

Spurgeon Sermons on Hosea 2

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Hosea 2:23: God's People, or Not God's People

NO. 2295

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, FEBRUARY 12TH, 1893, DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"I will have mercy upon her that had not obtained mercy; and I will say to them which were not my people, Thou art my people; and they shall say, Thou art my God." — Hosea 2:23.

"As he saith also in Osee, I will call them my people, which were not my people; and her beloved, which was not beloved." — Romans 9:25.

To my mind, it is very instructive to notice how Paul quotes from the Prophets. The revelation of the mind of God in the Old Testament helps us to understand the gospel revealed in the New Testament. There is no authority that is so powerful over the minds of Christian men as that of the Word of God. Has God made known any truth in his Word? Then, it is invested with divine authority. Paul, being himself inspired by the Holy Spirit, and therefore able to write fresh revelations of the mind of God, here brings the authority of God's Word in the olden times to back up and support what he says: "As he saith also in Osee."

Beloved friend, if you are seeking salvation, or if you want comfort, never rest satisfied with the mere word of man. Be not content unless you got the truth from the mouth of God. Say in your spirit, "I will not be comforted, unless God himself shall comfort me. I want chapter and verse for that which I receive as gospel." Our Lord's reply to Satan was, "It is written, man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." Give me, then, but a word out of God's mouth, and I can live upon it; but all the words out of man's mouth, apart from divine inspiration, must be as unsatisfying food as if men tried to live on stones.

Notice, again, how Paul teaches that the very essence of the authority of the Scriptures lies in this, that God speaks through his revealed Word: "As HE saith also in Osee." It is God speaking in the Bible whom we ought to hear. The mere letter of the Word alone will kill; but when we hear God's voice speaking in it, then it has power which it could not possess otherwise. It is a blessed thing to put your ear down to the promises of Scripture, till you hear God speaking through them to your soul. It is truly profitable to read a gospel commandment, and to listen to its voice until God himself speaks it with power to your heart. I pray you, do not regard anything that is preached here unless it agrees with what is written there in the Bible. If it is only my word, throw it away; but if it is God's truth that I declare to you, if God himself speaks it through my lips, you will disregard it at your peril.

I will make only one other observation by way of introduction. Is it not wonderful how God's Word is preserved century after century? There were seven or eight hundred years between Hosea and Paul; and it is remarkable that the promise to the Gentiles should lie asleep all that time, and yet should be just as full of life and power when Paul was quoting it after all those centuries. God's Word is like the wheat in the hand of the mummy, of which you have often heard. It had lain there for thousands of years; but men took it out of the hand, and sowed it, and there sprang up the bearded wheat which has now become so common in our land. So you take a divine promise, spoken hundreds or thousands of years ago, and lo, it is fulfilled to you! It becomes as true to you as if God had spoken it for the first time this very day, and you were the person to whom it was addressed. O blessed Word of God, how we ought to prize thee! We cannot tell yet all that lies hidden between these covers; but there is a treasury of grace concealed here, which we ought to seek until we find it.

Having thus introduced our texts as taken from God's Word in the Old and New Testaments, and as being God's voice to us, speaking adown the centuries with all the freshness and force it would have if it were uttered anew to-night, I invite every unconverted person to listen with both his ears, and his whole heart, to hear if there shall drop some living word of cheer and promise that shall make this evening to be his birthnight. If so, this shall be the time wherein his captivity shall be ended, his mouth shall be filled with laughter, and his tongue with singing, and his spirit shall rejoice in God his Savior.

I. Now, first, in considering the words in the Epistle to the Romans, let us look at The Original State Of God's People. "I will call them my people, which were not my people; and her beloved, which was not beloved."

If we look at the original state of God's people, we shall gaze upon a very gloomy picture. Yet this portrait reveals the state in which every unconverted man is to-night, the state in which all of us, who are now saved, once were. We were not God's people; that is to say, We had not God's approval. I speak now of all those whom God has saved. There was a time when there was no approval of them; as the apostle says, "They that are in the flesh cannot please God." So was it with those who were not God's people; their thoughts were contrary to God's thoughts; their ways were such as God could not endure; their speech grated in his ears; they followed the devices and imaginations of their own hearts; the prince of this world had dominion over them, and God's grace had not been displayed upon them. They went astray like lost sheep. That is your condition tonight, sinner, you are the object of divine disapproval. "Not beloved", says the text. "Not beloved." How can you be beloved of God? How can the Lord take any delight in a man who takes no delight in his God, who tries not even to think of him, who breaks his law with impunity, and finds pleasure in that which God abhors? "Not my people", says the text, that is, they were not the subjects of divine approval.

Next, such people receive from God no good thing of the highest order.

"Oh!" say some, "but we are receiving all sorts of temporal blessing's from God." I know you are, and you ought to thank him for them; but as you are not his people, and not beloved, even these good things turn out to be evil things to you. Your table becomes a snare and a trap to you. Men who receive God's mercies before his grace has brought them to himself, make idols of the good things he bestows upon them. They receive benefits at his hands, and use them to provoke him to anger. They take of their wealth, and they say, with the rich fool, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry;" and so they forget that they must die, and they forget their God. Oftentimes, even health and strength become a snare to men. They will plunge into greater sin because they have so much vigor of body. We have known some, who have been so robust in health that they would not; think of God, or of Christ, or of their souls, or of eternity. I tell you, sinners, that while you are as you are, God's curse rests upon your blessings. There is no good thing out of Christ; for that which would be good with Christ becomes evil without Christ; it becomes a thing which destroys rather than blesses, and which helps men the more rapidly to destroy their souls. Oh, what a sad state is yours of whom God says, "They are not my people, and they are not beloved"! While they are as they are, they cannot receive the highest good from God; even the best thing that he sends them they turn into evil.

Remember, too, you who know not God, that you are in a very miserable condition, because to you there is no application of the precious blood of Christ. Jesus died for sinners; but you pass by his cross as though you had nothing to do with it. Israel in Egypt was saved because God saw the blood, and passed over the houses of his people; but you are not beneath that crimson sign. You have never looked to Christ by faith. No blood is on the lintel and on the two side-posts of your door. All we can say of you, as we look at you, is "Not beloved: not beloved." Oh, poor souls, you who have not believed, what does the Scripture say to you? Why, that you are "condemned already" because you have not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. You who have not believed in Christ are lying in the wicked one; and what does that expression mean? Why, lying in his bosom, as if you were the darling children of the devil. How can there be any sign of the divine delight or complacency towards you while your delight is in Satan and in sin? No, you have no interest in the precious blood of Jesus. Ah, me! What should I do if this were my case? I would sooner lose my eyes, my hearing, my sense of taste; I would sooner lose life itself than lose an interest in the precious blood of Jesus. Yet some of you live at ease though there has been for you no pardon of sin, no washing in the blood of sprinkling. You are still guilty before God.

Again, when these people were called by God "not my people", and not beloved", there had been no saving work of the Spirit of

God upon them. I am addressing some here to-night who have never had their hearts broken by the Spirit of God. They have never been brought to repentance, they have never been led to faith in Christ. Consequently, to them the Spirit of God is not a Quickener; to them he is not a Comforter; to them he is not an Illuminator. All his divine offices are fulfilled in other people; but not in them. They are strangers to that blessed power, without which no man can come to God, or believe in Christ. Oh, what a sad condition for any to be in — “not my people”, and “not beloved”! They have no trace of that life which they would have if the Spirit of God had made them to pass from death unto life. God is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living; and as long as you are dead in sin he is not your God in this special sense, neither does he call you his people.

Those who are in that sad state have no relief in prayer. They do not pray; they cannot pray. Now, when I am in trouble, I need nobody to advise me to pray. A trouble no sooner comes to me than I spread it before God, and I find a sweet relief at once. Oh, if there were no mercy-seat, I should wish that I had never been born! But there are some of you who never truly pray. Such prayers as you do offer have no heart in them, no life in them; and therefore God does not hear you, and you live on in this world without prayer. Men, how can you exist thus? Life must be to you like a burning desert, where every particle of sand blisters the foot that treads upon it. What can this world be to a prayerless man?

And as you are without prayer, so you are without the promises of God to sustain you. The wealth of God's people seldom lies in ready money. Their treasure consists mostly in promises to pay, promises which God has made to his own people. But for the ungodly there are no blessed promises. God will give nothing to you who will not even believe his Word. He has made no covenant with you who will not even trust his Son. You remain as he says, — it is not my word, but his, — “not my people”, and “not beloved”, as long as you are without faith in the Lord Jesus Christ: whatever promises he has made to his people, you are without power to plead those promises at the throne of grace, for they do not belong to you.

In addition to all this, you are now without any fellowship with God, or with his Son, Jesus Christ. God made this world; but you never speak with the world's Maker. You are guarded by his providence, and yet you have no fellowship with the God who ruleth over all. Why, the joy of life to some of us lies mainly in our fellowship with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He is the very center of the circle in which we move. He is the height and glory of our manhood; the all in all of our existence. We would not wish to live if it were not for him. He is the sun that makes our heaven bright; all would be dark without him; and yet some of you have no communion with him, perhaps not even any knowledge of him. Oh, my dear friend, you have no Christ, no Savior, no communion with God, no fellowship with the Most High! “What a terrible condition is yours!

Besides this, you have no hope of heaven. If you were to die as you now are, what could be your eternal portion but to be driven from the presence of God, and from the glory of his power? The Lord Jesus would say of you, “I never knew them, I never know them. They are not my people. They are not my beloved.” Why, you have never even sought him; you have never cried to him; you have never forsaken the sin which he hates! You have never rested upon the atonement which he has made. You have never trusted in his living power to save. Ah, poor creatures that you are, how I do pity you! “Do not call us poor,” say you. “We are rich, we are increased in goods, and have need of nothing.” So much the worse is your poverty, because of your fancied wealth. It will be an awful thing to go from your well-spread table to the place where you will be denied a drop of water to cool your burning tongues. It will be a terrible thing if you go from the weakness and sickness of the dying bed at once to stand before your God, to be driven from the pangs of your last moments into that dread position of a culprit, unpardoned, to receive sentence from the great Judge of all. “Not my people”, and “not beloved.” I cannot bear the thought of your doom; and I can say no more on that terrible theme.

II. But now, in the second place, I have to speak of The New Condition Of God's People. Listen, and as you listen, may God make it to be your condition! There are many in this world to whom my text has been proved to be true: “I will call them my people, which were not my people; and her beloved, which was not beloved.”

Now see the change which God can make. It is God who makes it. The very same people of whom he said, “They are not my people,” he now, calls his people. Ay, and in the very place where he said that they were not his people, he says they are the people of the living God. Now, what if tonight I have been saying of such and such that they are not God's people? But what if, before they leave this place, God should say to them, “You are my people”? Oh, what a blessed change would have taken place in them! Let me describe it.

If the Lord shall say to us to-night, “Ye are my people, and ye are my beloved,” then we shall know, first, that he thinks upon us, that his mind is toward us, that he has a kindly regard for us, that he takes delight in us, that his heart is set on doing us good. Oh, ye who do love the Lord, and are his children, do think of this, you have the thoughts of God running towards you in streams of ever-abounding tenderness, and mercy, and goodness, and faithfulness!

And, as the Lord thinks of us, he speaks to us. Oh, to think that the Lord should speak to those who were not his people once, and speak to them so effectually as to make his sweet promises enter into their ears, yea, into their hearts, and should become familiar to them, for “the secret of the Lord is with them that fear him; and he will shew them his covenant”! Oh, how sweetly does God

commune with his own children! How he does open up his very heart to them, and make them to know him, even as Jesus manifests himself unto his chosen as he does not unto the world! It is a choice privilege of a child of God to be thought of, and then to be spoken to by the Lord.

More than that, God hears as speak. When we are his people, and his beloved, then our accents become sweet in his ears. You know that your dear children often speak very poorly and badly, and other people do not care much to listen to their talk; but to a father's ear the sound of his own child's voice is always sweet. You have been away from home for some weeks. I know that you are longing to hear the dear prattlers once again. Well, like as a father loves the voice of his child, so does our heavenly Father love the voices of his beloved whom he calls his people, and he has regard to what they say, he hearkens to the voice of their cry.

Then, beloved, he not only hears us, but he grants us our desire. He will come to our deliverance in the time of trouble. He will bestow upon us all good things: "No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly." Oh, the privileges of those who are God's people! The theme is too vast for human language to compass.

One special mark of our now condition is that the Lord forgives our sin. Once we were loaded with sin; but now we have not a single sin left upon us. The blood of Jesus Christ, God's clear Son, cleanses us from all sin. Paul challenges the whole universe to lay anything to the charge of God's elect, for God has justified them. "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us." Oh, the heaped-up blessedness of the man whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered! And that is true of all whom God calls his people, though they once were not his people.

And then, dear friends, sin being forgiven, the Lord works all things for our good. Whether we are joyous or depressed, if we are the Lord's people, all is working for our good. "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." Our losses and our crosses, our bereavements and our bodily pains, as well as our rapturous joys and our highest delights, are all working out the best results for us.

More than this, when we are in trouble, God pities us; for like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him." Ay, and he sends us relief, too, according to that word of David, "Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the Lord delivereth him out of them all." What is better still, God dwells in us, as he said, "I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people." And the Holy Spirit has come, and taken up his abode in these mortal bodies, and he dwells there, our Teacher and our Comforter, our Guide and our Friend.

By and by, the Lord Jesus will come again, and receive us unto himself, that where he is there we may be also. I wish I had the tongues of men and of angels that I might tell you the splendor of the position of those who are the Lord's own people, the Lord's own beloved. And who were these people once? I come back to my text again. They were not God's people, and not beloved: "I will call them my people, which were not my people; and her beloved, which was not beloved." Now then, some of you, whom God cannot now look upon except with anger, why should he not look upon you with love to-night through Jesus Christ? He that believeth in Christ Jesus may have the blessed assurance that the Lord loves him, and that he is one of the Lord's people. You may have come in here saying, "I belong to the devil. I am sure I do; I feel within my spirit that I am under his cruel sway. Alas! I have not a spark of grace, or a thought of goodness. I am as far off from God, and holiness, and heaven, as ever I can be." Then to you, may God say, "I will call them my people, which were not my people; and her beloved, which was not beloved"! Oh, the magnificence of this grace that waits not for man, neither tarries for the sons of men, but works according to the eternal purposes of God, and accomplishes all his sovereign will!

III. This brings me, in the third place — going back to the text in Hosea to notice The Grand Result Of This Wonderful Change: "I will say to them which were not my people, thou art my people; and they shall say, thou art my God." Here is a dialogue between the Lord and his people. God says something to them, and they say something to him.

Remember that there is no change in God; it is only a change in our relation to him, because those who have become his people were really his people, in his everlasting purpose, from before the foundation of the world, though they were not actually so as to their own spiritual condition. But now, when this change comes to pass in their relations to God, see the grand result of it.

First, the Lord says, "Thou art my people." Now I pray that the Lord may come to-night, and speak to some who never made mention of his name before, some who never knew him, who never trembled at his Word, never hoped in his mercy, never trusted in his Son, never, indeed, meant to be his people at all. I do trust that the Lord will now say to some of them, "Thou art my people." Oh, what a wonderful experience it is when the poor lost sinner finds out that he belongs to God, that he has been redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, that God means to save him, that he will not let his Son's blood be shed for him in vain! I remember the shame and yet the joy that filled my soul when I first woke up to the consciousness of what Christ had done for me. I remember the confusion of face I felt because I had treated such a Savior so badly; and yet I also felt intense delight in thinking that he loved me, notwithstanding all my sins. This is a text that comforted me, — I pray the Lord to send it home to some other heart, — "I have

loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee;" and this one also, "I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine." Oh, if the Holy Spirit would apply those words with power to some sinner's heart to-night, what a running after God, what a seeking after Christ there would be!

