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C. H. Spurgeon Sermons on Psalms Part 4

Psalm 50:21 Mistakes Concerning God

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“Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself.” — Psalm 50:21

GOD is here speaking to a bad man, who had been committing all sorts of evil deeds. Even while professing to declare God's statutes he had been casting God's words behind him, he had been the accomplice of thieves, and had been uttering falsehood and slander; yet, all the while, God did not interfere with him, but suffered him to run on in his wicked way, and the man gathered from that noninterference that God did not mind what he was doing, and that, in fact, he was such an one as himself. But if we begin to think, in a right manner, about God and ourselves, it will strike us at once that there must always have been an infinite disparity between the eternal God and the very noblest of his creatures. It is true that man was made in the image of God, and that, when he was in his perfect state, he could have learned more from what he then was as to what God might be than he could learn from all the rest of creation. His moral qualities, before sin had tainted his nature, rendered him akin to the Most High. Yet, even then, although man was in the image of God, it must have been a very tiny miniature of the Infinite One. Manhood is not a mirror broad enough or long enough to reflect the majesty of the Eternal. We are like him as a spark of fire is like the sun, or as a tiny raindrop may be like the sea, but the resemblance cannot go any farther than that, and perhaps not so far. We are but creatures of a day, and he is the Everlasting. Even if we had still remained as pure as the holy angels that adore the thrice-holy One, we must have felt ourselves to be less than nothing in his eyes. But now that man has fallen from his first estate, how unlike God he is! Man fallen is only the image of God so far as a miniature dashed to pieces could be said to be a likeness at all. There are touches of the divine about man even in his lost estate. Manhood is a palace, but it is like a palace after a siege, or a conflagration, or long decay, a ruin, like some ancient palace or temple that is now the haunt of dragons and owls, with just enough to show us what it once was, but much more to show us how changed it has become. And if man fallen is unlike God, man further debased by gross sin becomes, not merely unlike God, but the very opposite of God, so that you may sooner learn, from a man who has degraded himself by vice, what God is not than what God is; and it becomes a monstrous mistake, and far worse than a mistake, when such

a man as that looks at himself, and says, "God is like me." "Thou thoughtest" — and it was a most blasphemous thought — "thou thoughtest that, I was altogether such an one as thyself."

It is my sorrowful task to have to show you that this great sin is very common among three classes of persons. First, it is very common for the ungodly to fall into this error, secondly, returning sinners often make the same mistake; and, thirdly, even the children of God are not always free from this error.

I. First, then, It Is A Common Thing For The Ungodly To Fall Into This Error: "Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself."

God is very long-suffering to men; this is not the place of judgment. Sinners are not, as a general rule, punished here; their sentence is reserved until the day of judgment. Some people regard every accident as a judgment, but we do not agree with them at all, else should we have very frequently to condemn the innocent. Our Lord has very expressly told us that those upon whom the tower in Siloam fell were not greater sinners than the rest of those who dwelt in Jerusalem at that time, and that the Galileans whom Pilate slew, and whose blood he mingled with their sacrifices, were no worse than the other Galileans who went up to the temple, and came away unharmed. God does sometimes startle the world with his judgments, but not often. This is not the time of judgment; judgment is yet to come. The object of God in thus keeping his sword sheathed when, oftentimes, we are inclined to think that it might fairly be drawn, and used, is to lead those who are thus spared to repentance and salvation. "I will spare them yet a little while longer," says the long-suffering Lord, and so the trees that only cumber the ground are not hewn down; and the inference that wicked men draw is, not that God wishes them to repent, and turn to him, but that he is like themselves.

Wicked men imagine that God is like themselves in the following ways. First, in an insensibility to moral emotion. They do not care whether a thing is right or wrong; to have done right gives them no joy; to have done wrong gives their hardened hearts no pain. Some of them can curse and blaspheme; the words that make a child of God shudder with horror seem to be their usual language. In fact, you cannot now stand in our streets, where there are two or three working-men; without hearing such filthy language, much of it is utterly unmeaning, that you wonder how their companions can endure it; yet none of them seem to mind it; and they will commit deeds which it would be wrong for me to mention, but when they have committed them, they seem to forget all about them; and they suppose, because God does not strike them dead, or punish them immediately for their transgressions, that he is just as impervious to moral emotion as they are, — that he never grows angry at sin, and that he takes no delight whatsoever in excellence. How grossly do they mistake God in this supposition! He feels sin most sensitively. To him, it is "exceeding sinful." It touches the very apple of his eye: it grieves him at the heart; it vexes his Holy Spirit; yet the ungodly think not so.

They also are utterly careless about how they perform their own duties in relation to God, and they suppose that God is equally careless as to the discharge of the office which he sustains. If these ungodly men were made judges, they would neither fear God nor regard man; and they suppose that God, the Judge of all, has no respect for his own moral government, no care for the vindication of his law, that he lets things go just as they please, and will not interfere with men, but will let them act as they like. If they are servants, they are only eye servants, and are not careful to do that which is right. If they are masters, they seek only to do the best they can for themselves. The mass of mankind seldom look round to see the general bearings of a question; they only enquire, "How will this affect me?" Each man joins that party in politics, or that particular club, or goes in for the defense of that particular Act of Parliament which he regards as most likely to advance his own interests. As to the general equity of the whole concern, only a few eclectic spirits will be found who will consider that; and that God should ever be a God of equity, that he should look into the motives of men's actions, and especially that he should punish every sinful action, and word, and thought, and act with the utmost scrupulousness as a Judge, — all this ungodly men do not understand. They think that God is as loose and lax as they are, that he plays battledore and shuttlecock with moralities, and will let men do just as they like, never calling them to account. At least, they seem to think that, if there should be any account to be rendered to God at the last, it will be a very small matter, which will soon be over, and that there is for them no everlasting punishment no dreadful terrors of the wrath to come.

They think that God is altogether such an one as they are, and they themselves are indifferent to the condition of others. If they hear that a man has become a drunkard, it does not greatly concern them. If they hear that a man has been committing an act of uncleanness, very likely they make fun of it, but it never troubles them. If they were informed that hundreds had passed into hell within the last few days, they would regard it as no matter of concern to them; and they suppose that God is just as indifferent as they are. O sirs, why will ye so defame your Maker as to think it possible that he can be like yourselves? God is concerned about the character of the poorest man and woman living on the face of the earth. The honesty of that poor work-girl, or the chastity of that young man whose name will never be published before the world, is a matter of intense interest to him. The right that is done, or the wrong that is perpetrated, in every place beneath the sun, is a matter of the deepest concern to him; he knows it all, writes it all down in his book of remembrance, and feels glad or sad concerning it all. He is not a God of stone or of wood; he is a God — I know not how to speak of him with due honor, for he is altogether beyond the range of human imagination or description; but I know

that he is a God of wondrous sensitiveness with regard to sin. He cannot bear even to look upon iniquity, his whole being loathes it. We know that he is not indifferent to sin because the inspired psalmist tells us that "God is angry with the wicked every day. If he turn not, he will whet his sword; he hath bent his bow, and made is ready."

Ungodly men also seem to imagine that God, like themselves, is easily deceived by appearances. They go to church or to chapel, and they seem so think that, by doing so, they have wiped off all their old scores. What if they have broken God's law, in different ways, for many years? Have they not been to hear a sermon? Have they not even been to a prayer-meeting? Have they not repeated, night and morning, a prayer that their mother taught them when they were children? As for sin, they regard that as a small matter. When they are about to die, they can send for some good man to pray with them, and so everything can easily be made all right. That is their notion. Ah, but God is not deceived by outward appearances; he looks to the heart, and requires that there should be in the heart purity, a love to the right, and a hatred to the wrong, and these beings never are in the heart apart from the new birth which is always accompanied by faith in Jesus.

We have known some go to the length of thinking, or pretending to think, that God was an accomplice in their sins. Because he sat still, and did not at once interfere, and smite them, they have said, after the commission of a certain sinful action, that providence seemed to have put them in circumstances where it was necessary for them to do wrong. We have constantly heard men try to make excuse for their sins by reason of the peculiar position or the very remarkable circumstances in which they were placed. Even a murderer has pleaded his necessities as a reason why he felt that he might burgle, and steal, and even kill to supply his needs. Men will actually say that God has put them where they cannot help doing wrong, and that "fate" decreed it, and God ordained it, and so they seek to shift the blame from themselves. This is indeed thinking and saying that God is such an one as themselves, and it is the height of impudent blasphemy when a man reaches that point. O thou pure and holy God, who utterly abhorrest everything that is evil, how far has the sinner gone in sin when, instead of confessing his iniquity with shamefacedness and humiliation, he dares to speak as if thou wert as sinful as he is himself!

This condition of heart in which men think that God is like themselves, prevents their feeling any reverence for him. Hence, many of them render to him no kind of worship, set apart no day specially as his, and even ridicule the idea of there being any Lord's day in the week, and have a League of their own for the special purpose of desecrating the day that most of his people regard as his beyond all the other days of the week. This takes away from them all desire to pray to God. They say, "If we pray unto him what profit shall it be to us?" His inspired Word is to them no more than any other book; indeed, they even venture to criticize it with a severity which they do not show towards the works of their own poets or historians. They utterly reject both God and his salvation.

This mistaken notion concerning God also keeps sinners from repentance. As long as a man thinks that God is as bad as he himself is, he will never repent of his sin. It is often the holiness of God that breaks men down under a sense of their own guilt. This mistaken idea of the character of God also prevents the exercise of faith, for a man cannot have faith in one whose character he does not respect; and if I am wicked enough to drag God down to my level in my estimation of him, of course I cannot trust him, because I have enough sense left to enable me to feel that I could not trust him if he is like myself. If he is indeed such as my depraved imagination pictures him, faith in him becomes an absurdity, and well may the man who thinks this of God say that it is not possible for him to believe in him. Of course, he could not believe in such a god as he sets up in his own imagination; but, O thou ever-blessed Jehovah, when we know how holy, and pure, and good, and true, and perfect thou art, and see how opposite to thee we are in every respect, we do, like Job, abhor ourselves, and repent in dust and ashes, but we find it easy to put our trust in thee. When thy blessed Spirit has opened our eyes to see thee, how can we keep from trusting thee? When we know thee, we must rely upon thee. When we see the beauties of everlasting love gleaming in the face of the Lord Jesus Christ, every power of our being seems to say, "I must trust in him, and rest in him alone." May God bless these words to any ungodly ones who have been thinking that he is such an one as themselves!

II. Now, secondly, I am going to speak of the same sin from another point of view, and to show you that Returning Sinners Often Make The Same Mistake Concerning God.

Numbers of persons are kept from peace of mind through mistaken ideas of God. They think that he is like themselves, and so they do not receive the gospel. For instance, it is not the easiest thing in the world to forgive those who have trespassed against us. There are some people who find this duty to be one of the hardest that they have to perform. Consequently, when a man with such a disposition as that is conscious of having offended God, he thinks it is quite as hard for God to forgive him as it is for him to forgive his fellow-man; and judging God by himself, he says, "Surely he cannot forgive me." Looking at his innumerable provocations, thinking of the twenty, or perhaps forty, fifty, or sixty years or more in which he has hardened his heart against God, he says to himself, "I could not forgive a man who had held out so long against me, so how is it possible for God to forgive me?" Well might the Lord answer him out of the excellent glory, "Thou thinkest that I am such an one as thyself, but as high as the heavens are above the earth so high are my ways above your ways, and my thoughts above your thoughts." I have never found a

text which says, "Who is a man like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by transgression?" for that is not characteristic of man; but I do find this text, "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage?" Yes, the Lord loves to forgive, he delights to pardon. His justice has been fully vindicated by the death of his Son, the Substitute for sinners. That was necessary, for he could not tarnish his justice even for the sake of his mercy; but now that the righteous Judge sees that the foundations of his moral government will not be shaken by his forgiveness of repenting sinners, he can freely dispense the mercy in which he delights. His mercy endureth for ever, and whomever confesseth and forsaketh his sin shall find mercy. It is not difficult for God to forgive though it may be difficult for us to do so.

The awakened sinner often imagines that, since he would not bestow favors upon the undeserving, therefore God will not. He hears of the great blessings that are promised in the Word of God to those who believe in Jesus, and he says, "This news is too good to be true." Contrasting his own deservings with the fullness of this divine promise, he says, "How can I believe this promise? That one surpasses all credence. How can I accept that other one as true?" The best reply is that given by God in our text, "Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself." What if the gift seems so be too great for thee to receive? Is it also too great for God to give? What if it seems to be too lavish to be given by one man so another? It is not too lavish to be given by him who is King of kings, and Lord of lords. Like as a king giveth, -nay, like as a God giveth, doth he give unto thee. The greatness of the divine promises, instead of staggering our faith, ought to be the evidence of their truthfulness. Is it reasonable to suppose that God would promise to do only little things for those who trust him? Oh, judge not so! He "doeth great things past finding out; yea, and wonders without number." His mercies are high as heaven, and wide as the East is from the West.

The convinced sinner is also often troubled with the thought that God cannot mean what he says. "What!" he asks, "can I be pardoned in a moment, be justified in a moment, be saved from hell and made an heir of heaven all in a moment?" He thinks it cannot really be so, and he thinks so because he often says what he does not mean, and he therefore thinks that God speaks in the same style. But, sir, I pray you not to measure God's corn by your bushel. If you play with words, Jehovah never does. Hath he spoken, and will he not do as he hath said? Hath he promised, and shall it not come to pass?

The sinner next thinks that surely God cannot mean to give him all this mercy freely. He says to himself, "If a man had offended me, I should expect him to make some reparation before I forgave him. I should look for something at his hands; and is God's mercy to be given to the undeserving, and nothing to be asked of him before it is given? How can that be?" He thinks that God cannot mean it, and that the Scriptural declaration concerning the freeness of salvation cannot be meant to be taken literally as it stands. When this invitation sounds in a man's ears, "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," he says, "They are beautiful words, but they cannot apply to me, just as I am, without anything to recommend me." So he practically thinks that God talks as he does himself, without meaning what he says. But, verily it is not so, for every promise of God is true, and shall be fulfilled to the letter.

This poor convinced sinner next says, "But, surely, you do not mean to say that God will give me all this mercy now." Yes I do, for he saith, "I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succored thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." Yet, because this sinner has himself been dilly-dallying, and procrastinating, and postponing, he thinks that God will act in the same manner, and will say to him, "You must wait now; you have waited for your own pleasure, now you may wait for mine." But there is nothing in Scripture to warrant such an idea as this. It is only our trying to drag God down to the level of our narrowness and littleness that makes us think so. It is immediate salvation, instantaneous pardon that God delights to give. He asks, and it is done; he commands, and it stands fast. There stands the sinner in his rags, filthy from head to foot, degraded and debased; but the command comes from the excellent glory, "Take away his filthy garments from him," and they are gone in a moment. "Wash him from his defilement," and he is at once clean. "Array him in white garments," and he is so arrayed. "Set a fair mitre upon his brow," and the mitre is there. What the Lord does, requires no time. We need weeks, months, years, to do what we have so do; but when Christ had even to raise the dead, he did it in a moment. He simply said, "Lazarus, come forth," and there was Lazarus. He touched the bier on which the dead young man lay, and the young man at once sat up, and began to speak. He said to the little maiden, "Talitha cumi;" and she opened her eyes at once, and rose from her bed ready to eat the refreshment which the Savior commanded her parents to bring her. O poor sinners, I pray you do not doubt that the great mercy, the free mercy of Jesus Christ is to be given even now, if your hand is but stretched out to receive it!

I have known some get into their heads the notion that simply to trust in Christ cannot be the right thing for them to do. They say, "Surely, there is a great deal more to do besides that." Yes, there is much more to do after you have believed, but the gospel command says, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." One says, "I will go home and pray," another says, "I will read the Scriptures;" and there are some who, in their despair of finding peace, resolve to do nothing at all. Some time ago, a young man, who had been greatly concerned about his soul, came to the conclusion that he must be lost, and he determined not to read the Bible, nor to attend a place of worship, for twelve months. But this very resolve made him still more wretched; and, one day, a Christian woman, to whom he told his feelings, was much grieved at his decision, and she said to him, "What a pity it is that you cannot take Jesus Christ!" As he walked home, that remark stuck in his mind, "What a pity it is that you cannot take Jesus Christ!" Is that all we have to do, -to take Jesus Christ? Yes, that is all. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved,"

comprehends the whole case; and where faith is exercised by us, we are saved. But we think that there must be something behind the promise because we ourselves often keep something behind in our promises, so again the test is true, "Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself," but it is not so. If you come just as you are, with all your sin and hardness of heart and just rest your guilty soul upon the person and the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, resolved that, if you perish, you will perish trusting alone in him, your heavenly Father will give you a kiss of acceptance, lift the burden from your weary shoulders, and send you home in peace. "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth," is no lie, no exaggeration, no straining of the truth; put it to the test, sinner. God help you so so do, and he shall have all the praise.

III. Before I close, I must have a few words with you who love the Lord, for There Are Children Of God Who Make This Same Mistake.

They begin thinking that God is such an one as themselves. Now I am going to find some of you out; I know where you are for I have been that way myself, I am sorry to say.

