

Spurgeon Sermons on Amos

Amos 3:3 Communion With Christ - A Baptizing Sermon

NO. 2668

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DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT NEW PARK STREET CHAPEL, SOUTHWARK,
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“Can two walk together, except they be agreed?”—Amos 3:3.

THE expression “walking together” is often used in Scripture as a figure for communion. “Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him.” Communion, if it be thorough and entire, implies activity. It is not merely contemplation, it is action; and hence, inasmuch as walking is an active exercise, and walking with a man is communion with him, active communion with him, we see how walking comes to be the picture of true communion with Christ. An old Puritan said, “It doth not say that Enoch returned to God, and then left him, but he ‘walked with God.’” All his journey through, he had God for his companion, and lived in perpetual fellowship with his Maker.

There is also another idea contained in the term “walking together.” It is not only activity, but continuance. So, true communion with Christ is not a mere spasm, not just an excitement of ecstasy: but if it be the work of the Holy Spirit, and if it be enjoyed by the healthful soul, it will be a continual thing.

It implies also progress; for, in walking together, we do not lift up our feet, and put them down in the same place, but we proceed nearer to our journey's end; and he that hath true communion with Christ is making progress. It is true that Christ can go no further towards excellence, for he hath already attained perfection; but the nearer we get to that perfection, the more fellowship we have with Jesus; and unless we progress, unless we seek to be more child—like in faith, more instructed in knowledge, and more diligent in service, unless we seek to have more zeal and fervency, we shall find that, in so standing still, we lose the presence of the Master; for it is only by following on with the Lord that we continue to walk with him. It will, therefore, very readily strike you how walking with a person is an excellent figure for communion with him; and how the term “walking with God” is the best expression for fellowship with God. Hence, our text implies, by its very form, that two can—not walk together except they be agreed; and it teaches us, therefore, that unless we be agreed with Christ, we cannot attain to the sweet state of communion with him.

We, shall, first, notice the agreement here mentioned; we shall, secondly, try to notice the necessity for this agreement; and then, thirdly, we shall ask all Christians to seek after this agreement with Christ that they may have full communion with him.

I am not addressing myself so much to the world without as to the church within. When we are preaching the gospel of salvation, we preach that to the world; but communion is like the holy of holies. Salvation itself seems to be but as the court of the priests, but communion is the innermost place, that which is within the veil, and into that none but the Christian can be allowed to enter.

I. First, then, Christian, we shall endeavor to show thee What Is The Agreement which must subsist between thy Lord and thyself before thou canst walk with him. We will do this in a very simple way. We shall keep to the figure, and we shall see that there are certain things necessary to enable one person to walk with another.

First, then, it is quite certain that, if we would walk with Christ, we must walk in the same path. Two men cannot walk together if one turns his head in one direction, and another turns his head the opposite way. If one should turn to the right, and the other to the left, they cannot walk together, although they may arrive at the same end by devious roads; but they cannot walk together unless they walk along the same road. It is true that they can have a little conversation even if they are some yards apart; but if one walks on one side of the road, and the other on the other, we should think that their communion was rather distant, and their love rather chill. But, the nearer they walk in precisely the same road, the more are they enabled to hold fellowship with one another.

Now, child of God, albeit thou canst not be saved by thy good works, and thy salvation does not depend upon thy works, remember that thy communion doth. It is impossible for thee to have fellowship with Christ except as thou art obedient unto his commands. Let a Christian err, and he will be pierced with many sorrows. Let the child of God forsake the way of God, let him, as alas we oftentimes do, go down by the stile to By-path Meadow, and he will not have his Master go down By-path Meadow with him. If we will be self-willed, and choose our own path, we must go our own path alone. If, for some seeming pleasure, or some fancied gain, instead of following the fiery-cloudy pillar, we follow the will-o'-the-wisp of our own desires, we shall have to go alone, and in the dark, too. Christ will go with us anywhere where duty calls us. If duty should call us into the burning fiery furnace, the Son of man will be there;

if it should lead us into the lions' den, he will be there to shut the lions' mouths. He would not have gone there with Daniel if he had sought, by neglect of duty, to avoid the threatened destruction. Although the Lord would go with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego even into the heat of the burning fiery furnace, yet, if they had bowed down to the image, he would not have gone with them. "If ye walk contrary to me," saith the Lord, "I will walk contrary to you."

Here I must guard what I have said, lest I should be misunderstood. I do not mean that Christ forsakes his people so as to destroy them; but he forsakes them so as to take away their communion with himself; For again I repeat that, although salvation doth not depend upon good works, communion hath this dependence, and cannot be enjoyed between Christ and the soul that is full of sin. A man may have much sin about him, and yet be a saved man; and much of frailty and imperfection cleaveth to us all. But if we are living in sin, if we are in any way whatever breaking the commands of God, to the extent of our sin there will be just that extent of separation between our souls and Christ. Sin may not kill us, but it will make us sick; it will take Christ's right hand from under our heads. Take care, therefore, Christian, that thou walkest in the steps of thy Master; strive to be obedient to his law; righteously, soberly, and godly do thou live in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation. Be thou like Caleb, who followed the Lord fully. Endeavour in every way to learn his will, and then to do it; in all thy Lord's appointed ways pursue thy journey. Remember all his ordinances, and perform his every precept; resign thyself to his every dispensation; be thou not as the horse or mule, which have no understanding, whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle lest they come nigh unto thee; but be thou guided by the Lord's own eye, run thou in the way of his commandments, and thou shalt find them a delightful road. This is the first point; those who walk together must go the same way.

Further, in going the same way, they must go with the same motive. Two persons may be going the same way, but suppose they are going for very opposite ends. There is a lawyer walking side by side with the man whom he is going to fleece. Let the poor man know that he is to be robbed at the end of his journey, and there will not be any communion between the two travelers. Suppose two men are going together, and one is about to bring an action against the other, there will not be any communion between them. Suppose they are going to fight with each other, there will not be any communion between them. Suppose the two are going to the same election, intending to vote for opposite candidates, they will not be likely to hold very sweet conversation with one another, albeit they may go in the same way. So, it is needful that we should not only go in the same road, but with the same motive.

Perhaps you ask, "Is it possible that we can go with Christ in the same road, and yet not with the same motive?" Certainly, it is. You see a man who appears to be quite as holy as a Christian; he seems to be as obedient to the Lord as the man who really follows the Master. As for ceremonies, he is the very first to observe them; as for the duties of morality, he attends to them most scrupulously; but ask him why he does all this, and he says it is because he desires to save his soul by it. Immediately, he and Christ are at arms' length; Christ calls such an one an anti-Christ, and they are sworn enemies. You are trying to save yourself, are you? Then you are to be a savior, while Christ is a Savior; then you and he are at enmity; but if you are travelling on this road to be saved by grace, desiring to show forth your thanks with your lips, and in your life, then you do not wish to rob Christ's kingly or priestly office of any of its dignity; you do not desire to set yourself up as another king in Zion. But if you are walking in this road with a motive contrary to Christ, you cannot hold any communion with him.

There is very blessed communion with Christ to be enjoyed in the Lord's supper; but if anyone comes to the Lord's table merely with the thought that it may do him good, and save his soul, there is no communion with Christ; for him, because that is not Christ's object; and it is the same with baptism. That ordinance is a blessed means of communion with Christ in his death and burial; but if anyone desires to be baptized, supposing that the observance of the ordinance will save his soul, then there is no communion. If anyone attaches more to the act than that Christ has commanded it, and, therefore, it is our duty to fulfill it,—the moment a man supposes any efficacy in the water, and in the body being buried therein, then the communion ceases; for unless we come to anything with Christ's motive, or with a motive which is congenial to Christ's heart, we are not capable of walking with him. Two cannot walk together except they be agreed, not only in the way they walk, but also in the object with which they walk in that way.

Once again, two persons may walk the same road, and they may walk with the same purpose, and yet they may not be able to speak to each other, unless they travel the same pace. If one person shall travel home very swiftly to-night, and another, who lives in the same house, goes creeping home very slowly, perhaps they will go down the same streets, yet they will say nothing to one another, because one will be at home long before the other. So, we must agree in the pace at which we travel. Why is it that many Christians hold no fellowship with Jesus? It is because they travel to heaven so slowly, that the Lord Jesus leaves them behind. They are so lukewarm, so cold, so indifferent, they have so little zeal, so little love, they have so little true desire to glorify God, that the swift heart of Jesus cannot be restrained to tarry with them.

"Oh!" saith one, "I travel as fast as I can, but I am only a poor feeble creature; I often creep when I see others run; and when I run, I often see others flying."

Beloved, Christ does not measure your walking by the speed at which you go. If your desire be slack, then the Lord Jesus will leave you, and travel on before you; and you will probably find the whip of affliction behind you, goading your soul to travel more swiftly.

John Bunyan has a good picture. He says, "if you send a serving-man for medicines, and he goes as fast as he can, perhaps he rides on a sorry jade of a horse, and he cannot make it go fast; but the master does not measure the pace by the rate at which the horse goes, but by the rate at which the servant wishes the horse to go, and he says, 'That man would go fast if he could; if you put him on a horse that had some mettle in him, he would be back, and bring the medicines.'" So is it with our poor flesh and blood. It is an ill pace at which we can ever go with such a sorry thing to ride on; but the Lord Jesus measures our pace, of by the actual distance traversed, but by our desires. When he sees us kicking and spurring, as it were, in prayer, pulling at the rein, and toiling to make our poor flesh and blood rise to something like devotion and zeal, then he accepts the will for the deed, and Christ stops to keep company even with us who are, such poor disciples. But let our desires be cold, let us become lazy, let us do little or nothing for Christ, what wonder if the Lord Jesus says, "This man observeth not my words, and keepeth not my sayings; I will not sup with him, and he shall not sup with me. I will give him enough comfort to keep him alive; I will give him enough spiritual food to keep his soul from actually starving, but I will put him on poor diet until he turns to me with full purpose of heart, and then I will take him to my bosom, and show him my love"?

There is one thing more. You can suppose two persons travelling on the same road with the same intentions, and at the same pace; yet they do not walk together, so as to hold any fellowship with each other, because they do not like each other. Where there is no love (and that, perhaps, is the fullest meaning of the text), there can be no communion. Unless two be agreed in heart, they cannot walk together. You know some of our very excellent Hyper-Calvinistic friends. Now, suppose one of them meets an Arminian, you cannot suppose for one instant that there could be any conversation between them, except it were some jangling, and abuse of each other. Suppose some good strict Baptist brother speaks to us, who have more enlarged principles. He smites us with his heavy weapons, and cuts us down for the great sin of loving all who love the Lord Jesus Christ, and welcoming to the Lord's table all whom we believe the Lord has received. But, so far as communion is concerned, our brother would be obliged to go on the other side of the road; there must be, he thinks, a little distinction and a little difference kept up, for the honor of his own views. And we know that there are some brethren, who have a peculiar obnoxiousness of temper; they seem to be covered with bristles and sharp quills, to prick and annoy any and every person who happens to come in their way. You cannot commune with them; it is impossible for you to walk in the same road with them, for you would feel it better to hold your peace all the way, because they would be sure to misunderstand what you said. There must be an agreement in heart, an agreement in opinion, or otherwise two cannot walk together.

O believer, hast thou agreement of heart with the Lord Jesus? Say, dost thou love Christ, and dost thou think a great deal of him? Dost; thou ever seek to magnify him, and speak well of his name? Dost; thou think him the chief amongst ten thousand, and altogether lovely? And dost thou feel that he also has a good opinion of thee? Hath he said to thee, "Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee"? Has he spoken soft words to thine heart, which have caused thee to think that his bowels of compassion have yearned over thee? Ah, then, communion is easy with thee and thy Lord; for your two souls are bound up in the same bundle of life; therefore, it is possible for thee and Christ to walk together. Art thou and he of the same opinion? Are Christ's words thy doctrine? Hast thou been taught to give up all divinity except that which came from Jesus? Canst thou say of him, "He is my only Rabbi, my only Teacher in the law and the gospel; at his feet, with Mary, I could sit and receive his words, and believe all that he has uttered to be the very truth of God"? If so, believer, communion between thee and Christ is easy; for, when two agree in thought, and intention, and way, and affection, then they can walk together.

I have taken so much time for this first point that the other two must be very briefly hinted at.

II. The second point was to be, The Necessity For This Agreement.

First, Christ will not; walk with us, unless we are agreed with him, because if he did so, it would be a slur upon his own honor; nay, more than that, it would be a denial of his own nature. Should Christ come into concord with Belial? Should he make himself free and communicative with those who indulge the lusts of the flesh, and who disobey his commands? It would look ill if the king's son should walk arm in arm with traitors. We should not think it any good sign if we saw the highest in the land herding with the lowest. Christ keeps good company; and if we do not have our hearts purified by the Holy Spirit, he will not come to us at all. He will not abide even with his own children so long as they harbour sin. Invite the devil into the front parlour of your heart, and Christ will not come too. No, it would be a derogation of his own dignity, an insult to his own character to do so. Give your heart up to the indulgence of some ambitious desire, and you cannot give the Savior the insult of inviting him to come to you. In our own houses, we do not invite two persons who are at enmity; and is it likely that Christ will come where sin is reigning, or pampered, or indulged? No; brethren; he knows there is sin in the best human heart; but, as long as it is kept down, and as long as he sees that our desires are to overturn it; he will come there; but when he sees sin petted and fed in the place which ought to his own palace, when he sees self-righteousness and self-security harboured there, he says, "I will not return until they have repented of their sin."

There is another reason why you cannot commune with Christ unless you are in agreement with him, and that is because you yourselves are incapable of it. Unless your soul be in agreement with Christ, unless in motive, and aim, and will, you are, as far as possible, like your Master, you cannot rise to the dignity of fellowship with him. Fellowship with Christ is a high privilege; no man can

attain to it, as long as he indulges evil purposes, or low desires. The heart must be assimilated to the likeness of Christ, it must be cleansed and renewed by the Holy Spirit, or else it loses its wings, and is unable to mount to the high places of the earth, where Christ doth show to his people his love.

There is another reason why Christ will not commune with us unless we are agreed with him, namely, for our own good. Christ cannot and will not hold sweet fellowship with his people unless they are in harmony with him. If Christians swerve from Christ's path, and backslide from his ways, and Christ were still to indulge them with love feasts, they would not realize their sin, and would still continue in it. Let a father indulge the erring child with all the usual display of his affection; let him put away the rod, let him never use a harsh word at all, but treat the sinning one with the same love as another who is dutiful and obedient, how is it to be expected that the child would ever forsake its faults? If Christ should give the same love, the same enjoyments, in sin and after sin, as he does in duty and after duty, his people would scarcely recognize their sins, and they would continue in them; but just as the Lord is pleased to make pain the tell-tale of disease, so that a headache becomes an indication of something wrong within the system, so does he make the absence of his own fellowship the tell-tale by which we may know that there is something within our soul that is hostile to him, something that must be driven away before the sacred Dove will come, with wings of comfort, to dwell in our hearts. "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" No; that is impossible.

III. Now, thirdly, I want to urge all Christians to seek after this agreement with Christ.

Beloved brethren and sisters, in order that you may agree with Christ, I have first to remind you that the perpetual indwelling of the Holy Spirit must be with you. Unless the same Spirit that dwells in Christ shall dwell in you, your agreement can never rise to such a height as to admit of any depth or nearness of union. Take care continually to seek the unction from on high, the indwelling of the Holy One of Israel. In the measure in which your heart has been endued by the divine influence and baptized by the holy fire of the Spirit, in that proportion will your soul be in agreement with Christ, and your union be true, and close, and lasting. Take care of that.

And then, next, under that divine influence, look well to all your motives. Seek not to have any aim to get honor to thyself, or honor to thy fellow-men. Take care that, in all thou doest, thou doest it with a single eye to thy Master's honor; for, unless thine eye is single, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If thou wilt win the sunlight of thy Master's face, thou must seek his glory, and his glory alone.

Then, if thou wouldst have union with Christ, take care, in the next place, that thou doest all in dependence upon him; for if, in the affairs of thy soul, thou settest up in business for thyself, Christ will be at enmity with thee. Seek not only to turn thine eye to him for direction, but also for support; and look to him in thy prayers, in thy preachings, in thy hearings, and in everything, for so shall Christ and thy soul be agreed, and thou shalt have fellowship with him.

And, lastly, be continually panting after more holiness. Never be content with what thou art; seek to grow, seek to be more and more like Christ; and then, when that desire for holiness is strongest, thou wilt have the same desire that Christ has; for his desire is that thou shouldst be holy, even as he is holy; and his command is, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." And when your desires are Christ's desires, then shall it be possible for you to walk with Christ, but not till then.