"I will say to them which were not my people, Thou art my people." The Lord does not always say that to his people with equal force. At first, they half hope that it is so. They indistinctly hear his voice saying it; but as faith increases, they hear him say it more distinctly, "Thou art my people." I do feel that it is most gracious of God to call those his people that were not his people. You see that he gives them a new name, and that overrides the old one. I think that I hear some one saying, "I have found the Savior." "What? What?" says somebody who knows you. "You? Heugh! we all know what you were." Perhaps one says, "Ah, you know that you have been as bad as any of us!" Possibly in one case they might say, "You talk of being God's child? You are a fallen woman," or, "You have been a thief," or, "You have been a liar," or, "You have been a frequenter of places where God is forgotten, a lover of Pleasure rather than a lover of God." Yes, but beloved, if the Lord says, "I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine;" you can say to yourself, "They may say what they please about me, and I must own the truth of it all; but this word of the Lord, "Thou art mine," overrides it all.

What a blessed text this is for one who has lost his character, for one who has lost all repute! If you come to Christ, and believe in him, here is a text that applies to you. God says, "Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honorable, and I have loved thee." God can make "right honourables" out of those who are in themselves most dishonorable, and he can give them a name and a place among his people. Yet I can imagine God looking upon some one here to-night, and saying of such an one, "How can I put him among the children? What! put such a sinner among my children?" I can fancy there is somebody here who is so extremely sinful that, if I were to propose to God's people that he should be received among them, they would say, "We should not like to receive that man into the church." Ah, but when our heavenly Father welcomes home his prodigal son, he will not have the older brother talk like that. He comes out, and reasons with him, and says, "It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found." Jesus would have us receive the very chief of sinners, the jail-birds, the hell-birds, the men who have gone farthest astray, the men who have lost all hope, the most forlorn and self-condemned, the most dejected, distressed, devil-haunted men and women out of hell. These are just the people in whom the grace of God triumphs over all sin. "I will call them my people, which were not my people; and her beloved, which was not beloved;" "and I will say to them, which were not my people, thou art my people."

When the Lord says this to any, their sin is; put away. My Lord is a great Forgiver! My Lord, whom I preach to you to-night, who was once nailed to the cross, is able to save all them to the uttermost that come unto God by him. "He delighteth in mercy," it is; his right-hand attribute, his last-born, his Benjamin. Never does he display his mercy more than when, like the mighty sea, his love rolls over the very tops of the mountains of iniquity, and covers them.

I close by noticing what the Lord's people say to him, "They shall say, Thou art my God." That is the right saying for every one of the Lord's people, "Thou art my God." Poor sinner, may God the Holy Ghost help you to begin to say that, "Thou art my God"! Here is a text that should help you to say it, even as it helped me in the hour of my conversion, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else." Will you look to God, sinner? Will you say to the Lord, "Thou art my God"? "My God, I have long forgotten thee, I have blasphemed thee, I have rebelled against thee, I have desecrated thy Sabbath, I have decried thy gospel, I have ridiculed thy servants! But, behold, I look to thee, for I have sinned; have mercy upon me, for thy dear Son's sake!"

That is a good beginning; but may you have grace to advance beyond that experience, so that you may come and lay your hand on Christ the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world, saying "This Savior is my Savior. I accept him as my Substitute, to stand in my room, and place, and stead"! When you have once rightly uttered this blessed sentence, Thou art my God," God's grace will help you to keep on saying it. There is no getting farther than this, "Thou art my God." That is the end of all good things. What more does a man want? What more can a man desire? There is not a good thing anywhere out of Christ. One of the old Puritans, in the days when nobody much liked going to sea, said, "When a man is in a ship, and in his own little cabin, if he casts his eye all around, and sees nothing but the wild waste of waters, without a sign of land anywhere, nothing but angry billows tossing the vessel up and down, if anyone says to him, Will you leave your little cabin? Will you leave your little ship? 'No,' says he, 'where else can I go? There is nowhere else to go.'" That is just how I feel to-night about my Lord. My cabin, my ship, my Christ, my faith in him, gives me rest and peace. I cannot see anywhere else that I can go except to destruction and despair; so my soul says over again, "Thou art my God, thou art my God. Others may have what they will; but I will have my God. They may have what god they like; but thou, Triune Jehovah, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, thou art my God, and on thee my soul doth rest, seeking no other confidence."

Will you say that to-night, my dear hearers? I do not know your cases; but I know that, if I want to get sheep into a fold, a good way is to set the gate open as widely as ever I can; and then another good way to entice the sheep in is to have rich pasture inside. Well, I have tried to set before you the rich, free grace of God to the very chief of sinners, and I have pointed to the opened door,

that is wide enough to let the biggest sinner come through. Jesus said, "I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture." Now, if Noah's ark had a door that was big enough to let an elephant through, then it was big enough to let a dog through, or a fox, or a cat, or a mouse. You may come if you are the biggest sinner in the world; and I do not suppose that you are, for the biggest sinner died and went to heaven long ago. Paul says that he was the biggest sinner, the chief of sinners; and I believe that he knew what sized sinner he was. If there was room for him to go through the gate of salvation, there is room for you. May God's grace draw you this very night; and unto the God of all grace shall be the praise for ever and ever! Amen.

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Hosea 3:5 A Fear to Be Desired

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"And shall fear the LORD and his goodness in the latter days."-Hosea 3:5.

THIS passage refers in the first place to the Jews. If we read the whole verse, and the preceding one, we shall see that they describe the present sad condition of God's ancient people, and inspire us with hope concerning their future: "For the children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image, and without an ephod, and without teraphim: afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the Lord their God, and David their king; and shall fear the Lord and his goodness in the latter days." From this, and many other texts of Scripture, we may conclude, without the shadow of a doubt, that the Jews shall, one day, acknowledge Jesus to be their King. The Son of David-who is here, doubtless, called by the name of David, and who, when he died upon the cross, had Pilate's declaration inscribed over his head, "This is Jesus the King of the Jews,"-will then be owned by them as their King, and then shall they be restored to more than their former joy and glory. God has great things in store for the seed of Abraham in the latter days. He has not finally cast them away, and he will be true to that covenant which he made with their fathers, and on Judaea's plains shall roam a happy people, who shall lift up their songs of praise unto Jehovah in the name of Jesus Christ their Lord and Savior. Whenever that shall happen, we, or those who will then be living, may know that the latter days have fully come, because it is foretold here, and in other passages that this is what will occur in the latter days. I am not going to attempt any explanation of the prophetic intimations concerning the future, but this one fact is plain enough,-that, when the end of the world is approaching, and the fullness of the Gentiles is gathered in, and all the splendor of the latter days has really commenced then "shall the children of Israel return, and seek the Lord their God, and David their king; and shall fear the Lord and his goodness."

On this occasion I intend only to call your attention to this expression, "They shall fear the Lord and his goodness;" for what Israel will do, in a state of grace, is precisely what all spiritual Israelites do when the grace of God rests upon them. The fear of the Lord, which is the beginning of wisdom, fills the heart, and the goodness of the Lord becomes the source and fountain of that fear in the hearts of all those whom the Lord has blessed with his grace. So I shall, first of all, ask you to notice a distinction which is to be observed; secondly a grace which is to be cultivated; and then, thirdly, a sin which is to be repented of in the case of many.

I. First, then, here is A Distinction To Be Observed.

Human language is necessarily imperfect. Since man's fall, and especially since the confusion of tongues at Babel, there has not only been a difference in speech between one nation and another, but also between one individual and another. Probably, we do not all mean exactly the same thing by any one word that we use; there is just a shade of difference between your meaning and mine. The confusion of tongues went much further than we sometimes realize; and so completely did it confuse our language that we do not, on all occasions, mean quite the same thing to ourselves even when we use the same word. Hence, "fear" is a word, which has a very wide range of meaning. There is a kind of fear which is to be shunned and avoided,-that fear which perfect love casts out, -because it hath torment. But there is another sort of fear which has in it the very essence of love, and without which there would be no joy even in the presence of God. Instead of perfect love casting out this fear, perfect love nourishes and cherishes it, and, by communion with it, itself derives strength from it. Between the fear of a slave and the fear of a child, we can all perceive a great distinction. Between the fear of God's great power and justice which the devils have, and that fear which a child of God has when he walks in the light with his God, there is as much difference, surely, as between hell and heaven.

In the verse from which our text is taken, that difference is clearly indicated: "Afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the Lord their God, and David their king; and shall fear the Lord;" so that this fear is connected with seeking the Lord. It is a fear,

which draws them towards God, and makes them search for him. You know how the fear of the ungodly influences them; it makes them afraid of God, so they say, "Whither shall we flee from his presence?" They would take the wings of the morning if they could, and fly to the uttermost part of the earth, if they had any hope that God could not reach them there; at the last, when this fear will take full possession of them, they will call upon the rocks and the hills to hide them from the face of him who will then sit upon the throne, whose wrath they will have such cause to dread. The fear of God, as it exists in unrenewed men, is a force which ever drives them further and yet further away from God. They never get any rest of mind until they have ceased to think of him; if a thought of God should, perchance, steal into their mind, fear at once lays hold upon them again, and that fear urges them to flee from God.

But the fear mentioned in our text draws to God. The man who has this fear in his heart cannot live without seeking God's face, confessing his guilt before him, and receiving pardon from him. He seeks God because of this fear. Just as Noah, "moved with fear," built the ark wherein he and his household were saved, so do these men, "moved with fear," draw nigh unto God, and seek to find salvation through his love and grace. Always notice this distinction, and observe that the fear which drives anyone away from God is a vice and a sin, but the fear that draws us towards God, as with silken bonds, is a virtue to be cultivated.

This appears even more clearly in the Hebrew, for they who best understand that language tell us that this passage should be read thus, "They shall fear toward the Lord, and toward his goodness." This fear leans toward the Lord. When thou really knowest God, thou shalt be thrice happy if thou dost run toward him, falling down before him, worshipping him with bowed head yet glad heart, all the while fearing toward him, and not away from him. Blessed is the man whose heart is filled with that holy fear which inclines his steps in the way of God's commandments, inclines his heart to seek after God, and inclines his whole soul to enter into fellowship with God, that he may be acquainted with him, and be at peace.

It is also worthy of notice that this fear is connected with the Messiah: "They shall seek the Lord their God, and David their King,"-who stands here as the type of Jesus the Messiah, the King of Israel; and further on it is said, "They shall fear the Lord and his goodness;" and I should not do wrong if I were to say that Christ is Jehovah's goodness,-that, in his blessed person, you have all the goodness, and mercy, and grace of God condensed and concentrated. "In him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." So, that fear which is a sign of grace in the heart,-that fear which we ought all to seek after,-always links itself on to Christ Jesus. If thou fearest God, and knowest not that there is Mediator between God and men, thou wilt never think of approaching him. God is a consuming fire, then how canst thou draw near to him apart from Christ? If thou fearest God, and knowest not of Christ's atonement, how canst thou approach him? Without faith, it is impossible to please God, and without the blood of Jesus there is no way of access to the divine mercy-seat. If thou knowest not Christ, thou wilt never come unto God. Thy fear must link itself with the goodness of God as displayed in the person of his dear Son, or else it cannot be that seeking fear, that fear toward the Lord, of which our text speaks. It will be a fleeing fear, a fear that will drive thee further and yet further away from God, into greater and deeper darkness,-into dire de destruction,-in fact, into that pit whose bottomless abyss swallows up all hope, all rest, and all joy for ever.

II. Let this distinction be kept in mind, and then we may safely go on to consider, in the second place, The Grace Which Is To Be Cultivated: "they shall fear the Lord and his goodness."

We will divide the one thought into two; and, first, I will speak about that fear of God, which is the work of the Holy Spirit, a token of grace, a sign of salvation, and a precious treasure to be ever kept in the heart. What is this fear of God? I answer, first, it is a sense of awe of his greatness. Have you never felt this sacred awe stealing insensibly over your spirit, hushing, and calming you, and bowing you down before the Lord? It will come, sometimes, in the consideration of the great works of nature. Gazing upon the vast expanse of waters,-looking up to the innumerable stars, examining the wing of an insect, and seeing there the matchless skill of God displayed in the minute; or standing in a thunderstorm, watching, as best you can, the flashes of lightning, and listening to the thunder of Jehovah's voice, have you not often shrunk into yourself, and said, "Great God, how terrible art thou!"-not afraid, but full of delight, like a child who rejoices to see his father's wealth, his father's wisdom,, his father's power,-happy, and at home, but feeling oh, so little! We are less than nothing, we are all but annihilated in the presence of the great eternal, infinite, invisible All-in-all. Gracious men often come into this state of mind and heart by watching the works of God; so they do when they observe what he does in providence. Dr. Watts truly sings,-

"Here he exalts neglected worms

To sceptres and a crown;

Anon the following page he turns,

And treads the monarch down."

The mightiest kings and princes are but as grasshoppers in his sight. "The nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as

the small dust of the balance,” that has not weight enough to turn the scale. We talk about the greatness of mankind; but “all nations before him are’ as nothing; and they are counted to him less than nothing, and vanity.” Again Dr. Watts wisely sings,-

“Great God! how infinite art thou!

What worthless worms are we!”

When we realize this, we are filled with a holy awe as we think of God’s greatness, and the result of that is that we are moved to fall before him in reverent adoration. We turn to the Word of God, and there we see further proofs of his greatness in all his merciful arrangements for the salvation of sinners,-and especially in the matchless redemption wrought out by his well-beloved Son, every part of which is full of the divine glory; and as we gaze upon that glory with exceeding joy, we shrink to nothing before the Eternal, and the result again is lowly adoration. We bow down, and adore and worship the living God, with a joyful, tender fear, which both lays us low, and lifts us very high, for never do we seem to be nearer to heaven’s golden throne’ than when our spirit gives itself up to worship him whom it does not see, but, in whose realized presence it trembles with sacred delight.

It is the same fear, but looked at from another point of view, which has regard to the holiness of God. What a holy being is the great Jehovah of hosts! There is in him no fault, no deficiency, no redundancy; he is whole, and therefore holy; there is’ nothing there but himself, the wholly perfect God. “Holy! holy! holy! is a fit note for the mysterious living creatures to sound out before his throne above; for, all along, he has acted according to the principle of unsullied holiness. Though blasphemers have tried, many times, to-

“Snatch from his hand the balance and the rod,

rejudge his judgments, be the god of God,”

they have always failed, and still he sits in the lonely majesty of his absolute perfection, while they, like brute beasts, crouch far beneath him, and despise what they cannot comprehend. But to a believing heart, God is all purity. His light is “ as the color of the terrible crystal,” of which Ezekiel writes; his brightness is so great that no man can approach unto it. We are so sinful that, when we get even a glimpse of the divine holiness, we are filled with fear, and we cry, with Job, “I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.” This is a kind of fear which we have need to cultivate, for it leads to repentance, and confession of sin, to aspirations after holiness, and to the utter rejection of all self-complacency and self-conceit. God grant that we may be completely delivered from all those forms of pride’ and evil!