Sometimes, we are afraid that God will overlook us, because we are so insignificant. If we walk through a wood, possibly we say, "What a lonely place this is; there is nobody here!" Yet, just at our feet perhaps, there are fifty thousand little ants. "Oh, but we do not reckon them!" Why not? They are living creatures, and God reckons them, and he takes care to supply their needs as well as the needs of the people in that great city over there. And those birds in the trees, ay, and the tiny insects that hide away under the bark, that those woodpeckers are seeking after, or those little midges that dance up and down in the air around you, God takes notice of them all, and provides for them all, even as he provides for you. You think, because you the insects, that God also ignores them, but he does not. If the Queen were to come down Newington Butts, it would soon be reported in all the papers; but if there is a poor beggar going past our gates just now, with no shoes or stockings on, that will not be noted in "The Times" to-morrow morning; but God takes notice of beggars as well as of queens. You do not know that poor man who is just going into the casual ward at the workhouse; he is of no consequence to you, is he? But he is of consequence to God, for there is not a human being who is beneath God's notice, nor yet an animal nor an insect. If you take the tiniest insect in the world, and put it under a microscope, and examine it carefully, you will see that there are upon it marks of divine skill and forethought, and if you are able to learn all about that little creature which will only live a single day, you will find that the arrangements concerning it are truly wonderful. Yes, God thinks of little things; so you little one, believe that God thinks of you; and whenever you harbour the notion that you are too poor and too obscure for God to care about you, say to yourself, "Ah, that is because I am thinking that God is like myself. I tread on a beetle, and think nothing of it; yet, though I might be far more insignificant in comparison with the great God than a beetle can be in comparison with me, God will not crush-me. No, he loves me, and he is continually thinking of me."

We also are apt to grow weary of the sad and the sorrowful. "Oh!" says one, "I cannot bear to talk to Mr. So-and-so; he has such a gloomy countenance and he speaks in such dolorous tones." Another says, "Really, my poor sister quite wears me out. I used to nurse her with a great deal more pleasure than I do now, for I think she has less patience than she used to have." We get weary of those who cannot cheer us, those whose lives are full of sadness and then we think that God gets as weary of us, but he never does. No, O sad ones; the Lord comforteth the mourners, and cheereth those that are cast down. You especially who are sad on account of sin may rest assured that your sadness and dependency will never weary your God; your friends may get tired of you but your God never will.

We also sometimes forget our promises. In the multiplicity of things that some of us have to do, it is possible that we occasionally fail to keep our promise, and we are very grieved when, quite unintentionally, it so happens. But God never forgets any one of his promises, so let no one of us ever say, "My God has forgotten me." It cannot be; there never was such a thing as a slip of memory with God. Every promise of his will be kept to the second when it comes due.

We also sometimes find ourselves loth to give to those who ask of us. After we have given to several, we feel that we really cannot give to everybody who asks us for help; but it is never so with God. If we have gone to him a hundred times, let us be all the bolder to go to him again; and if we know that he has been helping a thousand other poor saints like ourselves, or poor sinners either, let us go to him again, and go right boldly, for his bounty of mercy is not exhausted, nor his store of grace diminished.

We know, too, dear friends, that we are often unwise. What man is there on the face of the earth who does not make mistakes? The pope, who is called infallible, makes more mistakes than anyone else ever does. We all make mistakes; and, therefore, we imagine that God does the same. When we get into a little trouble, we begin to suspect that there is some mistake in the arrangements of divine providence. We do not say so much as that; we should be ashamed to say it, especially if anybody heard it, but that is what we think. It seems to us that God has brought us into a difficulty out of which it will not be possible for him to extricate us. We do not say as much as that, except in our hearts; but, beloved, when we even think anything like that, we are really imagining that God is such an one as ourselves.

We know also that we are sometimes harsh in our judgments, and that we expect more of people than we ought to, and do not make allowances for their infirmities; and we fancy that God is like we are. But to his dear children he is ever generous and kind, even as Jesus made allowance for his sleeping disciples when he said, "The spirit truly is willing, but the flesh is weak." I think that we sometimes represent God as being even worse than we ourselves are. When I was ill, some little time ago, I found that I could not keep my thoughts fixed upon any subject as I wanted to do; when I tried to meditate upon holy themes, my mind rambled because the pain I was suffering quite distracted me. I said to a friend who came to visit me that I wished I could concentrate my thoughts, and that I felt as a Christian, I ought to do so. He said, "Well now, if your boy was as ill as you are, and he, said to you, 'Father, I cannot think as much about you as I would like to do, my pain is so great,' you would say, 'My dear son, I do not expect you to do anything of the kind;' you would sit down by his bedside, and try to comfort him; and you would tell him that, while his poor body was so racked with pain, you would not be so unreasonable as to expect him to act in any other way." I saw at once that my friend was right, and then he said to me, "Do you think that you are kinder to your son than God is to us?" If our opinion of God is that he is harsher and sterner to us than we are to our children, it is a very erroneous notion. Some Christian people seem to be afraid to rejoice, yet we love to see our children full of joy, so we may be sure that our heavenly Father loves so see his children happy.

Further, we know that we ourselves are weak, and therefore we dream that God also is weak. When the furnace of affliction is very hot, and we feel that we cannot endure its heat, we foolishly think that God cannot uphold us under the fiery trial. If our labor is very hard, and we feel that we cannot accomplish it, we are very unwise to dream that God cannot give us all the strength we need for our task. How can we be so foolish as to estimate the omnipotence of Jehovah by our weakness, for I will not venture to call it strength?

We also know that we constantly change. We are as fickle as the weather, fair to-day, and foul to-morrow; and therefore we fancy that God changes as often as we do. Some talk about his loving his children to-day and hating them to-morrow, but that is not true. Listen to these texts, "I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed." "God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent." "Every good gift and every perfect gift, is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of burning." Judge not the Lord, then by your fickleness as if he were such an one as yourselves.

The mischief of this mistake on the part of Christians is that we narrow the possibility of our attainments. We think that we cannot overcome sin, we think that we cannot walk in the light as God is in the light, we think that we cannot enjoy abiding fellowship with our Lord, we think that we cannot be holy; and all this is because we only think of what we can do, not of what God can do for us and in us. Now, as far as the poles are asunder should be our estimate of ourselves and our estimate of God. Christ not only says to us, "Without me ye can do nothing," but also, "All things are possible to him that believeth," to him who thus links himself with the omnipotence of God.

And I believe, brethren, by thinking that God is like ourselves, we also limit the probabilities of success in his work. If we could have the management of the affairs of the kingdom of God upon the earth, and the power to convert a hundred thousand sinners to-morrow should be put into our hands, we should be wise if we asked God to take back that power, for I am quite certain that God will save a hundred thousand sinners in a day when things are ripe for it, -ay, and he will save a nation in a day when the right time comes. But if there were to be a thousand persons saved under one sermon, or three thousand, as on the day of Pentecost, in any place in London, there is not a church on the face of the earth that would believe in the reality of the work, and the result would be that those who were convened would not be added to the church as the three thousand were on the day of Pentecost. Even professing Christians would say, "This is wildfire that will do more harm than good; we do not believe in it." If they were told that one person, or perhaps two, had heaven saved, they might believe that; -possibly not the two, though they might half believe in the one; but if there were three thousand who professed to be saved, they would say, "Oh, that could not be!" the reason for this unbelief is that members and ministers alike have the mistaken notion that God is such an one as we are. Many ministers feel very happy if they have a dozen conversions in a year, and some are quite content if there is one conversion in a dozen years. A brother-minister said to me, the other day, "We have had a baptism at our chapel this year, bless the Lord." "Oh!" I said, "how many have you baptized?" "There were two," he replied, "and one of them was my own son." I said, "Yes, bless the Lord for those two, but what are we to say about those in your congregation who are not converted to God?" When we judge the Lord by what we ourselves are, our belief is like that which prevented the Master from doing many mighty works in his own city of Nazareth. May the Lord be pleased to give us a far higher conception of what he really is, for that will enable us to do much more for him. It is because of this mistaken notion of ours concerning God that we limit our desires, and slacken our endeavors, and are satisfied to have everything on the pigmy scale when it might be gigantic. We are content with pence when we might have pounds of grace. We are satisfied with the very imperfect cultivation of a tiny plot of land when the broad acres of God's bounty lie before us. We win an inch or two of the enemy's territory, and we throw up our caps, and cry, "What mighty conquerors we are!" while whole provinces lie unconquered, and whole nations remain ignorant of the gospel. Then we keep on straitening ourselves more and more, contracting our conceptions and our ideas, the older we grow, till the zealous youth gets to be a "prudent" old men, whose "prudence" consists in chilling

everybody he meets, carrying wet blankets to cover up everyone who has a little life in him, snuffing everybody's candle, and generally managing to snuff all the candles out. We must, most of us, be conscious of this chilling process; I seem to myself to be continually feeling it. I think I am not altogether destitute of earnestness even now, but I wish I could keep at blood heat always, for blood heat is the heat of health, the heat of true life. May God keep us up to that mark, and it will help to keep us so if we have true notions of what God can do, and will do, and for ever give up thinking that he is such an one as ourselves. May God's blessing rest upon you, for Jesus' sake! Amen.

Psalm 51:6 God's Desire for Us, and His Work in Us

GOD'S DESIRE FOR US, AND HIS WORK IN US.

NO. 3486

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“Behold thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom.” — Psalm 51:6.

WHAT a contrast is here, and I think intended to be here! In the verse before this one, David describes human nature as it is in its original. He was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did his mother conceive him. So that throughout his entire nature from the very first there was iniquity and sin. But God desireth the very opposite, so that he felt that he was the very opposite of what God would have him to be. God desireth truth, and his heart had been false to God. God would have him to be wise, and he was from his very birth as foolish as a wild ass's colt. Observe, then, that wide as the Poles are asunder is human nature, and what God would have human nature to be. It would be right to tell you that the older translators and commentators have been accustomed to read this verse somewhat differently from our own version, though I believe our own version to be correct. Calvin and others that preceded him thought that David here said, “Thou desirest truth in the inward part, and in the hidden part thou hast made me to know wisdom,” putting it in the past tense; and they thought that David said this to show how very inexcusable was his sin — “I am not an untaught one — an uninstructed person. I have not been left without knowledge of thy law, of what sin is, and of what holiness is. Thou hast made me to know wisdom. I have felt thy power within my heart. I have been taught in my most secret places to know thee, and yet for all that, I have revolted and gone aside, and committed this foul sin of adultery and murder.” If so — if that were the correct translation (and there is no reason why that should not be correct, as well as the one we have here), it teaches us that it is a great aggravation to sin when sin is committed by a Christian. Never say that because a man is a believer his sin is less. Nay, but if it be the same sin as in another? it is far worse in him than it would be in another. A stranger may say of me what my child must not say without being guilty of great ingratitude and much unkindness. It was thou, a man, my friend, mine acquaintance — this made the treachery of Judas to become so cutting to the Savior. The nearer a man is to God's heart, the more detestable is the sin in him. You cannot bear to see an evil in one you love. If one you love have the toothache, you think more of the pain of that beloved one than of some far greater sickness of one in whom you take no concern. So sin is a disease which, when God sees in his own beloved child, he perceives it with sorrow, and he is quick to remove it, and to heal it. Never trifle with sin because thou art a Christian. Rather be the more careful to watch against it.

“Quick as the apple of an eye,

O God, my conscience make;

Awake my soul when sin is nigh,

And keep it still awake.”

But now we will go to the text as it stands in our own most admirable and never equalled, and I think never to be excelled, version of Holy Scripture. We have here two things; first, we have God's desire; and secondly, we have God's work. “Thou desirest truth in the inward parts”; then next, “In the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom.” Let us conquer first: —

I. The Lord's Desire For Us.

That which is desirable to God must be exceedingly and essentially desirable. All wise men will desire that which the infinitely wise God may desire. We are quite certain that there must be something exceedingly precious in that which God thinks fit to be an object for his infinite desires.

Now observe what this desire is. And the first remark shall be, it has to do with inward things. “Thou desirest truth in the inward

parts.” God had made man not only outward, but man inward not merely these outward members, but the sentient, thoughtful, commanding spirit, that rules these members of flesh and blood. God looks, therefore, in all that is done by us that we should do it with our spiritual nature, and he estimates all our actions not merely by what they are apparently, but by what they spring from; he measures them by the native, by the spirit, by the ruling desire in them. Having made our inward parts, he keeps his eye fixed upon the complicated spiritual machinery within us, understanding it all, knowing when any cog of any wheel is out of order, when any of the machinery is disarranged. Nothing is hid from his presence and knowledge. He searcheth the hearts, and trieth the reins of the children of men; and his desire, as here expressed, is not so much anything with regard to the outward act or the tongue, or to any ceremonial performances whatsoever, but, first of all, it hath to do with the inward parts. Dear hearer, learn from this that there is nothing in religion that is so desirable as the inward part of it. Thy first and chief business with thy God has to do with thy innermost self — thy real self. Thou shalt come to keep thy outward rightly enough if thou wilt begin first to cleanse the inside of the platter. The outside of the house shall be whitewashed and cleansed afterward; but thy first work must be to look into the secret chamber of thy spirit, and discover what is there. True religion does not begin without, and then go within, but it begins within, and then it works without. The candle is not outside the lantern, but it is first inside the lantern, and then it sheds light all around. Let thine inward part be, then, the first part of thy care. The mass of even religious mankind think not so. Do they not go to their place of worship on a Sunday? Do they not read their Bibles occasionally? Have they not a form of prayer at the very tip of their tongue? Have not they given up swearing? Are they not strictly sober? Are they not honest? There are all these outward and external things, and a few ceremonies to complete them, such as baptism and the Eucharist, and many more things sometimes are added; and the man thinks himself perfectly complete, whereas he hath not even begun yet, for all this is but a thing of nought unless the heart has first of all been purged and made right inside by God. Dear hearer, whatever thou shall omit, see to it that thou look to thy heart. “My son, give me thy heart”: see to it that thou love thy God with heart and soul, and that thy religion is a thing that has to do with thy vital, thine inward, thy very essential self; for God’s desire is here, and let thy anxiety be in the same direction.

Next, I observe in the text that God careth for truth — he looks for truth — by which, I think, we are to understand here, truth as opposed to hypocrisy. Hypocrisy in the heart is a mortal disease. If thy religion be only a pretense, if thy heart be black, though thy face be bright; if thou hast filthiness in the well, though in the bucket there may be a little clean water, thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bonds of iniquity. The pure, truthful, holy God abhors hypocrisy. There can hardly be conceived anything more detestable in the sight of the Most High than to mock him with words of seeming while our hearts and the reality of our nature are at enmity to him. God desireth truth in opposition to mere semblance. There are some who have no intention to be hypocrites, but still all the grace they have is but sham grace; all the knowledge of God they have is but theoretical; all the experience they have ever had is fanciful; all the communion with God they have ever had is mere delusion. The whole thing is but a bubble. Fair are its colors, but it will soon vanish; it is not stable and substantial; it is a mere outward shadow, but there is no substance in it. God desireth “truth in the inward parts,” real repentance, real faith, vital godliness, real communion with God. Everything there must be what it professes to be, for God desireth truth — that is, substance — in the inward parts.

Does not this yet mean a third thing, that God desireth truth as opposed to falsehood? Some persons very sincerely hold falsehood in their inward hearts. I do not doubt but what there is many a man who believes a false religion, and is as sincere in it as any man is in a true one, but his being sincere in believing a lie doth not transform the lie into a truth; and if he followeth a wrong way, that wrong way will lead to a wrong end, however sincerely it may be followed. God desireth that there may be truth in thy heart, not error. Even if it be thy heart that holds the error, that shall make no difference. He desires truth to be there — truth about himself, truth about his Son, truth about his Spirit, truth about thyself, thy sin, the way of thy salvation — truth about what he has revealed. He desireth truth — “truth in the inward parts.”

Now put the two things together, God desireth truth and he desireth truth in the inward parts. Now does not this mean that he desires truth to affect all the powers of our mind, and all the powers of our mind to be conformable to divine truth? This is what I mean — we have knowledge we know — God would have us truly know. There is much knowledge that is not true knowledge. A man knows Christ, it may be, by what he has heard, what he has seen of others, but he does not know Christ truly in his own soul. Beware thou of the letter only. Beware thou of mere theoretical knowledge! God desireth that what thou knowest about his Son should be true, real knowledge. There is a great danger when we live with Christian people to pick up a second-hand experience. They have their sorrows: we hear them speak of them. We, perhaps, think we know something about those sorrows: we talk as they do. We hear of their joy, and oh! it is so easy to dream that we have enjoyed the same. We use their language. This is how cant comes into the world; and it has not quite gone yet: it is all too common. But a borrowed experience, and the language that comes of it — these are very loathsome to true minds, and very loathsome to God. God would not have thy brains stuffed with mere words, nor would he have thee seduce thyself into confidence with mere doctrines. He would have thee know in thy heart the guilt of sin by bitterly lamenting it — know in thy heart the power of the precious blood by receiving the cleansing which it brings. Knowing the sorrows and the joys of being a Christian by being a Christian thyself. He desires truth in the inward parts, wherein occur knowledge is stored up.

So would the Lord have truth in our desires. We desire to be saved, all of us, I suppose: but oh! how many of these desires have no

truth in them! "Yes," saith a man. "I would fain be saved, but then he will not give up his sin. He would fain be saved, and he commences to pray, but his goodness soon vanishes. Prayer is irksome to him: he has not learnt prayer. He desires, he says, to be taught of God, but he does not give a willing ear. He desires to be resigned to God's will, he says, and he continues to kick and rebel against it. It is vain to say, "My desire is this" and "that," when my course of action is clean contrary to it. I certainly do not desire to go North if I voluntarily steer towards the South. God would have our desires to be all true. Oh! delude not yourselves with the thought that you have holy desires unless you truly have them. Do not think your desires are true towards God unless they are really so: he desireth truth in our desires.

So would the Lord have truth in all our affections. We think we love God, but I venture to ask the question of myself — I would raise it, and I would have you raise it with yourselves — do you really love the Lord? Do you really love him? Were he here, and your soul spoke the honest truth, and it were put, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?" what would the answer be? And, indeed, it will be put to you tonight; when you get home it will probably be put to you in some new shape. You will be tried in your patience. If you love him, keep his commandments then, and be patient towards all men. You may be tried to-night by some loss or cross; if you love him you will take up his cross and cheerfully follow him. See how your love may be. "Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith: prove your own selves." Where are your affections? Are they where the moth and rust corrupt, or are they yonder where eternity shall never see corrosion or robbery to deprive you of your possessions? "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." God desires not that thou shouldest say, "I love," if you do not, or that you should say, "Peace, peace," where there is no peace, and give a traitorous kiss. He desires truth in thy affection. Is thy heart right? Ah! this question is easy to put, but to answer it is not so easy — at least it may be easy to answer it if it be hurried without consideration, and probably untruthfully; but if thou wouldest be grounded on the rock, truly bottomed on a sure foundation, thou wilt say, "Search me, O God! and try me, and know my ways: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. Help me to keep my heart with all diligence, for I know that out of it are the issues of life." May there be truth in the inward parts of my affections.