I do long to have a church in complete agreement with the Lord Jesus Christ, for that would be a church against which the gates of hell could never prevail. If a church be merely founded by a man, the man will die, and the church shall perish. If a doctrine be only taught by a man, and you receive it on his authority, his authority shall pass away as all earthly things must; but, if it be of God, woe unto them that fight against it, for they can never prevail against him! Woe unto him that dashes himself against this stone, for he shall be broken in pieces; but if it be rolled upon him, it shall grind him to powder! Let us know that any church is a Church of God in her doctrines, and in her ordinances, and in her prayer and praise, and we may know that she shall be like the stone we read of in Daniel, "cut out of the mountain without hands;" none shall be able to break her, but she shall break all opposers in pieces, and she shall fill the earth.

Now there are some friends who are about to walk with Christ into this pool of baptism. Can two walk here except they be agreed? You may walk into this pool, but you cannot bring Christ with you except you are agreed with him. If you come without agreement with Christ, you will make a slip of it in your life, or else go back, and walk no more with him, and be offended with him. Remember, brethren and sisters, unless your two hearts are agreed, unless Christ and your heart be made one, you will fall out with one another before long; Christ will not long be at peace with you, nor will you be at peace with Christ. Your profession will be short-lived, after all, unless it be a true and real one, the expression of the inner heart. I pray that your profession to-night may be a sincere one, that you may testify to the world a true, saving, and entire agreement with your Lord and Master; and if any of you be not agreed with Christ. I beseech you, though you have come so far, come no farther. Go not into this pool till you are thoroughly agreed with Christ. I charge you, in the name of the living God, as you shall have to stand before his bar at last, play not the hypocrite. Be sincere; for, if you give yourselves not wholly to Christ, you are doing like those who come unworthily to the Lord's table, and who eat and drink condemnation to their own souls, for he that is plunged into the baptismal pool, as a hypocrite, is immersed unto his own damnation. But, O, ye humble followers of Jesus, you have testified to us your fellowship in the faith! Be not afraid now to confess it before men,

and may God own all your names at last amongst the followers of the Lamb, for his dear Son's sake! Amen.

Amos 3:3-6 The Voice of the Cholera

NO. 705

DELIVERED ON SUNDAY MORNING, AUGUST 12TH, 1866,

BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“Can two walk together, except they be agreed? Will a lion roar in the forest, when he hath no prey? will a young lion cry out of his den, if he have taken nothing? Can a bird fall in a snare upon the earth, where no gin is for him? shall one take up a snare from the earth, and have taken nothing at all? Shall a trumpet be blown in the city, and the people not be afraid? shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it.”-Amos 3:3-6.

WE have all felt grieved when reading our bills of mortality to observe the mysterious spread of cholera in our great city. It is high time that it should be made the subject of special prayer, and that the nation should seek unto the Lord for its removal. While as yet there has been but comparatively little of the evil, we should be humbled under it, that we may be spared a greater outbreak.

There are different ways of looking at this disease. Men viewing it from one point of view alone, have frequently despised those who have regarded it under another aspect. Occasionally Christian men express themselves indignantly concerning those who speak of cholera as the product of ascertained and governable causes, to be checked and even prevented by due attention to the laws of health. I have never shared in that indignation. It seems to me that this disease is to a great extent in our own hands, and that if all men would take scrupulous care as to cleanliness, and if better dwellings were provided for the poor, and if overcrowding were effectually prevented, and if the water supply could be larger, and other sanitary improvements could be carried out, the disease, most probably, would not occur; or, if it did visit us occasionally, as the result of filth in other countries, it would be in a very mitigated form. I am thankful that there are many men of intelligence and scientific information who can speak well upon this point, and I hope they will never cease to speak until all men learn that the laws of cleanliness and health are as binding upon us as those of morality. So far from a Christian man being angry with those who instruct the people in useful secular knowledge, he ought rather to be thankful for them, and hope that their teaching may be powerful with the masses. The gospel has no quarrel with ventilation, and the doctrines of grace have no dispute with chloride of lime. We preach repentance and faith, but we do not denounce whitewash; and much as we advocate holiness, we always have a good word for cleanliness and sobriety. We would promote with all our hearts that which may honor God, but we cannot neglect that which may bless our neighbors whom we desire to love even as ourselves. On the other hand, it is even more common for those who look to natural causes alone to sneer at believers who view the disease as a mysterious scourge from the hand of God. It is admitted that it would be most foolish to neglect the appointed means of averting sickness; but sneer who may, we believe it to be equally an act of folly to forget that the hand of the Lord is in all this. The singular manner in which this disease seizes frequently upon unlikely persons, and turns aside from its expected path, should show us that there is an unseen band which directs its gloomy circuit. Let the wise man work below, but fix his hope above; let him cleanse and purge away the hotbeds of death, but let him look up to the Lord and Giver of life for success in all his doings.

It is not my business this morning to describe the sanitary aspect of the subject; this is not the day nor the place, but I shall claim a full liberty to enter into the theological view of it, and if that should happen to excite the contempt of the practical man, we shall be more grieved for his narrowness of mind than for his contempt of us. We do not despise him, but wish him God speed in his reforms, and he should not despise us, but recognize in us his true allies. We believe that God sends all pestilences, let them come how they may, and that he sends them with a purpose, let them be removed in whatever way they may; and we conceive that it is our business as ministers of God, to call the people's attention to God in the disease, and teach them the lesson which God would have them learn. I am not among those, as you know, who believe that every affliction is a judgment upon the particular person to whom it occurs. We perceive that in this world the best of men often endure the most of suffering, and that the worst of men frequently escape; and therefore we do not believe in judgments to particular persons except in extraordinary cases; but we do nevertheless very firmly believe that there are national judgments, and that national sins provoke national chastisements. As to individuals, their punishment or reward is reserved for the next state; but nations will not exist in the next world: there is no such thing as a judgment of nations, so such, at the last great day; that will be the judgment of individuals one by one. The trial and punishment of nations takes place in this state, and it is here that we are to look for the judgment of God upon national sin. Upon the present visitation as a national chastisement we shall speak this morning, but I shall not detain you with further preface, but conduct you at once to the questions of the text.

I. The First Question is a metaphor taken from the traveler: “Can two walk together except they be agreed?” which means,

being interpreted, that it is no wonder if God does not continue to walk with a sinful people; that it is not to be expected that when a nation falls out with God, God should continue to bless it.

Two travelers have been walking together for some little time, but on a sudden they fall to angry words, and after awhile one strikes the other and maltreats him. You cannot suppose that the person thus attacked will continue to walk with him who maliciously assaults him. They must part company. Now, when God walks with a nation that nation prospers, but if that nation falls to words with God, quarrels with him about his will and law, and rushes perversely into sinful courses nay, if there be some in it who would have no God at all, who do their best to extirpate his very name from the earth which he himself has made, then we cannot expect that God should continue to walk with such offenders. Brethren, let me ask you soberly, without fanaticism, to consider whether there has not been enough in England, and especially in this great city, to make God angry with us? Has there not been grievous disagreement between the dwellers in this city and God? Has there not been enough to make him say, "I will walk no more with this people: I will chasten them sorely, and send heavy judgments upon them"?

We will not speak of those sins of this city which are common to all other places; but let me ask whether the drunkenness of England is not enough to provoke God to smite it with all his thunderbolts. If it be said that there is as much drunkenness elsewhere, I reply that possibly there may be places found which are quite as besotted, where the gin palace blazes with glaring light at every corner, and the gates through which drunkards reel to hell are opened at every turn,-it may be so; but I must still hold that there is no other country where drunkenness is carried on to such an extent under so strong a protest, for drunkenness happens to be a sin against which not only the pulpit, the press, and the bench, are continually exclaiming, but tens of thousands of earnest, indefatigable, courageous, self-denying men are both by their example and their teaching denouncing this vice. We certainly have no deficiency of protests against excess of drink, for there are few companies in which the most sweeping censures are not frequently heard. There is not a place throughout the world where drunkenness is so vehemently and abundantly cried down as in England; there is no place where there is established so strong a public sentiment against this degrading form of self-indulgence. There has been much done, not, I say, only by those who preach the gospel, which lays the axe at the root of all sin, but also by those who dedicate their strength to the sawing off of this particular limb from the great tree of evil; so that this vice is known by every man to be a vice, and is no longer winked at as a venial offense. It wears upon its front the damning mark; it is no longer misnamed conviviality, and excused as an amiable weakness. The public mind to a great extent is enlightened upon the subject of strong drink, and consequently this sin of drunkenness is more God-provoking in this country than in any other. There may be countries where there is just as much drunkenness, but none in which the protest is more clear and plain, and we all hold that sin is increased by the measure of light against which a man commits it, and that when an evil practice is by the common consent of mankind denounced and put down, it becomes the more atrocious on the part of those who still pursue it. Alas, alas! this drunken city may well expect that God should visit it.

Moreover, we know enough-and we do not wish to know more of the evil, which the moon sees-of the debauchery with which certain of the streets of our city are reeking. We thank God it has never come to such a pass in England, that we nationally recognize and systematically regulate lasciviousness, so that it may be indulged in with comparative impunity, but there can be no sort of doubt that amongst all classes and ranks of men there is enough of lewdness to bring down Heaven's wrath upon our city. The sins of the flesh are sure to be visited ere long by that God who loathes iniquity, and in whose nostrils fornication is a stench. He will not for ever endure this abounding sin, for it is committed, be it remembered, in a country famous above all others for its love of home and its estimation of the joys which cluster around the family hearth. We have not the pestilential influence of a licentious court and a degraded public opinion, but this sin is carried on in the teeth of a general reverence for purity. Shall not God visit London for the sins which nightly pollutes her streets, festers in gilded halls, and riots amid revelry and music? Like a terrible monster, the social evil drags our daughters down to destruction, and our young men to the gates of the grave, and while this lasts we need not wonder if God's health-giving providence should refuse to walk with us, for he cannot be agreed with a people who choose the way of filthiness.

Constant neglect of the worship of God is a sin for which London is peculiarly and pre-eminently guilty. In some of our country towns and villages, the accommodation in places of worship is even larger than the population, and I know places in England where there is scarcely a soul to be found at home at the hour of public worship-certainly not more than absolutely necessary to nurse the sick, care for the infants, and protect the doors, for the whole population turn out to attend the place of worship. But in London the habitual forsakers of public worship are probably in a large majority. It must be so, because we know that even if they wished to go, the provision of seat room is most lamentably short of what they would require, and yet, short as it is, there is not half so much want of churches and chapels in London as there is of inclination to go to either the one or the other. The masses of our people regard not God, care not for the Lord Jesus, and have no thought about eternal things. This is a Christian city we sometimes say, but where shall be found more thorough heathens than we may find here? In Canton, Calcutta, or even Timbuctoo, the people have at least a form of worship and a reverence for some idea of a God, but here tens of thousands make no pretense of religious worship. I protest unto you all that whereas you think Christianity to be well known in our streets and lanes, you only think so because you have not penetrated into their depths, for thick darkness covers the people. There are discoveries yet to be made in this city, that may

make the hearts of Christendom melt for shame that we should have permitted such God-dishonoring ignorance, that in the very blaze of the sun, as we think our country to be, there should be black spots where Christian light has never penetrated. O London! dost thou think that God's Sabbaths are for ever to be forgotten; that the voice of the gospel is to sound in thine ears, and for ever to be despised? Shalt thou for ever turn thy foot from God's house and despise the ministrations of his truth, and shall he not visit such a city as this? This dreaded cholera is but a gentle blow from his hand, but if it be not felt, and its lesson be not learnt, there may come instead of this a pestilence which may reap the multitude as corn is reaped with the sickle; or he may permit us to be ravaged by a pestilence worse than the plague; I mean the pestilence of deadly, soul-destroying error. He may remove the candle of his gospel out of its place, and may take away the bread of life from those who have despised it, and then, O great city! thy doom is sealed!

Brethren, if there be any one thing which yet provokes God above all this, it is the fact that, we have once again, as a nation, permitted downright Popery to claim to be our national religion. Dark is the day, and dismal is the hour, which sees the ancient superstitions defiling the houses, which are at least nominally dedicated to the God of heaven. In our Established Church the gospel is no longer dominant, albeit that a little band of good and faithful men still linger in it, and are like a handful of salt amid general putrefaction. We have no longer any right to speak of our national Protestant Church; it is not Protestant, it tolerates barefaced Popery, and swarms with worshippers of the God whom the baker bakes in the oven, and whom they bite with their teeth. Not many streets from the house in which we are assembled, you may have your candles, and your incense, and your copes, and your albs, with all the other pomps and vanities of the detestable idolatry of Rome. That Romanism against which Latimer bore testimony at the stake has been suffered to hold its mummeries and practice its fantastic tricks in the name of this nation, until it counts its deluded admirers by tens of thousands. That monster, which stained Smithfield with gore and made it an ash-heap for the martyrs of God, has come back to you; the old wolf that rent your fathers and tore their palpitating hearts out of their bosoms, you have suffered to come back into your house, and you are cherishing it, and feeding it with your children's meat. Once again, the harlot of Babylon flaunts her finery in our faces almost without rebuke. Do not tell me it is not Popery, it is the selfsame Antichrist with which your fathers wrestled, and a man with but half his wits about him may see it to be so: and yet this land bears it, and rejoices in it, and crouches at the foot of a priest once more. Our great ones, our delicate women, and dainty lords, are once again the willing vassals of priest-craft and superstition; and amid all this, if any one speaks out, he is assailed as uncharitable, and abhorred as a troubler in Israel. Is it for nothing that God has favored this land with the gospel? Must all her light be turned to darkness? Must all the gains of the valiant men of old be lost by the sloth and cowardice of this thoughtless generation? In days of yore, men like Knox and Welch in Scotland, and Hugh Latimer, and John Bradford, fought like lions for the truth, and are we to yield like coward curs? Are the men of oak succeeded by the men of willow? The men who cried, "No Popery here!" now sleep within their sepulchres, and their descendants wear the yoke which their fathers scorned. Shall not God visit us for this? I would that a voice of thunder could arouse this slumbering generation. I am for liberty of conscience for every man: I would have, by all manner of means, the Catholic as free to practice his religion as any one else; I would have religion left to its own native power for its support, and would allow no church to offer to God what it had taken from an unwilling people by the legalised robbery of church-rate and tithe; but, above all things, if we must be doomed to have an Established Church, I pray God it may not for ever be a den of superstition and the haunt of Papistical heresies. If the Church of England does not sweep Tractarianism out of her midst, it should be the daily prayer of every Christian man, that God would sweep her utterly away from this nation; for the old leprosy of Rome ought not to be sanctioned and supported by a land which has shed so much of her blood to be purged from it.

Can two walk together, then, except they be agreed? And as these things cannot be supposed to be agreeable to the mind and will of God, we cannot wonder if there should be a plague upon our cattle, and then a plague upon men, and if these should come sevenfold as heavy as they have ever come as yet.

II. The Second Question of the prophet is, "Will a lion roar in the forest when he hath no prey? will a young lion cry out of his den if he have taken nothing?"

Amos had observed that a lion does not roar without reason. By this question he brings forward the second truth, that when God speaks it is not without a cause, and especially when he speaks with a threatening voice. My brethren, our God is too gracious to send us this cholera without a motive; and he is moreover too wise, for we all know that judgments frequently repeated lose their force. It is like the cry of "Wolf," if there be no meaning in it, men disregard it. God therefore never multiplies judgments unnecessarily. Besides, he is withal too great to trifle with men's lives. We heard of some twelve hundred or more who died in a week in London, but did we estimate the aggregate of personal pain couched in that number, the aggregate of sorrow brought to so many hundred families, the aggregate too of eternal interests which were involved in those sudden deaths? Time and eternity, both of them big with tremendous importance, were wrapped up, just so many times in those hundreds who fell beneath the mower's scythe. Think you the Lord does this for nothing? The great Lion of vengeance has not roared unless sin has provoked him.

Since I have already indicated our great public sins, I should like to ask Christians present how far they have been concerned in them. You who profess to be people of God, and who recognize God's hand in this visitation, I ask you how far has justice found provocation in you? What have you had to do, professing Christians, with the drunkenness of this city? Are you sure that you are

quite clear of it? Have you both by your teaching and by your example shown to men that the religion of Jesus is not consistent with drunkenness? Have you tried to put down this vice, or are you in some degree a fellow-criminal, an accomplice before or after the fact? Oh if you have been guilty, I pray you seek to be purged of this sin. You cannot wipe out all the national iniquity, but if each man reformed himself of this vice, by God's grace, this great evil would cease. Let each Christian look at home. How far you professors of religion-how far are you clear in the matter of sins of the flesh? Has there never been any lightness of speech about these sins? When merriment has become uproarious upon impurity, have you never joined in such laughter? And what about your course of conversation? Have you always been free-I will not say from the grosser acts of sin-I scarcely like to ask you such a question, but have you been clear from everything that verged upon it? Have you heard ringing in your ears the precept, "Be ye holy, for I am holy"? Has the Holy Spirit by his mighty grace kept you from indulging in unclean words and thoughts. Have you in any way fallen into lightness of talk and thought, and so helped to increase the flood of this evil? Oh, my brethren, who among us must not confess to some guilt, when we remember the Savior's words, "He that looketh upon a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart." Let us bow our heads in penitence, and seek to the God of all grace that he would not roar over this his prey, but be pleased to purge us from it that we may be clean in his presence?