The fear of God also takes another form, that is, the fear of his Fatherhood, which leads us to reverence him. When divine grace has given us the new birth, we recognize that we have entered into a fresh relationship towards God; namely, that we have become his sons and daughters. Then we realize that we have received “the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.” Now, we cannot truly cry unto God, “Abba, Father,” without at the same time feeling, “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God.” When we recognize that we are “heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ,” children of the Highest, adopted into the family of the Eternal himself, we feel at once, as the spirit of childhood works within us, that we both love and fear our great Father in heaven, who has loved us with an everlasting love, and has “begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away.”

In this childlike fear, there is not an atom of that fear which signifies being afraid. We, who believe in Jesus, are not afraid of our Father; God forbid that we ever should be. The nearer we can get to him, the happier we are. Our highest wish is to be for ever with him, and to be lost in him; but, still, we pray that we may not grieve him we beseech him to keep us from turning aside from him; we ask for his tender pity towards our infirmities and plead with him to forgive us and to deal graciously with us for his dear Son’s sake. As loving children, we feel a holy awe and reverence as. we realize our relationship to him who is our Father in heaven,-a clear, loving, tender, pitiful Father, yet our Heavenly Fattier, who “is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him.”

This holy fear takes a further form when our fear of God’s sovereignty leads us to obey him as our King; for he, to whom we pray, and in whom we trust, is King of kings, and Lord of lords, and we gladly own his sovereignty. We see him sitting upon a throne, which is dependent upon no human or angelic power to sustain it. The kings of the earth must ask their fellow men to march in their ranks in order to sustain their rulers, but our King “sits on no precarious throne, nor borrows leave to be” a king. As the Creator of all things, and all beings, he has a right to the obedience of the entire creature he has made. Again I say that we, who believe in Jesus, are not afraid of God even as our King, for he has made us also to be kings, and priests, and we are to reign with him, through Jesus Christ, for ever and ever. Yet we tremble before him lest we should be rebellious against him in the slightest degree. With a childlike fear, we are afraid lest one revolting thought or one treacherous wish should ever come into our mind or heart to stain our absolute loyalty to him. Horror takes hold upon us when we hear others deny that “the Lord reigneth;” but even the thought that we should ever do this grieves us exceedingly, and we are filled with that holy fear, which moves us to obey every command of our gracious King so far as we know it to be his command. Having this fear of God before our eyes, we cry to those

who would tempt us to sin, "How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" It is not because we are afraid of him, but because we delight in him, that we fear before him with an obedient, reverential fear; and, beloved, I do firmly believe that, when this kind of fear of God works itself out to the full, it crystallizes into love. So excellent, so glorious, so altogether everything that could be desired, so far above our highest thought or wish, art thou, O Jehovah, that we lie before thee, and shrink into nothing; yet, even as we do so, we feel another sensation springing up within us. We feel that we love thee; and, as we decrease in our own estimation of ourselves, we feel that we love thee more and more. As we realize our own nothingness, we are more than ever conscious of the greatness of our God. "Thine heart shall fear, and be enlarged," says the prophet Isaiah, and so it comes to pass with us. The more we fear the Lord, the more we love him, until this becomes to us the true fear of God, to love him with all our heart, and mind, and soul, and strength. May he bring us to this blessed climax by the effectual working of his Holy Spirit!

Now I want to dwell, with somewhat of emphasis, upon the second part of this fear: "They shall fear the Lord and his goodness." It may at first seem, to some people, a strange thing that we should fear God's goodness; but there are some of us who know exactly what this expression means, for we have often experienced just what it describes. How can we fear God's goodness? I speak what I have often felt, and I believe many of you can do the same as you look back upon the goodness of God to you, - saving you from sin, and making you to be his child; and as you think of all his goodness to you in the dispensations of his providence. You may, perhaps, be like Jacob, who left his Father's house with his wallet and his staff; and when he came back with a family that formed two bands, and with abundance of all that he could desire, he must have been astonished at what God had done for him. And when David sat upon his throne in Jerusalem, surrounded by wealth and splendor, as he recollected how he had fed his flock in the wilderness, and afterwards had been hunted, by Saul, like a partridge upon the mountains, he might well say, "Is this the manner of man, O Lord God?"

In this way, God's goodness often fills us with amazement, and amazement has in it an element of fear. We are astonished at the Lord's gracious dealings with us, and we say to him, "Why hast thou been so good to me, for so many years, and in such multitude of forms? Why hast thou manifested so much mercy and tenderness toward me? Thou hast treated me as if I had never grieved or offended thee. Thou hast been as good to me as if I had deserved great blessings at thy hands. Hast thou paid me wages, like a hired servant, thou wouldst never have given me such sweetness and such love as thou hast now lavished upon me, though I was once a prodigal, and wandered far from thee. O God, thy love is like the sun; I cannot gaze upon it, its brightness would blind my eyes! I fear, because of thy goodness." Do you know, dear friends, what this expression means? If a sense of God's goodness comes upon you in all its force, you will feel that God is wonderfully great to have been so good to you. Most of us have had friends who have become tired of us after a while. Possibly, we have had some very kind friends, who are not yet tired of us; but, still, they have failed us every now and then at some points; either their power could not meet our necessity, or they were not willing to do what we needed. But our God has poured out his mercy for us like a river; it has flowed on without a break. These many years he has continued to bless us, and has heaped up his mercies, mountain upon mountain, until it has seemed as though he would reach the very stars with the lofty pinnacles of his love. What shall we say to all this? Shall we not fear him, and adore him, and bless him for all the goodness that he has made to pass before us; and, all the while, feel that, even to kiss the hem of his garment, or to be beneath his footstool, is too great an honor for us?

Then there will come upon us, when we are truly grateful to God for his goodness toward us, a sense of our own responsibility; and we shall say, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits toward me?" We shall feel that we cannot render to him anything compared with what we ought to render; and there will come upon us this fear, - that we shall never be able to live at all consistently with the high position which his grace has given to us. As God said concerning his ancient people, we shall fear and tremble for all the goodness and for all the prosperity that he has procured for us. It will seem as though he had set us on the top of a high mountain, and had bidden us walk along that lofty ridge; it is a ridge of favor and privilege, but it is so elevated that we fear lest our brain should reel, and our feet should slip, because of the height of God's mercy to us. Have you never felt like that, beloved? If God has greatly exalted you with his favor and love, I am sure you must have felt like that many a time.

Then, next, this holy fear is near akin to gratitude. The fear of a man, who really knows the love and goodness of God, will be somewhat of this kind. He will fear lest he should really be, or should seem to be, ungrateful. "What," he asks, "can I do? I am drowned in mercy. It is not as though my ship were sailing in a sea of mercy; I have been so loaded with the favor of the Lord that my vessel has gone right down, and the ocean of God's love and mercy has rolled right over the masthead. What can I do, O Lord? If thou hast given me only a little mercy, I might have done something, in return, to express my gratitude. But, oh! thy great mercy in electing me, in redeeming me, in converting me, and in preserving me, and in all the goodness of thy providence, toward me, - what can I do in return for all these favors? I feel struck dumb; and I am afraid lest I should have a dumb heart as well as a dumb tongue; I fear lest I should grieve thee by anything that looks like ingratitude."

Then the child of God begins, next, to fear lest he should become proud; "for," says he, "I have noticed that, when God thus favors some men, they begin to exalt themselves, and to think that they are persons of great importance; so, if the Lord makes the stream of my life flow very joyously, I may imagine that it is because there is some good thing in me, and be foolish enough to begin to

ascribe the glory of it to myself." A true saint often trembles concerning this matter; he sometimes gets even afraid of his mercies. He knows that his trials and troubles never did him any hurt; but he perceives that, sometimes, God's goodness has intoxicated him as with sweet wine, so he begins to be almost afraid of the goodness of his God to him. He thinks to himself, "Shall I be unworthy of all this favor, and walk in a way that is inconsistent with it?" He looks a little ahead, and he knows that the flesh is frail, and that good men have often been found in very slippery places, and he says, "What if, after all this, I should be a backslider? Thou, O Lord, hast brought me into the banqueting house, and thy banner over me is love; thou hast stayed me with flagons, and comforted me with apples; thou hast laid bare thy very heart to me, and made me know that I am a man greatly beloved! Shall I, after all this, ever turn aside from thee? Will the ungodly ever point at me, and say, Aha! Aha! Is this the man after God's own heart? Is this the disciple who said he would die rather than deny his Master?" Such a fear as that very properly comes over us at times, and then we tremble because of all the goodness which God has made to pass before us.

I think you can see, dear friends, without my needing to enlarge further upon this point, that, while a time of sorrow and suffering is often, to the Christian, a time of confidence in his God; on the other hand, a time of prosperity is, to the wise man, a time of holy fear. Not that he is ungrateful, but he is afraid that he may be. Not that he is proud; he is truly humble because he is afraid lest he should become proud. Not that he loves the things of the world, but he is afraid lest his heart should get away from God, so he fears because of all the Lord's goodness to him. May the Lord always keep us in that state of fear for it is a healthy condition for us to be in. Those who walk so very proudly, and with too great confidence, are generally the ones who first tumble down. My observation and experience have taught me this; when I have met with anyone who knew that he was a very good man, and who boasted to other people that he was a very good man, -he has generally proved to be like some of those pears that we sometimes see in the shop, -very handsome to look at, but sleepy and rotten all through. Then, on the other hand, I have noticed a great many other people, who have always been afraid that they would go wrong, and who have trembled and feared at almost every step they took. They have feared lest they should grieve the Lord, and they have cried unto him, day and night, "Lord, uphold us;" and he has done so, and they have been enabled to keep their garments unspotted to their life's end. So, my prayer is, that I may never cease to feel this holy fear before God, and that I may never get to fancy, for a moment, that there is, or ever can be, anything in me to cause me to boast or to glory in myself. May God save all of us from that evil; and the more we receive of his goodness, the more may we fear, with childlike fear, in his presence!

III. Now I must close with just a few words upon the last point; which is, A Sin To Be Repented Of.

I cannot help fearing that I am addressing some to whom my text does not apply except by way of contrast. Are there not some of you, who are unsaved, and yet who do not fear God? O sirs, may the Holy Spirit make you to fear and tremble before him! You have cause enough to fear. If you live all day long without even thinking of God, or if, when you do think of him, you try to smother the thought at once; -if you say that you can get on very well without him, and that life is happy enough without religion; -I could weep for you because you do not weep for yourselves. You say, "We are rich;" yet, all the while, you are wretched, and miserable, and poor. Your poverty is all the worse because you fancy that you are rich. You are also blind. That is bad enough, yet you say, "We can see." It is doubly sad when the spiritually blind declare that they can see, for they will never ask for the sacred eye-salve, or go to the great Oculist who can open blind eyes, so long as they are satisfied with their present condition. It is a great pity that many unconverted men do not fear God even with a servile fear. If they would only begin with that, it might prove to be the lowest rung of the heavenly ladder, and lead on to the blessed fear which is the portion of the children of God.

There are others of you, I am afraid, who never fear either God or his goodness. How I wish you would do so, for the Lord has been very good to you. You were saved at sea after you had been wrecked. You were raised up from fever when others died. You have prospered in business, on the whole, though you have had some struggles. Blessed with children, and made happy in your home; -all this you owe to the God whom you have never acknowledged. The goodness of God to some ungodly men is truly wonderful. I think, when they sit down at night, when everybody else has gone to bed, and remember how they began life with scarcely a shilling to bless themselves with, yet God has multiplied their substance and given them much to rejoice in, their hearts ought to be full of gratitude towards their Benefactor. I would like all such people to recollect what God said by the mouth of the prophet Hosea, "She did not know that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold, which they prepared for Baal. Therefore will I return, and take away my corn in the time thereof, and my wine in the season thereof, and will recover my wool and my flax given to cover her nakedness." Take care, O ye ungrateful souls, that the Lord does not begin to strip you of the mercies which you have failed to appreciate! I pray that you may be led to confess whence all these blessings came, and to cry, "My Father, thou shalt be my Guide, henceforth and for ever. Since thou hast dealt so lovingly and tenderly with me, I will come and confess my sin unto thee, and trust in thy dear Son as my Savior and Friend, that I may henceforth be led and commanded by thee alone, and may fear before thee all the days of my life."

May God grant to every one of us the grace to believe in Jesus, and to rest in him, and then to walk in the fear of the Lord all our day, for Christ's sake! Amen.

Hosea 3:5 The Silken Fetter

NO. 888

DELIVERED ON SUNDAY MORNING, AUGUST 29TH, 1869,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“Fear the Lord and his goodness.” — Hosea 3:5.

THE whole verse runs thus: “Afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the Lord their God, and David their king; and shall fear the Lord and his goodness in the latter days.” A brief word may suffice upon the prophecy. I think no reader of Holy Scripture can doubt but that the seed of Abraham, however long they may be in blindness, will at the last obey the Messiah, Jesus, the Son of David, and in those days the goodness of God to them will be so extraordinary, that they shall fear and wonder at it; constrained by gratitude, they will be numbered among the most earnest servants of the Lord. May the Lord hasten so blest a consummation in his own time. O that the happy day would dawn, when Israel’s sons shall acknowledge Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews, to be the Messiah that was promised of old! The expression, “Fear the Lord and his goodness,” much impressed me, and I have therefore ventured to take it from its connection, that we may meditate upon it. Is it so, that there are powerful motives and active causes for fear not only in God himself, but also in his goodness? Alas! dear friends, too many who enjoy the blessings of divine men are far enough from fearing him. His goodness, from the very commonness and continuity of it, casts them into a self-complacent slumber, in which they dream that they will continue in prosperity for ever, but they spend not even a single thought on him from whom all goodness flows. Alas! another class of persons are even excited by the goodness of God to a height of pride and arrogance. If Pharaoh be fixed on a powerful throne, if his dominions be in peace, if the Nile causes Egypt to be fat with harvest, the proud monarch defiantly demands, “Who is Jehovah that I should obey his voice?” If the hosts of Sennacherib be mighty in battle, and if God give prosperity to his kingdom, what will Sennacherib do but wax exceeding haughty against God, the God of Israel, and laugh his people to scorn! Many a man has put his trust in his riches, and has presumed against the Most High; because he has enjoyed long years of success, he believes not that any evil can befall him, but his pride towers aloft, even to the very heavens. Alas! even in those men who are right-hearted, in whom grace reigns, it has too often happened that the goodness of God has not wrought in them a corresponding gracious result. Hezekiah is endowed with riches, and displays them with ostentatious pride: instead of honoring his God in the presence of the ambassadors that came from far, he sought only to give them a high idea of himself, and thus by the pride of his heart he brought upon himself a stern rebuke from his Lord. Asa prospered, but when he was lifted up in outward circumstances, he became also lifted up in heart, and departed from the Most High. Even good men cannot always carry a full cup without some spilling. Even those whose hearts are right have not always found their heads steady enough to stand with safety upon the pinnacles of prosperity and honor. Yet, my brethren, though these things do occur as the results of the goodness of God, on account of the evil of our hearts, yet the true and right effect of goodness upon us ought to be to make us fear God; not to lift us up, but to keep us down; not to make our blood hot with presumption, but to cool and calm it with a grateful jealousy; not unduly to exhilarate us until we become profanely defiant, but to sober us with conscious responsibility till we humbly sit with gratitude at the feet of him from whom our good things have proceeded. This, then, is to be the drift of this morning’s discourse — the right and proper result of the goodness of God upon our hearts.

I shall address myself, first of all, to God’s people; secondly, to such as are yet unreconciled to him.

I. First, To God’s People.

It is yours, beloved, to fear the Lord and his goodness. You have received of God’s goodness in two ways; the first and the higher is his spiritual goodness to you with regard to your immortal nature and your eternal concerns; the second form of goodness in which God has been very lavish to some now present is the providential bounty of God towards you as a pilgrim in this present world.

