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1 Peter 5:8-9 The Roaring Lion

C. H. Spurgeon

“Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.” — 1 Peter 5:8, 9.

SATAN, who is called by various names in the Scriptures, all descriptive of his bad qualities, was once an angel of God, perhaps one of the chief among the fiery ones —

“Foremost of the sons of light,

Midst the bright ones doubly bright.”

Sin, all-destroying sin, which has made an Aceldama out of Eden, soon found inhabitants for hell in heaven itself, plucking one of the brightest stars of the morning from its sphere and quenching it in blackest night. From that moment this evil spirit, despairing of all restoration to his former glories and happiness has sworn perpetual hostility against the God of heaven. He has had the audacity openly to attack the Creator in all his works. He stained creation. He pulled down man from the throne of glory and rolled him in the mire of depravity. With the trail of the serpent he despoiled all Eden's beauty, and left it a waste that bringeth forth thorns and briers, a land that must be tilled with the sweat of one's face. Not content with that; inasmuch as he had spoiled the first creation, he has incessantly attempted to despoil the second. Man once made in the image of God, he soon ruined; now he uses all his devices, all his craft, all the power of his skill, and all the venom of his malice to destroy twice-made man, created in the image of Christ Jesus, and with ceaseless toil and untiring patience, he is ever occupied in endeavoring to crush the seed of the woman. There is no believer in Christ, no follower of that which is true and lovely, and of good repute, who will not find himself, at some season or other, attacked by this foul fiend and the legions enlisted in his service. Now, behold your adversary. Yea, though ye cannot see his face, or detect his form, believe that such a foe withstands you. It is not a myth, nor a dream, nor a superstitious imagination. He is as real a being as ourselves. Though a spirit, he has as much real power over hearts as we have over the hearts of others, nay, in many cases far more. This is, I repeat it, no vision of the night; no phantom of a disordered brain. That wicked one is as sternly real this day as when Christ met him in deadly conflict in the wilderness of temptation. Believers now have to fight with Apollyon in the valley of Humiliation. Woe to the professors of godliness who are defeated by this deadly antagonist; they will find it a terrible reality in the world to come. Against this prince of darkness we utter afresh this morning the warning of the apostle, “Whom resist stedfast in the faith.”

I shall now speak to four points.

First of all, *Satan's incessant activity*, — “He walketh about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour;”

secondly, we will dwell awhile upon his terrible roarings

thirdly, *upon his ultimate aim*, seeking to devour God's people;

and then, lastly, *let us take up the exhortation of Peter; and show how Satan is to be overcome.*

I. First, then, SATAN'S PERPETUAL ACTIVITY .

Only God can be omnipresent; hence, Satan can only be in one place at one time.

Yet, if you will consider how much mischief he doeth, you will easily gather that he must have an awful degree of activity. He is here, and there, and everywhere tempting us here, and anon scattering his temptations in the countries which are antipodes to us; hurrying across the sea or speeding over the land. We have no means of asserting what are his means of flight; but we may easily infer from his being so constantly in all places, that he must travel with inconceivable velocity. He has, besides, a host of fallen spirits who fell with him. This great dragon drew with his tail the third part of the stars of heaven — and these are ready to execute his will and obey his behests, if not with the same potency and force which belongs by hereditary right to their great leader, still with something of his spirit, his malice, and his cunning.

Think for awhile, how active he must be! We know that he is to be found in every place! Enter the most hallowed sanctuary, and you shall find him there. Go where men congregate upon the Exchange, and you shall lack no signs of his being present there, retire into the quietude of the family circle, and you will soon detect in bickerings and jealousies, that Satan has scattered handfuls of evil seed there. Nor less in the deep solitude of the hermit's cave, might you find the impress of his cloven foot. You shall sail from England to America, and find him there amidst the clashing of swords. You shall come back and journey across the mighty empire of Russia, and find him there in the tyrant's heart, and perhaps, too, even in the enmity which is excited in the breasts of those who are oppressed. You shall go into the wilds where foot of Christian missionary never trod, but you shall find that Satan has penetrated into the far interior, and tutored the untutored barbarian. You shall go where the name of Jesus is as yet unknown, but you shall find Satan having dominion there. He is the prince of the power of the air. Wherever the breath of life is inhaled, the poisonous miasma of temptation is a thing familiar. They that dwell in the wilderness bow before him the kings of Seba and of Sheba offer him gifts, yea, and the dwellers in the isles acknowledge him too often as their king.

