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Hebrews 13:5, 6 Never, No Never, No Never

NO. 3150

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“Let your conversation be without covetousness: and be content with such things as ye have. For he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.” — Hebrews 13:5, 6

WHEN the Lord foretold, through the mouth of his servant the prophet Isaiah, that he would “make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow,” surely he must have had in his mind such precious truths as this one which we have in our text, “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.” This is the very essence of consolation, I might truly say

that it is the quintessence of delight. Here is solid spiritual food condensed into a very small space. Take these eight words, and extract the marrow from them, or treat them as a honeycomb, and get the sweetness out of them into your soul, and it will be full of content, nay, more, it will be overflowing with sacred delight: "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee."

I. With such a text before us, we need no further preface, so we will at once begin our meditation upon the text; and, first, I will ask you to View These Words As A Quotation.

You observe that the apostle writes, "He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee," from, which it plainly appears that Paul was quoting from Holy Writ, and this should teach us how needful it is for us also to quote Scripture whenever we can. The Holy Spirit abounds in gracious thoughts and in fitting language in which to express those thoughts, so he has no need to make extracts from what he has previously said; yet he pleases to do so. Instead of giving us a new promise, he here gives us an old one over again, as if to remind us that there are no better things in the world than the words of God himself, and that the very noblest expressions are those which have been already used.

Besides, the Holy Spirit here puts honor upon the Old Testament by quoting from it for the consolation of New Testament believers. There are some persons who seem to think more of the New Testament than they do of the Old Testament. I have met with Christians in Germany with whom it has been quite a superstition that the evangelists were superior to the apostles, and that the apostles were superior to the prophets; but I trust that such notions as those will never spread among us. We see here that, when an apostle writes as an inspired man, he quotes from the Pentateuch, he quotes from the Chronicles, and he quotes from the prophecy of Isaiah; so that we are to honor the Old Testament, and not to look upon it as a secondary book compared with the New Testament, but to reverence the divine teaching in both portions of the inspired Word.

In addition to that, the Holy Spirit bids Paul apply this Old Testament promise to us, to show us that the words spoken to saints in the ancient times were spoken also to us; so that, if the Lord gave a promise to Jacob, it was not meant to be restricted to Jacob, but to belong to all those who, like Jacob, can wrestle in prayer; and that, if God spake, as he did, a promise to Joshua, it was not intended to be for Joshua only, but for all who were in like circumstances to his. Scripture promises have all of them a message to all believers; and if you believe in Jesus, what God has said to other believers of old he says this day unto you.

I think we may learn much from the fact that this promise is a quotation from the Old Testament. Where did Paul find it? It is not very easy to say, because it occurs in various places, and the apostle has not quoted it literally; he has given the sense rather than the exact words of the quotation. He may have quoted the Septuagint version rather than the Hebrew, for no doubt he was familiar with both. There is not any one text in the Old Testament of which you could positively say that it is the one he intended, but there are several passages, of any one of which you might say, "The words are almost here, and the spirit and meaning of the passage are entirely here."

One of the first passages which Paul may be supposed to have quoted is Genesis 28:15. The fugitive Jacob lies asleep, with a stone for his pillow. In his dream, he sees a ladder reaching from earth to heaven; at the top of it stands the Almighty, who makes a covenant with him, and amongst the other covenant promises is this, "Behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of." Here you get the words, "I will not leave thee." Does not that passage, in its proper connection, suggest that the promise is very applicable to young people starting out in life? Jacob was leaving his father's house, under very unfavourable circumstance, and he was going to a distant country, where he had relatives, but strangers might have been kinder to him than Laban was, for he got all he could out of him, and gave him as little in return as he could. So Jacob, starting for Padanaram, gets this promise from God, "I will not leave thee." I can conceive of that promise coming to some young friend here. You have committed yourself to God's keeping, you are a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, and now you are, about to start on a new career. Some measure of trembling comes over you, and you have been breathing this prayer to God, "O Lord, lead me in the way in which thou wouldst have me to go, guide me in all my untrodden way." It is just possible that you are going to a distant land, and you are a lover of your home, as Jacob was, and you feel some natural anxiety concerning the change that you are about to make. Here comes in the promise that is just suited to your case, "I will not leave thee." Jacob proved the truth of that promise. Although he had many trials, which were most of them of his own making, yet never was he deserted by his God. In his old age, he said, "All these things are against me," but he was not speaking the truth when he said that, for even then everything was working for his good; and, notwithstanding his troubles, he died a blessed old man, who was able to give blessings to others as well as to enjoy them himself. So, my dear young friend, take this text as the Lord's promise to you for many years to come, "I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of."

There is a second passage which is more nearly to the point, from which the apostle probably did quote, that is Deuteronomy 31:6-8. Moses first speaks to the children of Israel, and he says to them, "Be strong and of a good courage: fear not, nor be afraid of them: (that is, of the Canaanites) for the Lord thy God, he it is that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee." Then

turning to Joshua, Moses says, "The Lord, he it is that doth go before thee; he will be with thee, he will not fail thee, neither forsake thee: fear not, neither be dismayed." In Joshua 1:5, we find that the Lord repeated the promise to Joshua, "I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee." In the version which Paul may have read, the words here may have been identical with those he uses in writing to the Hebrews. What do we learn from the connection of this passage? God was here speaking to those who were about to lose their leader, and who would need this assurance. Moses was about to die. He had been the mainstay of the children of Israel, and they had always looked up to him as their leader. Under God, Moses was the father of that nation, and he carried them like children in his bosom. If they wanted water, it was he who smote the rock to make the stream gush forth; if they needed that their enemies should be destroyed, it was he whose uplifted hands brought them the victory. Now Moses was about to go up to the top of Nebo, and to die there, and the people greatly trembled at the prospect of losing him; but the Lord gave them this promise to console them, "I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee." Moses dies, but Moses' God does not die. The strong man, whose eye had not waxed dim, and whose natural force had not abated, must look from the mountain top upon the good land beyond the Jordan, and then his God must take away his soul as with a kiss; yet God would not be gone. He is the dwelling place of his people, in all generations. You see then, dear friend, what is the bearing of the text upon your experience. You have lost, or are about to lose, the mainstay of your house. Your father is failing in health, and you cannot shake off from your mind the apprehension that, in a few more days, you may have to pay a visit to the grave. One in whom you have rightly reposed much confidence, and in whose presence you have felt that all was well, is soon to be taken away from you; but be not distressed as though God himself were about to die, for Jehovah ever lives, and he saith to thee, "I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee." Thou who art already, or who soon wilt be a widow, dry thine eyes with this blessed handkerchief. Thou who art, or soon wilt be, a fatherless child, be of good comfort, for thy Father in heaven will not leave thee, nor forsake thee. Perhaps I am addressing members of a bereaved church. You have lost a man of God, who went in and out among you as Moses did among the children of Israel in the wilderness, and you are asking, "Where is his successor to come from?" Perhaps there is a Joshua within sight, but you are half afraid as to whether he will have the power needed to carry on the great work. Trust that the God who was with Moses will be with Joshua also, and take this promise home to your own heart, and say to each of your fellow-members in the sorrowing church that the Lord hath said, "I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee."

There is another passage from which Paul may have quoted, in the first Book of the Chronicles, in the 28th chapter, at the 20th verse, where David says to his son Solomon, "Be strong and of good courage, and do it: (that is, build the temple:) fear not, nor be dismayed: for the Lord God, even my God, will be with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee, until thou hast finished all the work for the service of the house of the Lord." I scarcely need indicate that the promise is applicable to any who are about to undertake some great enterprise for God's glory. You have not to build a material temple, but you have perhaps to build up a spiritual church, or to evangelize a wide district, or to gather together a class of young people, and you feel half afraid that you are unequal to the task; but will not this promise be like a girdle about your loins? Will it not strengthen you to do exploits when the Lord saith, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee"? Go in this thy might, O thou who art full of weakness and trembling, go, for God bids thee go, and henceforth let not thy heart ever again fear!