Let us take the first, and dwell upon it, and survey the spiritual goodness of God to you his people for a moment. It was no small goodness which chose you at the first, when there was no more in you than in others whom God beheld in the same glass of his purposes; he might have passed you by as he has passed by tens of thousands of others, but he chose you because he will have mercy on whom he will have mercy, and he determined that you should be the vessels of mercy to be filled with his grace. It was no slight goodness which ordained a covenant on your behalf with Christ Jesus, a covenant ordered in all things and sure, which is, I hope, to you to-day all your salvation, and all your desire, even if your house be not so with God as you could wish. It was no slight goodness which fulfilled that covenant, by the gift of the Only Begotten. My words when applied to such a topic, seems to me to be threadbare and miserable things, too poor to set forth the lovingkindness manifest in our incarnate God dwelling among men, in our holy Savior working out a perfect righteousness, above all, in our bleeding Redeemer making expiation for innumerable sins by the giving up of himself to death. Here are heights of goodness which the hind’s foot of imagination shall never scale; here are

depths of mercy which the plummet of profoundest reasoning can never fathom — what do you not owe unto him who loved you and redeemed you unto God by his blood?

Think again of the goodness of God to you when you were as yet unconverted: what longsuffering! what tenderness! When you were determined to perish, he was determined to save. When you rejected his offers of mercy, he did not reject you; he would not take your denial for a reply, but he persevered with the sweet solicitations of his gospel and with the silent influences of his Holy Spirit, until at last he made you willing in the day of his power, and brought you to that cross to find your hope hanging thereon, and to be filled with joy and peace, as you looked up to Jesus and rested in him. Months and years have glided away since then, but all along life's chequered way, divine goodness has continually followed you. My dear brethren and sisters, I need not be choice in my language in order to excite in you gratitude, if you will but now turn over the pages of your day-book, one by one, and think of what God has done for you since that dear hour when he brought you to his foot, and placed you among his children. Why, your bread has been given to you spiritually, and your waters have been sure. You have been preserved from temptations, and preserved in temptations, and brought out of temptations. You have been led first into one truth, and then into another; you have been conducted, step by step, in the pathway of experience; little by little, as you have been able to bear it, has he revealed himself unto you; you have been kept until this day by his power; you have been comforted unto this day by his presence; you are being taught every day by his Spirit; and you are being made meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light. Oh, the goodness of God to you! If you do not feel it, I desire to be, for my own part, overwhelmed with thankfulness, so as to say in my own soul, "Oh, the goodness of God to me in spiritual matters, his goodness, to an unworthy one who continues still unworthy, his goodness in watering the plant that bears so little fruit, his goodness in ministering comfort to one so ready to create distresses by foolish fears; in bearing in his teaching with one so prone to forget, and so slow to understand." Brethren, we cannot mention even the small dust of our great Father's mercies; he has outdone all that we have asked or even thought in what he has revealed to us; he has dealt well with his servants according to his word.

Now, all this goodness, which I would fain recall to your recollection, should constrain you to fear the Lord. To fear the Lord and his goodness—how is this to be done? First, there should be a fear in your souls of admiration to think that ever the infinite God should deal graciously with you; that he who made the heavens and the earth should stoop from his loftiness to you; that you, being sinful, and having therefore provoked him, and angered his sense of purity — that he should stoop to you in your defilement and loathsomeness, and should reveal his Son in you. The wonder grows as we think, not merely that he should give mercy, but such mercy; not merely grace, but such boundless grace, such unsearchable goodness and loving-kindness. A truly enlightened mind is bewildered amid the multitude of the Lord's favors, and bowed down with sacred awe. The fear that hath torment love has cast out, but the fear which must ever suffuse a spirit when it stands on the brink of the boundless, and gazes into the infinite, such a devout and wondering fear we feel when we behold the everlasting love of God. I remember well being taken one day to see a gorgeous palace at Venice, where every piece of furniture was made with most exquisite taste, and of the richest material, where statues and pictures of enormous price abounded on all hands, and the floor of each room was paved with mosaics of marvellous art, and extraordinary value. As I was shown from room to room, and allowed to roam amid the treasures by its courteous owner, I felt a considerable timidity, I was afraid to sit down anywhere, nor did I hardly dare to put down my foot, or rest my hand to lean. Everything seemed to be too good for ordinary mortals like myself; but when one is introduced into the gorgeous palace of infinite goodness, costlier and fairer far, one gazes wonderingly with reverential awe at the matchless vision. "How excellent is thy lovingkindness, O God!" I am not worthy of the least of all thy benefits. Oh! the depths of the love and goodness of the Lord.

Saints who have tasted that the Lord is gracious, should fear him for his goodness with the worshipful fear of adoration. Everything which comes to us from divine love should bow us to our knee. Mercies should be the unhewn stones of which we should build an altar to our God. Even the sterner attributes of God compel devotion in right minds much more than the gentle glories. Survey the nightly heaven and feel how true it is, "An undevout astronomer is mad." Galen, the physician, when studying the marvellous fabric of the human body, declared that he who saw not there the handiwork of God must be devoid of reason. When one reviews the goodness of God the same feeling is produced, but it is more melting, personal, tender, and practical. In the works of creation, we behold grandeur and goodness, but in the grace that gave to man a Savior, you behold all the attributes of God in a soft subdued splendor which charms the soul to a more loving worship than nature alone can suggest. From nature up to nature's God is well, but from grace to the God of grace is the more sure and easy way. I have never worshipped even in the presence of Mont Blanc, or amid the crash of thunder, as I have at the foot of the cross. A sense of goodness creates a better worshipper than a sense of the sublime. In our best seasons the most excellent sublimities of nature become too little for us, they dwarf rather than magnify our conceptions of God. The day in which I saw most of creation's grandeur was spent upon the Wengern Alp; my heart was near her God, and all around was majestic; the dread mountains like pyramids of ice, the clouds like fleecy wool; I saw the avalanche and heard the thunder of its fall; I marked the dashing waterfalls leaping into the Yale of Lauterbrunnen beneath our feet, but my heart felt that creation was too scant a mirror to image all her God — his face was more terrible than the storm, his robes more pure than the virgin snow, his voice far louder than the thunder, his love far higher than the everlasting hills. I took out my pocket-book and wrote these lines:-

Yon Alps, who lift their heads above the clouds,

And hold familiar converse with the stars,

Are dust, at which the balance trembleth not,

Compared with his divine immensity.

The snow-crown'd summits fail to set him forth Who dwelleth in Eternity, and bears Alone the name of High and Lofty One. Depths unfathomed are too shallow to express The wisdom and the knowledge of the Lord; The mirror of the creatures has no space To bear the image of the Infinite, 'Tis true the Lord hath fairly writ his name, And set his seal upon creation's brow; But as the skillful potter much excels The vessel which he fashions on the wheel, E'en so, but in proportion greater far, Jehovah's self transcends his noblest works. Earth's ponderous wheels would break, her axles snap, If freighted with the load of Deity: Space is too narrow for the Eternal's rest, And time too short a footstool for his throne. E'en avalanche and thunder lack a voice To utter the full volume of his praise. How then can I declare him? Where are words With which my glowing tongue may speak his name? Silent I bow, and humbly I adore.

But in musing upon the person of Jesus Christ, and the plan of salvation, a very different result has been experienced. I have been prostrate under the weight of Deity there revealed, and ready to die amid the splendor there so graciously unveiled to my soul in rapt communion. No fear which cometh of bondage, but that which is borne of gratitude and bliss, has bowed me before the mercy-throne with awful wonder at divine goodness.

Further, the goodness of God to us should suggest aspiration as well as adoration. If he hath treated us so as never any other did, if he hath dealt with us in tenderness surpassing thought, then will we serve him if he will but condescend to accept the sacrifice. There was never such a God as he. Oh, what an honor to be his servants! With tears of joy bedewing our eyes, we ask, "My God, may we be permitted to serve thee? Is there aught of service or of suffering which thou canst condescend to allot to such as we are? for thy goodness constrains us with thy fear, we are bound by it to be thine for ever." Brethren, the greatness of God's goodness should suggest to us great service; the continuance of that goodness should move us to persevere in honoring him; the disinterestedness of the love of God should make us ready for any self-denials; and above all, the singularity and speciality of his goodness towards his elect should determine us to be singular and remarkable in our consecration to his cause. Each believer is so remarkably a debtor to his Lord, that he should not be content to render mere ordinary tribute, but should be panting and sighing that he may attain to eminence in holy labor. He owes more than others, he should render a worthier return. Oh, if the goodness of God would inspire but one here to-day to make a full surrender of his whole life to Jesus' love, what a gain would this be to the church! If some young man whom God has favored with especial mercy would say, "Here am I, indulged as I have been with God's goodness I will press into the front rank of self-abnegation; I will give myself up, spirit, soul, and body, to the Master's service in foreign lands," what might he not achieve! Come, ye gallant of heart, ye generous of spirit, ye owe a boundless debt to him; it is but your reasonable service that you give him your all. Come, lay your hands upon his altar-horns, and dedicate yourselves this day as a whole burnt-offering unto Christ. This is that fear of God and his goodness which every saint should covet.

We should also fear the Lord and his goodness in the sense of affection, an affection combined with the fears peculiar to holy jealousy. Has the Lord done so much for us! then how we ought to tremble lest we should grieve so kind a God. If you have a master for whom you do not care, because he is ungenerous or tyrannical, you will be little careful to please him, except so far as your sense of duty might demand; but when you are serving a kind and generous person, who has been your benefactor from your youth up, you would not for all the world vex him, either by negligence or fault. No father commands the obedience of his children like the parent whose affection to his children has been most manifest and undoubted. Fathers who provoke their children to anger, must not wonder if they find them discouraged in their reverence. Our gracious God wins the deepest affection of his people, and they become jealous lest by anything done or undone they should grieve his Holy Spirit. Oh, that blessed, holy fear, that sacred jealousy of sin! I wish we all had more of it. We had, I fear, more of it at our first conversion, but alas! many professors have little of it now. They are too familiar with the world, they have lost their sensibility of sin; they are no longer quick as the apple of an eye, they allow sins which horrified them once. God save us from getting a film over our consciences by slow degrees. He that serves God serves one who is very jealous. Remember, beloved, there are some among us here who have been permitted to enjoy communion with Christ in a very remarkable degree; you have been like John with his head on Christ's bosom, taken into the innermost chamber of divine affection. Now, none can grieve God so soon as you can. There are none that must pick their steps more carefully than you. A common subject would be allowed by a monarch to do fifty things which one of his familiars must not do. Art thou a favorite of the King? It is an awful thing to be beloved of heaven — it is as dread as it is glorious; but it calls for great care and deep anxiety; and the Lord grant that you may walk humbly before him with that fear of his goodness which dreads lest for a single moment God should be provoked by your temper, your thoughts, words, or deeds.

We must fear him again — for I have a sevenfold fear to describe, and must therefore be brief upon each — with humiliation. The

goodness of God to us if it finds us in a healthy state, will always make us think less of ourselves. We shall be like Peter's boat, which when empty floated high, but which when full began to sink. God's great mercy to us will make us sit down with David, overwhelmed with astonishment, and say, "Whence is this to me? What am I and what is my father's house?" Reckon that thy soul is right with God if his mercy humbles thee, but if it puffs thee up, there is some base thing within thy heart that must be purged away.

Again, the goodness of God ought to make us fear him with a sacred anxiety, an anxiety of a double character. Am I really his? This great salvation which I hope I have received, have I really received it, or is my experience mere fancy? I see before me a vast estate, is it mine, or do I misread the title-deeds? Does it belong to some other, or actually to me? The higher thoughts you have of the grace of God in the gospel, the more carefully should you examine yourselves whether you be in the faith, the more anxious should you be to go every day to the cross to make your calling and election sure by looking into those five wounds again, and counting once more the purple drops, and crying with holy faith, "Thus my sins are washed away." Oh, if ye had but a small heaven and a God of little mercies, ye might play fast and loose therewith, but with a God who brims with kindness, and a heaven that is flooded with glory, oh! be anxious that there be no question in dispute as to whether ye are Christ's or no. Our second anxiety should always be this, "If I be indeed his, and I have such goodness bestowed on me, am I rendering to him what he may expect?" Beloved, you are God's vineyard, he has built a hedge about you, he has watered you, and planted in your soul the choicest vine of the true spiritual life, but see how little fruit you have yielded to him in return! He looks for clusters, and he finds but grape-gleanings; you give harbour to the wild boar of the wood, but you find little room for the Lord of the vineyard; he looks at your branches, and lo, they are covered with the moss of carelessness, and at your root the ground is overrun with evil weeds of pride and self-seeking. What more could he do than he has done to you? What more of goodness could he show you? Oh, fear and tremble lest you give him nought where he has given so much, rendering no interest on your talents, no return for the outlay of his mercy.

Once again, there is another fear, We should fear the Lord and his goodness with the fear of resignation. You remember Job, noble Job. He was once very rich and increased in goods; God had been very good to him for many years, both in spirituals and temporals, and Job loved his God because of his goodness. This love he proved to be genuine, for when the cattle and the camels, and what was worse, his children and his health, were all gone, he said, "What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord." In the hour of the gladness of your spirit, you ought to say within yourself, "Ah! after he has pardoned me, made me his child, and promised me that I shall be with him in heaven for ever, he may do what he will with me. Lord, here am I, do what seemeth good in thy sight. By thy Spirit's help, I will not complain though the bone comes through the skin through long tossing on the bed of Sickness; since thou hast delivered me from hell, what is sickness that I should complain of it? If the wind whistles through my scanty rags, and my table be bare, and my house unfurnished, if I have a Christ on earth and a Christ in heaven to be my portion, then I dare not murmur." Now this is the true fear of God, and if we could always keep in it, how happy should we be! If we were so satisfied that God is good, that we would not believe he could do us an unkind turn, so overjoyed with his spiritual goodness that all else appeared mere dirt and dross, we should honor our Lord more, and be far more blest ourselves.

Thus I have spoken at length upon fearing the Lord and his goodness, taking it as spiritual goodness. Now, for a few minutes, I wish to address myself to believers in Christ who possess much of the goodness of God in providential matters. All the saints are not poor. Lazarus is a child of God on the dunghill, but Joseph of Arimathea is no less beloved, though he hath great riches. Many were converted to God from the poorest classes in the apostles' days, but the Ethiopian eunuch, who had great possessions, was none the less a genuine disciple. Now, there are some of you whom God has always prospered in your business, who have a healthy family growing up around you, while you enjoy excellent bodily health — indeed, you have the comforts of this life in profusion. I beseech you above others to fear the Lord for all this goodness. The tendency of prosperity is too often injurious; it is much harder to bear than adversity. As the fining pot to silver, and the furnace to gold, so is prosperity to a Christian man. Many a man will pass through trouble, and praise God under it, who, when he is tried with no trouble, will forget his God, decline in grace, and grow almost a worldling. Believe me, there is no trial so great as no trial, even as an old divine used to say that there was no devil so bad as no devil; there is no state in which a man is in such great danger as when he can see no danger.

"More the treacherous calm I dread

Than tempest howling overhead."

Let me put these few thoughts to you, you who are blessed with temporal goodness. Fear God much more than ever before, lest these temporals should become your God. Money is compared in Scripture to thick clay, because it sticks; and what is more, it sucks a man into itself, Many a man sinks in wealth like a horse in a bog; his possessions suck him under. While your earthly goods are kept under foot, they will do you no hurt, but when they rise as high as your heart., they have begun to bury you alive. While a man carries money in his purse, it is well, especially if the rings are not too tight; but when he carries it in his heart, it is bad, be he who he may; his gold shall eat as doth a canker, and work him infinite mischief. Child of God, need I tell you this? You know better

than to trust in uncertain riches. Well, then, if you worship the golden calf, you will be guilty indeed. Oh, be anxious to fear your God, and not to be an idolater. Fear him more than you ever did at any time of your life before, and in proportion to your prosperity let the depth of your godliness increase.

