for they pervert the longsuffering and forbearance of God into a reason for being

unbelieving. They say to themselves, “We have got on very well in this world although we have never been religious. We have had a good time of it though we have never prayed. We have been raised up from sickness, though afterwards we never thought about religion any more; so we may do as we like; God will not be angry with us, he will not stretch out his hand, and smite us.” Ah! I know nothing that is more perilous to an ungodly man than to go on prospering; but whenever I meet with an ungodly man who is in great trouble, I have a hope that God has chosen that man unto eternal life, and that therefore he will not let him go to hell, but puts bars and posts across the road to brook the way to perdition. But as for the man who is prosperous though ungodly, in regard to whom every wind seems to be favorable to his ships, and every season gives him better crops than his neighbors have, and who children are multiplied, and so on,-do you know why God acts thus towards him? I can tell you.

I have heard of a Christian woman, who had a very wicked husband. He was a dreadful swearer, and always opposed her in every good thing; yet she was the kindest wife that a man ever had. One night, or rather, early in the morning, as he sat drinking with boon companions, he told them that he had a splendid wife, and that, if they were all to go home with him, even though it was two o’clock in the morning, if she had gone, to bed, she would get up and prepare supper for them without showing the slightest sign of displeasure, but would, for his sake, wait upon them as if they were lords in the land. They went to the house, and the husband called his wife, as she had gone to bed; she put on her clothes, and came down, and got ready such things as she had, and made them all welcome. They asked her why she was so kind to one who was so brutal to her, but she would not answer. Another day, she said to her husband, when he asked a similar question, “I have prayed for you thousands of times, and I have done all I can to bring you to the Savior; yet there is a dreadful fear in my mind that you will be lost. I am afraid you will continue to sin against God, and that you will be sent to hell, so I have made up my mind that I will make you as happy as you can be while you are, here, for I fear that you will never have any happiness hereafter.” And I believe it is for the same reason that God lets wicked men get rich. “There,” says the Lord, “they shall enjoy themselves while they can. I will give them these things while they are here, for the time will come when I can show them no pity, but my inexorable justice must drive them from all pleasure for ever.” I think if there had been any true manhood in that man whom I have mentioned, he would have said to his wife, “Woman, do you feel like that towards me? Have you loved me so much, and prayed for me so long, and have you put up with any inconvenience so that you may do me good? Then, at any rate, I will be unkind to you no longer, and I will hear what these things are; that you say will make for my peace.” A sane man would talk like that; and if you are sane, I pray you now to heed what your God says to you. This is how he put the case long ago, and he might, put it to you in the same way: “Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth! I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master’s crib; but Israel doth not, know, my people doth not consider.” Which of you would keep an ox or an ass if it never served you in any way? Which of you would suffer even a dog to be in your house, if it always flew at you when you came near it? Yet God has put up with you, his ungrateful creatures, for these many years. Will you never kiss the hand that feeds you? Are you more asinine than an ass? Are you more of a beast than the ox itself is? Oh, may God deliver sinners from continuing such injustice to him, and such cruelty to themselves!

III. Now, lastly, Let Us Feel The Force Of The Leading Of God’s Goodness: “the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance.”

It ought to be reason enough for our not despising God’s goodness that it is a very unjust thing to despise it. I looked in classic history to see if I could find any parallel case to this between man and God, and I found one something like it. In Alexander’s day, a soldier, who had been shipwrecked, was hospitably received by a certain person, who took him to his house, and fed and clothed him; but, as soon as the soldier was able to get back to Alexander, he misrepresented the case, with many falsehoods, and asked the great commander to give him the house of the man who had entertained him. When Alexander afterwards found out the ingratitude of the wretch who thus tried to deprive his host of his own house in order to get it for himself, he ordered him to be branded on the forehead so that he might be known everywhere as the ungrateful guest; but what branding iron and what coals of juniper shall ever be hot enough to brand the ungrateful being who was created by God, fed by God, put in the way of mercy, invited by grace, and yet remained ungrateful still?

Seldom is man so ungenerous to his fellow-man as man is to his God; the very men who would scorn to rob their fellow-men of a farthing go on robbing God without compunction all their lives. Men who are scrupulously just in their dealings with their fellow merchants will persist in injustice to the God who created them. Why is this base conduct? Oh! I pray you, continue it not;-I would, with tears in my eyes, entreat you to continue it no longer. Are you not under great obligation to God? You know that he made you. Deep down in your soul there is a voice that says to you, “It is God who keeps you alive.” You know that it is so; then how can you imagine, that the Creator and Preserver of all can be forgotten with impunity? Let me give you a text that will remind you how dangerous a thing it is to live in the neglect of God’s goodness: “The wicked shall be turned into hell,” (especially notice the next words,) “and all the nations that forget God.” When I began to quote that text, you may have said to yourself, “I am not wicked; I do not do anything outrageous;” but listen again to the rest of the verse, “and all the nations that forget“-not the nations that swear, or blaspheme, or rebel against God, but “all the nations that forget God.” “That is only one text,” say you. Ah! but here is another, and

there are many like it: “How shall we escape if we” -what? “If we neglect“-that is all,-it is only a matter of neglect — ”if we neglect so great salvation?” Despising God by neglecting him, despising him by forgetting him, this is a grievous kind of despising that will bring upon men eternal ruin.

“Lord, do thou the sinner turn!

Rouse him from his senseless state;

Let him not thy counsel spurn,

Rue his fatal choice too late!”

It may seem, to some of you, child’s play to face this congregation, and to speak as I am now doing; but the Lord knoweth it is no child’s play to me. I feel that I am accountable to God for all of you who, within a short time, will have to stand before my Master’s judgment-seat; and if, at the last tremendous day, I were summoned to give an account of how I employed this opportunity of speaking to you, and if I should have to confess that I did not tell you plainly that the neglect of God would ruin you for ever, if I should have to confess that I was cold and indifferent,-as cold and indifferent as you now are,-then my soul would be crimsoned with your soul’s blood. But it cannot be, it shall not be so, for I do entreat you, by the living God, and by the Christ who died to save sinners, by the certainty of death, by the certainty of judgment, by the splendours of heaven and by the terrors of hell, I do beseech you to consider the goodness and forbearance and longsuffering of God. Turn ye unto him with weeping and with supplication, and above all turn to the gospel as it is here declared, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved;” or, to put it in Christ’s own full way, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.” The Lord bring you all to simple faith in Jesus Christ his Son, then to obedience to Christ in the matter of baptism, and then may he preserve you by his grace until life’s last hour, never again to despise, but for ever to adore the goodness, and forbearance, and longsuffering of God, for his dear name’s sake!

Romans 3:24-26 Justice Vindicated, and Righteousness Exemplified

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“Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus; whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.” — (see notes Romans 3:24; 25; 26).

THE death of our Lord Jesus Christ answered many valuable purposes. It manifested the manifold wisdom of God. To angels in heaven, and to saints on earth, God never appeared so infinitely wise as in the ordaining of the plan of salvation by the substitution of his Son for guilty sinners. That death also revealed God’s amazing love. It proclaimed to astonished worlds how “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” The atonement of Christ answered the purpose, moreover, of purifying his people; that he might sanctify the people by his own blood, he suffered without the camp. He loved his Church, and gave himself for it, we know, “that he might present it to himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing.” The cross has also been the great battering-ram for breaking down the middle wall of partition between Jew and Gentile. It is by Christ’s blood that we are made one. “Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God.” Caste is abolished, and invidious distinctions are set aside. There is no longer in Christ Jesus barbarian, Scythian, bond or free, circumcised or uncircumcised, but Christ is All-in-all. That same atoning sacrifice also broke down the wall which separated both Jew and Gentile from God: “that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby.” The alienation prevailed till the reconciliation was effected by the precious blood of Jesus. We remain enemies in our minds by wicked works until we see the great love wherewith he loved us, and then that love melts our heart, and makes us friends of God.

Time would fail me did I attempt to enter into anything like an enumeration of the blessed purposes which the blood of Christ serveth before God and among men. Try, if you can, to calculate the inestimable value of the air you breathe, how every plant feeds upon it, or upon some portion of it, — how every creature, whether on the loftiest mountains, or in the deepest mines, must have a portion of it, or else can no longer subsist; think of the force with which it operates upon the world in wind and tempest. Need I do more than suggest to you the infinite number of ways in which the air becomes valuable, not merely as an accessory to our comfort, but as a necessity of our life? Yet, how infinitely more precious is the blood of Jesus Christ, which in every way and in

every place becomes efficacious to the everlasting salvation of all believers! That water, which sustains the life of leviathan, and of an infinite multitude of fishes, is your drink and mine. It makes glad the meads, it fertilizes every field, and gives to the husbandman his harvest; but, while it does this, it has other uses which we cannot here stay to dilate upon. See how it bears today upon its bosom the commerce of the world, and becomes the highway of nations. When you shall have recalled all the excellencies of the water, with which God has girdled the globe, you shall then have but opened a parable thoroughly inadequate to represent the immeasurable benefits which come to us through Christ, and the innumerable forms which those benefits assume. We know that it has an operation in the highest heaven; certainly it has saved us from the deepest hell.

Do you see that cross on which Jesus died? What is it more than a simple piece of transverse wood? I see it in vision. I see it growing till its top reaches the most excellent glory, lifting up the elect to the very throne of the Most High. I see its base sinking deep as our helpless miseries could plunge us in hopeless ruin, going down till it reaches even the depths of the vengeance of God; I see its arms spread till all whom God hath chosen are sheltered beneath them, and all mankind receive some favors which never would have come to them if it had not been that there the Savior of sinners offered the one availing sacrifice for sin. As when the servant of Elias saw a little cloud, the size of a man's hand, and the prophet marked in that the sign of abundance of rain, so, when I see the cross of Calvary, it is as a little cloud, but faith beholds it, spread all over heaven, and then drop down in mighty showers of mercy to fructify the earth, and bless the children of men. If you would count the drops that fall from that cloud, you must grasp "infinity" in your comprehension.

According to our text, it appears that one main purpose of the sacrifice of Christ was the manifestation of the righteousness of God. The apostle twice over assures us that this was the case, "Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation … to declare his righteousness." And as if this were not enough, "to declare, I say, at this time his righteousness." What, a grand thought! The death of Jesus Christ is a resplendent manifestation of divine righteousness. When we have mused upon that, we will proceed to notice that divine righteousness — the moral government of the Almighty — is, by the death of Christ, cleared of two difficulties to which reference is made. Then we shall close by noting the lessons which this great doctrine teaches.

I have nothing new to say this evening, — I should be ashamed of myself if I had. This is the old doctrine, this is the soul-saving truth. It is blessedly simple, and we thank God that it is, and that therefore the wayfaring man, though a fool, shall not err therein. It is plain to him that understandeth, and if the Lord giveth us understanding in this thing, we certainly have here the beginning, and we shall soon have in it the end of wisdom.

I. Jesus; Death, Then, Manifested Divine Justice In The Very Highest Degree.

The expulsion of our first parents from the garden of Eden did manifest the justice of God, but not fully. They were only expelled from paradise, but their lives were spared. In strict justice, they should have died. "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." Though that curse was not confined to natural death, it certainly included it. Had justice there been fully vindicated, the human race would have been utterly destroyed. The expulsion of the sinner does not so fully set forth God's righteousness as does the expiation of the Savior.

The justice of God was exhibited in dreadful forms when the deluge came, and swept the race of man from the earth. Yet why was yonder ark freighted with the chosen eight? Were they not sinners? If justice be come out in its full strength, why does it permit so many as eight to escape? The number may be few, but the principle is infringed. In strict, severe justice, apart from the atonement, not even Noah could have escaped, and certainly not his unrighteous son Ham. The eight, as they are floating yonder, indicate the exercise of some other prerogative than that of absolute and naked justice.

Then comes the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. See them, with the other cities of the plain, licked up by tongues of fire; behold the light smoke as it ascends and clouds the heavens! But here was only divine justice upon one atrocious sin, — a sin which will forever bear the name of the place in which it came to its worst height. It was not the declaration of God's justice against sin as sin, so much as against sin in a certain form when the virus of evil had been most banefully developed.

Hark to the shriek that goes up from the midst of the Red Sea, when the water's, that stood upright as a heap, suddenly descend, and lock in their death-wooing arms the multitudes of Egyptian chivalry! Do you not see here the justice of God? You do; but you do not see it so completely, because a multitude of sinners, in front, have escaped by this very destruction. I grant you that, here, a most blessed type of our Lord Jesus Christ is conspicuous, but there is not a complete declaration of divine justice, for had divine justice smitten all sinners on that occasion, Israel would have been drowned as well as Egypt. There rather the pride of Pharaoh was subdued than the sin of Egypt. That judgment fell only upon the chief of Egypt, the chief of all her strength was smitten there; but judgment must come upon the little as well as upon the great, when it cometh from the hand of the Most High in its absolute force.

Of all the other judgments which we find mentioned in Holy Scripture, it is enough to say that they were manifestations of divine justice, but they were not such manifestations of it as we have in Christ. If I might use such a metaphor, divine vengeance slept, and all those judgments were but its startings in its sleep. God had not yet laid bare his terrible right arm; judgment was then his strange work. He did not put both his hands to the tremendous work of punishment as he did afterwards, when his only-begotten Son stood before him., the Just in the place of the unjust, and the Guiltless with the guilt of man upon his shoulders.

The death of Christ did more clearly set forth the righteousness of God than all these put together. In some respects, even hell itself cannot so exhaust the vindication of infinite justice. Do you demur to this last assertion? You may well do so, till I explain my meaning. It needs a whole eternity to set forth, in hell, all the justice of God in the punishment of sin. To manifest to those who suffer, being impenitent, all the vengeance of incensed Deity, demands an ageless age of years, countless and interminable. Behold the Lamb of God! In Christ, you have set forth at once all the fullness of the vengeance of God against the sins of men. See the cup of trembling drained to its utmost dregs. See the baptism accomplished. He sank beneath the swelling waves of vindictive wrath; but, lo! he rises again. He has finished the endurance, and paid the debt that none could reckon. There is more of the vindication of justice on the tree than can be seen at any one time, or at any one point, in the lowest depths of hell.