One other passage contains part of our text in another form; it is that well-known one in Isaiah 41:10: "Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness." There the promise is enlarged, but the sense of it is the same; it is a promise of the divine presence and of the divine help to the Lord's tried and afflicted people.

II. Now we will change the run of our thought, and view these words as an adage or household word from God.

I think this must have been a sort of proverb or common saying amongst the early Christians, "The Lord hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee;" and that it was one of the things that they constantly said the one to the other. I wish that we had more such holy proverbs current among us nowadays, — that our common sayings were more worth saying than they often are, and that our proverbial philosophy were more truly Christian philosophy.

This saying, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee," is peculiarly a saying of God. Paul puts a "Thus saith the Lord" to this saying, "He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." To my mind, it invests these words with special power to my soul when I remember that it is God who, speaks to me, and to each of my fellow-believers, and says, "I-I say this, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." As I repeat these words, they may not seem to you to have much power in them, but if the Holy Spirit will impress these simple syllables upon your heart, they will come to you full of the music of heaven, and you will realize that it is God who saith, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee."

Further, these words are remarkably forcible in the original. You probably have heard that, in the Greek, there are no less than five negatives, we cannot well translate them into English except in such language as that of the verse we were singing just now,-

"The soul that on Jesus hath lean'd for repose,

I will not, I will not desert to his foes;

That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake,

I'll never, no never, no never forsake!"

In our English language, two negatives would destroy each other, but it is not so in the Greek language; and the heaping up, as it were, of these denials on God's part of all thought of ever forsaking his people ought to be sufficient to satisfy even the most doubtful among us. If God has said, "I will not, not, NOT, no never forsake my people," we must believe him, and we must chase away all thought of the possibility of the Lord's forsaking his servants, or leaving them to perish.

These words also derive much of their preciousness as a Christian proverb from the fact that they relate to God himself and his people. They are God's own words, and they speak concerning himself: "I will not leave thee." This is not merely a promise of deliverance out of trouble, or of the presence of angels to bear us up in their hands, lest we dash our feet against a stone. God is not here promising us any temporal mercies, nor indeed any spiritual mercies by themselves; but he is speaking concerning himself, who is the substance of all his own promises, but infinitely greater than the promises, and he says, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee."

And you will observe that this promise ensures to us God's presence and God's help: "I will never leave thee," — that is, "I will always be with thee;" — "nor forsake thee." The force of that promise is, "Being with thee, I will never let thee work alone, I will help thee. I will not desert thee as to my presence, and I will not desert thee as to my succor. I will be with thee, and I will help thee in all that thou hast to do." This is a double promise, and it is doubly sweet.

Besides that, this promise wards off from us the most terrible calamity that could possibly occur to us. It may help to make this promise increasingly precious to us if we think for a minute what would become of us if God did leave us or forsake us. Then indeed might the heavens be hung with blackness, and the light of the sun be put out for ever if God should leave us. The straight road to hell would be open before us, and we should soon be going thither if we were forsaken of God. It would have been better far never to have been born, or never to have known the way of life at all than, after all, to be deserted of God, and be left to perish. Thank God, that can never be the portion of anyone who has truly trusted in him.

Recollect also that, if he had not been God, he would have forsaken us long ago. Our patience with our fellow-creatures holds out but a very little while; but it is because God is God, and therefore changes not, that we are not consumed. Have you not done a thousand times enough to have made him forsake you if he were like the sons of men? I confess sorrowfully that I know I have; and if he could turn from his eternal purpose, and if his everlasting love could change, then surely he would long ago have cast my poor soul far away from his presence, to receive its well-deserved punishment. Is it not a blessed thing to think that the very thing that is most to be feared by any man can never happen to a believer, for God has said, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee"? Thou dost well deserve to be forsaken of God, but he will never leave thee. He will deal with thee, in the way of grace, and not of justice. If he left thee, thou wouldst utterly perish; but he will not and cannot do so; thou art too dear to him for his heart ever to turn away from thee.

And while this promise averts from us the direst ill, it secures to us the richest possible blessing. To have God with us, — is there anything beneath the sky, is there anything above the sky that is a choicer blessing than that? To be with God, and to have God with us, is the very heaven of heavens; and he who hath this blessing here hath a veritable heaven upon earth. No other blessings can ever be compared with this one. No mirth of them that make merry in the dance, or of those who shout by reason of wine can ever be likened to the holy excitement and enthusiasm of a soul that is in the presence of God, and knows that it is there. To be helped of God, which is the second part of the promise, is bliss indeed. What better help than that does anyone need? We are glad to be helped by our fellow-Christians who have the ability to aid us; but to be helped of God is to have the exchequer of heaven and the great deeps of divine omnipotence to draw upon. Whatsoever it is that we really need we already have if God be with us for "no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly." The best of blessings are secured to the man to whom God has said, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." Then, beloved friends, this is a promise that only God could give. The husband whispers in the ear of his wife, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee;" but he forgets the hour of death when he must go from all below. The mother, as she presses her child to her bosom, says, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee;" but she knows not how soon that little child may be an orphan to need another's care. Friend says to friend, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee," forgetting how changeable human friendships are, for many are the hearts that have been rent asunder by vows, honestly whispered at the time, which have been forgotten through the lapse of years, or have been treacherously broken. "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee," is not a promise for mortal lips to utter. Transient beings like ourselves must not venture to say, "I will never do this or that;" for, alas! we know not what we may do, or may not do! Even though we think we shall never prove to be traitors, yet traitors we may prove to be; or if not traitors, our power may fail, so that, we shall be unable to do what we have promised. But when Jehovah says, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee," it is a divine promise, and he who utters it divinely keeps it. 'Tis a fit

promise for God to speak, and 'tis a fit promise for God's servants to hear. You have lost many of those dear to you, but you have not lost your God. They have gone from you one by one, "as star by star grows dim;" but his light still shines on, and shall shine on for ever.

Further, beloved, this choice promise provides against all troubles. We do not know what troubles may come upon us; let us not think about them. They will come soon enough, and it will be quite sufficient for us to trouble ourselves about them when they do come. But whatever they may be, "He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." There may come to us great losses. Our riches may take to themselves wings, and fly away; where we had large estates, we may be without a place whereon to lay our head; but, "He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." We may be the victims of cruel slanders, and under the pressure of those slanders those that used to respect us may avoid us, and former friends may be alienated from us; but "He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." We may have to suffer great pain, and the earthly physician may be unable to relieve us; but God's promise will still avail us, for "He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." Sore sinking of heart may come upon us, and all God's waves and billows may roll over us; but "He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee."

In the course of our service for God, we may meet with many difficulties; where we looked for helpers, we may find opponents; but let us still press onward, for "He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." We may have to remove to distant lands, but "He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." Days of weakness may come to us, when the pillars of the house shall tremble, when they that look out of the windows shall be darkened, and the grinders shall fail because they are few; the infirmities of old age may tell upon us; but "He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." And with old age may come the loss of children and friends, till we seem left, "like the last rose of summer," or the last sere leaf of the woods in the autumn; yet "He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." And then shall come the chill river of death, and the gathering darkness of the night; but "He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." And after that shall come another world, where our spirit shall fly through tracks unknown, and where new and wondrous scenes shall burst upon our astonished view; and, in the fullness of time, Christ shall come, and the last great battle shall be fought; but whatever is to be, or is not to be, a Christian has nothing to fear, for "He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." Come forth, thou dragon bound with the chain, and ravage the world again if so it must be; rise, Antichrist, from thy den amidst the seven hills, pollute the churches once again if thou canst; let war and bloodshed, famine and pestilence break loose again with unwonted fury; but whatever happens, in time or in eternity, "He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." "Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea." If the Lord of hosts is with us, what ground can there be for fear? I know of no supposable dangers, no imaginable troubles, no conceivable difficulties, through which, and out of which, and beyond which this text will not carry us, if by faith we grasp it, "He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee."

III. Now I must pass on to the next point.

We have viewed these words as a quotation, and as a proverbial saying; now the practical outcome of this subject, according to the text, is that we are to View These Words As A Motive For Contentment: Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." That is to say, do not be grasping, do not be seeking to rake all the world to yourself, do not stretch out your arms, like seas, to enclose all the shore.