Fear God and his goodness, again, lest you should undervalue your responsibilities. What you have is none of yours. As far as your fellow men are concerned, your possessions are your own, but as far as your God is concerned you have nothing. You are but a steward; and is it the part of an honest steward to be constantly amassing for himself, and refusing his master his due? Why, if a steward should say, when he pays his master a certain part of his profits, "I have been generous and have given my master so much," is he not a rogue to talk so? All that he makes in a year, since he is but a steward, belongs to his master, and it is not generosity in his case to render it up. O believers, all that you have belongs to him who bought you with his blood. I pray you ask grace that you may not accumulate sin as you increase your wealth. There is awful sin resting somewhere in the church. I know some Christians who are giving to God's cause beyond their means, and others fully up to their proportion, and yet there are souls perishing by tens of thousands because they have not the gospel, and they might hear the gospel within a week if we had the pecuniary means of sending it to them; we have the men waiting, but not the means to support them. There are heathen nations in darkness ready to receive the gospel — providence has opened the door, but there is a lack of funds for entering the door. Now, I believe there is no lack of funds whatever among the whole body of professors, but the gold gets into the hands of certain pretenders to religion who are base hypocrites, since they profess to be wholly Christ's, but their actions belie them; they do no more than others, and what is done is rather to get their names in the subscription lists and not to be thought mean, than with a single eye to God's glory. It is a sad thing it should be so, for we ought never to give to receive honor of man, but out of love to God and God alone. The more you have, the more responsibility you have; get grace, then, to know and feel your responsibility, and ask for more grace as your talents increase, that you may be honest with your God.

Thirdly, fear God and his goodness, lest he turn his hand and make you poor. How soon can he dry the springs and send a drought upon you! He can send seven years of famine to eat up all the years of plenty. If he should do so to you who serve him so miserably, how you will wish that you had served him when you had the opportunity. God never leaves his people, but he often chastises them; and I do not doubt that many a man is brought down in the world because God tried him in other circumstances, but he was not faithful. "Ah," saith the Master, "he is no good steward, and I will not trust him any more." I should not wonder but that many of you might have been rich, but when in prosperity you did not give in proportion, and the Lord said, "I will not put my talents out to so bad a servant." Is it not often so, that when Christian men have given away their wealth in shovelfuls, God has given it back to them in wagon loads? "There was a man," said Bunyan, "and some did count him mad, the more he gave away the more he had." Let all wealthy Christians remember that he who gives them prosperity to-day may give them adversity tomorrow, and therefore with holy fear let them adore their God while they have the opportunity of serving him.

You should fear the Lord now, especially while you have your children about you, and you are in health, because you will have to leave all these things very soon. They may leave you, but certainly you will have to leave them. Oh, set loose by worldly comforts I enjoy them as though you had them not; take them, and say as you receive them, "These are but passing, fleeting things. Embrace not such deceptive clouds, look not on these as your rest, but as slight refreshments on the way to your eternal home.

Beloved, fear God and his goodness, because he is better than all his gifts of providence. Let him give you a fair house, and a goodly estate, let him plant you among the rich and the noble, let him bestow on you good health and cheerful spirits, let him give you a numerous and happy family, let him cause his candle to shine upon you, still he is better than all this. All these put together could not fill a hungry soul. God alone can satisfy a true heart. You have him, and having him you have more than all the rest can contribute to you; therefore, fear him and fear his goodness. This is a lesson for the prosperous people of God to learn.

II. May the Holy Spirit help us to say a few solemn words to Such As Are Not God's People, but remain enemies to God, careless, and yet prosperous.

God has been very good to you; he has spared your lives, that is something. You might have been in hell, you ought to have been there; if justice had had its due you would have been there. You have oftentimes provoked God. You could not bear to be teased ten minutes, and yet you have vexed your God these forty years with your sins, your negligences, your despisings of his Sabbath, of his word, of his Christ. You have put your finger, as it were, into the very eye of God in speaking ill of his gospel, perhaps in ridiculing those truths in which his honor is most concerned, and yet you have been spared! You have been not only spared, but have been surrounded with the comforts of this life. I speak to many here who are not among the poorest and the neediest: you have received many comforts; in fact, you have all that heart could wish, except the one thing needful. God has dealt very graciously with you indeed. Now hear a message from God to you. Will you not fear him and serve him out of gratitude? Is it not unjust to receive so much and to give nothing in return, no love, no thanks, no service? If you make a tool you make it for your own use, and expect some benefit from it. God has made you for his own glory, and yet he has had no glory out of you. If you keep any animal on your farm you expect service, and yet God has kept you, and you have rendered him no return. Do you not feel ashamed that so good a God should be so ill repaid? I know you have so much manliness about you, that you would feel very hurt if any

friend who had rendered you a kindness should accuse you of being ungrateful. You have always felt through life that ingratitude is one of the vilest of vices, and that it lowers him below a brute, since the brute has a kindness for those that do it a kindness. The dog will fawn in return if you fondle it; the ox knoweth its owner, and "the ass its master's crib;" and you would despise yourself to be worse than they; and yet you are so if you fear not God who has treated you so well. Let me say to you, wherefore will you not serve him? Is there anything that you can set off against his kindness to you? Do you suspect him of any sinister motive? If so, your gratitude might be withheld. Do you suppose that divine goodness does not lay you under any obligation? Surely you cannot be so foolish. Well, then, if indeed God has for long years of remarkable goodness had from you no recompense but neglect, shall it always be so? Is there not an invincible power in tenderness? The old fable tells as of the sun and the wind which strove to see which could first remove the traveler's cloak, The wind blustered, but the traveler only wrapped his cloak more tightly about him, but when the sun shone warm and soft upon his head, the traveler speedily east off his cloak. If God had dealt roughly with you, I should not have wondered if you had said, "I will not serve him;" but after his being so kind to you, off with that cloak of indifference, and be his servant. Will not the warmth of God's love thaw your soul? The chilling frost of threatenings might have hardened you into a rock of ice, but this sunshine of prosperity which the Lord has given you, will it not melt you, will it not bring you to Jesus? God grant that it may be so with many in this house, new and evermore.

Ought you not also, brethren, to fear God out of hope? If he has dealt so exceedingly well with you in temporals, though you have not feared him, have you not every reason to expect that he will do as well for you in spirituals? You call at a friend's house — you are riding on horseback; he takes your horse into the stable, and is remarkably attentive to it — the creature is well groomed, well housed, well fed; you are not at all afraid that you will be shut out, there is surely a warm place in the parlor for the rider, where the horse is so well attended to in the stable. Now, your body, which I might liken to the horse, has had its temporal prosperity in abundance, and surely the Lord will take care of your soul if you seek his face I Let your prayer be, "My God, my Father, be my guide. Since thou hast dealt so well with me in these external matters, give me grace within my heart, give me the true riches, give me to love thy Son and trust in him to be henceforth thy child. Thou hast given me the nether springs, give me to drink of the upper springs. I have the blessings which thou givest to the ungodly, O give me the blessings of the godly, the peculiar heritage of thy saints!" O Holy Spirit, constrain many thus to hope and pray.

Should you not, again, fear the Lord and his goodness out of great admiration? for how well, how kindly, how strangely well has he dealt with you. You could not have been patient with any one who had plagued you such a length of time, and yet God has been so with you. I have sometimes thought as I have read the story of the dying Savior, that even if Jesus Christ had never lived and died for me, if I had no part in his precious blood, I must still love him because of his love to other people. He is so good, and so kind, that were I lost myself, I must admire the loving Savior. Do you not admire what you' have seen of God's kindness to you, and do not you feel that such a God and such a Christ should have your heart?

Lastly, let me say you may well fear God out of apprehension concerning his goodness, for the goodness which he now renders to you will pass away ere long. All the temporal mercy of God is but like a land-flood, but the surface water, you have not touched the great springs which cannot be dried up. The great deeps belong only to believers, theirs is the fountain of Jacob which never can be exhausted; your comforts are but the surface waters, and will be gone: what will you do then when you have only the goodness of God to think of, to leave a bitterness upon the memory because you loved not God for his kindness when you had it? Remember, if God's kindnesses do not bring you to repentance, he will deal with you in another way. The axe of the Roman lictors was bound up in a bundle of rods, and the bundle was tied together with knotted cords, and the reason was this, when the judge examined the prisoner, then the lictors began to undo the cords knot by knot, waiting to see if there was any hope that the prisoner might escape; if there was any repentance that might permit the scourging to be put away, they gave space for it; if not, when the cords were unbound, then the rods were used, and if the culprit turned out to be a greater offender still, then came the axe, but only as a last resource. So the Lord hitherto has treated you with great mercy, he has not untied the knots yet, but the angel of justice is beginning to untie them. There is trouble for you in store except you turn and repent; there will come first one rod — sickness to the child; another — loss in business, sickness to yourself, death to your wife — more rods. I have seen this in observing God's hand in many, and if all the rods bring you not to repentance, then the axe remains to be used last. Woe to that man whom neither goodness nor severity can move; whom neither lovingkindness could draw, nor justice drive. For such a man there remaineth nothing but to be cast away for ever from God whom he would not love, from Christ whom he would not accept, from mercy which he despised, from love which he rejected. O let it not be so with you! I feel this morning as if my tongue were tied, comparatively, contrasted with the way in which I want to speak to you young people who at present live in much gaiety and pleasure. It would be such a noble thing, such a just thing, such a fitting thing, if in the heigh-day of your joy you would come to Jesus because God's mercies draw you. O say in your hearts, "My Lord, thou hast shone on me, and I, like the flower, will open to thee, and pour out the love of my heart like sweet perfume. Thou hast kept me from poverty and from sickness, thou hast preserved me from many of the ills of life; here then thy lamb for whom thou hast tempered the wind, comes to thee, and saith, 'Good shepherd, carry me in thy bosom, mark me with the red mark of thy blood, take me into thy flock.'

'Dissolved by thy goodness, I fall to the ground, And weep to the praise of the mercy I've found.'

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Hosea 4:17: Let Him Alone

NO. 1140

DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone.” — Hosea 4:17.

TO what purpose these vast assemblies Sabbath after Sabbath? Why crowd ye these aisles and galleries till every seat is occupied, and every foot of standing room is filled? Have ye all of you a zeal to worship? Do ye all thirst to hear the word of the Lord? Ah me! I am beset with fears and misgivings. My heart is troubled for full many of you. Many persons entertain the evil notion that preaching sermons and hearing sermons is a light matter. When the occasion is past, the exhortation closed, the congregations broken up and the Sunday over, they think that all is done and ended. The doors are shut, and what they have heard they no longer heed any more than if they had been at the playhouse, and the curtain had fallen, and the lights were out. To them the Sabbath is but as another day, and the preacher but an orator who helps them to while away an hour. But it is not so. Whether we look for a result from the proclamation of God's word or not, be ye sure God looks for it. No man in his senses sows a field without looking for a harvest. No man engages in trade without expecting profit. Oh, sirs! God is not mocked. He does not send his word that it may return unto him void; neither does he think that it is enough when his servants have been as those who make pleasant music, or sing a sweet song, though the audience may repair to the sanctuary as they would go to a theater, content to be pleased and careless about being profited. Hear ye, then, this solemn lesson. For every Sabbath day that I occupy this place I shall have to give an account before God. My fidelity to my congregation is of such solemn moment that were it not for the infinite mercy of God in Christ Jesus, I feel it had been better for me that I had never been born, than to have to render in that account. Oh, the faults of which I am myself personally conscious! they fill me with shame, though they are, I fear, but few compared with what God himself beholds in the service I attempt to render. But, then, you also will have to answer every sermon you have heard or may yet hear. Dare any of you imagine that an opportunity of hearing the gospel is given to you that you may tread it under foot? Oh, what would dying men give to hear the gospel again! What would lost souls in hell give if they could have the opportunities of grace back again! They are priceless beyond all estimate, and, as they are so precious, a strict account will be taken of them. The hearer who went his way and said, “I heard the sermon, and I formed a judgment of the preacher's style,” and flippantly quoted tills or that, will find that another view of the service has been taken by Almighty God, and another form of reckoning will be carried out before his judgment seat. Do you suppose that the preaching of the gospel is no more than the performance of a play? Or shall men come and listen to the truth as it is in Jesus, preached earnestly to them, with less concern than to an orator in Parliament? Are death and judgment, heaven and hell, to be looked upon as common themes, which awaken nothing but a passing interest? You may judge so if you will; but neither do God's servants dare to think so, nor does God himself so think. The text suggests these enquiries. It appears that the Ephraimites, or rather the whole people of Israel, the ten tribes, had been warned again and again and again, and because they did not turn at the warning-, but refused the message of God, and continued in their sin, at last God was provoked with them, and he said to his servants, “Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone — no longer waste your powers on careless minds. On such a rock as that it is vain to plough. The case is become utterly hopeless, cease your labor. Go somewhere else where your hallowed occupation will be more remunerative, where hearts will be touched, and ears will be opened to the word. Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone.”

Fearing lest there may be some in this congregation — nay, being persuaded that there are some on the verge of being such, I shall try to speak, first, upon the sin which provoked this punishment, then upon the strange punishment itself; and thirdly, upon such practical reasoning as arises out of the whole subject.