So the Lord would have truth in our emotions. The emotion of fear, for instance, should not be excited as it is in some by foolish frivolous things. This is a false fear which ought not to come across the Christian's mind. There be some, too, who say they have a fear of God; others who say they have a joy of God; some that speak of sweet peace in God; others that talk of holy delight in God. But it is one thing to talk about these things, and another to possess them. He desires that all thy emotions, when thou art in his presence (and thou art always there), should be truthful. Too often we say in prayer, I fear, more than our heart says, and perhaps the preacher, in talking to you to-night, may say more than he himself knows. We are apt to do this. We have, therefore, good need to be very, very watchful, for all that there is within us that is untruthful is unacceptable. Only that which is of the truth, that cometh of the truth that is in Christ Jesus, who is the truth — only that can be pleasing to the Lord our God. Thus might I mention the understanding. God would have us have truth there, and not put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter. I might mention the will. The will should truly be surrendered to God, and cheerfully obedient to him. He desireth truth there. But whatsoever there may be within man, whatsoever faculty, power, or talent he possesses, the whole should be truthfully laid at his feet, and the whole experience of the little world within us should be conformed to the truth as it is in Jesus. To live with truthfulness within is a great thing, for we often talk in our hearts falsehood. The fool said in his heart, "There is no God." We may tell lies in our own hearts; we may thief, and rob, and steal, and murder in our own hearts. Yea, our own hearts may be a shamble in which we may murder all the world, though we never laid a finger on any man, and in our hearts we may destroy the very throne of Deity, aye, and God himself, for we do that in our heart when we wish there were no God. I know not what there may be in our heart — a very pandemonium, a little hell — a great hell in a little heart. Oh! God, look thou on us, and put out all false things, and let truth be in our inward parts.

Now mark, before I turn from this first head of the subject, that when we say that the great desire of God is that we should have truth in our inward parts, we are, not to suppose that, therefore, he is indifferent to our outward actions, our words, and so on. On the contrary, it is because he is a lover of holiness and purity that he thinks most of our hearts, because a true-hearted man must be a truth-speaking man and a truth-loving man. You have made the fountain clean — well then, there cannot be foul water come out of it. If once you have been made all clean within by sovereign grace, then the outcome must be from what there is within. You may have the devil within, and hang out the angel outside; but you cannot have the angel within, and the devil without; it cannot be so. Where Jesus Christ reigns in the interior, the glory of his presence will glow in the exterior too. You may be to your neighbors and friends an upright man, towards your enemies, a forgiving and gentle man, towards your God a manifestly devout man, if in all things you are upright within, and devout within. May God grant, then, that we may be what he would have us. That we may have truth in the inward parts. Now for the second part of the text.

II. God's Work In Us.

I am very thankful that the second sentence comes after the first, for surely we might all tremble if it were not so. "Behold thou desirest truth in the inward parts." "Yes," we might say, "but, Lord, how shall we ever get it there? How shall we who are unclean be purged? Thou mayest say, 'Thou shalt be clean,' but, Lord, we cannot bring it to thee; how shall we who are polluted cleanse ourselves?" Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? But now comes this, joined on with an "and," a blessed rivet that can never be driven out — "and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom." Now let us go over this blessed

word of encouragement — “and in the hidden part” — the secret part — “thou shalt make me to know wisdom.” Observe that where there is all fallen within us, there will God work. He does not disdain to begin even with us, though all be out of order, though all be stained and all polluted. When he made the world, truly there was nothing to help him, but there was nothing to oppose him. Darkness was on the face of the deep, and disorder ruled, but those were rather negative than positive, and they disappeared at once at his bidding. But in the fallen heart there is much to oppose, and to oppose vigorously. With a fierce determination to ruin himself, man resists the grace of God, and were it not that he who created the world puts his hand a second time to the work, to create in us a new heart, we should continue in our destruction, and in our guilt, and enmity to the Most High. Now what a comfort it is that God will deal with our secret part — our hidden part! He does not disdain to come and touch the wheel, and the machinery within, though it is all polluted. If we were to think of touching a running sore, or to put our hand upon a leper, we should shudder at it; but what must it be for a holy God to come and deal with an unholy heart, with corrupt affections, with a depraved will! We think of some poor men that are, for their livelihood, compelled to work in loathsomeness in our common sewers, but oh! what is all that compared with the heart! Yet the infinite mercy, and condescension, and omnipotent grace of God stooped down to deal with our inward parts. Admire the condescension of God, and have hope for thyself, poor lost one, because God will deal with thy inward parts.

But now notice that in my inward part, “Thou wilt make me to know wisdom.” See the grandeur of that word! No one else can make a man wise, really, spiritually, internally, and eternally wise, but God himself. Here, again, I must remark upon the condescension of God. In one verse I find him asked to be a washer, in another place I find him asked to heal us, and here I find him asked to come and teach us. Shall he be schoolmaster to us? Shall he take such as we are in hand, and our inward parts in hand, to teach our inward parts his wisdom? Yes, he will do it. Means are used I know — his ministers, his Word, his providence — but we never learn by these till he teach us to profit. These are school books, the apparatus of the school-house. The Master must come and explain them, and bring the truth home, or else we learn not. It is his prerogative, his sole prerogative, to speak to the heart so as to make us foolish ones wise. The Holy Ghost will do it. “In the inward parts thou wilt make me to know wisdom.” Oh! blessed Spirit, thou wilt show me of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment to come: thou wilt take of the things of Christ, and reveal them unto me: thou wilt not disdain me, poor scholar as I am: thou wilt make me to know wisdom. And great Son of God! so wilt thou also teach: thou wilt condescend thine example, by thy sacrifice, and by thy precept, to make me to know wisdom. And thou, great Father, even thou shalt not disdain to deal with us as with sons, and by thy chastening still to teach us until we know wisdom. See, then, how God dealeth with the inward parts, and it is God that does it.

Well, next, “In the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom” — me. It is David that speaks, but he speaks, I trust for you. “Make me to know wisdom.” Now who was he that used those words? it was David, a great sinner — to put it plainly, an adulterer and a murderer; but “thou wilt make me,” says he, “to know wisdom.” This is a bad scholar to begin with, a rough block for the great sculptor to carve, but says he, “Thou wilt make me to know wisdom.” A sinner, I said, but he was a sinner publicly disgraced. Men knew of his sin, he was the song of the drunkard, and the mark of the blasphemer. His character for a while was gone; men spoke of David’s sin. Ah! but thou wilt make me — the biggest fool in Israel (for I doubt not he felt he was) — thou wilt make me to know wisdom — me, from my disgrace and dishonor, thou wilt yet lift up. He that said this, mark you, was a penitent, bitterly penitent for what he had done. How canst thou know wisdom till thou hast hated sin? God hath not introduced thee to the school yet, until he has made thee smart under his rod on account of sin. This is the very beginning of wisdom, to know the bitterness and mischief of sin, and to turn from it. He that spake this was a praying man. The whole Psalm is a prayer. God will teach the praying one. He that teacheth thee to prey will teach thee everything else. This is one of the early lessons of the Christian, to learn to pray. “Behold, he prayeth,” was said of Saul of Tarsus. Thou shalt learn to sing as angels do if thou beginnest with these bass notes of prayer. He that said this was a believing man. He was a great sinner, but he was a great believer. It was a great faith, as we said in the exposition, that made him, say, “Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.” Now sinner, disgraced sinner, but penitent, prayerful, believing sinner, God will make thee wise yet — make thee wise. Man, dost thou see this, that he desires it? He will give thee that, but he will give thee more. He will give thee wisdom: that is more than truth. You know that truth is one thing, but, wisdom is better than knowledge, for wisdom is the right way of using knowledge. Many a knowing man is a fool. A wise man is a “knowing” man, although “a knowing man” is not always wise. He desires thee to have truth, and wherever truth is, he that follows her is wise. He will put truth within thee; that is the doctrine: thou shalt have wisdom, that is the practice. Truth shall be the sardine, the gem; but wisdom shall be the flashing rays which come from it, the brilliance thereof. He will make thee to know wisdom. Let me say very briefly, and in two or three sentences, what it is to know wisdom. Suppose thou knowest the truth about sin. Well, if thou dost know it truthfully, then thy wisdom will be to hate that sin. If thou knowest the reality of sin, thy wisdom will be to lay it upon Christ faith where God hath laid it in the old covenant, in the covenant of grace, and then having had thy sin forgiven, if thou knowest sin aright, and wilt be wise concerning it, thou wilt watch against it, knowing its damnable character, and how apt thou art to fall into it; and so, knowing the truth in thy heart about sin, in thy heart thou wilt be wise towards sin, lamenting it, confessing it, carrying it to Christ; watching against it, abhorring it, protesting against it all thy days.

So taking another subject, a blessed subject, the Savior, if thou hast truth in thy inward parts about the Savior, thou knowest him to be the sole and only Savior, but an all-sufficient and perfect one. Well then, thy wisdom is to live upon him; to live with him, to live

like him; and the God that desires thee to have the truth about Christ in thy heart will teach thee how to act wisely concerning Christ. In thy heart and in thy life thou wilt worship him, thou wilt adore him so as to spend thyself for him, for this is wisdom towards the truth as it is in Jesus.

So take but one other subject. If thou hast learnt the truth about service, and God would have that truth in thy heart, for thou art his servant bought with his blood, why, then, he will teach thee wisdom in service; he will show thee how to deny thyself, how to consecrate thyself, how to pour out thy whole strength at his feet, how to meet thine enemies, how to surmount thy difficulties, how to fight his battles, how to win the crown. He desires thee to have truth in thy heart about this matter, and ere will give thee wisdom in thy heart concerning it all. So observe that what God requires of us in one place God gives us in another. He deals with sinners very honestly: he tells them what he wants. He then deals with them very generously, for he gives them what they need. He does not lower the law, or diminish its spirituality to suit the sinner: he tells him the truth, that he desires that he should have truth in his inward parts, but when he hath set out the law, he sets out an equally broad gospel. He works in the sinner what his gracious law demands. There are the tables of stone: God does not take one out of the ten commands away; he puts the mercy-seat, on the top of the whole — covers the whole — and so he does not diminish from the Christian ought of what should be in him, or tell him to rest content with inferior holiness, or with a second-rate obedience. He tells him that he desires truth, even in his inward parts; he comes to him and he says, “That which I expect from thee I will give thee: that which I require I will bestow upon thee.” “In the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom.” Now turn my text into a prayer. “O God! I confess my inward part is not what it should be, nor can I make it. Thou mightest well sweep me away because my heart is depraved, but oh! take me — wash me in the Savior’s blood; send thy Spirit to new create me, and make me in my inward part to know wisdom,” for thy mercy’s sake. Amen.

Psalm 51:7 The Guilt and the Cleansing

NO. 3056

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“Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.” — Psalm 51:7.

You know how David had sinned; to the sin of adultery he had added that of murder. David felt like one who was shut out from God, and was unworthy to approach him. He could not be content to remain in such a condition. He longed to be reconciled to God; and he remembered that he had sometimes seen a man, who had the leprosy, put out of the city as an unclean person; or he had seen one, who had defiled himself by touching a corpse, shut out for a time from all communion with those who drew near to worship God. “Ah!” thought he, “that is just as I am; — I am unworthy to appear before God, for I am spiritually unclean.”

But David had also seen the priest take a basin full of blood, and dip hyssop in it, and when the bunch of hyssop had soaked up the blood, he had seen the priest sprinkle the unclean person therewith, and then say to him, “You are clean; you have admittance now to the worship of God; you can mingle with the great congregation; I pronounce you clean through the sprinkled blood;” and David’s faith, acting upon the telescopic principle, looked far down the ages, and he saw the great atoning sacrifice offered upon Calvary, and as he saw the Son of God bleeding for sins which were not his own, he desired that the blood of Christ might be applied to his conscience, feeling that it would take away his defilement, and admit him into the courts of God’s house, and into the love of God’s heart; and so he prayed this prayer, “Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean.”

He felt, too, that sin was a very great defilement, — that he was black and filthy; but he knew how he himself had often, when hunted like a wild goat among the mountains, stooped down to a cooling brook, and washed away the dust and stain of travel in the running water, and his face and hands had been clean again; and so, bowing down before God, he sees, in the sacrifice of Christ, a cleansing flood, and his desire is expressed in these words, “Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.” The words do not require any exposition; they require application. They do not need to be explained; they need to be offered up to God in prayer by brokenhearted suppliants.

There are two things I shall try to talk about, as God shall help me. The one is, that sin is a very foul thing: David says, “Purge me,” “Wash me.” The other is, that the cleansing must be very great: this process of hyssop-sprinkling and of washing must be very potent, for he says, “I shall be clean.” “I shall be whiter than snow.”

I. First, then, a little about The Defilement.

Sometimes, it has been asked by unconverted men, “Why do you talk so much about atonement? Why could not God be generous,

and forgive sin outright? Why should he require the shedding of blood, and the endurance of great suffering?" Sinner, if you had a right sense of sin, you would never ask such a question. In asking that question, you speak upon the supposition that God is such an one as yourself; but he hates sin, he sees in sin such loathsomeness as you have never dreamed of; there is, to him, such horrible abomination, such a heinousness, such a detestableness and uncleanness about sin, that he could not pass it by. If he did, he would bring upon his own character the suspicion that he was not holy. Had God passed by human sin without a substitutionary sacrifice, the seraphim must have suspended their song, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts." The Judge, who winks at sin, is the abettor of sin. If the supreme Ruler does not punish sin, he becomes himself the patron of all guilt, and sin may take its reel beneath the shadow of his wings. But it is not so; and, sinner, God would have you know, and have angels know, and have devils know, that, however lightly any of his creatures may think of sin, and however foolishly simple man may toy with it, he knows what a vile thing it is, and he will have no patience with it. "He will by no means spare the guilty."

I have heard it said, by persons looking at the subject from another point of view, that the preaching of full forgiveness, through the Savior's blood, to the very chief of sinners, is apt to make men think lightly of sin; — that, when we tell them —

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

There is life at this moment" —

for every soul that looks at Christ, we do, in effect, find a plaster for men's wounded consciences, which, when thus healed, will only aid and abet them in going to sin again. How untrue this is, a moment's reflection will show you. We tell the sinner that God never does gratuitously pass by a single sin, and that pardon never could have come to one man of Adam's race had it not been procured by the tremendous griefs of the Savior, who stood in men's stead. Our own belief is that all the proclamations of the law, and all the threatenings of judgment that ever were thundered forth by the most Boanerges-like of ministers, never did show man so much the vileness of sin as the preaching of this one great truth, "The Lord hath caused to meet on him the iniquity of us all. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows; yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed." That is the great condemnation of sin, — the Savior's death. Never is God dressed in such resplendent robes of glorious holiness as when he is smiting sin, as it is laid upon his only-begotten Son. Having lifted it from sinners, and laid it upon Christ, he does not spare it because of the worthiness of the Person to whom it is imputed. He smites and crushes it with his full force and fury, till the oppressed Victim cries out, "Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, when Jehovah hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger."

Let us now turn this subject over a little, — the guilt of sin. We think that the atonement sets forth that guilt most thoroughly; let this truth reach the ear of every unpardoned man and woman here. It appears that there is nothing but blood that will ever wash your sin away, — the blood of Christ, the blood of God's dear Son; this cleanseth us from all sin, but nothing else can. The blackness of your sin will appear, then, if you recollect that all the creatures in the universe could not have taken one of your sins away. If all the holy angels in heaven had performed the best service that they could render, they could not have taken away even one of your sins. If the great archangel had left his station near the throne of God's glory, and had been led into a deep abyss of suffering, all that he could have done would not have been a drop of the bucket compared with what would be required to take away one single sin, for sin is such an enormous evil that no created being could remove it; and even if all the saints on earth could have ceased to sin, and could unceasingly have praised God day and night, yet there is not merit enough in all their songs to blot out one single offense of one single sinner. Nay, let me go further. Could your tears, and the tears of all created intelligences, "no respite know," could the briny drops —

"For ever flow;

All for sin could not atone."

Nay, I will go a step lower. The pains of the damned in hell are no atonement for sin. They suffer in consequence of sin, but no atonement has been made by them, for all they have suffered has not lessened what they have to suffer; and when ten thousand times ten thousand years shall have rolled over their poor accursed heads, they will be just as far off having satisfied divine justice as they are now, for sin is such a dreadful thing that even Tophet cannot burn it up, though "the pile thereof is fire and much wood," and though "the breath of the Lord, like a stream of brimstone, doth kindle it." Sin is cast into its flames, and men suffer there; but all the burnings of Gehenna never did consume a single sin, and never could. Think of that! Earth, and heaven, and hell, could never take away a single sin from a single soul.

None but Christ could do it, and even Christ himself could not do it except he became a man. It was absolutely necessary that the substitute for human sin should be of the same nature as the offender. Christ must therefore be born of Mary that he might become man. Man must suffer, for man had sinned. As in Adam all died, so in another Adam must all be made alive if they were ever to be made alive at all. They fell by one man; so they must rise by another Man, or else never rise. But even the man Christ Jesus, in

association with the Godhead, could not have taken away your sins unless he had died. I never read in Scripture that all that he did in his life could take away sin. The Savior's life is the robe of righteousness with which his people are covered, but that is not the bath in which they are washed. The whole life of Christ, all his preachings upon the mountains, all his fastings in the wilderness, all his travail in birth for souls, yea, all his bloody sweat, all his scourgings, all the shame and the spitting that he endured, could not have saved your soul, or take away one sin, for it is written, "Without shedding of blood is no remission" of sin. Think of this, sinner! To take out that one sin of yours, if you had only one sin, the Infinite must become an infant, and the Immortal must yoke himself with mortality; and then, in that position, and in that condition, he must become "obedient unto death," or else no one sin on your part could ever be removed from your soul.