"But," says one, "I have so very little." Thou hast as much as God has been pleased to give thee, so be content with such things as thou hast. "I wish I had a great deal laid by," says another. Dost thou want more than this, "He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee,"? "I wish I had a large regular income," says another. This looks pretty regular, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." Someone asks, "But does that mean temporal things?" "Dost thou think that God will let thy body die of starvation when he promises to take care of thy soul: There is an ancient promise for the man who walketh righteously and speaketh uprightly, "Bread shall be given him; his waters shall be sure;" and it shall still be so; in this matter also, the Lord will not leave thee, nor forsake thee, if thou dost trust in him. It seems to me that the man who can claim this promise has his fortune made for him. If he had made large investments, they might turn out badly; if he possessed large estates, they might have to be sold; if he had wealthy friends, they might all forget him, for memories are not always very strong in the direction in which some people wish they might be; while many a man has fallen from the pinnacle of personal wealth to the pit of personal want; and many others, who were waiting for dead men's shoes, have had to go barefoot to their own graves. It is poor confidence that trusts in men, but it is blessed confidence that rests in this glorious truth, "He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." "Trust in the Lord, and do good: so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed."

But I know how it is with many of us, we cannot live by faith, we are so apt to think that something to see and to handle is so much more satisfactory than a promise of God. But is not that a species of blasphemy? Is not God's promise better, more sure, more satisfactory, more ennobling, more divine, than anything that can be seen? O child of God, what wantest thou more than this gracious assurance, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee"? What though thy wallet holds but little, if thy God hath said that he

will fill it every morning and every evening, what more dost thou want? The children of Israel tried to store the manna, but it bred worms, and stank, for they were to gather their daily supply morning by morning. There is many a man who has not been content to trust in God, so he has asked for something to look at and to handle, and he has had it, and it has been a stench in his nostrils all his days, and he has never again been the man he was when he had not given way to an evil spirit of covetousness. I would rather be the poorest Christian in this world, and live on this promise, than be the richest man that lives, and not have this promise; and in saying this I am sure that I am speaking for every Christian here. Our true treasure is this, “He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee;” that, is our bank stock in the Bank of Heaven; all else that we have is but the spending money of a traveler when he stays at an inn. But we are soon to be up and away to the land where our true treasure lies, where our God and our Father lives, who has said, “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.”

IV. The last point is that These Words Are To Be Viewed As A Reason For Courage: So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.”

If God says to me, “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee,” I never ought to be the victim of fear of man; yet the fear of man, that bringeth a snare, is one of the curses of the lives of many professors. They are afraid of opposition, and afraid of persecution; and although persecution is very mild nowadays compared with what it used to be, they are afraid of the public opinion in their little circle, afraid of the contemptuous remarks that will be made; afraid of the cold shoulder, afraid of the innuendoes and the dark hints, afraid to be thought to be one of those “vulgar people” who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and who desire to follow him “whithersoever he goeth.” That horrible fear of losing the respect of ungodly people still operates upon thousands and tens of thousands who, if they only realized the truth of this promise, “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee,” would each one say, “Let men think what they like of me, let them call me a fool or a fanatic, let them shun me, but what does it signify so long as thou, my Lord, dost not forsake me?”

So, my brethren and sisters in Christ, let every one of us, first of all, fling away from our souls, by the power of God’s Spirit, all desire to grasp this world, and make that our god. Let us abhor covetousness. If God sends us wealth, let us reckon that we are only stewards of it, and use it for his glory. If he does not send it to us, let us be quite content to be without it, for it brings a heap of trouble with it. Let us always keep the world under our feet, and reckon it to be unworthy of a Christian’s craving.

Then let us fling away all cowardice, and boldly say that the Lord is our Helper, so we will not fear what man may do unto us. Accursed be the lips of any minister who dares to say, “I must not utter that unpopular truth for fear I should have the censure of the public press or public opinion.” Shall such fear as that ever stop us from uttering what we believe to be true? If it does, how shall we be able to give in our account at the last great day? I reckon it to be my business, as a man sent of God, never for a moment to consider how you or anybody else will like what I have to say in my Master’s name, nor whether it shall be approved by this man or that, whether he be eminent in rank or eminent as a critic. Nay, let him be what or who he may, if I have done my Master’s work faithfully, it matters not to me whether the man praises it to the skies or condemns it to the bottomless pit. In the pulpit, it does not concern me what man’s judgement upon my message shall be; and you in the pews must never hesitate to take the consequences of doing what is right. Be just in your business, come what may of it. Be honest in your profession, carry out your principles; and if that should involve loss, be content to lose. Whatever comes of it, be straight, — as straight as though God had ruled you with his own divine hand, and there was ne’er a bend or crack in your character. Press onward towards the goal of sincerity and purity, and may God strengthen you to reach it! Though there are a thousand influences that might make a true man fall, and cause a brave man to turn coward, and might urge you to sell your principles, or at least to take off the sharp angles of them, do not so, — do not so, by the love of God, do not so! As “He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee,” do not leave your God, do not forsake his truth! Your fathers died rather than give up the gospel; your ancestors fought for it on many a bloody field. We have cast away the sword of the warrior, and we have done well, for we fight not with carnal weapons; but, by the grace of God, we grasp “the Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God,” and with brave hearts and strong we stand steadfastly for the faith; and so will we stand until the truth shall win the day, and the victory shall be unto the Captain of our salvation. Stand fast, brethren, in the name of God, and may the Lord bless you, for Jesus sake! Amen.

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Hebrews 4:12. The Sword of the Lord - Sermon Notes

THE word of God is a name for Christ as well as for the Scriptures. The Scriptures are meant in this place, but the Lord Jesus is never dissevered therefrom: indeed, he is the substance of the written word. Scripture is what it is because the Lord Jesus embodies himself in it. Let us consider from this text—

I. THE QUALITIES OF THE WORD.

1. It is divine. It is the word of God.

2. It is living. "The word of God is quick."

In contrast to our words, which pass away, God's word lives on.

It has life in itself. It is "the living and incorruptible seed."

It creates life where it comes.

It can never be destroyed and exterminated.

3. It is effectual: "quick, and powerful;"

It carries conviction and conversion.

It works comfort and confirmation.

It has power to raise us to great heights of holiness and happiness.

4. It is cutting: "Sharper than any two-edged sword."

It cuts all over. It is all edge. It is sharpness itself.

It wounds more or less all who touch it.

It kills self-righteousness, sin, unbelief.

5. It is piercing: "even to the dividing asunder;"

It forces its way into the hard heart.

It penetrates the smallest opening, like the arrow which entered between the joints of the harness.

6. It is discriminating: "to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit;"

It separates things much alike: natural and spiritual religion.

It divides the outer from the inner: external and internal religion, "joints and marrow."

It does this by its own penetrating and discerning qualities.

7. It is revealing: "a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."

It cleaves the man as the butcher cleaves a carcase and opens up the secret faculties and tendencies of the soul.

Laying bare thoughts, intents, and inner workings.

Criticizing them and putting a right estimate on them.

Tracing their windings and showing their dubious character.

Approving that which is good and condemning the evil.

All this we have seen in the preaching of the word of God.

Have you not felt it to be so?

II. THE LESSONS WHICH WE SHOULD LEARN THEREFROM.

That we do greatly reverence the word, as truly spoken of God.

That we come to it for quickening for our own souls.

That we come to it for power when fighting the battles of truth.

That we come to it for cutting force to kill our own sins and to help us in destroying the evils of the day.

That we come to it for piercing force when men's consciences and hearts are hard to reach.

That we use it to the most obstinate to arouse their consciences and convict them of sin.

That we discriminate by its means between truth and falsehood.

That we let it criticize us, our opinions, projects, acts, and all about us.

Let us keep to this sword of the Lord, for none other is living and powerful as this is.

Let us grasp its hilt with firmer grip than ever.

Sharpeners

All the great conquests which Christ and his saints achieve in this world are got with this sword. When Christ comes forth against his enemies, this sword is girded on his thigh (Ps. 14:3): "Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O most mighty"; and his victory over them is ascribed to it (verse 4), "And in thy majesty ride prosperously because of truth," that is, the word of truth.

