

Sermons on Proverbs

by

C.H. Spurgeon

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C.H. Spurgeon

The Hold Fast

A sermon (No. 1418) delivered on Lord's Day morning, June 9th, 1878,
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“Take fast hold of instruction; let her not go: keep her; for she is thy life.”—Proverbs 4:13.

Faith may be well described as taking hold upon divine instruction. God has condescended to teach us, and it is ours to hear with attention and receive his words; and while we are hearing faith comes, even that faith which saves the soul. To take “fast hold” is an exhortation which concerns the strength, the reality, the heartiness, and the truthfulness of faith, and the more of these the better. If to take hold is good, to take fast hold is better. Even a touch of the hem of Christ’s garment causeth healing to come to us, but if we want the full riches which are treasured up in Christ we must not only touch but take hold; and if we would know from day to day to the very uttermost all the fullness of his grace, we must take fast hold, and so maintain a constant and close connection between our souls and the eternal fountain of life. It were well to give such a grip as a man gives to a plank when he seizes hold upon it for his very life— that is a fast hold indeed.

We are to take fast hold of instruction, and the best of instruction is that which comes from God; the truest wisdom is the revelation of God in Christ Jesus: of that therefore we are to take fast hold. The best understanding is obedience to the will of God and a diligent learning of those saving truths which God has set before us in his word: so that in effect we are exhorted to take hold of Christ Jesus our Lord, the incarnate wisdom in whom dwelleth all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. We are not to let him go but to keep him and hold him, for he is our life. Does not John in his gospel tell us that the Word is our light for instruction and at the same time our life? “In him was life, and the life was the light of men.” The more we abide in the Lord Jesus and the more firmly we take hold upon him, the better will it be for us in a thousand ways. I intend at this time to speak as the Holy Spirit shall enable me upon this fast-hold; and I reckon that the subject is one of the most important which can occupy your attention at this particular crisis in the history of the church. Many there be around us who believe in Christ, but it is with a very trembling faith and their hold is unsteady; we need to have among us men of tighter grip, who really believe what they profess to believe, who know the truth in its living power, and are persuaded of its certainty, so that they cannot by any means be moved from their steadfastness. Among the vacillating crowd we long to see fast-holders who are pillars in the house of our God, whose grasp of divine truth is not that of babes or boys, but of men full grown and vigorous.

We shall handle our subject by speaking first upon the method by which we may take fast hold; then upon the difficulties which will lie in our way in so doing; thirdly, upon the benefits of such a firm grasp; and lastly upon the arguments for our fast holding mentioned in the text.

I. First then, the method of taking fast hold upon true religion, upon the gospel, upon Christ in fact.

At the outset my brethren, much must depend upon the intense decision which a man feels in his soul with regard to eternal things. If he intends trifling he will trifle, but if he means taking fast

hold he will, by God's grace, do so. Under God, this, in many cases, depends very much upon a man's individuality and force of character. Some men are naturally thorough and whole-hearted in all things upon which they enter, whether of this world or the next. When they serve the devil they are amongst his life guards, and they rush to the front in all kinds of iniquity. Among sinners they become the chief for they have no fear and no hesitancy; they are daredevils, defying both God and man, sinning greedily with both hands. Such men, when converted, often become eminent saints, being just as thorough and resolute in their following after God as they were in the pursuit of evil; they are determined to vindicate his holy cause and spread abroad the knowledge of his love. I must confess an earnest longing that many such may be brought into the church of Christ at this time to brace her up and inspire her with new energy. Many in our churches appear to have no depth of earth; with joy they receive the word from the very fact that they are so shallow, but as soon as the sun ariseth with burning heat it is discovered that they have no root, for they wither away. Others are truly religious, and probably will remain so, but they are not zealous; in fact they are not intense about anything, but are lukewarm, weak, and unstable. These are mere chips in the porridge, neither souring nor sweetening: they give forth no flavour, but they take the flavour of that which surrounds them; they are the creatures of circumstances, not helmsmen who avail themselves of stream and tide, but mere drift-wood carried along by any and every current which may take hold on them. They have no fullness of manhood about them, they are mere children; they resemble the sapling which can be bent and twisted, and not the oak which defies the storm. There are certain persons of this sort who in other matters have purpose enough, and strength of mind enough, but when they touch the things of God they are loose, flimsy, superficial, half-hearted. You see them earnest enough in hunting after wealth, but they show no such zeal in the pursuit of godliness. The force of their character comes out in a political debate, in the making of a bargain, in the arrangement of a social gathering, but you never see it in the work of the Lord. The young man comes to the front as a volunteer, or as a member of a club, or in the house of business, but who ever hears of him in the Sabbath school, the prayer-meeting, or the home-mission? In the things of God such persons owe any measure of progress which they make to the influence of their fellows who bear them along as so much dead weight, they themselves never throwing enough weight into the matter to add a single half-ounce of spiritual power to the church. Now, all this is mischievous and wrong.