I. What Then, Is The Sin Which Provokes This Utterance, “Let that man alone”?

The sin appeared to be, in Ephraim's case, continuance in idolatry. Israel had set up idols. They knew the Lord; but when they separated from the tribe of Judah, Jeroboam, in order to keep them from going up to Jerusalem, set up the golden calves. It was not intended that they should worship other gods, but the theory was, that they would worship God, the true God, through the representation of an ox, which represented power. It was a symbol which they conceived to be appropriate and instructive, just as they tell us now-a-days, “We do not want people to worship idols, but they are to worship Christ through a representation of a cross, or of a man hanging on a crucifix; this will teach them and assist their devotions. They are not to worship the image itself, but to worship God through this image. Now, be it never forgotten that this method of devotion is expressly forbidden in the law, and is contrary to one of the ten commands. “Thou shalt not make to thyself any graven image, nor the likeness of anything which

is in heaven above, or in the earth beneath, or in the water under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down to them nor worship them.” This command was disregarded, and the ten tribes became practically the representatives of the Papist or Ritualist of the present day. They worshipped God through images, and after a while they went further (as this kind of superstition always does go further) — they began to set up false gods and goddesses — Baal, Ashtaroth, and the like. Thus at length they went aside altogether from the Most High. Prophet after prophet came and said, “If you do this you will be visited with judgments for it. The Lord our God is a jealous God, and can only be worshipped in the manner which he has himself ordained. If you essay to worship him in these new-fangled ways, with these devices and superstitious ordinances of your own, he will be wroth with you, and will smite you.” They listened not to these prophets. Even Elijah, that mightiest of God’s messengers, gained but a slender hearing from them. Elisha, his successor, was equally disregarded. Servant after servant of God’s household came to them and admonished them in the name of the Lord. It was all to no purpose. They despised the message, persecuted those who delivered it, and in the sequel put many of them to evil deaths. So at last the Lord said, “They are bound to their idols; they cling and cleave to them with a morbid infatuation. Their heart is callous, their purpose stubborn, they will never give them up; let my servants, therefore, return and refrain themselves, and go no more to them. Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone.” I fear the like judgment will come upon the Ritualists of our time, but I prefer to deal rather with you who hear me this day. To you, also, this bitter foreboding is addressed, or ever your ears are deaf to counsel and your conscience numb to reproof. Any vice deliberately harboured, any one sin persistently indulged, may bring about this fearful result. God will speak of you, then, not as an erring creature whom it is possible to reclaim, but as a wretched outcast whom it is necessary to abandon. A man may be overtaken with a fault. If he has been guilty of drunkenness his conscience rebukes him. Falling into that sin once or twice, he has felt (as well he may) that he has been degraded by it. Let that man continue — and I might especially say, “Let that woman continue” (for the common use or the constant abuse of intoxicating drinks exerts its baneful spell over both sexes) — let any one continue to violate the laws of sobriety, and ere long that sin will become a rooted habit. Then conscience will cease to accuse, and God will practically say, “Ephraim is given to his cups: let him alone!” Or let a man begin some practice of fraud in his business. At first it will trouble him: he will feel uneasy. By-and-by his systematic dishonesty will bring him no compunction. He will become so familiar with crime that he will call it custom, and wonder how ever he could have been so chicken-hearted as to feel any trouble about it at all. God will let him alone, and leave him to eat the fruit of his own ways. He is given to his sin, and his sin will bind him with iron chains and hold him a captive. I cannot, of course, pick out the special sin of any here present, but whatever your sin is, you are warned against it. Your conscience tells you it is wrong. If you persevere in it, it may come to be your eternal ruin. God will say, “The man is joined unto idols: let him alone!” Continuance in sin provokes sentence; especially when that continuance in sin is perpetrated in the teeth of many admonitions. A person who continues in sin, unwarned, may, comparatively, have but little fault, compared with another who is frequently and faithfully rebuked. The child who in his early sinfulness was affectionately admonished by a gracious mother, who felt the hot drops of her tears fall on his brow, because his offense had grieved her, the child who was again and again admonished, when he had grown somewhat older, by a faithful father, but laughed to scorn paternal teaching and went further and further astray, does not sin at all so cheaply as the Arab of the streets, who has been poisoned by bad example from his youth up. Some of you who have sat under the sound of the gospel, where the word is preached in awful earnestness, will sin ten times more grievously if you despise the exhortations of the Lord, than those whose Sabbaths were wasted by listening to sermons which never touched their conscience, and never were intended to do other than lull the moral sense and charm the taste. You, young man, cannot have been warned as you have been of late by that kind friend, you cannot have been admonished as you have been lately by that book you have been reading, which has deeply impressed you, you cannot have been impressed as you have recently been by the example, and especially by the dying words, of your departed sister, and then go on as you used to do, without incurring sevenfold guilt. Continuance in sin after admonition is that which provokes God to say, “He is joined to his idols: let him alone.”

Remember, too, that where a man becomes guilty of despising the chastisements of God, and perseveres in his wickedness after having suffered for it, there again the guilt assumes a double dye. For instance, the sailor has been profane, a common swearer, and at whatever port he has touched he has spent his time in riotous living. But the other day he was at sea in a tremendous storm, and then he cried unto God. He escaped, as it were, by the skin of his teeth, and while he was being saved from impending death, his heart trembled on account of his guilt. Now, if that man, after being saved from shipwreck, goes back to blasphemy and debauchery again, there will be sharp reckoning with him. That soldier who has been in the hospital, laid aside by sickness brought on by his own folly, who, after his life was despaired of, has nevertheless recovered, if he shall return like a dog to his vomit, every sin that he will commit will count for many times as much as those sins he rebelled in before that warning. That young man who left his father’s house in the country, where he had been trained to virtue, and came to London, and plunged into its whirlpool of vice, but who in the infinite mercy of God has been snatched like a brand from the burning for a while, and is able again to come up to worship with God’s people — if he should go back, like the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire, woe be unto him! It may be that he will never have God’s rod to make him smart again. The rod will be put up, and the axe of justice will be used ere long. You know how the Roman lictors, as they went through the street with the consul, carried a bundle of rods, and when a culprit was brought before the consul, he would say sometimes, “Let him be smitten with rods,” and they began to unbind the bundle. It was a rule that the “fascēs,” as they were called, should be tightly bound, so that it would take a long time to unbind them. This was to give time for the criminal to make confession, or to plead something as a mitigating circumstance. Sometimes, where the case

was one of treason, which perhaps the culprit repented and confessed, he would be forgiven. They would be for a while untying the knots, and the consul would look the man in the face, to see if there were any signs of relenting, or if he were altogether stubborn. Then when the rods were unbound, it was a good thing for the criminal if the lictors began to smite him with the rods, because that might be a token that he was not to die; but if the rods were laid aside, and the axe brought forth, then it was known that he must die. So God has smitten you in mercy. Fever and disease have been God's lictors that have used the rods upon you. By-and-by he will say, "Let him alone," because he is reserving you for the axe of future and inevitable doom. Oh, sirs, the Lord knows all your hearts. Where are you? I may be speaking right into the face of some of you who have endured many afflictions, and been brought low by poverty and want, or by disease and sickness, so that you have come to death's door; and all this has been the milder chastisement of God, by which he has been saying to you, "My child, do not destroy yourself!" It has been the hand of mercy put upon the bridle of that wild horse of yours, to draw him back, that he may not leap with you over the precipice; but if you spur him on in defiance of the hand of mercy, you will be permitted to take the leap to your own destruction, for God may say, "He is joined to his idols: let him alone."

Once again. This punishment may be brought, and generally is brought, upon men when they have done distinct violence to their conscience. Before sin has come to its worst, there is a great deal of struggling in men's minds. Conscience will not be quiet; it cries out against the maltreatment which it suffers from ungodly lives. Many a young man, especially if he has been well brought up, and many a young woman, too, if she has been trained in religious ways, will have times in which they are pulled up short, and it comes to this: "I have been wrong; if I go further in this wrong I shall suffer for it. There is a way of grace; I see the door of mercy open to me." They have stood halting, as if a hand had been laid on their shoulder, and they have felt as though they were turned from the wrong and drawn into the right way. But they have fought against mercy, and the evil spirit has set before them all the sparkle of fleshly lust and worldly pleasure, and at last, with a desperate effort, they have dragged themselves away to their sins again. Now, the next time they do that they will not suffer half the compunction, and the next time they will have less still, for every time conscience is violated it becomes less vigorous, and is more easily tranquillized. I recollect an earnest Christian man telling me how before conversion he used to spend his nights in shameful ways, and frequently would be in the streets — though the son of a most respectable man — in a state of half intoxication. As he stood under a lamp one night, with his brain confused and his mind bewildered, he put his hand into his pocket and took out a letter. By some strange impulse he was induced to begin to read it. It was a tender appeal from a loving, pious sister. Unwonted reflections cast their shadows across his breast. Taking counsel with himself he thought, "Well, what is it to be?" He was sober enough even then to feel as if he had come to a point. Revolving the matter, and deliberating upon it, it pleased God to lead him to put that letter back into his pocket, and say, "I will go home, and I will seek my sister's God." That resolution proved to be the first step to his conversion: —

"He left the hateful ways of sin,

Turned to the fold and entered in."

Ever afterwards he came to regard this as the crisis of his soul's history. He said to me, "If that night I had gone elsewhere, and God's Spirit had not graciously led me there and then to something like decision, it may be that it would have been the very last time my conscience ever would have troubled me, and I should have gone headlong to destruction." I wonder whether such a time as that may have come to some of my hearers! If it be so, O Eternal Spirit, throw in the weight of thine omnipotent influence to decide the will of man for that which is good and right, and let not evil win the day. Do you not see in the pictures I have drawn, and the descriptions I have given, some delineation of that aggravated guilt which provokes the withering blast of incensed mercy turned into wrath, which wails forth the woe of my text, "Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone"?

II. Now, let me crave your earnest attention to The Singular Punishment — "Let him alone."

Is there anything in this to excite our surprise? The calamity is so dire that we may well shudder at it; but the sentence is so just, and the issue so reasonable, that we can only acknowledge it to be such as might have been expected. What can be more natural? There is a piece of ground. Last year it was manured, and it was sown with good seed, but nothing has come on upon it. The year before the like pains were bestowed upon it. They trenched it, and it has been thoroughly drained. There could not have been better seed cast upon it than has been used. Yet nothing grew last year; no harvest rewarded the labourer's toil. Year-after year its hopeless barrenness has vexed the husbandman's soul. Farmer, what will you do this year? "Do," says he; "why, do nothing! What can be done with it? Let it alone." Is he not right in his verdict? Here is a man grievously sick; the doctor called upon him, but they shut the door in his face; he called again, and he gained access to the patient, and the patient cursed him. He called again, and gave him a prescription, but he took up the prescription and tore it in pieces, and flung it away. What do you mean to do, doctor? "What can I do?" says he. "I must let him alone! What can I do? My services are rejected. I am treated with insult! What more remains to me?" And here is a sinner in danger of being lost. The Lord says to him, "Behold my Son! I have anointed him to be a Savior. If you trust him he will save you." This counsel is despised, it is thought nothing of, forgotten, neglected, put off, in some cases scoffed at, made a matter of ridicule, treated with hatred; and perhaps the deliverer of the message is made the subject of persecution. What will God say? Why, "That is a case in which I will let him alone! I sent his mother to him when he was a child, I

sent his Sunday-school teacher to him, I sent a godly friend to him; I have sent my servant, the minister, to him, times out of mind, I have put good books in his way scores of times. It is all in vain! "Brethren, is there anything that can be more reasonable or more just than for God on his part to say, "Let him alone"? The tree never has brought forth any fruit! what need to waste any more time upon it? It seems meet on God's part that he should say, "Let him alone." Judge ye if it be not so!

Well, but what happens when a man is thus let alone? Why, he is as a great many people would like to be. Liberty is given him; nay, let me collect myself, he takes license to pursue his own course, he is no more "pestered and bothered about religion; "he is no more fretted and worried in his conscience about duties and obligations. God's people begin to let him alone, for, if they speak to him, he only growls at them and returns an answer which grieves them at the heart; so they keep out of his way, or if they do speak to him, their word, though given in earnest, is taken in jest; like water on a slab of marble, the warning does not penetrate the surface or affect his heart. He has got out of the way of being impressed. Now he has no mother to trouble him; she has long slept under the green award. He has no poor old father now to talk to him about his sins; he has long been carried to heaven. No minister disturbs him now, for he gives the servant of God a wide berth and keeps clear of him. No books come in his way that can at all alarm him; he will not open them if they do. Give him the Sunday newspaper, that is enough for him; give him a book of science, or something that has to do with this time state; having put his faith in infidelity he fortifies his heart against fear, he takes care not to trouble himself about religion. No qualms or questioning, no doubts or disputes disturb him; no fierce temptations or fiery trials distract his peace. Everything seems to go merrily and smoothly with him. He is the man to make money; he is the jolly fellow that can indulge in sin with impunity, put his hand into the fire and take it out again without being hurt, where another would be badly burnt. He seems to wear a charmed life. God has said, "Let him alone!" Those about him envy him: but if they knew! if they knew! if they knew that God had "set him in slippery places," and that "his foot will slide in due time," they would no more envy him his prosperity and peace than they would envy the bullock that is fattening for the Christmas show, or the full-fleshed sheep that is driven to the shambles. His end is destruction. Perhaps I am speaking to some who are wrapping themselves up quite complacently in the idea that the lines have fallen to them in pleasant places, that fortune smiles on them, and their reputation is in the ascendant; they would not wish to have their course altered, and yet the terrible sentence has gone out against them, "Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone." O men, I pity you from my Soul, but I fear you will ridicule my sympathy. Alas! alas! I can but mourn in secret, for I see that your day is coming.

I have shown you, then, what it is to be let alone by God. Do you ask, now, What is the general result of it? Why, let me tell you, for the most part it leads the man into greater sin than he had ever committed before; it leads him to become more defiant and more boastful than aforetime. Very frequently he becomes a scoffer and a skeptic; and not infrequently he becomes intolerant to the poor, and a persecutor of those who fear the Lord and observe his ordinances. Restraints are taken off from him; those moral obligations which curbed him, and that respect for public opinion which induced him to practice a little decency, he has renounced; they are clean gone. Vain conceits fill the place of virtuous counsels. He violated conscience, and conscience has left him; he wearied out those who rebuked him, and they have ceased to reprove him, or if they rebuke him he turns a deaf ear to their admonitions; he has become like the adder that cannot, and will not, hear the wisest charmer. So the man goes from bad to worse, still with the full conceit that he is amongst the happiest and most highly favored of mortals.

But here is the evil of it! The dreadful sound is in my ears. God has said to all the agents that might do that man good, "Let him alone! "But wait a while; he will not say that to the agents which can do him harm. He has not said to the Devil, "Let him alone!" He will not say to Death, "Let him alone!" He will not say to Judgment, "Let him alone!" nor will he say to the names of hell, "Let him alone!" He will not say to infinite misery, "Let him alone!" On the contrary, he will let loose all the destroying angels against him, and the man who was let alone in sin shall not be let alone in punishment. I cannot speak of this as I could wish. These are things to be thought of and weighed in the soul; and I pray that you may so weigh them that, if you have fallen into a state of indifference, you may be aroused out of it, and resolve that it shall not be so any longer. Oh, that you would cry out in terror, "God helping me, I will not be one of those of whom God shall say, 'Let him alone!'"