And so with the other sins, which we have indicated. Have we all borne our earnest, fervent protest against them? Have we been negligent of the house of God, or has our continual meeting for public worship cleared us of this? I think most of us are clear here, but I know there are some professors who neglect the assembling of themselves together, who spend their Sabbath occasionally, at any rate, where it ought not to be spent, and who thus by their lax example increase the general forgetfulness of God.

And as to this Anglican Popery-have we spoken out about that? Or do we lend it our direct or even indirect support? God grant that if we have not repudiated it we may do so, and holding the truth in the love and power of it may we come out of Babylon, lest we be partakers of her plagues in the day when God shall visit her in his wrath. Such, I think, was what Amos indicated by his second question.

III. The Third Question is this: "Can a bird fall in a snare upon the earth where no gin is for him?"

The first question was taken from travelers, the second from wild beasts, and the third from fowlers. You see the bird aloft in the sky, on a sudden it flies to the ground, and is taken in the net; now, Amos says it would not be taken in the net unless a net had been designedly laid to catch it. It is taken because the snare was meant to take it, and Amos means to remind us that men do not die without a design on God's part. It is the same thought as before, but it is held up in another light. The bird is not taken in the net without the design of the fowler, and men do not fall into the net of death without an intent on God's part. Death, with all which it involves on earth and in eternity, is not sent by God without a reason. For ever banished from the Christian's conversation be the word "chance." "It repenteth me greatly," says Augustine, "that I ever used that heathenish word fortuna;" for fortune or chance is a base heathenish invention. God ruleth and overruleth all things, and he doeth nothing without a motive. Brethren, the falling of a sparrow to the earth is in the divine purpose, and answereth an end. Every grain of dust that is whirled from the threshing-floor is steered with as unerring a wisdom as the stars in their courses, and there is not a leaf that trembles in the autumn from the tree but is piloted by the plan and purpose of the Lord, as much as Arcturus and his sons. Surely, then, in so great an event as death, involving, as we have already said, so much of pain to the person falling, so much of bereavement and sorrow to the families of those who are smitten, we cannot believe but what God has a purpose. The insatiable archer is not permitted to shoot his bolts at random every arrow that flies bears this inscription, "I have a message from God for thee." When God permitteth disease to walk through the streets at night, to stretch out his mighty but invisible hand, and take away here a child, and there a full-grown man, and consign to the grave those who might have otherwise long survived, you will not believe that the Lord commissioned so dread a messenger, without intending to answer some end by his errand. Let us conclude most surely that a purpose, consistent with the love and justice of God, lies hidden in the present harvest of death.

IV. Now follows a Fourth Question: "Shall one take up a snare from the earth and have taken nothing at all? by which he means that the fowler does not remove the net until he has caught his bird; so that this fourth question implies, that inasmuch as God had a purpose in sending tribulation, we may expect that he will not remove it until that design is answered."

Whatever God has to say to London, if it he heard at once he need not speak again, but if it be not heard the first time, there shall come a second voice, and yet another. The fowler takes not away his net unless some bird be caught, and God takes not away the trouble which he sends unless he has answered his design by it. If you ask me what I think to be the design, I believe it to be this-to waken up our indifferent population, to make them remember that there is a God, to render them susceptible of the influences of the gospel, to drive them to the house of prayer, to influence their minds to receive the Word, and moreover to startle Christians into energy and earnestness, that they may work while it is called to-day. My reason for selecting this subject at all was that I might be helpful in the hands of God the Holy Spirit to aid this great design, that you, dear friends, might hear at once God's voice, that so for you, at any rate, it might not be necessary that there should be a repetition of the judgment. Brethren and sisters, you are acquainted with history, and you have reason to bless God, I am sure, in turning over its pages that we have, during the last half

century, been spared many of those dreadful calamities which in former days occurred in this and other lands. Who can read the story of the plague of London without a shudder? And who can close the book without thankfulness that such a black death is unknown among us? Who has read of famines in this land without gratitude for the abundance of bread? Who can turn to the descriptions of the sack and pillage of cities under such armies as those conducted by Tilly, and other savage commanders, without thankfulness that we live in better days? Who can even read the story of the last campaign in Austria without thanking God that our country is an island, and that so we are preserved from the horrors of war? But it is much to be feared that a constant run of prosperity, perpetual peace and freedom from disease, may breed in our minds just what it has done in all human minds before, namely, security and pride, heathenism and forgetfulness of God. It is a most solemn fact that human nature can scarcely bear a long continuance of peace and health. It is almost necessary that we should be every now and then salted with affliction, lest we putrefy with sin. God grant we may have neither famine, nor sword; but as we have pestilence in a very slight degree, it becomes us to ask the Lord to bless it to the people that a tenderness of conscience may be apparent throughout the multitude, and they may recognize the hand of God. Already I have been told by Christian brethren laboring in the east of London, that there is a greater willingness to listen to gospel truth, and that if there be a religious service it is more acceptable to the people now than it was; for which I thank God as an indication that affliction is answering its purpose. There was, perhaps, no part of London more destitute of the means of grace, and of the desire to use the means, than that particular district where the plague has fallen; and if the Lord shall but make those teeming thousands anxious to hear the gospel of Jesus, and teach them to trust in him, then the design will be answered; and without a doubt the great Fowler will gather up his net. May it be so, O Lord, for thy Son Jesus Christ's sake.

V. The questions have all worked to one point. We have seen that it is no wonder if disease should come, we have learned that it does not come without a cause, we have seen that when it does come there is a design, and that it will not be removed unless that design be answered, and now we are prepared to take the further step, raised by The Fifth Question, namely, that an awakening should be the result.

"Shall the trumpet be blown in the city, and the people not be afraid?" In times of war in the olden times, there were men stationed upon watch towers, and when they saw the enemy coming the cornet was sounded, and the people rushed to arms. The sound of a trumpet was the warning of war. This cholera is like the sound of a trumpet. The voice of the Christian ministry is not heard. Those who go to listen to it do not all hear it, for they hear as though they heard not; while the great mass know nothing, and care less about the preacher's message. The ministry of London is not altogether powerless to those who attend it, but it is utterly without point or force to the dense mass who lie outside the house of God. Disease, however, is a trumpet, which must be heard. Its echoes reach the miserable garrets where the poor are crowded together, and have never heard nor cared for the name of Christ, they hear the sound, and as one after another dies, they tremble. In the darkest cellar in the most crowded haunt of vice; ay! and in the palaces of kings, in the halls of the rich and great, the sound finds an entrance and the cry is raised, "The death plague is come! The cholera is among us!" All men are compelled to hear the trumpet-voice-would to God they heard it to better purpose! Would to God all of us were aroused to a searching of heart, and, above all, led to fly to Christ Jesus, the great sacrifice for sin, and to find in him a rescue from the greater plague, the wrath to come!

VI. The great end and design of God, then, it seems, is to arouse the city, and that arousing should follow from the fact declared in The Last Question: "Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?"

Here is not intended moral evil-that rests with man-but physical evil, the evil of pestilence or famine! Shall there be cholera in the city, and God hath not done it? My soul cowered down under the majesty of that question, as I read it; it seemed to stretch its black wings over my head, and had I not known them to be the wings of God, I should have been afraid. The text talked with me in this fashion:-It is not the cholera which has slain these hundreds, the cholera was bat the sword. The hand which scattered death is the hand of a greater than mere disease. God himself is traversing London. God with silent footstep walks the hospitals, enters the chamber, strikes the wayfarer in the street, and chills the heart of the suppliant kneeling by his bed. God, the great Judge of all, at whose girdle swing the keys of death and hell, the mysterious one whose voice bids the pillars of heaven's starry roof to tremble, who made the stars, and can quench them at his will;-it was none other than he who walked down our crowded courts, and entering our lanes and alleys called one after another the souls of men to their last account! God is abroad! There are times when God comes especially near to men. He is everywhere, and yet he is frequently described in Scripture as saying, "Let us go down, that we may see whether it be altogether according to the report thereof." God has come down, and is going through this city. Tread solemnly when you go to your business tomorrow morning; you walk the streets where God has walked. You who will go to the cemetery with your dead ones, I had almost said, Put off your shoes from off your feet, for the place whereon you stand is holy ground, for God is there! The last time this disease was here I had a pervading sense of the presence of God wherever I went, It seemed to me as if the veil between time and eternity were more transparent than usual. If anything ought to compel our attention to God's voice, it should be the remembrance that it is attended with God's presence, and if anything ought to make us feel his rod, it is the fact that it is not the rod that smites, but God himself that uses the rod.

Leaving the text itself, I want to gather up my thoughts, as God shall help me, in a few earnest words. My dear hearers, I would speak as God's mouth to you as his Holy Spirit shall enable me. Is not the Lord speaking to all of us both saints and sinners, and

warning us to be agreed with him? O you who are his blood-bought people, believers in Jesus, is there any sin that has parted you from communion with Christ? Have you fallen into anything, which has provoked the Spirit, so that his comforts are withdrawn? If so, by deep humility and earnest prayer, standing at the foot of the cross of the Lord Jesus, pray-

**“Return, thou heavenly Dove, return,
Sweet messenger of rest;
I hate the sins that made thee mourn,
And drove thee from my breast.”**

At all times it is well for the Christian to acquaint himself with God and be at peace, but especially just now. How can you help others, if you yourself have lost the sense of the love of God shed abroad in your heart? I know you are his, and he will never cast you away, but if you do not enjoy his presence you will be as weak as water.

And oh! those of you who are not his people, can you bear to be at disagreement with God? How can he walk with you? You ask his protection, but how can you expect it if you are not agreed with him? Now, if two men walk together, there must be a place where they meet each other. Do you know where that is? It is at the cross. Sinner, if thou trustest in Jesus, God will meet thee there. That is the place where true at-one-ment is made between God and sinners. If thou goest repentingly to Jesus, saying, “Have mercy upon my iniquity; wash me in thy blood,” thou shalt be agreed with God, and then thou mayest look forward to living or dying with equal delight, for if we Live we shall walk with God on earth, and if we die we shall walk with God above.

Brethren, while the lion roars, should we not remove any evil which may have caused his anger to burn? Christian, search thyself now and purge out the old leaven. T he head of the Jewish household, when the feast of unleavened bread draws nigh, not only puts away the loaves of bread ordinarily used in the household, but takes a candle and searches every part of the house, lest there should be even a crumb of leaven anywhere. He cleanseth it all out, that he may keep the feast not with leavened bread. Now, Christian, as this is God’s visitation, ask for the candle of the Holy Spirit to discover any little sin. Let any little self-indulgence into which we have fallen be conscientiously given up, and for the sake of that dear Savior who denied himself every comfort for us, let us take up our cross and follow him, determined that if the lion shall roar, it shall not be because of any prey in us.

And oh, sinner, against whom God has been roaring, do you not remember his own words, “Beware, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver.” Who can remove the iniquity, which provokes the Lord to jealousy, except the dying Savior, the Lord Jesus? He has put away sin by bearing it in his own body, and if thou trustest him, there shall be no sin in thee to provoke God; but it shall be said of thee as of Israel, “In those days, and in that time, saith the Lord, the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found: for I will pardon them whom I reserve.”

Moreover, the Lord our God speaks to us by his providence, and says, “Submit yourselves, this day, to God’s design.” The great Fowler has spread the net: he will not take away that net till he has caught the bird. Be caught in it. Saint, fly not from your God. If he puts out even an angry hand, fly into it: there is no shelter from an angry God but in the pierced hand of his dear Son. When vengeance would strike a heavy blow, the closer you can get to it, the less will it wound you. Get close to God in Christ; cling to him, and he will not destroy you. Fly to Jesus! Sinner, fly! Be taken in God’s net. Say to God, “What wouldst thou have me to do? Wouldst thou have me to be thine? Here I am, Lord; before thou takest me in the nets of death, take me in the nets of grace. Before the snares of hell prevent me, let the blessed snare of thine eternal love sweetly entangle me. I am, I would be, thine.”

Be awake, Christian, and be aware of God’s design, for the trumpet is sounding, and when the trumpet sounds, the Christian must not slumber. Let the presence of God infuse into you a more than ordinary courage and zeal. My brethren, I wish I could speak to you this morning as I had hoped to have done, for then I would throw my whole soul into every word; I charge you, as you love Jesus, as you know the value of your own soul, now, if never before, be in earnest for the salvation of the sons of men. Men are always dying, time like a mighty rushing stream is always bearing them away, but now they are hurried down the torrent in increasing numbers. If you and I do not exert ourselves to teach them the gospel, upon our heads must be their blood. It is God’s work we know to save, but then he works by instruments, and we have his own solemn word for it: “If the watchman warn them not, they shall perish, but their blood will I require at the watchman’s hands.” Are there no houses round your dwelling where Jesus is unknown? Is there no court, no lane, no alley near to where you reside, without God and without Christ? Have you no friends unconverted? Have you no acquaintance unsaved? May there not be even sitting in the pew with you, some unpardoned person? May there not be, Sabbath after Sabbath, sitting in the next seat some one who knows not Christ, who was never warned of his danger or pointed to the remedy? It is a great mercy when the bell tolls if we can say of those who die, “I did all I could to save them from ruin.” I thought when I read Whitfield’s words to his congregation; I wish I could always say as much. He said, “Ah, souls, if you are lost, it is not for want of praying for, it is not for want of weeping over, it is not for want of faithful gospel preaching.” I can say the last, but I cannot say the first as I could wish; and yet I know that there are some of you here, who, if you be lost, are not lost for want of warning, nor for want of teaching, nor for want of invitation. We have set before you life and death; we have threatened you in God’s name, and we have invited you by the precious blood of Jesus. Years ago there seemed to be some hope about you, but it was like the

morning cloud and the early dew; for you are still unsaved. When I heard the other day that Mrs. So-and-So was dead, and that she died of cholera, I could not lament, for she was one who had long feared God. When they told me that a worthy young man had fallen, I was sorrowful to have lost so good a student from the college, but I was thankful that one who had served his God so well in his youth had gone to his rest; but if I heard of the death of some of you, it would cause me unmingled grief and fear. Some of you have been sitting here for years who will, I fear, go out of this tabernacle to destruction—you know you will, unless you are changed. If you die as you now are you have nothing to expect but a fearful looking for of judgment and of fiery indignation. Some of you know well the result of sin, and yet you choose it; your consciences prick you often, and yet you run against them; you have been alarmed and so awakened that it seems impossible that you can continue as you are; but alas, you will not turn and your end is coming. My hearer, I can hardly settle my face to think of thy fate; I feel like Elijah when he looked into the face of Hazeel, and trembled as he foresaw his history. It is terrible to think of thy doom. He who has warned thee and prayed for thee will meet thee in another world, and when he meets thee thou shalt not have to say he did not speak plainly and pointedly to thee; thou shalt be speechless, because the trumpet was sounded and thou didst not take the warning, and God was in the city and thou wouldst not hear him, and death spoke as well as the minister, but thou stoppedst both thine ears because thou wast resolved to die, and thy heart was set on mischief. Thou scornest eternal life and chooseth destruction for the sake of a few paltry pleasures, or a deceitful darling lust, which will treacherously stab thee through thy heart; thou lettest Jesus go and heaven go, and all this for a moment's pleasure! Ah, my hearer, you shall have much to answer for. I speak to you as a dying man, and pray you not to venture into eternal wrath. Give these words some consideration, I pray you, and as you consider them, may God the Holy Ghost fasten them as nails in a sure place, and may you seek the Lord while he may be found, and call upon him while he is near, for this is his word to you, "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?" and Jesus adds his loving words, "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest;" and "the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

Amos 4:12 Prepared to Meet God

NO. 2965

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"Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Israel: and because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel." — Amos 4:12.

There is a peculiar solemnity about the language of our text, because, albeit that the whole of Scripture is the Word of God, yet very much of it is given to us by the prophets, apostles, and other inspired writers. But, here, it is God himself who is speaking, and out of heaven he addresses his erring people, and says to them, "Because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel." If ever every mortal ear should be earnestly attentive, it is when God's voice is heard. Shall not the creature listen to its Creator? Shall not man give heed to the voice of the God of the whole earth? O Lord, give to us the hearing ear, and let not thy words merely reach our ears, but may the inward meaning of them penetrate our souls, through the effectual working of thine almighty Spirit!

I. I am going to use the closing words of the text — "Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel, as An Address To All Who Are Now Present.

You have come hither, but for what purpose have you come? If you have come rightly, you have come to meet your God. The Israelites often came together to bow down before their graven images, or professing to worship God with rites of their own inventing. They forgot that all true worship must be spiritual; and, though they did not, and could not, meet with God in such a way as that, yet they went back to their homes perfectly satisfied with what they had done. They had performed the external rites of their religion; they had gone through all its ceremonies correctly, and they were content. But now God calls upon them to prepare to meet HIM, — no longer to be satisfied with the visible and the external, but to get to the Invisible and the Eternal; and that is the call of God to every one who is now present here.

