

Spurgeon on Job

Job 1:21 Fifteen Years After!

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“The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.” — Job 1:21.

Or, as some read it, “The Lord giveth, and the Lord taketh away; blessed be the name of the Lord.” So that, the text is not only concerning the past, but it may rightly be considered as relating to the present also. Some of the rarest pearls have been found in the deepest waters, and some of the choicest utterances of believers have come from them when God’s waves and billows have been made to roll over them. The fire consumes nothing but the dross, and leaves the gold all the purer. In Job’s cause, I may truly say, with regard to his position before God, he had lost nothing by all his losses, for what could be purer and brighter gold than this which gleams before us from our text, revealing his triumphant patience, his complete resignation, and his cheerful acquiescence in the divine will? “The Lord giveth, and the Lord taketh away; blessed be the name of the Lord.”

There are two points to which I ask your earnest attention while we meditate upon this subject. The first is the exhortation drawn from the text, — learn to see the Lord’s hand in everything, in giving and in taking; and, secondly, — and this is a harder lesson, — learn to bless the Lord’s name in everything, in giving and in taking.

I. First, let us learn to see the lord’s hand in everything.

Our whole history seems to be divided, as our text divides itself, into a beholding of God’s hand in giving, and then a beholding of it in taking. We are then, first of all, to behold God’s hand as a giving hand. If we are believers, all the comforts and mercies that we have are to be viewed by us as coming from the hand of our gracious Heavenly Father. Job confessed that the Lord had given him the camels, and the sheep, and the oxen, and that the Lord had given him his seven sons and three daughters; everything which he had ever possessed he looked upon as having been the gift of God. Job did not say, “I worked hard to obtain all that stock that I have now lost.” He did not complain, “I spent many weary days and many anxious nights in accumulating all those flocks and herds that have been stolen from me.” He did not ascribe any of his wealth either to his own wit, or to his own industry, but he said of it all, “The Lord gave it to me.” In his mind’s eye, he took an inventory of all that he once had, and of all that, he had lost, and he said of the whole, “It was all the Lord’s gift to me.”

Now, beloved, whatever may be the possessions which you have at the present time, whatever may be the number of those who are the comfort of your life, husband or wife, parents or children, kinsfolk of any sort, — say of all of them, “The Lord gave them to me;” and, as a Christian, learn the wisdom of never ascribing any earthly comfort to any earthly source. The worldling may not always be able to say what Job said concerning his possessions. Some of what he has may not have been obtained honestly; the Lord did not give any of that to him. Some of what he has may turn out to be a curse rather than a blessing; but the believer in Christ may say, with the utmost truthfulness, with regard to all that he has, “It is all the gift of my loving and tender Heavenly Father.”

And, brethren, there is associated with this fact that all our possessions are God’s gifts, the remembrance that they are all undeserved gifts. They are gifts in the fullest sense of the word, the gifts of God’s grace. They are not given to us because we have merited them, for we have never deserved even the least of all the mercies which the Lord has so bountifully bestowed upon us. We may say of the whole river of his favor, which flows continually side by side with us as we journey along the pathway of our pilgrimage, that there is not a drop of it which comes to us of debt or by law, but all comes through the free gift of God’s grace. All that we have, over and above what would have been our portion in the pit of hell, is the gift of God’s mercy towards us. It is of the Lord’s mercy, and because his compassions fail not, that we are not consumed. Every believer can truly say, with Job, “The Lord gave;” yes, the Lord gave even to me, an unworthy one who sat as a beggar at his gate, and received from his own hand countless tokens of his infinite lovingkindness.”

And I may add, with regard to those gifts, that they have been given to us with wondrous kindness and thoughtfulness on God’s

part Some here, I think, will have to say that they have found themselves provided for by God's forestalling their wants. He has gone before them in the way of his providence, and mysteriously cleared a path for them. Before they have felt the pinch of poverty, the pinch has been averted. There are others of God's servants here, who have sometimes been brought very low, yet they can bear witness that, hitherto, their bread has always been given to them, and their waters have been sure; and while God's mercy comes to us very sweetly when forestalling our need, there is equal sweetness if it comes when the need has been felt No food is so palatable as that which has hunger for its sauce. To know what it is to be poor, will make us more grateful if God ever gives us abundance. But time would fail me to tell me the love and care of God towards each one of us, every day of our lives, and to recount how he not only continues but even multiplies his favors. It is impossible for us to count them, for they are more in number than the hairs of our head, or the sand on the seashore, or the stars in the midnight sky.

Now, as everything we have is freely and graciously given to us by God, this should make us feel, in the first place, that this truth sweetens all that we have. I daresay there is many a little thing in your house that is of no great value in itself, but it was given to you by someone who was very dear to you. How much a child values that Bible that was given to her by her mother, who wrote her name in it! Many a man has, in his house, things which an auctioneer would appraise at a very small amount, but which the owner prizes very highly because they were given to him by someone whom he intimately esteemed, and who gave them to him, as a token of his love. In like manner, look at the bread on the table of a believer as a love-token from God. The Lord gave it to him; and if there were upon his table nothing but that bread, it would be a token of God's gracious condescension in providing for his needs. Let us learn to look thus at everything that we receive in this life, for such a view of it will sweeten it all. We shall not then begin to calculate whether we have as much as others have, or as much as our own whims or wishes might crave; but we shall recognize that all we have comes from the hand and heart of our Heavenly Father, and that it all comes to us as a token of our Father's love, and with our Father's blessing resting upon it.

This fact should also prevent any believer from acting dishonestly in his daily avocations, or even from wishing to obtain anything that is not his own by right All of you, who belong to God, have what God has given you; so mind that you do not mix with it anything that the devil has given you. Do not go into any worldly enterprise, and seek to gain something concerning which you could not say, "The Lord my God gave it unto me." Men of the world will engage in such transactions, and they will say that you are not as sharp as you might be because you will not do the same. But you have a good reason for refusing to gain even a shilling upon which you cannot ask God's blessing. A sovereign, dishonestly procured, though, it might gladden your eyes for a little while, and help to fill your purse, would certainly bring a curse with it, and you do not want that You would not like to have to confess to yourself, concerning anything you possessed, "I dare not tell my Heavenly Father how I got it, though he knows; and I dare not ask his blessing upon, it, nor do I think he would ever give it to me. He will probably turn it into a rod, and sharply scourge me for having dared to use such unholy means to get what I ought not to have even wished to possess." Some of God's people might have been very happy if they had not been greedy and grasping. He that hasteneth to be rich will soon find that he will fall into many snares and abundant temptations. It is an evil thing when people cannot be content although they have enough for all their necessities, for even the world's proverb says, that "enough is as good as a feast " Yet many stretch out their arms, like wide-encircling seas, and try to grasp in them all the shore. Such people, sooner or later, begin to rob others right and left, and very many of them come down to poverty and the Bankruptcy Court, disgraced and dishonored. Let it not be so with you, beloved, but be ye content with such things as ye have, whether God gives you little or much; and, above all things, pray that you may have nothing but what he gives you, nothing in your house or shop but what comes in at the front door in the light of day, nothing but what may be seen coming in if any eye should be watching. That man is truly happy who can say of all his substances, be it little or be it much, "The Lord gave it to me."

Further, as it is the Lord who gives us all the wealth that we possess, how very foolish are those people who are proud of possessing a little more of this world's wealth than others have/ There are some, who seem to be thoroughly intoxicated by the possession of a larger income than their neighbors enjoy. They even seem to fancy that they were made of better material than was used in the creation of ordinary mortals. Did not a broad grin appear on the faces of many aristocrats when someone said, in Parliament, that we were all made of the same flesh and blood? Of course, all those who were in their right senses, knew that it was true; but insanity in high places seemed to be moved to utter contempt at the bare mention of such a thing. When a man is poor, unless he has brought his poverty upon himself by extravagance, or idleness, or his own wrongdoing, the man is a man for all that, and none the worse man for being poor. Indeed, some of the best of men have been as poor as their Lord was. I have known many, who have been very poor, yes who have been the excellent of the earth, in whom a true saint of God might well take delight There always will be various ranks and conditions among man, and there is a certain respect which is due from one to another which should never be withheld where it is tightly due; but, at the same time, whenever a man begins to say that, because God has given him more than he has given to another, therefore he will despise his poorer brother and look down upon him, it must be dishonoring and displeasing to God, and it is extremely likely that he will turn round, and make the proud man bite the dust How often those, who have held their heads so very high, have been rolled in the mire, and how easily that might be made to come to pass with others!

A further inference arising out of this truth that God gives us all that we have, is that it ought never to be difficult for us to give back to God as much as ever we can. As he has given us all that we have, it is but right that we should use it to his glory; and if, under the rule of his grace, and under the gospel, he does not so much claim a return from us as a matter of right, but leaves our liberality to be aroused by the love which constrains us, rather than by the law which compels us; yet let us not give God less because he gives us more. Under the Mosaic dispensation, the Jew gave his tenth by compulsion, but let us willingly give to God more than that, and not need to be constrained to do it, except by the sweet constraint of love. Do I owe every penny that I have in this world to the bounty of God's hand? Then, when God's cause and God's poor are in need, let no one have to beg of me to give to them. I always feel ashamed when I hear people say that we are "begging for God's cause." God's cause has no need to be a beggar from those who would be beggars if it were not for God's grace. Oh, no, no; it must never be so! We ought to be like the children of Israel in the wilderness, who gave so generously towards the building and furnishing of the tabernacle that Moses had to restrain their liberality, for they had already given "much more than enough for the service of the work, which the Lord commanded to make." Let us try to imitate the liberality which God has manifested toward us in the gift of his well-beloved Son, and in all the covenant blessings which come to us through him. All those who have received so much from God should count it their privilege and delight to give back to him all that they can.

These reflections might suffice for this part of the subject, but I shall add one more. "The Lord gave;" — then we must worship the Giver, and not his gifts. How can we so degrade ourselves as to worship that which God has given to us? Yet you know that many make idols of their gold, their lands, their husbands, their wives, their children, or their friends. It is no unusual thing for a little child to be the god of the family; and wherever that, is the case, there is a rod laid up in store in that house. You cannot make idols of your children without finding out, sooner or later, that God makes them into rods with which he will punish you for your idolatry. "Little children, keep yourselves from idols," was the injunction of the loving apostle John, and he wrote thus in love, because he knew that if God sees us making idols of anything, he will either break our idols or break us. If we really are his people, he will, in some way or other, wean us from our idols, for he wants our love to be given wholly to himself; so it is best for us to keep the creature in its right place, and never to let the joys or comforts of this life usurp God's rightful position in our hearts. God has been pleased so to fashion the world that it should always be under our feet; and, as Christians, we should always keep it there. The dearest thing we have on earth should ever be estimated by us at its proper value as a gift from God but as nothing more than that; and never be allowed to occupy our heart's throne, which should always be reserved for the Lord alone.

But now we are to think, for a while, of the Lord's hand taking away from us as well as giving to us. Job said, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away." Some of you have come to this service very sad and heavy of heart because that dear child of yours is dead. Well, I do not blame you for sorrowing over your loss, but I pray you also to remember that it is the Lord who hath taken your child away from you. You say that it was the fever that took away your dear one, and perhaps that was the immediate cause of your child's death; but if you can realize that the fever was only the instrument in God's hand to remove the dear little one from your care to his own, surely you will dry your tears. And as for that substance of yours, which has almost malted away under the fiery trial to which it has been subjected, so that poverty now to stare you in the face, you will be able to bear even that when you remember that it is the Lord's hand that has taken away what his hand had first given.

So long as we look at the secondary causes of our trouble, we reason for sorrow; but when our faith can pierce the veil, and see the Great First Cause, then our comfort begins. If you strike a dog with a stick, he will try to bite the stick, because he is a dog; but if he knew better, he would try to bite you, and not the stick. Yet that is the way that we often act with the troubles that come to us; we fly at the second causes, and so are angry and petulant with them; but if we would always recollect that it is God who taketh away, as well as God who gives; — that he is at the back of all our trials and troubles; — that his hand weighs out our share of grief, and measures our portion of pain, then we should not dare to rebel and bewail; but, like David, we should say, "I was dumb, I opened not my mouth; because thou didst it;" even if we could not get up higher still, and say, with Job, "The Lord giveth, and the Lord taketh away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

Further, when once we know that God has done anything, that fact forbids any question concerning it. It must be right because he did it. I may not be able to tell why, but God knows why he did it. He may not tell me the reason; but he has a reason, for the Lord never acted unreasonably. There never was any action of his, however sovereign or autocratic it might appear to be, but was done "after the counsel of his own will." Infinite wisdom dictates what absolute sovereignty decrees. God is never arbitrary, or tyrannical. He does as he wills, but he always wills to do that which is not only most, for his own glory, but also most for our real good. How dare we question anything that God does?

My dear sister, rest assured that it is better that you should be a widow, and seek to glorify God in your widowhood. My dear young friend, believe that it is better that you should be an orphan; otherwise, God would not have taken away your parents. It is better that you, dear friends, should lose your eyes; it is better that you should be poor, or diseased, or else the Lord would not let you be so, for "no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly." If health and wealth were good things for you, God would let you have them. If it were a good thing for saints never to die, they never would die. If it were a good thing for them to go to heaven

at once, they would go there at once. If you are walking uprightly, you may know that you have all things, which, all things considered, would be good for you. Some things, which might be good in themselves, or good for others, might not be good for you; and, therefore, the Lord in love withholds them from you. But, whatever he gives, or takes away, or withholds, raise no questions concerning it, but let it be sufficient for you that the Lord hath done it.

Besides, when we know that the Lord takes away our possessions, the knowledge that they are his effectually prevents us from complaining. Suppose you are a steward to a certain nobleman, and that his lordship has been pleased to entrust you with ten thousand pounds of his money. By-and-by, he withdraws it from your charge, and invests it somewhere else. Well, it never was your money; you might have complained if it had been. But you are only a steward, and if your lord pleases to withdraw his own money, are you going to be out of temper with your master because he does what he wills with his own? Suppose you have a banker, — and we are, as it were, the Lord's bankers, — and suppose that, a week or two ago, you paid into the bank a thousand pounds, or more, and the clerks or those in authority were pleased to take charge of your money. But suppose that you went to the bank to-day, and drew it all out; they did not get angry with you. You would not like to trust a banker who was only civil to you when you were paying in money; and if we are God's bankers, he sometimes puts his treasure into our keeping, and sometimes takes it out; but it is not our treasure any more than our money is the banker's when we entrust it to his care. It is on deposit with us, and we ought to be paying to God good interest upon it. Whatever God has given to us, he never gave it as our own freehold. 'It was always on a lease; — a lease, too, that had to be renewed every moment; for, if God chose to cancel it, he could do so whenever he pleased. How dare we then complain?