Then, remember, that as he is found in all places, so you have often found him in all your duties. You have sought to serve God in your daily avocations, but strong temptations, furious suggestions of evil, have followed you there. You have come home from your business almost broken-hearted with your slips. You have come into the family and sought to magnify your Master in the social circle; but perhaps in the best moment, when you seemed about to achieve the greatest work, you were clipped up by the heels; your easily besetting sin overturned you, and Satan exulted at your fall. You found him there. You have said, "I will go to my bed," but in your tossings at midnight, you have found him there. You have risen and said, "I will go into my closet and shut-to the door;" but who among us has not met the foul fiend even there in solitary conflict? When we wished to be wrestling with the angel of God, we have had to contend with the fiend of hell. Look upon any of your duties, Christian, and will you not see upon them marks of sin, and on some, not only marks of sin, but marks of Satan's presence too? Satan is not in all sin; we sin of ourselves. We must not lay too much upon Satan's shoulders. Sin grows in our hearts without any sowing just as thorns and thistles will grow in fallow furrows; but still there are times when Satan himself must have been present, and you have had to know it and feel it. On some of the old bricks of Egypt and of Babylon there has been found the mark of a dogs foot. When the brick was made, while it was left to dry, the creature passed over it and left the imprint of his foot upon it, and now, thousands of years afterwards when we pull down the wall we find the dog-mark. Thus hath it been often with us. While our duties were in such a state that they were yet impressible; before they were yet sun-burned, and dried, and ready to be builded up for real practical purpose, that dog of hell has passed over them and left the dog-foot on the best things that we ever did. As we look back years afterwards, we perceive what we might not have seen at the time — that he really marred and stained the best performance of our most willing hands. Ah! when I think how Satan follows us in all places and in all duties, I am sometimes almost ready to apply to him the language of David when he spoke of the omnipresent God — "Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me, even the night shall be light about me." But glory be to God, if I climb to heaven thou art not there. There I can escape thee. Beyond the reach of thy roarings my spirit shall find her rest in God.

We must observe also how ready Satan is to vent his spite against us in all frames of heart When we are depressed in spirit, — perhaps some bodily illness has brought me low. Our animal spirits have ebbed and we feel ready to sink, then that old coward Satan is sure to attack us. I have always noted as a matter of experience that he prefers rather to attack some of us when we are in a low and weak state than at any other time. Oh! how temptation has staggered us when we have been sick! We have said — "Ah! if this had but come when I was well, then I could have caught it on the shield at once; in fact I would have laughed at it and broken it in pieces." But Satan avails himself of our sad and weak frames in order to make his fiery darts tell more effectively. On the other hand, if we are joyous and triumphant, and are something in the frame of mind that David was when he danced before the ark, then

Satan knows how to set his traps by tempting us to presumption — “My mountain standeth firm, I shall never be moved, “or else to carnal security — “Soul, take thine ease, thou hast much goods laid up for many years;” or else to self-righteousness — “My own power and goodness have exalted me.” Or else, he will even attempt to poison our joys with the spleen of evil forebodings. “Ah!” saith he, “this is too good to hold, thou wilt soon be cast down, and all these fine plumes of thine shall yet be trodden like the mire of the streets.” He well knows how, in every frame of mind, to make our condition minister to his devouring purposes. He will follow thee, Christian, when thy soul is all but despairing, and he will whisper in thine ears — “God hath forsaken thee, and given thee over to the will of thine ears.” And he will track thine upward course, riding as it were on cherub’s wings, when thou treadest the starry pathway of communion, he will dog thy footsteps even upon Tabor’s summit, and climb with thee to Pisgah’s brow. On the temple’s pinnacle he will tempt thee, saying, “Cast thyself down, “and on the mountain’s highest peak he will attack thee with. “Bow down and worship me.”

And ah! remember how well he knows *how to turn all the events of Providence to our ill* Here comes Esau, hungry with hunting, there is a mess of pottage ready, that he may be tempted to sell his birthright. Here is Noah, glad to escape from his long confinement in the ark, he is merry and there is the wine-cup ready for him, that he may drink. Here is Peter, his faith is low, but his presumption is high, there is a maiden ready to say — “Thou also wast with Jesus of Nazareth.” There is Judas, and there are thirty pieces of silver in the priestly hand to tempt him, ay, and there is the rope afterwards for him to hang himself withal. No lack of means. If there be a Jonah, wishing to go to Tarshish rather than to Nineveh, there is a ship ready to take him. Satan has his providences as if to counterfeit the providence of God. At least, he knows how to use God’s providence to serve his own ends. One of the greatest mercies God bestows upon us is his not permitting our inclinations and opportunities to meet. Have you not sometimes noticed that when you had had the inclination to a sin there has been no opportunity, and when the opportunity has presented itself you have had no inclination towards it. Satan’s principal aim with believers is to bring their appetites and his temptations together; to get their souls into a dry, seared state, and then to strike the match and make them burn. He is so crafty and wily with all the experience of these many centuries, that man, who is but of yesterday, can scarcely be thought of as a match for him. Did he not drag down the wise man, even Solomon, whose wisdom was more excellent than any of the sons of men? Did he not lay the Royal Preacher, like a helpless victim at his feet? Did he not cast down the strong man, Samson — who could slay a thousand Philistines, but who could not resist the dallyings of Delilah? Did he not bring down even the man after God’s own heart by a most sorrowful fault? Let us sorrowfully remember that we have hardly met with a perfect and an upright man against whom Satan has not vented his spleen, and over whom Satan has not in some degree triumphed.