The death of Christ gloriously set forth divine justice, because it taught manifestly this truth, that sin can never go without punishment. It is a law of God's moral universe that sin must be punished. He has made that as necessary as the law of gravitation. The law of gravitation he may suspend; the law of justice, never. He will by no means spare the guilty. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." As the Lord had appointed the salvation of his people, even this, the dearest desire of his soul, does not lead him to tamper with his inviolable law. No, a Substitute shall be provided, who shall to the utmost farthing pay whate'er his people owe. Upon his head the fire-cloud shall discharge itself, and into his bosom shall be emptied out, the coals of fire. No pardon without punishment! If the question be asked, "Why not?" it is enough to say that, so long as God rules the universe, he, rules it in wisdom, and his wisdom knows that it would be unsafe if sin were at any time permitted to be blotted out apart from satisfaction received. Christ, therefore, must himself give a satisfaction for sin, that this rule may be declared, and written upon the forefront of the skies, — God will not pardon sin by overlooking it; there must be redemption before there can be remission.

This was shown also very clearly in what the Savior had to endure. A part of the penalty of sin is shame. The wicked will rise "to shame and everlasting contempt." Rebellion against God is the most contemptible thing that angels ever heard of. The devil will be recognized, at last, as the worst of fools, and become the object of intense mockery. But see our Savior! When he takes the sinner's place, "He is despised and rejected of men." His own disciples, as it were, hid their faces from him: "He was despised, and we esteemed him not." He is the song of the drunkard; reproach hath broken his heart. They that sit in the gate speak against him; they spit in his face, they bow the knee, and hail him with mock homage; they put him to the death of a slave; they give him the pre-eminent place of shame as center of the three crucified ones. Never was shame more shameful than in the experience of our Lord. Here God seemed to declare, once for all, how shameful in his sight sin was. When sin lay but by imputation upon his own dear Son, his Son must be an object of scorn to the universe.

Transcendent was his sorrow as well as his shame. We cannot divine his meaning when he said, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death." Your sympathies can never interpret those pangs of heart which forced the blood to stream from every pore.

His physical sufferings alone are enough to make us faint, if we would but think of them aright. As for his soul's sufferings, which were the soul of his sufferings, here is enough to melt our hearts away in grief that we should ever have caused him thus to die. When the Lord thus emptied out all his quivers, and shot every arrow against the heart of his dear Son, — when all his waves and his billows went over him, — when deep called unto deep, and there was the noise of God's waterspouts, and Christ was made to sink in deep mire where there was no standing, — then God declared most loudly what an intolerable evil sin is, how supremely just he is, and how jealous of his justice.

In the Savior's sufferings, shame and sorrow were deepened, both of them, by divine desertion. "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" has the grief of ages in it. Here you have tremendous pangs distilled and given to Christ in quintessence. "Eloi, Eloi, lama Sabachthani?" is a more desperate cry than ever came from lost souls. Every word of it was emphatic, every syllable needs to be pronounced with the awful force of one who is in the pangs of death, and in the pangs of hell, for the Savior could truly say, "The sorrows of death compassed me, and the pains of hell gat hold upon me; I found trouble and sorrow. Then called I upon the name of the Lord; O Lord, I beseech thee, deliver my soul." No answer came, for God had forsaken him. His enemies persecuted and took him, and there was none to deliver him. Herein, in the leaving of his own Son, his only-begotten Son, his ever-obedient Son, God showed his intense righteousness and hatred of sin.

Nor was Christ spared the last pinch, — one would have thought that he might have been spared that, — He died. Here shame, and sorrow, and desertion reached the culminating point, — the Savior dies. The holy soul is parted from the pure and blessed body; he suffers the very pangs of death; he yields up the ghost. Though immortal, he dies. Brightness of the Father's glory, he

slumbers in the tomb! See him, believer, as the disciples take him down, drawing out the nails, one by one, so tenderly! See him, as they lay him in the sheet which the holy women had prepared, and wrap him up in the spices which Nicodemus in his love, and Joseph of Arimathea in his bounty, had brought! See the Savior, as they put him in the tomb, and go away sorrowing, for the stone is laid, and the seal is set upon him! See him, I say. See him, whom angels worship, "over all God, blessed for ever," sleeping thus a captive in the grave! Does not Jehovah here reveal how he hates sin in that he spared not his own Son? The Christ must die when sin and expiation come into contact, even though that contact be but by imputation.

To one more point I must call your attention. The excellency of the Person who suffered all this is the great platform upon which God displays his righteousness. He who suffered this was the Just One; — of spotless nature; — a King; "the King of the Jews." He was the Messiah, the Shiloh, whom God had foreordained to be the Mediator of the covenant. Nay more; he was the Son of the Highest, being begotten of the Holy Ghost, and born of the Virgin Mary. Mounting higher still, he was himself "very God of very God." It is a great mystery, one which, however, we receive with reverence.

The hand that was stretched out to the nail is the very hand that wields the scepter of universal empire; the heart that was pierced is the very heart which will beat on throughout eternity in love to his people; yet more, the very Being, who thus became capable of suffering, was he who built the heavens, and scattered the stars like dust along the sky; who bespake the light, and said, "Light be," and sent forth the Spirit to brood over chaos, and brought order out of its confusion. "Without him was not anything made that was made." He is the express image of his Father's glory and person; "in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." I merely talk; this theme demands an angel's tongue to sing. Sing of him, spirits before the throne, in your rapturous song, — sing of him, in wonder that he should ever leave your happy choirs, and forsake the throne of his eternal glory, to become a man! Sing of him when he stripped himself of his azure mantle, and did hang it on the sky, and took away his golden rings, and hung them up like stars, and laid aside the vestments of his glorious reign, and came to dwell in humble garments of clay! Oh, mysterious love! — he came to suffer, bleed, and die! Oh, mystery of righteousness, that such an One as this should have to bleed, should have to smart, even to the uttermost, and be obedient, unto death, even the death of the cross! Never, then, did righteousness receive such vindication as when God, the mighty Maker, having assumed flesh, in that flesh died for man, the creature's, sin.

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II. This Great Manifestation Of Divine Righteousness In The Person Of Christ, as I understand the text, Intelligibly Clears God's Moral Government Of Two Great Difficulties.

When Christ became a propitiation, he declared God's righteousness for the remission of sin. We are pardoned through the forbearance of God. For thousands of years, men lived and sinned, and yet were justified; — rebelled, and yet were forgiven; — wandered, yet wore restored. I say, for thousands of years, poor fallible men claimed complete righteousness, and entered into the rewards which belong exclusively to those who are justified before God. There they go, streaming up to heaven, a long bright line of patriarchs, and prophets, and warriors for the holy cause, and kings, and priests, and saintly men and women, who believed in God, and this was imputed to them for righteousness. Now here we are in a difficulty. A just God is saving all these sinners, and taking them to heaven, without any sort of vindication of his justice! But Christ comes in, and declares the righteousness of God "for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God," and all the difficulties of the antediluvian, and patriarchal, and Mosaic times are cleared up at once.

Another difficulty, with which you and I are far more concerned, is how God can be just, and yet the Justifier. The apostle says that this was cleared up: "To declare, I say, at this time, his righteousness; that he might be just, and the Justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." This is the great problem which the world has been trying to solve. I know of no religion, except Unitarianism, — which is not a religion, but a philosophy, — which ever pretends to do without a sacrifice. It is remarkable that no religion can be popular except that which deals with a sacrifice for sin; and where this is left out in any man's ministry, you very soon find there are more spiders than hearers, and very soon the place, which might have been crowded under an Evangelical ministry, grows empty. It is a happy circumstance that it is so, but it is a very significant one. If a man were to open a shop for the sale of bread, and were to sell nothing but stones, it is certain that he would have but few customers. The baker's shop is the last that is shut up in the parish. When all other trades die out, his will live, for men must have bread; and so, if every other good thing should pass away, the gospel, because it meets the wants of common humanity, is quite certain to survive them all. Dr. Patten, the other Sabbath morning, said to me after service, "I am often asked why so many people come to the Tabernacle, and, my dear friend," he said, "I cannot give any answer; can you? — except this one, that you do try to preach that which the soul wants, the essential and vital point of how men are saved and justified before God through Jesus Christ; and so," said he, "if you keep to that old theme, there is no fear but what there will be enough hungry souls to come and feed upon that bread." And so I think it is. This I know, if a man would have a subject that will never grow stale, and never wear out, let him preach Christ crucified. You need not go to philosophies, nor turn over the books in your libraries, to find out some novelty; the old story is more novel than the new. There is nothing so new as Christ. We may say of him, "Thou hast the dew of thy youth;" for Christ Jesus and his sacrifice exactly meet the common wants of our humanity.

Well, there is a sacrifice provided, and that sacrifice, dear friends, I say, answers the question which God has put into every man's mind, "How can I be saved, and yet God be just?" Man has the conviction, though he may not express it, that God is just. Every sinner knows that sin must be punished. He may trifle with that knowledge, but he cannot destroy it; and he never can get any peace of mind, when his conscience is really awakened, till he learns this great truth, — God punished Christ instead of you. Christ has so honored the law of God that, without God being unjust, or being thought to be so, he can forgive you. There has been such a satisfaction offered to God's violated purity, that he can be discovered to be infinitely pure, nay, severely just, and yet, at the same time, infinitely gracious and merciful. O soul, hast thou ever caught a glimpse of this matter? My heart remembers when I first understood that. Though those words, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth," were the channel of my comfort, yet the ground of it was this, — I did see that Christ suffered for me, that Christ stood as a Substitute for believers, and that precious doctrine of substitution was the window of light to my dark soul.

Hear, ye sinners, hear this! God demands of you two things, — first, that you should keep his law. You cannot do this, for you have already broken it. If you never sinned again, you have put yourselves out of court. On Sinai's mount there is no safety for you. Even Moses said, "I do exceedingly fear and quake," when Sinai was altogether on a smoke. But God demands more than this. He demands punishment for the sins that are past, as well as a perfect obedience for the years to come. Can you bear this? Can you endure the flames of hell and the terrors of his vengeance? Your heart quails at the thought. Well, as Christ has come into the world, he has provided for both. He knows your need. Christ has kept the law of God for you; and Christ has suffered the penalty of that law too. You have two answers to the Most High; and when conscience says, "Thou must be punished, for thou art guilty," thou canst say, "Nay, not I; Christ was punished for my sins. God will never punish two for one offense; — first the Substitute, and then the sinner for whom he was a Substitute." And when conscience says, "Ah! but thou canst not bring in a perfect righteousness," thou canst answer, "Yes, I can, for Christ has wrought out and brought in a perfect righteousness, and he gives this to me, according to his own name and title, 'Jehovah-Tsidkenu,' the Lord our Righteousness." Oh, that we might have grace, dear friends, to understand that all that God wants of us is found in Christ! You think there is something for you to do in order to save yourself; but Christ has saved all who will be saved, — saved them already, virtually; and you shall be saved actually when, by humble faith, you receive the salvation which Christ has wrought out. To add to Christ anything of your own, would be to tack on your own filthy rags to his gold and silver-threaded garments, to bring your filthy lucre to eke out the golden payment which he has laid down at God's throne. Do not this, sinner. God is content with Christ; be thou content with him; and as thou seest how God is just, see also how thou mayest be happy and at peace.

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III. And now I conclude by just drawing Two Practical Lessons.

First, let us see what an evil thing sin is, and how God hates it. Christian, do you hate it too. Loathe it; never endure it. If I had to pass the place where some dear friend of mine was murdered, I should dread the very spot; but if there lived on earth the man who had stabbed my dearest friend to the heart, methinks I could never bear him affection, but I should feel moved to stir the myrmidons of justice to pursue him. Now, your sins have murdered your Savior. Revenge here is holy. In other places, it must be very doubtful, but here it is sacred. Seize your sins. Where are they? Seize yourselves, and you have them. If you feel any anger against the murderer of Christ, turn to your looking-glass, and see his face. There stands the man who slew his Friend; there stands he who killed his Friend, who died to save him; yea, in the very act and suffering of murder that Friend gave himself up to bleed and die for the good of his murderers. Shall I spare the sins, then, that nailed my Savior to the tree? O Christian, how you ought to hate the very thought of sin! We are very severe upon the sins of others, sometimes; how much more severe ought we to be upon our own! Truly, a man's foes are they of his own household. The very thought of sin, the word of sin, the very garments spotted with the flesh, should be hated by the Christian. The Lord give us to feel more and more of this! We shall only get it, however, by living more where the groans of Calvary can meet our ears, and the sight of the Savior's wounds can melt our hearts.

Then, let us see our sad condition if we are not delivered from sin. If Christ became the object of his Father's wrath when sin was only imputed to him, how angry must God be, everyday, with the wicked whose own sins lie upon themselves! There can be no more dreadful thought to a sinner than this, if we will look at it in that light, — that God spared not his own Son. Surely, if the Judge smites his own Son so severely, he will not spare you, his enemy. Ah, you who have no Savior, and who have never looked to Christ to take away your sins, what will you do when you have to stand before the bar of God? Christ needed to be omnipotent to endure the stroke of his Father's sword; but what will you do when God's dreadful voice cries, "Awake, O sword, against my foe; against the man that despised my Son, and trampled on his blood"? The wrath of the Lamb is the worst thing a sinner can ever feel. "The wrath of the Lamb!" Think of that! When love turns to anger, it is cruel as the grave. To despise incarnate love, is to entail upon yourself infinite misery. They who perish without the knowledge of Christ, perish happily compared with you. It shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for you if you have despised Christ.