To use another figure, our Position is like that of a nurse, into whose care a mother placed her babe, and the nurse dandled the child, and was glad to have the charge of it; but when she had to return it to its mother, she cried over the loss of the little darling. Yet it was not the nurse's child, given to her to keep; it was only hers to nurse. So it was with your children whom God has taken home to himself; they were not yours to keep. The Lord put each one of them, for a while, into your charge, and said to you, "Christain mother, take this child, and nurse it, for me, and I will pay thee thy wages;" so, when he called the child back to himself, why should you complain as though he had wronged you? Or, to use another illustration, which has been frequently employed in this connection, — a gardener had been specially careful in tending one particular rose, which was yet fair to look upon; but, when he went, one morning, to his favorite rose-bush, he found that the flower, of which he had taken such care, was gone. He was very vexed, for he thought that some bad boy had stolon into the garden, and taken away his best flower. He was complaining very bitterly of his loss, when someone said, "The master has been down in the garden this morning, and he has been admiring this rose-bush, and he has taken away that fine bud of which you were so proud." Then the gardener was delighted that he had been able to grow a flower that had attracted his master's notice; and, instead of mourning any longer, he began to rejoice. So, should it be with anything upon which we have set our hearts. Let each one of us say to our Master, "My Lord, if it pleases thee to take it, it pleases me to lose it. Why should I complain because thou hast taken from me, what is really thine own?

"If thou shouldst call me to resign What most I prize, — it ne'er was mine; I only yield thee what was thine: Thy will be done!"

II. The second part of my discourse must be briefer than the first part, yet it is equally important. It is this, learn to bless the Lord's name in everything.

Learn to ring the bells of his praise all day long; and, for the matter of that, all night, long too. First, bless the name of the Lord when he reveals his hand in giving.

"Ah!" you say, "that is an easy thing to do." So it ought to be, my brethren and sisters in Christ, and it is a neglect of our duty where we do not do it. We come down to our breakfast in the morning, rejoicing in health and strength, and we go out to our day's engagements, but, I hope not without thankfulness that we are in health, and that we have food to eat, and raiment to put on. We are out all day, and things prosper with us, but I trust that we do not accept all this as a matter of course, but that we praise the Lord for it, all the day long; and then, when we go home again at night, and God is still with us, I hope we do not fall asleep before we again praise him. John Bunyan used to say that the very chickens shame us if we are ungrateful, for they do not take a drink of water without lifting up their heads, as if in thankfulness for the refreshing draught. If we, who are the Lord's children, do not bless him for the mercies which so constantly come to us from him, we are of all people the most ungrateful. Oh, for a grateful frame of mind, for I am sure that is a happy frame of mind. Those who are determined to murmur, and to complain of God's dealings with them, are sure to find plenty of things to complain of; while those who are of a thankful spirit will see reasons and occasions for gratitude in everything that happens. Do you remember a touching story, told some years ago, of a poor mother with her two little fatherless children? On a cold winter's night, they discovered an empty house, into which they went for shelter. There was an old door standing by itself, and the mother took it, placed it across a corner of the room, and told the children to creep behind it so as to get a little protection from the cold wind. One of the children said, "Oh mother, what will those poor children do, that haven't got, any door to set up to keep out the wind?" That child was grateful even for such a poor shelter as that; yet there are some, who have

thousands of greater blessings than that, and yet do not see God's hand in them, and do not praise him for them. If that has been the case with any of us, let us turn over a new leaf, and ask God to rule it with music lines, and then let us put on them notes of thanksgiving, and say to the Lord, with David, "Every day will I bless thee; and I will praise thy name for ever and over;" or say, with one of our old poets, —

"My God, I'll praise thee while I live,

And praise thee when I die,

And praise thee when I rise again,

And to eternity."

Praising God is one of the best ways of keeping away murmuring. Praising God is like paying a peppercorn rent for our occupation of our earthly tenement. When the rent is not paid, the owners generally turn the tenants out, and God might well do so with us if he were like earthly landlords. If we are not grateful to, him, for all the bounties which we constantly receive from, him, he may make the stream to stop, and then what should we do? Ungrateful mind, beware of this great danger! Thankfulness is one of the easiest virtues for anyone to practice, and certainly it is one of the cheapest; so let all Christians especially comply with the apostolic injunction, "Be ye thankful." It is a soul-enriching taking to be thankful. I am sure, that a Christian man, with gratitude for a small income, is really richer than the man who lives a graceless life, and is plentifully endowed with worldly wealth. David spoke truly when he said, "A little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked." So, let others do as they will, we say, "Give us, Lord, whatever thou wilt, whether it be little or much, so long as thou dost give with it the light of thy countenance, our souls shall be abundantly content." Thus are we to bless the name of the Lord for all that he gives us. But, it is a much more difficult thing to bless the name of the Lord for what he takes away from us; yet, difficult as it is, I venture to say that many believers, who have forgotten to praise God while he was giving to them, have not forgotten to praise him when he was taking away from them. I do not know how thankful Job had been before this trying period in his history, but I do know that his trials brought out this expression of his thankfulness; it is his first recorded praise to God. Some of us need to lie a little while upon a sick-bed in order to make us thankful for having had good health for so long; and we need to be brought low, and to have our spirits depressed, in order to make us grateful that we have had such cheerful spirits, and been blessed with so many comforts. It is not natural or easy for flesh and blood to praise God for what he takes away; yet this painful experience often wakes up the gratitude of the Christian, and he who forgot to praise the Lord before makes up for it now.

Brethren, praise is God's due when he takes as well as when he gives, for there is as much love in his taking as in his giving. The kindness of God is quite as great when, he smites us with his rod as when he kisses us with the kisses of his mouth. If we could see everything as he sees it, we should often perceive that the kindest possible thing he can do to us is that which appears to us to be unkind. A child came home from the common with her lap full of brightly shining berries. She seemed very pleased with what she had found, but her father looked frightened when he saw what she had got, and anxiously asked her, "Have you eaten any of those berries?" "No, father," replied the child, to his great relief; and then he said to her, "Come with me into the garden," and there he dug a hole, put the berries in, stamped on them, and crushed them, and then covered them with earth. All this while, the little one thought, "How unkind father is to take away these things which pleased me so much!" But she understood the reason for it, when he told her that the berries were so poisonous that, if she had eaten even one of them, she would in all probability have died in consequence. In like manner, sometimes, our comforts turn to poison, especially when we begin to make idols of them; and it is kind on the part of God to stamp on them, and put them right away from us, so that no mischief may come to our souls. Surely that child said, "Thank you, father, for what you have done; it was love that made you do it," and you also, believer, can say, "Thank God for my sickness, for my poverty, for that dead child of mine, for my widowhood, for my orphanhood, — thank God for it, all. It would have been ruinous to me to have left me unchastened. Before I was afflicted, I went astray; but now have I kept his word. Blessed be his name for all that he has done, both in giving and in taking away."

It is a grand thing when we do not judge God's dealings with us simply by the rules of reason. From the first moment when the love of God is revealed to us, right on to the hour when we shall be, in the presence of the Father in glory, we may depend upon it that there is infinite love in every act of God in taking from us, just as much as in giving to us. Jesus said to his disciples, "As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you." The Father always loved Jesus with infinite love, — he loved him as much when he was on the cross as he did when he was on his throne. And, in like manner, Jesus always loves us with an unchanging love, — a love which can never fail us. He loves us as much in the furnace of affliction as he will love us when we shall be with him in glory; so let us bless his name, whether he gives or takes away. I invite every mourning soul here to bless God's name at this moment

"Ah!" says one, "I wish I could get a little more happiness to sustain me under my many trials." Well, let me just remind you of the poor widow woman who went out to gather a few sticks to make a fire, that she might bake some cakes for herself and her son. When the prophet Elijah met her, what did he say to her? He told her to make him a little cake first, and afterwards, he added, "make for thee and for thy son. For thus saith the Lord God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of

oil fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth. And she went and did according to the saying of Elijah: and she, and he, and her house, did eat many days. And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the Lord, which he spake by Elijah." Notice that he said to the woman, "Make me a little cake first;" and God seems to say to you, "Praise me first, and then I will bless you." Say, as Job did a little later in his history, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." I believe it marks the turn of the tide, with a saint, when he can say to the Lord, with good old John Ryland, — "Thee, at all times, will I bless; Having thee, I all possess." The sky soon begins to clear when the Christian begins to say, "The Lord's will be done;" "not as I will, but as thou wilt " This is a sign that the chastisement tins had its due effect; the rod will probably be put away new. Ye mourning souls, take down your harps from the willows and sound forth at least a note or two to the praise of the Lord your God. Praise him with such notes as these: "Truly Go is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart ... I will not fret myself because of him who prospereth in his way, because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass... O my God, I believe that all things are working together for my good, and that thou art my gracious Heavenly Father, full of compassion, and overflowing with love." If you talk like this, Christian, and mean what you say, it will be a blessing to yourself, a comfort to others, and an honor to your God. As I speak thus, I am reminded that these comforting truths belong only to tame believers; and as I send you away, I dare not put the words of my text into all your mouths, for, alas! some of you cannot see our Father's hand in anything that happens to you. You are without a parent, except that wicked one of whom Christ said to the Jews, "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do." Yet, remember, you who cannot claim God as your Father, that the door of his grace is not yet shut. He is still willing to receive you; if you will come to him, confessing your sins, and seeking mercy through the precious blood of Jesus, he is both able and willing to give you a new heart, and a right spirit, to save you here and now, and to adopt you at once into his family. Then will you also be able to see his hand both in giving and in taking away, and you also will learn to bless his name at all times. If God the Lord shall deal thus graciously with you, his shall be the praise for ever and ever. Amen.

Job 9:20

FALSE JUSTIFICATION AND TRUE

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"If I justify myself, mine own mouth shall condemn me."—Job 9:20.

"It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth?" —Romans 8:33 (note), 34 (note)

THE great question for the human race to answer has ever been this, "How can man be just with God? "It is clear to every conscience that is at all awake that the thrice-holy God demands obedience to his law, and that disobedience to the divine law will certainly entail punishment. Hence the grand essential for each one of us is to be right towards God, — to be accounted just even at his judgment bar. This is a most important matter at all times, but it appears to increase in importance as we advance in years, and get nearer to that great testing time when the Lord shall put everyone into his unerring balances, to weigh him, and so to prove what he really is. Woe unto the man who shall stand before the bar of God unjustified; but happy shall he be who, in that last, dread day, shall be approved and accepted by the Judge of all the earth.

I am going to speak about the way in which we are justified in the sight of God, and I have taken two texts because so many people seem to have thought that these are two ways by which sinners can be justified before God. The first way that I shall describe is the false one, the second is the true way; the first is that which is mentioned by Job, the way of self-justification, of which it may be truly said that it is self-condemning instead of self-justifying. The second mode of justification is the one that is ordained by God, and of that it may rightly said that it never can be condemned. It challenges heaven and earth and hell in those grand words which I have just read to you, "It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth?"

I. First, for a few minutes, let us consider The Self-Justification Of Which Job Speaks: "If I justify myself, mine own mouth shall condemn me."

I call to your remembrance the fact the it is Job who speaks thus, because, if there ever was a man, in this world, who might have been justified before God by his own works, it was Job. Did not the Lord himself say of him to Satan, "There is none like him in the earth, a perfect, and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil"? Yet, so far was Job from imagining that he had attained a sinless condition, that he here declares concerning himself, "If I say, I am perfect, it shall also prove me perverse. Though I were perfect, yet would I not know my soul: I would despise my life." In addition to Job's excellence of character, he paid devout

attention to religious observance. When his children met together for feasting, he ordered special sacrifices on their behalf, saying, "It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts." Job was evidently as devout towards God as he was upright towards man; yet, you see, he tells us that, if he were to justify himself, his own mouth would condemn him. Further, as if to show us how notable Job was in all respects, he had, in addition to his excellent character, all his devotional spirit, most remarkable afflictions; but, putting together all his good works, all his religious observances, and all his afflictions, he says, "If I justify myself, mine own mouth shall condemn me." Job, at any rate, was not one of those who have imagined that they could work out a righteousness of their own which could be acceptable in the sight of God.

Let us try to find out what he meant when he said, "If I justify myself, mine own mouth shall condemn me. I think he meant, first, that it would not be true. He could not, and dare not say that he was just, before God; it would be a lie for him to stand up before the Lord, and say, "Great God, I deserve commendation at thy hands, for in me is found true righteousness." Instead of talking like that, Job says, "If I were to say that, my own mouth would contradict me while I was trying to say it. I could not say it; I dare not say it." I hope there are many here who feel that, to talk about any righteousness of their own, would be utterly absurd. If I were to attempt to justify myself before God, I should have to rely on my conscience, my self-knowledge, and my whole being. Whatever anyone else may think or say, I know that I must be saved by the grace of God, or else that I shall never be saved at all. I have not done a single good work in which I cannot see any faults, — not one solitary thing which I cannot perceive to be marred and stained, and, like a vessel spoiled even while it is on the potter's wheel, not fit to be presented before God at all. That is what Job meant when he said, "If I justify myself, mine own mouth shall condemn me."

But he meant, next, that his words themselves would be sufficient to condemn him. I know that I am addressing a large number of persons whose lives are apparently blameless. The most observant critic here would be unable to bring any very grave or serious charge against you; and yet, my dear friend, if you were to try to justify yourself before God, your words themselves would be enough to condemn you, for what sort of words do you use? I do not suppose that you use profane words; I will not imagine that you take the name of God in vain; though, alas! that is a sin that is not at all uncommon. But do you not often utter proud, boastful words? Do you not often speak in a very lofty way concerning yourselves and your own doing? Do we not all use far too many light and trifling words, — not merely such as cheerfulness may warrant, but such as are a mere waste of time, diverting the mind from serious purposes? And did not our Lord Jesus Christ say that, "Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof is the day of judgment"? And, friend, let me whisper other questions in thine ear. Dost thou never use words of a very doubtful kind? Is it not far too common in society for people to go to the very verge of propriety in what they say? Have you never done so? And have you never used false words? Have you always spoken the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth? Has your heart always gone with your tongue? Have there been no false compliments, — no lying expressions of an affection that you never felt? I wish that certain people would more often go to the looking-glass, and examine their tongues. Doctors judge of their patients' health by looking at their tongues, and we might judge of our moral and spiritual health in a similar way. Oh, what tongues some people would have if their words could blister their tongues as they ought to do! How common it is to hear scandalous words, and slanderous words, and how many hearts are made to bleed, full often, by the cruel things that are said! If I justify myself," says Job, "mine own mouth shall condemn me," and I think he means, "because my very words have been sufficient to cause me to plead guilty before God." I trust we also feel like that; and if we do, we shall never dare to be self-righteous.