Well, I have thus spoken of Satan’s terrible activity; of his following us into all places, and attending us wherever we may go. I am sure that no Christian heart here thinks this to be a mere trifle. Of course there are skeptics. There are some who will not believe in the existence of this evil spirit. Too generally I have noticed that, when a man has no devil he has no God. Usually when a man does not believe there is a devil, it is because he never experiences his attacks, and probably never will, for the devil does not take the trouble to go and look after those he is sure of. “Oh! no,” he says, “let them take their ease; I do not need to tempt them.” But I say this, if a man has ever met Satan, as John Bunyan describes Christian meeting Apollyon in the Valley of Humiliation, he will have no doubt of the existence of a devil. When I have stood foot to foot with that arch-tempter, in some dire hour of conflict, I could no more doubt his being shown struggling and wrestling within; then a soldier who has been cut, and scarred and grounded, while bleeding and faint, doubt that there must have been an antagonist to indict those wounds. Experience will be to man, after all, the best proof of this, and we cannot expect that those who have never known the joys of the Holy Spirit, will know much about the attacks of the Evil Spirit; nor that those who doubt that there is a God, can ever be much tormented with the devil. “Oh!” saith Satan, “let them alone, they will fall into the ditch of themselves; there is no need that I should go abroad after them.” I think I remember telling you of Mr. Beecher’s illustration. When the negro went out with his master to catch wild ducks; one of the ducks being a little wounded, the master made the most desperate efforts to get that, but he observed that when it was dead, and had fallen down, he did not trouble much about it, because he could pick it up at any time. And so it is with dead souls; the devil can pick them up at any time. It is those that are wounded, but have got some little life, that he is afraid of losing. Such as these he is sure to pursue; he will be ever striving to get them safe in his grasp.

II. And now we turn, secondly, to SATAN’S ROARINGS .

The destroyer has many ways of mischief. Here in the text he is compared to a *roaring* lion. In some passages of Scripture you will remember he is compared to a fowler. Now, a fowler makes no noise; it would altogether defeat his end if he were to frighten the birds; but as quietly as possible he sets his lure, and with sweet notes he seeks to enchant his victim till it is taken in the trap. That is quite a different thing from the roaring lion of the text. In another passage it is said that he knows how to transform himself into an angel of light, and then, plausibly and smoothly, he teacheth false doctrine and error, and all the while appeareth to have a holy zeal for truth, and the most earnest love for that which is delicate and lovely, and of good repute. We have plenty of specimens in these days of the devil teaching morality. You sometimes take up a newspaper of the skeptic or scorpion school, whose writers

hate all true religion as much as the devil hates virtue, and you find a most unctuous article upon the indelicacies of some honest preacher, or a very pious lamentation over the presumed follies of an earnest minister. Never let the devil accuse Christians of cant and hypocrisy again, let him find his answer in his own dear allies who can plead for the sanctity of places which they abhor and for a solemnity which they despise. Of all devils the most devilish is the saintly hypocrite loving sin, and yet pleading against it in order to promote it. In this text, however, he is not an angel of light, but a roaring lion. I think it was Rutherford who said that he liked the devil best in this shape. I remember in one of his letters he thanks God that he had given him a *roaring* devil to deal with. Now what is the peculiar temptation which is intended under the metaphor of a roaring lion — again we repeat it — not the slouching gait of a prowling lion who is seeking after its prey, and will only roar when it gives in spring, but a lion that roars till he makes the very forest startle, and shakes the hills, which gird the prairie.

These roarings of Satan are threefold.

Perhaps Peter here alluded to the roaring of persecution. How Satan roared with persecutions in Peter's days. He roared, and roared, and roared again, till none but stout hearts dared to show themselves valiant for Christ. There were the underground prisons filled with frogs, and serpents, and toads, where breath or fresh air never chased away the noxious smell and pestilential vapor. There were racks and gibbets, there was the sword for beheading and the stake for burning, there was dragging at the heels of the wild horse, there was smearing over with pitch and then setting the body still alive to burn in Nero's garden. There were torment which must not be described, the very pictures of which are enough to make one's eyes weep blood as you look upon them. There was nothing for the Christian then but banishment and imprisonment, these were the lowest penalties. "They were stoned, they were sawn in sunder, they wandered about in sheep-skins and goat-skins, destitute, afflicted, tormented." These were the roarings of the lion in good Peter's day. Since then, from his old den at Rome, what roarings has he given forth, like thunders indeed to all except the men who knew the difference between the mimic thunders of hell and the real thunder of the God of heaven! Let Smithfield testify to the roarings of this lion! Let our cemeteries and graveyards which still bear the memorial of our myriad martyrs, testify how the lion has roared at us! And let our denomination especially, persecuted alike by Protestant and Romanist, hunted both by good and bad upon the face of the earth — let the thousands that have been drowned in the rivers of Holland and Germany — let the multitudes who have there been put to the most exquisite torture merely because they would hold God's holy ordinance, and would not prostitute it at will of the Pope or prelate, — let all these speak and tell how Satan has roared in days of old! He has not half the roar in him now that he had then! Why, he can do nothing at all against us! His roars now-a-days are like the hissings of some angry cat. All he can do is but to use cruel mockings; now and then a wicked slander, or a jeer, or a caricature, or a witty sentence. What are these? Oh! if we cannot bear these, what should we have done when the lion used to roar in real lion-like style? Well, well, he may growl again yet before some of us have gone off the face of the earth, for we know not what may happen. But let him roar; we know, blessed be God, that he who is for us is more than all they that be against us.