My dear friends, we must all confess that if the religion of Christ be true it deserves that we should give our whole selves to it. If it be a lie let it be scoured from creation; but if it be true, it is a matter concerning which we cannot be neutral or lukewarm, for it demands our soul, our life, our all, and its claim cannot be denied. There must be a determination wrought in our souls by the Holy Spirit to be upright and downright in the work of the Lord, or else we shall be little worth.

We come however to closer matters of fact when we observe next that our taking fast hold of the things of God must depend upon the thoroughness of our conversion. In this church we try, as far as we can, in receiving church-members, to receive none but those who give clear evidence of a change of heart; but this evidence can be imitated so skilfully that the best examination and the most earnest judgment cannot prevent self-deceived persons from making a profession of religion. This we cannot help, but woe to those who wilfully deceive. Many exhibit flowers and fruits which never grew in their own gardens; their experience is borrowed and does not spring from the essential root of the Holy Ghost's work within their souls: this is sad indeed. Our condition before God is a personal matter and can never be settled by the judgment of our fellows, for what can others know of the workings of our hearts? Each man must judge himself and examine himself, for whatever a

church may attempt in its zeal for purity, it can never take the responsibility of his own sincerity from any man. We do not pretend to give certificates of salvation, and if we did they would be worthless; you must yourselves know the Lord and be really converted, or else your profession is a forgery and you yourselves are counterfeits. If a man shall in after life hold fast the things of God he must be soundly converted at first. Very much of his after life depends upon the thoroughness of his beginning. There must at the very first be a deep sense of sin, a consciousness of guilt, a holy horror of evil, or he will never make much of a Christian. I do not say that all or even any of those doubts and temptations and satanic suggestions which some have had to struggle with, are necessary to make a true conversion; but I must confess that I am not at all displeased when I meet with a good deal of battling and struggling in the experience of the newly awakened. It is not pleasant for them, but we hope it will be profitable. Those whose souls are ploughed and ploughed and ploughed again before the seed is sown upon them, often yield the best crop. John Bunyan's "Grace Abounding" very much accounts for John Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress." If it had not been for his terrible conflicts of soul he might not have known how to hold fast his confidence when shut up for twelve years in prison, nor would he have seen visions of the celestial city when all around him was as the valley of the shadow of death. I do not wish to see seeking souls distressed by Satan, but I do press for this— that there shall be an end of self-trust, a total destruction of self-righteousness, a complete giving up of all legal and carnal hopes, or else the conversion will be a mere show and he who is the subject of it will be like Ephraim, a silly dove without heart. Unless repentance of sin is real in you, you will never take fast hold of the truth of God.

And there must be, dear friends, a very sincere laying hold upon Christ Jesus. If you have any doubt about the doctrine of atonement I do not wonder if your religion soon wears into shreds. No, you must without question accept the substitutionary sacrifice; your soul must feel that the precious blood is her only hope, that this and this alone can make her clean before the living God. You must fly to Christ in desperation, and cling to him as all your salvation and all your desire; there must be no hesitancy here. At the very outset of the Christian life these two things should be very distinct with you —sin which has ruined you, and Christ who has saved you. Make a muddle at first and your life will be a tangle. Some tradesmen never carry on their business well, they evidently do not more than half understand it and are mere bunglers. Now, if you come to enquire you will find that they were never thoroughly grounded in their calling; either they never served an apprenticeship, or else they were lazy lads and never became masters of their trade, and this bad commencement sticks to them all their lives. It is the same with the higher learning. A man may go a long way in the classics, but if he was not grounded in the grammar he will be everlastingly making mistakes which a sound scholar will soon discover. Every teacher must work hard at the elements if his pupils are to succeed. Whatever you do with the higher forms, do teach that little boy his grammar, ground him in the rudiments, or he will be injured for life. To borrow another illustration, we have heard of a bridge which spanned a stream and for some years stood well enough, but by-and-by through the force of the current, it began to show signs of giving way. When it came to be examined it was soon seen that the builders never went deep enough with the foundations. There is the mischief of thousands of other things besides bridges. We must have good and deep foundations or otherwise the higher we build the sooner the fabric will fall. Look at many of the wretched houses in the streets around us, they are the disgrace of the city; you will see settlements and cracks everywhere because of bad foundations and bad materials. The same is true in the characters of many professed Christians; for want of a good commencement you can see flaws and cracks innumerable and you