But I want you to go with me further than this. Christ himself, in his death, could not have taken away one sin if it had not been for the peculiar form of death which he endured. He had to be crucified, and then Paul could write, "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us, for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree. Christ must, therefore, hang upon a tree that he might be cursed, and there is no man who ever lived who can tell what is meant by that expression — that Christ was cursed. If all the mighty orators who have moved the Christian Church at once to tears and to joy, could stand here, I would defy them to weigh this burden of the Lord, or estimate its tremendous meaning, "Christ was made a curse for us." Christ a curse! Jehovah-Tsidkenu a curse! Jesus, the darling of the Father, made a curse! He, who "counted it not robbery to be equal with God," a curse! O angels, ye may well marvel at this mystery, for its astounding depths ye cannot fathom! Yet so it is. "He hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."

And this leads me to mention what I think is surely the climax here, that, although Christ died the death of the cross, even then he could not have taken any sin away unless it had been expressly ordained and settled that he therein did himself take our sin as well as our curse, and did therein stand before God, though in himself personally innocent, as if he had been a sinner, and there suffer, "the Just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God." There is that black, that hideous, that damning, that everlasting soul-destroying thing called sin; Jehovah-Jesus sees it on his people; he knows that they can never be with him where he is while that sin rests on them, and he also knows that there is no way by which they can be freed from it except by his taking it. Can you picture the scene? He takes that terrible, that cursed, that hell-kindling, that hell-feeding thing, that fuel of the eternal pit, that object of eternal wrath; he takes that sin upon himself, and now what does sin seem to say? It is imputed to Christ, and it seems to hide itself behind Christ, and it says to God, "O God, thou hatest me, but thou canst not reach me here. Here I am; I am thine enemy; but there is between us an impassable barrier." Now, what will become of sin? Hear this, you sinners who still have your sins resting upon you! What will become of sin? God says, "Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of hosts: smite the shepherd." And the sword did smite him, so that Christ could cry out, "All thy waves and thy billows are gone over me;" and he uttered that dreadful shriek, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" in unutterable depths of anguish, because God had turned away his face, and smitten him in his fierce anger, pounded him as in a mortar, trampled on him as in the wine-press, crushed him as in the olive-press, broken him between the upper and the nether millstones of his awful wrath, made him to drink the whole cup dry, and caused him to suffer —

"All that incarnate God could bear,

With strength enough, but none to spare."

So, you see that, before even one sin can be pardoned, Christ must suffer what that sin deserves, or something tantamount thereunto, by which divine holiness shall be cleared of all stain. Then, what an awfully evil thing sin must be! Yet you will see her standing at the corner of the street, with a smiling face, trying to allure you; but shake your head at her, and say, "Nay, nay; the Savior bled because of thee." And you will see sin sparkling in the wine-cup, but look not on it when it is red, and moveth itself aright; but, say unto it, "O sin, I loathe thee, for thou didst open my Savior's veins, and cause his precious blood to flow." It is easy to get black by sin, but remember that it is so hard to get clean that only God's omnipotence, in the person of Christ, could provide a Cleanser for your sins.

And now, sinner, I say this word to you: yet some will go and make a mock of it. I cannot make you see the filthiness of sin; you think it a mere trifling thing. God Almighty, you say, is very merciful, forgetting how tremendously just he is. But though I cannot make you see sin, yet I can leave this truth with you, — you will one day feel what sin means, unless you repent of it, for he that spared not his own Son will not spare you. If the Judge upon the throne smote Christ, who had no sin of his own, — smote him so sternly for other men's sins, — what will he do with you? If he spared not his beloved Son, what will he do with his enemies? If the fire burned up Christ, how will it burn up you? O you who are out of Christ, without God and without hope, what will ye do, what will ye do, when God shall put on his robe of thunder, and come forth to deal with you in his wrath? Beware, beware, ye that forget God, lest he tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver you! "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little."

I want you to take this prayer now. I have tried to bring out the meaning of it. You are thus black, so pray to God, "Purge me with

blood: apply it by thy Holy Spirit, as the priest applied to the leper the blood upon the bunch of hyssop. 'Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.' "

II. And now we shall have a few words upon The Power Of The Cleansing.

Whom can it cleanse? That is the first question. David answers it, for he says, "It can cleanse me." He meant himself. I would not exaggerate David's sin, but it was a very frightful one. What could be more dreadful than for a man so highly-favored, who had so much light, so much communion with God, and who stood so high as a light in the midst of the nation, to commit two crimes so accursed as those which we must lay at his door, — adultery and murder? While my blood runs chill at the very thought of his having committed them, yet in my soul I am glad that the Holy Spirit ever permitted such a black case to stand on record. What an encouragement to seek pardon it has been to many who have sinned as foully as David did! If thou canst bend thy knee, and pray David's prayer, thou shalt get David's answer, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean." What if thou hast even defiled thy neighbor's wife? What if thou hast even smitten thy neighbor to his heart, and left him dead upon the earth? These two crimes will damn thee to all eternity except thou shalt find pardon for them through the blood of Jesus; but there is pardon for them there. If thou lookest up to where that blood is streaming from the hands and feet and side of Jesus; if thou dost trust thy broken spirit in his hands, there is pardon for thy crimson sins to be had just now. Is there a harlot here? O poor fallen woman, I pray that Christ may so forgive thee that then wilt wash his feet with thy tears, and wipe them with the hairs of thine head! Is there a thief here? Men say that you will never be reclaimed, but I pray the eternal mercy, which saved the dying thief, to save the living thief. Have I here one who has cursed God to his face a thousand times? Return unto thy God, for he comes to meet thee; say unto him, "Father, I have sinned." Bury your head in his bosom; receive his kiss of forgiveness, for God delighteth to pardon, and to blot out transgression. Now that he has smitten Christ, he will not smite any sinner who comes to him through Christ. His wrath is gone, and he can now say, "Fury is not in me." Here, then, is a great wonder, — that Christ's precious blood can cleanse the vilest of the vile, and you may now pray the prayer of the text, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean."

From what can it cleanse? I dare not mention every kind of sin, but there is no sin from which it cannot cleanse. What a precious truth that is, "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." During this last week, I have been with Brother Offord, conducting prayer-meetings, and he told, one evening, a tale which I made him tell every evening afterwards, for I thought it so good. He said there was a poor man, living on Dartmoor, who had been employed during the summer in looking after horses, and cows, and so on, that were turned out on the moor. He was a perfect heathen, and never went to a place of worship, perhaps, since he was a child. For him there was no Sabbath. After a time, he grew very ill. He was over sixty years of age, and having nothing to live upon, he went into the workhouse. While he was there, it pleased the mysterious Spirit to make him uneasy as to his soul; he felt that he must die, and the old man had just enough light to let him see that, if he did die, all was wrong with regard to a future state. He had a little grandchild, who lived in a neighboring town, — Plymouth, I think it was, — and he asked leave for his grandchild to come in everyday to see him. As he was very ill, and near death, that was allowed. She came in, and he said to her, "Read the Bible to me, dear." She complied; and the more she read, the more wretched the old man grew. "Read again," said he. The more she read, the more dark his mind seemed to be with a sense of guilt. At last, one day, she came to that passage in the first Epistle of John, — you know it, — "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." "Is that there?" he asked. "Yes, grandfather," replied the little girl, "that is there." "Is that there? "Oh, yes, grandfather, it is there." "Then read it again! Read it again!" She again read, "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." "My dear, are you sure it is just like that?" "Yes, grandfather." "Then read it again, dear." "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." "Then," he said, "take my finger, and put it on that verse. Is it on that text, child? — is my finger on that blessed text?" "Yes, grandfather." "Then," said he, "tell them," (alluding to his friends) "that I die in the faith of that!" — and he closed his eyes, and doubtless entered into eternal rest. And I will die in the faith of that truth, by the grace of God; and so will you, I trust, brethren and sisters, die with your finger on that text, "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." Oh, it is sweet living, and it is sweet dying, if you can rest there! Now we see, then, that, whatever your sins may have been, they are all included in those little words, "all sin"; therefore be of good comfort, poor sinner, if thou believest in Jesus Christ, thou art born of God, and his blood cleanseth thee from all sin.

Another question is, When will it cleanse? It will cleanse now. It will cleanse at this moment. You remember that it is in the present tense, "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth" — that is to say, just at this particular moment, some three or four minutes to eight o'clock, — there is efficacy in the precious blood of Jesus to cleanse now. You need not stop till you get home to pray. He who trusts Christ is saved the moment that he trusts; his sin is blotted out the instant that he accepts Christ as his Substitute, and justifies God in smiting sin in the person of the Savior. There is efficacy in the blood now. Perhaps there has strayed in here one who says, "It is too late." Who told you that? Sir, it was the devil, and he was a liar from the beginning. "Ah!" says another, "but you do not know that I have sinned against light and knowledge." My dear friend, I do not know how much you have sinned, but I do know that it is written, "He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him," and I know that you have not gone beyond the uttermost, so I conclude that he is able to save you, — just now, just as you are, standing in yonder crowd, or sitting here in these pews.

Once more, — In what way is Christ able thus to cleanse? I answer, — In a perfect and complete way. David says, “Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.” We do not see snow very often now, but when we did see it last time, what a dazzling whiteness there was upon it! You took a sheet of paper, and laid it upon the snow, and you were perfectly surprised to see the clean, white paper turned yellow or brown, in comparison with the snow’s dazzling whiteness; but David says, “I shall be whiter than snow.” You see, snow is only earthly whiteness, only created whiteness, but the whiteness which Christ gives us, when he washes us in his blood, is divine whiteness; the whiteness is the righteousness of God himself. Besides, snow soon melts; and then, where is the whiteness? The snow and the whiteness run away together; but there is no power in temptation, no power in sin, which is able to stain the whiteness which God gives to a pardoned sinner. And then snow, especially here in this our smoky city, soon gets brown or black; but this righteousness never will.

“No age can change its glorious hue;

The robe of Christ is ever new.”

“And is this perfect whiteness for me?” says one. Yes, for thee, if thou believest in Jesus. If thou wert as black as the devil himself, if thou didst but believe in Jesus, thou shouldst be as white as an angel in a moment, because, by believing, thou acceptest God’s way of saving souls, and to do this is the greatest thing that can be done. The Pharisees came to Christ, and they said, making a great fuss about their zeal, “Here is our money; here is our talent; here is our time: ‘what shall we do, that we might work the works of God?’” “They opened their ears for his answer, and they thought he would say, “Give tithing of mint, and anise, and cummin. Be careful to wash your hands every time you eat; give your money to the poor; endow a row of almshouses; become monks; lacerate your backs; tear your flesh,” and so on; but Jesus said nothing of the kind. They wondered, I have no doubt, what he was going to say, and they seemed to be all on tiptoe. “Now he is going to tell us the greatest work that a creature can do.” “What shall we do that we might work the works of God.” He answers them thus: “This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.” Ah, then they went away directly; for no such simple thing, no such humbling thing as this would they do. Perhaps there are some of you who say, “Why don’t you preach morality?” “Talk of morality!” says Cowper, —

“O thou bleeding Lamb,

The best morality is love of thee;” —

and so indeed it is. If I were to tell you that I was commissioned by God to say that, if you walked from here to John o’Groats’ House in the cold and wet, bare-footed, and ate nothing on the way but dry bread and drank nothing but water, you should inherit eternal life, you would all be on the road tomorrow morning, if not tonight; but when I say just this, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved,” what do you do then? Art thou such a fool as to be damned because the way to be saved is too simple? My anger waxes hot against thee, that thou shouldst play the fool with thine own soul, and be damned because it is too easy. Think of a man who has a disease that is killing him, and he will not take the medicine because it is too simple; he will not apply to the physician because his terms are too cheap; he will not apply such-and-such a remedy because it is too simple! Then, when that man dies, who can pity him? Did he not reject the remedy from the worst and emptiest of all motives?

“Oh!” says one, “but, simple as it is, it seems too hard for me; I cannot believe.” Sinner, what can you not believe? Can you not believe that, if Jesus Christ took human sin, and was punished for it, God can be just in forgiving it? Why, you can surely believe that! You say that you cannot believe, that is, you cannot trust Christ. Why, poor soul, I should find it the hardest work in the world if I were to try not to trust him, for he is such a precious Savior, such a mighty Savior, that I can say, with John Hyatt, that I would not only trust him with my one soul, but with a million souls if I had them. Yet it may be that thou dost not understand what believing is. It is not doing anything; it is leaving off doing; it is just believing that Christ did it all.

“Nothing, either great or small,

Nothing, sinner, no;

Jesus did it, did it all,

Long, long ago.”

Christ is worthy of being trusted. Rely upon him; God give thee the grace to do so, and thou art saved. Remember what we said the other night; there is all the difference in the world between the religion that is made up of “D-o, do,” and that other religion that is spelt “D-o-n-e, done.” He who has the religion of “It is all done,” loves God out of gratitude, and he serves him because he is saved; but he who has the religion of “Do” is always a slave, never gets salvation, but perishes in his doings, as they deserve to do who will look to themselves instead of looking to Christ. May the Lord now command his own blessing, for Jesus’ sake! Amen.

Psalm 57:4 Among Lions

NO. 1496

DELIVERED ON THURSDAY EVENING, SEPTEMBER THE 4TH, 1879,

BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“My soul is among lions.”-Psalm 57:4.

Some of you cannot say this, and you ought to be very thankful that you are not obliged to do so. Happy are you young people who have godly parents, and who dwell in Christian families. You ought to grow like the flowers in a conservatory, where killing frosts and biting blasts are unknown. You live under very favorable circumstances. Your soul, I might almost say, is among angels; for you dwell where God is worshipped, where family prayer is not forgotten, where you can have a kindly guidance in the hour of difficulty and comfort in the time of trial. You dwell where angels come and go, and God himself deigns to dwell. Happy young people to be thus circumstances! How grateful and how holy you ought to be! I want all who dwell where everything helps them to recollect the many gracious ones who dwell where everything hinders them. You who live near the Beautiful Gate of the temple must not forget the many who are sighing in the tents of Kedar. If your soul is not among lions, praise God for it; and then let your sympathies go out towards those who mournfully complain

“My soul with him that hateth peace

Hath long a dweller been;

I am for peace; but when I speak,

For battle they are keen.”

It is a Christian duty to “remember them that are in bonds as bound with them”; and whenever our own favored circumstances lead us to forget those who are persecuted and tried, our very mercies are working mischief to us. “We are all members one of another.” If one member suffers, all the rest should suffer with him; and therefore, we will turn our thoughts towards our persecuted brethren to-night, that our united supplications may sustain them under their difficulties, and, if the Lord be so pleased, may even deliver them.

When may a Christian man truly say, “My soul is among lions”? Such is the case when, either from our being members of ungodly families, or from having to gain our livelihood amongst unconverted and graceless people, we are subjected to reproach and rebuke, and to jest and jeer for Jesus Christ’s sake. Then we can say, “My soul is among lions.” Many in this congregation known to me are the only ones in their family whom God has called. I bless his name that he is often taking one of a household, and a lone one of a family, and bringing such to Jesus. Some quite un-Christian person who thinks not of God drops in here out of curiosity, and God meets with him and he becomes the first of his kith and kin to say “I am the Lord’s.”

Frequently when converts come to cast in their lot with us they will say, “I do not know one in all my family who makes any profession of godliness: they are all of them opposed to me.” In such a case the soul is among lions, and it is very hard and trying to be in such a position. Well may we pity a godly wife bound to an ungodly husband. Alas! full often a drunkard, whose opposition amounts to brutality.

A tender, loving spirit, that ought to have been cherished like a tender flower, is bruised and trodden under foot, and made to suffer till the heart cries out in grief, “My soul is among lions.” We little know what life-long martyrdom’s many pious women endure. Children also have to bear the same when they are singled out by divine grace from depraved and wicked families. Only the other day there came under my notice one who loves the Lord. I thought that if she had been a daughter of mine I should have rejoiced beyond all things in her sweet and gentle piety, but the parent said, “You must leave our house if you attend such-and-such a place of worship. We do not believe in these things, and we cannot have you about us if you do.” I saw the grief, which that state of things was causing, and though I could not alter it I mourned over it. Woe unto those who tyrannize over my Lord’s little ones.

Nobody knows what godly working men have to put up with from those among whom they labor. There are some shops where there is religious liberty; but frequently the working men of this city are great tyrants in matters of religion. I tell them that to their faces. If a man will drink with them, and swear with them, they will make him their companion; but when a man comes out to fear God they make it very hard for him. And pray, sir, has not a man as much right to pray as you have to swear? And has he not as much right to believe in God as you have to disbelieve? It is a wonderfully free country, this wonderfully free country! Almost as free as America in the olden time when every man was free to lick his own nigger; for now the working man claims freedom to laugh and swear at every other working man who chooses to be sober and religious. There are large factories all over London where a Christian man has to run the gauntlet from morning to night of sneers which never ought to come upon the face of honest men

which never would come if Britons were as fond of freedom as they profess to be. They declare that they never will be slaves; but they are slaves-slaves to their own ungodliness and drunkenness-the great mass of them; and only where divine grace comes in and snaps the chain do men become free at all. If one serious man sets his face steadfastly to serve God the baser sort seem as if they must get him under their feet, and treat him with every indignity that malice can devise. It may be all in sport, but the victim does not think so. Do not tell me that persecution ceased when the last martyr burned. There are martyrs who have to burn by the slow fire of cruel mockings day after day; and I bless God that the old grit is still among us, and that the old spirit still survives, so that men defy sneers and slander and hold on their way. I could tell stories, which would both shock you and delight you, of what is said and done by the common order of English working men against those who profess religion, and how courageously the righteous and the true bear it all, and, in the long run, conquer too, and oftentimes win their mates to confess the selfsame faith. They call us all cants and hypocrites, and the like, but they know better, and if they had a grain of manliness they would cease from such lying. A true Briton gives that liberty to others which he claims for himself, and if he does not choose to be religious himself he stands up like a man to defend the rights of others to be so if they choose. Now, then, ye British workmen, when shall we see you doing this?