We read of Apollos (Acts 18:28), that he "mightily convinced the Jews." He did, as it were, knock them down with the weight of his reasoning. And out of what armory fetched he the sword with which he so prevailed? See the same verse, "Showing by the Scriptures that Jesus was Christ." He, therefore, is said to be "mighty in the Scriptures" (verse 24).

Bless God for the efficacy of the word upon thy soul. Did ever its point prick thy heart, its edge fetch blood of thy lusts? Bless God for it. You would do as much to a surgeon for lancing a sore, and severing a putrified part from thy body, though he put thee to exquisite torture in the doing of it. And I hope thou thinkest God hath done thee a greater kindness ... There is not another sword like this in all the world that can cure with cutting; not another arm could use this sword, to have done thus with it besides the Spirit of God. None could do such feats with Scanderberg's as himself.

The word of God is too sacred a thing and preaching too solemn a work to be toyed and played with, as is the usage of some who make a sermon but matter of wit and fine oratory. If we mean to do good, we must come unto men's hearts, not in word only, but with power. Satan moves not for a thousand squibs and wit-cracks of rhetoric. Draw, therefore, this sword out of your scabbard, and strike with its naked edge; this you will find the only way to pierce your people's consciences and fetch blood of their sins. — William Gurnall

When the heathen saw the converts reading the book, which had produced the change, they enquired if they talked to it. "No," they answered, "it talks to us, for it is the Word of God." "What then!" replied the strangers. "Does it speak?" "Yes," rejoined the Christians, "it speaks to the heart." — Life of Moffat

Miss Whateley says, "To rouse the torpid and unexercised mind of a Moslem woman is wonderful, for they are sunk in ignorance and degradation. But while I was reading to one of them a few weeks ago, she exclaimed, 'Why, it is just as if I were out in the dark, and you held a lamp to me that I might see my way.'"

The Rev. James Wall, of Rome, relates the following instances of conversion through the reading of the Scriptures: One of the converts, when first presented with a New Testament, said, "Very well; it is the very size for me to make my cigarettes? and so he began to smoke it away. He smoked away all the Evangelists, till he was at the tenth chapter of John, when it struck him that he must read a bit of it, for if he didn't, there would soon be no more left to read. The first word struck home, and the man read himself into Christ.

A secret society of political conspirators, who sought to achieve their purposes by assassination, were in the habit of placing a Bible (as a blind) on the table of the room where they met for deliberation. One night, when there happened to be little business to transact, and they were all rather sleepy, a member of the society opened the Bible and saw a verse that went right to his heart. He soon returned to the book and read more of it, and now he was a very earnest follower of the Lord Jesus. — Missionary Herald

Hebrews 4:16 Boldness at the Throne - Sermon Notes

PRAYER occupies a most important place in the life of the Christian. His vigor, happiness, growth, and usefulness depend thereon. In Scripture, the utmost encouragements are held out to prayer. This verse is one of the sweetest of invitations to prayer.

I. HERE IS OUR GREAT RESORT DESCRIBED:— "The throne of grace."

Once it was called "the mercy seat," but now "the throne." In drawing near to God in prayer, we come—

1. To God as a King, with reverence, confidence, and submission.

2. To one who gives as a King; therefore we ask largely and expectantly. He has riches of grace and power.
3. To one who sits upon a throne "of grace" on purpose to dispense grace. It is his design, his object in displaying himself as King.
4. To one who in hearing prayer is enthroned and glorified. Grace is at its utmost when believers pray; it is grace on the throne.
5. To one who even in hearing prayer acts as a sovereign, but whose sovereignty is all of grace.

To the throne of the great God, poor sinners are invited to come. Oh, the privilege of having audience with the King of Grace!

II. HERE IS A LOVING EXHORTATION:— "Let us come."

It is the voice of one who goes with us. It is an invitation—

1. From Paul, a man like ourselves, but an experienced believer who had much tried the power of prayer.
2. From the whole church speaking in him.
3. From the Holy Spirit, for the apostle spoke by inspiration. The Spirit, making intercession in us, says, "Let us come."

Let us not be indifferent to this sympathetic call. At once let us draw near to God.

III. HERE IS A QUALIFYING ADVERB:— "Let us come boldly."

Not proudly, presumptuously, nor with the tone of demand, for it is the throne, yet "boldly," for it is the throne of grace.

By this adverb, "boldly," is meant—

1. We may come constantly, at all times.
2. We may come unreservedly, with all sorts of petitions.
3. We may come freely, with simple words.
4. We may come hopefully, with full confidence of being heard.
5. We may come fervently, with importunity of pleading.

IV. HERE IS A REASON GIVEN FOR BOLDNESS. "Let us therefore come."

1. "That we may obtain mercy, and find grace;" not that we may utter good words; but may actually obtain blessings.

We may come when we need great mercy, because of our sin.

We may come when we have little grace.

We may come when we are in great need of more grace.

2. There are many other reasons for coming at once, and boldly.

Our character may urge us. We are invited to come for "mercy," and therefore undeserving sinners may come.

The character of God encourages us to be bold.

Our relation to him as children gives us great freedom.

The Holy Spirit's guidance draws us near the throne.

The promises invite us by their greatness, freeness, sureness, etc.

Christ is already given to us, and therefore God will deny us nothing.

Our former successes at the throne give us solid confidence.

3. The great reason of all for bold approach is in Jesus.

He once was slain, and the mercy-seat is sprinkled with his blood.

He is risen and has justified us by his righteousness.

He has ascended and taken possession of all covenant blessings on our behalf. Let us ask for that which is

our own.

He is sympathetic, tender, and careful for us; we must be heard.

Let us come to the throne, when we are sinful, to find mercy.

Let us come to the throne, when we are weak, to find help.

Let us come to the throne, when we are tempted, to find grace.

Expositions

When God enacts laws, he is on a throne of legislation: when he administers these laws he is on a throne of government: when he tries his creatures by these laws, he is on a throne of judgment, but when he receives petitions, and dispenses favors, he is on a throne of grace.

The idea of a throne inspires awe, bordering upon terror. It repels rather than invites. Few of us could approach it without trembling. But what is the throne of the greatest earthly monarch that ever swayed a scepter? The God we address is the King of kings. In his eye an Alexander is a worm; yea, all nations before him are less than nothing and vanity. How can we approach his infinite majesty? Blessed be his name, he is on a throne of grace; and we are allowed, and even commanded, to come to it boldly. — William Jay

It is styled a throne of grace, because God's gracious and free favor cloth there accompany his glorious majesty. Majesty and mercy do there meet together. This was, under the law, typified by the ark. At each end thereof was an angel, to set forth God's glorious majesty. The cover of it is styled a "mercy-seat" (Exod. 25:17-18). — William Gouge

A holy boldness, a chastened familiarity, is the true spirit of right prayer. It was said of Luther that, when he prayed, it was with as much reverence as if he were praying to an infinite God, and with as much familiarity as if he were speaking to his nearest friend. — G. S. Bonyes

This word boldly signifies liberty without restraint. You may be free, for you are welcome. You may use freedom of speech. The word is so used, (Acts 2:29; 4:13). You have liberty to speak your minds freely; to speak all your heart, your ails, and wants, and fears, and grievances. As others may not fetter you in speaking to God by prescribing what words you should use; so you need not restrain yourselves, but freely speak all that your condition requires. — David Clarkson

A petitioner once approached Augustus with so much fear and trembling that the emperor cried, "What, man! do you think you are giving a sop to an elephant?" He did not care to be thought a hard and cruel ruler. When men pray with a slavish bondage upon them, with cold, set phrases, and a crouching solemnity, the free Spirit of the Lord may well rebuke them. Art thou coming to a tyrant? Holy boldness, or at least a childlike hope, is most becoming in a Christian.