My hearers, I have tried as best I can to preach Christ to you, and to lift him up as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness; but some of you will not look at him. I fear you never will look, but that you will die in your sins. It was but the other day that I heard of

one of your number who, after listening to this voice, suddenly went into eternity in a moment; and the like is happening to very many. You will not be able to say, at the last, that you never heard of Christ, or that I covered him up amidst a multitude of gaudy periods and high-sounding words. I have set forth Christ Jesus in all the naked beauty of his mysterious sacrifice. Look to him, souls! If I have never been able to move your heart before, may God move it now! Look to Jesus! Is salvation such a thing to be trifled with, that you can live without it? Are the joys of being reconciled to God such trifles that you will not have them? If you had to die like dogs, it would be worthwhile to prove the happiness of being reconciled to God in this life. But, oh, remember the world to come! You shall soon pass through the gates of the grave; the death-sweat will settle on your brows; the night of death shall seal your eyes. What will you do, in those few solemn moments when the last sands are trickling from the hour-glass, without a Savior? Say not that these are things not to be talked of because they are too distant. Men and women, they will come to you. Tomorrow, ere next Sabbath-bells shall toll, you may be hurried to the land where the sound of the church-going bell is never heard. May God lead you to lay hold of Christ now; for if not, there remains for you nothing but the fearful looking for of judgment and of fiery indignation. The trumpet sounds, the dead awake, Jesus sits upon the great white throne, the heavens are opened, the angels come to gather God's harvest, and it is gathered into the garner. But now they come to reap the vintage, and with their sickles they cut down cluster after cluster of the wild vines of sin. Oh! if you are there, you must be gathered with the rest, cast into the winepress of the wrath of God; and, oh! how tremendous will that be, when he who once trod the winepress for his people, shall come to tread the winepress of his wrath for the last time! How dreadful when, to use the prophetic words of the Revelation, the blood flows forth even unto the horses' bridles! Oh! tremendous vengeance of an incensed God, whose mercy has been despised, and whose grace has been put away!

I am not in the habit of often using such strong words; I rather love to plead the love of Jesus Christ to souls; but strong words must sometimes be used, or slumbering souls will never else awake. Why will you perish? Do you choose your own destruction? Wherefore do ye choose it? Come, let a brother lead you back. Here, in these seats, cover up your eyes, and let the silent confession go up to heaven. Look to Jesus crucified; fly to those dear wounds of his. A Substitute for sinners, there he hangs, and bleeds, and dies.

"There is life for a look at the Crucified One;

There is life at this moment for thee," —

if thou believest in him. God give thee the grace to believe, for Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

Romans 3:24-26 Justification, Propitiation, Declaration

JUSTIFICATION, PROPITIATION, DECLARATION.
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"Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God hath set forth to he a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past through the forbearance of God. To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." — (see notes Romans 3:24; 25; 26).

I think, dear if friends, some of you will be saying, "There is that same old doctrine again that we are so continually hearing," and I am sure if you do say so I shall not be surprised. Nor, on the other hand, shall I make any sort of excuse. The doctrine of justification by faith through the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ is very much to my ministry what bread and salt are to the Bible. As often as ever the table is set, there are those necessary things. I regard that doctrine as being one that is to be preached continually, to be mixed up with all our discoursings, even as, under the law, it was said, "With all thine offerings thou shalt offer salt." This is the very salt of the gospel; indeed, it is impossible to bring it forward too often. It is the soul-saving doctrine; it is the foundation doctrine of the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is that by which God is pleased to bring many into reconciliation with himself. As the schoolmaster takes care to ground his scholars well in the grammar, that they may get hold of the very roots of the language, so must we be rooted and grounded in this fundamental and cardinal truth of justification through the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

Martin Luther, who used to preach this doctrine very vehemently and forcibly, yet declared that he felt as if he could knock the Bible about the peoples heads if he could by any means get this doctrine into them; for so soon after they had learnt it did they forget it. Over and over, and over again must the Christian minister continue to insist upon this truth, that God was, in Christ, reconciling the

world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them. And for ever and ever, as long as the world standeth, must he continue to repeat the truth, that we are justified through the righteousness of our Redeemer, and not by any righteousness of our own. I do not intend at this time to try and preach a sermon, but rather give an “outline exposition” again of this doctrine. And if you turn to the text, I think we can very well divide it, and very properly too, into three parts, and head it with three words of, justification, propitiation, declaration. Justification: “Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.” Propitiation: “Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation though faith in his blood to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins.” And then we come to the third; the Declaration: to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past through the forbearance of God: to declare, I say, at this time his righteousness, that he might be just and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. First, then, here is something about: —

I. Justification.

The sense of this term is, in this place, and in most others, to declare a person to be just. A person is put on his trial, he is brought before the judge. One of two things will happen; he will either be acquitted or justified, or else he will be condemned. You and I are all virtually before the judge, and we are at this moment either acquitted or condemned, either justified or under condemnation. It is not possible that any one of us should be acquitted on the ground of our not being guilty, for we must all confess that we have broken the law of God ten thousand times. It is not possible for any of us to be declared just on the ground of our own personal obedience to the law, for to be just through our own obedience we must have been perfect; but perfect we have not been. We have broken the law, we continue still to break it, and, by the works of the law, it is clear we cannot be just, cannot be justified. The Lord, even the God of heaven and earth, has planned and promulgated a way by which he can be just, and yet can declare the guilty to be just: a way by which, to use the words of our text he can be just and yet the justifier of him that believeth. That way is simply this, a way of substitution and imputation. Our sins are taken off of us, and laid upon Christ Jesus, the innocent Substitute: “For he hath made him to be sin for us who knew no sin.” Then, when this is effected, the righteousness which was wrought out by Jesus Christ is taken from him and imputed, reckoned unto us; so that the rest of the text comes true, “That we may be made the righteousness of God in him.” We are found in him not having our own righteousness which is of the law, but the righteousness which of God by faith. You see, we did not keep the law, but broke it. We were, therefore, condemned. Jesus came and stood in our stead, headed up the whole race that he had chosen, became their representative, kept for them completely all the law, suffered also the punishment due for all their breaches of the law, becoming a substitute actively and passively obeying the law, and suffering its penalty too. And now what he did is imputed to us, while what we did by way of sin was of old imputed to him, and he was made a curse for us: as it is written, “Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree.” If you ask me how this can be a just thing to do, I reply, God hath determined it, and it is not possible that he should have determined anything that was not just.

But, moreover, there was an original reason for it, for our first ruin came upon us through our first parent, Adam. Our first fall was not our doing, but the doing of the man who stood as our representative. Perhaps had we, each one of us, at the first separately and distinctly sinned, without any connection with him, redemption might have been as impossible to us as we have reason to believe it is to fallen angels; but inasmuch as the first sin was in connection with the federal hardship of the first Adam, it became possible and right that there should be a salvation through a second federal headship, even Jesus Christ, the second Adam. “As by man came death, so by man also comes the resurrection from the dead.” As by man sin came into the world, and the race perished, so by the second glorious man, Christ Jesus, grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life. But you need not question the justice of the plan. The Sovereign against whom you have offended deigns to accept it, and what God accepts we need not hesitate to rely upon. If the offended One be satisfied to proclaim us just, we may be perfectly satisfied with what he shall do toward us: for if he justifies, who can condemn? If he acquits, who dare accuse? We may boldly say, if once we are acquitted, “Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect?”

Now notice what the text says of this plan of justification. It tells us that, as far as we are concerned, it is given to us freely. Being justified freely, God forgives the sinner’s sins gratis, freely; not on account of any repentance of his meritoriously considered — not on the ground of any resolutions of his which might bribe the Eternal mind — not on account of penance, or suffering endured or to be endued, but he puts sins away freely because he chooses to do it — for nothing; without money, without merit, without anything that could move him but his own grand nature, for he delighteth in mercy — “Being justified freely.”

And then to make it clearer still, it is added by his grace, which is not a tautology, though it be a repetition. We are justified, not by any debt due to us, not because God was bound to justify, but because out of his own abundant love and rich compassion he freely makes the guilty to be pardoned, and the unrighteous to be justified by the righteousness of Christ. I know it has been said by some that we make out that there is no such thing as free pardon and free justification, because we set the righteousness of Christ in, as the procuring cause of both. I grant you we do, but we equally strenuously hold the pardon to be free, and the justification to be free, though it is through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus — free to us, free so far as the heart and mercy of God is concerned, and only through redemption, because God must be just, he must be righteous, he cannot separate sin from the penalty. He is a Sovereign, but he never, in his sovereignty, violates righteousness; and it would be a sovereign act of unrighteousness if he passed by sin without awarding to it the punishment which he threatened should follow it: an act which it is

not possible for God to do; for he must be just, and he has himself declared the will by no means clear the guilty. Still, the justification is free to you, free to every soul that will have it, free to every man that believeth in Jesus.

Now note this justification is put before you as being through the redemption, which is in Christ Jesus. There is a price paid, it is through the redemption. There is an intervening suffering, and an intervening obedience. We are not justified freely without redemption, nor justified by his grace without the intervention of the atoning sacrifice. Oh! how men labored to get rid of this. There are certain persons who think themselves philosophic, who will do all they can to throw dirt into the face of this doctrine of substitution, but it is the very soul, head, foundation, corner, and keystone of the entire gospel; and if it be left out, I hesitate not to say that the gospel preached is another gospel, which is not another, but there be some that trouble you.

"In vain the guilty conscience seeks

Some solid ground to rest upon.

With vain desire the spirit breaks,

Till we apply to Christ alone.

Till God in human flesh I see;

My thoughts no comfort find

The holy, just, and sacred three

Are terrors to my mind.
But if Emmanuel's face appear,

My hope, my joy, begins;

His grace forbids my slavish fear,

His love removes my sin."

We cannot give up the doctrine of redemption, the redemption which is in Christ Jesus. This is it, soul: listen to it — thou art justified freely, but it cost the Savior dear; it cost him a life of obedience; it cost him a death of shame, of agony, of suffering, all immeasurable. There was thy cup of wrath which thou must drink for ever, and which thou couldest never drain to the bottom. It must be drunk by someone. Jesus drinks it, sets the cup to his lips, and the very first drop of it makes him sweat great drops of blood falling to the ground; but he drinks right on, though head, and hands, and feet are all suffering: drinks right on, though he cries, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Drinks right on, I say, until not one black drop or dreg could be found within that cup, and, turning it upside down, he cries, "It is finished. It is finished," as he gives up the ghost. At one tremendous draught of love, the Lord hath drunk condemnation dry for every one of his people for whom he shed his blood. "Justified freely by his grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus." There was a redemption by substitutionary suffering, a redemption by vicarious obedience, a redemption by interposition of Christ on our behalf: —

"To bear, that we might never bear

His Father's righteous ire."

Understandest thou this, sinner? Understandest thou this? If thou dost not, then God help thee to grasp it now, for it is a thing of the present — is it not here a present participle? — being justified freely, that is, now, now justified. O sinner, thou art now condemned, but if thou now wilt look to Jesus standing as the victim in thy stead, if thou wilt now trust in Jesus dying in thy room, thou shalt be now just, thy sins shall be now forgiven; the righteousness shall be thine now, and thou shall know the meaning of that text, "There is, therefore, now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" See ye, then, what justification means? Oh! may you enjoy it; it will make you leap for joy if you do. And now the second word is: —

II. Propitiation — a reference here to the mercy-seat, the covering in; in our own word it is a reconciliation, a something by which God is propitiated; an atonement by which God and man are made one, a propitiation; a something which vindicates the injured honor of God, which comes in to make amends to the divine law for human offenses.

Now concerning this propitiation let us speak, and may the Holy Spirit give us utterance. Thou sayest, O sinner, "Wherewithal shall I come before God? How shall I draw near to the Most High God?" What would you give to be saved? All that you have, you would freely present; if you had bullocks and sheep upon a thousand hills, and their blood could cleanse you, you would pour it out in rivers. You ask again, "What is the propitiation I can bring?" God tells thee. Here he tells thee that he has provided a propitiation in

the person of his dear Son. And I would have thee notice first of all who it was that provided it — whom God had set forth. Admire the love of this — that the God who was angered is the God who finds the propitiation. Against God the sin was revelled; God himself finds the way of being gracious towards sinners. How safe it must be to accept a propitiation which God, the offended one, himself proposes. Notice next that it is said that God hath set this forth. The margin has it, "Has fore-ordained it." The atonement of Christ is not a new idea; it is an old determination of the Most High, and it is no close secret. God has published it — set it forth. By his prophets in his Word — by his preachers in all your streets, God has set forth Christ to be the propitiation for human sin. It is his own arranging, his own, and the publication to you to-night is by his own authority. Oh! regard ye this, and ye that seek his mercy leap to think that it comes to you certified in such a way.

But then notice that the main point in this propitiation is the blood. "Christ Jesus, whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood." Some cannot bear to hear about the blood of Jesus, and yet, under the old law, it was written, "It is the blood which shall make atonement for sin." And again, "Without shedding of blood there is no remission," and again, "The blood is the life thereof," and again, "When I see the blood I will pass over you," that is to say, that which makes atonement for human sin is not the life of Christ as an example — nor the actions of Christ as a vindication of righteousness — but the suffering of Christ — the death of Christ. Everyone knows that this is what is meant by the blood. In the blood-shedding, Jesus suffered his body suffered — inwardly his soul bled, his spirit suffered — his soul-sufferings were the soul of his sufferings. Then came death. Death was the penalty of sin. Jesus died, literally died; and the heart's blood came forth, mingled with water, from his pierced side. God is pleased to pardon us because Jesus suffered, and the main point of comfort is the cross — the cross of the crucified, the dying Savior. Do not let your minds wander away from this, ye that are seeking peace with God. Your hope is not so much at Bethlehem as at Calvary. Your consolation is not to be found in the Second Advent but in the First Advent, and the death that closed it. You are not to look to Christ in his glory for your comfort, but to Christ in his humiliation. Christ in his expiatory sufferings as your only hope. The blood, the blood, the blood, it is there the propitiation lies; and to that our faith must turn our eye. It is so. Yes, it is so.