wonder that they do not come down in sudden ruin. So indeed they would, but like those wretched houses they hold one another up. Many professors only keep upright because they stand in a row and derive support from their associations. I wish we could see more Christian men of the sort who dare to stand alone, like those old family mansions which stand each one in its own garden, so well built that when we begin to take them down each brick is found to be solid as granite, and the mortar is as hard as a rock. Such buildings and such men become every day more rare, but we must come back to the old style, and the sooner the better. Those of you who are yet in the early days of your piety should see to this. See that you are right, and sound, and thorough, and take fast hold of truth in the days of your first love, or yours will be but a sickly life in years to come.

This being taken for granted, the next help to a fast hold of Christ is hearty discipleship. Brethren, as soon as you are converted you become the disciples of Jesus, and if you are to become fast-holding Christians you must acknowledge him to be your Master, Teacher, and Lord in all things, and resolve to be good scholars in his school. He will be the best Christian who has Christ for his Master and truly follows him. Some are disciples of the church, others are disciples of the minister, and a third sort are disciples of their own thoughts; he is the wise man who sits at Jesus' feet and learns of him with the resolve to follow his teaching and imitate his example. He who tries to learn of Jesus himself, taking the very words from the Lord's own lips, binding himself to believe whatsoever the Lord hath taught and to do whatsoever he hath commanded—he I say, is the stable Christian. Follow Jesus my brethren and not the church, for our Lord has never said to his disciples, "Follow your brethren," but he has said "Follow me." He has not said, "Abide by the denominational confession," but he has said, "Abide in me." Nothing must come in between our souls and our Lord. What if fidelity to Jesus should sometimes lead us to differ from our brethren? What matters it so long as we do not differ from our Master? Crochets and quibbles are evil things, but a keenly sensitive conscientiousness is invaluable. Be true disciples of Christ and let his least word be precious to you. Remember that if a man love him he will keep his words; and he hath said, "he that shall break one of the least of these my commandments and shall teach men so, the same shall be least in the kingdom of heaven." Shun all compromises and abatements of truth, but be thorough and determined, holding fast your Savior's words. Follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. If such be your resolve by the grace of God, you will take fast hold of instruction and will never let it go.

It will much help you to this if in the next place you have a studious consideration of the Word of God, and meditate much upon the truth which you have received. There is too little studying of the Scriptures nowadays, I am persuaded. Books, magazines, papers, and the like bury the Bible under heaps of rubbish; but he who means to be a man of God to the fullness of his manhood will feed upon the word of God at first hand. Like the Bereans he will be of a noble spirit, and he will search the Scriptures daily. "I want," saith he, "to obtain my creed, not at second hand from others, but directly for myself from the very word of God itself—the pure well of gospel undefiled." This is a very important point. I have heard often of late a misused expression—"I do my own thinking;" let us correct it and then adopt it by saying, "I do my own searching of the word of God." Remember, we are not called to think out a new gospel, as some imagine, but we are called to be thinkers upon the old gospel, that we may know and understand its principles and its bearings and become confirmed in the belief of it. We need to think over the word till we are thoroughly imbued with it. The silk of certain insects takes its color from the leaves on which they feed, and a Christian man's life will always take its color from that which his soul feeds upon. Oh, to live upon the word

of God, even upon the deep things of God, for so shall we be rooted and grounded in the faith and shall take fast hold of eternal wisdom.

An established Christian is one who not only knows the doctrine but who also knows the authority for it, having looked around it and pondered it in his heart. By careful meditation he is taught in the truth and is able to give a reason for the hope that is in him with meekness and fear. Nor is he merely a man of the letter; his study in the power of the Holy Spirit has carried him into the essence of the word. He has asked the Spirit of God to make him acquainted with divine truth, so that he has not only read of it but he has communed with it, and now he lives upon it, eats it, drinks it, receives it into the inward parts of his soul, and retains it there as a living and incorruptible seed. Now a man who does this year after year is the kind of man who, by God's grace, will take fast-hold of instruction, and will prove a faithful witness for his Lord.