"What went ye out for to see?" What came ye here to hear? Too many attend even the house of God with the notion of merely going to listen to the preacher. He is a thoughtful man, profound, philosophic; or he is an eloquent man, oratorical and fluent. Is it for this reason that ye go to your churches and your chapels, simply to be charmed by the voice of man? If so, let me remind you that God abhorreth this mockery of worship. As for myself, I have long ago despised the tricks of oratory and the gaudy displays of eloquence, and would sooner be dumb than merely speak so as to exhibit my own powers. If ye have come here aright, ye have come that God

may meet with you, and that you may meet with God, that your consciences may be aroused, and that the truth may enter your hearts; but, O my hearers, have you come with any such design? Are there not some of you who have almost come out to meet God as Michal went out to meet David, — that she might scoff at him? Have not some of you come almost as Goliath went to defy Israel, — that ye may fight against God, and contend against the truth; or, possibly, to despise it, in your hearts, and to mock at it? God speaks to all such persons, and says to them, “Cease ye from your evil ways, and prepare your heart to meet ME.” Oh, if we always went up to the assemblies of God’s people with prepared hearts, we should not go there in vain. If sinners came up to hear the gospel with their hearts breaking all the way, and crying, from their very souls, “Oh, that we might find Christ!” — if they came up with earnest, believing prayer, — if they gathered together with a sacred expectation of blessing, — what meetings there would be between God and them! There would be for them no more wasted Sabbaths, no more sham profession, no more formal religion without any effect upon the conscience and the life. Then would our solemn services be streams of blessing; water would again leap out of the rock, and the thirsty congregation would be indeed refreshed. O God, wilt thou not touch men’s hearts so that, when they gather together in thy house, they will come prepared to meet thee there, and to worship thee in spirit and in truth!

II. A second application of the text which I shall make, without insisting upon its being the one designed, is this; it may be looked upon as An Address To God’s Own People.

Sometimes, the Lord’s people get out of the way of communion and fellowship with him. It was so with Israel in the day of Amos, yet the Lord here avows himself to be their God still, for he says, “Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel.” As for you, who are his people, he it still your God; and though you may have fallen into a cold condition of heart, and are walking now in darkness, and seeing no light, yet he calls you to meet, him, for he desires to have your company. He has been chastening you, again and again, because you would not walk near to him, and he is prepared to chasten you yet more; but he will stay his hand if you will now come near to him. Remember what Eliphaz said to Job, and obey the injunction, “Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at peace: thereby good shall unto thee.” Child of God, permit me to point to thee with my finger, and to say to thee, “Prepare to meet thy God.” Were not those blessed times when the sound of his feet made music in thine ears? Hast thou forgotten the Hermonites and the hill Mizar where the Lord appeared unto thee, and said, “I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.” Oh, blessed were those days when we retired to a private corner, and communed with God. Hallowed was that study, that kitchen, that bedroom, that hay-loft, or that ditch under the hedge, where we were accustomed to meet with the Beloved of our souls, and to talk with him as one talketh with his friends. We have had many blessed occasion when heaven’s gate has seemed to be set wide open; and if we did not pass right through, yet we did sit down as upon the doorstep of glory, and Jesus unbosomed himself to us, and we poured out our heart before him. There have been times when we have received those kisses of his lips of which we love to speak even now when the company is select; and shore have been love-tokens between our soul and our Savior which have made us feel that, whether in the body or out of the body, we could hardly tell; God only knew. Then, by all your sweet recollections of the past, come, ye children of the living God, and prepare to meet him again now.

If you ask, “What shall we do in order to get ready to meet him?” I answer, — Cast out the idols from your hearts; let them all go; love no one else and nothing else as you love him, but give him your whole body, soul, and spirit. Humble yourself before him at the very thought that you should ever have wandered away from him, and played the wanton towards your Best-beloved. Come, also, with a firm reliance upon his unchanging mercy, believing that, though you have often forsaken him, he has never forsaken you. Believe in that gracious declaration of his which says, “I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee.” Look again to the precious blood of Jesus, which is the only way of access to the Father, and come besprinkled with it even now. Why should you not come to him at once? God has most delightful ways of blessing his people on a sudden. “Or ever I was aware, my soul made me like the chariots of Ammi-nadib.” Personally, I know what it is to rise, from the deeps of despair, right away from the place where I was distracted with a thousand cares, and sorrows, and sins, and to soar straight away into the serene ether of perfect reconciliation with God, and conscious fellowship with him. “Behold,” says the risen and glorified Jesus, “I stand at the door, and knock.” It is at the door of Laodicea, the door of that church which was lukewarm, neither cold nor hot, and it is at your door, O lukewarm Christian, that Christ is now knocking. What is the cure for your lukewarmness? It is Christ’s standing at the door, and knocking, and saying unto you, “If any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.” This will lift you up out of your lukewarmness; and, instead of Christ spueing you out of his mouth, as it looks as if he must do, he will come and feast with you, and you shall feast with him. Open your hearts to him, now, brothers and sisters; who among us, who profess to love him, can keep our hearts closed against him? “Come in, thou blessed of the Lord,”—we cry to our Beloved; and, as we gaze upon him, and see that his head is wet with dew, and his locks with the drops of the night, our bowels yearn towards him, and with heartfelt love we pray to him, “Abide with us, O blessed Savior, and go no more out for ever, but let our fellowship with thee be perpetual!”

III. I should have liked, if I had had time, — but I have not, — to have applied this text to any professors here who have gone beyond the negative loss of communion with God, and who have backslidden into sin.

This is The Lord’s Address To Backsliders: “Prepare to meet your God.” Prepare to come back into his loving arms, and to be reconciled to him again. There are some of you, perhaps, who were not only members of this church, but who were also members

of the class so long presided over by that godly woman Mrs. Bartlett had been “called home” during the week preceding the delivery of this discourse. (See Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, No. 1,249, “Saints in Heaven and Earth One Family.”) for whom we have hung up these memorials of our grief the wept over you when you burned aside; and, amongst the many things which have made it hard work for you to sin, is this one that you knew you were grieving her gracious and gentle spirit. Hear her voice calling to you from the grave; nay, more than that, listen as she speaks to you out of the excellent glory, saying, “My beloved sister, come back to your Lord!” You have had to suffer already for your backsliding. God has sent you, as the Lord says he sent to idolatrous Israel, “blasting and mildew.” He has also withheld from you the rain in a spiritual sense, so that you are nigh unto famishing; and there is something even worse coming upon you. God does not tell you what it is, even as he did not tell the guilty Israelites all that he would do to them it is something so terrible that he seems to hesitate to describe it; but he says, “Because I will do this unto thee.” I know not what it is, nor can you guess; but it is something that will destroy all your joys, and lay you prostrate in the dust of sorrow. Because he threatens to do this unto you, return unto him, return unto him now. “Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little.” - I wish I could come round to each one of you, backsliders, and beseech you to remember that we have not ceased to love you, nor to pray for you, nor to hope that you may yet be led to prepare to meet your God.

IV. Now, coming to my principal object on this occasion, I want to take the text, and use it as A Message To The Unconverted. O Spirit of God, apply it to them with thine almighty power!

I think the text may be applied to the unsaved in three ways; first, as a challenge: “Prepare to meet thy God;” secondly, as an invitation: “Prepare to meet thy God;” and, thirdly, as a summons, — and it will, one day, come in that form to every one of us: “Prepare to meet thy God.”

First, this sentence comes to the ungodly as a challenge. At the time referred to in the text, God had been punishing the idolatrous Israelites again, and again, and again, and again, with the view of bringing them to repentance; but none of his chastisements had, so far, moved them to yield to him. The more God smote them, the harder they became, so he seemed to say to them, “Well, then, since you will not submit to me, since nothing appears to make you bow down at my feet, I will now put on my armor of wrath, and come out against you with sword and buckler; and I throw down this challenge to you, — prepare to meet me.” Now, my dear hearers, you who have long heard the gospel, but who, until now, have rejected it, I ask you, — Do you hope to be able to withstand God when he comes forth against you in the majesty of his righteous wrath? Already, when he has but touched you, he has made every bone and nerve in your body to tremble. You know how near to the gate of death he has brought you; do you imagine that, when he comes out against you in his might, you will be a match for him?

There are three things you may try to do, and I will ask you whether you are prepared to meet God in reference to them. The first will be, to justify yourself for remaining his enemy. Are you prepared to do that? When the Lord God says to you, “I created you, I have kept you in being, I have fed you, and cared for you until now, why have you not obeyed me?” — when the Lord Jesus Christ says to you, “I loved sinners so much that I died for them; why will you not believe in me?” — and when the Spirit of God says, “I strove with men; why did you resist me?” — what answer will you give? Will you be able to make it clear that you were perfectly justified in choosing the pleasures of this world rather than yield obedience to God? Will you be able, with all your logic, to make it seem right for you to have lived a wrong life, right to have despised the law of God, and right to have rejected the gospel of Christ? Come, man, set your wits to work, and see whether you can expect, in the great assize which will soon be held, to be able to justify yourself before the bar of God. Prepare, in that way, to meet your God.

Or, secondly, do you expect to be able to resist him? Come, ye brave men, gird on your armor, and come out to battle against the Lord God Almighty! Better let the thorns contend against the fire which licks them up with its flaming tongue, better let the wax contend against the furnace heat which makes it run like water, than let the sinner try to contend against the omnipotent God. His faintest breath would suffice to scatter the ungodly, and drive them like chaff before the wind. Can ye stand up against the Most High, O ye that despise and forget him? Did Pharaoh triumph over Jehovah at the Red Sea? Did Sennacherib overthrow the God of Israel on that dreadful night when his vast host was cast into a deep sleep from which there was no awakening? No; and you cannot successfully stand up against God; but if you mean to fight with him, count the cost, understand what it means, and so prepare to meet your God.

There is a third course open to you, and that is, are you able to endure what he can lay upon you? I have read of a prisoner insulting the judge by whom he has them sentenced, and telling him that the punishment he had awarded was a mere trifle. Can you say this to God? O unconverted men, will you be able to endure the terror of his ire in that day when he comes forth against you? Oh, no! the very joints of your body shall be loosed in that day, your hair shall stand erect with horror, that bold spirit of yours shall despair, and all thee bravado with which you said, “There is no God,” shall have departed from you, and you will crouch, and tremble, and weep, and wail in his presence. You say to-day, “There is no hell;” but you will not say that when you get there. You defy God to-day, but you will not defy him in the day when he reveals himself to you; for, then, you will cry to the mountains to fall upon you to hide you from his angry face. O sirs, the challenge of the living God is just this, — if you will not yield to him, be prepared to fight the quarrel out with him. If you will not submit to his mercy, if you cannot justify yourselves for your wrongdoing, then take up your arms, and

contend with him, or harden yourselves like adamant, and prepare to endure the fierceness of his wrath. But neither of these things can you do, so let that terrible challenge bring you to your knees, and cause you to

“Seek his grace Whose wrath ye cannot bear.”

So, in the second place, I will use the text as an invitation, and the note at once changes from the thunders of Sinai to the still small voice of Calvary: “Prepare to meet your God.” Have you heard these tidings, ungodly men? God is coming out against you, armed with his dreadful two-edged sword, — that very sword of infinite justice with which he smote his only-begotten Son in that day when he stood as the Substitute for sinners. What can you do? Will you run away from him? To whom or whether can you run? The utmost ends of the earth are in his hands. Should you fly to the far-distant seas, he will arrest you there; should you plunge into the thickest shades of darkness, his eye will still behold you.

**“Lord, where shall guilty souls retire,
Forgotten and unknown?
In hell they meet thy dreadful fire,
In heaven thy glorious throne.
“If wing’d with beams of morning light,
I fly beyond the West;
Thy hand, which must support my flight,
Would soon betray my rest.
“If o’er my sins I think to draw
The curtains of the night;
Those flaming eyes that guard thy law
Would turn the shades to light.
“The beams of noon, the midnight hour,
Are both alike to thee:
Oh, may I ne’er provoke that power
From which I cannot flee!”**

God is coming forth to meet you, and there is no way for you to escape from him. Will you stay where you are? Then he will soon overtake you; and when he does, then shall come your terrible end. Your wisdom is to give heed to the advice of the text, and go to meet him. You cannot escape if you remain where you are, so go to meet him. “How?” say you. Well, go to meet him thus: with humble confessions and petitions on your lips, and with ropes on your necks, adjudging yourselves worthy of death, and yielding yourselves up entirely into the Lord’s hands, confessing that you deserve any punishment that he pleases to put upon you. It is thus that a rebellious subject should meet his King, — confessing guilt, praying for mercy, pleading for forgiveness, asking for grace. Thus David met his God. Read the 51st Psalm, note how he prayed, and go thou, and do likewise. You must go also with repentance in your hearts. The sins you have loved in the past must be hated and forsaken. You must go to God abhorring yourselves, and making a full surrender of your souls to him. Yield yourselves thus to him, and do it at once, seeing that, since you have rebelled against him, his justice can seize you at any moment, and execute upon you his hot displeasure.

But let me tell you that you have a stern task before you if you are to prepare yourselves in this fashion to meet your God, — a task which you will find impossible to perform in your own strength. Our rebellious heart will not readily yield; our stubborn spirit will not easily bow; our pride will not let us confess our sin; the dumb devil within us will not permit us to pray. I will tell you what to do. Go to God, just as you are, in the Mediator’s name; or go first to Jesus, and say, “Lord Jesus, give me, repentance, give me faith, give me hatred of sin, give me a yielding spirit, give me a heart of flesh, give me a pliant mind;” and when you have thus yielded yourself up to Jesus, you are prepared to meet God, for the place where God meets sinners is at the cross of Christ and it is the only place where it is safe for a sinner to attempt to meet his God. If, then, you would be prepared to meet your God, go to that Jesus who met his Father on your behalf, and who, as the result of that terrible meeting, died for your sins, if you are truly trusting him. Go to Christ and he will wash you in his precious blood, and clothe you in his spotless robe of righteousness. Go to Christ and he will breathe the perfume of his merits over you; and then, when you meet God, he will not merely see, in you a sinner, but a sinner saved. He will smell the fragrant odour of the garments of his Son, which will have such a sweet savor to him that you will be acceptable to him for Christ’s sake. There is no other way to God than this. How I wish that every unconverted person here would heed this message, and obey it, “Prepare to meet thy God.” Go and meet him in the way I have pointed out to you; go and meet him this very hour.

“Where shall I go to meet God?” asks one. Well, meet him just where you are. Trust Jesus, and yield yourself to God, and the great transaction is done; or get away into some quiet corner, and pour out your grief before the Lord, and ask him, for Jesus sake, to meet with you, that you may be reconciled to him through the death of his Son.

It is scarcely a week ago since our good sister, Mrs. Bartlett, fell asleep; and I do not know of anything that would so well keep her in

our memories, — especially in the memories of those of you who have often heard her loving invitations, but have not yielded to them, as for me to speak on her behalf, as well as on my Lord's behalf, and say to you, "Come and meet the Lord; come and meet him now, prepared to meet him through the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ your Lord." Happy day, happy day, would it be if many were led by the gracious Spirit to meet with God now. I remember well the time when I first met him thus. I thought that I was a lost soul; I judged myself to be upon the brink of hell. I had no merit and no native goodness to bring to God; I was just a mass of corruption and sin; but — "I came to Jesus as I was, Weary, and wow, and sad; — and in Jesus I met my God, and, meeting God, my soul ways set at liberty; and, to-night, my soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit doth rejoice in God my Savior. The door that was open to me is open to thee, my friend, so enter it, and: enter it now. May the Holy Spirit graciously enable thee to come!

And, lastly, if the invitation of this text be not accepted, it will soon be heard as a summons. I am not the officer to bring the summons to you, I have no authority to do that; I am sent to invite you to meet your God, and I have done that; but these will come a day, my friends, when the authorized officer will deliver this message to you, "Prepare to meet your God." You will be sitting at the work-table, young woman, and you will feel a strange pain in your side, and you will ask yourself, "What is this?" It will be a message saying to thee, "Get thee home to thy bed, for, thus saith the Lord, from that bed thou shalt come down no more till thou art carried down in thy coffin. 'Prepare to meet thy God.'" That message will come to you also, my aged friend, before very long. You have almost completed the full period of your life; and, very soon, you must retire to your room, and sit still, and wait, for you also must prepare to meet your God. This summons may come to me as I stand here, or to you as you sit there; it may come to the strongest young man or young woman amongst us. Even while we are at this service, the dart of death may reach any one of us.