Obtaining mercy comes first; then finding grace to help in time of need. You cannot reverse God's order. You will not find grace to help in time of need till you have sought and found mercy to save. You have no right to reckon on God's help and protection and guidance, and all the other splendid privileges which he promises to "the children of God by faith in Jesus Christ," until you have this first blessing, the mercy of God in Christ Jesus; for it is "in" Jesus Christ that all the promises of God are yea and Amen. — F. R. Havergal

Hebrews 5:2 Compassion on the Ignorant - Sermon Notes

Who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way. — Hebrews 5:2

MEN who are ignorant should not be met with scorn, nor faultfinding, nor neglect, for they need compassion.

We should lay ourselves out to bear with such for their good. A disciple who has been taught all that he knows by a gracious Savior should have compassion on "the ignorant."

A wanderer who has been restored should have compassion on "them that are out of the way."

A priest should have compassion on the people with whom he is one flesh and blood, and assuredly our Lord, who is our great High Priest, has abundant compassion upon the ignorant.

Let us think of his great pity towards them.

I. WHAT IS THIS IGNORANCE? It is moral and spiritual, and deals with eternal things.

1. It is fearfully common among all ranks.

2. It leaves them strangers to themselves.

They know not their own ignorance.

They are unaware of the heart's depravity.

They are unconscious of the heinousness of their actual sin.

They dream not of their present and eternal danger.

They have not discovered their inability for all that is good.

3. It leaves them unacquainted with the way of salvation. They choose other ways.

They have a mixed and injurious notion of the one way.

They often question and cavil at this one and only way.

4. It leaves them without the knowledge of Jesus.

They know not his person, his offices, his work, his character his ability, his readiness to save them.

5. It leaves them strangers to the Holy Spirit.

They perceive not his inward strivings.

They are ignorant of regeneration.

They cannot comprehend the truth, which he teaches.

They cannot receive his sanctification.

6. It is most ruinous in its consequences.

It keeps men out of Christ.

It does not excuse them when it is willful, as it usually is.

II. WHAT IS THERE IN THIS IGNORANCE WHICH IS LIABLE TO PROVOKE US, AND THEREFORE DEMANDS COMPASSION?

1. Its folly. Wisdom is worried with the absurdities of ignorance.

2. Its pride. Anger is excited by the vanity of self-conceit.

3. Its prejudice. It will not hear nor learn; and this is vexatious.

4. Its obstinacy. It refuses reason; and this is very exasperating.

5. Its opposition. It contends against plain truth, and this is trying.

6. Its density. It cannot be enlightened: it is profoundly foolish.

7. Its unbelief. Witnesses to divine truth are denied credence.

8. Its willfulness. It chooses not to know. It is hard teaching such.

9. Its relapses. It returns to folly, forgets and refuses wisdom, and this is a sore affliction to true love.

III. HOW OUR LORD'S COMPASSION TOWARDS THE IGNORANT IS SHOWN. "He can have compassion on the ignorant." This he clearly shows:

1. By offering to teach them.

2. By actually receiving them as disciples.

3. By instructing them little by little, most condescendingly.
4. By teaching them the same things over again, patiently.
5. By never despising them notwithstanding their dullness.
6. By never casting them off through weariness of their stupidity.

To such a compassionate Lord let us come, ignorant as we are.

For such a compassionate Lord let us labor among the most ignorant, and never cease to pity them.

Notes

It is a sad thing for the blind man who has to read the raised type when the tips of his fingers harden, for then he cannot read the thoughts of men which stand out upon the page; but it is far worse to lose sensibility of soul, for then you cannot peruse the book of human nature, but must remain untaught in the sacred literature of the heart. You have heard of the "iron duke," but an iron Christian would be a very terrible person: a heart of flesh is the gift of divine grace, and one of its sure results is the power to be very pitiful, tender, and full of compassion. — C. H. S.

Ignorance is the devil's college. — Christmas Evans

What the Papists cry up as the mother of devotion, we cry down as the father of superstition. — William Secker

That there should one man die ignorant who had capacity for knowledge, this I call a tragedy. Were it to happen more than twenty times in the minute, as by some computations it does, what a line of tragedies!

The miserable fraction of science which our united mankind, in a wide universe of nescience, has acquired, why is not this, with all diligence, imparted to all? — Thomas Carlyle

Utter ignorance is a most effectual fortification to a bad state of the mind. Prejudice may perhaps be removed; unbelief may be reasoned with; even demoniacs have been compelled to bear witness to the truth; but the stupidity of confirmed ignorance not only defeats the ultimate efficacy of the means for making men wiser and better, but stands in preliminary defiance to the very act of their application. It reminds us of an account, in one of the relations of the French Egyptian Campaigns, of the attempt to reduce a garrison posted in a bulky fort of mud. Had the defenses been of timber, the besiegers might have set fire to and burnt them; had they been of stone, they might have shaken and ultimately breached them by the battery of their cannon, or they might have undermined and blown them up. But the huge mound of mud had nothing susceptible of fire or any other force; the missiles from the artillery were discharged but to be buried in the dull mass; and all the means of demolition were baffled. — John Foster

In "Eyesight, Good and Bad," by Dr. R. B. Carter, the writer says, "Nothing is more common than for defective sight to be punished at obstinacy or stupidity. For my own part, I have long learned to look upon obstinate and stupid children as mainly artificial productions, and shall not readily forget the pleasure with which I heard from the master of the great elementary school at Edinburgh, where twelve hundred children attend daily, that his fundamental principle of management was that there were no naughty boys and no boobies."

I used to reproach myself for religious stupidity when I was not well; but I see now that God is my kind Father, not my hard taskmaster expecting me to be full of life and zeal when physically exhausted. It takes long to learn such lessons. One has to penetrate deeply into the heart of Christ to begin to know its tenderness and sympathy and forbearance.

The love of Jesus — what it is
Only His sufferers know.
— Elizabeth Prentiss

Hebrews 5:8 The Education of Sons of God - Sermon Notes

Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered. — Hebrews 5:8

IT is always consoling to us to behold the footsteps of our Lord. When we see him tried, we cheerfully submit to the like trial. When we perceive that in his case an exception to the rule of chastening might have been expected, and yet none was made, we are

encouraged to bear our sufferings patiently.

When we see the great Elder Brother put to more rather than less of trial, we are fully drawn to obey the will of God by submission.

I. SONSHIP DOES NOT EXEMPT FROM SUFFERING.

1. Not even Jesus, as a Son, escaped suffering.

He was the Son, peculiarly, and above all others.

He was the honored and beloved first-born.

He was the faithful and sinless Son.

He was soon to be the glorified Son in an eminent sense.

2. No honor put upon sons of God will exempt them from suffering.

3. No holiness of character, nor completeness of obedience, can exempt the children of God from the school of suffering.

4. No prayer of God's sons, however earnest, will remove every thorn in the flesh from them.

5. No love in God's child, however fervent, will prevent his being tried.

The love and wisdom of God ensure the discipline of the house for all the heirs of heaven without a single exception.

II. SUFFERING DOES NOT MAR SONSHIP.

The case of our Lord is set forth as a model for all the sons of God.

1. His poverty did not disprove his Sonship (Luke 2:12).

2. His temptations did not shake his Sonship (Matt. 4:3).

3. His endurance of slander did not jeopardize it (John 10:36).

4. His fear and sorrow did not put it in dispute (Matt. 26:39).

5. His desertion by men did not invalidate it (John 16:32).

6. His being forsaken of God did not alter it (Luke 23:46).

7. His death cast no doubt thereon (Mark 15:39). He rose again and, thus, proved his Father's pleasure in him (John 20:17).

Never was there a truer, or lovelier, or more beloved Son than the sufferers. "A man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief."

III. OBEDIENCE HAS TO BE LEARNED EVEN BY SONS.

Even he in whom there was no natural depravity, but perfect, inherent purity, had to learn obedience.

1. It must be learned experimentally.

What is to be done and suffered can only be learned in the actual exercise of obedience.

How it is done must be discovered by practice.

The actual doing of it is only possible in trial.

2. It must be learned by suffering.

Not by words from the most instructive of teachers.

Nor by observation of the lives of others.

Nor even by perpetual activity on our own part. This might make us fussy rather than obedient; we must suffer.

3. It must be learned for use in earth and in heaven.

On earth by sympathy with others.