"My side deserve thy wrath, my God;

Thy wrath has fallen on thy Son."

My sins turned away thy face: thou hast turned away thy face from him. My sins deserved death: he has died. My sins deserved to be spit upon — to be mocked — to be cast out as felons. All this he has endured as if he were my sin, and is it not so? "He hath made him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." Brethren, I do protest my conscience never knew any peace until I understood this truth, and ever since then I have no rock I build on but this. Christ in my stead, and I in Christ's place, safe in him, and he chastened, bruised, wounded, slain, instead of me. He it is. Propitiation through the blood. But the text says, "Through faith in his blood." So, then, this shows you that no propitiation has had any effect with regard to us actually until we have faith in the blood. I can never I know that God has blotted out my sin until I have faith. And what is faith but trust? And then, when I trust the blood of Jesus, my sin is all forgiven me in one moment. When I humbly rely upon my Savior's finished work, "Though sins were as scarlet, they become as wool; though they were red like crimson, they are whiter than snow." Do you know — I hardly know how to talk about this propitiation truth. It makes my heart so leap for joy that I cannot find words to tell you. I do know that I, and that you, and that every believer under heaven, is as clear before God of every sin as if he never had sinned, and is before God as accepted as if his whole life had been perfect obedience; and all because that propitiation blood and the dear merits of our once crucified, but now glorified Redeemer stands in our stead. If I might have a perfect righteousness of my own, I would not; I would sooner have my Lord's, for my righteousness, were it perfect, were but the righteousness of a man; but his is the righteousness of God and man, God — man. Oh I it is not merely immaculate and complete; it overflows with merit. Truly I say again, could we have a righteousness of our own, it were wise to leave it, and to have the righteousness of Jesus Christ wrapped about us by an act of faith, that we might for ever stand accepted, but "accepted in the Beloved." Why, it is the very glory of the acceptance that the acceptance comes to us in Christ.

Thus have I dwelt as well as our short time allows upon the propitiation. And now a word about: —

III. The Declaration.

The great object, it appears, of the redemption, and of the gospel, is to show how God is just, and yet the justifier of such as believe; and Paul very properly divides the effect of Christ's death into two parts. First, he says that that death declared God's righteousness as to the sins that were past, through the forbearance of God.

Before our Savior came into the world there had passed over the world some thousands of years. Our chronology talks about four thousand years. I do not know that. I never did believe in the chronology which is appended by human judgment to our Bibles. It may be, or it may not be correct; however, it may be four thousand years. During that time a very large number of sinners lived, and a large number of sinners were saved. The transgressions of the Patriarchs, the transgressions of Israel under the law, were remitted; and these persons were justified by faith, and accepted — but how? There had been no offering of blood. True, the bullocks and the lambs were offered, but these could never put away sin. These were brought often, as if to show that the work

was not done. The text tells us that this was through the forbearance of God. In the foresight of the atonement to be offered, God remitted — passed over, as the word is — the sins of those of his children who lived before Christ was sent — before the penalty was endured by the Substitute. It is a glorious thought, this atonement of Christ acting forward, before it was finished, before it was presented, and multitudes entering heaven and enjoying felicity as Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the saints did, when as yet not a drop of that blood which saved them had been shed, not a pang of the agony which made up the atonement had yet been endured. Now had God passed over all this sin, and no atonement been after all presented, his justice would not have been declared, but our Savior ultimately coming and suffering all was a declaration of the righteousness of God concerning the sins that were past. It was proven that he had in his mind's eye this great sacrifice when he passed by sin — that he had not unjustly remitted it without demanding the penalty.

But then the Apostle gives us the other half of the great result of Christ's death: he says, "To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness." That is, today: while we read this passage. "To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness, that still as for us who live after the Passion, he might be just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus." The atoning sacrifice of Christ looks forward, and will fool all down the ages till he comes.

"His precious blood shall never lose its power

Till all the ransomed

Church of God

Be saved, to sin no more."

All the sins of his people, both past and present and to come, were laid on Christ — the whole mighty mass of all the sin of all his people that ever have believed, or ever shall believe, on him — all were transferred to his head and laid on him, and he suffered for them all, and made an end of all their transgressions, and brought in everlasting righteousness for them all. Here is the grand truth, the grandest truth of inspiration.

Now I shall spend the last few minutes of our time in reminding you that I have not, beloved, been beating about the bush, nor preaching to you a doctrine that may or may not be true. I have not been holding up to you some angle of an eccentric creed. Behold before you that which will be a savor of life unto life, or of death unto death. Not with words of man's wisdom, but in simplicity have I tried to tell you God's way of pardoning and justifying men. At your peril reject it. As you shall answer for it before my Master's bar in that day when he shall summon you to give an account, oh! I beseech you by the living God accept the propitiation which God sets forth. Here are no hard terms: here are no rigorous conditions. There stand the words, "Believe and live"; as it is written, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved: he that believeth not shall be damned." I have told you what this believing is. It is an unfeigned act of reliance upon the Incarnate God, suffering in your room, and place, and stead. If ye believe on him, or trust him, that is the indisputable evidence that he was a substitute for you that the load of your guilt is gone: that the stone that lay at the door is removed, and you are saved. Go not about, I pray you, to seek another righteousness. All the righteousness you want Christ presents you freely with. Do not say that you are guilty: it is true you are, but this mode of salvation was meant for the guilty. Demur not because you feel unfit. All the fitness that is wanted is that you do but confess you are unfit, and take freely what God presents you. No sin of yours shall ruin you if you believe, but no righteousness of yours shall save you if you will not believe. This is God's way to save men. Will you set up another? Will you dare play Antichrist with Christ? He has declared his righteousness in the substitution of the Savior. Do you fail to see that righteousness, or seeing it, will you not admire it? Will you not adopt the plan which manifests it? Accept it, sinner! It is all a brother's heart and voice can say, accept it. Oh! if you know the joy it would bring you, you would accept it now. I bear my witness personally. Burdened with sin, lost utterly, as much as you, I heard this gladsome news; I heard the message which said, "Look unto me and be ye saved, all ye ends of the earth." I did look: I was as unfit as you — as undeserving as you — but the moment my eye caught sight of the great surety on the ground of Gethsemane, bleeding for me, and on the cross dying for me, I saw that if God had punished him for me, he could be just, and yet never punish me. Nay, that if Christ was punished in my stead, to punish me after Christ had died for me would be injustice altogether; and I hide myself tonight beneath the wings of Jesus, the great Surety, and my only shelter in the storm.

"Rock of Ages cleft for me

Let me hide myself in thee."

In his riven side my soul doth find a shelter from the blast of divine wrath. It is peace now: it is joy now: it is salvation now with me. Why should not it be so with you? You did not come here to find him. No! but God brought you hither to find you. Is it not written, "I will call them a people that were not a people, and her beloved that was not beloved." "I am found," saith he, "of them that sought me not." Oh! may he be found by you to-night. You did not know the way to be saved: you do know it now. Do not add to your guilt by knowing what you don't practice, but now, now trust him. Oh! may the Holy Ghost work faith in you. "'Tis but a little faith," says

one. Little faith will save thee, but Christ deserves great faith; Oh! he is a true Christ: he cannot lie. Oh! can you not lay hold of him! Dost thou see but the hem of his garment? Is it but a ravelled thread that hangs out? Touch it, touch it with thy finger, and thou shalt be made whole. What if thou canst not believe as thou would? Believe as thou canst. Say with him of old, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief." Lift up the cry of the publican, "God be merciful — be propitiated towards me, a sinner. Jesus, I will have thee: have thou me." The Lord grant it, and may many in this place be caved to-night, to the praise and the glory of his grace wherein he hath made us accepted in the Beloved. Amen and amen!

Romans 5:5 The Heart Perfumed

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"The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, which is given unto us."— Romans 5:5 (note)

As one reads the opening verses of this chapter one cannot help saying, "What marvellous treasures are those which belong to the people of God!" Hezekiah took the Babylonian ambassadors through all his varied treasure-houses, and herein he did evil; but if you can conduct your mind through the spiritual treasure-houses, and the minds of your friends in the same direction, you will do well. What is the wealth of God's people? Who can count it? It is wondrous, and beyond conception! The apostle seems to have taken up a whole handful of brilliants in the first verses of this chapter, and he holds them up now, one by one, and lets them glitter in the light, nay not merely a handful plucked at random, but they seem to be striving together, for one follows on after the other. "Therefore" is the link which connects justification with "peace," and then there is a connection between this "peace" and "access," and from this "access" to God we go on to "rejoice in hope of the glory of God." And when we have got as far as this string of pearls, the apostle adds, "And not only so," and then he holds up a cluster: when he has spoken of that he adds that "tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and" — another "and" — "experience hope," and then another "and" — "and hope maketh not ashamed," and then at the end of this string of jewels he brings up the language of the text — "Because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, which is given unto us."

I suppose the allusion in the text is to the pouring out of water, the love of God being to us like a spring shut up, a fountain sealed, until the Holy Ghost comes, and then the love of God flows in, a pure and crystal stream being shed abroad in our hearts.

But, perhaps, another figure may suit us as well tonight. The love of God is comparable to precious spikenard, but it is in the alabaster-box; the Holy Ghost opens that box, and then the sweet perfume is "shed abroad" in our hearts, not merely "shed," but "shed abroad"; not only poured out as the oil was on Aaron's head, but running down to the skirts of his garments, and perfuming all the room, just as it did in his case.

Now, observe, to some extent we can shed abroad the love of God in this house. Whilst the preacher is preaching of it, there will be a sweet savor of Christ. There is, as it were, a spiritual perfume in the assembly of the righteous whenever Jesus Christ is spoken of, for "Thy name is as ointment poured forth, therefore do the virgins love thee." But the text means something more than this. It is the love of God shed abroad, not in the assembly, but in the heart. The one is the aggregate, but this is the individual and personal sense of it; not in the house, I say, but in the heart. The preacher sheds abroad this love when he preaches of Christ, but he cannot shed it abroad in the heart. He can only speak of it; he cannot bring it home to your own personal realization. It must be shed abroad in your heart by the Holy Ghost, and if it once gets there, the sweet perfume of it is ever recognized by your inner man. It is not the preacher, neither is it the letter of this Book, but it is the Holy Ghost who most graciously comes there to shed abroad the love of God in your heart. Oh! see, then, how much we are indebted to the third person of the blessed Trinity! With what reverence should we always speak of him! With what rapture should we love him! With what devotion should we adore him! The love of God itself is, even to us, as spikenard unperceived until he brings it to the spiritual senses and makes it sweet to us. The love of God is like light to a blind eye until the Holy Ghost opens that eye. It is like food and raiment to a dead man, until the Holy One of Israel comes and gives us life to enjoy these mercies. Oh! then, may the Holy Spirit now be here in each one of us, to shed abroad the love of God in our hearts.

I shall first, then, and for a very little time, speak of the precious ointment which is here said to be shed abroad, namely, the love of God; secondly, upon the shedding of it abroad; thirdly, upon the blessed results of its being shed abroad in the heart; and then, fourthly, upon some matters which tend to hinder our enjoyment of the shedding abroad of this love in our hearts. First, let us speak of

———

I. — THE PRECIOUS OINTMENT WHICH IS HERE SPOKEN OF — "THE LOVE OF GOD."

Now, although I have to speak of this, yet it is a thing which, as to its essence, is not to be spoken of. It is to be enjoyed, and to be felt, but no words can convey its unmistakable sweetness.

"The love of Jesus, what it is

None but his loved ones know."

No words, either of the pen or the tongue, will ever be able to convey it either to hearer or reader. We receive the love of God doctrinally, and I think we do well so to do. We may speak of it in various theological senses; we may declare the love of God to be in some respects universal: for "His tender mercies are over all his works," and "the Lord is good to all."

But we may delight most of all to speak of it in its discriminating and distinguishing character, as revealing itself in the full blaze of its splendor to those whom he has chosen unto himself.

I believe the preacher does well who descants upon this love of God in its eternity, who says of it that it is an ancient thing, more ancient than the hoary mountains, or the aged sea: who speaks of it as an unchangeable and inimitable thing, abiding fast forever to those chosen ones who possess it. He does well, I believe, who speaks of it as being without an end, who shall declare in God's name that Christ, having loved his own who were in the world, loves them to the end; and that this is but a picture of the great love which is in God our Father towards us, that having loved us once, he will never cease to love us, but we shall always be the object of his heart's affection. But, brethren, it is very easy to talk doctrinally about the love of God, but you may not know anything about the love of God when you know all that. If I were to give a description of a father's love to some poor orphan here, I dare say I might make him feel envious; I might make him desirous to have something of the kind; but it would be quite impossible by any mere words to tell him what a father's love really is if he had never known it. It would be something like showing a skeleton to an angel who wished to see a man. A man is something more than a set of bones, and nerves, and muscles, and ligatures; you cannot present the man by any description that you may give, however anatomically correct, neither can you describe the love of God by merely doctrinally giving an outline of it, as the theologian would do, for there is vastly more there than the mere theologian has ever learned. You know some people have a herbarium in which they preserve specimens of various plants. Among the Alps you are asked by persons to buy collections of the flora of such-and-such districts. Well, you may buy them, and you will be interested in them when you get them home, but when you turn over the leaves and find the plants dried between the papers, they are nothing at all like what they are as they bloom on the Alps. The gentian has not the marvelous bloom which startles you as you find it on the side of the glaciers. It is a dry, dead thing now; you cannot convey to your friends what the flower is really like when at home; to know that fully you must take them to see it. So is it with theology; it is easy to preserve the living things of truth in a dry form, but you have not really understood them until you have seen them in life and known them by experience.