I think, further, that Job meant that, if he were to plead that he was righteous before God, he would be sure to make such a muddled statement that, somehow or other, the statement itself would contain its own condemnation. If a man says, "I have kept God's law perfectly, so I can enter heaven by the merit of my own good works," every intelligent person thinks, "What a proud man that is?" And can a proud man be accepted before God? Is it not written, "Though the Lord be high, yet hath he respect unto the lowly: but the proud he knoweth afar off"? So you see that a statement of justification by betraying the pride of our heart, straightway condemns us. Men who believe themselves to be saved by their own good works generally have something harsh and evil to say against God's grace, or against his Son, or against the divine plan of salvation through the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ; and the very fact that they say anything against those things shows that their heart is in rebellion against God, and therefore their own mouth condemns them.

Years ago, there was, as old man, in Wiltshire, who according to his own statement, was a hundred and three years of age, he had never neglected his parish church, he had brought up eleven children, and had no help from the parish, and he expected that, by-and-by, he should go home to God, for "he had never done anything wrong in his life that he knewed about." "But," said someone to him, "you are a sinner, you know." "I know I ain't," he said. "Well, but God says that you are." And what, think you, did that old man reply? He said, "God may say what he likes, but I know I ain't." So, you see, he even contradicted God himself, and is not that a great sin for anybody to commit? What worse sin can there be, and what clearer proof of the alienation of the human heart, than that a man should flatly contradict God? Well, none of you ever did that, did you? No, you have not honesty enough to do that, but you mean it all the same. Many of you mean it, in your very souls. When a man does not accept salvation by Jesus Christ, if you probe his heart to its very depths, you will find that his rejection means that he does not really feel that he is guilty in the sight of God. He will not own that he needs divine mercy, nor will he accept salvation by the blood and righteousness of Christ. Self-

righteousness often lies concealed far down in the heart of man; but whenever he ventures to speak it out, the very way in which he talks of it condemns him.

I have heard men talk in this fashion, — “Well, I am quite as good as others are; and if I am not all right at last, it will be a very bad look-out for a great many.” Oh, yea, I see what you mean; because others are not what they should be, you are content with your own condition because you are like them. There is no fear of God before your eyes; and your only hope is that, as you are like others, it will be as well with you as it will be with them! But is not that a poor hope to lean upon? Do you not know that the broad road is thronged with travelers, and yet that it leads to destruction? Even if you fare as others do, it will be no comfort to you to perish as they do. There is a very ancient declaration, which ought to be a warning to you: “Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished.”

“Well,” says another, “I have done my best, and I cannot do more than that.” When you speak like that, you mean to imply that God asks of you more than he ought to ask, that really he is unjust, in his dealings with you, and that the great evil is not that you are a bad servant, but that he is a tyrant Master. What is that but flinging down the gauntlet to the Almighty, and charging him with injustice. Such language as that betrays the enmity of your heart against the Most High.

“Well,” says another, “I pay everybody all that is due.” I am glad that you do, so, and wish everybody else did the same; but have you paid to God all that is due to him? There is the great flaw in your life, — you pay every creditor except your God, to whom you owe all that you have. Many a man, who would not illtreat this dog, does not mind illtreating his God. The last one of whom many of you think is your Creator, and Provider, and Perseverer, the God who keeps the breath of life in your nostrils. You give some sort of consideration to their meanest servant in your kitchen; but to him who made the heavens and the earth, to him who sustains all things by the word of his power, you pay no regard whatsoever. As this is the real meaning of your attempt at self-justification, it carries its condemnation upon its very surface.

“Still,” says one, “whatever I may seem to be, I am reasonably good at heart.” Ah! that is another of the sayings that I have often heard, but I have never yet been able to believe that a man could be bad in life, yet good at heart. It is sometimes said of a man, who dies drunk, and cursing his Maker, “Ah, he was a good fellow at bottom.” That is not the way that men talk in the market. If you go to buy a barrel of apples, and see a lot of rotten and spoiled ones at the top of the barrel, do you believe the salesman when he says, “Ah, but the apples underneath are very good ones”? Of course, you do not believe anything of the kind; you always reckon that the fruit below is worse than that at the top, for the universal practice is to put the best at the top, and the poorer quality underneath. In like manner, we do not believe the man who says that he is good at bottom, and good at heart, although his life is evil. No, sir, you are even worse in heart than you ever were in life, because there are many things that restrain you from revealing your naked self to these who only see your outward life. But your sin is there, down at the bottom of your heart; and if you attempt to justify yourself in the sight of God, the very statement that you make will condemn you.

Besides so conscious are men that their own good works will not justify them before God, that I do not remember ever meeting with a person who absolutely professed to be at peace with God as the result of his own endeavors. If I were to ask any man, who says that he is righteous simply because of what he has himself done or been, “Are you prepared to die?” he would shake his head, and say, “Oh, no! I am not prepared to die.” You say that you have done nothing wrong, and that you are aright. But suppose that, tomorrow, you were to be called to stand at God’s judgement-bar, would you feel comfortable in the prospect? “Oh, no!” you say. I felt sure that must be your answer. Indeed, all the religions, in the world that teach the doctrine of salvation by works are at least honest enough not to pretend to ensure for any man present salvation. Take, for instance, that gigantic form of error, the Romish system of religion. It never tells anybody that he is saved. There is not a cardinal, though he is called a prince of the church, and there is not a pope, though he is called Christ’s vicar on earth, who dares to say that he is saved. They have some kind of faint hope that they may be saved at some future period, but there are none of them who dare to say that they are already saved. As to using the language of the apostle Paul, “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,” — language which even boys and girls in our Sunday-school can use as soon as they have believed in Jesus Christ, — well, even the greatest and the wisest of them cannot say that, either while they are in full health and strength, or when they are about to die. What becomes even of their great cardinals when they die? I have seen a notice of this sort put up in their churches, and probably many of you have also seen it, “Of your charity, pray for the repose of the soul of Cardinal So-and-so;” so that it is evident that he has gone somewhere or other where he is not at rest. It is quite clear that he has not gone to heaven; so all that he has done, all the masses that he has said, all the confessions he has made, and all the penances he has undergone, have done nothing for him but land him somewhere where he has not got repose for his soul. But it, is the glory of the gospel of Christ that it says to the sinner, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be justified immediately. Trust in what he has done, and you shall be saved, and you shall know that you are saved, and that you shall be saved for ever.” This is a gospel that is worth preaching, and I pray you, therefore, to regard it as worth hearing, while I try to expound it during the few remaining minutes available for my discourse; and, in order that you may do so, I urge you to put away all self-righteousness in which you have hitherto trusted. Bury it; bury it for ever; it will only ruin you if you rely upon it.

II. Our second text reveals The Divine Justification Of Which The Apostle Paul Speaks: “It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth?”

Brethren and sisters in Christ, you know that God can justify the ungodly. We may put this truth very broadly, and say that God can take an unjust, unrighteous sinner, and, by a wondrous process, which made even the angels in heaven to be astonished when it was revealed to them, he can take the guilt from the guilty one, and cast it into the depths of the sea; and he can cover the unrighteous man with a spotless robe of righteousness, so that he shall be accounted fair and lovely, and whiter than the newly-fallen snow. God can do this, at once, for every soul that is willing to accept the divine plan of salvation. Well might the apostle say, “It is God that justifieth.” Oh, what a blessing it is that God is able to pardon the guilty, and both to impute and impart righteousness to those who have none of their own!

Notice how this great work is done. The whole wondrous plan of salvation can be summed up in a single word, — substitution. As the first Adam stood before God as the representative and federal head of the whole human race, and as it was by his sin that our whole race fell, it became possible for God to regard our race as a whole, and to find for us another Adam, who would come and stand in our stead, and represent us as the first Adam did; so that, as in the first Adam we fell, we might be raised up by a second Adam. That second Adam is the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God and the Son of Mary, the Lord from heaven. He has been here upon this earth, and he has kept the law of God in every jot and tittle, and has woven a righteousness which covers the sinner from head to foot when he is enabled to put it on; and then, when the law of God examines him, it cannot find a flaw, or a rent, or even a faulty thread, in that matchless robe which is woven from the top throughout.

In addition to this, inasmuch as we had actually sinned against the Lord, this glorious God-man, the Lord Jesus Christ, suffered the terrible consequences of our sin. Oh, wondrous truth! He went up to the accursed tree, and freely gave himself up to die a felon's death, that, in that death, the justice of God might be vindicated, and that God might be just, and yet the Justifier of him that believeth in Jesus to be just because Jesus that was due for his sin. It is thus that God can reckon the sinner has taken his place, and borne the penalty.

“But,” asks someone, “how is that great work accomplished? I see that Christ suffered instead of sinners, and wrought out a righteousness which sinners could never have wrought for themselves; but how can that righteousness become theirs?” God's plan, my friend, is that thou shouldst hide thyself in Christ. Thou must come to Christ, and take what he has done to be thine by an act of simple faith. I cannot use a better illustration than that of the sin-offering brought to the priest under the Mosaic dispensation. When the sacrificial animal was about to be slain, the sinner came and laid his hands upon the head of the beast, and confessed his sin over the appointed sin-offering. Thus, his sin was put on the animal, which was then killed and consumed; and so, in type, the man's sin was put away. In a similar fashion, come, beloved, to my Lord Jesus Christ at this very moment; and, by an act of faith, put your sin where God long ago laid it; and, in token of that act say to your Lord and Savior himself, —

“My faith doth lay her hand

On that dear head of thine,

While like a penitent I stand,

And thus confess my sin.”

If thou dost thus trust Christ, even though thou hast never done so in all thy life before, it does not matter; for, if thou has done so now, then thy sin is laid upon Christ, and he has so completely borne the penalty for it that it has ceased to be, and his righteousness is accounted thine seeing that thou art a believer in him. When God looks at thee, he see no sin in thee, nor does he mark any lack of righteousness; in thee; but for the sake of Jesus Christ, his Son, he doth accept and look upon to as though thou hadst always kept his righteous law.

“But for whom is this great work accomplished?” someone asks; “you surely do not mean that it is for me?” I do mean that it is for thee if thou art a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. But if thou wilt not trust to him, on thine own head be the guilt of thy soul's eternal ruin. If thou wilt have Christ's righteousness, it is for thee. “What,” sayest thou, “for such a guilty sinner as I am?” Harken, man; if thou hadst not been guilty, God need not have provided a righteousness for thee. Of course, Christ's righteousness is for the guilty; for whom should it be if not for them? “Dost thou mean,” says one, “that, in a moment, I may be cleansed from all sin simply by believing in Jesus?” Yes, I do mean that; thou, even thou, may be cleansed this very instant. “But I have not lived a good life.” If thou hadst lived a good life, thou wouldst not have needed a Savior; Christ Jesus came into the world to have, not the good, but the bad. “In due time Christ died for the ungodly.” Publish that blessed truth round the whole earth, and let the ungodly especially hear it. Jesus himself said, “They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.” Therefore, ye sin-sick souls, trust yourselves to the Christ who came on purpose to heal just such souls as you are. Only trust him, and there is immediate pardon

and immediate salvation for you. "This is too good to be true," saith one. Not so, for high as the heavens are above the earth, so are God's thoughts above your thoughts, and his ways above your ways. You feel that you could not forgive like this any who had wronged you; but God's ways are not to be measured by yours. You have often heard us praise and extol him by singing, —

"Who is a pardoning God like thee? Or who has grace so rich and free?"

My first text said, "If I justify myself, mine own mouth shall condemn me;" but my second text as good as says, "If God justifies me, nobody can condemn me." Paul, who wrote these words, and who had been a blasphemer, and a prosecutor, and injurious, boldly declares, "It is God that justifieth," and then utters the confident challenge, "Who is he that condemneth?" Are you not astonished to hear that little man from Tarsus talk in such a fashion as that? Why, there is the blood of the martyr Stephen crying out of the ground, and saying, "Why, Paul, I condemn thee." Then there is the blood of all the poor men and women whom he dragged off to prison, or compelled to blaspheme the name of Christ. And those whom he put to death in every city, does not the blood of the martyrs cry out against Paul the apostle, who was once Saul the persecutor? How does he dare to cry, "Who is he that condemneth?" Yet there is no voice of blood raised against him; all is still and silent, for God has blotted out for ever even that great sin which he had committed. But do not the fiends of hell bring accusations against him? Does not the arch-fiend lift up his head, and say, "Saul of Tarsus, you are a liar, for I can condemn you. You know what a self-righteous man you used to be, and how you sinned against God in that way"? No, even Satan himself dare not accuse the apostle, for "it is God that justifieth." He has so effectually silenced the powers of darkness with the blood and righteousness of Christ, that, like, dogs which dread their master's whip, they lie down in their kennel, not daring even to howl against a blood-washed child of God. But do you not expect the angels in heaven, who saw Stephen die, and watched Saul of Tarsus in all his cruel persecutions, to bend down from their shining thrones, and say, "O Paul, it ill becomes you to ask, Who is he that condemneth? when all of us can condemn you"? Oh, no! they all see the splendor of the righteousness of Christ, and they are all glad to take their harps, and sing a new song to the praise and glory of Jesus. Paul's triumphant declaration, "It is God that justifieth," seems to start them again singing, as John heard them in his island prison, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing." You may thus challenge hell, earth, and heaven, if you believe in Jesus; for if God has justified you, who is he that can condemn you?

"But," says someone, "we must feel something." Just so; but if you ever do feel aright, Christ must make you feel aright. You must not bring your feelings to Christ, any more than your worlds; salvation by feelings is no more possible than salvation by good works. Salvation is all of grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

"Well," says one "I am spiritually brought to a bankrupt condition; for, if I turned my pockets inside out, metaphorically, I could not find a solitary farthing in them." Well, then, you are the very man to receive the free grace of Christ. When you have no merits, no good feelings, nothing whatever to recommend you, — when at hell's dark door you lie, then it is that salvation's joyful sound is pleasant to your ears and blessed are the ears that hear it, and blessed is the heart that accepts it. Ask Christ for it, and thou shalt have it; the Holy Spirit himself will help thee to ask for it aright. Ask him to teach thee how to ask for it. Ask Christ for everything, for all your salvation, from foundation to topstone, is in him, and he will freely bestow it upon you for his own glory.

Now I must close my discourse by reminding you that this way of finding justification by faith in Jesus Christ has commended itself to the best of men, and I hope it will commend itself to you. Cowper, in one of his later letters, says: - I will give you his words as nearly as I can remember them,) "I cannot survey the future with any joy, when I look upon it from the top of my own good works. Though I have labored, ever since my conversion, to have a conscience void of offense toward God and men, yet my only hope in death is in the blood and righteousness of my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, in whom death once sheathed his sting." And when Dr. Watts, that sweet singer of Israel, was dying, he said to one who stood by his bedside, "I heard an old divine once say that, when the most learned Christian minister comes to die, he draws his greatest comfort from the plainest promises of God's Word; and so," said Dr. Watt, "do I; and I bless God that they are so simple that they do not need any great understanding in order to grasp them. My hope is simply in the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ my Lord and Savior." And so the good man fell asleep. If we had time and opportunity, we might multiply such testimonies almost indefinitely, for all the children of God, who have lived the best conceivable lives, uniformly declare that they do not trust for salvation in anything they have done, or felt, or been, or suffered, but that they live by faith upon the Son of God, who loved them, and gave himself for them.