In heaven by perfect praise to God growing out of experience.

IV. SUFFERING HAS A PECULIAR POWER TO TEACH TRUE SONS.

It is a better tutor than all else, because:

1. It touches the man's self: his bone, his flesh, his heart.
2. It tests his graces, and sweeps away those shams which are not proofs of obedience, but presences of self-will.
3. It goes to the root, and tests the truth of our new nature. It shows whether repentance, faith, prayer, etc., are mere importations, or home-grown fruits.
4. It tests our endurance, and makes us see how far we are established in the obedience which we think we possess. Can we say, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him"?

The anxious question: Am I a son?

The aspiring desire: Let me learn obedience.

The accepted discipline: I submit to suffer.

Blossomings of the Rod

Corrections are pledges of our adoption and badges of our sonship. One Son God hath without sin, but none without sorrow. As God corrects none but his own, so all that are his shall be sure to have it, and they shall take it for a favor, too (1 Cor. 1 1:32). — John Trapp

I bear my willing witness that I owe more to the fire, and the hammer, and the file, than to anything else in my Lord's workshop. I sometimes question whether I have ever learned anything except through the rod. When my school-room is darkened, I see most. — C. H. S.

If aught can teach us aught, Affliction's looks,
Making us look unto ourselves so near,
Teach us to know ourselves beyond all books,
Or all the learned schools that ever were.

This mistress lately plucked me by the ear,
And many a golden lesson hath me taught;
Hath made my senses quick, and reason clear,
Reformed my will, and rectified my thought.
— Sir John Davies

"I never," said Luther, "knew the meaning of God's word, until I came into affliction. I have always found it one of my best schoolmasters." On another occasion, referring to some spiritual temptation on the morning of the preceding day, he said to a friend (Justin Jonas), "Doctor, I must mark the day; I was yesterday at school." In one of his works, he most accurately calls affliction "the theology of Christians": "Theologium Christianorum." "I have learned more divinity," said Dr. Rivet, confessing to God of his last days of affliction, "in these ten days that thou art come to visit me, than I did in fifty years before. Thou teachest me after a better manner than all those doctors, in reading whom I spent so much time." — Charles Bridges

A minister was recovering from a dangerous illness, when one of his friends addressed him thus, "Sir, though God seems to be bringing you up from the gates of death, yet it will be a long time before you will sufficiently retrieve your strength, and regain vigor enough of mind to preach as usual." The good man answered: "You are mistaken, my friend; for this six weeks' illness has taught me more divinity than all my past studies and all my ten years' ministry put together." — New Cyclopaedia of Anecdotes

Not to be unhappy is unhappiness,
And misery not to have known misery;
For the best way unto discretion is
The way that leads us by adversity;
And men are better showed what is amiss
By the expert finger of calamity
Than they can be with all that fortune brings,

Who never shows them the true face of things.
— Samuel Daniel

Hebrews 10:9. The First and The Second - Sermon Notes

He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second. — Hebrews 10:9

THE way of God is to go from good to better.
This excites growing wonder and gratitude.

This makes men desire, and pray, and believe, and expect. This aids man in his capacity to receive the best things. The first good thing is removed, that the second may the more fitly come. Upon this last fact we will meditate, noticing:

I. THE GRAND INSTANCE. First came the Jewish sacrifices, and then came Jesus to do the will of God.

1. The removal of instructive and consoling ordinances.

While they lasted they were of great value, and they were removed because, when Jesus came:

They were needless as types.

They would have proved burdensome as services.

They might have been dangerous as temptations to formalism.

They would have taken off the mind from the substance which they had formerly shadowed forth.

2. The establishment of the real, perfect, everlasting atonement.

This is a blessed advance, for:

No one who sees Jesus regrets Aaron.

No one who knows the simplicity of the gospel wishes to be brought under the perplexities of the ceremonial law.

No one who feels the liberty of Zion desires to return to the bondage of Sinai.

Beware of setting up any other ordinances; for this would be to build again what God has cast down; if not to do even worse.

Beware of imagining that the second can fail as the first did. The one was "taken away"; but the other is established by God himself.

II. INSTANCES IN HISTORY. These are many. Here are a few:

1. The earthly paradise has been taken away by sin; but the Lord has given us salvation in Christ, and heaven.

2. The first man has failed; behold the Second Adam.

3. The first covenant is broken, and the second gloriously takes its place.

4. The first temple, with its transient glories, has melted away; but the second and spiritual house rises beneath the eye and hand of the Great Architect.

III. INSTANCES IN EXPERIENCE.

1. Our first righteousness is taken away by conviction of sin, but the righteousness of Christ is established.

2. Our first peace has been blown down as a tottering fence, but we shelter in the Rock of Ages.

3. Our first strength has proved worse than weakness, but the Lord is our strength and our song; he also has become our salvation.

4. Our first guidance led us into darkness; now we give up self, superstition, and philosophy, and trust in the Spirit of our God.

5. Our first joy died out like thorns which crackle under a pot; but now we joy in God.

IV. INSTANCES TO BE EXPECTED.

1. Our body decaying shall be renewed in the image of our risen Lord.
2. Our earth passing away, and its elements being dissolved, there shall be new heavens and a new earth.
3. Our family removed one by one, we shall be charmed by the grand reunion in the Father's house above.
4. Our all being taken away, we find more than all in God.
5. Our life ebbing out, the eternal life comes rolling up in a full tide of glory. Let us not grieve at the taking away of the first. Let us expect the establishment of the second.

Meliora

The Law is a Gospel pre-figured, and the Gospel a Law consummated. — Bishop Hall

The sin-destroyer being come, we are no longer under the sin-revealer. — Martin Boos

No need of prophets to inquire:

The Sun is risen — the stars retire:

The Comforter is come, and sheds

His holy unction on our heads.

— Josiah Conder

When Alexander went upon a hopeful expedition, he gave away his gold; and when he was asked what he kept for himself, he answered, "Spem majorum et meliorum" — the hope of greater and better things ... A Christian's motto always is, or always should be, Spero meliora — I hope for better things. — Thomas Brooks, in "The Best Things Reserved Till Last"

On a cold, windy March day, a gentleman stopped at an apple-stand, whose proprietor was a rough-looking Italian. He alluded to the severe weather, when, with a cheerful smile and tone, the Italian replied: "Yes, pritty cold; but by-and-by — tink of dat!" In other words, the time of warm skies, flowers, and songs was near, and was to be thought of. The humble vendor little thought of the impression made by his few words. "By-and-by — think of that!"

The Jewish rabbins report (how truly is uncertain) that when Joseph, in the times of plenty, had gathered much corn in Egypt, he threw the chaff into the River Nile, that so, flowing to the neighboring cities and nations more remote, they might know what abundance was laid up, not for themselves alone, but for others also. So God, in his abundant goodness, to make us know what glory there is in heaven, hath thrown some husks to us here in this world, that so, tasting the sweetness thereof, we might aspire to his bounty that is above, and draw out this happy conclusion to the great comfort of our precious souls — that if a little earthly glory do so much amaze us, what will the heavenly do? If there be such glory in God's footstool, what is there in his throne? If he give us so much in the land of our pilgrimage, what will he not give us in our own country? If he bestoweth so much on his enemies, what will he not give to his friends? — John Spencer

There are certain words which, occurring frequently, are like a bunch of keys, and enable us to unlock the treasures in this epistle. Such a key is "better"; and we find the Lord Jesus described as being better than angels (1:4; illustrated in John 5:4-6), better than Moses (3), Joshua (4), and Aaron (7); his blood speaking better things than that of Abel (12:24); himself the Surety of a better testament, established upon better promises (7:22; 8:6). The old covenant based upon man's promise (Exod. 19:8; 24:7-8) was broken in forty days; but the performance by the Son of God was the foundation of the better covenant. "The two tables of the testimony were in the hand of Moses" (Exod. 32:15; Gal. 3:19), but God's law is within the heart of our Surety (Ps. 40:8; compare Deut. 10:1-2). That word was spoken by angels (Heb. 2:2; Acts 7:53); but this by him who is "so much better than angels." — E. A. H. (Mrs. Gordon)

Hebrews 12:13 Lamé Sheep - Sermon Notes

And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed. — Hebrews 12:13

WE sometimes meet with those who are fleet of foot and joyous of spirit. Would to God that all were so! But as they are not, the lame must be considered.