The text speaks of a soul among lions. Why did the psalmist call them lions? "Dogs" is about as good a name as they deserve. Why call them lions? Because at times the Christian man is exposed to enemies who are very strong perhaps strong in the jaw-very strong in biting, rending, and tearing. Sometimes the Christian man is exposed to those who loudly roar out their infidelities and their blasphemies against Christ, and it is an awful thing to be among such lions as those. The lion is not only strong but also cruel; and it is real cruelty, which subjects well-meaning men to reproach and misrepresentation. The enemies of Christ and his people are often as cruel as lions, and would slay us if the law permitted them. The lion is a creature of great craftiness, creeping along stealthily, and then making a sudden spring; and so will the ungodly creep up to the Christian, and, if possible, spring upon him when they can catch him in an unguarded moment. If they fancy they spy a fault in him they come down upon him with all their weight! The ungodly watch the righteous, and if they can catch them in their speech, or if they can make them angry, and cause them to speak an unguarded word, how eagerly they pounce upon him. They magnify his fault, put it under a microscope of ten thousand power, and make a great thing of it. "Report it! Report it!" they say, "So would we have it!" Anything against a trueborn child of God is a sweet nut for them. Such as are daily watched, daily carped at, daily abused, daily hindered in everything that is good and gracious, go with their tears before the God they serve and cry to him, "My soul is among lions."

Now, it is to such that I am going to speak to-night, a little at first by way of comfort, and then a little by way of advice.

I. First, By Way Of Comfort.

You are among lions, my dear young friend, then you will have fellowship with your Lord and with his church. Every Lord's-day, and every time we meet, this benediction is pronounced upon you, that you may enjoy the fellowship of the Holy Ghost. Fellowship with the Holy Ghost brings you into fellowship with Jesus, and this involves your being conformed to his sufferings. Now, your Lord was among lions. The men of his day had not a good word to say for him. They called the Master of the house Beelzebub, they will never call you a worse name than that. They said that he was a drunken man and a winebibber; possibly they may say much the same as that of you, and it will be equally false. You need not be ashamed to be pelted with the same dirt that was thrown at your Master; and it, it should ever come to this, that you should be stripped of everything, and false witnesses should rise up against you, and you should even be condemned as a felon, and taken out to execution, still your lot will not be worse than his. Remember that you are the followers of a Crucified Lord, and cannot expect to be the world's darlings. If you are Christians, the inspired description of the Christian life is the taking up of the cross. Do you expect to be dandled on the knees of that same ungodly world which hung your Master upon the gibbet? No; you know that he who is the friend of this world is the enemy of God. This truth is unchangeable. It is just as certain today as it was in years gone by, that "the evil hateth the righteous, and gnasheth upon him with his teeth." You may pick up a fashionable religion, and get through the world with it very comfortably; but if you have the true faith you will have to fight for it. If you are of the world, the world will love its own; but if you are not of the world, because the Lord has chosen you out of the world, the world will hate you. When a villager goes up the little street the dogs do not bark at him, for they know him well; but when a stranger rides along they set up a howl. By this shall you know whether you are a citizen of the world or a pilgrim towards the better land.

Nor was your Master alone. Recollect the long line of prophets that went before Christ. Which of them was it that was received with honor? Did they not stone one and slay another with the sword, cut one in pieces with a saw, put others to death with stones? Ye know that the march of the faithful may be tracked by their blood. And after our Lord had gone to heaven, how did the world treat the church? In the streets of Rome, and all large cities, the fierce cry was often heard, "Christians to the lions! Christians to the lions! Christians to the lions!" At dead of night men cry "Fire!" when a house is blazing; or a mob will cry "Bread!" when they are starving; but the cry of old Rome that was dearest to the Roman heart, and most expressive of their horrible enmity to goodness, was "Christians to the lions!" Of all the gallant shows the Roman Empire ever saw, that which excited the populace beyond all things

else was to see a family a man and his wife, perhaps, and a grown-up daughter and son, and three or four children all marched into the arena, and the big door thrown up, that out might rush the lion and spring upon them, and tear them to pieces. What harm had they done? They had forgiven their enemies. That was one of their great sins. They would not worship the gods of wood and stone. They would not blaspheme the name of Jesus whom they loved, for he had taught them to love one another, and to love all mankind. For such things as this men raised the cry, "Christians to the lions! Christians to the lions!" All along this has been the cry of the world against all who have faithfully followed in the steps of Jesus Christ. Just now the merciful hand of providence prevents open persecution, but only let that hand be taken away, and the old spirit will rage again. The seed of the serpent hates the seed of the woman still; and if the old dragon were not chained he would devour the man-child, as he has often tried to do. Do not deceive yourselves, in one form or other the old howl of "Christians to the lions!" would soon be heard in London if almighty power did not sit upon the throne and restrain the wrath of man.

You who have to suffer a measure of persecution for Christ's sake ought to be very glad of it, for you are counted worthy not only to be Christians, but to suffer for Christ's sake. Do not, I pray you, be unworthy of your high calling, but endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ. In these afflictions you are having fellowship with your head and with his mystical body, therefore be not ashamed.

Here is another thought. If you are among lions you should thereby be driven nearer to your God. When you had a great many friends you could rejoice in them; but now that these turn against you, and the truth has come home to you "A man's foes shall be they of his own household," what ought you to do? Why, get closer to God than ever you were before. Jesus Christ so loved his church that he said as he looked at his poor disciples, "These are my mother, and sister, and brother." You should do what your Master did make his church your father and mother and sister and brother; nay, better still, make Christ all these to you and more. Take the Lord Jesus to be everything that all the dearest of mortals could be and far more. Sing that charming verse, which is a great favourite of mine, for it was very precious to me in days gone by-

"If on my face, for thy dear name,

Shame and reproaches be,

All hail reproach, and welcome shame,

If thou remember me."

Be sure that you live near to God. All Christians ought to do so, but you especially should be driven by every false accusation, by every caustic remark, by every cutting sentence, nearer to your Father's bosom. The more they rebuke you the more constantly should you abide under the covert of his sacred wings, and find your joy in the Lord.

And, getting close to Christ, let me say to you now by way of advice, and by way of comfort too, endeavor to be very calm and happy. Do not mind it. Take as little notice of the scoff as ever you can. It is a grand thing to have one deaf ear. Mind that you keep yourself very deaf to slander and reproach, as the psalmist did when he said, "I was as a man that heareth not, and in whose mouth are no reproofs." One blind eye towards the folly of enemies is often of more use to a man than two that are always looking about with suspicion. Do not see everything, do not hear everything. When there is a hard word spoken do not notice it; or if you must hear it, forget it as quickly as ever you can. Love others all the more the less they love you: repay their enmity with love. Heap coals of fire upon them by making no return to a hard speech except by another deed of kindness. Very seldom defend yourself: it is a waste of breath, and casting pearls before swine. Bear and bear again. Recollect that our Lord has sent us forth as sheep among wolves, and sheep cannot defend themselves. The wolf can eat all the sheep up if it likes; but, do you not see, there are more sheep in the world now than there are wolves, ten thousand to one? Though the wolves have had all the eating, and though there never yet was a sheep that devoured a wolf, yet still the sheep are here and the wolves have gone. The sheep have won that victory: and so will Christ's little flock. The anvil is struck by the hammer, and the anvil never strikes in return, and yet the anvil wears the hammer out. Patience baffles fury and vanquishes malice. The non-resistance principle involves a resistance, which is irresistible. The steady patience that cannot be provoked, but which, like Jesus, when reviled reviles not again, is certain of conquest. This is what you persecuted ones need to learn to get more near your God the more you are among the lions, and so to be the more calm and patient the more men rage against you.

A third piece of comfort is this. Please to recollect that, although your soul is among lions, the lions are chained. When Daniel was thrown into the lions' den the lions were hungry and would soon have devoured him; but you know why it was that they could not touch him. Ah, the angel came. Just as the fierce lions were about to seize on Daniel, down he came swift from heaven, and stood in front of them. "Hush!" said he, and they lay as still as a stone. So says the text: "My God hath sent his angel and shut the lions' mouths." They had fine teeth, but their mouths were shut. If the Lord can easily shut a lion's mouth, he can quite as easily shut the mouth of an ungodly man. He can take off all trouble from you, if he wills it, in an instant, and he can give you a smooth path to heaven when it pleases him; only remember that if everything on the road to heaven were smooth, heaven would not be so sweet

at the end, and we should not have an opportunity of displaying those Christian graces which are brought out and educated by the opposition of the world. God will not quench the fire of persecution, for it consumes our dross, but he will moderate its power so that not a grain of pure metal shall be lost. The lions are chained, dear friend; they can go no farther than God permits. In this country the most they can do, as a rule, is to howl, they cannot bite; and howling does not break bones; why, then, be afraid? The man who is afraid of being laughed at is not half a man, but almost deserves the scorn he receives. Never mind what is said. Talking will not hurt you. Harden your spirit against it, and bear it gallantly. Go and tell your Lord of it if your heart fails you; and then go forward, calm, as your Master did, fear nothing, for God will bear you through. The lions can roar, but they cannot rend fear them not.

Another fact for your comfort is this; when your soul is among lions, there is another lion there as well as the lions that you can see. Have you never heard of him? He is the Lion of the tribe of Judah. How quietly he lies! How patiently he waits by the side of his servants! he jest, the jeer, the noise continue, and he lies still. If he only would if he thought it wise, if it were not for his superlative patience he has only to rouse himself for one moment, and all our enemies would be destroyed. Our great Lord and King could have had twenty legions of angels when he was in the garden for the lifting of his finger, but he continued a lone, a suffering man. If he willed it at this day he could sweep the ungodly away as chaff before the wind: his longsuffering is for their salvation, if haply they may turn and repent. If your faith be as it should be, it will be a great joy to you to know that he is always with you, that he is always near you. If he is ever absent from others of his servants, he is never away from his persecuted servants. Ask the Covenanters amongst the mosses and the hills, and they will tell you that they never had such Sabbaths in Scotland as when they met among the crags, and set their scouts to warn them against Claverhouse's dragoons. When Cargill or Cameron thundered out the word, with what power was it attended. How sweetly was the blessed Bridegroom with his persecuted church among the hills. There is never such a time for seeing the Son of God as when the world heats the furnace seven times hotter. There is the flaming furnace, go and stand at the mouth of it and look in. They threw three men bound into it in their chosen and in their hats, and the flame was so strong that it killed the soldiers who threw them in. But look! Can you not see? Nebuchadnezzar himself comes to look. See how greatly he is astonished! He calls to those around him, and he demands, "Did not we cast three men bound into the furnace? Look ye, there are four. A strange, mysterious form is that fourth. They are walking the coals as if they walked in a garden of flowers. They seem full of delight, they are walking calmly as men converse in their gardens in the cool of the day; and that fourth that mysterious fourth is like the Son of God!" Ah, Nebuchadnezzar, thou hast seen a sight that has often been seen elsewhere. When God's people are in the furnace, God's Son is in the furnace also. He will not leave those who will not leave him. If we can cling to him, rest assured that he will cling to us, even to the end. Fear not the lions, then. Our Samson would turn upon them, and rend them in a moment if their hour were come.

**"Jesu's tremendous name
Puts all our foes to flight;
Jesus, the meek, the angry Lamb,
A Lion is in fight.
By all bell's host withstood,
We all bell's host o'erthrow;
And conquering them, through,
Jesu's blood We still to conquer go."**

Again, I want to comfort you with this word: you whose souls are among lions should recollect that you will come out of the lions' den unharmed. Daniel was cast into the den. Darius could not sleep that night, and when he went in the morning he did not expect to find a bone of Daniel left, and so he began crying out to him. How surprised he must have been when Daniel replied that his God had preserved him. How thankful he was to fetch him out of the den. You, too, dear child of God will come out of the den all right. There will be a resurrection of God's people's bodies at last, and there will be a resurrection for their reputations also. The slanderer may belie the character of a true man, but no true man's character will ever be buried long enough to rot. Your righteousness shall come forth as light, and your judgment as the noonday. You need not be afraid but that, as Daniel rose from the den to dignity, so will every man who suffers for Christ receive honor and glory and immortality "in that day."

Recollect that if you are among the lions now, the day is hurrying on with speed when you shall be among the angels. Our Lord and Master, after being in the wilderness with the wild beasts, found that "angels came and ministered to him." Such a visitation awaits all the faithful. What a change those martyrs enjoyed who took a fiery breakfast on earth, but supped with Christ that very day after riding to glory in a chariot of fire. If you have now to suffer all that can possibly be wreaked of vengeance upon you for Christ's sake, you will think nothing of it when you have been five minutes in heaven. Indeed, it will be a subject of congratulation that ever you were permitted in your humble measure to be counted worthy to suffer for Christ's sake. Therefore, be ye comforted, you young

people, and march on with heroic step.

I see a soldier or two here tonight, and I am right glad that we have generally a block of red coats in the congregation. I know that often in the barrack-room it is hard for a Christian man to bear witness for Jesus Christ. Many and many a soldier has found his path as a Christian to be extremely difficult; he has had to sail very carefully, like a ship among torpedoes, and only divine grace has kept him safe. Some of you who reside in large establishments, where you sleep in rooms with great many others, find it difficult even to kneel down to pray. Mind that you do it, though. Do it at first right bravely, and keep it up. Never be ashamed of your colors. Begin as you mean to go on; and go on as you begin. If you begin parleying you will soon lose all their respect, and make it worse for yourself; but in the name of Jesus Christ let me beseech you to be firm and steadfast even unto death. Be comforted, for there has no new thing happened to you. It is no novelty for the followers of Jesus to be ridiculed and despised. He came to send fire on the earth, and it has been kindled well nigh two thousand years. The fiery path is the old road of the church militant; therefore tread it, and be glad that you are permitted to follow the heroes of heaven in their sacred way.

II. Now, a few words By Way Of Advice.

Of course this does not deal with all of you who are now present. I hope that many of you dwell among the godly. Still there are some whose soul is among lions, and to them I give this counsel.

First, if you dwell among lions do not irritate them. If I happened to be among lions! would not tease them: I would take good care that if they were cruel and fierce I did not make them so. I have known some, who I hope were Christians, who have acted very unwisely, and so have made matters bad for themselves. There is such a thing as ramming religion down people's throats, or trying to do so; and you can put on a very long face, and try to scold people into religion. This will not do. Never yet was anybody bullied to Christ, and there never will be. Some are very stem, and make no allowances for other people: these may be good, but they are not wise. What is a rule to you and to me may not be a rule to everybody else. We said the other Sunday that we should not think of eating what we give to swine; but we do not, therefore, say, "These swine must not have their wash." No, no; it is good enough for them. Let them have it. And as to worldly people and their amusements, let them have them, poor things. They have nothing else, let them have their mirth. I would not touch their joys, nor would you, for they would be no pleasure to you; but do not, as a new-born man, go and set yourself up as the standard of what the ordinary sinner, dead in sin, is to be. He cannot come up to our standard. Do not be perpetually finding fault: that is pulling the lions' whiskers, and the creatures are very likely to growl at you. If your soul is among lions, be gentle, be kind, be prudent, be tender sometimes be silent: a good word is on your tongue, but there are times when you must not say it: for the life of you, you must not say it, for it would rouse the lions and make more sin than need be. Sometimes a truth needs defending; but, my inexperienced and untaught brother, do not try to defend it, for you have not the strength. The champion of infidelity will challenge one who is weak and uninstructed, and he overthrows him, and he who came forth valorously is beaten in argument. He was not up to the mark in knowledge, and so he was vanquished: and then, what do the adversaries say? Why, they boast that the truth is disproved and that Christ is beaten. Nothing of the kind. The British empire was not defeated when a regiment of our soldiers were slain at Isandula; and the truth and cause of Christ is not defeated when some weak champion fall of zeal rushes to the front when he ought to have kept in the rear. I do not say much on this point, because we have not much rash zeal nowadays, and it would be a pity to cheek what honest zeal there is; but still there is such a text as "Be ye wise as serpents and harmless as doves." Put your finger on your lips when you are irritated. You cannot speak to the purpose when you are perturbed, and are likely to be angry. Be quiet and bide your time. Many a man would do more good for the cause of God if he would not irritate ungodly people. Let them alone: seek their salvation lovingly and tenderly; but when your efforts to do them good only provoke them to sin, try another way. Do not go on with that which angers them; invent another method. I do believe that some Christians make half the opposition, which they get from the world by their own ill tempers and stupidity. They challenge conflict: their actions seem to say, "Who will fight me?" and then, of course, somebody takes up the cudgels. Do not act foolishly; but if your soul is among lions, and they are inclined to be quiet, do not needlessly excite them.

Secondly, if your soul is among lions, do not roar yourself, for that is very easy to be done. We have known some, who we hope were Christians, who have met railing with railing, hard words with hard words, bitter speeches with bitter speeches. The ungodly are lions, and you are not; do not try to meet them in their own line. You will never roar as well as they do. If you are a Christian man, you have not the knack of rearing. Leave them to do it. Your way of meeting them is not by losing your temper and abusing your antagonists, and so becoming a lion yourself; but you must conquer them with gentleness, patience, kindness, and love. I pray you, dear brothers and sisters who have to bear a good deal for Christ's sake, do not get soured in spirit. There is a tendency in a martyr age to become obstinate and pugnacious. You must not be so. Love, love, love; and the more you are provoked, love the more. Overcome evil with good. I think it necessary to mention these cautions, because I know many require them.