But there is another kind of furious attack, the roaring of strong and vehement temptation. This some of us have felt. Do you know what it is, Christian — I hope you do not — do you know what it is sometimes to be caught hold of by the clutch of some frightful temptation which you hate, loathe, detest, and abominate, and yet the clutch of the hand is seconded by an arm so terrific in its strength that it drags you right on against your will. You look at the sin, look it in the very face; you feel you cannot do this great wickedness and sin against God, and yet the impulse strong and stern, mysterious and irresistible, drags you on till you come to the edge of the precipice and look down upon the yawning gulf, which threatens to swallow you up quick, and in the last moment, as by the very skin of your teeth, you are delivered, and your foot doth not slip, neither do you fall into the hand of the destroyer; yet you have had reason to say — "My steps had almost gone, my feet had well-nigh skipped." Have you known what it is to have this temptation come again, and again, and again, till you were in a very agony? You felt that you had rather die than thus be perpetually assaulted, for you feared that in an evil hour you might leave your God and turn unto perdition. You have been like good Mr. Standfast in Bunyan's *Pilgrim*, when tempted by Madam Bubble, he fell at last down upon his knees, and with sighs and cries to God he begged him to deliver him, and he that cometh to the help of the feeble at last delivered his servant. Have you ever known this? This is one of Satan's roarings at you, thrusting his temptation against you like the torments to which they put some of the early martyrs, when they laid them down and poured filthy water down their throats in such immense quantities that they were at last killed, and though they loathed the filthy liquid, yet their enemies continued to pour on and on. So has Satan done with us pouring down his filth, cramming us with his mire, constraining us as much as possible to yield to temptation.

My peculiar temptation has been constant unbelief. I know that God's promise is true, and that he that said it will do it; he that has performed of old changeth not, and will be firm and faithful even to the end; yet does this temptation incessantly assail me — "Doubt him; distrust him; he will leave you yet." I can assure you when that temptation is aided by a nervous state of mind, it is very hard to stand day by day, and say, "No, I cannot doubt my God; he that has been with me in days gone by is with me still; he will not forsake his servant, nor put him away." That perpetual assaulting, that perpetual stabbing, and cutting, and hacking at one's faith, is not so easy to endure. O God, deliver us, we pray thee, and make us more than conquerors by thy Spirit's power!

Once more, Satan has another way of roaring. I do not suppose that one in ten of God's people knows anything about this

— and they need not wish to — **Satan can roar also in the Christian's ears with blasphemies** I do not allude now to those evil thoughts which spring up in the minds of men who, in their childhood, and their early youth, went far into sin. I know that you will sometimes, when in prayer, be troubled with the snatch of an old song which you once were used to sing; and perhaps, when you would be most free from every unhallowed thought, some coarse expression which you heard in your former haunts, will return again, and again, and again. Why, the verse of a hymn may suggest to you some unholy thing, or a text of Scripture bring up some of those old recollections which you have longed to forget. But, I allude now more especially to those yet more ferocious attacks of Satan, when he will inject blasphemous thoughts into the minds of believers who never thought such things before. You know how Bunyan describes it. "Good Christian had to pass through the valley of the shadow of death. About the midst of this valley, he perceived the mouth of hell to be: and just when he was come over against the mouth of the pit, one of the wicked ones got behind him and stepped up softly to him, and whisperingly suggested many grievous blasphemies to him which he verily thought had proceeded from his own mind. This put Christian more to it than anything he had met with before, even to think that now he should blaspheme Him that he so much loved before. Yet, if he could have helped it, he would not have done it. But he had not the discretion either to stop his ears, or to know from whence those blasphemies came." Seldom does the ministry allude to these matters; but, inasmuch as they trouble some of the people of God I believe it to be the duty of a faithful shepherd of the flock, to minister to those who are called to pass through this dark and dismal state. Oh! the horrors and terrors which Satan has sometimes caused to God's people, by the thoughts that were not theirs, but proceeded from himself, or from some of his fiends! First, he suggested the thought so vividly, that they cried with David — "Horror hath taken hold of me, because of the wicked that keep not thy law;" and then, when the thought had flashed for a moment upon the soul, he gave a second horror, by saying, "Ah" you are not a child of God or you would not have so vile a nature." Whereas you never thought it at all. It was his suggestion, not yours; and then, having laid his sin at your door, he has turned accuser of the brethren, and has sought to cast down your faith from its excellency, by making you imagine that you had committed the unpardonable sin. Now, if he roars against you, either with persecution, or with temptation, or with diabolical insinuations, take the language of our apostle here — "whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world."

III. I now turn to my third point, which is SATAN'S ULTIMATE AIM — "SEEKING WHOM HE MAY DEVOUR."

Nothing short of the total destruction of a believer will ever satisfy our adversary. Nothing less than the perfection and complete salvation of a Christian is the heart's desire of our Savior. He will never see the full fruition of the travail of his soul till all his people are completely saved. The reverse is true of Satan. He can never be content till he sees the believer utterly devoured. He would rend him in pieces, and break his bones and utterly destroy him if he could. Do not, therefore, indulge the thought, that the main purpose of Satan is to make you miserable. He is pleased with that, but that is not his ultimate end. Sometimes he may even make you happy, for he hath dainty poisons sweet to the taste which he administers to God's people. If he feels that our destruction can be more readily achieved by sweets than by bitters, he certainly would prefer that which would best effect his end.