Again, you may think about the love of God historically, and what a wonderful topic is here! Begin — where? Well, since there is no beginning, begin where you will. Begin with the council chambers of eternity; begin with the purpose, the election, the covenant, the suretyship engagement. Then go on to the love revealing itself in the first promise; love sparing guilty man, love manifesting itself by slow degrees through the mist and smoke of the Mosaic ritual, and at last bursting into its full splendor upon the cross in the person of the dying Savior. Then go on to love developing itself in our experience, beginning by convincing us of our folly and our danger, and proceeding until it takes us into the arms of God, and puts us there forever in the enjoyment of the beatific vision. But, my dear friends, you know reading the story of a battle cannot give you any idea of the battle itself. Every man who has heard the sound of the cannon, and has marked the pain and misery of those who fall beneath the sword of war, will tell you that no description, however graphic, can ever make you feel what a battle is. So with regard to the love of God. You may give the history of it with the greatest accuracy, but when you have given it all you do not know what it is unless you have really tasted and handled it in your own soul's experience. So that if I am to speak of this ointment, I know not wherewithal I shall find words. I must the rather ask that you may have it shed abroad in your hearts.

There is a way, too, I think of speaking of the love of God in such a manner as to get none of it. I do think that controverting over practical Gospel truths is about the surest way of depriving you of the unction and the savor of them; I think we ought to treat divine truth very much as the true mother treated her child when they were before Solomon. Let us not rend it. But there are some who rend it anyhow, so long as they can keep their share of it. Oh! yes, for a hair's breadth of a doctrine, for some infinitesimal point, for some one Greek article, or a half a word, some men would mar the fellowship of the Saints, and drive away some of the best beloved-of God out of their communion. They are like the simpletons who, to find out who shall drink a jug of milk, spill it altogether, and neither of them get a drop of it. They have some choice of rare fruit, but they trample it under their feet in a strife as to who should eat of it. Let us beware of so doing with the love of God; and yet we have sometimes felt that we have handled themes connected with the love of God in such a controversial spirit as to take the bloom from the surface, and the very juice from the grape.

After all, dear friends, the best we can say of the love of God is just this: that you must know it and feel it for yourselves. But oh! the wondrous love. Angels marvel at it! To think that God should love his sinful creatures! You will marvel at it, even in heaven. When you shall be grown accustomed to wonders, this will still strike you as being a great marvel.

I believe you will

"Sing with rapture and surprise

His loving kindness in the skies."

and that when you have dived into the greatest deeps that your intellect can bear, you will find the wondrous depth of love both beneath and above you. When your faculties shall have been expanded to the heavenly size, and you shall be elevated to become the peer of the angelic host, even then you shall feel that the love of God surpasseth your powers of knowledge and comprehension.

This, then, is all we will say concerning it, that the love of God is the precious ointment. But secondly, the text says: —

II. — This Love Of God Is "Shed Abroad In Our Hearts."

What does this mean? Does it mean our merely knowing that God is love? We must know that as a preliminary step; but oh! the shedding abroad of the love of God is vastly more than that. It does not mean merely prizing that love, the coming into a state of desiring after it, when we feel that it must be a precious thing to be beloved of God. That is a very proper state of mind, but it is not what is meant here. It is not even believing in the love of God. That is the Christian's privilege, and should be his constant position — believing that God loves him, resting confident that even under affliction's cross the love of God is still the same, and that if God should hide his face, yet his heart is not changed. But the love of God shed abroad is more than that. It is not even the waiting for visits from God's face. It is a sweet thing to sit at Christ's door, and wait until he cometh to us. If I may not feast at the table, I may be grateful to be allowed to hunger and thirst to do it. Next to having Christ, a real longing after him is one of the most precious gifts of the Holy Spirit. But still, a great deal more than this is meant here. It is not even remembering former love-visits. That is often very consolatory.

"Our former favors we recount

When with him in the holy mount."

And we sometimes think on the Hermonites, and the hill Mizar, and find great comfort in the thought that he did once shine upon us: he did once show his love to us, and we rejoice greatly. But the shedding abroad of his love is more than this. It is not the remembrance of a thing, however precious, that is past and gone; but the deep enjoyment of something that is now present.

What is it then? Well, is it not just this? When the Holy Spirit brings home to our souls a sense of the love of God, we no longer entertain the slightest doubt — we are assured of God's love to us. We are now far past the range of questioning. It is not with us:

"'Tis a point I long to know

Oft it causes anxious thought."

It is there, and we know it is there. I called today upon a friend whose business calls him to the use of many perfumes, and I was shown into his little room, where there were various articles with which the perfumes were made. Now, I can suppose him to lose one of those pots of perfume, but I cannot suppose him to lose it and know where it is when it is shed abroad, for then he cannot help smelling it and perceiving it, and then he says, "Why, here it is; the room is filled with it." So when the love of God is shed abroad, you do not ask where it is. Your heart is filled with it. All your passions and powers are flavored and scented with it. It is not "Where is it?" but "Here it is!" Oh! the joy of saying, "Here it is!" If all the powers of earth and hell combined say that God does not love me, I can deny and refute them all, for I feel that love shed abroad in my heart. It is a clear perception of the fact that God loves me as a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ; it is a persuasion of the presence of the Holy Spirit, of the sealing of the Spirit, of the Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are born of God.

And even more than that. It is a thing that we hardly want a witness about; it is a consciousness, a perception, of the love of God as it is shed abroad in our soul; so that this love of God being shed abroad seems to me to mean that it is deeply and intensely enjoyed. Treasure it up in the bottle, and you do not enjoy the perfume; shed it abroad, and then all the fragrance fills the room and every nostril is regaled. Oh! there are times when we are as full of heaven as we can hold this side of the Jordan, and when we know Christ's love because he kisses us "with the kisses of his mouth," and we drink deep draughts of his love, it is better than wine.

We do not look on at the feast; we feed. We do not admire the rich clusters; but we take them and drink the nectar thereof. We do not look from Pisgah's brow, as did Moses, with the eye of faith; but we come to the wood that drops with honey, and, like Jonathan, we dip our spear into it, and feel that our eyes are enlightened as doves' eyes. Oh! Christian! you know what this means! You have had it in the prayer-chamber when you have been alone with God; you have had it in the depth of trouble: some of you have had it on a sick bed, some in the furnace, and yet so manifestly was Christ with you there, that the furnace glowed with joy as with the pain you felt. You rejoiced in Christ Jesus, and as your tribulations abounded, so your consolations abounded also. The love of God was enjoyed by you; you felt it, you were ravished with it.

Where the love of God is shed abroad, it fills the whole man. There are some perfumes which, if you once spill but a few drops of them, you would not only know it yourself, but everybody else would know it, too. "Gently," said my friend, when he was showing me a certain perfume, and I was going to pour out a drop, "if you do not want to smell of that for a month, do not do that," and as I did not particularly desire to smell of anything for so long a time as that I kept my fingers off. If you could once get the love of God shed abroad in your heart, you would be flavored by it, and when it is once shed abroad there it will be there to all eternity. There will be no fear of its being taken away from us when it is once fully poured out in all its glorious efficacy into our hearts. You must have felt it, my brethren and sisters in Christ, when from morning till night the whole day was full of the love of God. When you woke, you did not know how it was, but instead of a care and a fear about the day, you woke with a hymn, a verse, a comfortable promise, as though you had put a wafer made with honey between your lips when you went to sleep, and it had been melting there till it had sweetened your mouth and your whole soul. And when you went downstairs, it did not matter whether things went cross or not; they seemed to you to go well all the day; for your will was, through this love of God, brought to his will, and that pleased you which pleased him.

You were very rich today, not that you had more than formerly; but you had the love of God to sweeten all. You were today kept from using the tongue too freely; you did not want to speak about the great many things which once had engrossed your conversation, because your meditation of him was sweet, and you wanted to speak with him. That day persons noticed you; they could not help it. If your face did not shine, your conversation did; and if you met with any of God's people who had a spiritual taste to appreciate your conversation, they remembered that you dropped pearls of soul-enriching from your mouth, for you spake as one who had "been with Jesus and learned of him."

Do you remember, too, locking up your heart at night, and giving God the key, and then when you woke up remembering David's words, "When I wake I am still with thee"? Perhaps you did not remain with him long, but, whether longer or shorter, it was the best exposition that could have been given you of the meaning of our text. "The love of God shed abroad in your heart, by the Holy Ghost."

I know this, dear friend, if thou hast even known this, thou wilt thirst and hunger after it again. This wine of heaven is such that if a man drinketh of it, the more he drinketh the more he wanteth. If thou hast ever eaten the bread of heaven, the bread of earth will never satisfy thee. If thou hast ever eaten of the bread which droppeth from heaven, and on which angels feed, the food of common mortals will have lost its sweetness for thee. Thou hast been made to feast at the "feast of fat things, full of marrow, and of wines on the lees well-refined"; thou hast been taken up from where men grovel, and where thou art thyself groveling now, and on the wings of eagles thou hast been made to mount into a clearer atmosphere, and thou wilt feel heavily oppressed in the dense smoke of this world, and thou wilt be wanting to be away with Christ again. Perhaps thou art singing: —

"Ah! woe is me that I In

Meshech sojourn long;

That I in tents do dwell,

To Kedar which belong!"

But it shall not always be so. Thou shalt soon see his face if thou seek after him, and again shall the "love of God be shed abroad in your hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us."

And now, may God help us, while for a few minutes we go over what we have said, and ponder.

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III. — The Results Of This Love Being Shed Abroad In Our Hearts.

I have anticipated some of these already, but we remind ourselves more definitely that the love of God in our hearts sweetens everything. It sweetens our duties, and they become privileges.

"'Tis love that makes our willing feet

In swift obedience move."

Oh! when you feel that God loves you, how you can watch and pray! Then you can fight and wrestle! "All things are possible to him that believeth," and more than all is possible to him that loveth. When the heart gets the love of God in it, it

"Laughs at impossibilities,

And cries, It shall be done."

A believer may have the most desperate enterprises, and they may involve the most serious self-denial, but they will be accomplished with readiness when the love of God is shed abroad. It sweetens all our trials. Trials are scarcely trials when we see them coming from a Father's hand. The gardener wept, you know, when he found that his choicest rose had been cut, but when he knew that it was the Master who had taken it, he wept no more, for the Master had a right to it. There are no murmurings in the heart of him who can say, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord, seeing he has more blessing because he has taken away them I might have given him if he had not so done." And, beloved, it sweetens, I am certain, all our pursuits. We are very apt to think that our engagements in the world are too humble, too obscure, and then they become a drudgery when we think so. Do you not know that Jesus counts the very hairs of your head, and he seems to intimate by that that your very humblest pursuits are the objects of his careful observation? He knows where you are, what you are, and what you have to do, and he knows how to sweeten it all. But, when the love of God is shed abroad in the heart, how cheerfully the poor woman, with her eyes all weary and red, plies her noodle, and how the hard-toiling man finds his load grow light! Poverty sees to grow rich, and the hut and the hovel seem to grow into a mansion, and even rags seem to glisten like robes, when the love of God is shed abroad in the heart. Have you never heard how the martyrs used to sing at the stakes? Why was it? Not because the fire was made of roses; they did not find the faggots to be less hot to them than they would have been to others, but it was because the love of God was shed abroad in their hearts, and therefore they could endure all things for Christ's sake, seeing that love was theirs. It sweetens all.

Then again, it overmasters all other things. There are some perfumes that, if they were let loose in a room, would overpower and kill all others. There may be other sweet scents in the chamber, but just unstop this bottle, and now where are they? They are all swallowed up, as Aaron's rod swallowed up Egypt's rods. When the love of Jesus fills our souls we have love towards our dear friends and relatives; God forbid that we should not! But still, the love we have to Jesus seems to swallow them all up, his love towers above all other loves, like some mighty Alp above mole-hills. Best of all, when this love masters the soul, it kills all evil loves. During cholera times people are very anxious to get something that will destroy all noxious vapors and ill-smells. Ah! there is many an ill-odor in our hearts! There is the old swamp of natural depravity which is capable of spreading death and destruction every time we encounter it. But when the love of God is shed abroad in the heart, how effectually it kills this! Then the love of sin dies; the loving principle within subdues and tramples underfoot all lusts and all corruption, and we rejoice in the Lord Jesus Christ, and are not daunted by the conflict we feel within. This love kills all evil. And how blessedly it destroys all doubt! As I have said, when you are smelling a perfume you cannot doubt but what it is there. If you go into a field at this time of the year, you might walk all down a path and not know that there was any game there, but as soon as ever the partridges begin to fly, or the hares begin to run, you know directly that there is game there, because you can see it. So when our graces are slumbering and still, we do not know that they are there, but as soon as ever they get into active exercise, then we discover them, and we are sure of them. So is it with the love of God. When it has been slumbering in our hearts, we have had some doubt, but when it is poured out and shed abroad, its fragrance fills the entire man, and then doubts and fears are given to the winds.

And where this perfume is, once more, it is quite sure to communicate itself from the man, instrumentally, to his fellows. He who has been in beds of spices will smell thereof, and they who sit with their Lord will bear away some tokens of his companionship. All the ways of the Lord Jesus are full of perfume, because "his garments smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia," and when your garments smell of the same, through having been with him, you will communicate something of the savor, instrumentally, to those whom you meet. God grant you grace to seek this as a holy ambition, that, having the love of God in your hearts, it may be as when one has a candle lit, and others bring their candles to his, and he imparts the light; for it makes him none the poorer, whilst they rejoice therein. And now, to conclude, I think we all who love the Lord desire to feel his love shed abroad in our hearts, but we sometimes mourn because we do not feel it. What, then, is

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IV. — The Reason Why We Do Not Feel The Love Of God Shed Abroad In Our Hearts?