Add to this also an earnest seriousness of character, and you go a long way towards maintaining a fast hold of Christ. We do not mean by this that we are to dismiss cheerfulness—the Lord give us more of it, for it is as oil to the wheels, and is a high recommendation of religion to the unconverted. There are some who are a deal too gloomy in their religion, and seem to think that the grace of God is never displayed by them unless they are sullen and doleful. But at the same time there is a flippancy which is not commendable, and a levity which is far apart from the mind of Christ. Christian life is not child's play; we above all men ought to make our lives sublime, and not ridiculous. We are not called into this world to trifle away the hours and kill time in doing nothing; for this life links itself to eternity, and that eternity, in spite of all that is said to the contrary, will be one of endless misery or of endless joy; it is therefore no small thing to possess an immortal mind and to be responsible before God. Sin is no trifle, pardon is no trifle, and condemnation is no trifle. Eternal life is precious beyond all things, and to lie under the wrath of God is dreadful beyond conception. I love to see, especially in young Christians, with regard to the things of God, deep seriousness of purpose and spirit, showing that they feel it to be a weighty thing to be a Christian, and that they cannot afford to have their Christianity put under the shadow of suspicion, nor dare they even appear to be mere players upon a stage, for they fear and tremble at his word.

Now, if all these things be in you and abound, there will grow around them an experimental verification of the things of God. I mean that you will not only read of the love of God, but you will feel it from day to day, and so be assured of it. You read in the Scriptures of the power of sin and you believe what you read, but to this will be added the confirmatory fact that you feel it in your members, and therefore cannot doubt it. You read of the efficacy of the precious blood of Jesus; but you do more, for you feel its cleansing power upon your heart and its consoling influence over your conscience, and so you are established in the blessed truth. We hardly know anything till we have lived it. You must get truth burnt into you with the hot iron of experience or you will forget it. I believe that the pains and griefs and afflictions of many of God's children have been absolutely necessary to establish them in the faith; and I can only hope that you who are the children of joy may derive as much benefit from your gladness, as mourners have found in their sorrows; it might be so and should be so, but I fear it seldom is. The whole of our life should be a daily testing of the gospel, and a continuous verification of the eternal truth thereof. Our life should agree with this Book of life: just as the book of nature, being written by the same author as the book of revelation, shows the same hand and style; so the book of the new creation within us; being inscribed by the same Spirit who has written these Scriptures, will display the same style and manner; and we shall thus be growingly assured of the things which are verily revealed to us of God. Go on,

dear friends, and may the Lord grant that whatever your experience may be, whether it shall abound in bitterness or in sweetness, the testimony of God may be confirmed in you, and your grip of it may be intensified by every year's experience.

I must add one other word. I believe that in the mode of taking fast hold upon the gospel, practical Christianity has a great influence; I refer especially to practical usefulness. Some members enter the church and never do a hand's turn. We have the distinguished privilege of seeing them sit in their pews, and that is all we know about them. We cannot bring them under church censure, for they are punctual in religious observances; but they are barren boughs. Give me the young man who, when he joins the church, says, "I shall take a little time to study the gospel till I know more of it by the teaching of God's Spirit;" and then, having done so, says, "I have not learned this for myself. There is something for me to do in connection with the church of God and I am determined to find out what it is and to do it." You see such a young believer going to the Sabbath school, or you find him beginning to speak in a cottage, or becoming a visitor, and seeking to speak personally to individuals about their souls. If he be a man of the right kind his work will be another hold-fast to his mind. Look at him, how he keeps to the gospel: how he clings to the old, old truth. He is not the man to run after new theories and modern doubts for he is helped to keep right by his practical connection with spiritual disease and its remedy. Go into the back slums of London and see if you will doubt the doctrine of human depravity. Oh no, it is your ladies and gentlemen that wear lavender kid gloves who doubt that doctrine. Try to rescue a harlot from her sin, and if you are enabled to lead her to Jesus you cannot doubt the power of the precious blood of Jesus to cleanse the heart. Not those who battle with vice but those who practice it themselves are found cavilling at the doctrine of atonement. Those who are busy plucking brands out of the fire are little given to speculation, but are firm abiders in the gospel. I think there are few exceptions to the rule that the "advanced thought" gentlemen are not engaged in practical work for the salvation of souls. They are grand talkers but very poor workers. I am not hypercritical when I say that if you will mention a "modern thought" professor, it will generally turn out that he is not worth his salt as to practical usefulness: not he; he has the parrot-faculty of pulling things to pieces, but what positive work has he ever done? He may be a distinguished dignitary or a noble scholar, but as to actually grappling with the hearts and consciences of men and entering into the dark and troublous experience of tempted souls, he is quite at sea, for he knows nothing about it. He would talk after another fashion if his hand had ever been laid to hard work among sinful men and afflicted consciences. I tell you sirs that to argue with a poor distressed conscience and to try to bring it to peace in Christ soon lets you know the truth of the gospel. To stand by a dying bed and hear the holy triumph of even the most illiterate of the children of God, or what is equally efficacious, to watch the last sad hours of an impenitent sinner dying without hope, will make you know that there is a world to come, joyful or terrible as the case may be; and you will also learn that sin is a great evil, and that the atonement is a great reality. Young convert, if you want to be one of the firm holders of the gospel you must get to work as well as to study, for this by the overruling power of the Holy Ghost will strengthen you in the faith of God's elect. Thus I have brought forward the method: may it prove to be instructive.