I should like to finish by telling you the way in which one of the old Puritans, Mr. Thomas Doolittle, once finished a sermon, and I pray that God will set his blessing on it. The preacher turned to one of the members of the church, sitting in the left-hand gallery, and, addressing him by name, he said: "Brother So-and-so, do you repent having trusted your soul to Christ?" And the brother answered, "No, sir, I do not repent it, for I never knew what true joy and peace meant until I believed in the Lord Jesus Christ." Mr. Doolittle then turned to the other side of the gallery, and said, a Brother So-and-so, do you repent having trusted your soul with Christ?" And he answered, "No, sir, I do not. I have known the Lord since I was a child, and my soul's rest and confidence have been found in him; and the more I know him, the more I rejoice in him." Then, looking straight before him, to a young man who had been somewhat uneasy during the sermon, the preacher said, "Young man, I do not know your name, but will you have the blood

and righteousness of Christ to save you?" The young man was so abashed by this public appeal that he hid his face, and said nothing. The person sitting next to him nudged him, and the minister, looking straight at him, said to him, "Young man, will you answer this question? There is salvation for you in Jesus Christ if you believe in him; are you ready to believe in him?" These young man looked up, and said, "Yes, sir." "When?" asked the preacher. The young man replied, "Now, sir." "Then," said he, "listen thou to the voice of God. 'Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.'" That young man and his father became two earnest Christian men renowned in the church in years afterwards. It might not be wise for me exactly to imitate that good man's action, and if I specially addressed a young man, the old men might think that I did not mean them to trust in Christ, and the young women might imagine that I had passed them over. So, instead of speaking to one person only, I will put the question to everybody here. I have told you about God's way of making you just in his sight; now, are you willing to be made just in God's way? If you die unjust, you will be lost for ever. If you live unjust, you will miss all true peace and rest of heart. Are you willing to have God's righteousness? You say, "Yes." Well, faith is the accepting of what God gives. Faith is the believing what God says. Faith is the trusting to what Jesus has done. Only do ye this, and you are saved, as surely as you are alive. You may have come into this place unsaved, and have been sitting here a lost soul, yet you may go home saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation, and you may know it, too. So I say to each individual here, — If thou believest in the Lord Jesus Christ, thou art saved, saved now, and saved for ever. Therefore, be of good courage, thou who hast trusted in the Lord, and go thy way rejoicing in him, and may God bless thee both now and for ever! Amen.

Job 9:30, 31

Cleansing—Wrong or Right

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"If I wash myself with snow water, and make my hands never so clean; yet shalt thou plunge me in the ditch, and mine own clothes shall abhor me." — Job 9:30, 31.

WE are all, by nature and by practice, unclean, in the sight of God. However excellent or virtuous we may seem before man, we have all broken God's law, for that law requires perfection, and we have been far from it. The law demands spotless holiness towards God, and perfect rectitude towards man; and in, some point or other we have all transgressed that law, and we have therefore become polluted before the thrice-holy Jehovah. The great question which ought to arise in the mind of every one of us is this, "How can I be cleansed before God?"

I. We are called upon to remember, first, that To Be Clean In The Sight Of God Is Worth Every Possible Effort.

Job speaks of washing himself with snow water, and trying to make himself clean; and this he speaks of right earnestly. However far from the hot plains in which he lived Job might have to send for snowy water, — whatever quantity of soap (for, in the Hebrew, there is an allusion to soap in the second clause,) — however much nitre and soap he might have to take in order to wash himself perfectly clean, it was worth all the expense and trouble if only it could be accomplished.

And, dear friends, we must be clean in the sight of God; we must want to be clean in the sight of God; for, if not, we are the objects of his continual displeasure. "God is angry with the wicked every day." This is a solemn truth which is far too much forgotten in the present day. Many have tried to put the thought of it right on one side, and held forth only the doctrine of the divine benevolence; but while that doctrine is blessedly true, these solemn declarations are equally true, "The wicked shall be turned into Hell, and all the nations that forget God;" and "he that believeth not, is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."

Now, if we were, right-hearted towards God, this would seem to us to be a very dreadful thing. We little know how exceedingly hateful sin is to God. You know that, there are some things, which you and I sometimes see, which are very disgusting and loathsome, to us. I went once, into a railway station in Italy, where I saw a man who had lost his arm, and who, by way of begging, exposed to us the stump of it, and also, a horrible, ulcer from which he, was suffering. I fumed away sick at, the sight, and dreaded to go to, that, station again, for fear that I should be met, inside the door of the waiting-room, by that horrible spectacle. But, depend upon it, no mutilation and no disease of man's body was ever so sickening to the, most delicate taste as sin is sickening to God. He loves purity, and therefore he must. loathe impurity. He delights in those, who, are just, and true,, and upright, and he cannot endure

those who are unjust, false, or unrighteous. His holy soul abhors them, as that strong expression of his in the prophecy of Zechariah proves: "My soul loathed them, and their soul also abhorred me." The sinner does not dislike God more than God dislikes him., as a sinner. The sinless God cannot look with complacency upon him who is. sinful; he is loathsome, to the holy mind of God. So, surely, if we are right-hearted, we shall feel that anything and everything that we can do,, in order to get right with God, and to become, clean in his: sight,, we ought to do at once.

Let us also remember that, as long as we are unclean, we are in daily danger of the, fires of hell. Do any of you know what hell is? It is the lazar-house of the universe. Just. as, in the olden times, when the "black pest," or some other terrible epidemic ran through a town or village, they would build a house some miles away from the place, axial call it The pest-house, where they would put away all those, who, had Th. pest or plague, — such is hell, only a million times worse than any earthly pest-house ever was. Hell is the pest, house, of the moral universe:. You know that, in countries where leprosy prevails, they shut up the lepers in a place by themselves, lest the terrible disease should pollute the whole district,; and hell is God's leper-house, where, sinners; must be, confined for ever when they are incurable, and past hope. And what are the pains of hell? They are the natural result of sin. Sin is the mother of hell. The pains and groans of lost spirits, in hell are simply the fully-developed flowers of which the sins were the seed. Bitter is the fruit, sour is the vintage of that vine of Sodom and Gomorrah which some men set, themselves so diligently to plant, and so industriously to water. Sin bears its own sting within itself. The torments that are to, come, are the stings of conscience,, and the. inevitable effects of remorse, upon the soul and body of the man who, will continue, to be unclean in the sight of God. Lest, therefore, any of you should ever be shut up in that place of "everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power," I do beseech you to arouse yourselves, and diligently seek to find out how ye may be made clean in God's sight.

"Ye sinners, seek his grace,

Whose wrath ye cannot bear;

Fly to the shelter of his cross,

And find salvation there.

"So shall that curse remove,

By which the Savior bled;

And the last awful day shall pour

His blessings on your head."

In addition to the eternal loss which all who are cast, into hell must, sustain., be it also remembered that none can enter heaven until they are pure. Those holy gates are so closely guarded by angelic watchers that no contraband of sin shall ever cross the frontiers of heaven. The angels look up and down, and through stud through, the man who presents himself there; and if so much as a speck, or spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing be found upon him, he cannot be allowed to enter. Just think for a minute hear utterly impossible it must be for the impure to enter the courts of the thrice-holy God. You sometimes see, in the streets of London., wretched creatures in whom poverty, and drunkenness, and debauchery have so combined that, even in their outward appear-ante, they present a truly horrible aspect. They are so foul, and filthy, and loathsome that I should not dare to describe them more fully. None of us would like to come very near them; our flesh creeps at the very thought of them. Now, suppose that these' shoeless, ragged, filthy, diseased creatures should present themselves at the gates of Buckingham Palace on some great, occasion when all the princes of the blood and the peers of the realm, were: gathered there; do even the most democratic of you think that, the soldiers would be too squeamish if they were to tell them that they were unfit to enter such a place, and to mingle with such company? "Why, no," you say, "of course, they must at least be clean, or they can never enter the royal palace." Well, then, it must assuredly be so, in a still more emphatic sense, with regard to the palace of the King of kings. Would it be possible for any to, enter there defiled with sin, foul with fornication's, adulteries, thefts, murders, infidelities, blasphemies, profanities, and rebellions against God? It cannot be that the pure air of heaven should ever be breathed by them, for it is expressly declared that "there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie." All who are there are absolutely prefect; and you and I, if we would be with them, must, be renewed in heart, and converted unto God, and washed from every stain, and spot., and speck of sin. It is clearly impossible that the thrice-holy God should have, unrenewed, un-cleaned sinners immediately under his own eyes, in his own, courts. It is bad enough for him to have them, for a time, in this little planet, floating in the vast sea of space; but he could not endure to have them up there amid the splendors of eternal glory. That cannot, must not, and will not, be.

Once more, every man will feel that it is worth his while to endeavor to be clean before God if he wants a quiet conscience, for a truly quiet conscience is never possessed by any man until he has been washed in the precious blood of Jesus, and so made

“whiter than snow.” Does anyone ask, “Can that be done?” I answer in God’s own words: “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.” This great miracle of mercy can be wrought, and nobody’s conscience will ever be perfectly at peace till it is accomplished. There is a way of silencing conscience without that miracle being wrought, but it is like the way in which camel tyrants sometimes silenced the martyrs. “Hold your tongue,” the tyrant has said, “I will not listen to your heresy,” but the brave man has still gone on speaking, he would not be silenced; and then the tyrant has cut his tongue out. I think I have known men cut out the tongue of their conscience, so that, it could no longer speak. Perhaps some: here have done it, — torn it right out, by the roots, by going to the drink-shop, by frequenting evil company, by taking up infidel ideas, when they knew better. They knew that they could not, with a clear conscience, do what they wanted to do, so they resolved that they would tear out its tongue, so that it could no longer rebuke, them.

O foolish man, you could not have done a worse thing for yourself than that, for he who quiets his conscience after that fashion is like one of whom I have heard who, one night, was unable to sleep because a faithful dog kept, on howling under his window. He called out to it, and bade it lie, down, and went back to bed, and tried to sleep, but still the howling continued; and, at last, when the creature would not be quiet, he took his gun. and shot it in his anger. He, ought to have known that the dog wanted to tell him that, there were burglars who were trying to enter his house, and that the faithful animal was doing its best to preserve its master’s life. Affix the dog was dead, and the man had gone to sleep again, the burglars entered his bedroom., stole, everything of value that they could find, and ended by imbruing their hands in the blood of the foolish man who had killed the poor creature that warned him of his peril. The devil is trying to destroy your soul; and your conscience, like that, faithful else, gives, the alarm, but you cry to it, “Lie down!” It, does not lie down, however; and perhaps this very sermon is helping to, walde, it, up; but you are determined that it shall be quiet., and you will even kill it if you can. Well, if you do. you will then have sealed your own destiny by that very deed. The only proper way of quieting conscience is the method that a wise owner would have taken of quieting his dog. Supposing that man had gone downstairs, and patted his dog on the head. and praised it for being a good dog; suppose that he had loosed its. chain, and taken it round the, yard with him.

Suppose, too, that he had taken that gun, with which he so foolishly killed his dog, and when, at. last., he had discovered the villains who had come to rob him, he had set his dog at them, or even leveled his gun at them, that, would have been far wiser than’ killing his dog, and losing his own life. In such a fashion as that, go and loose your conscience, and let your sins be destroyed; otherwise, they will assuredly destroy you. The quieting of an awakened conscience can only be rightly done by getting rid of sin; and to get rid of sin there is but one way, of which I will speak before, I have finished my discourse.,

Thus much can the first point, — to be clean in the, sight of God is worth any and every effort.,

II. Now, secondly, All Efforts Of Our Own, Made In Our Own Way, Will Certainly Fail.

It is very curious what efforts people will make, to get rid of their sins. Some try to get clean, by ceremonies. Ah, Mr. Priest, is that good soap that you axe, bringing with your bowl of water? “Yes,” he replies, “the best Roman soap, or you can have a cake from Canterbury or Oxford if you would prefer it. How beautifully white your hands will look if you only use enough of this patent scap.” So you say; but if you had your eyes opened, you would see that, after all your washing, they are as black as night. The soap-suds get in your eyes, sir, and therefore you do, not, see the dirt that is still on the sinner’s hands. That is all that ever comes of mere ceremonies; they blind, but they do not cleanse.

Another thinks that he can obtain cleansing by religious observances. His form of washing with snow water is attendance at his usual place of worship. He goes there regularly,, he will never be away, if he can help it, when the proper time for service comes; and having done that,, he asks, “Will not that take away my sin?” No, sir, not a spot, nor even half a spot. Some have given away large sums of money with the hope of thereby cleansing themselves from sin; but all the gold in the world can never form a golden ointment, with which to cleanse iniquity. There are many who have tried to get cleansing by their moralities and their charities, but their efforts have all been in vain. Mr. Legality and Mr. Civility are said to be great hands at washing blackamoors white, but, I have very grave doubts as to whether the blackamoors are not blacker after the washing than they were before.

Men have had the strangest notions as to how they might be cleansed from sin. Read John Bunyan’s “Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners,” — -which is, as you know, a record of his own experience, and you will see some very curious ideas of his concerning the way in which he hoped to wash himself from sin; yet, his ideas are not any more curious than those of people who are living now. The other day, I read a letter from a young farm laborer, describing the way in which, at one time, he hoped to get saved. He said that, in the village where he lived, there were some young men who went to the Patagonian Mission, and there got what he called “massacred.” Of course, he, meant, to say that they were massacred; and he further wrote, “I thought; that, if the Patagonian Mission would have taken me, and, the natives would only have killed me, joyfully and gladly would I have gone, for I heard that they wore all saints who died in, that way, and I would willingly have gone if I could have got to heaven by that method.” Ay, and so.

would I, and so would most of us when we were under the burden of sin. We would not have minded being killed and eaten if we might, in, that way, have entered into eternal life., for a man who really feels the burden of sin is willing to try all sorts of extraordinary methods, of getting rid of it. Look at the methods adopted by the heathen in, order, as they hope to get rid of sin. Go to India, and look at the great car of Juggernaut, and see by what cruel means the people there hope, to get rid of sin.; and there are ninety other equally useless methods which the spiritual quacks are vainly puffing as unfailing ways of getting rid of sin.

But., on, the authority of the Word of God, we confidently declare that all human methods of seeking the cleansing of sin, which men may practice, must end in failure, even as Job's did when he said, "If I wash., myself with snow water, and make my hands never so clean; yet shalt, thou plunge me in the ditch, and mine own clothes shall abhor me." Yet, if God really means to save you, he will never let you be satisfied with any human plan of salvation; but he will, to use Job's expression, plunge you in the ditch, and make you feel even blacker than you did before,. How will he do, that?