What a flurry some people are in when that summons comes to them, "Prepare to meet your God!" As a rule, they have not the hardihood to put it aside. A few do so; but, many say, "Send for the minister, call in some praying friends, and let us prepare to meet our God." They go about that solemn business in quite the wrong fashion. Their harvest is past, their summer is ended, and they are not saved; and, even now, they do not go the right way to be saved. They are relying upon men; they are relying upon prayers; for they have not yet learned to look alone to Jesus. I do not know any more dreary work than to be called, sometimes at dead of night, to see a dying man or woman who has lived a careless, godless life. I often feel as if it would be, better to refuse to go; for, when one gets there, frequently the person is insensible; and what their friends imagine we, who are ministers, can do with insensible people, is more than I can tell. Why, we cannot do much with you while you have your senses. Even while you are sitting here, much that, we say glides off you like rain off the roof of your house; what can you hope that we can say to you when you are either unconscious, or distracted with pain, with your head aching, and your mind confused, and your soul amazed by the near prospect of the world to come God's grace can work miracles, I know; but I fear that this miracle is seldom wrought, — that the man, who has neglected all his life to prepare to meet his God, should be able to light his lamp all of a sudden, and go forth to meet the King just when the trumpet voice is sounding through the streets, "Behold, the Bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him." For the most part, there is a piteous appeal, "Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out," but that we cannot do; and, while they go to buy for themselves, the Bridegroom comes, and when they clamor for admittance at the closed door, the answer is, "Too late! too late! Ye cannot enter now." The old Rabbis used to say that every man should prepare to die one day before his Death-day; and, since he did not know whether he might not die to-morrow, the wisest plan was for him to prepare, to-day; and so it is. Through this assembly, then, let this truth run, — that there will come a summons to death, and that summons will run thus, "Prepare to meet thy God."

But when you die, in an instant your soul will be before the bar of God. There will be held, what I may call, the petty sessions before the lash grand assize; and at that sessions your soul will stand alone, and God will bid you go to the house of detention, where you must wait till your body also shall rise to be united with your soul. When the day of resurrection arises, louder than ten thousand blunders will ring out the blast of the archangel's trumpet, startling heaven and earth, and echoing over land and sea, "Awake, ye dead, and come to judgment!" Then shall the cemeteries heave and toss like seas when lashed into fury by the tempest. Then shall the battlefields of earth grow rich with living men as the harvest field is rich when the reaper goeth forth with his sickle. Then shall earth, from her teeming womb, yield the unnumbered myriads that have slept within her bosom; and they shall stand, covering earth and sea, a countless multitude, like the leaves of the forest or the sands of the seashore. Then again shall the trumpet sound o'er all the gathered throng, "Prepare to meet your God;" and HE shall come, the man Christ Jesus, whom they would not have to be their God and King; and, sitting on the great white throne, with all nations before him, "he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats;" and "the books" shall be opened, and whosoever, of all our fellow-creatures and of ourselves also, shall not be found written in the book of life shall be cast into the lake of fire. O sirs, O sirs, in the name of the living God, I ask you, — Are you prepared for that great day? Some of us can say, with humble boldness, "Yes, we are prepared for it." I hope that many here could truthfully say, with Count Zinzendorf, —

**"Jesus, thy blood and righteousness
My beauty are, my glorious dress;
Midst flaming worlds, in these array'd,
With joy shall I lift up my head.
"Bold shall I stand in that great day,**

**For who aught to my charge shall lay?
While through thy blood absolved I am
From sin's tremendous curse and shame."**

But if you have not been absolved by the blood of Jesus, how can you stand there? The very light of his countenance would scare you into abject terror; and, if his face alarms you, what will his voice do when he says, "Depart, ye cursed"? And what will his hand do when he grasps his rod of iron, and breaks you in pieces like a potter's wheel? Beware, ye that forget God, lest ye loiter, and linger, and procrastinate, until that last trumpet summons sounds, "Prepare to meet your God." May he graciously grant that you may be prepared now, instead of standing unprepared in that dread day!

**"Ye sinners, seek his grace,
Whose wrath ye cannot bear;
Fly to the shelter of his cross,
And find salvation there."**

Crouch at his feet; bow down before those dear feet that were nailed to the cross. Look up to the hands that still bear the nailprints. Gaze upon the face that once was stained with spittle, but now shines beyond the light of the sun. Look upward to that brow which once was crowned with thorns. Hide yourself in that cleft in his side where the spear-thrust made an open way to the heart of Jesus. In a sentence, rest in his atoning sacrifice, for there is nothing else in which you can rest. May the Lord enable you to do so, for Jesus sake! Amen.

Amos 5:8 Reasons For Seeking God

NO. 3034
ON THURSDAY, APRIL 4TH, 1907,
DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON

"Seek him that maketh the raven stars and Orion, and turneth the shadow of death in to the morning, and maketh the day chuck with night: that calleth for the waters of sea, and poureth them out upon the face of the earth: The Lord by his name." — Amos 5:8.

Idolatry has been in every age, the besetting sin of mankind. Inform or another, the unregenerate are all given to it; and even in God's people there remains in their old nature, a tendency towards it. In its grosser manifestation idolatry is the desire of man to see God with his eyes, to have outward representation of him. who be represented; who is too great, too spiritual, ever to be described by human language, much less to be set forth by images of wood, and stone, however elaborately carved and cunningly overlaid with gold. There is a great God who filleth all space, and yet is greater than space, whose existence is without beginning and without end, who is everywhere present, and universally self-existent; but man if so unspiritual that he will men hip this invisible One in spirit and. in truth, but craves after outward similitudes, symbols, and signs. If Aaron makes a calf, Israel forgets the Divine Jehovah's glory, and says of the image of an ox that eateth grass, "These be thy gods, O Israel which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt."

We are apt to imagine that it is a very strange freak of human depravity when men are led to worship visible objects and signs; but it is not at all unusual or singular; it is the general sin of believer has to contend against it in its subtler forms; for idolatry takes insinuating shapes, less gross in appearance than the worship of Dagon or Ashtaroht, but quite as sinful.

Take, for instance, the common religious idolatry of our own country, which coming, in part, of reverence to holy is, as it, brass, when architecturally arranged. English idolatry reveals itself in reverence to an order of meal, not because of their superior character, but because of contain mystic rites upon them, by virtue of which they are supposed to become the representatives of heaven, and the reservoirs of grace. How are our English idolaters in these men when they behold them appareled in vestamints which the tailor has cut into fashions remarkably helpful to devotion! Without these priests and the sumptuous adornings, and grotesque disfigurement, our modern idolaters cannot publicly worship, but in these they have as much as the Ephesians had in their great goddess Diana.

They earn only worship their God by objects which appeal to the mines. An outward altar, an outward priest, an outward ritual, outward rites, — all these are nothing but another form of the old idolatry of Babel and of Bethel. Man still burns from the unseen God; the unseen Priest, who has passed within the veil, man still ignores. The spiritual feast upon the body and blood of Jesus Christ, which is the joy of the saints, they know not; but, the outward emblems are adored by some, and hold in great reverence by others. Bread and wine, which are but created and common things, even when placed on the table to assist us in communion, are

made into deities by the blind idolaters of this age. Could Egypt, or Assyria do worse? Bread used at the ordinance is hush bread, and no other than ordinary bread; its emblematic use imparts to it no measure degree of sanctity, much less of divinity. It is idolatry, — flat, groveling idolatry, and nothing less, which on all sides is spreading its mantle of darkness over this land under the pretense of profoundly reverent piety.

Where Ritualism does not reign, how easy it is for men to be idolaters of themselves! What is self-reliance, understood as too many understand it, but idolatry of self? It is the opposite of dependence upon the living God, the great, source of power wisdom. Reliance upon, my own wisdom, upon my own resolution, upon my own strength of mind, — these are idolatries in a subtle and attractive shape. What, is much of our overweening affection to our children and to our relatives? What, is our unsubmissive repining but idolatry? How is it that we rebel against God if our friends are suddenly taken from us? O man, why is it, that, thy God has so little of thy love, and the creature so much? There is a lawful affection; up to that point, thou shouldst go. There is an unlawful affection when, by any means, the creature comes before the Creator; to this thou mayest not descend. Unlawful love, love which idolizes its object, is to be avoided with all our might.

Then, again, perhaps a less excusable form of idolatry, though no excuse is to be offered for any, is that in which men idolize their estates and their confidence in their accumulations, living only to acquire wealth and position, struggling in the race, not to win crown which is immortal, but that poor wreath with which men the wealthy merchant, the diligent student, the eloquent barrister, the valiant men of arms. This is idolatry again, for it is setting up an earthly object in the place of the Creator. To God is due all my love, my trust, my fear. He made me, and therefore I am bound to serve him; and whenever I lay down, at the feet of any person or object, dominion over my powers, apart from God, I am at once guilty of idolatry.

I cannot stay to tell you all the various form which this idolatry assumes, but may God give us grace to strive against them; and you who are still held captive by these idolatries, may he deliver! May he save you from leaning upon an arm of flesh, from trusting in what may be seen, and be handled, and bring you to rely upon the invisible God, to whom alone belongeth power and strength, and who has a right to our confidence and our service!

The text is addressed to those who have been guilty, either, either in word, or thought, or deed, of idolatry against God. It gives arguments to persuade them to turn away, first in its natural sense; and then, diving into its meaning a little more deeply, we shall spiritual reasons in it for seeking Jehovah, and Jehovah alone.

I. First, then, in the natural sense of the text, we find a truth, which is plain enough, but which we need constantly to be reminded of, namely, that Jehovah is really God.

If Jehovah were not really the Creator of the world, if he did not in very deed make “the seven stars and Orion”, if he did not actually work in the operations of Providence, changing the night into day, and day again into night, we might be excusable for not rendering him service into night, we might be excusable for not rendering him service, since homage might be safely withheld from an imaginary deity.

But, as God is real, and exists as truly as we do, as our existence is dependent upon his sovereign will, and he is All-in-all, it is due to him that we should “seek his face” And simple as that utterance is, I have need to push it home to you. I am afraid, dear friends, that many of you think of religion in its bearing towards God as being very proper, but at the same time imaginative, matter. You do not practically grasp the thought that God is, and that he is the Rewarder of them that diligently seek him. You do not lay hold upon this fact that, as surely as there are fellow-creatures round about you, there is a God close to you, in whom you live, and move, and have your being. The worldly man puts his foot down on the earth, and he says, “This is the main chance; I believe in this.” He takes up certain fragments of that earth, yellow and glittering, and he says, “Ah! I believe in this; here is something solid, and I feel it.” Just so, the created earth is real to him, and God, who created all things, is to him but a shadowy being. He may not rudely deny his existence, but, practically, he reduces his thought of God to a mere fancy, and says in his heart, “No God.” My attentive hearer, I trust that thou art not so unwise. Thou knowest that God is, that he is even if we are not, that is the Creator, the First and Chief of all things, I trust thou art anxious to seek him, and to yield to him thy obedience.

Note, from the text, that God is not only the true God, but his is the glorious I cannot understand how the heathen, supposing their gods had been gods, could worship such little, mean, base, and contemptible being. Think of Jove, for instance, the great god of Rome and Greece, what a disgusting animal he was! What a monster of sensuality, selfishness, and folly! I should feel it hard, as a creature, to worship such a god as that, if god he could be. But, when I think of him who made “the seven stars and Orion”, who stretched out the heavens like a curtain, and made the sky as of molten looking-glass, who is magnificent in the acts of creation, marvelous in the wonders of grace, and unsearchable in all the attributes of his nature, my soul feels it to be her honor and delight to adore him. It is an elevation to the soul to stoop to the dust before such a God. The more we reverence him, and the less we become in our own sight, the more sublime are our emotions. Well did even a heathen say, “To serve God is to reign.” To serve such a God as ours, is to be made kings and priests. Oh, were not our hearts perverted and depraved, it would be our greatest happiness, our highest rapture, to sound forth the praises of a God so glorious, and our hearts would be evermore enquiring of him,

“Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? Thy will is wiser and better than mine own will. I ask no greater liberty than to be bound with thy bands of love; I ask no greater ease than to bear thy blessed yoke.”

Since, then, the Lord is real, and, moreover, so glorious as to be infinitely worthy of worship, we should seek him and live.

Again, 'Jehovah, the true God, is most powerful, for he “maketh the seven stars and Orion, and turneth the shadow of death into the morning, and maketh the day dark with night: that calleth for the waters of the sea, and poureth them out upon the face of the earth: Jehovah is his name.” Think reverently of him, for he is not like the gods of the heathen, of whom the psalmist said in satire, “Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men’s hands. They have mouths, but, they speak not: eyes have they, but they see not: they have ears, but they hear not: noses have they, but they smell not: they have hands, but they handle not: feet have they, but they walk not: neither streak they through their throat.” Contempt and ridicule are poured upon these wooden gods by the prophet Isaiah when he tells of the workman who takes one end of a log, and makes a god of it, and with the other part kindles a fire, and warms his hands, and cooks his food. Such a god as this it is indeed a degradation for the human mind to worship; but the true God, who has displayed his power in the glittering firmament, and in the foaming sea, who is revealed with wonder to the eye of the astronomer in the innumerable worlds revolving in boundless space, such a God we must reverence. In the hour of storm and tempest, when the Lord is abroad, riding in his chariot of thunder-cloud upon wings of bias wind, casting forth his hailstones and coals of fire, making the earth to shake at the sound of his voice, and breaking the cedars of Lebanon with the flash of his spear, we feel we must adore him, and as we bow before him, reason endorses the worship which grace suggests. Is not, his power a cogent argument for seeking him? Will not you, who have hitherto lived without him, now adore him? A real God, so glorious said so powerful, should surely command your reverent adoration.

Further, he is a God who works great marvels, achieving wonders every moment which would astonish us if we were not so used to beholding in them. They tell the story — 'tis but a legend of the days of Solomon the wise, that the king astonished all beholders by taking a seed, and producing from it, in a few memento, a full-grown plant. They cried, “How wonderful! How astonishing!” But the wise man said, “This is only what the Lord doeth every day; this is wiser, he is performing everywhere in his own time, and you see it, and yet you never say, ' How wonderful ! '” When we have watched those who practice sleight-of-hand perform their feats, we have marveled greatly; but what are a few poor conjuring tricks when compared with the ordinary, but yet matchless processes of nature? Our fields and hedgerows teem with marvels never equaled by all the wisdom and skill of man. Walk into the grass field, and you tread on miracles. Listen to the birds as they sing in the trees, and you hear marvelous speech. If one little mechanical bird, with a few clockwork movements, were warbling out something like music in an exhibition, everybody would gather round it, and some would even pay to hear it sing; and yet thousands of birds sing infinitely more sweetly than anything man can make, and men had rather kill them than admire them. Men fail to see the miracle which God is working in each living thing.

Turn your eyes above you to the starry firmament, and watch the Pleiades and Arcturus with his sons; for though we know but little of them, they have won from every observer an awestruck acknowledgment of the greatness of God, inasmuch that it has been said that —

“An undevout astronomer is mad.”

The order, the regularity, the manifest calculation and design which appear in every one of the constellations, in every single planet, in every fixed star, and in every part of the great multitude of worlds which God has created, are such decisive evidences that, if men do not see something of God in them, they must be weak in their minds or wicked in their hearts. Surely, what is seen of God, in this way, has tended to make us worship him. Many of you may know but little of astronomy; but, still, you see every day that God is working everywhere around us, and that heaven, and earth, and land, and sea, are teeming with the products of his marvelous skill. The revolutions of day and night, and the formation and fall of rain are indisputable proofs of the presence of eternal power and Godhead. Let us, therefore, seek the Lord.!

How is it that a man can go up and down in God’s world, and yet forget the God who made the whole? I do not suppose that a man could have walked through the Exhibition at Paris without thinking of the emperor whose influence gathered all those treasures together, and who attracted the kings and princes of the earth to visit it; and yet men will go through this world, compared with which the Paris “Exposition” was a box of children’s toys, and will not recognize God therein! Oh, strange blindness, mad infatuation that, with God everywhere present, and such a God, — the God whom to know is life eternal, whom to delight in is present happiness and future bliss, — man is willingly ignorant, blind to his own best, senseless to the sweetest and the most ennobling emotions, and an enemy to his best Friend !

The surface of the text supplies us with motives for seeking God. Oh, that the Holy Spirit might supply us with grace that we might feel the motives, and be obedient to them!

II. We will now regard the text With a more spiritual eye.

We speak to those who are sensible of their departure from the living God, and are anxious to be reconciled to him, by the

forgiveness of their sins for Jesus' sake, but our text has also a word for the obdurate and unawakened. In many parts of Scripture the Lord has been pleased to invite the penitent to come to him; but, in this passage, in order that the invitation may miss none, it is made exceedingly wide in its character. Our text will appear to be very wonderful if we notice the connection in which it stands: "Ye who turn judgment to wormwood, and leave off righteousness in the earth, seek him." There is no mention of those who thirst for him, who are humbled, and confess their faults; but this exhortation is given to those who have no good points about them, but many of the most pernicious traits of character. Those who turn judgment into wormwood, and leave off righteousness in the earth, even they are bidden to seek God. Marvelous mercy ! Who after this shall dare despair? If my hearer has, up to this day, lived a stranger to God, the text does not exclude him from seeking God; but, as with an angel's voice, it whispers, "Seek him." If sin has perverted your judgments, yet seek the great Creator and Preserver; seek him, for you shall find him; you are not bidden to seek his face in vain; the command to see him implies the certainty of his being found of you.