Again, if your soul is among lions: then, do not be cowardly. Have you never heard that a lion is afraid of a man if he looks him steadily in the face? I am not sure about that piece of natural history; but I am quite certain that it is true with regard to the ungodly

world. If a man will bear himself calmly if he will be unmoved, determined, resolute, steadfast he will overcome the adversary. "When a man's ways please the Lord he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him." If you give way a little, you will have to give way a great deal. If you give the world an inch, you will have to give it an ell, as sure as you are alive. If you will not yield an inch, nay, nor yet a barleycorn, but stand steadfast, God will help you. Courage is what is wanted. The world, after a while, says of any man, "It is of no use laughing at him; he does not mind it. It is of no use calling him hard names; he only smiles at you. It is useless to be his enemy, for he will not be yours. He will only be your friend." Then the world whispers, "Well, after all, he is not so bad a fellow as we thought he was; we must let him have his own way." There is a big human heart somewhere down in men if you can but get at it, and after a while, when truth and righteousness have suffered, and been denounced, men turn round and are almost ready to carry on their shoulders with hosannas the selfsame person whom a little while before they longed to crucify. Do not be a coward! Do not be a coward!

"Stand up! stand up for Jesus!

The fight will. not be long;

This day the noise of battle,

The next the victor's song."

Even if the fight were long, for such a Master as Jesus it were worth while to endure ten thousand years of scorn, and moreover the reward at the end will repay us a thousand-fold.

If your soul is among lions, then do not go out among them alone. "Then whom shall I take with me?" says one, "there is not a Christian in the shop." Take your Lord with you. Be sure that you do that. Now, my dear friend, I know what they said yesterday, and how they bantered you; and you were tart and short with them, because you had not been in prayer in the morning as you ought to have been. If your mind had been more calm and gentle as the result of prayer you would not have minded it one-half so much. Take your Master with you, and whenever you have to speak think that he is standing at your side, and try to say what you would like him to hear; and then, when you have made your defense you will be able to say, "Good Master, I think I have not dishonored thee, for I have spoken thy words." Oh, live near to Christ if you live among lions. Those of you who endure opposition make the best Christians. Many that have been distinguished for Christ in after life have had to rough it a little at first. "It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth." If I could bring a garden-roller and roll the grass for you all the way from here to heaven do you think that I would do it? Certainly not. A rough place or two is good for you, it tries and strengthens pilgrim feet, A child will never become a man if he is carried about all his life like a baby. You must run alone. You must learn the arts of holy warfare, or else you will not be fit to be a soldier of the cross, a follower of the Lamb. May his good Spirit help you to keep in fellowship with Christ, that he may guard and protect you from every temptation and persecution.

Further, let me say to you that if your soul is among lions, and you feel very weak about it, you are permitted to pray the Lord to move you in his providence to quieter quarters. A Christian man is not bound to endure persecution if he can help it: "When they persecute you in one city flee to another." You are quite warranted in seeking another situation. There may be reasons why you should remain under the trial, and if so, take care that you do not overlook them. Prudence may make you avoid persecution, but cowardice must not mingle with the prudence. That prayer which says, "Lead us not into temptation," gives us, as it were, a permit to remove from places where we are much tempted; and sometimes it is the duty of the Christian to seek some other sphere of labor, if he possibly can, where he will not be so much tried.

One thought more: the braver thing is to ask for grace to slap with the lions and tame them. "My soul is among lions." Well, if the Lord makes you a lion tamer that is the very place where you ought to be. In some of our districts in London as soon as ever a man is converted he feels that he cannot live there any longer, and this makes the district hopeless. My dear friend, Mr. Orsman, working in Golden Lane, as it used to be, told me that his was an endless task, because as soon as ever the people were converted they say, "Would you have me live here any longer, in such a horrible place as this?" They naturally feel that as they have grown sober, and decent, and respectable, they should move into a different locality, and they do so: but the result is that the old spot does not improve. Sometimes the Christian man should say, "No: God has made me strong in grace; and I will stop here, and fight it out. These are lions, but I will tame them. I believe that God has put me here on purpose to bring my fellow-workmen to the Savior, and by his grace I will do it." Now, if I were a lamp I daresay that, if I had my choice of where I should burn, I should choose to blaze away in a respectable street. I should like to scatter my light in front of the Tabernacle; but surely if I were a really sensible lamp I should say to myself-"If there are only a few lamps, and all the streets have to be lit, there is more necessity to light up a back slum or a blind alley than to adorn a main street, therefore let me shine in the dismal courts. In a lonely, dark place where murder may be done, there let me act as guardian of the night and detective of the villain." A wise lamp would say, "I came into the world to give light, and I should like to give light where light is most wanted. Hang me up in Mint Street, or in St. Giles's, or away there by the back of Kent Street, where I may be most useful."

And now, Christian people, is there not sense about this advice? Is there not reason in it? Would not your Master have you go where you are most wanted, and should you not, therefore, if your soul is amongst lions, say, "Thank God it is so. These people are not going to conquer me, but I am going to conquer them"? What a beautiful spectacle was that which was exhibited by the Moraviau Brethren in their grand times! They could not land on one of the West Indies to preach the gospel to the negroes, for the planters would not have anybody there but slaves; and two brethren sold themselves for slaves, and lived and died in bondage, that they might teach the poor negroes. It is said that there was a place in Africa where persons were shut up whose limbs were rotting away through leprosy and other diseases. Two of these brethren climbed up the wall and saw these poor creatures some with no legs, and others with no arms. They asked to be allowed to go in to win their souls for Christ, and the answer was, "If you enter you can never come out again, because you would bring contagion. You go in there to die, to rot away as the lepers do." These brave men went in and died that they might bring the lepers to Christ. I hope that we have some drops of that grand Christian blood still in our veins; and if we have, we shall feel that we could go to the gates of hell to win a sinner. You are not like your Master unless you would die to save men from hell. You will bear jests and jeers, and count them nothing if you can but win souls. So stop where you are, my stronger brothers and sisters; if your souls are among lions, tarry and tame the lions. It will be a grand thing for you to come one day to the church meeting with two or three of your neighbors whom you have been the means of converting to Christ. I like to see a man march, if he can do it, with a tame lion on each side. When a man has by God's grace brought some of those that were drunkards and swearers to the feet of Jesus, oh, it is a grand triumph. It has been my business for many years to be a lion tamer, and I delight in it. If there is any lion of the sort here, I wish the Master would tame him, and make him lie down and crouch at his feet. There is the place for us poor sinners, at the feet of Christ. But do not be afraid of sinners, dear friends, for how can you tame them if you tremble at them. Go forth to win them in the strength of the living God, and you shall yet see the lion lie down with the lamb, and a little child shall lead them. Amen and amen.

Psalms 60:4 Our Banner

NO. 2979

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IN THE YEAR 1863.**

"Thou hast given a banner to them that fear thee, that it may be displayed because of the truth." — Psalms 60:4.

MOST writers upon this Psalm, after having referred the banner to the kingdom of David, say that there is here a reference to the Messiah. We believe there is nor is that reference an obscure allusion. In the Lord Jesus we find the clue to the history and the solution of the prophecy. He is the banner, — he is the ensign that is lifted up before the people. He is Jehovah-nissi, "the Lord my banner," whom it is our joy to follow, and around whom it is our delight to rally, we shall not stay to prove, — though we might readily do so, — that the banner here intended is no other than the Lord Jesus Christ in the majesty of his person, — in the efficacy of his merit, — in the completeness of his righteousness, — in the success of his triumph, — in the glory of his advent. If you read it with an eye to him, you have the meaning at once: "Thou has given Christ as a banner to them that fear thee, to be displayed because of the truth." So let us consider our Lord Jesus Christ, first, as he is compared to a banner; secondly, by whom he is given; thirdly, to whom he is given; and fourthly, for what purpose.

I. Let us consider Our Lord Jesus Christ As He Is Compared To A Banner.

The banner was far more useful, I suppose, in ancient, than it is in modern warfare. Times have changed, and we are changed by them. Yet we still speak with reverence of the old flag. There is much meaning in the phrase, "the flag that's braved a thousand years the battle and the breeze." The soldier still waves the flag of his country, and the sailor still looks with patriotic pride to the flag that has so long floated at England's masthead. Our metaphor, however, rather points to ancient than present use.

We should notice, first of all, that the banner was lifted up and displayed as the point of union. When a leader was about to gather troops for a war, he hoisted his banner, and then every man rallied to the standard. The coming to the standard, the rallying round the banner, was the joining with the prince, the espousing of his cause. In the day of battle, when there was ever a likelihood that the host would be put to flight, the valiant men all fought around the banner.

Its defense was of the first and chief consequence. They might leave the baggage for a while; they might forsake the smaller flags of the divisions; but the great blood-red banner that with prayer had been consecrated, they must all gather round it, and there, if need be, shed their heart's blood.

Christ, my brethren, is the point of union for all the soldiers of the cross. I know of no other place where all Christians can meet. We cannot all meet — I am sorry that we cannot, — at the baptismal stream. There are some who will not be baptized; they persist still in the sin of putting drops of water in the place of the ordained flood, and bringing infants where faith is required. We cannot all meet even around the table of the Eucharist; there are some who thrust aside their brethren, because they do not see eye to eye with them; and even the communion table has sometimes become a field of battle. But all Christians can meet in the person of Christ; all true hearts can meet in the work of Christ. This is a banner that we all love, if we be Christians, and far hence be those who are not. Hither to thy cross, O Jesus, do we come! The Churchman, laden with his many forms and vestments; the Presbyterian, with his stern Covenant, and his love of those who stained the heather with their blood; the Independent, with his passion for liberty, and the separateness of the free churches; the Methodist, with his intricate forms of Church government, sometimes forms of bondage, but still forms of power; the Baptist, remembering his ancient pedigree, and the days in which his fathers were hounded even by Christians themselves, and counted not worthy of that name; they all come to Christ. Various opinions divide them; they see not eye to eye on many masters; here and there, they will have a skirmish for the old landmarks; and rightly so, for we ought to be jealous, as Josiah was, to do that which is right in the sight of the Lord, and neither decline to the right hand nor to the left. But we rally to the cross of Christ; and there, all weapons of internecine warfare being cast aside, we meet as brethren, fellow comrades in a blessed Evangelical Alliance, who are prepared to suffer and to die for his dear sake. Forward then, Christians, to the point of union! In the crusade against the powers of darkness, with the salvation of sinners for my one undivided aim, little care I for anything but the lifting up of my Master's gospel, and the proclamation of the Word of mercy through his flowing blood.

Again, the banner, in time of war, was the great guide-star; it was the direction to the soldier. You remember what special care they took, in the day of battle, that, in case the standard-bearer should fall, there might still be some means of guiding the warriors.

So, to this day, Christ is the great Guide of the Christian in the day of battle. There is no fear that Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and for ever, will ever fail. Fix your eye upon him, Christian; and if you would know the best way to fight, fight in his footsteps, imitate his every action, let your life be a copy of his life. You need never stop to ask for directions: the life of Christ is the Christian's model. You need not turn to your fellow-believer, and say, "Comrade, what are we to do now? The smoke of battle gathers, and the cries are various; which way shall I go?" The apostle Paul has given us our directions: "Let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." Press forward, in Christ's footsteps, saying, "God hath given thee, my Savior, to be to me a banner because of the truth."

In these two respects, as the central point for rallying, and as the direction to the warrior, Christ is our banner.

And the banner, let it be remembered, is always the chief object of attack. The moment the adversary sees it, his object is to strike there. If it be not the most vulnerable point, it will be at least the point where the adversary's power is most felt. Did they not of old aim their shots at the flagstaff so as to cut down the banner? Whenever the old Knights of the Red Cross fought the Saracens, they always endeavored to make their steel ring upon the helmet of the man whose hand held the standard of Mohammed; the fight was ever fiercest around the standard. Sometimes, when the battle was over, the field would be strewn with legs, and arms, and mangled bodies; but, in one place, there would be a heap where they were piled one upon another, a great mountain of flesh and armor, broken bones and smashed skulls, and one would ask, "What means this? How came they here? How trampled they so one upon another, and fought in pocks of human blood?" The answer would be, "'Twas there the standard-bearer stood, and first the adversary made a dash, and stole the banner; and then fifty knights vowed to redeem it, and they dashed against their foes, and took it by storm; and then again hand to hand they fought with the banner between them, first in one hand and then in another, changing ownership each hour."

So, dear friends, Christ Jesus has always been the object of attack. You remember that, when divine justice came forth against Christ on Calvary, it made five rents in the great banner, and those five rents, all glorious, are in that banner still. Since that day, many a shot has sought to riddle it, but not one has been able to touch it. Borne aloft, first by one hand and then by another, the mighty God of Jacob being the strength of the standard-bearers, that flag has bidden defiance to the leagued hosts of the world, the flesh, and the devil; but never has it been trailed in the mire, and never once carried in jeering triumph by the adversary. Blessed are the rents in the banner, for they are the symbol of our victory. Those five wounds in the person of the Savior are the gates of heaven to us. But, thank God, there are no more wounds to be endured; the person of our Lord is safe for ever. "A bone of him shall not be broken." His gospel, too, is an unwounded gospel, and his mystical body is uninjured. Yea; the gospel is unharmed after all the strife of ages. The infidel threatens to rend the gospel to pieces, but it is as glorious as ever; modern scepticism has sought to pull it thread from thread, but has not been able so much as to rend a fragment of it. Every now and then, fresh adversaries have found out some new methods of induction or declamation, essaying to prove the gospel to be a lie, and Christ an impostor. Have they succeeded? Nay, verily, they have all had to fly from, the field. The good old banner of the Lord Omnipotent, even Christ Jesus, still stands exact above them all.

And why should the banner be the object of attack but for this very reason, that it is the symbol of defiance? As soon as ever the banner is lifted up, it is, as it were, flaunted in the face of the foe. It seems to say to him, "Do your worst, come on! We are not afraid of you, — we defy you!" So, when Christ is preached, there is a defiance given to the enemies of the Lord. Every time a sermon is preached in the power of the Spirit, it is as though the shrill clarion woke up the fiends of hell, for such a sermon to say to them, "Christ is come forth again to deliver his lawful captives out of your power; the king of kings has come to take away your dominions, to wrest from you your stolen treasures, and to proclaim himself your Master." There is a stern joy that the minister sometimes feels when he thinks of himself as the antagonist of the powers of hell. Martin Luther seems to have felt it when he said, "Come, let us sing the forty-sixth Psalm, and let the devil do his worst! "That was lifting up the standard of the cross. If you want to defy the devil, don't go about preaching philosophy; don't sit down, and write out fine sermons, with long sentences, three quarters of a mile in extent; don't try and cull fine, smooth phrases that will sound sweetly in people's ears. The devil doesn't care a bit for this; but talk about Christ, preach about the sufferings of the Savior, tell sinners that there is life in a look at him, and straightway the devil taketh great umbrage. Look at many of the ministers in London! They preach in their pulpits from the first of January to the last of December, and nobody finds fault with them, because they prophesy such smooth things. But let a man preach Christ, let him declaim about the power of Jesus to save, and press home gospel truth with simplicity and boldness, straightway the fiends of darkness will be against him; and, if they cannot bite, they will show that they can howl and bark. There is a symbol of defiance in the banner of the cross; it is God's symbol of defiance, his gauntlet thrown down to the confederated powers of darkness, a gauntlet which they dare not take up, for they know what tremendous power for good there is in the uplifting of the cross of Christ. Wave, then, your banner, O ye soldiers of the cross; each in your place and rank keep watch and ward, but wave your banner still; for though the adversary shall be full of wrath, it is because he knoweth that his time is short when once the cross of Christ is lifted up.

We have not quite exhausted the metaphor yet. The banner was ever a source of consolation to the wounded. There he lies, the good knight; right well has he fought without fear and without reproach; but a chance arrow pierced the joints of his harness, and his life is oozing out from the ghastly wound. There is no one there to unbuckle his helmet, or give him a draught of cooling water; his frame is locked up in that hard case of steel, and though he feels the smart, he cannot gain relief. He hears the mingled cries, the hoarse shouts of men that rush in fury against their fellows; and he opens his eyes, — as yet he has not fainted from his bleeding. Where, think you, does he look? He turns himself round. What is he looking for? For friend? For comrades? No. Should they come to him; he would say, "Just lift me up, and let me sit against that tree, but go you to the fight." Where is that restless eye searching, and what is the object for which it is looking? Yes, he has it; and the face of the dying man is brightened. He sees the banner still waving, and with his last breath he cries, "On! on! on!" and falls asleep content, because the banner is safe. It has not been cast down. Though he has fallen, yet the banner is secure. Even so, every true soldier of the cross rejoices in its triumph. We fall, but Christ does not. We die, but the cause prospers. As I have told you before, when my heart was most sad, — as it never was before nor since, — that sweet text, "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name," quite cheered my soul, and set me again in peace and comfort. Is Jesus safe? Then it never matters what becomes of them. Is the banner all right? Doth it wave on high? Then the adversary hath not won the day; he hath felled one and another, but he himself shall be broken in pieces, for the banner still glares in the sun.

And, lastly, the banner is the emblem of victory. When the fighting is over, and the soldier cometh here, what does he bring? His blood-stained flag. And what is borne highest in the procession as it winds through the streets? It is the flag. They hang it in the minster; high up there in the roof, and where the lines smoketh, and where the song of praise ascendeth, there hangs the banner, honored and esteemed, borne in conflict and in danger. Now, our Lord Jesus Christ shall be our banner in the last day, and when all our foes shall be under our feet. A little while, and he that will come shall come, and will not tarry. A little while, and we shall see--

**"Jehovah's banner furled,
Sheathed his sword; he speaks! 'tis done,
And the kingdoms of this world
Are the kingdoms of his Son."**

And then Jesus, high above us all, shall be exalted, and through the streets as the holy city the acclamations shall nag,

"Hosanna, Hosanna, blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord."

II. Let us turn to our second point for a few moments. It is this: Who gave us this banner? By Whom Was Christ Given To Us?