Sometimes the Lord does this by bringing to a man's memory his old sins. "There," says the self-satisfied man, "I am getting on now; how clean I am after that last wash!" And just then he recollects some sin he committed as a boy, or some one foul deed which he can never wipe completely off the tablet, of his memory. "Oh!" he cries, "that dreadful past sin, of mine has not gone, as I vainly hoped that it had; it is there still." So is he again plunged in the ditch, and all his beautiful washing counts for nothing.

At another time., the Lord permits the man, to be greatly tempted. He gets up in the morning, and says to himself, "Now I really feel a great deal better than I have felt for a long time. I have firmly resolved to make a man of myself, and I know that my resolutions are much stronger than they used to be." So he starts out very confidently; but., presently, there comes to him something that is stronger than his resolutions, and over goes the boastful man, generally falling in the very thing in which he fancied himself to, be strongest. He, soon discovers that he was only powerful as long as he had not a powerful adversary to contend with. him. That is the way in which many a man has been plunged by God in the ditch.

Sometimes, God will do, it in another way, — by opening a boastful man's eyes to see the imperfection of his work. He thinks, "I did that piece of work well; I am sure I did; and I do not see how any Christian could do it better." When any man begins to talk like, that, the Lord often makes him sit, down, and closely examine that work of which he is so proud; and as he looks at, it, he sees that it is full of flaws. It is a beautiful vase, but just try to fill it with water. Ah, it leaks! The man looks at it, and says, "Well, I never thought it was as faulty as this. It seemed to me to be perfect; yet this beautiful vase, that appeared to be so fair, runs like a sieve." The man says to himself, "That good action of mine was done with a bad me five, so it. is like a leaky vessel. While I was doing it., I was as proud as Lucifer over it., so it leaks; and after I had done it, I went away, and boasted about it., so the vase kept on leaking." In, that way, the, man gets plunged into the ditch again, and he sees himself to be blacker than he was before he had thus washed his hands with snow water.

Very frequently, men have been plunged into the ditch by being made to see the spirituality of the law. A man says, "I have not broken the law; I have kept all the commandments from my youth up. I never killed anybody; no ease call say that I ever did." But where he finds it written, "Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer," he also, "Ah, then, I have been a murderer!" A man says, very boldly, "I have never committed adultery; who dares to say that I have?" But when he reads the words of Jesus, "I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart," then the man says, "I must, own that I am guilty, for I see that I have broken these commandments, by my thoughts and looks, although I knew that I had not broken them by my actions. I did not know that the law concerned itself so, closely with looks and thoughts as well as with acts and words." But, indeed, that is the very thing with which the law is concerned, and for which it condemns men; and when the, self-satisfied man learns this solemn truth, he says, "Then I am plunged in the ditch, and my own clothes abhor me, although I had washed myself quite clean."

Others are plunged in the ditch in this way, — they are made to realize the supreme holiness of God. It had been the habit of a certain man to say, "I am, as good as my neighbors, and better than most of them. Don't talk to me about Christian men and women; there's many a professing Christian not half as good as I a.m. Why, was I not kind to my neighbor when he was in distress? Did I not give a guinea to such-and-such a charity? Am I not ready at all times to, stand up for the, right,?" So he talks; but when he gets a view of God, then, like Job, he abhors himself, and repents in dust and ashes; and he says, "I thought, I could compare; myself with. man. but I cannot compare myself' with God; and as God, and not. man, is the standard of holiness, I am indeed plunged in the, ditch. Yet. I thought I had washed myself perfectly clean; that snow water and patent soap did seem to, take the dirt off beautifully; but, now I find that, in the sight of God, I am just as filthy as ever I can be." And when the Lord, the Holy Spirit., convinces a man of sin, the words of Job are none too strong: "Mine own clothes shall abhor me." You may sometimes have abhorred your clothes because they were so dirty that. you were ashamed to be seen in them.: but, you must be dirty indeed when your very clothes seem ashamed to hang upon you. This is what the convinced sinner feels, — that he is so foul that his very clothes seem to be ashamed of him, as if they would rather have been on anybody else's back than on, the back of such a filthy sinner as he is.

"Ah!" says someone, "you are exaggerating now." No, I am not exaggerating, at least as far as my own personal experience is concerned. I can well remember — though I did not, then know that John Bunyan had used somewhat similar expressions — I can well remember, when I was under deep conviction of sin, wishing that I had been a frog or a toad rather than have been a human being, because I felt, myself to be so, foul in the sight of God. I felt that I was such a great sinner that the bread I ate might justly choke me, and that the air I breathed might have righteously refused to give life to the lungs of such a sinner as I was. I felt, at that time, that, if God spared me, it was only because he was boundless in compassion; and if he cast me into the hottest hell, I could never murmur against the justice of his sentence, for I felt that I deserved any punishment that he might award me. When the Holy Spirit brings sinners to feel like this, it, is a proof that he is leading them on the way by which he brings them, to Christ. Oh, that the Lord would make every guilty sinner here long to, be clean in his sight, and also make each one feel what is certainly the truth, — that all the means, in a man's own power, of making himself clean will turn out to be dead failures; for, though he should take snow water, and wash himself never so clean, yet would he again be plunged in the ditch, and his own clothes would abhor him.

III. The 'last point on which I have to speak is the best. It is this, — There Is A Right Way Of Getting Clean In God's Sight.

First, it is an effective way. He that believeth on the Lord Jesus Christ, shall, be made clean. He shall be cleansed from all the foulness of the past; God will wipe it right out,. He shall be cleansed as to his heart and his nature. To him God repeats that ancient promise, "A. new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit, will I put within you." "How is this to be had?" By trusting to the divine method of cleansing the filthy, for the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth from all sin everyone who, believes in him. There are millions upon the, earth now whom the blood of Jesus Christ has completely cleansed, and there, are millions more, now hymning his praises in glory., who have had every spot of sin taken out of them by the application of his precious blood. O sinful souls, if you could ever have made, yourselves clean, Christ would not have needed to pour out his life's blood that you might. be washed in it! If the cleansing bath could have been filled with human tears, or could have, been filled by means of the incantations of a so-called priest, there would have, been no need for thy wounds, O Emmanuel, and no, need of thine indwelling. O regenerating and sanctifying Spirit! But because we could not. be cleansed by any other means, the water and the blood flowed freely from the pierced heart of Jesus, the, Divine Son of God; and now the ever-blessed Spirit waits to be gracious, and to change the heart, and renew the nature, and make us fit, to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.

This effective way of getting cleansed is also an immediate way. We have often sung, —

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

There is life at this moment for thee; "and it is true, for there is instant cleansing for anyone who looks at Jesus Christ. A sinner may have committed more sins than he could count in a million years; and yet, as soon as he gives one believing look at Jesus Christ, all those sins are gone for ever. You know that, when a bill is paid, the receipt is written at the bottom, and that puts an end to the whole debt. So, sinner, the name of Jesus at the bottom of the whole roll of your indebtedness to God puts an end to it. all. The man who thinks he has only a few sins may bring his little bill, and you who know that you have many sins may bring your big bill, but Christ's receipt avails for one as much as the other. Even if the roll of your guilt should be many miles long, it makes no difference to the efficacy of the blood of Jesus. If Th. list of your sins should be long enough to, go right round the world, and just one drop of the blood of Jesus should be put upon it., all that is written there would at once disappear, and be gone for ever, and the sinner would be saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation.

Further, this effective and immediate way of cleansing is also an attainable way of cleansing. To preach to sinners a salvation which they cannot obtain, would be to tantalize them. We do not so, but to every person in this Tabernacle to-night, and to everyone anywhere else whom this message may reach, we have to say this, "If thou wilt confess thy sin to God, and then put thy trust in Jesus Christ, his Son, thou shalt be saved, — -eaten thou, whosoever thou art, and whatsoever sin thou mayest have committed." Thy confession is to be made, not to thy fellow-creature, but, to him against whom thy sin was committed. Go to thy home, or seek some quiet spot where thou canst commune with thy God; tell him that thou hast, sinned, and ask him to have mercy upon thee. Tell him that Jesus died in the place of. sinners, plead the merit of his precious blood, and say, "Lord, I believe, that thou canst save me, and I trust in thee to save me, for Jesus' sake." If you will do this, you shall be forgiven, you shall be renewed in heart, you shall be made clean.

In closing my discourse, I remind you, as I have often do he before, that this cleansing is available now, at this very moment, I recollect hearing of a somewhat niggardly man, who once wanted to hire a horse and chaise to. go out for a drive, so he went to the man who let, such things, and asked the price. He said that the sum asked was too high, and went round to every other person in the little town, who had such things to let., but found that their prices were; higher still. So, at last, he went back to the first man, and said to him, "I will take your horse and chaise at. the price you mentioned." "No." said he, "you won't, for you have been round

to everybody else. to try to gee them at a lower price, and I shall not let you have mine now." I was not very much surprised to hear that he was told that. Now, some of you have been to everybody else for salvation except to the Lord Jesus Christ. You have been to Rome, and you have been to Oxford, and you have been to self, and I hardly know where you have not boon; yet, notwithstanding that, you may come to Christ even now. He will not refuse you even now. Going to Canterbury has not saved you, but going to Calvary can. You Bare found no help in the city on the seven hills, but you may find immediate help on the little hill outside Jerusalem's gate, the little mound called Calvary, whereon the Savior shed his precious blood for all who will put, their trust, in him.

I have boon talking to you in a very simple, homely way, for I have been aft-aid lest anybody should by any possibility not know what the gospel really is. I always think that, if my net has small meshes, the big fish can get in, and the little risk cannot get out; so I have put mall meshes to my net, and talked in a homely style with simple illustrations which all can understand. The Lord knows that I have done this out of love to your souls. I would bring you all to Jesus if I could; but I cannot do that. Oh, that the Spirit of God would do it now! Why do, you need so much urging to come to Christ? You are filthy with sin, and here is a free bath in which you may be washed spotlessly white. Come and bathe in Jesus' blood, and that will make you fairer than the lilies, and lovelier than all the glories of Solomon. If you do but wash in this fountain, you will scarcely know yourself when you come up out of it; and if you happen to meet your old self, the next day, you will say, "Ah, self! I don't want to be on speaking terms with you now. I never knew that you were so ugly, I never knew that you were so filthy, I never knew that you were so abominable, bill I had got, rid of you by being made a new creature in Christ Jesus."

The Lord bless you, and bring you to trust in Jesus Christ, his Son, and he shall have all the praise and glory for ever and for eyes:. Amen

Job 15:4

Restraining Prayer

NO. 2943

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"Thou ... restrainest prayer before God."-Job 15:4.

THIS is one of the charges brought by Eliphaz the Temanite against Job, "Yea, thou castest off fear, and restrainest prayer before God." I shall not use this sentence as an accusation against these who never pray, though there may be some in this here of prayer whose heads are unaccustomed to bow down, and whose knees are unaccustomed to kneel before the Lord their Maker. You have been fed by God's bounty, you owe all the breath in your nostrils to him, yet you have never done homage to his name. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib, but you know not, neither do you consider the Most High. The cattle on a thousand hills low forth their gratitude, and every sheep praiseth God in its bleatings; but these beings, worse than natural brute beasts, still continue to receive from the lavish hand of divine benevolence, but they return no thanks whatsoever to their Benefactor. Let such remember that that ground, which has long been rained upon, and ploughed, and sown, which yet bringeth forth no fruit, is nigh unto cursing, whose end is to be burned. Prayerless souls are Christless souls, Christless souls are graceless souls, and graceless souls shall soon be damned souls. See your peril, ye that neglect altogether the blessed privilege of prayer. You are in the bonds of iniquity, you are in the gall of bitterness. God deliver you, for his name's sake!

Nor do I intend to use this text in an address to those who are in the habit of formal prayer, though there are many such. Taught from their childhood to utter certain sacred words, they have carried through youth, and even up to manhood, the some practice. I will not discuss that question just now, whether the practice of teaching children a form of prayer is proper or not. I would not do it. Children should be instructed in the meaning of prayer, and their little minds should be taught to pray; but it should be rather the matter of prayer than the words of prayer that could be suggested; and I think they should be taught to use their own words, and to speak to God in such phrases and terms as their own childlike capacities, assisted by a mother's love, may be able to suggest. Full many there are who, from early education, grow up habituated to some form of words, which either stands in lieu of the heart's devotion, or cripples it free exercise. No doubt there may be true prayer linked with a form, and the soul of many a saint has gone up to heaven in some holy collect, or in the words of some beautiful liturgy; but, for all that, we are absolutely certain that tens of thousands use the men language without heart or soul, under the impression that they as" praying. I consider the form of prayer to be no more worthy of being called prayer than a coach may be called a horse; the horse will be better without the coach, travel much more rapidly, and find himself much more at ease; he may drag the coach, it is true, and still travel well. Without the heart of prayer, the form it no prayer; it will not stir or move, it is simply a vehicle that may have wheels that might move; but it has no inner

force or power within itself to propel it. Flatter not yourselves that your devotion has been acceptable to God, you that have been merely saluting the ears of the Most High with forms. They have been only mockeries, when your heart has been absent. What though a parliament of bishops should have come, posed the words you use, what though they should be absolutely faultless, ay, what if they should even be inspired, or though you have used them a thousand times, yet have you never prayed if you consider that the repetition of the form is prayer. No! there is more than the chatter of the tongue in genuine supplication; more than the repetition of words in truly drawing near to God. Take care lest, with the form of godliness, you neglect the power, and go down to the pit, having a lie in your right hand, but not the truth in your heart.

What I do intend, however, is to address this text to the true people of God, who understand the sacred art of prayer, and are prevalent therein; but who, to their own sorrow and shame, must confess that they have restrained prayer. If there be no other person in this Congregation to whom the preacher will speak personally, he feels shamefully conscious that he will have to speak very plainly to himself. We know that our prayers are heard; we are certain — it is not a question with us, — that there is an efficacy in the divine office of intercession; and yet (oh, how we should blush when we make the confession!) we must acknowledge that we do restrain prayer. Now, inasmuch as we speak to those who grieve and resent that they should so have done, we shall use but little sharpness; but we shall try to use much plainness of speech. Let us see how and in what respect we have restrained prayer.

I. Do you not think, dear friends, that we often restrain prayer In The Fewness Of The Occasions That We Set Apart For Supplication?

From hoary tradition and modern precedents, we have come to believe that the morning should be opened with the offering of prayer, and that the day should be shut in with the nightly sacrifice. We do ill if we neglect those two sessions of prayer. Do you not think that often, in the morning, we rise so near to the time of labor, when duty calls us to our daily avocation, that we hurry through the wonted exercises with unseemly haste, instead of diligently seeking the Lord, and earnestly calling upon his name? And even at night, when we are very weary and jaded, it is just possible that our prayer is uttered somewhere between sleeping and waking. Is not this restraining prayer? And throughout the three hundred and sixty-five days of the year, if we continue thus to pray, and this be all, how small an amount of two supplication will have gone up to heaven!