The reasons given for seeking the Lord are, spiritually, these. The Lord "maketh the seven stars" that is to say, the Pleiades, and he also "maketh Orion." Now, the Pleiades were regarded as being the constellation of the spring, harbinger of the coming summer. We read of "the sweet influences of Pleiades." They are most conspicuous at the vernal period of the year. On the other hand, the Oriental herdsman, such as Amos was, when he saw Orion flaming aloft, knew the wintry sign right well. Both the Pleiades and Orion* are ordained of the Lord, he makes our joys and our troubles. See, then, the reason why we should seek God, because, if Orion should just now be in the ascendant, and we should be visited with a winter of despondency, chilled by howling winds of fear, and sharp frosts of dismay, if we seek God, he can withdraw Orion, and place us under the gentle sway of the Pleiades of promise, so that a springtime of hope and comfort shall cheer our souls, to be succeeded by a summer of rare delights and fruitful joys. Hearest thou this, poor troubled one?

See Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, No. 818, "The Pleiades and Orion." Whatever thy sorrow may be, the God who made heaven and earth can suddenly change it into the brighter joy. By the dispensations of his providence, he can do it. Thy circumstances, which are, now so desperate, can be changed by a touch of his hand within an hour. To whom canst thou better apply for succor? And if thy heart be sick and sad with a sense of sin, and thou art pining with remorse, his grace can find a balm and cordial for thy wounded conscience, which shall give thee peace at once. Before the clock ticks again, God can grant thee perfect salvation, blot out thy sins like a cloud, and like a thick cloud thine iniquities. Seek thou the pardoning God. Seek him, I say, for to whom else shouldst thou go ! Where else shouldst thou look for strength but to the Strong? Where else for mercy but to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ ?

The Lord, moreover, turns grief into joy. In the text it is added, "he turneth the shadow of death into the morning." The long dark night of sorrow, blacker than darkness itself because it presages everlasting wrath, the night created by the grim shadow of death, cold, chill, terrible, may have fallen upon your soul, but the living God can at once turn this darkness into the brightness of the morning. When the sun arises with healing beneath his wings the whole earth is made to smile, and even thus can the Lord at once make your whole nature glad with light of his countenance. Though you are ready to lie down in despair, though you suppose that hell yawns for you, and will soon receive your guilty soul, — he can turn this shadow of death, into the morning of peace and joy. To whom, then, should you go but to this God? He has already given his dear Son to be the way of life for us sinners. Have you ever heard of another who gave his son to die for his enemies? Gad not about after other helpers, but come at once to your Heavenly Father's arms." If you say, with the prodigal, "I will arise and go to my Father. If you are willing to come to God, the way is open, for Jesus died. You must not come arrayed in the supposed fitness at your own good works or good feelings, but you must come resting on the finished work of the appointed Savior. If you look to him, you shall be lightened . If you come with his name upon your lips, you shall ask what you will, and it shall be done unto you. Should not this be a reason for coming, — that he can turn your night into day, your winter into summer?

But the text bears another aspect, namely, that God can also turn your present joy into grief, and therefore you should see him. He makes the seven stars give way to Orion. "He maketh day dark with night." At this moment, it may be that you are at ease; but how long will you be so? Though you have no God, you are content with what you possess in this world, satisfied with your daily earning, or with your yearly income charmed with your wife, your children, your estate; but remember how soon your joys may be taken from you. Have you not heard how often God's providence has stripped the house, stripped the family, stripped the man's very soul of every comfort? Remember ye not the story of Job, who, although the wicked spread themselves abroad like a green bay tree, they shall suddenly wither, and though they be exceeding proud and strong, they shall come to their appointed end, like the ox fattened for the slaughter?

All our joys on earth are dependent on the sovereign will of heaven. Some of you know this by bitter experience, for you have seen the delight of your eyes taken away at a stroke, and the comfort of your heart carried to the grave. Now, to whom should you fly for succor, but to him upon whom all your present comfort depends, and who can so soon take it all away? How prudent to be at peace with him! How wise, above all wisdom, to be reconciled to the mighty God! But, alas for those who have often been warned, but who will not heed the warning! They have hardened their necks, and will be suddenly destroyed. Their day will blacken into everlasting

night. The proud sinner will die as others do, his eye will pale, and his brow grow cold, for he must face inexorable Death; and then, when he comes into the land to which the wicked are banished, he will enter into the outer darkness, darkness which shall be felt, in the land of confusion, where there is no beginning of hope, or end of misery; who would then desire to stand in his soul's stead? Escape then before the darkness gathers. Seek him, O man., who maketh the day dark with night!

**“Ye sinners, seek his grace,
Whose wrath we cannot bear;
Fly to the shelter of his cross,
And find salvation there.”**

The last clause of the text suggests a fourth reason for seeking the Lord, namely, God may make that which is a blessing to some a curse to others. Did you observe it? Seek him “that calleth for the waters of the sea, and, poured them, out upon the face of the earth.” This may allude to the deluge, when the waters of the ocean covered the very tops of the mountains; but it may be equally well explained by reference to the clouds which yield refreshing rain. The sun draws up the waters of the sea, leaving the salt behind; and when these exhalations have floated their appointed time in the air, they descend upon the thirsty earth to make glad the soil. Now, since the clause bears two readings, it were well to note how the actions of God oftentimes bear two renderings. There is, for instance, the gift of his dear Son, an unexampled act of love, and yet to some of you it will prove “a savor of death unto death.” To the unbeliever, it will prove a terrible thing that Jesus ever came into the world. He is a precious corner-stone to those who build upon him; but those who stumble upon him shall be broken, and if this stone shall upon any man, it shall grind him to powder. That which is heaven's greatest joy is hell's greatest horror. When Christ shall come, the sight of him shall draw forth the acclamations of his people, but it will also cause the utmost anguish to his enemies. They shall weep and wail because of him. They shall call upon the rocks and mountains to fall upon them, and hide them from the face of them, that him upon the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb. Since you, who so constantly hear the gospel, must have it made to you either a savor of death unto death or of life unto life, I pray that the Eternal Spirit may show you the wisdom of seeking God by Jesus Christ, and of seeking' him now. It will be a dreadful thing, at the last, great day, to find the gentle Lamb become a Lion to you, to tear you in pieces when there shall be none to deliver ! Why should that, which is the meat of humble souls, become your poison? Why should the blood of that Savior, in which so many have washed their robes, and made them white, be your condemnation? Remember that the blood of Jesus will be either upon you to cleanse you or upon you to condemn you. That dreadful cry of the Jews in the streets of Jerusalem, “His blood be on us, and on our children,” what a curse it brought upon their race in the massacres within the city walls, and in the bitter exile and suffering which they have so long endured! Take care that the same curse does not bring upon you an eternal exile from God ! Seek you his face, I beseech you ! You may not long have the opportunity to seek it. The day of his mercy may close as closes this day with the setting sun. You may not survive to enjoy another day of gospel invitation. May God the blessed Spirit, who alone can do it, make you seekers, and then make you finders, and his shall be the praise!

Thus much to the unconverted. The people of God can think over the text in relation to themselves. It is rich in priceless instruction to them, but time forbids me to direct their meditations. Farewell.

Amos 7:1 The King's Mowings

NO. 3129

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EARLY IN THE YEAR 1872.

“The king's mowings.” — Amos 7:1.

Certain lands belonged to the king so far, that he always took the first cut of grass for himself, and left any aftermath to those who worked upon the land. Now, our great King has his mowings too. His Church is the field which he has enclosed and blessed. At set seasons, the King takes his mowings. Lately, beyond any other time in my life that I remember, the King has been taking his mowings in and around the church of which he has made me overseer. One has spent many hours at the bedsides of the dying, and in trying to console the bereaved. Our loss, if I may venture to call it, a loss, as a church, at the opening of this year was extremely heavy. The King has been taking his mowings among us, and has cut down here one and there another. When churches commence with a great many young members, there would naturally not be so many deaths at first; but, as we all grow old together, there must be a large proportion of removals from this world into the land above. I purpose to speak a little upon that subject, and I shall do so in a threefold way, — first, by way of consolation; then, by way of admonition; and, then, by way of anticipation.

I. First, by way of Consolation. It is a sorrowful matter that our beloved brethren and sisters should be taken from us.

We were not more but less than men if we did not sorrow. Jesus wept, and by that act he sanctified our tears. It is not wrong, it is not unmanly, much less is it sinful, for us to drop the tear of sorrow over the departed; yet let us help to wipe those tears away with a handkerchief of sacred consolations.

First, seeing that "all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass," dost thou lament that the King has been mowing? Then let this thought chide thee. The King himself has done it! There is no such abstract thing as death, an unloosed monster devouring the saints at will, "Drinking the blood of men, and grinding their bones between his iron teeth." This is a poet's raving. No destroying angel is sent forth to slay the Israel of God. There is a destroying angel, it is true; but he comes not near those who bear the blood-mark. It is not in the power of disease, or accident, to kill the children of God except as instruments in the divine hand. No saint dieth otherwise than by the act of God. It is ever according to the King's own will; it is the King's own doing. Every ripe ear in his field is gathered by his own hand, cut down by his own golden sickle, and by none other. Every full-blown flower of grace is taken away by him, not Smitten with blight, or cut down by the tempest, or devoured by some evil beast.

When mortal man resigns his breath, 'Tis God directs the stroke of death; Casual howe'er the stroke appear, He sends the fatal messenger.

The keys are in that hand divine; That hand must first the warrant sign, And arm the death, and wing the dart Which doth his message to our heart."

The Lord has done it, in every case, and knowing this, we must not even think of complaining. What the King doeth his servants delight in; for he is such a King, that, let him do what seemeth him good, and we will still bless him; we are of the mind of him who said, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him."

Again, those who have been mown down and taken away are with the King. They are the King's mowings; they are gathered into his stores. They are not in purgatory; they are not in the limbus patran, much less are they in hell. They are not wandering in dreary pathways amidst the stars to find a lodging-place. Jesus prayed, "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world," and this prayer has fixed the saints' abode. We shall enter into no question now about whether heaven is a place, and where it is, or whether it be merely a state; it is enough for us that where Jesus is there his people are, — not some of them on lower seats, or in lower rooms, or sitting outside, but they are all where he is. That will certainly content me; and if there be any degrees in glory, you who want the high ones may have them. The lowest degree that I can perceive in Scripture is, "that they may be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory;" and that lowest degree is as high as my most vivid imagination can carry me. Here is enough to fill our souls even to the brim. And now do you sorrow for those who are with Christ where he is? Do you not almost blame your tears when you learn that your beloved ones are promoted to such blissful scenes? Why, mother, did you ever wish for your child a higher place than that it should be where Jesus is? Husband, by the love you bore your wife, you cannot grudge her the glory into which she has entered. Wife, by the deep devotion of your heart to him who has been taken from you, you could not wish to have detained him a moment from the joy in which his soul now triumphs with his Lord. If he were gone to some unknown land, if you could stand on life's brink, and hear the roaring billows of a dread mysterious ocean, and say, "My dear one has gone, I know not whither, to be tossed like a waif or stray upon yonder tempestuous sea," oh, then you might mix your own tears with the brine of that ocean. But you know where they are, you know with whom they are, and you can form some idea, by the joy of Christ's presence here on earth, what must be their bliss above.

"Sounds of sweet melody fall on my ear; Harps of the blessed, your music I hear! Rings with the harmony heaven's high dome, Joyfully, joyfully bring the saints home."

It is a sweet reflection, too, that although our dear friends have been cut down like flowers by the scythe, yet their lot is better than ours, though we are standing and blooming to-day. Life seems better than death, and the living dog is better than the dead lion; but take into account the everlasting state, and who will dare to say that the state of the blessed is worse than ours? Will not all assert that it is infinitely superior? We are suffering still, but they shall smart no more. We are weak and tottering here, but they have regained the dew of their youth. We know what want means, and wipe the sweat of toil from off our face, but they rest in abundance for ever. The worst of all is, that we still sin, and have to wrestle hard with doubts and fears; Satan still besets us, the world is around us, and corruptions fester within us. But they are where not a wave of trouble can ever break the serenity of their spirit, beyond the barkings of the hell-dogs, and beyond the arrows of hell's quiver, though there be archers who would shoot their darts into heaven itself if they could. The ingathered ones are supremely blest; they are far beyond what we are in joy, and knowledge, and holiness; therefore, if we love them, how can we mourn that they have gone from the worse to the better, and from the lower to the higher room?

And, moreover, brethren, although some of you sorrow very bitterly, because God has taken away the desire of your eyes with a

stroke, let me remind you that you might have had a worse sorrow than this concerning them. Ah, the mother who hath to mourn over a grown-up son who has become a profligate, has a bitterer pang a thousand times over than she has who sees her infant carried to the grave. The father, who knows that his sons or daughters have become a dishonor to his name, may well wish that he had long ago seen them laid in the silent tomb; and I have known men, in the church, whom I would sooner have buried a thousand times over than have lived to see what I have afterwards seen in them. For years, they stood as honorable professors; but they lived to dishonor the church, to blaspheme their Lord, to go back into perdition, and prove that the root of the matter was never in them. Oh, ye need not weep for those in heaven; weep not for the dead, neither bewail them; but weep for the spiritually dead; weep for the apostate and backslider; weep for the false professor and the hypocrite, "the wandering stars," "to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever." If ye have tears, go and shed them there; but for those who have fought the fight, and won the victory, for those who have stemmed the stream, and safely landed on the other side, let us have no tears; nay, put away the sackbut, and bring forth the clarion, let the trumpet ring out jubilantly the note of victory. It is to them the day of jubilee; why should it be for us the hour of sorrow? They put on the crown, and bear the palm branch in their hands; wherefore should we don the funeral weeds? There is infinitely more to rejoice in than there is to sorrow for; therefore, let our hearts be glad. The Lord hath said to them, "Well done," and rewarded them according to his grace, and this is infinitely better than that they should have lived to slip and slide.

"But this is poor comfort," you will say, and therefore let me come back to the text, and say that the King has taken his mowings. Sorrowful as we may be, it is not the worst sorrow that we must have; but, whether or no, we must not grudge the King any whom he takes from us. All the friends we have are lent us. The old proverb says, "A loan should go laughing home;" that is, we should never be unwilling to return a loan, but cheerfully give it back to the lender. Our dear ones were lent to us, and what a blessing they have been to us! The lamps of our house, have they been the joy of our day! The Master says, "I want them back again;" and do we clutch at them, and say, "No, Master, thou shalt not have them"? Oh, it must not be so. Our dear ones were never half as much ours as they were Christ's. We did not make them, but he did; we never bought them with our blood, but he did; we never sweat a bloody sweat for them, not had our hands and feet pierced for them, but he did. They were lent us, but they belonged to him. Your prayer was, "Father, let them be with me where I am," but Christ's prayer was, "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am." Your prayer pulled one way, and Christ's pulled another. Be not envious that Christ won the suit. If I ever enter into the Lord's Court of Chancery, if I find that Christ is on the other side, my Lord, I will not plead. Thou shalt have thy will, for I and thou and thou and I are one; and if it be thy plea that all I love may be with thee, so be it, for I shall be with thee too, ere long, and I would not quarrel with thy wish. The King has let out this church like a pasture to us, and he says, "I must take my mowings sometimes." Well, he has so watered us, and given us the smell of a field that the Lord God hath blessed, that, when he comes and takes his rent, we may not stand at the gate and forbid him, but say, "Good Master, come and take which thou wilt. Take thy quit-rent, for the field is all thine own. Thou hast dearly purchased it, and thou hast tilled it with much diligence; take what thou wilt, for it is thine."

And, let me add, to increase our comfort, that the King took his mowings at the right time. Out of those whom he has taken away from us, I think we must all confess that the Lord took them when they should be taken. In one case, a venerable sister, who, if she had lasted longer, would have been the prey of weakness and of pain; 'twas well she fell asleep. In another case, a dear young friend was pining under that fell disease, consumption; her throat was scarcely able to receive nourishment; I think those who loved her best must have felt relieved when at last she fell asleep. Two brethren rise before my mind's eye; the one struggled through life, and wandered often that he did not sink before, for he was like a ship unfit for sea, which every wave threatens to engulf; it is a wonder that he survived so long as he did. He served his Lord up to the last; and when all was over, it was well. Another, whom I saw with an afflicting disease about him that had brought him very low, had led so gracious a life: that he did not need to utter any dying testimony. Brethren beloved, also, who were once with us in the College have fallen asleep, having finished their course and kept the faith.