III. There Are Some Practical Inferences From This Very Sad Subject, to which I must now draw your attention.

It becomes the preacher, so long as he does not know the individual — and this he never can know — to whom God has said, "Let him alone!" to try and use the utmost endeavor to arouse every careless and indifferent man within his reach. I pray the Spirit of God to help me while I try to do so. Some of you are living in this world entirely for your own pleasure or your own gain. I do not deny either that it is right that you should seek gain, or that it is natural that you should desire pleasure; neither do I think that attention to the things of God will deprive you of any gain that is worth having, or of any pleasure that is desirable; but the sad thing is that many of you are living as if there were no hereafter. Now, do you really believe that there is no future in reserve for you? Because, if you are quite persuaded that you are no better than a dog, if you are quite certain that you are nothing but an animal, and that in due time, when you die, and the worms eat you, there will be an end of you — why, sirs, if I were of the same mind I should have but little to say to you. I should wish you to be as virtuous as may be in this life, for that is the best way to be happy yourself and to benefit the community; but I do not know that this is any particular business of mine — I would leave that matter to the policeman and the magistrate. But do you really suppose that you have no higher origin than the flesh, and no further destiny

than to mingle your dust with the mould of the earth? Would you like me to speak to you as to a dog? Would you like anybody to treat you as a dog? Being, as you say, only a dog, why should you not be treated as such? Can you in your heart of hearts really believe that the cemetery, and the shroud, and the sexton's spade will be the last of you? You do not believe it: you cannot believe it. You may try to persuade yourself that the terrors of judgment to come are merely bugbears of the imagination; but there is something within you, an irrepressible consciousness of immortality, which tells you you will live after death. God has fixed the conviction of a future state as a kind of instinct in men, so that where the gospel has never come, a future state has been conjectured, though for the most part but dimly inferred rather than distinctly expected. There has scarcely been a heathen tribe so abject but they have had glimmerings of the fact that there is another state after death. Well, my dear sir, I cannot conceive that you have degraded yourself into the notion that you are a beast — at any rate, I will not allow myself to think that you are a beast. You will live somewhere or other after your present career is closed. Does it not stand to reason that if you have lived entirely for self there must be a reckoning with you? Somebody made you! God made you! If you keep a horse or a cow you expect some service of it, and, if God made you, he must expect you to render him some service. But you have rendered him none. Though he has winked at your disobedience in this life, do you think he will always wink at it? Well, if you do think so, you are grossly mistaken: for, as the Lord liveth, there is a day of judgment coming, when the Lord Jesus Christ shall descend from heaven with a shout, and all the dead shall rise out of their graves, and all the living shall appear before his great white throne. You will as certainly be there as you are here. And when you are there, you will discover that every secret thought of yours has been written down against you, and will be read out and published before mankind, and there and then for every idle word you have spoken you will be brought into judgment. Can you think of this as possible, even though you may not admit that it is certain, and can you yet remain callous, indifferent, unconcerned? Is there not a something in your heart that says, "If this be so, it is terrible — it is terrible for me! What must I do to be saved?" "I am bound to answer you (and cheerfully do I answer you), "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Whosoever thou mayest be, however far thou mayest have gone astray, trust Jesus, dying and bleeding for sinful men, and now gone into the highest heavens to plead at the right hand of the infinite Majesty — trust Jesus, and you shall live. But if you have not Christ to put away your sin, to espouse your cause, and to plead for you in that last great day, as surely as you live, whether you believe it or not, this is true, the Judge will say, "Depart from me ye cursed, into everlasting fire in hell, prepared for the devil and his angels." And that may happen to you within much less time than you dream. Not many Monday nights ago, there came a beloved Christian sister here, who joined with us in prayer, she was taken ill, she did not leave this house conscious, she was taken home with death upon her, her disease proved to be past human aid, and in an hour or two she died. I hope there will never be another death in this Tabernacle, but more than once individuals have been thus called away from our very midst. Ere this congregation shall have broken up, some of you may have gone to the world of spirits. In all probability within this week, some one of you will be summoned before the Great Judge. If it is you, sir, or if it is you, good woman, are you ready? Are you ready? Do you feel no trouble about that question? Then methinks you may be among those whom God has given up. But if the question rings through your soul like a knell, and cuts like a sharp knife, then I pray you do not think God has given you up; and do not give yourself up, but fly to Jesus. Ay, ere you lay your head upon the pillow and fall asleep, cry mightily unto the living God to save you, so that you may be his in the day when the earth and the heavens will be in a blaze, and ungodly men will sink into perdition. That is the first practical inference — it is the preacher's duty to continue to warn men.

Another practical thought is — if any of you be aroused, do be obedient to the voice of conscience and the calling of the Spirit. Oh, if you have any life, do not attempt to stifle it! rather fan it to a flame! If you do but feel a little of the pain of penitence, pray God that it may deepen into true contrition and sincere repentance. If you feel anything, do not, I pray you, repress the feeling, if it is anything of a spiritual kind. I knew when I was seeking the Lord what it was to feel that. I would have given everything I had to be able to repent; when on my knees I felt that if I could but have shed a tear for sin, I would have been willing to be poor and blind my whole life long. To have a hard heart is an awful thing! It is well, however, when it can relent, and when the man can smite upon his bosom, with tears, and sobs, and groans, and cry, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" "If there is any tenderness in you, oh, do not crush it out! do not despise it; look well to it, and, above all, fly away to Christ at once. With many a man it is "now or never." Whenever you hear the clock tick, this is what it says to you, "Now or never," "Now or never," "Now or never," "Now or never." Ah, if some would hear that, it might be the means of driving them to the cross of Christ at once, where they would find eternal life. Dear young people especially, do not postpone the thought of eternal things while you are young and tender. Do not say, "When I have a more convenient season I will send for thee."

"'Tis easier work when we begin

To serve the Lord betimes."

Where grace comes into the heart while the heart is yet young and tender, there is less struggling against it in most cases, and it is a more cheerful task for the soul to submit itself to the power of Christ. The Lord bless that thought to you, and make it a converting power to your souls.

And, last of all, if there should be an unhappy individual here who says, "I believe God has given me up" — let me ask thee a

question, friend. Does the suggestion of such a thing make you very sad? Then the Lord has not given you up. Do you say, "I feel alarmed lest I am given up"? Then you are not given up. He is more likely to be given up of God who says, "I do not care whether I am or not! Give me my jolly companions, give me my amusements, give me plenty of money to spend, and good health and strength to enjoy myself, and you may have heaven if you like; I will run the risk of the future." Ah, sir, though you talk big, I do not believe in your bravado, for I know that many braggadocio sinners are cowards at bottom, and I hope, notwithstanding what you say, there is something in you that answers to the appeals I have made. But there may be some who really mean down deep in their souls that they have steeled themselves against reproof, and are prepared to dare all consequences. They stand like oaks I have seen shivered from top to bottom by lightning, never to send forth a shoot again. Ghastly and grim amidst the forest they lift up their heads as though they were huge deer with antlers, glorying in their desolation. There are such withered souls, defiant in awful desperation. Oh I if there are such here, if they were friends of mine I would say, "O man, be in pain and travail like a woman with child rather than be damned! O man, better for thee that thou shouldst from this moment begin a life of torment and agony, and never look up to God's sun again, and never see the fields, nor hear the birds sing with joy, nor ever have a hopeful thought of this world again, so that thou mayest but be saved, rather than go on with all thy mirth and jollity, and then lift up thine eyes in that eternity to come, where thou shalt be for ever, for ever, for ever lost; for, let those say what they will, who are the enemies of your soul — I speak the truth before the Lord — if you are lost, you will be lost for ever; and if God once pronounces that word, "Depart, ye cursed!" back to him you can never come, but departing, and departing, and departing into blacker night, and into denser glooms you must for ever and for ever continue. This is the dread inscription over the gate of hell:

"All hope abandon, ye who enter here!"

This is branded on their chains, and stamped upon their fetters; this is the worm that never dieth, and the fire that never can be quenched. The letters of fire that burn overhead in the dungeon of eternal despair spell out this word, "Eternity! eternity! eternity!" O my fellow men, as I shall meet you at the judgment seat, I implore you to fly away to Jesus, lest you perish eternally. When your eyes and mine shall meet again in the next state, when we have passed through the grave and the resurrection, do not sag I did not tell you of sin and of punishment, and of the Savior! You will not dare to sag it; but as I, poor guilty sinner as I am, stand there, this shall not be one of the sins laid to my charge, that I was not in earnest with you, and that I did not speak all that I felt to be the truth. To Jesus Christ I fly myself on my own account, for if I be not washed in his blood, unhappiest of mortals surely am I; for I have preached to more men for a larger number of years than any other man, perhaps, that lives; and if I have played with souls, I have their blood upon me, and the most accursed of men am I. But I shelter my soul beneath the purple canopy of my Savior's atoning blood. My hearers, come under that same shelter, all of you. There is room enough for you. That blessed purple covering will hang between us and God, even though there were millions of us, and it will cover all. Nor can there be any fear that the dart of divine vengeance shall smite any one of us who will cower down beneath the blood-red propitiation. God save you, sirs, who are strangers here! God save you, friends, who frequent these courts! God save you all! for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON — Proverbs 1:20-33.

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Hosea 5:13 A Caution For Sin-Sick Souls

NO. 2819

A SERMON INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, FEBRUARY 22ND, 1903,
DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
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"When Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah saw his wound, then went Ephraim to the Assyrian, and sent to King Jareb: yet could he not heal you, nor cure you of your wound." — Hosea 5:13.

There is a tendency, in the heart of man, to want something to look at rather than something to trust to. The children of Israel had God for their King, and a glorious King he was. Where else was there found such impartial justice, such tender compassion for the poor, or such perfect righteousness in every statute that was ordained, and every sentence that was enforce it. But they said, "Nay, let us have a king whom we can see, — a king whose pomp and magnificence shall dazzle our sees, even though he will take our sons to be his bondslaves, and our daughters to be His confectionaries. Let us have a king, that we may see the gaudy glitter of his crown with our eyes, and hear the sovereign mandate from his throne with our ears." God granted there that request.

Their sole allegiance was due to that almighty King whose superlative glory admitted of no natural similitude. The Lord Jehovah

was the God of Israel, a God ever ready to forgive their sins, to hear their prayers, and to seek their welfare. But the children of Israel said, "Not so; let us make a king to judge us, like all the nations: and let us set up gods, after the fashion of the Gentiles, that our hands can handle, and that our eyes can behold let us have blocks of wood and stone. Let us have the carved images of the heathen." Neither would they rest till they had set up for themselves, in every high place, gods that were no gods. For this, the Lord chastised them: He gave up their lands to famine, and their habitations to the spoiler. He brought enemies from far countries to lay them waste, so that the state became sick, and the whole nation impoverished. Then the people of Ephraim opened their eyes, and looked to their condition.

But when Judah saw himself to be wounded, what course did he pursue? There was God waiting to help him when he returned to his allegiance. There was Jehovah ready to heal all his distresses, to give him back all that had been laid waste, and to restore to him everything that the spoiler had taken. But, no! the arm of Jehovah was not enough for Judah; Judah must rely upon a force that could look imposing in its array. "Oh!" said the people, "let us send to the king of Assyria, and let him furnish us with tens of thousands of soldiers, and aid us with his mighty men, so we shall be safe. Thus will our state recover itself." But if they had trusted in God, my brethren, how secure they would have been! Mark what God did for them in the days of Hezekiah. Their enemies came upon them in great numbers; Hezekiah prayed before the Lord. And it came to pass, that night, God sent forth the blast of his nostrils, and their foes were utterly destroyed. When the men of Judah arose early in the morning, "behold, they were all dead corpses!" As often as they trusted in God, they found immediate succor, and their enemies were put to confusion.

But not so was their heart stayed in its confidence. No, they cannot rely upon the unseen arm. They must have men, and men's devices. They must have something they can see. Unless they have the spear, and the sword, and the shield of the Assyrian state, they can feel no sense of security. They went to the Assyrian king, they sent to king Jareb, "yet could he not heal them, nor cure them of their wound." How foolish they were to hope he would, for, as soon as they sent their ambassadors to the king of Assyria, he flattered himself while he spoke to them, "Oh, you want help, do you? I will send you some soldiers to help you." Remember that their houses had been stripped of all the gold and silver they contained to give a present to the king of Assyria. "I will send thy soldiers to help yet" said he to them; and then he whispered to himself, "After they have helped you, they shall help themselves." And so they did. When they had come, and for a little while had fought for the people of Israel, and set them free, then they turned round upon them, and carried them captive, and spoiled them of all they had. This comes of trusting in man. "Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm; but blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is."

Looking at this fallacy of a nation as illustrative of a common tendency of mankind, and using my text as, the picture of a sinner in a certain peculiar state of mental anxiety, I shall observe, first, the sinner's partial discovery of his lost estate; secondly, the wrong means which he takes to be cured of his evil; after which I will endeavor to direct you, as God shall enable me, to the right means of finding healing and deliverance through the atonement and obedience of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I. We have in our text somewhat of A Picture Of The Sinner When He Has Partially Discovered His Lost Estate.

Mark, it is but a partial discovery. Ephraim felt his sickness, but he did not know the radical disease that lurked within. He saw the local ailment, but was — ignorant of the organic derangement of his very vitals. He only perceived the symptoms; he was uneasy, he felt pain; but the discovery did not go deep enough to show him that he was actually dead in trespasses and sins. "He saw his sickness and Judah saw his wound." Yes, he saw his wound; it smarted; and therefore his eye was drawn to the spate. But he did not know how deep it was; he did not know that it had pierced to the heart, that it was, in fact, a death-blow; that the whole head was sick, that the whole heart was faint, and that, from the crown of the head even to the sole of the foot, it was all wounds, and bruises, and putrefying, festering sores. There was but a partial discovery of his lost estate.

How many men there are who have got just far enough to know there is something the matter with them! They little reckon that they are totally ruined, though they do feel that all is not quite right with them. They are conscious that they are not perfect, not even up to their own low standard of rectitude; hence they begin to be uneasy, albeit they still seem to think they can make themselves better, and that by degrees of reformation and daily prayer they will become superior to what they are. They have not yet learned the doctrine of the Fall, the deep depravity of mankind, the total perversion of the human heart; they have, only got so far as some modern ministers, who speak of man as being a little marred, but not entirely broken; as having had a fall, and become somewhat damaged, and rather spoiled as to outward beauty, though not altogether ruined, or incapable of raising himself up, and recovering his strength. In fact, the fashionable phrase that has been recently coined is, "the lapsed state of men." Depend upon it, when men use Latinized words to express their meaning, they do not mean much. The fall of man is full and entire; and when people frame certain, phrases of rather uncertain significance instead of talking honest English, they show a disposition to dispense with the bare facts. I know there are some sinners brought so far as to find themselves undone, and-to feel convinced that, unless some change takes place, they are not fit for the kingdom of heaven. But they have not as yet seen the fountains of the great deep of their depravity broken up; they have not been taken into the chambers of imagery, and shown the abominations of their own hearts. They still cling with some hope to their own devices.

However, I would remark that even this, though it be but a partial discovery of their state by nature, is not without its good effects. When a man gets thus far, the first good sign in him is that he cannot speak against religion. While he is at peace with himself, he calls religious men hypocrites. He can rail at the things of God, and despise and trample them under foot. But the man who is like Ephraim, in our text, will not be very anxious to find fault with others; his philosopher's tongue has been plucked out, and he is now a little more gentle in his speech, as he sighs for something in religion that he would like to have. "Oh!" says he, "I do not now find fault with the good folk who are always praying and singing. Would to God I could become like they are! Would that I had as they have, an interest in the blood of Christ!" So far, so good.

Such men, again, are generally thoughtful. I have known many a man who, before he came into this state, was a very dare devil, and never thought anything with regard to his soul and eternity; yet, when brought to know his sickness and his wounds, he has become not only thoughtful but serious, until some of his former companions have remarked it, and called him "Old Sobersides," or some such epithet, and laughed him out of countenance. They tell him he is a saint. The man says, "I wish what you are saying was true." They tell him, "You are beginning to be religious." "Yes," he says, "I wish I were really so." Some man once called me a saint as I went along the street, and I turned round, and said I wished I could make him prove his words. I would like to be one certainly. Such is the condition of a man when he begins to discover, though it be but partially, his lost estate. He is thoughtful; he cannot laugh as he did; he does not now shut his eyes, and throw the reins upon the neck of his lusts, and let them rush madly on down to the pit; but he tries to curb them, and hold them in with bit and bridle, for he knows that all is not right within him. Such a man, too, has another good trait, another hopeful feature in his case, — that he begins to attend to the things that belong to the peace of his soul. You see him now coming into the house of God be it chapel or church — to hear the Word preached. He never cared for that before. He worked so hard all the week that he was not Sable to go out on a Sunday; but now he feels he must go. He must be by the side of Bethesda's pool. Even though the angel stirs not the water, he feels a kind of satisfaction while he is lying at the edge of the healing pool. He longs to be saved, and therefore he is found in the way, hoping that God may meet with him.

Such a man, too, you will find, takes no pleasure in sin. If he is asked by his worldly companions to go into the haunts of vice, where once he went, even should he go, he Comes away, and says "It was the dullest evening I ever spent; no enjoyment whatever does it yield me. God has turned the sweet wine of my memory into bitter gall. 'Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.' I can find no comfort in sensual pleasures."

Have I been depicting the state of one who is here present? I hope I have, and I pray God that what I shall be able to say will, by the influence of the Holy Spirit be instrumental in leading such an one to the true remedy for his soul-sickness.