The road should be cleared for tottering steps.

Our desire is that the whole band may reach the journey's end in safety.

I. IN ALL FLOCKS THERE ARE LAME SHEER

1. Some are so from their very nature and birth.

Ready to despond and doubt.

Ready to disbelieve and fall into error.

Ready to yield to temptation, and so to prove unstable.

Unready and feeble in all practical duties.

2. Some have been ill-fed. This brings on a foot-rot and lameness.

Many are taught false doctrine.

Many more receive indefinite, hazy doctrine.

Many others hear light, insubstantial, chaffy doctrine.

3. Some have been worried, and so driven to lameness.

By Satan, with his insinuations and temptations.

By persecutors, with their slander, taunting, ridicule, etc.

By proud professors, unkindly pious, severely critical, etc.

By a morbid conscience, seeing evil where there is none.

4. Some have grown weary through the roughness of the road.

Exceeding much ignorance has enfeebled them.

Exceeding much worldly trouble has depressed them.

Exceeding much inward conflict has grieved them.

Exceeding much controversy has worried them.

5. Some have gradually become weak.

Backsliding by neglect of the means of grace.

Backsliding through the evil influence of others.

Backsliding through pride of heart and self-satisfaction.

Backsliding through general coldness of heart.

6. Some have had a terrible fall.

This has broken their bones so as to prevent progress.

This has snapped the sinew of their usefulness.

This has crippled them as to holy joy.

II. THE REST OF THE FLOCK MUST SEEK THEIR HEALING.

1. By seeking their company, and not leaving them to perish by the way through neglect, contempt, and despair.

2. By endeavoring to comfort them and to restore them. This can be done by the more experienced among us; and those who are unfit for such difficult work can try the next plan, which is so plainly mentioned in our text.

3. By making straight paths for our own feet.

By unquestionable holiness of life.

By plain gospel teaching in our own simple way.

By manifest joy in the Lord.

By avoiding all crooked customs which might perplex them.

By thus showing them that Jesus is to us "the way, the truth, and the life." No path can be more straight than that of simple faith in Jesus.

III. THE SHEPHERD OF THE FLOCK CARES FOR SUCH.

1. Their fears: they conclude that he will leave them.
2. The reason: to do so would be by far the easier plan for him.
3. Their dread: if he did so, they must inevitably perish.
4. Their comfort: he has provided all the means of healing the lame.
5. Their hope: he is very gentle and tender, and wills not that any one of them should wander and perish.
6. Their confidence: healing will win him much honor and grateful affection; wherefore we conclude that he will keep them.

Let us be careful to cause no offense or injury to the weakest.

Let us endeavor to restore such as are out of the way, and comfort those who are sorely afflicted.

Sheep-Lore

Sheep are liable to many diseases, many of them are weak and feeble; these a good shepherd taketh pity of, and endeavors to heal and strengthen. So the saints of God are subject to manifold weaknesses, temptations, and afflictions, which moved the Almighty to great compassion, and sorely to rebuke the shepherds of Israel for their cruelty and great remissness towards his flock: "The diseased have ye not strengthened, neither have ye healed that which was sick," etc. And therefore he saith he would himself take the work into his own hands; "I will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick." etc. — Benjamin Keach

Many preachers in our days are like Heraclitus, who was called "the dark doctor." They affect sublime notions, obscure expressions, uncouth phrases, making plain truths difficult, and easy truths hard. "They darken counsel with words without knowledge" (Job 38:2). Studied expressions and high notions in a sermon, are like Asahel's carcass in the way, that did only stop men and make them gaze, but did no ways profit them or better them. It is better to present Truth in her native plainness than to hang her ears with counterfeit pearls. — Thomas Brooks

Now Mr. Feeble-mind, when they were going out at the door, made as if he intended to linger; the which, when Mr. Great-heart espied, he said, "Come, Mr. Feeble-mind, pray do you go along with us; I will be your conductor, and you shall fare as the rest."

Feeble-mind: "Alas! I want a suitable companion: you are all lusty and strong; but I, as you see, am weak: I choose, therefore, rather to come behind, lest, by reason of my many infirmities, I should be both a burden to myself and to you. I am, as I said, a man of a weak and feeble mind, and shall be offended and made weak at that which others can bear. I shall like no laughing: I shall like no gay attire: I shall like no unprofitable questions. Nay, I am so weak a man as to be offended with that which others have a liberty to do. I do not know all the truth: I am a very ignorant Christian man. Sometimes, if I hear any rejoice in the Lord, it troubles me because I cannot do so, too. It is with me as it is with a weak man among the strong, or as with a sick man among the healthy, or as 'a lamp despised,' so that I know not what to do. 'He that is ready to slip with his feet is as a lamp despised in the thought of him that is at ease' (Job 12:5)?"

"But, brother," said Mr. Great-heart, "I have it in commission to 'comfort the feeble-minded,' and 'to support the weak.' You must needs go along with us: we will wait for you; we will lend you our help; we will deny ourselves of some things, both opinionate and practical, for your sake; we will not enter into 'doubtful disputations' before you; we will be made all things' to you, rather than you shall be left behind." — John Bunyan

It should be between a strong saint and a weak as it is between two lute strings that are tuned one to another; no sooner one is struck but the other trembles; no sooner should a weak saint be struck, but the strong should tremble. "Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them" (Heb. 13:3). — Thomas Brooks

Hebrews 12:25 Hear! Hear! - Sermon Notes

See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall we not escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven. — Hebrews 12:25

JESUS still speaks to us in the gospel. What a privilege to hear such a voice, with such a message! What cruel sin to refuse Jesus a hearing! Here is a most urgent exhortation to yield him reverent attention.

I. THERE IS NEED OF THIS EXHORTATION FROM MANY CONSIDERATIONS.

1. The excellence of the word. It claims obedient attention.
2. The readiness of Satan to prevent our receiving the divine word
3. Our own indisposition to receive the holy, heavenly message.
4. We have rejected too long already. It is to be feared that we may continue to do so, but our right course is to hearken at once.
5. The word comes in love to our souls; let us therefore heed it, and render love for love.

II. THERE ARE MANY WAYS OF REFUSING HIM THAT SPEAKETH.

1. Not hearing. Absence from public worship, neglect of Bible reading. "Turn away from him."
2. Hearing listlessly, as if half asleep, and unconcerned.
3. Refusing to believe. Intellectually believing, but not with the heart.
4. Raising quibbles. Hunting up difficulties, favoring unbelief.
5. Being offended. Angry with the gospel, indignant at plain speech, opposing honest personal rebuke.
6. Perverting his words. Twisting and wresting Scripture.
7. Bidding him depart. Steeling the conscience, trifling with conviction, resorting to frivolous company for relief.
8. Reviling him. Denying his Deity, hating his gospel, and his holy way.
9. Persecuting him. Turning upon his people as a whole, or assailing them as individuals.

III. THERE ARE MANY CAUSES OF THIS REFUSING.

1. Stolid indifference, which causes a contempt of all good things.
2. Self-righteousness, which makes self an idol, and therefore rejects the living Savior.
3. Self-reliant wisdom, which is too proud to hear the voice of God.
4. Hatred of holiness, which prefers the willful to the obedient, the lustful to the pure, the selfish to the divine.
5. Fear of the world, which listens to threats, or bribes, or flatteries, and dares not act aright.
6. Procrastination, which cries "tomorrow," but means "never."
7. Despair and unbelief, which declare the gospel to be powerless to save, and unavailable as a consolation.

IV. REFUSING TO HEAR CHRIST, THE HIGHEST AUTHORITY IS DESPISED.

"Him that speaketh from heaven"

1. He is of heavenly nature, and reveals to us what he has known of God and heaven.
2. He came from heaven, armed with heavenly authority.
3. He speaks from heaven at this moment by his eternal Spirit in Holy Scripture, the ordinances and the preaching of the gospel.
4. He will speak from heaven at the judgment.