May it not be, brethren and sisters, because we have restrained prayer? The common sin of God's people is slackness in player. If there be one sin that needs to be preached about more than another just now, it is the sin of the omission of secret dealings with

God. This is the secret of our spiritual leanness, the secret of many of our trials, of our want of joy, our loss of confidence in God.

Neglect the prayer-chamber! Why, the merchant might as well neglect his office and counting-house! This is the place where you must be impoverished if you neglect it. I am persuaded more and more the larger I observe my own self, and certainly the longer I observe others, that when we grow weak on our knees it is a sign of weakness throughout the entire man. How canst thou expect to know much of the love of God if thou wilt not go with him? If thou givest no time to meditation, if thou hast no season for searching the Scriptures, if thou hast no periods for communion with God, what wonder if thou shouldest miss enjoyment with him?

I am persuaded, too, that a great many of us lose a good deal through neglecting the means of grace. I do not think that this applies to the most of you as a congregation. I believe there are none who frequent the assemblings of themselves altogether as much as you do. I have no cause to complain. There are some of you who are always here as often as the doors are opened, and prayer meeting and lecture nights are no burden to you. You come with willing feet to meet with your God. But it is not so with some professors. Step into most of the places of worship in London, and look at the weeknight service, and in some country places they have to give up theirs because there are not enough to come, to make it worth their while to hold such meetings. There is a sad deficiency in some places of a love of the means of grace. There are some professors who, when they get by the seaside, or a little away in the country, are always glad of an excuse not to go out to hear the Word of God. They know but little of the emotion of David when he counted that to be a dry and thirsty land when he could not go up to the public worship of God. Brethren, we must use the means of grace, or else, as we despise them, we must not expect a blessing. We must dig the well, when we go through the valley of Baca. We must not depend upon that well, for it does not in this case fill from the bottom; it is filled from above; but still, the well must be digged. There must be our gracious exertions, and then there shall come the Divine blessing.

May we not say also, that many Christians lose much joyous fellowship with Christ because of idleness? Christ is a worker; if we are idlers, we shall not have communion with him. “The Father,” saith he, “worketh hitherto, and I work.” If your possessions are unconsecrated, if your talents are unused, if your time is misspent, you cannot wonder if the Lord Jesus Christ should give you the whip. The “whip is for the ass, and the rod for the fool’s back.” Idle Christians must expect to feel the whip or the rod, but if we will do what we may for Christ, we shall have sweet consolation in the doing of it, and the love of God shall be shed abroad in our hearts.

Worldliness, too, is a bar to the shedding abroad of the love of God in our hearts. Those who do as worldlings do, who can be amused and interested as they are, must not wonder if the love of God is not shed abroad in their hearts. I am very far from desiring to keep Christians from certain places of amusement where the amusement is simple, and only such as may be derived from social intercourse, science, music, and so on; but I am satisfied that the frequenting of such places, even the very best, must be unfavorable to the piety of the very best Christian. You will gain but very little compared with the risk you run of losing very much. If these things charm you, it is not likely that Christ will charm you longer. If you get worldly, you cannot be spiritual at the same time.

Is it not, also, very probable that our little faith prevents this love of God from being shed abroad in our hearts? If we trusted Christ more, and honored him more by resting upon the faithful love of his Father, should we not find his love shed abroad in us?

And may it not also be our ingratitude as to past favors? We have not thanked God enough for the comfortable seasons that we have enjoyed, and therefore he keeps us hungering until we thank him for what he did in days gone by.

And, dear friends, is it not because we do not sincerely seek conformity to the likeness of our Savior, that we have not, as we might, the love of God shed abroad in our hearts? It is even this, my brethren, it is even this! If thou hast ever known the sweetness of the love of Christ, thou understandest that I cannot exaggerate when I praise it. It is the sweetest, best, and happiest thing of which a mortal can sing. It is a bliss which angels might envy — the sense of the love of God in a man or woman’s heart. Then how is it that you and I can endure to be without it?. The true wife would be grieved, indeed, if she had a doubt as to her husband’s love; she could not be happy unless she could have an assurance of being its possessor. And oh! how is it that we can bear ourselves when we are saying, “Does he love me?”? How is it we can endure, as some professors do day after day, not to have a word from his lips, or a smile from his countenance? Do we really love him, or is it all mere talk? Has our heart any deep affection for him, or is it only formal profession? Have we caught it up from others? Have we stirred merely natural emotions in ourselves, and then thought we loved him? Oh! I do hope we may say, “It is not so, we do love him; we should be very wretched if we did not; we might sooner wish to die than cease to love him; he is the Chief among ten thousand to our hearts; we feel he is.” Oh! then, without making vows and resolutions, which we shall soon break, let us pray, “Oh! Savior, shed abroad thy love in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. Oh! God the Father, reveal thyself in all the fullness of thy love to us now, and never may we lose a sense of it, but have it abiding with us for ever!” What. a church would this be if we all had fellowship with Christ! Oh! how trivial would the world’s troubles become! We should then go on serving the Master like seraphs. Methinks we should scarce rest day nor night, but be always praising and blessing his dear name. This place might be a paradise, we should have to bless God so continually, and our songs might rival those before the throne! “The spirit truly is willing, but the flesh is weak,” but “we have a high priest who can be touched

with a feeling of our infirmities." Let us draw near to him with confidence, and let this be the burden of our prayer, "Abide with me! Continue with me, for thy love's sake, Amen."

Romans 7:13 Sin's True Quality

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"Exceeding sinful."—Romans 7:13 (note)

Into the connection of these words our time, which is very short this evening, will not permit us to enter. It was something like this: Paul was showing that the law could not make a man holy, and he observes that he had himself found that, when the law came into his heart, it excited in him a desire to act contrary to its precepts. There were some actions which he would not have thought of performing until he found that they were forbidden, and then straightway he felt a desire to do them at once. To this a grave objection was raised. This were to make the law aid and abet sin. Not so, replies the apostle; it was not the law that made him sin, for the law is good; but it was the sinfulness of his heart that could thus turn that which was good into an occasion of evil. He further showed that this was the very design of the law as given by Moses to make clear how sinful sin was; the purpose for which it was sent was, not to make men holy, but to make men see how unholy they were. It was not the cure of the disease, much less the creator of it, but it was the revealer of the disease that lurked in the constitution of man.

Now, what I want to call your attention to is, that Paul here calls sin "exceeding sinful." Why didn't he say, "exceeding black," or "exceeding horrible," or "exceedingly deadly"? Why, because there is nothing in the world so bad as sin. When he wanted to use the very worst word he could find: to call sin by, he called it by its own name, and reiterated it: "sin," "exceeding sinful." For if you call sin black, there is no moral excellency or deformity in black or white. Black is as good as white, and white is as good as black, and you have expressed nothing. If you call sin "deadly," yet death in itself hath no evil in it compared with sin. For plants to die is not a dreadful thing; rather it may be a part of the organization of nature that successive generations of vegetables should spring up, and in due time should form the root-soil for other generations to follow. If you call it "deadly," you have said but little. If you want a word, you must come home for it. Sin must be named after itself. If you want to describe it, you must call it "sinful." Sin is "exceeding sinful"

The text may suggest a broad argument and a special application. Our endeavor shall be to show you then that sin is in itself "exceeding sinful"; and yet there are some signs of which it may be said with peculiar emphasis that they are "exceeding sinful."

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I. Sin Is In Itself "Exceeding Sinful."

It is rebellion against God, and "exceeding sinful," because it interferes with the just rights and prerogatives of God. That great invisible Spirit whom we cannot see, whom even our own thoughts cannot encompass, made the heavens and the earth, and all things that are, and it was his right that what he made should serve his purpose, and give him glory. The stars do this. They jar not in their everlasting orbits. The world of matter does this. He speaks, and it is done. The sun, the moon, the constellations of heaven, yea and the terrestrial forces, even the billows of the sea and the ravings of the wind, all these obey his behests. It is right they should. Shall not the potter make of the clay what he wills? Shall not he who uses the adze, fashion what he chooseth for his own pleasure? You and I, favored in our creation—not inanimate clods, not worms, having sensations only, without intellect; we who have been favored with thought, emotion, affection, with a high spiritual existence—aye, with an immortal existence—we were especially bound to be obedient to him that made us. Ask your conscience, do you not feel that God has rights towards you? Ask yourselves, if you make or preserve anything, call it your own, and it is your own, do you not expect it to answer your end, or do your bidding? Wherefore have you forgotten him that made you? Wherefore have you spent your powers and faculties for anything but his glory. Ah! it is "exceeding sinful" when the crown-rights of him upon whose will we exist are ignored, or impudently centravened. Yet according to the part we take in sin, we trample on his edicts, and set at nought his jurisdiction.

How exceeding sinful is this rebellion against such a God! Muse on his attributes, and consider his majesty, for he is not merely infinitely powerful, wise, all-sufficient, and glorious; but he is supremely good. He is good to the fullest extent of goodness. He is a God whose character is matchless. Not like Jupiter, to whom the heathens ascribed every vice; nor like Juggernaut, the bloody god of Hindustan. He is a pure and holy God whom we worship; Jehovah, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises. Now, it is conceivable that if God were some vast being who had a right naturally to our service; yet if his character — (forgive, great God, the supposition!) — were severe without pity, rigorous without clemency, harsh without forbearance, there were some pretense why daring spirits should lead a rebellion against the oppressor. But our Father, God, the great Shepherd-King, who shall frame an

excuse when we for a single moment revolt against him, or lift a finger against his will? It were heaven to serve him. The angels will tell you this: it were bliss to do his will. The perfect spirits all proclaim this. Ah! sin is base indeed, a rebellion against monarch's gentlest sway, an insurrection against parent's tenderest right, a revolt against peerless benignity! Oh! shame on thee, Sin! Thou art "exceeding sinful" indeed.

What an aggravation of the sinfulness of sin is this: that it rebels against laws every one of which is just! The table of the ten commandments contains not one commandment but what is founded upon the essential principles of right. If a law were proclaimed in England which violated the principles of equity, to break that law might be the highest duty; but when the laws of our country are just and right, it is not only an offense against the natural power of the State, but an offense against the understanding and the conscience of right when a man breaks such a statute. God's laws have not only the divine authority, but they have also this recommendation, that they are all harmonious, and adapted to the relations of our being. Was it not the State of Massachusetts that at first passed a resolution when they were about to make statutes, that they would be governed by the laws of God until they found time to make better? Will they ever find opportunity to make better? Could any man strike out a clause and improve? Could he add a sentence and mend? No! The law is holy, and just, and good; and, rightly understood, it naturally forbids evil and simply commends good—only good. Oh, Sin! thou art sinful indeed that thou should'st dare to revolt against that which in itself is right and just, virtuous and true.

Moreover, brethren—this may touch some of us to the quick—sin is "exceeding sinful," because it is antagonistic to our own interest, a mutiny against our own welfare. Selfishness is a strong principle in us all. That which is good for us and personally advantageous, should be regarded with tenacious attachment, and were we wise would be pursued with strong enthusiasm. Now, whenever God forbids a thing, we may rest. assured it would be dangerous. God's commands are just like those notices, more suggestive of kindly warning than of stern prohibition, which we see upon the park waters in the days of frost, "Dangerous." God simply tells us that such and such a thing is fraught with peril, or it leads to destruction. What he permits or commends will be, if not immediately, yet in the long run, in the highest degree promotive of our best interests. God doth but, as it were, consult our well-being and prosperity when he gives us law. Doesn't it seem a vicious thing indeed that a man will recklessly dare to slight himself in order to sin against, his Maker? God saith to thee, "Do not thrust thine arm in the fire." Nature saith, "Do not do it." And yet when God saith, "Do not commit fornication or adultery, do not lie, do not steal"; when he saith, "Draw near to me in prayer, love me," these commands are in themselves as naturally wise as the injunction not to thrust thine hand into the fire, or the counsel to eat and drink wholesome food when hunger and thirst require. Yet we spurn these commands. Like a child that is bidden not to drink of the poison cup, and will drink of it. Like a child that is refused the edged tool lest he cut himself, and he will cut himself, not believing in his father's wisdom, but credulous of his own judgment; because the cup looks sweet, it must be harmless; because the edged tool glitters, it must be a proper plaything. Know it, man, thou dost when thou sinnest cut and tear thyself; who but a madman would do that? If thou neglectest to do the right, thou dost neglect to feed thyself with that which nourishes, and to clothe thyself with that which is comely; who but an idiot would lend himself to such folly? Yet such idiots and such madmen hath sin made us; and therefore it is "exceeding sinful."

Sin, if we rightly consider it, is an upsetting of the entire order of the universe. In your family you feel as a father that nothing can go smoothly unless there is a head whose discretion shall regulate all the members. If your child should say, "Father, I am determined in this family that, whatever your will is, I will resist it, and whatever my will is, I will abide by it, and always carry it out if I can." What a family that would be! How disorganized! What a household! might we not say, what a hell upon earth! There sails tomorrow a ship from the Thames under command of a captain, wise and good, who understands the seas; but he has scarcely reached the Note before a sailor tells him that he shall not obey, that he does not intend either to reef a sail, or to do anything aboard the vessel that he is bidden. "Put the fellow in irons!" Everybody says it is right. Or a passenger coming up from the saloon informs the captain that he does not approve of his authority, and throughout the whole of the voyage he intends to thwart him all he can. If there is a boat within hail, put that fellow on shore, and do not be particular if he lands in a muddy place; but get rid of him somehow. Everybody feels it must be. You might as well scuttle the ship, cut holes in her sides, as tolerate for a moment that the rightful central authority should be unshipped, or that every man should determine to do what is right in his own eyes. The happiness of everybody on board that. vessel will depend upon order being kept. If one man is to do this, and another to do that, you might almost as well be shut up in a cage with tigers as be in such a vessel. Now, look at this world, it is but a floating ship on a larger scale, and say who ought to be captain here but he that made it, for his mighty hand alone can grasp that awful tiller. Who can steer this gigantic vessel over the waves of Providence—who but he? And who am I, and, my hearer, who are you that you should say, "I will ignore the Lord High Admiral; I will forget the Captain; I will rebel against him"? Why, if all do as you do, what is to become of the whole vessel, what of the whole world? Disorder is introduced; confusion, sorrow, dismay, and disaster will be sure to follow.