Soldiers often esteem the colors for the sake of the person who first bestowed them. You and I ought greatly to esteem our precious

Christ for the sake of God who gave him to us: "Thou hast given a banner to them that fear thee." God gave us this banner in old eternity. Christ was given by the eternal Father, from everlasting, or ever the earth was, to his elect people, to be the Messiah of God, the Savior of the world. He was given in the manger, when "the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us." He was given upon the cross when the Father bestowed every drop of his Son's blood, and every nerve of his body, and every power of his soul, to bleed and die, "the Just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God." "Thou hast given a banner."

That banner was given to each one of us in the day of our conversion. Christ became, from that time forth, our glory and our boast. And he is given to some of us, especially, when we are called to the ministry, or when the Holy Spirit's guidance puts us upon any extraordinary work for Christ. Then is the banner, in a direct and especial manner, committed to our care. There are some here who have had this banner given to them to carry in the midst of the Sunday-school. A dear sister here has it. A beloved brother has it to bear in the midst of many of this congregation. The young men of our College, of our Evening Classes, and many others of you, workers for Christ, have that banner, that you may bear it in the streets, that you may lift up the name of Jesus in the causeways, and in the places of assembly. And, in a certain measure, all of you, who love the Lord, have that banner given to you, that in your various spheres of service you may talk of Jesus, and lift up his holy name.

Now, inasmuch as God himself gives us this banner, with what reverence should we look upon it, with what ardor should we cluster round it, with what zeal should we defend it, with what enthusiasm should we follow it, with what faith and confidence should we rush even into death itself for its defense!

III. Thirdly, To Whom Is This Banner Given?

The text says, "Thou hast given a banner to them that fear thee." Not to all men. God has a chosen people. These chosen people are known, in due time, by their outward character. That outward grace-wrought character is this, they fear God, and they that fear God are the only persons who ought to carry this banner. Shall the banner be put into a drunkard's hands? Shall the great truth of Christ be left to those who live in sin? Oh, it is a wretched thing when men come into the pulpit to preach who have never known and felt the power of the gospel themselves! Time was — but times are changed somewhat, — when, in multitudes of our parish pulpits, men whose characters were unhallowed preached to others what they never practiced themselves. To such, the banner ought not to be given. Men must fear God, or else they are not worthy to bear it.

Moreover, none but these can bear it. What others bear is not the banner; it is but an imitation of it. It is not Christ they preach; it is a diluted thing that is not the gospel of Jesus. They cannot proclaim it to others till they know it themselves. It is given to them that fear God, because they will have courage to bear it. Fear is often the mother of courage. To fear God, makes a man brave. To fear man, is cowardly, I grant; but to fear God, with humble awe and holy reverence, is such a noble passion that I would we were more and more full thereof, blending, as it were, the fear of Isaac with the faith of Abraham. To fear God, will make the weakest of us play the man, and the most craven of us become heroes for the Lord our God.

Now, inasmuch as this banner is given to those that fear God, if you fear God, it is given to you. I do not know in what capacity you are to bear it, but I do know there is somewhere or other where you have to carry it. Mother, let the banner wave in your household. Merchant, let the banner be fixed upon your house of business. Let it be unfurled and fly at your masthead, O sailor! Bear the banner, O soldier, in your regiment! Yours is a stern duty, for, alas! the Christian soldier hath a path of briar that few men have broaden. God make you faithful, and may you be honored as a good soldier of Jesus Christ! Some of you are poor, and work hard in the midst of many artisans who fear not God. Take your banner with you, and never be ashamed of your colors. You cannot be long in a workshop before your companions will pull their colors out. They will soon begin talking to you about their sinful pleasures, their amusements, perhaps their infidel principles. Take your banner out likewise. Tell them that it is a game two can play at; never allow a man to show his banner without also showing yours. Do not do it ostentatiously; do it humbly, but do it earnestly and sincerely. Remember that your banner is one that you never need be ashamed of; the best of men have fought under it; nay, he who was God as well as man: hath his own name written on the escutcheon. Surely, then, you need not be ashamed to wave it anywhere and everywhere. You can think bravely; now be great in act as you have been in thought.

"Presence of mind and courage in distress

Are more than armies to procure success."

IV. This is our last question, For What Purpose Was This Banner Given To Us?

Our text is very explicit upon that point; it was given to us to be "displayed because of the truth." It is to be displayed. In order to display a banner, you must take it out of its case. Members of this congregation, brethren in the church, I pray you study the

Scriptures much. I would not have men attempt to preach unless they have some power. To go forth without some study, would be like a man attempting to do execution with a gun that had much powder in it and no shot. Do unfurl the banner; to this end, husband well your time. Young men, save your spare hours to study the Bible. Steal them from your deep if you cannot get them anyhow else. Sunday-school teachers, be diligent in your preparations for your classes. Let your banner out of the case. It is of little service lifting it up in the midst of the ranks without its being unfurled. See that ye know the holy art of unfurling it. Practise it; study it; be well acquainted with him who is the wisdom of God and the power of God.

And, after the flag is unfurled, it needs to be lifted up. So, in order to display Christ, you must lift him up. Lift him up with a clear voice, as one who has something to say which he would have men hear. Speak of him boldly, as one who is not ashamed of his message. Speak affectionately, speak passionately, speak with your whole soul, let your whole heart be in every word you say, for this is to lift up the banner.

But, besides lifting up the banner, you must carry it, for it is the business of the standard-bearer, not merely to hold it in one place, but to bear it here and there if the plan of battle shall change. So, bear Christ to the poor lodging-houses, to the workhouses, to the prisons, if you can get admittance to the back streets, to the dark slums, to the cellars, to the solitary attic, to the crowded rooms, to the highways and the byways; and you especially who are private Christians; and not preachers, bear it from house to house. We had a complaint, the other day, that some of you had been going from house to house to try and talk to others about their souls; you had entrenched upon the parochial bounds of the authored gamekeeper! I pray you to entrench again. What is my parish? The whole world is my parish; let the whole world be your parish likewise. What does it matter to us if the world be parcelled out amongst men who probably do little or nothing? Let us do all we can. No man hath any right to say to me, "Visit in such-and-such a district; not here, — this is my ground." Who gave it to you? Who gave him lordship of the world, or any portion of its "The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof." The earth is your field, and no matter upon whose district, territory, or parish. Let me encourage you who love the Savior, you who have the pure gospel, to go and spread it. Let nothing confine you, or limit your labors, except your strength and your time.

Still, after all, if we carry the gospel, and lift up the banner, it will never be displayed unless there is wind to blow it. A banner would only hang like a dead flag upon the staff if there were no wind. Now, we cannot produce the wind to expand the banner, but we can invoke heavenly aid. Prayer becomes a prophecy when we say, "Awake, O heavenly wind, and blow, and let this banner be displayed." The Holy Spirit is that gracious wind who shall make the truth apparent in the hearts of those who hear it. Display the banner, talk of Christ, live Christ, proclaim Christ everywhere. He is given to you for this very purpose. Therefore, let not your light be hid under a bushel. "Ye are the light of the world." "Let your light so shine before men." Let the old flag be held up by firm hands. Go ye forth in new times, with new resolves, and may you have constant renewings as new opportunities open before you!

Oh, but are there not some of you who could not bear this banner? Let me invite such to come and take shelter under it. My Master's banner, wherever it goes, gives liberty. Under the banner of old England, there never breathes a slave. They tread our country, they breathe our air, and their shackles fall. Beneath the banner of Christ, no slave can live. Do but look up to Jesus, relying upon his suffering in your stead, and bearing your sins in your place and room, and forthwith you shall have acceptance in the Beloved, and the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your heart and mind through Jesus Christ. So may God enlist you beneath the banner, to his glory! Amen.

Psalm 66:10 The Church's Probation

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"Thou, O God, hast proved us." — Psalm 66:10.

THE psalmist, who spake these words in his song, told forth the experience of the godly in all generations. In the patriarchal age, when Abraham was called to leave his kindred, and go forth from Ur of the Chaldees; constrained to sojourn as a stranger among a people that he knew not; bidden to wait with patience for a son whom God would give him in his old age; and, at length, commanded to take that son to the top of a mountain, and offer him as a sacrifice, — he might well say, "Thou, O God, has proved us." Isaac could say the same when he tabernacled in the Land of Promise, having not so much as a foot of it that he could call his own, except his father's sepulcher. Jacob learned the same stanza when he was tried in Laban's household, when he wrestled with God in Peniel, and triumphed over the angel at Jabbok; this he knew when he went down into Egypt, and, dying, blessed the sons of Joseph. All the patriarchs, as they fell asleep, could say, "Thou, O God, hast proved us." And this was the song of the Church during her sojourn in Egypt, when she was lying among the pots, and during her wanderings in the wilderness, when she passed through a desert land by a way which she had not traversed aforetime. And this, too, was the voice of the Church under the

conduct of Joshua, when Israel came through Jordan, and began to defy the hosts of the Canaanites, — when they drew the sword against mighty adversaries who dwelt in cities fenced with high walls, gates, and bars, and came forth to battle in chariots that had scythes of iron, — “Thou, O God, hast proved us.” With such a word as this in their mouths, the judges fell asleep after they had avenged Israel, and done mighty deeds for the Lord of hosts. This David could well say, for he had seen affliction. This the kings, who walked in his steeps, and this the prophets, who spoke in God’s name, might all have said, “Thou, O God, hast proved us.”

And God’s dear Son, the Captain of our salvation, himself was tried and proved in all things too. He was thrust into the hottest part of the glowing coals, and tried as you and I have never been tried, — proved to such an extent as our heart hath not, conceived. And, amongst the professed followers of Jesus, all the sons of God are witnesses to this truth, “Thou, O God, hast proved us;” whether they were proved in dungeons where they lay victims of damp and mildew, or on racks where every bone was dislocated and every muscle snapped, or at the stake where they mounted in chariots of fire to heaven, or on the rocks where they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, afflicted, tormented, — in all these temptations and trials God proved them. And even to this day, though by less severe methods, yet by other tests, as I shall have to show, the Church has still the same song to sing; and each dying saint must still subscribe his name to the long list; yea, and every bright spirit around the throne, in looking back upon his experience on earth, will have to swell the great chorus, “Thou, O God, hast proved us.” There is not an ingot of silver in heaven’s treasury that has not been in the furnace on earth, and been purified seven times; there is not a gem of purest ray serene which that Divine Jeweller hast not exposed to every sort of test; there is not an atom of gold in the Redeemer’s crown which has not been molten among the hottest, coals so as to rid it of its alloy. It is universal to every child of God. If you are a servant of the Lord, you must be proved; you shall never enter heaven unproved; you must be tried in the fire; the proof, the assaying must take place upon every one of us. Nor do I think we ought to shun it, perhaps it may happen that, in the feeble words I speak to-night, some reason may be given which shall reconcile your hearts to the sternness of the proof, and even make you kiss the hand of the Refiner when he puts you into the fire.

I. What Is It That Thou, O God, Hast Proved In Thy People?

I think we may answer, he has proved everything. If we have anything that has not been proved, it either is to be proved, or else it is so bad that it is not worth proving. Everything we have, that God has given us, will have to be proved. There is not a grain of grace that will escape the probation; he is sure, in some way or other, to test and exercise it. We have no manna to lay in the cupboard, to breed worms; the manna is given us to eat. These rocks that follow us with its refreshing streams flows that we: may drink thereof; when we shall cease to thirst, the river will cease to flow; we only have grace given to us that it may be proved.

I think we can say, looking back upon our lives, those of us who are in Christ Jesus, that the Lord has proved our sincerity. Ah, how many put on the harness when we first put it on; and where are they now? In our little gospel experience, how many have we seen who have turned their backs in the day of battle! Yes, the young knights went out gaily enough to the field; but say nothing about their return;” tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Askelon,” how their shields were broken, their lances shivered, and their plumes trailed in the mire. When any turn from Zion’s way, our best method of using their apostacy is as Cowper used it, for self-examination, —

“When any turn from Zion’s way,

(Alas, what numbers do!)

Methinks I hear my Savior say,

‘Wilt thou forsake me too?’”

But, up to this time, one way in which God has tested our sincerity has been to keep our leaf green; and, through divine grace, that seniority has kept its hold, while some who, in the first flush of religious excitement, promised well for heaven, afterwards withered and faded. While many, who were like the fair blossoms of the spring upon the tree, were blown down by the East wind, or fell with a shower on the ground, we have been left, by divine grace, to bring forth some little fruit, though not as much as we could desire. O brethren, it is a great mercy, when God proves our sincerity, if, notwithstanding the defection of man, and the fickleness and instability of our own hearts, we are able to say, “Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee.”

It is a privilege to have our sincerity tried, but it is one which must be purchased at a sharp cost; for we cannot know our sincerity for God without being put where we are much tempted and troubled. I believe many young people think they have the grace of God in their hearts, who, if they were really put in temptation’s way, would soon discover that it is only a sort of hereditary profession, and not the true grace of God they possess. I have a great suspicion about buying hothouse flowers in the street. All the summer through, you see people with their barrows with the finest flowers you ever saw, but most of them have been forced; and if you take them home, and put them in your garden, on the first cold day they look pale, and begin to droop, for they cannot bear the change

of atmosphere, because they are forged. So I cannot doubt that there are many, who join Christian churches, who have been forged; they have been in the hothouse of godliness, in association with the saints; and when they are put away from Christian association, where is their piety, where is their religion? Some of you, I know, have had to suffer this chilling trial. You have been shut up among blasphemers, you have been made to live among the ungodly and profane, or you have had temptations from the polite and the godless, yet, thanks be to God, you have been enabled to retain your hold on Christ. You can say, with the psalmist, "Thou, O God, hast proved us." And if you are sincere, mark you, as surely as ever you have true godliness, it must and will be put to the test.

And God has also tried our vows of fidelity. Perhaps, the fewer vows we make, the better; but when we do make them, how jealous should we be to keep them! What a mass of vows we once made when our blood was hot with the novelty of our new discovery of the beauty of religion! We think we will do, we know not what our love laughs at impossibilities; we could leap like Curtius into the chasm, and sacrifice ourselves for Jesus. Would to God that we were always in that frame of mind! But then we get promising what we will do if we are put in certain positions, and our promissory notes are not written on stamped paper, they are only written on some common stuff of our own; and we put our signature, but still we dishonor the note when it comes due; we never pay our vows. God did not prompt us to the vow, but our own self-confidence; and, therefore, it gets broken. When I look back upon what you and I promised we would do when we first began the heavenly warfare, and how little we have really done, I think we can mournfully say, "O Lord, thou hast proved us." Some people talk about the older Christians as being so dull and so lifeless; but, let me put it to yourselves, how much better are you? And I, sometimes, in the early days of my preaching, was wont to speak of the cool, freezing lips of some ministers, and of the dilatory way in which they discharged their duties, but I have had, in looking at my text, to say of myself, is Lord, thou hast proved me." And some of these vows that I made, — to wit, how I would be the pillar of fire in his cause, and lead the souls of men, and win them to the foot of the cross, — how signally have they been broken, for "Thou, O Lord, hast proved us." All those fine visions, like potters' vessels when smitten with a rod of iron, have been broken into vile potsherds.

But how the Lord has been pleased, dear friends, to prove our professions and pretensions to eminence! Do you recollect — with some of you, it will not be very difficult to look back, certainly not with me, — do you remember how you thought, when first you knew the Lord, how different you would be from that nervous Mrs. Muchafraid? You went to see her, when you were first converted, and sat down and talked with her; and as you came away, you said, "That woman is a bag of nerves; if ever I live to her age, you will not find me so desponding." You have been proved since then, and how has it been with you? Do you remember how when you came, one evening, from a prayer-meeting, when some friend had prayed so long and so drearily, you said, "Please God, if ever I have the privilege of praying aloud at a prayer-meeting, there shall always be life and earnestness in my prayer"? How hast it been with you, brother? I question whether any man ever attained to the eminence in piety that he once marked out for himself, and whether we have not all had occasion to eat our words. Have I not said many things about what, I would do if I was in somebody else's place, and what I am sure I would do if I had that man's ability and that man's opportunity? We used to brag about the lofty heights which we would climb, and the mighty summits on which we would stand, and here we are creeping along in the valley! Do not make this confession to lull your conscience, or to comfort yourselves for being in the lowlands. We ought to be on the mountains — we ought to be all we hoped to have been; it is wrong in us not to have gained what we longed for; we must cleanse ourselves for this. Oh, how it ought to humble us to think how God has proved us, and brought us down! My pastoral experience, which, if you call it short, has, nevertheless, been very, very broad, bears witness to this; whenever I have seen a Christian talking large things about his loftiness in grace and his attainments, I have, always seen him, sooner or later, brought as low as the dust. I have known some brethren, who have said that they never had a doubt of their acceptance; and I have thanked God for them, and have hoped they never might; but I have seen some of them in such a condition as I pray I never may be in. I believe there are such things in the world, to this day, as those bullocks that pushed with side and with shoulder, and that fouled the waters with their feet where the trembling ones came to drink. Such professors as those will find that the Lord will bring them down ere long. Those big saints will one day be glad enough to creep into a mousehole, and feel themselves thrice happy if they are permitted to be numbered amongst the meanest of the Lord's people. As surely as we ever make these high pretensions to great things, we shall be brought down, and we shall have to cry, "O Lord, we did exalt ourselves, we did promise high and great things, but thou, O Lord, has proved us; and when it came to the proof, what insignificant, what worthless, what despicable worms we turned out to be after all!"