I may add that, not only did the King take his mowings at the right time, but in every case I have now before my mind, he took them in the easiest way. He took them gently. Some have a hard fight for it at the last, but in these cases, though there were pains and dying strife, yet at the last their souls were kissed away by the dear lips of him who named them by their names, and said they were his. They fell asleep, some of them so sweetly that those who looked on scarcely knew whether it was the sleep of life or the deeper sleep of eternity. They were gone; they were gone at once to their Lord and their God. Putting all these things together, reflecting that the King has done it, that those he has taken away he has taken to be with himself, that their present lot is an infinitely better one than anything beneath the moon; considering, too, that we must never grudge the King the heritage which he has so dearly bought, and that he took his mowings at the right time, and took them in the happiest manner, we will no longer repine, but we will bless the Lord.

II. And now, brethren, suffer me for a few minutes to use the subject by way of Admonition.

I hardly know whether, under this head, I have grouped together thoughts that are quite admonitory. The first one is to be very joyous. It is this, that as we belong to the King, our hope is that we shall be mown too. We are sitting on the banks of Jordan, especially some of us who are of riper years, waiting for a summons to the court of the Eternal King. It grows a wonder sometimes,

with aged Christians, why they stay here so long. John Newton, methinks, used to marvel at his own age, and Rowland Hill used to say that he half imagined they had forgotten him, and hoped they would soon recollect him, and send for him. Well, we have not quite got that length, — we who are young, — but still we entertain the hope that, some fair evening, calm and bright, the angel reaper will come with the scythe. Then shall we, having fulfilled, like the hireling, our day, lay down our tools of labor, and take our rest. Then shall we put down our sword, and take off our breastplate, and unloose the shoes of iron and brass, for we shall fight no more, but take the palm, and claim the victory before the throne. Never let us look forward to this with dread. It is wondrous that we should do so, and we could not if our faith were stronger. When faith vividly realizes the rest that remaineth for the people of God, we are tempted to long to be up and away. Then why should we wish to linger here? What is there in this old musty worn-out world, worm-eaten and full of holes, with its very gold and silver cankered, that can satisfy an immortal spirit? Let us away to the hills of spices and to the mountains of frankincense, where the King in his beauty stands with “helmed cherubim and sworded seraphim” and all the hosts that serve him day and night, to behold his face, and evermore adore him. Let us anticipate cheerfully the time when the King’s mowings shall include us also.

Brethren, the admonition that arises out of all this, is, let us be ready. Should not every Christian man live every day as if he were going to die that day. Should we not always live as if we knew our last hour to be at the door. If a man, in his right state were informed on a sudden, “You will die tonight!” he ought not to have to alter his mode of life one atom, he should be so living that he had nothing more to do but to continue his course. It is remarked of Bengel, the great critic, that “he did not wish to die in spiritual parade, but in the ordinary way; like a person called out to the street door from the midst of business: so much so that he was occupied with the collection of his proof-sheets at his dying season, as at other times.” To me, it seems to be the very highest kind of death to die in harness, concluding life without suspending service. Alas, many are unready, and would be sadly put about if the midnight cry were suddenly heard. Oh, let us see that everything is in order! Both for this world and the next nothing should be left to be hurried over in the last few hours’. Christian man, is your will made? Are your business affairs all straight. They ought to be, everything ought to be as nearly as you can keep it in perfect order, so that you are ready to go at any minute. Mr. George Whitefield used so to live in anticipation of death that he said, “I never go to sleep at night with even a pair of gloves out of place.” Oh, that we would be habitually ready and in order, especially in higher matters, walking before the Lord, as preparing to meet him!

Then, dear friends, this departure of many of our fellow-workers, while it admonishes us to be going, at the same time teaches us to do twice as much while we are here, seeing that our number are being so constantly thinned. A brave soldier, in the day of battle, if he hears that a regiment has been exterminated by the enemies shot and shell, says, “Then those of us that survive must fight all the more bravely. There is no room for us to play at fighting. If they have slain so many, we must be more desperately valiant.” And so, today, if one here or there is gone, a useful worker from the Sabbath-schools, or from the street-preaching, then it is time our broken ranks were repaired. O you young men, I pray you, fill up the gap; and you young women who love the Savior, if a Sabbath-school teacher is gone, and you are teaching, teach better, or if you are not teaching, come and fill the place. My dear brethren, I pray for recruits; I stand like a commander in the midst of my little army, and see some of the best smitten down, here one and there one, and what can I do, but as my Master bids me, lead you on, and say, “Brethren and sisters, step into their places; fill the gaps in the ranks.” Do not let death gain upon us; but even as one goes into the golden city, let another cry, “Here am I; ask me also to my reward.” As for us who are, at work, we must labor more zealously than ever, we must pray more fervently than ever. When a certain great man suddenly died in the ministry, I remember, in my young days, an old preacher saying, “I must, preach better than ever I did now that Mr. So-and-so is gone.” And you, Christian, whenever a saint is removed, say, “I must live the better to make up to the Church the loss which it has sustained.”

One other thought, by way of admonition. If the King has been, taking his mowings, then the King’s eye is upon his Church. He has not forgotten this field, for he has been mowing it. We have been praying lately that he would visit us. He has come, he has come! Not quite as we expected him, but he has come, he has come! Oh yes, and as he has walked these aisles, and looked on this congregation, he has taken first one and then another. He has not, taken me, for I was not ready; and he has not taken you, for you are not quite ripe; but he has taken away some that, were ripe and ready, and they have gone in to be with him where he is. Well, then, he has not, forgotten us, and this ought to stimulate us in prayer. He will hear us, his eye is upon us; this ought to stimulate us to self-examination. Let us purge out everything that will grieve him. He is evidently watching us. Let us seek to live as in his presence, that nothing may vex his Spirit, and cause, him to withdraw from us.

Beloved, these are the words of admonition.

III. And, now, a few more words by way of Anticipation. I hardly know under what head to place them. What anticipations are there that come out of the mowing?

Why, these. There is to be an after-growth. After the Kings mowings, there came another upspringing of fresh grass, which belonged to the King’s tenants. So we expect, now that the King has been mowing, that we shall have a fresh crop of grass. Is there not a promise, “They shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water courses?” Fresh converts will come, and who will they be? Well, I look around, and I will not say, with Samuel, as I look at some young man in the gallery, “Surely the Lord hath chosen

him;" neither will I look down to someone in the area, and say, "Surely the Lord hath chosen him," but I will bless God that I know he has chosen some, and that he means to make this fresh grass spring up to fill up the waste caused by the King's mowings.

Do you know who I should like to come if I might have my preference? Well, where the daughter has died, how glad I should be if the father came, or the brother came, and where the father has died, how would I be rejoiced if the son should come; and where, a good woman has been taken away, how glad would I be if her husband filled up the place! It seems to me as if it were natural to wish that those who loved them best should occupy their position, and discharge their work for them. But if that cannot be, I stand here tonight as a recruiting sergeant. My King in his wars has lost some of his men, and the regiment wants making up. Who will come? I put the colors in my hat; to-night, but I will not stand here, and tempt you with lies about the ease of the service, for it is hard service; yet I assure you that we have a blessed Leader, a glorious conflict, and a grand reward. Who will come, Who will come to fill up the gaps in the ranks? Who will be baptized for the dead, to stand in their place of Christian service, and take up the torch which they have dropped? I will pass the question round, and I hope that many a heart will say, "Oh, that the Lord would have me! Oh, that he would blot out my sins, and receive me!" He delighteth in contrite hearts; he saveth such as be of a contrite spirit. He will save whom he will have, but the way to be enlisted is plain. "Oh!" say you, "what must I give to be Christ's soldier?" To be the queen's soldier, you do not give anything; you receive a shilling. You take, in order to be a soldier of the queen, and so, to be Christ's soldier, you must take Christ to be your All-in-all, holding out your empty hand, and receiving of his blood and righteousness to be your hope and your salvation. Oh, that his good Spirit would sweetly incline your wills, that one after another might be made willing in the day of his power! May he thus do, and our hearts will greatly rejoice.

As I read the passage in Amos, from which I have taken my text, I noticed something about caterpillars. (The marginal reading calls them "green worms.") It is said that, after the King's mowings, there came the caterpillars to eat up the aftergrowth. Oh, those caterpillars! When the poor Eastern husbandman sees the caterpillars, his heart is ready to break, for he knows that they will eat up every green thing. And I can see the caterpillars here tonight. There is the great green caterpillar that eats up all before him; I wish I could crush him. He is called the caterpillar of procrastination. There are many, many other worms and locusts which eat up much, but this worm of procrastination is the worst, for just as the green blade is beginning to spring up, this caterpillar begins to eat. I can hear him gnawing, "Wait, wait, wait; tomorrow, tomorrow; a little more sleep, a little more sleep, a little more sleep." And so this caterpillar devours our hopes. Lord, destroy the caterpillar, and grant that, instead of the fathers, may be the children; instead of the King's mowings, may there come up the after-growth which shall be a rich reward to the husbandman, and bring glory to the Owner of the soil!

We have reason to pray that the Lord would send the dew and the rain to bring forth the outer-growth. "He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass." Now this congregation is like mown grass. God has mown it, — a rich mowing has the King taken from us. Now, my brethren, we have the promise; let us plead it before the throne. All the preaching in the world cannot save a soul, not all the efforts of men; but God's Spirit can do everything; oh that he would come down like rain upon the mown grass now! Then shall we see the handful of corn in the earth upon the top of the mountains multiply till its fruit shall shake like Lebanon, and they of the city shall flourish like grass of the earth. The Lord send it, the Lord send it now!

If any would be saved, here is the way of salvation: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." To believe is to trust. What you have to trust in is this, — that Jesus is God, that he became man, that he suffered in the sinner's place, and that whosoever believes in him shall be forgiven because God has punished Christ instead of believers. Christ bore God's wrath instead of every sinner that ever did or ever shall believe in him; and if thou believest in him, thou wast redeemed from among men. His substitution was for thee, and it will save thee; but if thou believest not, thou hast no part or lot in this matter. Oh, that thou wert brought to put thy trust in Jesus! This would be the pledge of thy sure salvation tonight and for evermore. God bless you, for Christ's sake! Amen.

Amos 7:7-8 The Plumbline

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"Thus he shewed me: and, behold, the Lord stood upon a wall made by a plumbline, with a plumbline in his hand. And the LORD said unto me. Amos, what seest thou? And I said, A plumbline. Then said the Lord, Behold, I will set a plumbline in the midst of my people Israel: I will not again pass by them any more. — Amos 7:7, 8.

God usually speaks by men according to their natural capacity. Amos was a herdsman. He was not a man of noble and priestly rank, like Ezekiel, nor a man of gigantic intellect and mighty eloquence, like Isaiah. He was a simple herdsman, and therefore God did not cause him to see the visions of Isaiah, or dazzle his mind with the wondrous revelations that were given to Ezekiel. God's rule is, "Every man in his own order;" and if we depart from that, we get out of place ourselves, and we are apt to try to make others do that which they are not fit to do, and then blame them when they fail to accomplish what they should never have attempted. God always uses his servants in the best possible way, and as they ought to be used; so, when the herdsman Amos had a vision, he simply saw a piece of string with a plumb of lead at the bottom of it, — a plumbline, — a thing which he could easily understand. There was a mystery about the vision, but the vision itself was not mysterious. It was a very simple emblem indeed, exactly suited to the mind of Amos, just as the visions of Ezekiel and Isaiah were adapted to the more poetic minds of men of another class. You and I, dear brethren, may be very thankful if God should use us as he did Amos; and, if he does, we must not be aping the Isaiahs and Ezekiels. If we see a plumbline, let us preach about a plumbline; and if God should ever enable us to understand the visions of Zechariah or Ezekiel, then let us preach about them. Let every preacher or teacher testify according to the measure of light and grace that God has given him; then we shall do well. Amos can see a plumbline, and he sees it well; and when he has seen it, he tells what he has seen, and leaves God to set his seal upon his testimony.

Now, on this occasion, we have nothing before us but this plumbline, but there is a great deal to be learn from it. The first thing is this, the plumbline is used in construction; secondly, the plumbline is used for testing what is built; and, thirdly, it appears from the text that the plumbline is used in the work of destruction, for the casting down of that which is found not to be straight.

I. First, The Plumbline Is Used In Construction.

We are told, in the text, that "the Lord stood upon a wall made by a plumbline," that is to say, a wall which had been constructed with the help of a plumbline; and, therefore, he tested it with that which was supposed to have been used in its construction, which was a fair and proper thing to do. If the wall only professed to be run up without a plumbline, then it might be hard to try it with the plumbline; but as it was a wall which professed to have been constructed according to the rules of the builder's art, it was fair and reasonable that it should be tested by the plumbline.

First, then, dear friends, a plumbline is used in building when it is done as it ought to be; and I remind you that God always uses it in his building. Everything that God builds is built plumb, and straight, and square, and fair. You see that rule at work in nature; there is nothing out of proportion there. Those who understand these things, and look deeply into them, will tell you that the very form and size of the earth have a connection with the blooming of a flower, or the hanging of a dew-drop upon a blade of grass; and that, if the sun were larger or smaller than it is, or if the material of which the earth is formed were more dense, or different in any degree from what it is, then everything, the most magnificent and the most minute, would be thrown out of gear. Someone of old used to say that God is the great Arithmetician, -the great Master of geometry; and so he is. He never makes any mistakes in his calculations; there is not anything in the world that he has made in a careless manner. The mixing of the component parts of the air we breathe is managed with consummate skill; and if you could resolve a drop of water into its original elements, you would be struck by the wisdom with which God has adapted the proportions of each particle so as to make a liquid which man can drink. Everything is done by order and rule, as in the changes of the various seasons, the movements of the heavenly bodies, and the arrangements of divine providence. God always has the plumbline in his hand. He never begins to build, as a careless workman would, that which might turn out to be right, or might turn out to be wrong; but he makes sure work of all that he does.

In spiritual matters, it is very manifest that, whenever God is dealing with souls, he always uses the plumbline. In beginning with us, he finds that the very foundation of our nature is out of the perpendicular; and, therefore, he does not attempt to build upon it, but commences his operations by digging it out. The first work of divine grace in the soul is to pull down all that nature has built up. God says, "I cannot use these stones in my building."

This man has been behaving himself admirably in some respects, and he thinks that he is building up a temple to my honor and glory with his own natural virtues, his own good works, and other things of a like character. But all this must be dug out." The man has taken a great deal of pains in putting it together, but it must all come out, and there must be a great hole left; the man must feel himself emptied, and abased, and humbled in the sight of God; for, if God is to be everything to the man, then he himself must be nothing; and if Christ is to be his Savior, he must be a complete Savior, from beginning to end. So, the foundation of human merit must be cleared right out, and flung away, for God could not build squarely upon it. With such a foundation as that, the plumbline would never mark a perpendicular wall.

After all human merit has been flung out, the Lord begins his gracious work by laying the foundation stone of a simple faith in Jesus Christ, and that faith, though simple, is very real. When a man professes to convert his fellow-man, he only gives him a fictitious faith which is of no value to him; but when God saves a sinner, he gives him real faith. There may be little knowledge of the truth, but the little that the man knows is truth; and faith, though it be but as a grain of mustard seed, if it be of the right sort, is better than that, faith which is as big as a mountain, yet all of the wrong sort, which will not stand in the time of testing. But the faith, which the Holy

Spirit gives, is the faith of God's elect, the real faith which will endure even the tests which God applies to it.

Side by side with that faith, God puts true repentance. When a man attempts to convert his fellow-man, he gives him a sham repentance, or perhaps he tells him that there is no need of any repentance at all. Certain preachers have been telling us, lately, that it is a very easy matter to obtain salvation, and that there is no need of repentance; or if repentance is needed, it is merely a change of mind. That is not the doctrine that our fathers used to preach, nor the doctrine that we have believed. That faith, which is not accompanied by repentance, will have to be repented of; so, whenever God builds, he builds repentance fair and square with faith. These two things go together; the man just as much regrets and grieves over the past as he sees that past obliterated by the precious blood of Jesus. He just as much hates all his sin as he believes that his sin has been all put away.

The Lord never builds anything falsely in any man, or teaches him to reckon that to be true which is not true; but he builds with facts, with substantial verities, with true grace, and with a real and lasting work in the soul. When the Lord builds in a man, he builds with the plumbline in the sense of always building up that which is towards holiness. Have any of you fallen into sin, rest assured that God did not build you in that way. Have sinful desires and lustings after evil been excited within you by any doctrine to which you have listened? Then, you may be sure that it was not of God. "By their fruits shall ye know them," is an infallible test of doctrines as well as of disciples; and if any of you have embraced any form of doctrine which hinders you from being watchful, prayerful, careful, and anxious to avoid sin, you have embraced error, and not truth, for all God's building tends towards holiness, towards carefulness, towards a gracious walk to the praise and glory of God. When the Lord builds a man up, he makes him conscientious, makes him jealous of himself, makes him detect the very shadow of sin, so that, before the sin itself comes upon him, he holds up his all-covering shield of faith, that he may be preserved from its deadly assaults. You may always know God's building because it is pure building, clean building; but if anybody builds you up in such a style that you can talk of sin as a trifle, and think that you may indulge in it, at least in a measure, with impunity, that is certainly not God's building.