"More the treacherous calm I dread

Than tempests rolling overhead,"

said Toplady, and much in the same spirit, said a Puritan divine of old — "There is no temptation so hard to bear, as not being tempted at all." Indeed, it is a stern temptation to be left at ease. When we think we have no occasion for our sword, we begin to unbuckle it from our side; we strip off our armor-plate piece by piece, and then it is that we become most exposed to the attack of our enemies. Satan will be glad enough, no doubt, to see your faith weakened, but his aim is to destroy that faith, so that you may not believe in God to the saving of your soul. He will be pleased enough if he can throw mire into the eyes of your hope, so that you can no more look to the goodly land that is beyond Jordan; but he will never be satisfied till he puts those eyes out altogether, and sends you, like Samson, to grind at the mill. Let us take this for our comfort; if it be Satan's desire that we may be utterly destroyed, in that at least he is certain to be defeated. When it comes to a question which shall win the victory, Christ, the Eternal Son of God, or Satan, the prince of the power of the air, we need have no doubt as to which shall succeed. The devil is but a creature, finite in his nature, and limits are laid upon his prowess. If the battle were between Satan and man, then, indeed, woe worth the day to us! We might quit ourselves like men and be strong, but before this giant all the host of Israel must flee. But the battle is not ours; it is the mighty God's. He that once broke this serpent's head still wages war with him. Yea, and Christ himself must be defeated, the glory of his cross must be dimmed, his arm must be broken, the crown of sovereignty must be snatched from his head, and his throne must reel beneath him, ere one of those for whom he died, and on whom he set his love, should ever be cast away or be given up to the power of his adversary. In this, then, tried believer, count it thy joy that he may worry, but he cannot rend; he may wound, but he cannot kill, he may get his foot upon thee to make a full end of thee, but thou shalt yet start up with fresh strength and say, "Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy: when I fall, I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me."

IV. With the fourth point, we now draw to a close —WHAT WE SHOULD DO IN ORDER THAT WE MAY OVERCOME THIS ADVERSARY .

“Whom stedfast in the faith.”

This is our first means of defense. When Satan attacks us as an angel of light, we need not so much resist by open antagonism as by flight. There are some temptations which are only to be overcome by running away from them, but when Satan roars we must raise the shout and the war-cry. To run *then*, would be cowardice, and must entail certain destruction. Suppose now that Satan roars with *persecution*, (and it is a poor roar that he can raise in that way now) or, suppose you are slandered, villified, abused — will you give way? Then are you undone. Will you say, “No, never, by him that called me to this work, I will see this battle out, and in the name of him who has been my helper hitherto, I set up the banner; and cry — Jehovah-Nissi: the Lord of hosts is our banner, the God of Jacob is our refuge.” You have done well, you have resisted, and you will win the day. Hath he assailed you with some temptation obnoxious to your spirit? Yield an inch, and you are undone, but become more watchful, and more vigilant over yourself in that particular sin, and resistance must certainly bring victory. Or has he injected blasphemy? Resist. Be more prayerful every time he is more active. He will soon give it up, if he finds that his attacks drive you to Christ. Often has Satan been nothing but a big black dog to drive Christ’s sheep nearer to the Master. Often has he been like a tremendous crested billow which has just lifted the poor shipwrecked mariner on to the rock, and from very fear has made him cling the more tightly there. If he thrusts you thus, match him by turning even his temptations to good account and he will soon give up that mode of warfare, and exchange it for another. Resist him. But how resist him? “Stedfast in the faith.” Seek to obtain a clear knowledge of the doctrines of the gospel, and then get a good grip of them. Be ready to die, sooner than give up a particle of God’s revealed truth. This will make you strong. Then take hold of the promises of God, which are yea and amen in Christ Jesus. Know that to every doctrine there is some opposite promise. Have ready for every attack some strong word commencing with “Is it written?” Answer Satan with “Thus saith the Lord.” — “Stedfast in the faith.” Remember, all the water outside of a ship cannot sink it. It is the water inside that perils its safety. So, if your faith can keep its hold, and you can still say, “Though he slay me yet will I trust in him,” Satan may batter your shield; but he has not wounded your flesh.

“Amidst temptations sharp and long,

My soul to this dear refuge flies;

Hope is my anchor, firm and strong,

While tempests blow, and billows rise.

***The gospel bears my spirits up;
A faithful and unchanging God
Lays the foundation for my hope,
In oaths, and promises, and blood.”***

The conflict may be long, but the victory is absolutely sure. Oh poor soul! do but keep near to the cross and thou art safe. Throw thine arms around the dying Savior. Let the droppings of his blood fall on thy sins, and even if thou canst not see him, still believe him. Still say, “I know that he came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief,” and I will cling to the sinner’s Savior as my only hope and trust. Then let Satan roar, he cannot hurt; let him rage, his fury is vain; he may but show his teeth, for he certainly cannot bite. “Whom resist, stedfast in the faith.”

But, there is another word added for our comfort, — “Knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.” This is well sketched by John Bunyan, in that picture I have already alluded to, of the Valley of the Shadow of Death. “As Christian was going along the exceedingly narrow pathway, with a deep ditch on one side, and a dangerous quay upon the other, he came to a stand, and he had half a thought to go back, and then again he thought he might be half-way through the valley, so he resolved to go on. And while he pondered and mused, he heard the voice of a man as going before him, saying, ‘Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me.’ Then he was glad, and that for these reasons. He gathered from thence that some who feared God were in this valley as well as himself, that God was with them, though they perceived him not; that he hoped to have company by-and-bye so he went on, and called to him that was before, but he knew not what to answer for that he also thought himself to be alone.” Here honest John has our experience to the life, It is likely enough that as I am speaking this morning, some of you will say, “I did not think that anybody ever felt as I feel.” And though I tell you these things, and know that many of you have heard Satan roar, I am compelled to confess that I have frequently said in my own heart, “I do not believe that any other man ever had this temptation before me.” Well, this text stands to refute our supposition “The same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.” Martin Luther was wont to say, that next to Holy Scripture, the