But, beloved, we have not only been tried in our sincerity, and in our vows, and in our lofty pretensions, but have we not also been tried in our strength? How strong we are sometimes! As my friend Will Richardson, who, though he is a poor laboring man, is a divine I like to quote, just as some people would quote St. Augustine, said to me one day, "Brother Spurgeon, if you and I ever get one inch above the ground, we get that one inch too high, and the Lord will bring us down again." How true that is! And the old man said, "O sir, you know, in winter-time, I feel as if I could do such a deal of mowing, and as if I could reap the fields at such a rate!" but when the hot summer comes on, poor old Will wipes the sweat from his brow, and he thinks it is hard work reaping after all, and he will be very glad when he can get home and lie down, for he is getting an old man. "O sir," said he, "If I could reap in the summer as I think I can in the winter, then I should do." And is not that the way with us? When there is no trial to bear, we can do all things, or can bear all sufferings; when there are no duties to be performed, then our strength runs over, we have too much; we have enough,

and some to give to our neighbors; but when we get into the work, and the struggle, and begin to reap and to mow, the sweat of weariness is such that we long to be away from it; our strength, when tried, is found to be less than nothing and vanity. "Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee,"-the man who can sing with the psalmist, "All my springs are in thee." You know, dear friends, many streams that run in winter become dry in summer; but they tell us that those wells that sap the mainsprings never do get dry. How happy is the believer who has sapped the mainspring, who has got deep enough down in his faith and confidence in God not to be dependent on the landsprings and the upper waters, but has got down to the mainspring, for then weeks of drought may be followed up by months without rain, but still his soul shall go on bubbling up, and his fountain shall ever flow!

Moreover, the Lord has proved our faith as well as our strength. Our faith is indeed our real strength, because our faith is that by which we lay hold upon God's arm. Has not your faith been proved, brother? An untried faith is no faith; at least, I mean, if a man has had faith for some considerable length of time, and that faith has not been tried, I question whether it ever came from God. I may say truly of faith what the old naturalists used to say falsely of the salamander, — that it lives in the fire. The natural element of faith is fire, it never gets on well unless it has some fire to try it. What think faith is given us for unless it is to be tried? Didst thou ever know a man build a house, and then shut it up, and let no one live in it! Houses are built to be inhabited, so God does not give anything without a design. Dost thou know a man who keeps his wheat year after year, and never puts it through the mill? Let me tell thee that my God puts all his wheat through the mill, and you must all go between the big stones, and you must have your crushing. You will never out fit to be offered unto the Lord unless you have been between the stones, there must be "the trial of your faith." We know that our friends in Australia, when they are getting gold, stand up to their waists in water, shaking the earth to and fro to get the golden grains out of it; and you and I, like spadefuls of earth, must be shaken to and fro that the earth may run away, and that the pure gold may remain. Your faith is much more precious than gold, so it also must be tried in the fire. You, Mr. Greatheart, must prepare for a great many battles. And you, "Valiant-for-Truth," depend upon it you will have to fight until your arm bleeds, and your sword grows to your hand, cemented with your own blood. "Father Honest," there is warfare for you before you enter heaven. You "Little-faiths" and "Despondencies" and "Much-afraids" may go on with but few trials, comparatively, for God does not sail his small ships on the sea, but puts them on the shallow waters; but the great ships must cross the Atlantic, and big waves may some times dash over thou, to let the angels in heaven see how well God can build his saints, so that they can stand every storm that earth, or hell, or heaven itself can send against them. Your faith must be tried.

To sum up all in one, dear brethren in Christ Jesus, depend upon it there is nothing that you have, that is good for anything, which will not be tried. Your religious principles will be tried. Why should they not be?

There is a certain sort of Christians, — I do not know whether I shall think them Christians soon, — who profess to be better than anybody else. They are non-sectarians; they have left all sects, to make a snug little party to go comfortably to heaven by themselves; and instead of seeking the conversion of sinners, they seduce the members of our churches, and compass sea and land to make one proselyte; and the more useful our church-members are, the more do they seek to pervert them to their disorders, and the more industrious are they in every way to show their perfect hatred of the Church of the living God. I sometimes meet with persons who are afraid of them; they say, "What shall we do?" "I can only say, if they are right, God prosper them; and if they are wrong, we are not afraid to meet them; we are not afraid that God's cause will suffer by their attacks. I had hoped — there was a time when I was fool enough to hope so, — that these were men who really meant what they said; but now that they show themselves in their true colors, as the destroyers of every order in the Church, and as especial enemies of God's ordained servants, of course, we can only bid them the defiance that they bid to us, and, in God's name, stand upon our bastions and our bulwarks, as our forefathers did aforetime, fearful of nothing they may do, because our cause is God's, and he has delivered us out of the hands of many a confederacy aforetime, and he will do so even unto the end. Never fear, my brethren, any attacks from nominal Christians, or proud, conceited persons, who think themselves too good to join with other churches, who, forsooth, are Babylon; they are the men of wisdom, and say, "Stand by, for we are holier shall thou." But what of the Pharisees of modern times from the South of England, what shall we say of them? Let them do their best, and their worst, and fight as they will. If our course be right, we can bear to have it proved. I like to see breezes spring up, — these fresh blasts that, every now and then, beat upon the good old ship. If she is all right, she will outlast them, and whether it be from disorders within or quarrels without, she will come out of the trouble.

If we have an ordinance, it ought to be tried: may baptism be tried! Let the Lord's supper be tried. The Church can never to reformed except by these trials. I always court the trials if they are sent by a brother in friendliness of spirit; it is only the bitterness with which they come that sometimes makes my blood boil about, it; but I must look to the God that sends it, and not to the man who may happen to be the second cause. Whether as individuals, or as a church, or as a denomination, we shall have to say at last, "O Lord, thou hast, proved us; blessed be thy name that thou hast, for —

“Our silver bears the glowing coals

The metal to refine.”

II. And now let us turn to the second question, How Has God Proved Us?

Dear friends, the Lord has proved us in a thousand ways. Many men think that the only proof that God gives to his servants is that of trial. He often proves them by trials, by bereavements, by temporal losses, by sickness in body, by personal infirmity, by slander, by persecution, all these are, therefore, proofs to a Christian; and a man who can go through all these, and find his faith still keeping its hold, and that he is able to say, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord," such a man may thank God for the proof. And, after all, dear friends, the only grace that is worth having is that which shall be with us when we go through fire, and through water, and when men do ride over our heads. Do not tell me of your sunshiny religion; do not tell me of your summer-day godliness. You may sometimes see, on the Mediterranean, when the waters are calm and still, a little fleet with fair and beautiful sails floating gaily there; it is the nautilus coming up in the sunshine to float; but there is a black cloud yonder, and at the first breath of wind that comes whistling across the waveless sea where it that fleet! Where is the nautilus? Every little creature has drawn itself into its stroll, and fallen to the bottom of the sea. Oh, there are too many of this kind, too many Christians who are with us when everything goes well; but where are they when the times have changed? To use John Bunyan's expressive metaphor, they walk with Religion when she goes in her silver slippers; but when she is bare-foot, and men laugh at her through the streets, then where are they? Affliction does try men.

But mark you, believers, there are many others trials; let me mention some, of them, that I often think severe. There is a very sharp trial, which some Christians have to bear when they have fresh light given them, and they shut their eyes against it. There are plenty of things that we never dreamt of in our philosophy, that are true after all. Am I like a man who, whereunto he hath attained, walks by the same rule, but is still ready to advance further if the rule is more fully revealed? Hold on to the old and tried truth of to grace of God which bringeth salvation, as with a death-grip; but, still, you are not perfect yet; there is a height beyond. Sometimes, when you are reading a passage of Scripture, you say, "Ah, yes, yes; it must mean that!" You pray over it. "Yes, it must mean that; but if it means that, what about that text our minister preached from last Sunday week, what about that?" And you are apt to say, "Well, now, I won't believe that, for it does not fit in with my system of theology." Is there not many a good "Hyper" brother, who has a full knowledge of the doctrines of grace; but when he is reading the Bible, one day, and he finds a text that looks rather wide, and general he says, "This cannot man what it says; I must trim it down, and make it fit into Dr. Gill's Commentary"? That is the way many a brother does. Is not this the right thing to say? "Now, this does mean what it says; the Lord knows better how to write than I do; there may be faults in my reading, but there cannot be any faults in his writing; then, if such-and-such a thing to true, I will not doubt it; and if that other thing is true, I will not doubt it; and if they seem to contradict one another, I will believe them both; but I can never entertain a thought that they really do contradict one another; I believe that them is some fault in me, not in the truth."

You sometimes go to the stationer's, and you ask for a picture of such-and-such a church. "Yes, sir," he says, and brings you out a picture; and you say, "There are two pictures here." "Oh, no, sir," he says, "that is only one." "But," you say, "there are two, and this one bakes the view a little further to the right, and that, apparently, a little more to the left. I do not, understand your giving me two pictures." "O sir," he says, "that is only one; and if you look at it, rightly, you will find that the two will melt into one, and stand out very clearly and beautifully, much better than in an ordinary print." You look, and look again, and say, "There seem to be two, as far as I can see; and I cannot make them to be one." "Stop," says he. He opens his drawer, and fetches out a stereoscope. "Now," says he, "just put your eyes their." "Oh, yes," you say, "I see it is only one now; the two pictures have melted into one;" I believe there are many truths in Scripture that are just like two pictures on a stereoscopic slide; they are really one, only you and I have not the stereoscope. When we get to heaven, we shall get a stereoscope, and then they will appear to be one; and we, shall see that conflicting truths, such as free-agency and divine sovereignty, were only different views, after all, of the same truth taken from a little different angle; and we shall see how God gave us both the truths and how foolish we were to go against them.

Now, that man, I take it, is proved to be right who, when he is thus tried with superior light, says, "Well, yes, I have been wrong in many of my thoughts and reasonings; the more I learn of God's revelation, the more I will open my heart to receive it." I like a brother who is ready to advance. I think, as a church, we ought always to be advancing. It strikes me, for instance, that the breaking of bread should be every Lord's-day; the more I read the Scripture, the more I feel that it is an ordinance that should be commemorated every Sabbath-day. "Well," says somebody, "but it has been usually observed once a month, and what matters it." If it be Scriptural to have it four times in the month, be it so, and let us get the benefit of the alteration, and do it, saying, "If ever a truth starts up, and fresh light comes, I will follow; whatsoever thou hast to say unto me, speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth." This is by no means a very small trial to a Christian man, to be tried by fresh light.

Don't you think it is a very sharp trial to be tried by other loves? You have an only child; how fond you are of that girl; how your heart is knit to that boy! You have a dear husband, properly enough you love him; but, ah! improperly enough you idolize him. Or, alas! it is a brother, or sister, or some other Christian man, and your heart is set on that object. Do you know what Jesus says to you? He has said, "There is a disciple who loves me; he says he does; I will see if he does; I will give him that child, and I will see which he doves the better; I will give him that wife, I will give her that husband; I will see now whether I really am King in that heart or no." And

in how many ways have we mournfully to suspect that Jesus Christ was not King! O dear friends, it is sad to think of how it would be if some of us were tried by that test: "If any man love father or mother, son or daughter, more than me, he is not worthy of me." If some are tried in that way, what a trial it must be to them! And there are many who fail here, and many more Christians would fail, perhaps, only that God, on a sudden, comes like a great iconoclast, and breaks their images in pieces, and utterly spoils their false gods; and then they are compelled to go to Christ and say, "Yes, we do love thee." But perhaps that was hardly true while the idol was in the way. It is a hard trial to have these fair things put in competition with Jesus, happy all ye if ye have been tried, and yet have stood the trial!

I believe that God often proves his servants by opening up to them fresh fields of labor. It has been my lot, when I have been busy about my Master's service, here and there to come to a certain corner, all see before me what I had never seen before, a great field ripe for the harvest; and perhaps flesh and blood have said, "Well, you have enough to do here; this is your lot." I believe, then, God is trying the man to see whether he is willing to begin that new work which is opening to him. Perhaps it is a work in which nobody else has ever engaged; and when you begin it, some excellent friend shrugs his shoulder, and says, "O dear brother, how imprudent you are!" I think there is no word in the English language that deserves more of my esteem, and yet for which I have a greater and more insufferable contempt from the misuse of it than the word "prudence." Oh, the many times I have it whistled in my ears, "Prudence!" — and this is the meaning of the word "prudence" according to the translation I have given of it by these brethren, — never act upon faith. If you can see your way clearly, that is to say, if you are strong enough to do it yourself, do it, but never go beyond your own strength; do not attempt anything in which other people would differ from you in opinion. Along the cool sequestered vale of life keep you the even tenour of your way. If there is a giant Goliath, go to bed, and let giant Goliath defy the hosts of Israel as he likes. If there are nations that need help, — Macedonians that cry, "Come over and help us,"—tell somebody else what the Macedonians said, and say, "What a pity it is that nobody will go!" If Jesus calls, and duty, too, just mind that you are so far off that you cannot hear the call; like some militiamen I have heard of, who always say, when the bugle sounds for them to come to drill, that they never heard it, because they take wonderfully good care to be always so far away that the sound cannot reach them. And there are many such Christians as that, who always get out of the sound of the bugle-note. "Oh, yes, of course, Lord Shaftesbury presided at the meeting, and the Bishop of London, and this member of the privy council, and that member of Parliament, were present, and it must be the right thing to do, therefore I will go and do what I can to help it; but, I do not desire new work. Some woman, who has found out the missing link, or somebody or other, is just going to try some absurd, Quixotic scheme for the conversion of the people, but I could not think of giving a shilling for that, because, you see, that is a work of prayer and faith; but the other has a committee, treasurer, vice-presidents, and patrons innumerable, almost as many as the lords, governors, and counsellors that came to Nebuchadnezzar at the door of the burning fiery furnace." Most people like those things in which there are plenty of great armies; but, there are chosen men who always stand where there is nothing to rest upon but the bare arm of God. This seems to be the proof of the Christian when he can dare to say, "This is the field of usefulness which God has put in my way; though my strength is not sufficient, I have faith; here I am, and I will do it." "Who art, thou, O great mountain! Before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain." "Awake, awake, Deborah; awake, awake, utter a song: arise, Barak, and lead thy captivity captive, thou son of Abinoam." "Shake thyself from the dust; arise, and sit down, O Jerusalem! loose thyself from the bands of thy neck, O captive daughter of Zion!" for thy God is in the midst of these, and if thou wilt but do and dare for him, when proved in the day of trial, thou shalt have his blessing upon thee, and that right early and abundantly.

III. Multitudes of other proofs suggest themselves, but our time flies; let us come, therefore, to the closing question, and just see What Has Been The Result Of All Those Provings Through Which We Have Passed?

Well, I think, dear friends, we have lost a good deal by our provings. We have gained much, but we have had our heavy losses likewise. "What," says one, "lost anything by God's proving me?" Yes, brother, I will tell you one or two of the things you have lost. I think you have lost that habit of putting your trust so much in earthly things. So many trees have been cut down; that you had built on, that you begin to wish to build somewhere beyond the stars; you find that this world is not your rest. If you have lost that, you have lost something. Have you not also lost that habit of talking so positively about what you mean to do? A good thing if you have. You do not glitter so much, but there is more gold in you. You do not flash and sparkle, and make so much noise, but the waters run stiller because they are deeper. You have lost that habit of boasting in an arm of flesh.

As the result of your being proved, you have lost that disposition to invite trial. I know a Christian woman, — I think she is here this evening, — who had not any trouble, for some time, and she was very troubled about having no trouble; she prayed to God to send her some; she will never pray that prayer again. She was like a child whom I heard crying in the street, and his mother opened the window, and asked him what he cried for; and when he said "Nothing," she said he should have something to cry for before long. There are many children of that sort; they think they cannot be children of God because they are not always living in hot water; but when they get the trial, they never think that again, — never. Those are some of the things we have lost. We go through the Red Sea of trial; some few things we leave in the Red Sea along with the Egyptians; may they never be washed up again!

One has learned, by being proved, to love that habit of treading quite so hard on the ground as we used to do. We used to tread on other people sometimes; by being proved, we tread more gently. We used to push and say, "If the man is in my way, I cannot help it;" now we walk a little more carefully, we do not wish to touch other people's sore places, because we know our own. I heard a dear brother say, the other night, that I comforted the doubters a great deal too much. I thought, if that dear brother had to go through some of the deep waters we ourselves have known in connection with this church, he would find the doubters want a great deal more comforting than he thinks; for, when one has been in the dungeon, and has not been able to read his own title clear, and when there have been times when sin and Satan have so prevailed over grace that one could only say, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" then we have wanted something very sweet and very comforting. I do not think that a Christian knows much of doing business on the great waters if he does not feel, sometimes, as if he would give all he has to have as good a hope as the meanest lamb in Jesus' fold has. And, dear friends, we lose that habit of being so hard, and speaking so loftily, and these are blessed losses. Lord, send us many such losses!

Then, we also gain much by being proved. I cannot tell all that we gain. I never read a list of the ear-rings and the bracelets that the Israelitish women gained from the Egyptians; and I cannot, therefore, give you a category of all the golden jewels, all silver bracelets, and the rich ruby tiaras that Christians get from the depths of their tribulation. We get all sorts of choice things thus. Was it not Rutherford who said that he drank many sorts of God's wine, but the wine which was the sourest of all ways the sweetest when it was down? And so assuredly it is. There are many sorts of bread that we eat that are very delightful, — many breads of heaven; but that, which is baked on the coal, just as the bread which Elijah ate was baked, that is the meal that makes us go in the strength thereof for forty days. All bread that comes from God is good; but that, which the black ravens with their hoarse throats bring to us, that is the bread which is most fit for God's prophets. All our passages through the fiery furnace make us like swords when they are well annealed; they are ready to cut right through the bone, it makes us true Jerusalem blades thus to be put through the fire again and again. Well, brother, you and I will not cease from being tried until we get to heaven, and then it will be all over; and we shall sing, and this shall be the sweet note of it, "Thou hast proved us, O God; and blessed be thy name for it; before we were afflicted, we went astray; but now have we kept thy word."

There are many here who, I fear, if they were proved, would be found to be dross. Let such remember that God, by his grace, can transmute the vile metal into the purest, gold. One touch of the cross of Christ one drop of his precious blood can turn a sinner into a saint. "God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham." And however great and vile your sins may be, "there is life in a look at the crucified One." One glance at the bleeding Savior, and your sins are forgiven. A simple act of trust in Jesus, and you are saved, and then, from that time forth, though you will have trial, you shall bless God for it; and we shall meet in heaven to praise the name of the Most High, world without end. Amen.