I trust there are none here present, who profess to be followers of Christ who do not also practice prayer in their families. We may have no positive commandment for it, but we believe that it is so much in accord with the genius and spirit of the gospel, and that it is so commended by the example of the saints, that the neglect thereof is a strange inconsistency. Now, how often this family worship is conducted in a slovenly manner! An inconvenient hour is fixed; and a knock at the door, a ring at the bell, the call of a customer, may hurry the believer from his knees to go and attend to his worldly concerns. Of course, many excuses might be offered, but the fact would still remain that, in this way, we often restrain prayer.

And then, when you come up to the house of God, — I hope you do not come up to this Tabernacle without prayer, — yet I fear we do not all pray as we should, even when in the place dedicated to God's worship. There should always be a devout prayer lifted up to heaven as soon as you enter the place where you would meet with God. What a preparation is often made to appear in the assembly! Some of you get here half an hour before the service commences; if there were no talking, if each one of you looked into the Bible, or if the time was spent in silent supplication, what a cloud of holy incense would go smoking up to heaven!

I think it would be comely for you and profitable for us if, as soon as the minister enters the pulpit, you engaged yourself to plead with God for him. For me, I may especially say it is desirable. I claim it at your hands above every or man. With this overwhelming congregation, and with the terrible reliability of so numerous a church, and with the word spoken here published within a few hours, and disseminated over the country, scattered throughout all Europe, nay, to the very ends of the earth, I may well as you to lift up your hearts in supplication that the words spoken may be those of truth and soberness, directed of the Holy Spirit, and made mighty through God, like arrows shot from his own bow, to find a target in the hearts that he means to bless.

And an going home, with what earnestness should we as the Master to let what we have heard dive in our hearts! We lose very much of the effects of our Sabbaths through not pleading with God on the Saturday night for a blessing upon the day of rest, and through not also pleading at the end of the Sunday, beseeching him to make that which we have heard abide in our memories, and appear in our actions. We have restrained prayer, I fear, in the fewness of the occasions. Indeed, brethren, every day of the week, and every part of the day, should be an occasion for prayer. Ejaculations such as these, "Oh, would that!" "Lord, save me!" "Help me!" "More light, Lord!" "Teach me!" "Guide me!" and a thousand such, should be constantly going up from our hearts to the throne of God. You may enjoy a refreshing solitude, if you please, in the midst of crowded Cheapside; or contrariwise, you may have your head in the whirl of a busy crowd when you have retired to your closet. It is not so much where we are as in what state our heart is. Let the regular seasons for devotion be constantly attended to. These things ought ye to have done; but let your heart be habitually in a state of prayer; ye must not leave this undone. Oh, that we prayed more, that we set apart more time for it! God Bishop Farrar had an idea in his head which he carried out. Being a man of some substance, and having some twenty-four persons in his

household, he divided the day, and there was always some person engaged either in holy song or else in devout supplication through the whole of the twenty-four hours; never was there a moment when the censor ceased to smoke, or the altar was without its sacrifice. Happy shall it be for us when, day without night, we shall circle the throne of God rejoicing; but, till then, let us emulate the ceaseless praise of seraphs before the throne, continually drawing near unto God, and making supplication and thanksgiving.

II. But, to proceed to a second remark, dear friends, I think it will to very clear, upon a little reflection, that we constantly restrain prayer By Not Having Our Hearts In A Proper State When We Come To Its Exercise.

We rush into prayer too often. We should think it necessary, if we were to address the Queen, that our petition should be prepared; but, often, we dash before the throne of God as though it were but some common house of call, without even having a thought in our minds of what we are going for. Now, just let me suggest some few things which I think should always be subjects of meditation before our season of prayer, and I think, if you confess that you have not thought of these things, you will also be obliged to acknowledge that you have restrained prayer.

We should, before prayer, meditate upon him to whom it is to be addressed. Let our thoughts be directed to the living and true God. Let, me remember that he is omnipotent, then I shall ask large things. Let me remember that he is very tender, and full of compassion, then I shall ask little things, and be minute in my supplication. Let me remember the greatness of his covenant, then I shall very boldly. Let me remember, also, that his faithfulness is like the great mountains, that his promises are sure to all the seed, then I shall ask very confidently, for I shall be persuaded that he will do as he has said. Let me fill my soul with the reflection of the greatness of his majesty, then I shall be struck with awe, with the equal greatness of his love, then I shall be filled with delight. We should pray better than we do if we meditated more, before prayer, upon the God whom we address in our supplications.

Then, let me meditate also upon the way through which my prayer is offered; let my soul behold the blood sprinkled on to mercyseat; before I venture to draw near to God, let me go to Gethsemane, and see the Savior as he prays. Let me stand in holy vision at the foot of Calvary, and see his body rent, that the veil which parted my soul from all access to God might be rent too, that I might come close to my Father, even to his feet. O dear friends, I am sure, if we thought about the way of access in prayer, we should be more mighty in it, and our neglect of so doing has led us to restrain prayer.

And yet, again, ought I not, before prayer, to be duly conscious of my many sins? Oh! when I hear men pray cold, careless prayers, surely they forget that they are sinners, or else, abjuring gaudy words and flowing periods, they would smite upon their breast with the cry, "God be merciful to me a sinner;" they would come to the point at once, with force and fervency. "I, black, unclean, defiled, condemned by the law, make my appeal unto thee, O God!" What prostration of spirit, what zeal, what fervor, what earnestness, and then, consequently, what prevalence would there be if we were duly sensible of our sin!

If we can add to this a little meditation upon what our needs are, how much better we should pray! We often fail in prayer because we come without an errand, not having thought of what our necessities are; but if we have reckoned up that we need pardon, justification, sanctification, preservation; that, besides the blessings of this life, we need that our decaying graces should be revived, that such-and-such a temptation should be removed, and that through such-and-such a trial we should be carried, and prove more than conquerors, then, coming with an errand, we should speed before the Most High. But we bring to the altars bowls that have no bottom; and if the treasure should be put in them, it would fall through. We do not know what we want, and therefore we ask not for what we really need; we affect to lay our necessities before the Lord, without having duly considered how great our necessities are. See thyself as an abject bankrupt, weak, sick, dying, and this will make thee plead. See thy necessities to be deep as the ocean, broad as the expanse of heaven, and this will make thee cry. There will be no restraining of prayer, beloved, when we have got a due sense of our soul's poverty; but because we think we are rich, and increased in goods, and we have need of nothing, therefore it is that we restrain prayer before God.

How well it would be for us if, before prayer, we would meditate upon the past with regard to all the mercies we have had during the day, what courage that would give us to ask for more! The deliverances we have experienced through our life, how boldly should we plead to be delivered yet again! He that hath been with me in six troubles will not forsake me in the seventh. Do but remember how thou didst pass through the fires, and waste not burnt, and thou shouldst be confident that the flame will not kindle upon thee now. Christian, remember how, when thou passedst through the rivers aforetime, God was with thee; and surely thou mayst plead with him to deliver thee from the flood that now threatens to inundate thee. Think of the past ages too, of what he did of old, where he brought his people out of Egypt, and of all the mighty deeds which he has done, — are they not written in the book of the wars of the Lord? Plead all these, and say unto him in thy supplications: — "O thou that art a God that heareth prayer, hear me now, and send me an answer of peace! I think, without needing to point that arrow, you can see which way I would shoot. Because we do not come to the throne of grace in a proper state of supplication, therefore it is that to often we restrain prayer before God

III. Now, thirdly, it is not to be denied, by a man who is conscious of his own error, that, In The Duty Of Prayer Itself We Are Too Often Straitened In Our Own Bowels, And So Restrain Prayer.

Prayer has been differently divided by different authors. We might roughly say that prayer consists, first, of invocation: "Our Father, which art in heaven." We begin by stating the title and our own apprehension of the glory and majesty of the Person whom we address. Do you not think, dear friends, that we fail here, and restrain prayer here? Oh! how we ought to sound forth his praises! I think, on the Sabbath, it is always the minister's special duty to bring out the titles of The Almighty One, such as "King of kings, and Lord of lords!" He is not to be addressed in common terms. How should we endeavor, as we search the Scripture through, to find those mighty phrases which the ancient saints were, wont to apply to Jehovah! And how should we make his temple ring with his glory, and make our closet full of that holy adoration with which prayer must always be linked! I think the rebuking angel might often say, "Thou thinkest that the Lord is such an one as thyself, and thou talkest not to him as to the God of the whole earth; but, as though he were a man, thou dost address him in slighting and unseemly terms." Let all our invocations come more deeply from our souls reverence to the Most High, and let us address him, not in high-sounding words of fleshly homage, but still in words which set forth our awe and our reverence while they express his majesty and the glory of his holiness.

From invocation we usually go to confession, and how often do we fail here! In your closet, are you in the habit of confessing your real sins to God? Do you not find, brethren, a tendency to acknowledge that sin which is common to all men, but not that which is certainly peculiar to you? We are all Sauls in our way, we want the best of the cattle and the sheep; those favourite sins, those Agag sins, it is not so easy to hew them in pieces before the Lord. The right eye sin, happy it that Christian who has learned to pluck it out by confession. The right hand sin, he is blessed and well taught who aims the axe at that sin, and cuts it from him. But no, we say that we have sinned, — we are willing to use the terms of any general confession that any church may publish; but to say, "Lord, thou knowest that I love the world, and the things of the world; I am covetous or to say, "Lord, thou knowest I was envious of So-and-so, because he shone brighter than I did at such and-such a public meeting, Lord, I was jealous of such-and-such a member of the church, because I evidently saw that he was preferred before me;" and for the husband also to confess before God that he has been overbearing, that he has spoken rashly to a child; for a wife to acknowledge that she has been wilful, that she has had a fault, — this would be letting out prayer; but the hiding of these things is restraining prayer, and we shall surely come under that charge of having restrained prayer unless we make our private confessions of sin very explicit, coming to the point.

I have thought, in teaching children in the Sabbath-school, we should not so much talk about sin in general as the sins in which children most commonly indulge, such as little thefts, naughty tempers, disobedience to parents; these are the things that children should confess. Men in the dawn of their manhood should confess those ripening evil imaginations, those lustful things that rise in the heart; while the man in business should ever make; this a point, to see most to the sins which attack business men. I have no doubt that I might be very easily led, in my confession, to look to all the offenses I may have committed against the laws of business, because I should not need to deal very hardly with myself there, for I do not have the temptations of these men; and I should not wonder if some of you merchants will find it very easy to examine ourselves according to a code that is proper to me, but not to you. Let the workman pray to God as a workman, and confess the sins common to his craft. Let the trader examine himself according to his standing, and let each man make his confession like the confessions of old, when every one confessed apart, — the mother apart and the daughter apart, the father apart and the son apart. Let each one thus make a clean breast of the matter, and I am sure there will not be so much need to say that we have restrained prayer before God.

As to the next part of prayer, which is petition, lamentably indeed do we all fail. We have not, because we ask not, or because we ask amiss. We are ready enough to ask for deliverance from trial, but how often we forget to ask that it may be sanctified to us! We are quite ready to say, "Give us this day our daily bread:" how often, however, do we fail to ask that he would give us the Bread which cometh down from heaven, and enable us blessedly to feed upon his flesh and his blood! Brethren, we come before God with such little desires, and the desires we get have so little fervency in them, and when we get the fervency, we so often fail to get the faith which grasps the promise, and believes that God will give, that, in all these points, when we come to the matter of spreading our wants before God, we restrain prayer.

Oh, for the Luthers that can shake the gates of heaven by supplication! Oh, for men that can lay hold upon the golden knocker of heaven's gate, and make it ring and ring again as if they meant it to be heard! Cold prayers court a denial. God hears by fire, and the God that answers by fire let him be God. But there must be prayer in Elijah's heart, first — fire in Elijah's heart first — before the fire will come down in answer to the prayer. Our fervency goeth up to heaven, and then God's grace, which gave us the fervency, cometh down, and giveth it the answer.

But you know, to, that all true prayer has in it thanksgiving. "Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, far ever and ever." What prayer is complete without the doxology? And here, too, we restrain prayer. We do not praise, and bless, and magnify the Lord as we should. If our hearts were more full of gratitude, our expressions would be far more noble and comprehensive when we speak forth his praise. I wish I could put this as plainly that every Christian might mourn on account of his sin, and mend his ways.

But, indeed, it is only mine to speak; it is my Master's to open your eyes, to let you see, and to set you upon the solemnly important duty of self-examination. In this respect, I am sure even the prayers that you and I have offered today may well cry out against us, and say, "Thou hast restrained prayer."

IV. Yet, again, I fear also we must all sin in acknowledging A Serious Fault With Regard To The After-Part Of Our Prayers. When prayer is done, do you not think we very much restrain it?

For, after prayer, we often go into the world immediately. That may be absolutely necessary; but we go there, and leave behind us what we ought to carry with us. When we have got into a good frame in prayer, we should consider that this is like the meat which the angel gave to Elijah that he might go on his forty days journey in its strength. Have we felt heavenly-minded? Yet, the moment we cross the threshold, and get into the family or business, where is the heavenly mind? Oh, to get real prayer, inwrought prayer, — not the surface prayer, as though it were a sort of sacred masquerading after all, — to have it inside, in the warp and woof of our being, till prayer becomes a part of ourselves; then, brethren, we have no restrained it. We get hot in our closets, — when I say awe", oh, how few can say so much as that! — but, still, we get hot in our closets, and go out into the world, into the draughts of its temptations, without wrapping ourselves about with promises and we catch well-nigh our death of cold. Oh, to carry that heat and fervor with us! You know that, as you carry, a bar of hot iron along, how soon it begins to return to its common ordinary appearance, and the heat is gone. How hot, then, we ought to make ourselves in prayer, that we may burn the longer; and how, all day long, we ought to keep thrusting the iron into the fire again, so that, when it ceases to glow, it may go into the hot embers once more, and the flame may glow upon it, and we may once again be brought into a vehement heat. But we are not careful enough to keep up the grace, and seek to nurture and to cherish the young child, which God seems to give in the morning into our hands that we may nurse it for him.

Old Master Dyer speaks of locking up his heart by prayer in the morning, and giving Christ the key. I am afraid we do the opposite, — we lock up our hearts in the morning, and give the devil the key, and think that he will be honest enough not to rob us. Ah! it is in bad hands when it is trusted with him; and he keeps filching all day long the precious things that were in the casket, until at night it is quite empty, and needs to be filled over again. Would God that we put the key in Christ's hands, by locking up to him all the day!