best teacher for a minister was temptation, he put affliction next, but temptation he kept first in his view. When we have been tempted and tried ourselves we know how to succor others. I grant you it is hard to have the conviction on one's mind, that you are standing in a perilous place where never man stood before, and tempted as never man was tempted before you. Come, believer, we will talk this matter over for two or three seconds. Certainly your Lord has been there before, for he was tempted in all points like as you are. Scripture saith that all your brethren have had some participation in your trials. Now mark, as they suffered as you suffer no temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man. As they came through the temptation safe and unharmed, so shall you. As they testified that their light afflictions worked out for them a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, so that shall be your testimony. As they have overcome and now circle the throne of God clothed in pure white garments, so will you. And inasmuch as their temptations have left no tears upon their brow, no stains upon their robes, no rent in their royal mantles so neither shall Satan be able to disfigure or to mutilate you, but you shall come out of every trial and of every struggle, losing nothing therein save that which it is well to lose — your dross and your tin, your chaff and your bran. Ye shall come forth from the deep waters washed, cleansed, and purified. God grant that so it may be with you, but it can only be so by your resisting Satan, stedfast in the faith.

And now, I am addressing some this morning whom the precept does not reach for they have no faith in which to stand fast. If you knew what a blessed thing it is to be a Christian, you would weep your eyes out that you are not Christians yourselves. "Oh!" say you, "but you have described to us the temptations of Satan." Just so, but it is a blessed thing to be a Christian in his very worst state. As I look some times upon those pictures which are drawn by the artist to illustrate the *Pilgrim's Progress*, even when I have seen poor John up to his neck in the mire, I have thought I would sooner be Christian in the Slough of Despond, than Pliable on the dry land on the other side; sooner be Christian when the dragon hurled all his darts at him though he smiled not all the day long — sooner be Christian then, than be Hypocrisy or Formality climbing over the wall to go by some other way. It is a good thing to be a Christian even in his very worst state, and what must it be in his best? Young men and young women, as one of your own age, I bear my testimony that to follow Christ is the most blessed and pleasant thing, even in this present evil world.

"I would not change my bless'd estate

For all the world calls good or great;

And while my faith can keep her hold,

I envy not the sinner's gold."

But who am I, that I should say this? Why, nothing but a poor miserable sinner, who looks for all in Christ. With nothing in my hand, I simply cling to his cross. Nor am I an inch forwarder than I was twelve years ago in this respect. My cry then was "None but Jesus, none but Jesus," and it is my cry now, and shall be my cry even to the end. And what are you to-day but a lost, guilty sinner? But do not despair. Trust Jesus! Trust Jesus! — and the joys and privileges of the Christian are yours. Now, this moment cast yourself on him. Look to his agony and bloody sweat, his cross, his passion, his death, his burial, his resurrection, his ascension, and you shall find a balm for every fear, a cordial for every distress. All that you want, and all that your heart can ever desire is most surely to be found in Christ Jesus your Lord.

May God grant us to be partakers of that grace which is in his most blessed name, that we may not be destroyed by the destroyer!

1 Peter 2:23-25 The Withering Work of the Spirit

NO. 999

A SERMON DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JULY 9TH, 1871,

BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field: the grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the Spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it surely the people is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever." — Isaiah 40:6-8.

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

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

Look at the chapter in Isaiah with care. What is the subject of it? It is the divine consolation of Zion. Zion had been tossed to and fro with conflicts; she had been smarting under the result of sin. The Lord, to remove her sorrow, bids his prophets announce the coming of the long-expected Deliverer, the end and accomplishment of all her warfare and the pardon of all her iniquity. There is no doubt that this is the theme of the prophecy; and further, there is no sort of question about the next point, that the prophet goes on to foretell the coming of John the Baptist as the harbinger of the Messiah. We have no difficulty in the explanation of the passage, "Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God;" for the New Testament again and again refers this to the Baptist and his ministry. The object of the coming of the Baptist and the mission of the Messiah, whom he heralded, was the manifestation of divine glory. Observe the fifth verse: "The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it." Well, what next? Was it needful to mention man's mortality in this connection? We think not. But there is much more appropriateness in the succeeding verses, if we see their deeper meaning. Do they not mean this? In order to make room for the display of the divine glory in Christ Jesus and his salvation, there would come a withering of all the glory wherein man boasts himself: the flesh should be seen in its true nature as corrupt and dying, and the grace of God alone should be exalted. This would be seen under the ministry of John the Baptist first, and should be the preparatory work of the Holy Ghost in men's hearts, in all time, in order that the glory of the Lord should be revealed and human pride be for ever confounded.

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

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

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

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

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

I. Turning then to The Work Of The Spirit In Causing The Goodliness Of The Flesh To Fade, let us, first, observe that the work of the Holy Spirit upon the soul of man in withering up that which is of the flesh, is very unexpected.

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

The convincing work of the Spirit, wherever it comes, is unexpected, and even to the child of God in whom this process has still to go on, it is often startling. We begin again to build that which the Spirit of God had destroyed. Having begun in the spirit, we act as if we would be made perfect in the flesh; and then when our mistaken upbuilding has to be levelled with the earth, we are almost as astonished as we were when first the scales fell from our eyes. In some such condition as this was Newton when he wrote: —

“I asked the Lord that I might grow In faith and love and every grace, Might more of his salvation know, And seek more earnestly his face. Twas he who taught me thus to pray, And he, I trust, has answered prayer; But it has been in such a way As almost drove me to despair. I hop’d that in some favour’d hour, At once he’d answer my request, And by his love’s constraining power Subdue my sins, and give me rest. Instead of this, he made me feel The hidden evils of my heart. And let the angry powers of hell Assault my soul in ev’ry part.”