If you want proof that sin is exceedingly sinful, see what it has done already in the world. Lift up your eyes and survey that lovely garden where every beautiful creature, both of bird and beast, and every flower of unwithering loveliness, and everything that can delight the senses, are to be discovered in the sunlight. There are two perfect beings, a man and a woman, the parents of our race; enters there sin, the flowers are forthwith withered, a new wildness has seized upon the beasts, the ground brings forth her thorns

and thistles, and the man is driven out in the sweat of his face to earn his daily bread. Who withered Eden? Thou didst, accursed sin! thou didst it all! See there—but can you bear the sight?—clouds of smoke, rolling pillars of dust, the sound of clarion, the yet more dreadful boom of cannon; hark to the shrieks and cries; they fly; they are pursued; the battle is over! Walk over the field. There lies a mangled mass of human bodies, cut and torn, fiddled with shot, skulls splintered with rifle balls, dabbled pools of blood. Oh! there is such a scene as only a fiend could gaze on with complacency. Who did all this? Whence come wars and rumours but from your own lusts and from your sins? Oh! sin, thou art a carnage-maker! Sin, thou dost cry, '"Havoc," and straightway dost let loose the dogs of war! There had been naught of this hadst thou not come. But the spectacle multiplies on our vision. All over the world you have but to wander, and you see little hillocks more or less thickly scattered everywhere; and if you analyze the dust that blows along the street and interrogate every gram. it will probably tell you it was once a part of the body of some man who in generations past died painfully and rotted back to mother earth. Oh! the world is scarred with death. What is this earth today, but a great Aceldema—a field of blood, a vast cemetery? Death has worm-eaten the world through and through. All its surface bears relics of the human race. Who slew all these? who slew all these? Who indeed but sin? Sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.

I scarcely dare ask you to follow me, nor if you could follow, would I venture to lead the way, across the stream that parts the land of mortals from the regions of the immortals, should your venturous wings of imagination dare the flight to a land that is full of confusion and without any order. Athwart that valley of the shadow of death, ye might look on the gloomy region of wretched souls, where their worm dieth not, and their fire is not quenched. If you dared to peer into that dismal pit that hath no bottom, that place wherein spirits condemned of God are put away for ever and for ever from all light of hope and restoration. But you shudder even as I shrink back in very horror from that place where God's wrath burns like a furnace, and the proud that do wickedness are as stubble, and the nations that forget God for ever are consumed. Who lit that fire? Where is he that kindled it? It is sin, sin that did it all. No man is there except for sin. No man that ever breathed was ever cast away except as punishment most just for sin most grave. Sin is indeed "exceeding sinful."

Not even now have I reached the climax, nor must I venture the description. The worst phase is neither death nor hell. But on Calvary's tree the Lord himself who loved us, and came to earth to bless us, proved the sinfulness of sin when sin nailed him to the tree and pierced his side, and sinners, rejecting him with many a jibe and sneer, exclaimed, "We will not have this man to reign over us." In the agonies of Jesus, in the shame and spitting, in the woes and anguish that he endured, we read the sinfulness of sin, written as in capital letters, that even the half-blind might see. Oh! sin, murderer of Christ, thou art "exceeding sinful." My time has failed me, or I had meant to have enlarged upon:—

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II. Some Particular Sins That Are Exceeding Sinful Above Any Ordinary Transgression.

I mean sins against the Gospel. I will just give the catalogue, that everyone here who is honest with himself may search and see whether he be guilty. To reject loving messengers sent from God; godly parents; earnest pastors; affectionate teachers; to reject the kind message that they bring and the yearning anxiety that they feet for us, is "exceeding sinful." To resist the loving Gospel which talks to us only of mercy, and pardon, and adoption, and redemption from hell and exaltation to heaven—to reject that is "exceeding sinful." To resist the dying Savior, whose only motive in coming to earth must have been love, whose wounds are mouths that preach his love, whose death is the solemn proof of love, to despise, to neglect, to ignore him, this is "exceeding sinful." To sin against him after having made a profession of loving him; to come to his table and then go and sin with the ungodly; to be baptized in his name and yet to be unjust, dishonest, unrighteous, this is "exceeding sinful." To be numbered with his church and yet to be of the world; to profess to be his followers, and yet to be his enemies, this is "exceeding sinful." To sin against light and knowledge; to sin, knowing better; to sin against conscience; to push conscience on one side; to do violence to one's better self; to sin against the Holy Ghost, against his admonitions, warnings, promptings, invitings, this is "exceeding sinful." To go on sinning after you have smarted; to continue to sin when sin costs you many pains and difficulties; to push onward to hell, as if riding a steeple-chase, over post, and bar, and gate, and hedge, and ditch, this is "exceeding sinful."

Some of you here to-night are in this exceeding sinful. Oh! How I have pleaded with some of you. I have cried to you to come to Jesus. I have warned some of you again and again. If I am called to make answer at the judgment bar, I must say "Amen" to the condemnation of many of you. I shall be obliged to confess that you did know better—that some of you drink when you know how wrong it is; that some of you can swear; that some of you are thieves; some of you sin with a high hand; and yet I scarce know why you come to this tabernacle again and again and again. You love to hear my voice, and yet you cling to your sins, your sins that will surely damn you. Let me be clear of your blood; I will not mince matters with you or talk with you, as if you are all saints when I know you are not, and as if you are all going to heaven, when, alas! many of you are still swiftly spreading your wings to fly downward to the pit. Oh! may God arrest you, or otherwise the brightness and the light in which you sin will make your sin the darker and the plainer; and the warnings you hear will make your condemnation the more overwhelming when it comes.

But why must it come? Why will you die? Why are you set on sin? Why love ye mischief? I see often in the gas-light of my study poor gnats come flying in if the window be but ajar, and how they dash against the flame, and down they fall, but have scarcely recovered strength before up they fly again unto their destruction. Are you such? Are you mere insects, without wit, without knowledge? Oh! you are not, or else were you excusable. Come to my Savior, poor souls! He still is willing to receive you. A prayer will do it. Breathe the prayer. A broken heart he will not despise. A look at him will do it. A faint glance at Jesus pleading for you will do it Holy Spirit make them give that glance. Oh! by thy irresistible power, constrain them now to look and live. Oh! it shall be. God be thanked, it shall be. You shall look tonight, and God shall have the glory; and though, you be "exceeding sinful," yet shall you, through the precious blood, be fully forgiven, and I hope exceeding grateful for the great, forgiveness which Jesus brings. The Lord bless you, for his name's sake. Amen.

Romans 8:14 The Family Likeness

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"For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God."— Romans 8:14 (note)

WE shall do well to notice how much in this chapter is ascribed to the Holy Spirit. It is a chapter full of all God things, most instructive and consolatory; but perhaps one of its most notable points is this, that it so greatly magnifies the Holy Spirit. You observe in the second verse how it describes his gifts — that holy liberty which we now have from our former bondage — "the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made one free from the law of sin and death." Then further on, in the sixth verse, it virtually ascribes all our true life to the same power, for it is the Spirit who worketh in us a spiritual mind, and the Apostle tells us that "to be spiritually-minded is life and peace." The quickening of the body is, in the eleventh verse, ascribed to the same agency, "He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you." Meanwhile the true living that we have even here is traced to that same Spirit, "If ye, through the Spirit, do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live." No holy life is there, except as through the Spirit, sin is mortified. In the sixteenth verse the Spirit is described as being "a witness with our spirit" that we are born of God. How many gracious offices does he undertake for us! And as if that were not enough, in the twenty-sixth verse he is spoken of as "helping our infirmities" in prayer, teaching us what we should pray for as we ought, and "making intercession for us, or in us, according to the will of God." I am afraid we don't render that honor to the blessed Spirit which he deserves. Our ministry is not deficient, I trust, in magnifying the Christ of God; but too often the Holy Spirit is not sufficiently honored, and perhaps this may be some reason why he doth not so many mighty works in the Christian Church as he did at first. This is the dispensation of the Spirit. He dwelleth in us; he dwells in the Church. Let us honor him; let us grieve him no more, but put ourselves beneath his guidance and wait for his blessing. Our text ascribes to the Holy Spirit leading. Those who have been quickened and made to live, and introduced, therefore, into the family of God, have one mark, one never-failing mark. They all have it, and none others ever have it. As many as are led by the Spirit, they are the sons of God, and all who are the sons of God are led by the Spirit of God.

Now it is to this leading of the Spirit rather than to the sonship, and all the blessed beings that come out of that, that I shall direct your attention at this time. And we shall notice first: —

I. What Is Intended By A Man's Being Led Of The Spirit.

Every man is led by some spirit. There is an evil spirit in the world, and it leads the mass of mankind. He who saith, "I am free and led by none," is led by the spirit of pride and self-conceit. Under some form or another, the human mind subjects itself to some spiritual sway; and here we are told that those who are the sons of God are undistinguished by this — that the leadership under which they move is that of the Holy Spirit. I take this to mean, first, that the Holy Spirit becomes the governing principle of our life. Years ago we were led of the Spirit from the wilderness of our natural state. We had been called under the preaching of the Word, but vain were those calls. The Holy Spirit came, and then the call of the preacher became an effectual call to our own souls. The first active grace we ever exercised was by the leading of the Holy Spirit. We were then for the first time recognised as the children of God, because then also for the first time we yielded ourselves up to the leadership of the Holy Ghost. And mark, from that day to this, every act of ours that has been heavenward, every thought of ours that has been towards God and his Christ, has been under the leadership of that same Spirit. He who gave us at first to live has kept us alive. He who guided our tottering footsteps to the cross-foot, and there sealed our pardon, has led us along every step of the way, up every hill of difficulty, and down every valley of humiliation, even until this moment; and so it must be until we reach our journey's end. There may be steps in that journey, alas! that it should be so! in which we are not led of the Spirit, but depart from under his power for a while, and the flesh becomes dominant. Oh! that those steps might never be thought of except with bitter regret and humiliation of spirit. But in every true step onward and heavenward between here and the pearl-gate we shall be led by the Spirit of God. We run when he draws; we are

active when he makes us active. He makes us willing in the day of his power, and then we work with him because he worketh in us here to will and to do of his own good pleasure. Now, beloved, you may judge whether you are the sons of God then by asking yourselves this question, “Am I under the influence of the blessed Spirit? Has be led me from darkness into light — from self to the Savior? and has he continued to lead me onward and upward in the divine life, and am I leaning upon him for all future power with which I shall fulfill my pilgrimage till I come to the celestial city?”

But opening up a little further this leadership, I would observe that when a man is said to be led, there are four things implied in the thought. The first one is very apparent, namely, guidance. If I select a pilot, I accept him to steer the vessel. If, on a dark moorland, I accept a guide who knows the way, I do not pretend to know it myself, but I put myself exactly under his guidance. It is so with the child of God. He does not know. What he thinks he knows is usually his folly, if it be knowledge that has not been given to him by the Holy Spirit. But he who is under the guidance of the Holy Spirit takes Christ to be unto him wisdom, and expects to receive this wisdom through the Holy Spirit taking of the things of Christ and revealing them unto him. He is not a teacher, but a disciple: he is not himself a guide, but one who is guided. He has put himself into the hands of another. Self-will does not believe this. Self-love is disgusted with the thought. I may, therefore, ask you, beloved, Do you accept the Holy Spirit’s guidance? Do you desire to be led, not according to your own will, but according to the will of the Most High? Are you desirous that the prayer of your Master should be your prayer, “Not as I will, but as thou wilt”? Guidance — we must accept that, or we are not led by him.

But in the second place, there is drawing as well as guidance; for oftentimes when a person is led, especially if it be a weaker led by a stronger, there is a general impulse. I accept the map as my guide, but the map is not my leader. A leader gives me some degree of strength. He operates upon me gently and sweetly — impels me in the direction in which he would have me go. There is a great difference between a guide and a leader; but still there is a measure of power given by a leader who leads in the way. And oh! brethren, I am sure you, who know anything about the experience of children of God, will feel that you have not only had light from the blessed Spirit to show you the way, but you have had life and power to help you to run in the way, else you would have known the right, but you would never have followed it — you would have seen the way of God’s commandments, but you would never have run in them, unless he, the blessed Spirit, had enlarged your heart. If there be obedience to the light received, that obedience is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. Not merely the knowledge and the acquiescence in the knowledge of God’s will, but the power to carry out that will comes from him, and from him only. Now I think we may say that, in leading, there is something more than guidance — drawing.

There comes in yet a third point. Under the idea of leadership is that of government. Moses was the leader of the children of Israel through the wilderness. He was, as a leader, their ruler; and if the idea of government does not always attach to being led, yet it certainly does in this case. The Holy Spirit will never guide us along a road in which we claim to be his equal, in which we claim to be still free, and to have no authority above us. He is the spirit’s regent, the Lord and Governor within the soul of every man in whom he resides, and on whom he bestows his guidance. I will ask thee, my dear brother, whether thou dost not acknowledge this to be the fact. Thou art often rebellious against the Spirit, and thou dost often grieve him, but still, for all that, thy heart desires — thy renewed heart desires — fully to submit to the Holy Ghost. I feel in my own heart a longing to be sensitive to every impulse of the blessed Spirit, to feel his breath not only when he comes like a hurricane, but also when he comes as a gentle zephyr. I would desire to be moved by the Spirit’s faintest wish, and to have my soul cognizant of the Spirit’s work within — pliable, malleable, so as to be easily molded, plastic beneath his divine touch; and you are not led by the Spirit unless it be your wish — unless you put yourself under his government as well as under his guidance.