I think, too, that after prayer, we often fail in unbelief. We do not expect God to hear us. If God were to hear some of you, you would be more surprised than with the greatest novelty that could occur. We ask blessings, but do not think of having them. When you and I were children, and had a little piece of garden, we sowed some seed one day, and the next morning, before breakfast, we went to see if it was up; and the next day, seeing that no appearance of the green blade could be discovered, we began to move the mould to look after our seeds. Ah! we were children then. I wish we were children now, with regard to our prayers. We should go out, the next morning, to see if they had begun to sprout, and disturb the ground a bit to look after our prayers, for fear they should have miscarried. Do you believe God hears prayer?

I saw, the other day, in a newspaper, a little sketch concerning myself, in which the author, who is evidently very friendly, gives a much better description of me than I deserve; but he offers me one rather pointed rebuke. I was preaching at the time in a tent, and only part of the people were covered. It began to rain just, before prayer, and one petition was, "O Lord, be pleased to grant us favorable weather for this service, and command the clouds that they rain not upon this assembly!" Now he thought this very preposterous. To say the least, it was rash, if not blasphemous. He admits that it did not rain a drop after it. Still, of course, he did not infer that God heard and answered the prayer. If I had asked for a rain of grace, it would have been quite credible that God would send that; but when I ask him not to send a temporal rain, that is fanaticism. To think that God meddles with the clouds at the wish of a man, or that he may answer us in temporal things, is pronounced absurd. I bless God, however, that I fully believe the absurdity, preposterous as it may appear. I know that God hears prayer in temporal things. I know it by as clear a demonstration as ever any preposition in Euclid was solved. I know it by abundant facts and incidents which my own life has revealed. God does hear prayer. The majority of people do not think that he does. At least, if he does, they suppose that it is in some high, clerical, mysterious, unknown sense. As to ordinary things ever happening as the result of prayer, they account it a delusion. "The Bank of Faith!" How many have said it is a bank of nonsense; and yet there are many who have been able to say, "We could write as good a book as Huntington's 'Bank of Faith,' that would be no more believed than Huntington's Bank was, though it might be even more true."

We restrain prayer, I am sure, by not believing our God. We ask a favor, which, if granted, we should attribute to accident rather than ascribe it to grace, and we do not receive it; then the next time we come, of course we cannot pray, because unbelief has cut the sinews of prayer, and left us powerless before the throne.

You are a professor of religion. After you have been to a party of ungodly people, can you pray? You are a merchant, and profess to be a follower of Christ; when you engage in a hazardous speculation, and you know you ought not, can you pray? Or, when you have had a heavy loss in business, and repine against God, and will not say, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away;

blessed be the name of the Lord;" can you pray? Pity the man who can sin and pray, too. In a certain sense, Brooks was right when he said, "Praying will make you leave off sinning, or else sin will make you leave off praying." Of course, that is not meant in the absolute sense of the term; but as to certain sins, especially gross sins, — and some of the sins to which God's people are liable are gross sins, — I am certain they cannot come before their Father's face with the confidence they had before, after having been rolling in the mire, or wandering in By-path Meadow. Look at your own child; he meets you in the morning with a smiling face, so pleased; he asks what he likes of you, and you give it to him. Now he has been doing wrong, he knows he has; and you have frowned upon him, you have chastened him. How does he come now? He may come because he is a child, and with tears in his eyes because he is a penitent; but he cannot as with the power he once had. Look at a king's favourite; as long as he feels that he is in the king's favor, he will take up your suit, and plead for you. Ask him to-morrow whether he will do you a good turn, and he says, "No, I am out of favor; I don't feel as if I could speak now." A Christian is not out of covenant favor, but he may be experimentally under a cloud; he loses the light of God's countenance; and then he feels he cannot plead, his prayers become weak and feeble.

Take heed unto yourselves, and consider your ways. The path of declension is very abrupt in some parts. We may go on gradually declining in prayer till faith grows weak, and love cold, and patience is exhausted. We may go on for years, and maintain a consistent profession; but, all of a sudden, the road which had long been descending at a gradual incline may come to a precipice, and we may fall, and that when we little think of it; we may have ruined our reputation, blasted our comfort, destroyed our usefulness, and we may have to go to our graves with a sword in our bones because of sin. Stop while you may, believer; stop, and guard against the temptation. I charge you, by the trials you must meet with, by the temptations that surround you, by the corruptions that are within, by the assaults that come from hell, and by the trials that come from heaven, "Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation." To the members of this church I speak especially. What hath God wrought for us! When we were a few people, what intense agony of prayer we had! We have had prayermeetings in Park Street that have moved our souls. Every man seemed like a crusader besieging Jerusalem, each man determined to storm the Celestial City by the might of intercession; and the blessing came upon us, so that we had not room to receive it. The hallowed cloud rests o'er us still; the holy drops still fall. Will ye now cease from intercession? At the borders of the promised land, will ye turn back to the wilderness, when God is with us, and the standard of a King is in the midst of our armies? Will ye not fail in the day of trial? Who knoweth but ye have come to the kingdom for such a time as this? Who knoweth but that he will preserve in the land a small company of poor people who fear God intensely, hold the faith earnestly, and love God vehemently; that infidelity may be driven from the high places of the earth; that Naphtali again may be a people made triumphant in the high places of the field? God of heaven, grant this! Oh, let us restrain prayer no longer! You that have never prayed, may you be taught to pray! "God be merciful to me a sinner," uttered from your heart, with your eye upon the cross, will bring you a gracious answer, and you shall go on your way rejoicing, for —

"When God inclines the heart to pray,

He hath an ear to hear;

To him there's music in a groan,

And beauty in a tear."

Job 34:33 Conceit Rebuked

NO. 2834

A SERMON INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, JUNE 17TH, 1903,

DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON

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"Should it be according to thy mind?" — Job 34:33.

ELIHU thought that Job had spoken too boastfully, and that there was too much of self about him, and, therefore, he reproved him by asking this question, "Should it be according to thy mind?" It is a question which, in the original, has a great wealth of meaning in it; and as the language of the Book of Job is extremely ancient, and very sententious, it is not easy to get the fullness of Elihu's meaning. But it has been said that, upon the whole, our translation not only gives the meaning of his enquiry, but also more of the meaning than can be conveyed in any other words, so that we may be perfectly satisfied with it, and may pray God the Holy Spirit to apply it to us; and if we have grown to be high and mighty, and have begun to criticize the way of God in dealing with us, this question may come to us very sharply, "'Should it be according to thy mind?' Should everything he arranged just to suit thy whims and wishes? Should everything in the world be fashioned according to thy taste, and the whole globe revolve just to serve thy turn,

and please thy fancy? Should it be according to thy mind?"

There are four things I am going to say concerning our text; and first, I shall ask, Are there really any people in the world who think that everything should be according to their mind? Then, secondly, I shall enquire, what leads them to that notion? Thirdly, I shall try to show you what a mercy it is that they cannot have everything according to their mind; and then, fourthly, I shall urge you to keep this evil spirit in check, so that, henceforth, you will not wish that things should be according to your mind.

I. Our first question has a measure of astonishment about it.

Are There Really Any People In The World Who Would Have Everything According To Their Mind? Oh, yes, there are such people! I should not wonder if there are some of them here now; in fact, I question whether we have not, all of us, at times, drunk very deeply into this naughty, haughty spirit. If we have done so, may we be speedily delivered from it!

First, there are some people who would have God himself according to their mind. Now, as a matter of fact, all that I can know of God I must learn from God revealing himself to me. I cannot discover him by myself; he must unveil himself to me, and that he has done in Holy Scripture. All that he intends us to know about himself he has revealed in the written Word and in the Incarnate Word, his ever-blessed Son. But there are some people who get their idea of God out of themselves. You may have heard of the German philosopher who evolved the idea of a camel out of his own consciousness; at least, so he said. I do not think it was much like a camel when he had evolved it; but there are many persons who try to evolve the idea of God out of their own consciousness. It cannot be, they say, that certain statements in the Bible are true, because there is something or other, in their inner consciousness, that contradicts the Scriptural declarations. God, as they believe in him, is what they think he ought to be, not what he really is. And there are some, in these days, who have even gone so far as to reject the Old Testament altogether because its teaching concerning God does not meet the approval of their very marvellous, minds. Practically, these people are idolaters, for an idolater is one who makes a god unto himself. The true worshipper of God — the accepted worshipper — is one who worships God as he is, and as he reveals himself in his Word; but there are many persons, who make a god out of their own thoughts. The teachers of the modern school of theology work in a kind of god-factory. The people in some heathen lands make their gods out of mud, but these men make their gods out of their own thought, their imagination, their "intellect." That is what they call it, though I am not sure that it is that organ which is at work in this instance. But when a man makes a god of thought, he is just as much an idolater as if he had made a god of wood or of gold. The true God the God of Scripture thus revealed himself to his ancient people, "I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." This God is our God, "the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob," "the God of the whole earth shall he be called." Many a man refuses to accept this God as his; but I should like to ask him, "Should God be according to thy mind?" That would be a strange god indeed. Should he have no other attributes but such as thou would'st give to him? Should his character and conduct be only such as thou canst comprehend and justify? Must there be nothing in him that shall puzzle thee? Are there to be no divine depths that shall be beyond the reach of thy finite mind? Are there to be no heights beyond thy power to soar? That is what seems to be thy notion; and if there is anything that staggers thee a little, thou sayest, "I cannot believe it." If it were possible, thou wouldst eliminate from the character of God everything that is stern and terrible; though these attributes clearly appertain to the Most High as he has been pleased to reveal himself in Scripture. I beg you, dear friends, never to attempt to would the character of God with the fingers of your own fancy. Worship him just as he is, though thou canst not comprehend him. Believe in him as he reveals himself, and never imagine that thou couldst, by making any change in him, effect an improvement in him. By toning down his justice, thou thinkest that thou art increasing his love; and, by denying his righteous vengeance, thou dost imagine that thou art honoring his goodness; but, instead of doing so by the removal of these things which alarm and annoy thee, if thou couldst do so, — thou wouldst take away part of God's grandeur and strength which make his goodness and his mercy to shine so brightly as they now do. Leave God just as he is, remembering how he has said, "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." The infinite God must be past finding out by the creatures whom he hath made. I confess that it is one of my greatest joys to find myself completely baffled when I am trying to comprehend the character of God. Sometimes, when I have tried to preach upon the Deity of Christ, I have been fairly staggered under the burden of that stupendous truth, and I have felt the utter uselessness and poverty of human language to describe our great and terrible yet loving Lord; and I have been glad to have it so; for, verily, God is altogether above our comprehension, and none of us can speak of him as he deserves to be spoken of; but never let us try in any way to diminish his glorious perfections.

A more common way of offending against God, and setting up our self-will, is by quarreling with his providential dealings. If anyone here is doing so, let me ask, "Should it be according to thy mind?" You look, sometimes, upon the arrangements of providence on a great scale in reference to the nations of the earth, you see them at war with one another, and you note how slow is the progress of civil and religious liberty, and how few there are to rally in defense of right principles. Sometimes, you get greatly distressed about the general state of affairs, and you wish you could alter it; but the Lord looks down from his eternal throne, and he seems to say to you, "Should it be according to thy mind?" The world was wisely ordered by God before we were born, and it will be equally well

ordered by him after we are dead. When Alexander Peden, the Covenantor, was dying, he sent for one of his brethren, a fellow-minister of the Word — James Renwick; and he bade him stand out in the room, and turn his back to his departing friend. When he had done so, Peden said to him, “I have looked at thee, and I perceive that thou art only a little man, and thou hast but feeble shoulders and weak legs.” “Yes,” replied Renwick, “that is true, but wherefore hast thou made that observation?” “Because,” said Peden, “I perceive that thou canst not, after all, carry the whole world upon thy back; thou art not made for any such work as that,” and I may say of all of us who are here that we were not made to carry the world on our backs. Yet some of us attempt to play the part of Atlas, and not only try to carry the world, but seek to set the church right as well. We fancy that we can do that, poor worms that we are, but the Lord knows that we can do nothing of the kind. “He remembereth that we are dust,” though we are apt to forget it ourselves. Well, beloved, after all, “should it be according to thy mind?” Wilt thou, like Jonah, sit pining, and mourning, and complaining? Does not the eternal Ruler understand the politics of nations, and the best way of governing the world, infinitely better than thou dost? Do not thou attempt to drive the horses of the sun; thy puny hands are unfit for so tremendous a task as that. Leave all things with God; they are ordered well so long as they are ordered by him.

Probably, however, it is with the minor providence that we more often quarrel when we are in an ill state of heart. You think that you would like to be rich, yet you are poor. “Should it be according to thy mind?” You would have liked to be healthy and strong, but you are weak and sickly, or you have a suffering limb that troubles you, and you sometimes think, “Mine is a very hard loss; I wish it could be altered.” “Should it be according to thy mind?” Should the fashioning of thyself and thy circumstances have been left to thee? What thinkest thou? Possibly, you have recently sustained a great loss in business, and you cannot quite get over it. “Should it be according to thy mind?” Should providential circumstances have been arranged otherwise so as to suit thee? Should God have stopped the great machinery of the universe, and put it out of gear in order to prevent thee from losing a few pounds? “Should it be according to thy mind?”

Perhaps it is worse than that; a dear child has been taken away just when he had become most closely entwined around thy heart. Thou wouldst fain have kept him with thee; but was it right that he should go, or right that he should stay? Come now, there is a difference of opinion between thee and God, who is in the right? Should it be according to his mind, or according to thy mind? “Ah!” says someone else, “it is the mainstay of the home who has been taken away from us, the husband, the father of the family.” Well, though it is so, again I ask, concerning this bereavement, or any other trial that comes to you, “Should it be according to thy mind?” It should be sufficient for you to know that the Lord has permitted it, or actually performed it.

Should it be according to thy mind, or according to his mind? It is not easy, I know, to submit without murmuring to all that happens to us. I am probably touching very tender places in many who, at divers times and seasons, have really felt that God, in his providential dealings with them, had been unkind to them, or that, at least, he had been showing his kindness in a very strange way.

There are some, who carry this difference between them and God into another sphere, for they do not approve of the gospel as it is taught in the Bible. You know that the gospel, as revealed in the New Testament, is so simple that a child can understand it; and you may go and teach it to the poorest and the most illiterate, and many of them will leap at it, and grasp it at once. But there are others who think that it should be something which is much more difficult to understand, something which would need a higher order of intellect than the common people possess. Do you really think so, my dear sir? Should it be according to thy mind?” Wouldst thou shut out the poor and the needy, and the illiterate, from the privileges of the gospel, and keep them to thyself, and to a few others who have been highly educated? Surely not. O brethren, if it were possible for us to preach a gospel that we had made obscure, or which could only be comprehended by the elite of society, we should soon have cause sadly to deplore before God that we had lost that simple, blessed, plain way of instruction which the wayfaring man, though a fool, can understand, and in which he need not err.