Ah, marvel not, for thus the Lord is wont to answer his people. The voice which saith, “Comfort ye, comfort ye my people,” achieves its purpose by first making them hear the cry, “All flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field.”

2. Furthermore, this withering is after the usual order of the divine operation. If we consider well the way of God, we shall not be astonished that he beginneth with his people by terrible things in righteousness.

Observe the method of creation. I will not venture upon any dogmatic theory of geology, but there seems to be every probability that this world has been fitted up and destroyed, refitted and then destroyed again, many times before the last arranging of it for the habitation of men. "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth;" then came a long interval, and at length, at the appointed time, during seven days, the Lord prepared the earth for the human race. Consider then the state of matters when the great architect began his work. What was there in the beginning? Originally, nothing. When he commanded the ordering of the earth how was it? "The earth was without form and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep." There was no trace of another's plan to interfere with the great architect. "With whom took he counsel, and who instructed him, and taught him in the path of judgment, and taught him knowledge, and showed to him the way of understanding." He received no contribution of column or pillar towards the temple which he intended to build. The earth was, as the Hebrew puts it, Tohu and Bohu, disorder and confusion — in a word, chaos. So it is in the new creation. When the Lord new creates us, he borrows nothing from the old man, but makes all things new. He does not repair and add a new wing to the old house of our depraved nature, but he builds a new temple for his own praise. We are spiritually without form and empty, and darkness is upon the face of our heart, and his word comes to us, saying, "Light be," and there is light, and ere long life and every precious thing.

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

3. I would have you notice, thirdly, that we are taught in our text how universal this process is in its range over the hearts of all those upon whom the Spirit works.

The withering is a withering of what? Of part of the flesh and some portion of its tendencies? Nay, observe, "All flesh is grass; and all the goodness thereof" — the very choice and pick of it — "is as the flower of the field," and what happens to the grass? Does any of it live? "The grass withereth," all of it. The flower, will not that abide? So fair a thing, has not that an immortality? No, it fades: it utterly falls away. So wherever the Spirit of God breathes on the soul of man, there is a withering of everything that is of the flesh, and it is seen that to be carnally minded is death. Of course, we all know and confess that where there is a work of grace, there must be a destruction of our delight in the pleasures of the flesh. When the Spirit of God breathes on us, that which was sweet becomes bitter; that which was bright becomes dim. A man cannot love sin and yet possess the life of God. If he takes pleasure in fleshly joys wherein he once delighted, he is still what he was: he mince the things of the flesh, and therefore he is after the flesh, and he shall die. The world and the lusts thereof are to the unregenerate as beautiful as the meadows in spring, when they are bedecked with flowers, but to the regenerate soul they are a wilderness, a salt land, and not inhabited. Of those very things wherein we once took delight we say, "Vanity of vanities; all is vanity." We cry to be delivered from the poisonous joys of earth, we loathe them, and wonder that we could once riot in them. Beloved hearers, do you know what this kind of withering means? Have you seen the lusts of the flesh, and the pomps and the pleasures thereof all fade away before your eyes? It must be so, or the Spirit of God has not visited your soul.

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

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

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

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

4. You see, then, the universality of this withering work within us, but I beg you also to notice the completeness of it.

The grass, what does it do? Droop? nay, wither. The dower of the field: what of that? Does it hang its head a little? No, according to Isaiah it fades; and according to Peter it falleth away. There is no reviving it with showers, it has come to its end. Even thus are the awakened led to see that in their flesh there dwelleth no good thing. What dying and withering work some of God's servants have had in their souls! Look at John Bunyan, as he describes himself in his "Grace Abounding!" For how many months and even years was the Spirit engaged in writing death upon all that was the old Bunyan, in order that he might become by grace a new man fitted to track the pilgrims along their heavenly way. We have not all endured the ordeal so long, but in every child of God there must be a death to sin, to the law, and to self, which must be fully accomplished ere he is perfected in Christ and taken to heaven. Corruption cannot inherit incorruption; it is through the Spirit that we mortify the deeds of the body, and therefore live. But cannot the fleshly mind be improved? By no means; for "the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." Cannot you improve the old nature? No; "ye must be born again." Can it not be taught heavenly things? No. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." There is nothing to be done with the old nature but to let it be laid in the grave; it must be dead, and buried, and when it is so, then the incorruptible seed that liveth and abideth for ever will develop gloriously, the fruit of the new birth will come to maturity, and grace shall be exalted in glory. The old nature never does improve, it is as earthly, and sensual, and devilish in the saint of eighty years of age as it was when first he came to Christ; it is unimproved and unimprovable; towards God it is enmity itself: every imagination of the thoughts of the heart is evil, and that continually. The old nature called "the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other," neither can there be peace between them.