He is himself God, and therefore all that he saith hath divinity within it.

V. THE DOOM TO BE FEARED IF WE REFUSE CHRIST.

Those to whom Moses spake on earth, who refused him, escaped not.

1. Let us think of their doom, and learn that equally sure destruction will happen to all who refuse Christ.

Pharaoh and the Egyptians.

The murmurers dying in the wilderness.

Korah, Dathan, and Abiram.

2. Let us see how some have perished in the church.

Judas, Ananias and Sapphira, etc.

3. Let us see how others perish who remain in the world, and refuse to quit it for the fold of Christ.

They shall not escape by Annihilation, nor by Purgatory, nor by Universal Restitutions.

They shall not escape by infidelity, hardness of heart, cunning, or hypocrisy. They have refused the only way of escape, and therefore they must perish for ever.

Instead of refusing, listen, learn, obey.

Instead of the curse, you shall gain a blessing.

Warning Words

Our blessed Lord is represented as "now speaking from heaven" to Christians generally; and even if we were, contrary to all just reason, to confine the reference to the persons to whom the Epistle was immediately written, he is said to speak to multitudes who never saw or heard him in the days of his flesh. This could be only by the agency of inspired men, whose commission to teach and command "in the name of Christ" was proved by miracles. Those miracles they attributed to him, as is plain from many passages in the Acts and the Epistles. Thus Christ stands in the very position of power, authority, and action, continually ascribed to Jehovah in the Old Testament, speaking by his prophets. "This," observes Michaelis, "is saying of Christ the greatest thing that can be said." — Dr. J. Pye Smith

We seem to have done with the Word as it has passed through our ears; but the Word, be it remembered, will never have done with us, till it has judged us at the last day. — Judge Hale

A nobleman, skilled in music, who had often observed the Hon. Rev. Mr. Cadogan's inattention to his performance, said to him one day, "Come, I am determined to make you feel the force of music; pay particular attention to this piece." It was accordingly played. "Well, what do you say now?" "Why, just what I said before." "What! can you hear this and not be charmed? Well, I am quite surprised at your insensibility. Where are your ears?" "Bear with me, my lord," replied Mr. Cadogan, "since I, too, have had my surprise. I have often, from the pulpit, set before you the most striking and affecting truths; I have sounded notes that might have raised the dead; I have said, 'Surely he will feel now,' but you never seemed to be charmed with my music, though infinitely more interesting than yours. I, too, have been ready to say, with astonishment, 'where are his ears?'"

One of the modern thinkers had been upholding the doctrine of universal salvation at a certain house with much zeal. A child who had listened to his pestilent talk was heard to say to his companion, "We can now steal, and lie, and do wicked things, for there is no hell when we die." If such preachers gain much power in this country we shall not need to raise the question of a hell hereafter, for we shall have one here. — C. H. S.

Hebrews 13:5 Never, No Never, No Never - Sermon Notes

He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. — Hebrews 13:5

HERE is a divine word, directly from God's own mouth: "For himself hath said." (See Revised Version.)

Here is a promise which has been frequently made: "He hath said." This promise occurs again and again.

Here are some of the fat things full of marrow. The sentence is as full of meaning as it is free from verbiage.

Here is the essence of meat, the quintessence of medicine.

May the Holy Spirit show us the treasure hid in this matchless sentence!

I. VIEW THE WORDS AS A QUOTATION.

The Holy Spirit led Paul to quote from the Scriptures, though he could have spoken fresh words.

Thus, he put honor on the Old Testament.

Thus, he taught that words spoken to ancient saints belong to us.

Our apostle quotes the sense, not the exact words, and thus he teaches us that the spirit of a text is the main thing.

We find the words which have been quoted.

In Genesis 28:15, "I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of." Spoken to Jacob when quitting home, and thus to young saints setting out in life.

In Deuteronomy 31:8, "He will be with thee, he will not fail thee, neither forsake thee." To Joshua, and so to those who have lost a leader, and are about to take the lead themselves, and to enter upon great wars and rightings, in which courage will be tried.

In 1 Chronicles 28:20, "He will not fail thee, nor forsake thee, until thou hast finished all the work." To Solomon, and thus to those who have a weighty charge upon them, requiring much wisdom. We build a spiritual temple.

In Isaiah 41:10, "Fear thou not; for I am with thee." To Israel, and so to the Lord's tried and afflicted people.

II. VIEW THEM AS A HOUSEHOLD WORD FROM GOD.

1. They are peculiarly a saying of God: "He hath said." This has been said, not so much by inspiration as by God himself.
2. They are remarkably forcible from having five negatives in them in the Greek.
3. They relate to God himself and his people. "I"... "thee."
4. They ensure his presence and his help. He would not be with us, and be inactive.
5. They guarantee the greatest good. God with us means all good.
6. They avert a dreadful evil which we deserve and might justly fear; namely, to be deserted of God.
7. They are such as he only could utter and make true. Nobody else can be with us effectually in agony, in death, in judgment.
8. They provide for all troubles, losses, desertions, weaknesses, difficulties, places, seasons, dangers, etc., in time and eternity.
9. They are substantiated by the divine love, immutability, and faithfulness.
10. They are further confirmed by our observation of the divine proceeding to others and to ourselves.

III. VIEW THEM AS A MOTIVE FOR CONTENTMENT.

"Let your conversation be without covetousness, and be content with such things as ye have." These most gracious words:

Lead us to live above visible things when we have stores in hand.

Lead us to present satisfaction however low our stores may be.

Lead us to see provision for all future emergencies.

Lead us into a security more satisfactory, sure, ennobling, and divine, than all the wealth of the Indies could bestow.

Lead us to reckon discontent a kind of blasphemy of God.

Since God is always with us, what can we want besides?

IV. VIEW THEM AS A REASON FOR COURAGE. "So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me."

1. Our Helper is greater than our foes. "Jehovah is my helper."
2. Our foes are entirely in his hand. "I will not fear what man shall do."
3. If permitted to afflict us, God will sustain us under their malice.

What a blessed deliverance from fretting and from fearing have we in these few words!

Let us not be slow to follow the line of things which the Spirit evidently points out to us.

Notes on "Nots"

Lord, the apostle dissuadeth the Hebrews from covetousness with this argument, because God said, "I will not leave thee, nor forsake thee." Yet I find not that God ever gave this promise to all the Jews; but he spake it only to Joshua, when first made commander against the Canaanites, yet this (without violence to the analogy of faith) the apostle applieth to all good men in general. Is it so, that we are heirs apparent to all promises made to thy servants in Scripture? Are the charters of grace granted to them good to me also? Then will I say with Jacob, "I have enough." But because I cannot entitle myself to thy promises to them except I imitate their piety to thee, grant I may take as much care in following the one as comfort in the other. — Thomas Fuller

Our friend, Dr. William Graham of Bonn, has lately departed this life, and we are told that on his death bed one said to him, "He hath said, 'I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee,'" to which the good man replied, with his dying breath, "Not a doubt of it! Not a doubt of it!" — C. H. S., in the *Sword and the Trowel*, 1884

It is right to be contented with what we have, never with what we are. — Mackintosh

I have read, says Brooks, of a company of poor Christians who were banished into some remote part; one standing by, seeing them pass along, said that it was a very sad condition these poor people were in, to be thus hurried from the society of men, and made companions with the beasts of the field. "True;" said another, "it were a sad condition indeed if they were carried to a place where they should not find their God. But let them be of good cheer, God goes along with them, and will exhibit the comforts of his presence whithersoever they go."

A heathen sage said to one of his friends, "Do not complain of thy misfortunes, as long as Caesar is thy friend? What shall we say to those whom the Prince of the kings of the earth calls his sons and his brethren? "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" Ought not these words to cast all fear and care forever to the ground? He who possesses him, to whom all things belong, possesseth all things. — F. W. Krummacher

The soul that on Jesus has leaned for repose
I will not, I will not desert to his foes;
That soul though all hell should endeavor to shake,
I'll never, no never, no never forsake.

— George Keith