II. But when the man is thus partially aroused to know his lost estate, He Usually Betakes Himself To The Wrong Means For Deliverance: "Then went Ephraim to the Assyrian, and sent to king Jareb."

A sinner, when he finds himself lost, usually at First thinks, "I will make myself better, I will be diligent in religious observances — , I will attend to every ceremony, I will keep my tongue from evil, and my life from speaking guile; I will restrain my steps from evil haunts, my hands from evil deeds;" and so he thinks within himself that all his sins will be forgiven, and that he shall have rest for the sole of his foot. Be it known, once for all, that all this is a vain and useless effort to work out a radical cure in the soul of man. All that man can do apart from faith in the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ, is utterly in vain. Let him do his best, and strive to the very uttermost, not one inch has he proceeded on the road to heaven; he hath done mischief instead of doing anything meritorious, he hath pulled down instead of having built up.

O ye that are hoping now, while ye are under conviction, that you will get relief by doings of your own, let me remind you that you are undertaking a long task, which will tax your endurance. The men mentioned in our text went a very long way to the king of Assyria; it was a wearisome journey they took, while God, who was near at hand, was forgotten. How long do you suppose it would take you to work out your own salvation by your own good works? Why, my friends, ye may bend your knees till your joints grow stiff, and ye may work till there is no flesh upon your bones, and ye may weep till there is no moisture in your body from which to draw a tear, and ye may persevere incessantly in every exercise of body and mind, trying fresh postures and trifling with fresh problems; but you will find yourselves not half a league nearer eternal life than when you left the life of sin you used to like.

"Not the labors of my hands

Can fulfill thy law's demands:

Could my zeal no respite know,

Could my tears for ever flow,

All for sin could not atone:

Thou must save and thou alone."

If a criminal should get it into his head that he would climb up to the stars by going up the steps of a treadmill, he would be about as rational as when a poor sinner thinks of getting to heaven by his own good works. Tread, tread, tread; up, up, up; but never one inch higher! As old Matthew Wilks used to say, "You might as well hope to sail to America on a sere leaf as hope to go to heaven by your own doings." This is not the way, man; and run never so fast in it, if it is not the right road, it will not bring you to the right end. If a man takes the road to the rights when he wants to go to the left, he may run as fast as a race horse, he will but lose his labor, and find out that he is a fool for his pains.

And it is not only a very long task, but it is a very expensive one. If you would have salvation by the works of the law, you must give body and soul up, all you have, — hope and joy and comfort included. I used to live near some persons who regularly attended mass early every morning, and I noticed how straight they used to look down the face. I thought they had good reason to be gloomy if they were trying to reach heaven by their own righteousness. It is enough to put any man out of countenance if he has to stand before God, and justify himself. We might put our hands upon our loins, and roll in the dust in despair, if we had no hope but in our own deserts. Go and look for cooling streams in the arid desert, cast about for fresh water to drink in the midst of the sea, seek shelter on the mountain top where the hurricane is spending its fury, and then crave for comfort in the law. Go and visit Sinai, ye that seek to be saved by your own works. Look at it, shrink, tremble, and despair. Behold, the mountain is altogether on a smoke while God proclaims his holy law! If it melted like wax of old, how much more now, after you have broken the commandments, and incurred the penalty, — now that God cometh not to proclaim the law, but to execute his fierce anger upon the law-breakers!

"Well," says one, "but suppose we do our best, will not that suffice?" My friend, God requireth from man, if he would be saved by his works, perfect obedience; nothing but perfection can be acceptable to a perfect God. One wrong thought, one evil desire, not to say anything of one wrong act, will effectually shut any man out of heaven, if he desireth to go there by his own works. That one sin at once puts up an impenetrable barrier across that meritorious way to heaven which is known by the common name of "the law." If thou canst be perfect, and hast kept the precepts from thy youth up, and shalt do so till thy dying day, then might there be salvation by works. But if there be one flaw, then is that road to heaven effectually stopped up, so that no human foot can ever tread it.

And, once more, let me remind thee, O man, when thou triest to be saved by thy works, thou presumest that thy enemy will prove thy friend! "And who is my enemy?" sayest thou. Why, Moses. The law is sworn against thee. It hath become thine enemy, and goest thou to thine enemy to help thee? It is a device of Satan to try and draw poor sinners away from the path of faith into the path of law. Remember how John Bunyan graphically describes it. Poor Christian, with the burden on his back, is going to the wicket-gate with the light above it; and, on a sudden, a very good-looking gentleman meets him, and says, "It is a dangerous journey you are going, you had better turn aside to the right there; there is a town there known as the town of Legality, where lives a very skillful physician who will soon help you off with your burden; and if he is not at home, he has got a very good lad who will do almost as well as his master. Go there, and you will soon get cured." Away went poor Christian; nor had he gone far before he found that he had come to the foot of Mount Sinai, and the mountain hung right over the way, and there stood Christian; and while he was looking up, presently the mountain began to shake, the thunder to roar, and the lightning to flash, and he fell down upon his face, and said, "I am undone, I am undone." Then came Evangelist, and showed him the right way once more. Just so, sinner, if you trust to the works of the law, you will have to cry out, "I am undone, I am undone." Mr. Morality cannot cure you; he may put on a little poor man's plaister, and make your wound worse, and tie it up, and bandage it a little, but he can never relieve your pain, or recover your sore. It will go on bleeding, notwithstanding all the balsams he can apply. No hand can heal a sin-sick soul but the hand that wounded it, even the hand of God, through the person of Jesus Christ our Lord.

It is astonishing, after all the gospel preaching in England, how deeply-rooted is this constant fallacy of going to king Jareb for cure. Not very long ago, having engaged to preach at a seaport town, I arrived some hours before night, and, as I was standing by the river-side, I thought I should like to go down the river in a boat. So, hailing a waterman, I went with him; and, whilst sitting in the boat, wishing to talk with him about religious matter, I began by asking him about his family. He told me that the cholera had visited his place and that he had lost no less than thirteen of his relatives, one after another, by death. So I said, "Have you, my friend, a good hope of heaven if you should die yourself?" "Well, sir," he said, "I think as how I have." "Prey tell me, then," said I, "what is your hope; for, of a good hope no man need ever be ashamed." "Well, sir, I have been on this here river, I think, for these twenty-five or thirty years, and I don't know that anybody ever saw me drunk." "Oh, dear! oh, dear!" I replied, "is that all you trust to?" "Well, sir, when the cholera was about, and my poor neighbors were bad, I went for the doctor for 'em, and was up a good many nights; and I do think as how I am as good as my neighbors." Of course I told him that I was very glad to hear that he had sympathy for the suffering, and that I considered it far better to be charitable than to be churlish, but I did not see how his good conduct could carry him to heaven. "Well, sir," he said, "perhaps it will not. I cannot be often going to church; but I think, when I get a little older, I shall give up the boat, and take to going to church, and then, I think, that will be right, — won't it, sir?" "No," I said, "certainly your resolutions will not renew your heart; and should you ever perform them, they will not purge your soul from its sinfulness. Begin to go to church as soon as possible, but you will not be an inch further, if you think that by attending the sanctuary you will be saved."

The poor man seemed perfectly astounded, while I went on knocking down His hopes one after another. Then I put the question, "You have sometimes sinned is your life, have you not?" "Yes," he said, "I have." "On what ground, then, do you think your sins will be forgiven?" "Well, sir," he said, "I have been sorry about them, and I think they are all gone, — they do not trouble me now." Trying to rouse his conscience, I said, "Suppose you were to go and get into debt with the grocer where you deal, and you should say to her, 'Now, mistress, you have a score against me, I cannot pay for these goods, I am sorry to say; but I'll tell you what I'll do, I'll never get into your debt any more.' Why, she would say that was not the way she did business; and do you suppose that is the way in which God does business, or that he is going to strike out your debts because you say you will not run deeper into debt?" "Well, sir," he said, "I should like to know how my sins are to be forgiven. Are you a parson, sir?" In reply, I said, "I preach the gospel, I hope, but I do not go by the name of a parson; I am only a Dissenting minister." I told him how the Lord Jesus Christ had paid the debts of sinners; how those that reposed in him, and rested in his blood and righteousness, would find peace and mercy; and the man was delighted, and he said he wished he had heard that years ago. "But, to say the truth, master," he added, "I had not felt quite easy, after all, when I saw those poor creatures taken away to the graveyard. I did think there was something I wanted, but I did not know what it was."

I tell you this little personal incident because I see here a great many working people, and I know they delight in a little homely dialogue. It is not what we do or devise, the religious rites we observe, or the romantic aims we aspire to, the self-satisfaction we encourage, or the sufferings we endure, that can lead us to the land of light; not all your probity, however plausible, or your rectitude, however rigid you may be, will carry you to heaven. Your good works are good enough in themselves, good enough in your generation, — but they will never do for a foundation to rest upon. Do not run away, and say something like the foolish man, who went to a place where there was a house being built, and seeing the chimney pots standing there, he took them, and laid them in the trench to make the foundation. "What are you doing?" said one of the workmen. "Why, laying the foundation." "What, with the chimney-pots?" "I did not know that it was wrong," said he. "Well, take them away; they won't do for a foundation." "Oh!" said the other, "you are finding fault with them." "No; I am not finding fault with them, but with the place where you put them; they are good enough on the top, but they won't do at the bottom." So with good works; they will do at the top, but they will not do at the bottom. As a foundation for the soul to rest upon, nothing will suffice but the righteousness of Christ and his finished work. This is our hope of salvation. Our good works are good enough afterwards, when God the Holy Spirit, by his grace, works faith, and love, and all other good things in us.

III. What, Then, Is The Way Of Salvation?

Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary he should know that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came down from heaven, and was for our sin incarnate in human form, born of the Virgin Mary, lived a life of sanctity and of suffering; and at last this glorious Son of God — this grief-stricken Son of man — became obedient even unto death. In the garden he wrestled, and shed, as it were, great drops of blood in the prospect of the coming terrors of his death-struggle. To the cross was he nailed, amidst shame, and ignominy, and scoffing. There he endured pain incredible, pangs of body and agony of soul. He hung there, through the thick darkness, three hours: and at last, when the appointed time was come, when he had suffered all, when the full chastisement of our sin had been laid upon him, and the iniquity of us all had received its dreadful retribution at his hands, he cried, "It is finished!" Thus he gave up the ghost, was laid in the tomb, and then arose from the dead on the third day, and ascended to heaven.

Now, if thou wouldst be saved, my friend, it is necessary that thou shouldst believe in him who was the Son of God and the Son of man, and that thou shouldst believe in thine heart these things often: — First, that he is a divinely-ordained Savior, able to save all those that come unto God through him. Thou must believe, likewise, that he is willing to save, and that he will save those that seek salvation, believing and trusting in his power. When thou hast believed this, thou hast gone a good part of the way toward that saving faith which shall bring them into a state of grace. It is by acting upon this belief, by casting thyself simply on the merits of his blood, and of his perfect righteousness, as the ground of thine acceptance before God, that thou shalt find peace'. No man can be saved if he does not trust his soul in the hands of Christ. We must give up ourselves from our own keeping into Christ's keeping saying, "Lord, take me, save me, make me what thou wouldst have me to be; and then, when thy Father shall require my soul at the last day, stand thou my Surety, and bring me, perfect and spotless, into his presence."

I must add one thing more, — there must be what the old divines call a recumbency, a leaning on him, a dependence on him. But here I must warn you that some people have an idea that, if they get faith in Christ, it matters not how they live, or what they are. Now, be it understood, once for all, we are saved by faith, and not by works; but we must have good works if we are really saved. You know that faith is not only leaning on Christ, but obeying Christ. Suppose a case. There is a man who says to me, "You have committed such-and-such an offense; you are in such-and-such difficulties; but if you will implicitly trust me, and leave the matter entirely in my hands, I will see that you come through all right." Well now, if I get meddling with it, that will prove I do not trust in him; but, by-and-by, he comes to me, and says, "My dear friend, are you trusting me wholly?" "Yes," I say, "I am reposing all my trust in you." Suppose he says, "I want you to look over this document, which you must sign, and then I shall want you, on a certain morning, to be at such-and-such a place." What if I answer, "I shall do no such thing; I will not sign the deed, nor meet you by

appointment.” “Then,” says he, “you are not trusting me.” “I am learning on you, and trusting you,” I say. “Well!” says he, “unless you do what I tell you, your faith is not genuine faith, neither are you trusting in me at all.” Now, if you are perfectly trusting Christ, your next question will be, “Lord, I am trusting to be saved by thee, but how wilt thou have me be saved?” “Oh!” saith Christ, “I will save thee; but thou must break off those old habits.” “Oh!” say you, “Lord, assist me with thy grace, and I will renounce them all.” “Well,” saith Christ, “and if thou wouldst be saved, I will have thee, in the next place, attend to my ordinances. Come forward, and make a profession of thy faith; be baptized; unite thyself to the Church visible; receive the Lord’s supper.” But you say, “No, Lord! I will do no such thing.” “Well, then,” says he, “you are not trusting me, because, whatever I tell you to do, you ought to do it.”

You may have heard the good illustration which Mr. Cecil gives of faith. His little child was standing, one day, at the top of a dark cellar. She was in the light, and he was down below in the cellar. “My dear child, jump down, and I will catch you,” said he; and the child, without a moment’s thought, sprang into the father’s arms. Now that is one kind of faith; that is, when we are enabled so to trust Christ that we do, so to speak, venture our souls on him, risk all with him; but mark, that is not the complete picture of the faith of saints. This kind of faith some people profess to have, but their lives do not bear out their profession and therefore there must be something else to make it clear, and Mr. Cecil gives another illustration through the same little girl. “I said to her, one day, as she had a necklace of beads, ‘My dear child, you know I love you, and you would do anything I told you. Take those beads off, and throw them into the fire.’ She did so at once.” Now, the first faith was the faith of daring, venturing herself; but the second proved her faith to be true and genuine, when she could obey at such a cost. To a large extent, faith and obedience are really one, and it is useless for thee to say that thou dost believe in Christ as thy Savior if thou dost not obey him as thy Lord. Some try to do so, but their faith is worthless. But when we can unite unwavering trust with implicit obedience, we prove that we are really trusting in Christ, and then we are safe.

O my dear hearer, if I have puzzled thee instead of making the truth plain, I can say I did not intend to do so. I would have thee to understand, if thou art troubled on account of sin, that God requires not aught of thee but what he gives thee. He requires nothing but that thou shouldn’t depend for all on Christ. That is all he asks for. Do it. Oh, may his Holy Spirit enable you to do it now! But I will tell you a parable which shall illustrate faith. There were two children, according to the fable, walking with their father along a narrow ridge. On either side there was a dark deep precipice. One of the dear children put his hand inside the father’s hand, and his father grasped it. The other put his little fingers round his father’s hand, and took hold of his father’s hand. It was not long before? in the midst of the thick darkness, the children grew weary, and the child who had taken hold of the father’s hand perished. But the child, who had put his hand into the father’s hand, and let the father take hold of it, was carried safely to the end. Now, put thy hand inside the hand of Christ; and when he bids thee obey him, take it not away. Give thyself wholly up to him to be his, come life, come death, for better or for worse, to be his to trust and his to obey, being from this time forth his for ever. Oh, may God the Holy Spirit lead us to do this! It is easy enough when the Holy Ghost enables us, but it is hard enough when our human nature kicks against it. May sovereign grace our hearts subdue, and teach us to depend on Christ, and no more foolishly attempt to work out our salvation by impossible means! I can only pray that God will bless this brief, hurried discourse, and to his name shall be the glory, through Christ Jesus. Amen.

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