5. Let us further notice that all this withering work in the soul is very painful.

As you read these verses do they not strike you as having a very funereal tone? "All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field: the grass withereth, the flower fadeth." This is mournful work, but it must be done. I think those who experience much of it when they first come to Christ have great reason to be thankful. Their course in life will, in all probability, be much brighter and happier, for I have noticed that persons who are converted very easily, and come to Christ with but comparatively little knowledge of their own depravity, have to learn it afterwards, and they remain for a long time babes in Christ, and are perplexed with masters that would not have troubled them if they had experienced a deeper work at first. No, sir; if grace has begun to build in your soul and left any of the old walls of self-trust standing, they will have to come down sooner or later. You may congratulate yourself upon their remaining, but it is a false congratulation, your glorying is not good. I am sure of this, that

Christ will never put a new piece upon an old garment, or new wine in old bottles: he knows the rent would be worse in the long run, and the bottles would burst. All that is of nature's spinning must be unravelled. The natural building must come down, lath and plaster, roof and foundation, and we must have a house not made with hands. It was a great mercy for our city of London that the great fire cleared away all the old buildings which were the lair of the plague, a far healthier city was then built; and it is a great mercy for a man when God sweeps right away all his own righteousness and strength, when he makes him feel that he is nothing and can be nothing, and drives him to confess that Christ must be all in all, and that his only strength lies in the eternal might of the ever-blessed Spirit. Sometimes in a house of business an old system has been going on for years, and it has caused much confusion, and allowed much dishonesty. You come in as a new manager, and you adopt an entirely new plan. Now, try if you can, and graft your method on to the old system. How it will worry you! Year after year you say to yourself, "I cannot work it: if I had swept the whole away and started afresh, clear from the beginning, it would not have given me one-tenth of the trouble." God does not intend to graft the system of grace upon corrupt nature, nor to make the new Adam grow out of the old Adam, but he intends to teach us this: "Ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God." Salvation is not of the flesh but of the Lord alone; that which is born of the flesh is only flesh at the best; and only that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. It must be the Spirit's work altogether, or it is not what God will accept.

Observe, brethren, that although this is painful it is inevitable. I have already entrenched upon this, and shown you how necessary it is that all of the old should be taken away; but let me further remark that it is inevitable that the old should go, because it is in itself corruptible. Why does the grass wither? Because it is a withering thing. "Its root is ever in its we, and it must die." How could it spring out of the earth, and be immortal? It is no amaranth: it blooms not in Paradise: it grows in a soil on which the curse has fallen. Every supposed good thing that grows out of your own self, is like yourself, mortal, and it must die. The seeds of corruption are in all the fruits of manhood's tree; let them be as fair to look upon as Eden's clusters, they must decay.

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

7. This last word by way of comfort to any that are passing through the process we are describing, and I hope some of you are. It gives me great joy when I hear that you unconverted ones are very miserable, for the miseries which the Holy Spirit works are always the prelude to happiness.

It is the Spirit's work to wither. I rejoice in our translation, "Because the Spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it." It is true the passage may be translated, "The wind of the Lord bloweth upon it." One word, as you know, is used in the Hebrew both for "wind" and "Spirit," and the same is true of the Greek; but let us retain the old translation here, for I conceive it to be the real meaning of the text. The Spirit of God it is that withers the flesh. It is not the devil that killed my self-righteousness. I might be afraid if it were: nor was it myself that humbled myself by a voluntary and needless self-degradation, but it was the Spirit of God. Better to be broken in pieces by the Spirit of God, than to be made whole by the flesh! What doth the Lord say? "I kill." But what next? "I make alive." He never makes any alive but those he kills. Blessed be the Holy Ghost when he kills me, when he drives the sword through the very bowels of my own merits and myself-confidence, for then he will make me alive. "I wound, and I heal." He never heals those whom he has not wounded. Then blessed be the hand that wounds; let it go on wounding; let it cut and tear; let it lay bare to me myself at my very worst, that I may be driven to self-despair, and may fall back upon the free mercy of God, and receive it as a poor, guilty, lost, helpless, undone sinner, who casts himself into the arms of sovereign grace, knowing that God must give all, and Christ must be all, and the Spirit must work all, and man must be as clay in the potter's hands, that the Lord may do with him as seemeth trim good. Rejoice, dear brother, how ever low you are brought, for if the Spirit humbles you he means no evil, but he intends infinite good to your soul.

II. Now, let us close with a few sentences concerning The Implantation.

According to Peter, although the flesh withers, and the flower thereof falls away, yet in the children of God there is an unwithering something of another kind. "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever." "The word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you." Now, the gospel is of use to us because it is not of human origin. If it were of the flesh, all it could do for us would not land us beyond the flesh; but the gospel of Jesus Christ is super-human, divine, and spiritual. In its conception it was of God; its great gift, even the

Savior, is a divine gift; and all its teachings are full of deity. If you, my hearer, believe a gospel which you have thought out for yourself, or a philosophical gospel which comes from the brain of man, it is of the flesh, and will wither, and you will die, and be lost through trusting in it. The only word that can bless you and be a seed in your soul must be the living and incorruptible word of the eternal Spirit. Now this is the incorruptible word, that "God was made flesh and dwelt among us;" that "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." This is the incorruptible word, that "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God." "He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." "God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son." Now, brethren, this is the seed; but before it can grow in your soul, it must be planted there by the Spirit. Do you receive it this morning? Then the Holy Spirit implants it in your soul. Do you leap up to it, and say, "I believe it! I grasp it! On the incarnate God I fix my hope; the substitutionary sacrifice, the complete atonement of Christ is all my confidence; I am reconciled to God by the blood of Jesus." Then you possess the living seed within your soul.

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

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

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