And, blessed be his name, when our souls are really given up into the Lord's hands, he will continue to build in us until he has built us up to perfection. There will come a day when sin, which now makes its nest in this mortal body of ours, shall find this body dissolving and crumbling back to the earth of which it was made; and then our emancipated spirits, delivered from the last taint and trace of sin, — free from even the tendency to evil, — shall soar away to be with Christ, which is far better, and to wait for the trumpet of the resurrection, when the body itself shall also be delivered from corruption, for the grave is a refining pot; and, at the coming of Christ, our body shall be pure and white, like the garments of a bride arrayed to meet her bridegroom, and the soul, re united with the body, shall have triumphed over every sin. This is the way that God builds. He does not build us up so that we can go to heaven with our sin still working in us. He does not build us up to be temples for him to dwell in, and let the devil also dwell in us. Antinomian building is not according to the fashion of God's building; but God builds up surely, solidly, truthfully, sincerely, and until we have reached that state of perfection which makes us fit for heaven.

Now, beloved, as God thus uses the plumbline in his building, I gather that we also should, use the plumbline in our building. First, with regard to the uplifting of our own soul, I would urge upon myself first, and then upon you next, the constant use of the plumbline. It is very easy to seek after speed, but to neglect to ensure certainty. There is such a thing as being in a dreadful hurry to do what had better never be done, or else be done in a very different style. We see some people, who become Christians in about two minutes; and I am devoutly thankful when that is really the case. We see some others become full-grown Christians in about two days, and instructors of others in the course of a week; and, very speedily, they attain to such vast dimensions that there is no ordinary church that is big enough to hold them. That is very quick work; that is the way that mushrooms grow, but it is not the way that oaks grow. I urge you all to remember that, often, the proverb "the more haste, the less speed," is true in spiritual things as well as in temporal. My dear brother, if you only grow an inch in the course of ten laborious years, yet that growth is real, it is better than appearing to grow six feet in an hour, when that would only be disease puffing you up, and blowing you out. Often and often, the soul needs to use the plumbline to see whether that which is built so very quickly is really built perpendicularly, or whether it does not lean this way or that. As the work goes on, we should frequently stop, and say to ourselves, "Now, is this right? Is this real? Is this true?" Many a time, if we did that, we should have to fall upon our knees, and cry, "O Lord, deliver me from exalting myself above measure, and counting myself to be rich and increased with goods, when, all the while, I am wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked."

I would like you young men who are here to use the plumbline when you begin your spiritual life-building. I mean this; your father and mother are members of a certain church, but do not you, therefore, go and join that church without a thorough investigation of the principles on which it is founded. Use the plumbline to see whether it is all straight and square. Try all the doctrines that are taught, and do not embrace that which is popular, but that which is Biblical. Then, try with the plumbline the ordinances of the church; do not submit to them simply because other people do so, but use the plumbline of Scripture to test them all. You know that, as a body, we are not afraid that you will ever read your Bible too much. We, as Baptists, have no objection to your bringing everything that is taught to the test of the Bible, for we know that we should be the gainers if you were to do that; but, instead of using the plumbline of the Bible, many people have a newly-invented test, — the Book of Common Prayer, or Minutes of the Conference, or something else equally valueless. Now, whatever respect I have for books of that sort, I prize my Bible infinitely above them all, and above all

the volumes of decretals of popes, and councils, and conferences put together. I should not like to feel that I had been building, and building, and building, and building, and yet that there had been a radical error in the whole structure, for I had commenced with a mistake, and I had been building myself up, not in the most holy faith of the apostles, but in the most mischievous error of my own notions. Do, I pray you, apply the Bible plumbline continually to all your beliefs, and views, and practices.

But, even before you do that, use the gospel plumbline to see whether you really were ever born again, for our Lord Jesus said to Nicodemus, "except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Do test yourselves as to whether you have really believed in Jesus Christ, for "without faith it is impossible to please God;" and if you have believed in him, take care that, while you think you are getting more faith, more love, more patience, more of every grace, you keep the plumbline going; otherwise, you may get a great deal into the structure that you will have to take out again, and you will get the building out of the perpendicular, and the whole of it may come down with a crash.

And this plumbline is also to be used upon all work that is done on behalf of other people. There is much teaching which has been given with a pure motive, but which, nevertheless, cannot endure this test. There are some little sects, still existing upon the face of the earth, that were formed with much labor by their originators; but they are evidently not gold, or silver, or precious stones, for they are passing away with the lapse of time. I would like, as a minister of the gospel, to do for God that which will endure the supreme test of the day of judgment. I should not like to build up a great church here, and then, when I was dead and gone, for it to be scattered to the four winds, and to learn in heaven that I had been mistaken except as to the matter of my own salvation; and that, consequently, while some good was done, there was ill done as well. No; we must constantly use the plumbline, so that what we build may be perpendicular, and may stand the test of the ages, and the test of God's great judgment seat. Look to it, sirs, ye who are diligent, that ye are diligent in spreading truth, and not error. See to it, ye who count up your many converts, that they are real converts, and not the mere fruit of excitement. See to it, ye who plod on from day to day so industriously seeking to save souls, that they are really saved, and truly brought to Christ; for, if not, your work will be in vain. Churches that are built in a hurry will come down in a hurry; wood, hay, and stubble, that look all right in the building, will look terrible in the burning, when the day of the trial by fire shall come.

So that is our first point, that the plumbline is to be used in the construction of the building.

II. Secondly, The Plumbline Is To Be Used For Testing The Building When It Is Built.

Do not let us judge either ourselves or one another simply by the eye. I have frequently thought that a building was out of the perpendicular when it was not; and I have sometimes thought it perpendicular when it really was not so. The human eye is readily deceived, but the plumbline is not; it drops straight down, and at once shows whether the wall is upright or not. We must continually use upon ourselves the plumbline of God's Word. Here is a wall that needs to be tested, — the wall of self-righteousness. This man thinks he is all right. He never did anything very wrong. Moreover, he is religious in his way. He says that he has kept the law from his youth up. That is a fine piece of wall, is it not? — with some very handsome stones inlaid therein with fair colors. You are very proud of it, my dear friend; but if I put the Bible plumbline to your life, you will be astonished to find how much out of the perpendicular it is. The plumbline is according to this standard, "If any man will be saved by his own works, he must keep the law of the Lord perfectly; for he, who is guilty of the breach of any one of God's commandments, has broken the whole law: 'therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight.'" That condemns your wall, does it not? — because you have not at all times kept the whole law in the fullness of the meaning which Christ gave to it. If you are to be saved by works, there must not be a single flaw in the whole wall of your life. If there is, it is not in the perpendicular.

Here is another wall, built by a man who says that he is doing his best, and trusting to Christ to make up for his deficiencies. Well, my dear friend, your wall is sadly out of the perpendicular, because there is a text which says, "Christ is all;" and I know that the Lord Jesus Christ will never be willing to be put side by side with such a poor creature as you are, to be jointly used with yourself to your soul's salvation. Remember that, in the gospel plan, it is not Christ and Co. it must be all Christ, or no Christ at all. So, if you are depending partly upon self, and partly upon him, my plumbline shows that your wall is out of the perpendicular, and that it will have to come down.

Another man is depending upon rites and ceremonies. Now, there are some very strong texts in Scripture concerning that matter. Here is one: "To obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." Wilt thou come before God bringing the blood of beasts or costly offerings? Hath he not told thee that, to come before him with a broken and a contrite heart, and, especially, to come unto him through the merit of the one great sacrifice offered by his Son, is the only acceptable way of approaching him? The most gorgeous ceremonies in the whole world cannot save a single soul. That wall is out of the perpendicular, and must come down.

Here is another man, who says, "I am, as often as I can be, a hearer of the Word." I am glad that you are; but if you are only a hearer, and not a doer of the Word, your wall is out of the perpendicular; for, if it is good to hear what is right, it is better still to do it; and your condemnation will be all the more terrible if you have known what you ought to do, and yet have not done it. There are many of you, who come here, and who have been coming for a long time, who, I hope, will be led to do much more than simply

come to hear; for I trust that you will be led, by the Holy Spirit, to lay hold on eternal life. If not, your wall will not endure the test of the Bible plumbline, which plainly shows that you are quite out of the perpendicular.

There are many other bowing walls, beside those I have mentioned, but I cannot stop to try them now. I would, however, most earnestly urge you all to remember that, if you do not test yourself by the plumbline of God's Word, if you are God's servant, you will be tried and tested. Have you never known what it is to be laid aside, on a bed of sickness, and to have everything about you tried! In times of acute pain, I have had every morsel of what I thought to be gold and silver put into the fire, piece by piece, by the Master himself, until he has put it all in. Thank God, some of it has been proved to be gold; and has come out all the brighter for the testing; but, oh, how much of it has proved to be alloy, or even worthless dross! You can have a great deal of patience when you have not any pain; and you can have a great deal of joy in the Lord when you have got joy in your worldly prosperity; and you can have any quantity of it when you have no troubles to test its reality. But the real faith is that which will endure the trial by fire. The real patience is that which will bear intense agony without a murmur of complaint. The Lord will test and try you, my brother, sooner or later, if you are his. He will be sure to use the plumbline, so you had better use it yourself. It may save you much anxiety in the future if you stop now to question yourself, and to enquire whether these things be real and true to you or not.

And remember, once more, that God will use the plumbline, at the last great day, to test everything. How many of us could hear, without, a tremor, the intimation that God had summoned us to appear before his bar? O my brethren and sisters, if the great scales of divine justice were swinging from this ceiling now, and the Judge of all said to you, "Step in, and let me see what is your weight," is there one of us who could solemnly and sincerely rise, and say, "Lord, I am ready for the weighing"? Yes; I trust that many could say, each one for himself or herself, "There is not anything good in me, but my hope is fixed on Christ alone; and though I am not what I ought to be, nor what I want to be, nor what I shall be, yet 'by the grace of God I am what I am.' My profession of being a Christian is not a lie, it is not a pretense, it is not a piece of religious masquerade; it is true, great God; it is true." My brother, my sister, if you can say that, you may step into the scales without any fear, for the contrite and believing heart can endure being weighed. But into the scales you will have to go whether you are ready or not. Your building will all have to be tested and tried. Some of you have built fine mansions, and towers, and palaces; but the plumbline will be applied to them all, and it is God himself who will use the plumbline in every case. No counterfeit will be allowed to pass the pearly gates, nor anything that defileth, or worketh abomination, or maketh a lie. At the last great day, none shall pass from beneath the eye of the Judge of all without due examination. He will not suffer even one of the guilty to escape, nor condemn any one of those who have been absolved for Christ's sake. It will be a right, and just judgment that will be given in that day; but judgment there will be.

III. My last point is this, The Plumbline Is Used In The Work Of Destruction.

When a city wall was to be battered down, the general would sometimes say, "This wall is to be taken down to this point, and then the plumbline was hung down to mark how far they were to go with the work of destruction. They thus marked out that part which might be spared, and that which must, be destroyed.

Now, in the work of destruction, God always uses the plumbline, and he goes about that work very slowly. He shows that he does not like it. When the Lord is going to save a sinner, he has wings to his feet; but when he is going to destroy a sinner, he goes with leaden footsteps, waiting, and warning many times, and while he waits and warns, sighing, and crying, "How shall I give thee up?" He even goes so far as to use an oath, saying, "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live." God never brings men to judgment, as the infamous Judge Jeffreys did, in a great haste. He would hurry them off to the gallows, with indecent speed; but, at the last great day, there will be a solemn and stately pomp about the whole dread assize, — the sounding of the trumpet, the bursting of the graves, the setting up of the great white throne, the opening of the books, and the majestic appearance of him from whose face heaven and earth will flee away. And when the judgment begins, it will not be without due order, nor will it be without keen perception of all differences. There will hang the infallible plumbline. That which is perpendicular will be declared to be perpendicular, and that which bows will be shown tottering to its fall; for, before the Judge's eye, and before the eyes of the assembled universe, shall hang a plumbline, with these words above it, "He which is filthy, let him be filthy still;... and he that is holy, let him be holy still."

The whole judgment shall be according to the plumbline. Not a soul, in that great day, will be sent to hell who does not deserve to go there. If there be any man, who can plead that it would be unjust to condemn him, — if he can truthfully prove that he has been obedient up to the measure of his light, — if he can prove that justice is on his side, — God will not do an unjust turn to him, or to any other man. Those awful gates, that grind upon their iron hinges, never yet opened to receive a soul damned unjustly. It would be impossible, in the very nature of things, for such a thing to happen. If any man could truly say, "This is unjust," he would have taken away the sting of hell, for this is the essence and the soul of hell, "I am wrong, and can never get right. I am wrong, and do not want to get right; I am so wrong that I love the wrong, and make evil to be my good, and good to be my evil. I hate God, for it is impossible, while I am in such a state as this, that I can be otherwise than unhappy; and this is the greatest hell that can happen to a man, — not to love God, and not to love right." That is the flame of hell, the worm that gnaws for ever, — that being out of gear with God, — that being out of harmony with the Most High for ever. I ween that there needs to be no fiercer hell than that. So, the final

judgment will be according to the plumbline, so that no one will be condemned unjustly. You talk to me about the fate of the heathen who have never heard the gospel, and I reply, I know very little about them; but I know that God is just, so I leave them in his hands, knowing that the Judge of all the earth will do right." There will not be one pang, to a soul in hell, more than that soul deserves, — not a single spasm of despair, or a sinking in hopelessness, that is imposed by the arbitrary will of God. It will be a terrible reaping for them, when they reap sheaves of fire; but they will only reap what they have sown. There will be an awful pouring out of divine vengeance upon the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction; but no one will be able to say that the judgment is unjust. The lost will themselves feel that they only have to eat as they baked, and to drink as they brewed. It will all be just to them; and this is what will make the teeth of the serpent of hell, and the flame of its fire, — that it is all just, — that if I were myself judge, I must condemn myself to what I have to suffer. Think of that, and escape from the wrath to come.

And as that plumbline hangs there, in that great day of account, there will be differences made between some lost men and other lost men. All hell is not the same hell, any more than all flesh is the same flesh. That man knew his Lord's will, and did it not; lay on the lashes to the full that the law allows. That other man did not obey his Lord's will; but then, he did not know it, so he shall be beaten with few stripes. Few will be too many for anyone to bear; so do not run the risk of them. But, oh, the many stripes, what will they be. There are the lost that perished in Sodom and Gomorrah, — those filthy beings whose sins we dare not think upon. There they are, and there is the hell they suffer. There hangs the plumbline; and, by his unerring justice, God awards their doom. But what will he award to you, and you, and you, who have heard the gospel simply and plainly preached, and yet have rejected Christ? You will have to go lower down in hell than the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah, for God's plumbline tells us that sin against light is the worst of sin, and that the wilful rejection of the atoning blood flowing from the loving Saviours wounds, is the climax of all iniquity. That is how the plumbline will work. And when you come up, you rich man, who have spent your money in sin, — and when you come up, you poor man, who work so hard, — there shall be a difference between the one of you and the other, — between the seducer, whom the world allows to enter into her drawing-room, and the poor girl whom he led astray; for, though both are guilty, God will make a difference, not as men make it here, but quite the other way. The man of talent, and of rank, and of position, who frittered away his whole existence in the life of a butterfly, — there will be a difference between his sentence and that of the obscure, uneducated individual, who did sin, but not as he did who had the greater gifts. To put one talent in a napkin, brings its due punishment; but to bury or misuse ten talents, shall bring a tenfold doom; for there will hang that plumbline, and by the rules of infinite justice everything shall be determined.

"This is dreadful talk," some of you may be saying. It is; it is; and it is a dreadful business altogether for the lost, — that being driven from God's presence when you die, — hearing him say, "Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." You do not like to hear about this, and I do not like to preach about it; only I must do so, lest you come unto that place of torment because I failed to warn you. Then might you say, in your despair, "O cursed preacher! O unfaithful minister! You tried to fickle our ears with pleasant things, but you left out all allusions to the wrath to come. You toned down the truth, you softened it, and now we are ruined for ever through your wicked desire to please our foolish ears. O sirs, you will never be able truthfully to say that, for I do pray you to escape from that awful future. Run no risk of it. I think every one of you would like to have his house insured against fire, and to know that, as far as proper title-deeds go, whatever you have is held on a good tenure. Then, I implore you, make sure work for eternity by laying hold on Christ Jesus. Yield yourself up to him, that he may make you right where you are wrong, put you in gear with God, and set you running parallel with the will of the Most High; that he, indeed, may build you up on the perpendicular, on the solid foundation of his eternal merits by faith, through the power of the ever-blessed Spirit, — that you may be so built that, when God himself holds the plumbline, it may hang straight down, and he will be able to say, "It is all right." Happy will you be if you hear his verdict, "Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful in a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things. Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

May God grant this mercy to every one of you, for Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.