Many try to bring down the doctrines of grace. They would get rid of election if they could. Anything like the specialty of the atonement of Christ they cannot bear. The sweet and blessed doctrine of effectual calling they abhor, and they would fain make a gospel of their own. But should they want to do so? Is it not your duty and mine, brother, rather to try to find out what the gospel really is than to seek to make it what we consider it ought to be? “Should it be according to thy mind?” We have known some people take a text of Scripture, and because it did not square with the system in which they were brought up, they tried to cut it down to make it fit in with their notions; but, sirs, is not the gospel grander than any of our comprehension of it? Are there not in it great truths that cannot be cut down to fit any system that the human mind can make? And ought we not to be thoroughly glad that it is so? For, surely, it is better that the gospel should be according to God’s mind than that it should be according to the mind of Toplady, or the mind of Wesley, or the mind of Calvin, or the mind of Arminius! The mind of God is greater than all the minds of men, so let all men leave the gospel just as God has delivered it unto us.

Sometimes, this difference comes up concerning the Church of Christ. Some people do not like God’s order of church-membership and church-government, they would like to see the world welcomed inside the church. They do not approve of the ordinances as they were instituted and observed by our Lord Jesus Christ. Believers’ baptism is peculiarly objectionable to them. Sometimes, they

disapprove of God's ministers; they pick holes in the most useful of them; this man ought to be so-and-so, and that other man ought to be something else. I can only ask again, with regard to the whole matter, "Should it be according to thy mind?" Are you to make the ministers, and to teach them what they are to preach? Are they your servants or God's servants, and are they to deliver their message in your way or in God's way? Let the question be honestly considered, and then, perhaps, much of the murmuring that is sometimes heard, and much of the discord that often arises among professing Christians, would be cleared away. For, surely, these things should not be according to our mind; but we should let God appoint, and equip, and send forth his own servants just as he pleases, and not as we please. Christ must decide everything concerning his own Church; he must be free to choose whom he likes to be members of it, and to fashion his Church after his own model.

II. Now, secondly, we are to enquire — What Leads People To Think That Everything Should Be According To Their Mind?

My answer is, first, that there is a great deal of self-importance in such a notion. There are some people who seem to fancy that they are the center of the whole universe. The times are always bad if they do not prosper. If the earth does not so revolve as to bring grist to their mill, then the times must be out of joint. But who are you, dear friend, that you should suppose that for you suns rise and set, that for you seasons change, and that God is to have respect to you, and to nobody else? "Should it be according to thy mind?" Then, if so, why not according to my mind also? And why not according to the mind of another brother? And why not according to the mind of yet another? But no, it is according to thy mind that thou wouldst have it. Ah, does not this show what overweening importance we attach to ourselves? We are mere ephemera, creeping insects upon the bay-leaf of existence, — here to-day, and gone to-morrow, yet we suppose that all things are to be ordered for our special benefit, and we quarrel with God if we suffer even a little inconvenience.

This notion also arises from self-conceit. We really seem to fancy that we could arrange things much better than they now are; we would not dare plainly to say so, much less would we be willing to write it; but we talk and feel as if it were really so. If we only had had the ordering of things, we are quite sure that they would not have happened as they have done; but then, depend upon it, they would have happened wrongly if they had been other than they have been. "Should it be according to thy mind?" No; unless thou art self-conceited enough to put thy folly in comparison with the wisdom of God, thou knowest that it should not be according to thy mind.

Then there is the spirit of murmuring that so easily comes upon us; we have known some who really became slaves to that evil spirit. They complained of everything, nothing was right in their eyes; it was not possible, it seemed, even for God himself to please them. "Should it be according to thy mind?" How would it be possible to please one who is so changeable, so whimsical, so fanciful, as thou art? Poor simpleton; surely thou canst not think that such a thing should be.

But, oftentimes, this quarrel arises from want of faith in God. If we did but believe in him, we should see that all things are ordered well. If we did but trust in God as a loving child trusts in its father, we should feel safe enough at all times, and we should not want to have anything different from what it is. Have you never heard of the woman, who was in a great storm at sea, and terribly frightened? She saw her husband, who was the captain of the ship, perfectly composed even while the vessel was tossed about by the mighty billows, but he could not calm her troubled heart. So he drew a sword from its scabbard, and held it close to her breast. As he did so, he said to her, "Do you not tremble, my wife?" "No," she replied, "I am not in the least afraid." "But this sword is close to you." "I am not afraid of that," said she, "because it is in my husband's hand." "Well," said he, "is it not even so with this storm? Is it not in the hand of God; and if it be in his hand, why should we be alarmed? So, if we have true faith in God, we shall accept whatever God sends us, and we shall not want to have things arranged according to our mind, but we shall quite agree with what his mind ordains.

So would it be, too, if you had more love to God, for love always agrees with that which its object delights in. So, dear friends, when we come to love God with a perfect heart, we are glad for God to have his way with us. If he wills that we should be sick, we would not wish to be otherwise. If he wills that we should be poor, we are willing to be poor, and if he wills that we should pass through a sea of trial, we would not wish to have a drop less than his blessed will appoints.

III. But now, thirdly, What A Mercy It Is That Things Are Not According To Our Mind? If they were, I wonder what sort of world we should live in.

If things were according to our mind, God's glory would be obscured. He knows what will best glorify him, and he has been pleased to so arrange his providential dealings with men that all shall glorify him to the highest possible degree. And, beloved, if we were to alter anything of this, if we could altar anything, it is evident that the glory of God would not be so well promoted; so, "should it be according to thy mind" that God should lose a measure of the glory that is due unto his name? God forbid!

If it were according to our mind, others could often have to suffer. At any rate, if things were arranged according to the mind of some people, they would grind the poor in the dust, and utterly crush them. If things were settled according to the mind of man, we should often be in a terrible plight. Did not David say to God, "Let us fall now into the hand of the Lord; for his mercies are great: and let me not fall into the hand of man"? When God is most grieved with his people, he never deals with them in so harsh a manner as the ungodly would deal with them if they had them in their power. Let us trust in the Lord, my brethren, and thank him, that he does not allow things to be according to the mind of man, for it would be terrible indeed for us then.

Here is another reflection. If things were according to our mind, we should have an awful responsibility resting upon us, because we should feel that, if anything went amiss, we should be the cause of it. If we had the choosing of our circumstances, and the details of all that happened to us, we should straightway feel that we should be called to account for everything by our fellow-men and by our own conscience. But now that it is according to the mind of God, you have no responsibility concerning it. If it be according to his will, it must be that which is right, and that which is best; so let us bless his name that all things are left at his disposal.

If things were according to our mind, I am afraid our temptations would be greatly increased; for many who are poor would speedily become rich, and they do not know what the temptation of riches might be, nor the grace they would need to resist it. And some, who are sick now, and are praising God upon their sick-beds, if they were well, might find much of their spirituality departing, and they might be thrown into a thousand troubles which they now escape in the quiet of their own room. Some of you are in a condition of life where you may not have many comforts; but, on the other hand, you are not subject to those trials which come to us who are prominent in public life. Be sure that you are in your right place if God put you there. "Should it be according to thy mind?" If so, thou wouldst have more temptations, and less grace; — more of the world, but less of thy Lord. So, thank him that it is not according to thy mind.

If it were according to our mind, we should seldom know our own mind. If a man could manage everything as he liked, he would not long like his own management. Unrenewed men, especially, are never satisfied. The way for a man to be happy is not to have his own will, but to sink his will in the will of God. Look at Solomon when he had his own way. As one time, he gave all his thoughts to grand buildings; and when he had built his palaces, he got quite tired, so he took to making gardens, and aqueducts, and fountains of water. When he had made them, he did not get much satisfaction out of them, so he got him instruments of music, and singing men and singing women, but he was soon tired of them. Then he took to study, but he said, "Of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh."

He had whatever he chose to have, yet it was all vanity and vexation of spirit to him; and he never had what filled his soul till he came to rest alone in his God, which, we trust, he did in his old age. I do not know a more horrible endowment that a man could have than for God to say to him, "Everything shall be as you like to have it." He would probably be the most miserable and most dissatisfied person under heaven. "Should it be according to thy mind?" Ah, then, sin would go uncorrected in thee, for thou wouldst never have a mind to use the rod! Then thy dross would remain, for thou wouldst never have a mind to be put into the furnace. Should all things go with thee according to thine own will, then thy flesh would get the mastery over thee, and be pampered and indulged; thou wouldst be settled on thy less, and not emptied from vessel to vessel, and thou wouldst bring upon thyself unutterable woe. O beloved, for this reason also it is a thousand mercies that things are not arranged according to the mind of even the best saint out of heaven except when his mind is brought into full subjection to the will of God.

"Should it be according to thy mind?" Then there would be universal strife. If this were the case, think what a terrible condition the Church of God, and the world, too, would soon be brought into, because, as I have already hinted, if it were according to your mind, why should it not be according to my mind, or according to the mind of every other body? Then, what chaos, what confusion there would be! How would the world be managed if you, and I, and fifty others, each one with a different mind from all the rest, must have it according to our minds? It would mean that the King of heaven must resign his throne, and give place to universal anarchy. It could not be; it would be impossible that such an arrangement should continue for an hour. We should have to go, in tears, before the Lord, and cry to him, "O Lord, come back, and reign over us, for we cannot get on without thee! Everything is going to destruction for want of an almighty will to manage it." Should it be according to thy mind? "No, Lord never let it be so except when thou hast made my mind to be filled with thy mind, and then it shall be well." "I always have my way," said a holy man. "How is that?" asked one who heard him, and the good man replied, "Because God's way is my way." "I always have my will," said another, and he gave a similar explanation, "because it is my will that God should have his will." When God's will gets to be your will, then it may be according to your mind; but not till then, thank God, not till then.

IV. So now, in the last place, dear friends, I am going to say to you, let us try, by the help of God's Holy Spirit, to Check That Spirit Which Leads Men To Think That All Things Should Be According To Their Mind.

First, because it is impracticable. As I have already shown you, it is quite impossible that all things should be according to the mind

of men so long as their mind is in its natural carnal state.

Again, it is unreasonable that it should be so. In a well-ordered house, whose will ought to be supreme? Should it not be the father's? Do you expect everything in your home to be ordered according to the will of your little boy? No, you know that you take a comprehensive view of all who are in the house, and all their concerns, and you are better able to judge than he is what is right. It would be very unreasonable for your child to say, "Everything is to be managed according to my will." If he were to talk like that, you would soon teach him better, I warrant you; and it is unreasonable to imagine that the Lord should make your will to be the rule of his dispensations. Do not cultivate a spirit which you cannot justify by any sensible and reasonable arguments.

In the next place, it is un-Christlike. "Should it be according to thy mind?" Why, if ever there was a Son of the great Father, according to whose mind things should be, it was our blessed Lord Jesus Christ; yet what did he say? "Not as I will, but as thou wilt." And as Jesus said, "Not as I will," is there one among us who shall dare to say, "Let it be as I will?" "Will you not join your Elder Brother in that sweet resignation of all desire to be the ruler, in order that the great Father, who filleth all things, may have his way? If you wish to have all things according to your mind, you are not like Christ; for in all things he did the Father's will, and suffered the Father's will, too, and rejoiced in it. Let us pray the Holy Spirit to help us to do the same.

Once more, if we desire to have our own mind, it is atheistic; for a god without a controlling mind is no god, and a god, whose will was not carried out, would be no god. If you were to have your way in all things, you would be taking the place of God; do you not tremble at the very thought of it? His throne ill beseems you. Would you —

**"Snatch from his hand the balance and the rod,
Rejudge his judgments, be the God of God"?**

If you are truly converted, you shudder at the bare mention of such a thing as that. Yet, dear sister, was not that the spirit in which you came into this house? Did you not feel, "The Lord has dealt very hardly with me; I can scarcely be reconciled to him"? Oh, drop that rebellious spirit! Thou art but a poor, helpless creature, and he is God over all. Let his supreme will sweetly rule thy heart at this hour; and labor to get rid of that waywardness and that revolting from the Most High. I knew one, who was in mourning many, many years for a child; and a good Quaker said to her, "Friend, hast thou not forgiven God yet?" There are some, to whom we might put the same question, and we have heard of some, who professed to be Christians, who, when they met with a very terrible reverse, said they never should understand it, — meaning really that they should never acquiesce in the divine will about that loss. It must not be so with us. Whenever a child falls out with his father, the best thing he can do is to fall in again; for a sullen child, who is angry with his father, will have to come round if he has a wise father. The father will say to him, "My dear boy, there is one of us who must alter before we can be perfectly agreed; and I cannot, for I know I am in the right. It is you who must alter, and come round to my way of thinking." And if you have fallen out with God by wilfulness and stubbornness, he cannot come round to you, but you will have to come back to him. So yield to him at once; bow down before him, your own Father in heaven, who loves you infinitely. Do you mean to say that you will keep up the quarrel with him? You began the dispute, and you know that you are in the wrong, and that he is right; so say, "It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth him good." Or if you cannot say as much as that, at least do what Aaron did in his great bereavement, "Aaron held his peace," or what David did when he said, "I was dumb, I opened not my mouth; because thou didst it." Oh, for that blessed silence which springs from acquiescence in the divine will!

I should like you to go further than that, however, and even to praise and bless the Lord for poverty, and pain, and bereavement. In heaven, among the sweetest notes of your song, will be those you sing over your trials here below. There was one who lost his eyesight, but he always praised God for that, for he said that he never saw till he was blind. I have heard of another, who had lost a leg, and he said that he never stood on the Rock of Ages till he had that leg amputated. We, who are branches of the true vine, will have more of Christ's sharp pruning-knife than of anything else; but let us praise and bless God for it, and henceforth labor, by the Spirit's power, to chase out of our soul the idea that things should be according to our mind. Get away to thy room, and confess thy wilfulness and pride, dear brother, if thou hast fallen into that sad state. Ask the Lord to make thy soul even as a weaned child, —

**"Pleased with all the Lord provides
Weaned from all the world besides."**

I know that I have been speaking to some who do not love the old. I wonder what it is that keeps them where they now are, — out of Christ. You want something to be altered, you say. Well, ask the Lord to alter you, for that is the alteration that is needed. The plan of salvation does not quite suit you. Well, there will never be another. Does not Jesus Christ please you? God will never lay another foundation for a sinner to build his hopes upon, so you had better be pleased with God's way, and build upon Christ Jesus, the sure foundation stone. We tell people, sometimes, that they had better not fall out with their living; and I can tell you, soul, that you had better not fall out with your salvation. God's way of saving you is the best conceivable way, and it is also the only way. He says that whosoever believeth on the Lord Jesus Christ shall not perish, but shall have everlasting life. May the Eternal Spirit bring you now to believe in the Lord Jesus; and if you do so believe, you shall be saved at once. But do not think that the plan of

salvation will be altered to please you. It will not be made according to your mind. There is the gospel have it or leave it, but after it you cannot. May the Lord grant that you may accept it, and rejoice in it, for his dear Son's sake! Amen.

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