And fourthly, this being led implies acquiescence in the government, and in the guidance, and in the drawing; for a person is not led unless he acquiesces in the drawing, and runs when he is drawn. The Spirit of God never violates the free agency of man. It has been commonly laid to the charge of those who preach Calvinistic doctrine that we make it out that man is passive, and that the will is nowhere. I do not know who may have said so, but certainly the master theologians of our school have always endeavored carefully to show that the Holy Spirit works in us to will and to do, yet never so as to treat man as if he were not a free agent. God does not deal with man as with blocks of wood or stone. He deals with men as men. He has his will with them — his sovereign and ever blessed will, but he does not violate their will. There is a casket: it is locked. Anon, it is opened. Now he that made that casket opens it with a key, and does not violate the lock, nor even the most delicate ward of the lock. It is only the thief that comes with his crowbar, and rifles it, and violates its constitution. And so God knows how to put spiritual life, and grace, and obedience into the human heart without destroying the fact that it was a human heart, and that it had a free choice. He makes us willing in the day of his power. It is not that the day of his of God, but rather have a ringing in their ears, or a whispering in their heads, but nothing more. How does the Spirit of God then, lead his people?

I would reply, first of all, by the Word. This is the “more sure word of testimony, whereunto ye do well that ye take heed as unto a lamp that shineth in a dark place.” If any man would know the will of God by the Spirit, let him come to the Word that is written here — let him search this to know what is God’s mind, for “holy men of old spake as they were moved by the Spirit.” We are not to expect new revelation. The old is perfect and complete. There is a curse pronounced upon whosoever should add to it or take from it. Let us accept it as the complete mind of God so far, at any rate, as he sees fit to reveal it to us. The Holy Spirit speaks to us

through the Word. But it is not through the bare letter of the word, for in this he doth not always speak. Many an eye hath glanced over the Word, and seen none of the mind of the Spirit there. Ay, and many an eye of a true believer, too, has read and read again, and missed the glory of the passage, so that the Spirit does not always speak through the Word to us, or through the same word to the same person at all times; but he sheds a light over a certain part of the chapter, he illuminates it, lights it up, and then puts it to our souls with power; and those that are Bereans, and search the Scripture, shall come upon choice passages, words that shall make their hearts burn within them, texts that shall leap out of the page and embrace them, and whisper in their ear sweet loving words, and kiss them with the kisses of Christ's lips over again. It is in the Word, opened up of the Spirit, that we get his joy and guidance. Sometimes that will occur under the preaching of the gospel when the Lord gives to his servants power to speak his mind, and they are his mouth. Then it is that hearts made ready "receive with meekness the engrafted Word," and hearts are guided, and led, and directed. It may not be, however, by any minister; it may be by the words read in some book in connection with an explanation, or it may be the Word itself, which, for some peculiar reason unknown to us (the work of the Spirit of God), may appear to us to be more full of meaning than ever it was before. "But," saith one, "I perceive that we learn God's mind, and are led by the Word of God as thus illuminated by the Holy Spirit. But suppose there are certain difficulties, and I should want to know what is the proper course, how and in what way shall I learn the mind of the Spirit?" Brother, God does not treat us now altogether as little children, and give us, by Urim and Thummim, this or that direction; but he treats us as in a spiritual dispensation, somewhat more advanced than were his people under the legal types and ceremonies. And he does not say, "This is the way: walk ye in it," in so many words, but he does just this — if you distrust your own, wisdom, go to him in prayer, and ask his guidance. You shall then take the question and consider it. That very consideration will be a help to you to go rightly, for haste is usually unwisdom. That consideration shall of itself assist you, and you will then look at it in this light. If there be anything untruthful, then I cannot touch that. If there is anything unholy, then I cannot touch that; if my motive for such a course is purely selfish, then I feel I cannot do that. But if it is a path of wisdom consistent with truth, and righteousness, and the glory of God, then, at any rate, it is not closed to me; and if there be two of the like kind and here the difficulty will be — I will now go to God again and ask him to do something over and above what he ordinarily does through his Word, namely, direct me either by some providential circumstance, or by some advice that shall be tendered to me by a Christian friend, or by some direct impulse upon my will to make me do that which he would have me to do. Very few — none, I will venture to say — have ever gone wrong when they have thus consulted God and desired to be led aright. Something has occurred which has drifted them from the path they have chosen, and has drifted them into the path that they would have chosen had they been possessed of the wisdom of the infinite. Strangely, too, minds have been impelled to courses that did not seem to be wise, but they have turned out to be wise when those minds have humbly followed what they believed to be the impulse of the Holy Spirit; but I am persuaded there are many occasions in a Christian's life when, if he waits upon God, God will as distinctly move and guide him as ever he did the prophets of old, and there shall be direct communication between the Holy Ghost and the believer's soul. I am sure, unless I have been fearfully deceived, that I have often felt the motions of God's Spirit in that particular form. I have been enabled to obey them, and I here confess that, whenever any project has been carried out by this church and it has been successful, whenever we have attempted any new work for God, if anyone has said that I was wise in having suggested it, I can only reply that I never took the initiative. I have been the creature of the circumstances that God has put around me; I have been led and driven by a power superior to mine before which I have bowed; and if there has been any success resting upon the course I have followed, it is because I have waited always to be guided, and have never wished to go before the cloud. And you shall find that every man whose life has been happy before God will tell you that if at any moment there has been the wrong and the unhappiness, it has been when he has not sought counsel, and has been his own master, instead of waiting upon the Most High. I speak thus of myself only, for one knows one's own course best, and can speak with authority there; and sometimes the example of one Christian may be a help to others. Wait on the Lord and keep his way, and he will establish you in due time. He has not closed the door of his counsel, but still will direct his people. Jesus is to this day the Wonderful, the Counsellor, and you may seek guidance at his hands, and find it too.

And now, once again, what are the excellencies of being under such a leadership? They are very many. It supplies a great need. We are as sheep going astray, and astray we shall always go till a good shepherd leads us. It is ennobling to have such a leader. Every man under a leader participates in some degree in the honor-ableness of him that leads him. How sweet it is to feel that the Holy Spirit leads you! The greatest and wisest of men, Solomon himself — well, one would feel honor by sitting at the feet of so wise a man, but oh! the honor of being guided by the Spirit of God! The poor woman whom Cowper describes: —

"Yon cottager who weaves at her own door,

Pillow and bobbins all her little store,

Who knew — and knew no more — her Bible true."

and who waited upon God each day for guidance, was nobler far than Voltaire, who did guide himself, but who guided himself into a maze of doubt and darkness. Put thy little hand into the hand of the great Father of all spirits, whose wisdom is infinite, and the compact ennobles thee.

And how elevating it is to be led of the Spirit. To be led of the world is grovelling, to be led of ambition is a poor foolish thing, to be led of the noblest of human spirits is, after all, only to rise to the level of man. But to be led by God! He never lowers the tone of thought in us, but elevates us, and makes even our commonest actions to be divine, seeing they are done in his might. O dear brethren, if we are led of the Spirit of God, we are as high as the angels are in heaven, ay, higher than they, for unto none of them has he said that they are the sons of God. “Those who are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.”

Let us add how safe this guidance is. There are no errings where, he leads: all our mistakes are ours. Our blunders in doctrine, and our follies in life, and our divergences from the paths of peace — these are our own. If we would but follow him, our life would be clean, and pure, and perfect.

And how blessed it is to have him for a leader! What happiness it gives! He comforts, he enlightens, he instructs, he sanctifies. To be near to him is to be near to heaven. To be completely under his guidance is to be perpetually happy. Oh! happy people, whose God is the Lord, and whose leader is the Holy Ghost! And now in closing, perhaps there are some here who will say: —

IV. “How Can I Obtain This Blessing Of Being Led Of The Spirit Of God?”

The answer is, first, dear brother, thou must have the Spirit of God. No man is led of the Spirit till he has the Spirit. “Ye must be born again.” Unrenewed men cannot he led by the Spirit. He does never lead the flesh: it is enmity against God, and can never be otherwise. The old nature, it is not possible even for the Holy Ghost to lead. It would perpetually turn to lust.

There must be a new nature. The Holy Spirit must create us anew in Christ Jesus: we must have the Spirit, or else we cannot be led by him. It is your difficulty, then, O unrenewed men and women, that you must have the Spirit of God, or else vain will be your prayer to be led by the Spirit of God. The blessing is that he is already given to as many of you as believe in the name of Jesus Christ, and this evening, if you have never believed before, may you be led to trust in the Son of God. But you must have the Spirit before you can be led by the Spirit. If again you say, “But how can I obtain this blessing?” I would say, “Distrust yourself now.” Up to this good hour you have been a self-made man — you have believed in self-reliance. There is some truth in that in a certain sense, but as before the living God there is no man who is less a man than he who trusts himself. You shall be as cursed as the heath in the desert which seeth not when good cometh. Your strength shall, by and by, utterly fail you. You are not wise, though yourself whispers to you that you are; the fact that you believe you are wise proves that you are a fool. Can you believe this? — it is a part of the work of the gospel to make you empty. You cannot be full till you are. You cannot be led of the Spirit till you are willing to be led, and that will never be till, first of all, you see that you want leading. Oh! may he come and convince you of your folly, of your wandering, of your ignorance, and then laid low at his dear feet, Jesus Christ shall give you of his Spirit, and lead you in the way of his salvation. May this distrust happen to you to-night, if it never has done so before. Then if you would still be guided, but feel that you are not led of the Spirit, I would say to you, dear brother, consult the Word of God more than you do. If you have the Spirit, but don’t feel that you are led by him, but that, with desires to do right, you are often wrong, be a greater searcher of the Word of God. This is not the age in which the Bible is much read. I suppose there are more Bibles in England than any other book, but there are fewer Bible readers probably than of any other book; and yet the Bible readers are more numerous than the Bible searchers. I hardly remember a passage that bids you read, but I do remember a passage that says, “Search the Scriptures.” May we become students of the Word, desirous to know the meaning, and then we shall feel the Spirit of God instructing us through the Word, and we shall be led by him.

And add to this reading of the Scriptures abundant prayer. Again must I sorrow that there is so little prayer among, us. God grant that prayer-meetings may begin to be better attended, and that family prayer may be more regarded, and that private prayer may be more diligently and more spiritually maintained. We shall not be led as a church and as individuals by the Spirit of God if we got out of his way, and neglect his Word, and neglect to draw near to him in prayer. What is the reason why there are so many sects in the world? Surely it must be because we don’t follow the guidance of the Spirit of God. If we followed the Word of God and the will of God in all things, we should be very much more alike than we are. I do not think that even then we should all run in the same groove, for the road to heaven may be sufficiently wide to have several different paths in it, and vet shall they all be in the same way and in the same road. But the great divergencies — surely they must have come from this, that the Church did not want to be guided by the Spirit; she did not go to the Spirit’s book, nor go to the throne of grace to be guided; she followed first this saint and then the other, this learned doctor and then the other, and to this day you shall hear debatings about all sorts of methods of working and human authorities as if that were of any consequence at all. What has that to do with religion? This book, the Bible, and the Bible alone, is the religion of Protestants. And you shall have thrown before you the tenets of Independency, and the minutes of the Wesleyan Conference, or some dogma of close communion or open communion of the Baptist Church. To the dogs with it all! What matters it all — what rules and regulations we may pass? The Word of God and the Spirit of God only should have power in the Church of our Lord Jesus Christ, and happy will the day be when we shall dash down everything traditional, however venerable it may be; when we shall tear to pieces and utterly abhor all that came of wise, and learned, and good men, if it were contrary to the mind of the Spirit of God. I would that all Christians more fully in this respect we are willing to be led by the Spirit of God. But, beloved brethren, there are some Christian people who don’t want to know too much of their Master’s will. There are some

awkward texts in the Bible that some people don't like to read, because they know that certain learned doctors did not square them somehow or other with their creed, but that it was rather a twist and a squeeze, and they feel it was rather a wrench to the text, and so they don't often read it. And certain ordinances too. Many Christian people have got certain beliefs and traditions about them, but they never come to the Book Of God to see what that says. And so with every ordinance, whatever it may be — baptism, confirmation, auricular confession — what you will, if the Spirit of God has not taught it, we know nothing of it. But are we willing, all of us all round now, to learn what the Spirit of God would teach us, honestly and truly? Can all of us say, to whatever creed we belong, "I am a disciple at the feet of Jesus, and I desire to submit all my belief entirely to the instructions of the divine spirit"? We ought to say this, and must, or we lack one mark of being the sons of God; and when all through the Christian Church this shall be the spirit there will come a fusing — a separating between the precious and the vile, a casting away of all old beliefs and old traditions. I do not believe for a moment that the Church will come to believe as I believe, or as you believe, my dear brother. You will have something wrong to give up, and I shall have something wrong to give up. We ought to desire to give up everything which is wrong, and to learn everything which we do not know yet to be the truth, and which is the truth; and may we all be brought there, kept there, held there; led by the Spirit, not tethered down by a creed, not tied hand and foot by a certain commentary, not made to say, "There, that is all I ever will believe under any circumstances," but led by the Spirit through his Word, and through the enlightenment which he is sure to give to as many as put their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. Oh! that the sinner here were led to resign himself now to the Holy Spirit's will, for he would lead him to the cross at once! The Holy Ghost never leads a man into self-righteousness, never leads him to put his trust in sacraments, but leads him right away to the feet of Jesus. May the Holy Spirit there guide you and all of us, for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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