II. Very briefly I want now to show the difficulties of taking fast hold of instruction, and every difficulty I mention will tend to show all the more clearly the necessity of it.

The first difficulty is that this is the age of questioning. Everybody questions now. Our friends over in Germany have pushed the questioning business to the furthest point, and in their thorough

way they have produced its legitimate fruit in cold-blooded attempts to murder a venerable monarch. Professed ministers of the gospel have taught the German mind to doubt everything, and now the basis of society is shaken and law and order are undermined. What could they expect otherwise? He who does not fear God is not likely to honor the king. When men give up their Bibles they will care but little for human laws. We have plenty of the like evil leaven in England, and certain clergymen and dissenting divines are spreading it with hideous industry. Young gentlemen whose whiskers have not yet developed are authoritatively deciding that nothing can be decided, and dogmatically denouncing all dogmas. We meet them every day, and we notice that in proportion to their ignorance is their confidence in sneering at every holy thing. According to them nobody is sincere, nothing is sacred. These great men, who would never have been heard of if they had not been heretical, know better by far than God himself. As for apostles and prophets, they are just nothing at all to these infallibles; their own "thought" is more precious than inspiration itself. This conceited scepticism is in the air; everywhere it seems to be abroad and you cannot help encountering it; therefore let us be the more earnest to hold fast the faith.

Worse than this, this is an age of worldliness. Everybody wants to be rich, and nobody is rich now at the point at which his forefathers were content to stop. Our good old deacons and respected church members were content with very moderate incomes, they were satisfied and happy with thrift and prudence, and would have been deeply grieved with the extravagance which is seen on all sides at this time. They not only considered their shops and their fields, but they planned to have time to look after the Sunday-schools in which they were proud to serve, and the prayer-meetings which they delighted to attend. But, dear me, prayer-meetings, lectures, sermons, Sunday-schools, these are all despised now! If a man can make an extra guinea or two by putting himself where they are out of the question, he jumps at the chance. We must be rich, we must cut a dash, we must spend more than our neighbors, and for this the work of the church may go to the dogs. Oh for a few simple, earnest Christians who will judge their Lord and his cause to be worth some consideration, and will lay themselves out to serve his church. When worldliness is so predominant it becomes so much the harder to take fast hold of eternal things. One needs to hear the word, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you," for unless we do hear it we shall be tempted to take fast hold on the world, and let the things of eternity slip by us.

Then, besides, there is and always has been a great desire for novelty. We are all the subjects of it: we all like something fresh. But there are some who are sick of the changeable disease; you see them zealots for a creed to-day, but on a sudden you find them deeply immersed in the opposite teaching. Ah, now they have found out something very wonderful: just as the idiot who saw the rainbow, and believed that there was a jewel at the foot of it, ran for miles to seize a glittering sapphire and grasped a piece of glass bottle; so do they forever pursue and never attain. We have a few of these gentlemen in most of our churches, but you will find them nowhere long. Another inventor starts a new system and away they go, pining always to be the first disciples of each new prophet. May God save us from the Athenian spirit which for ever hungers for something new.

Another difficulty, and the worst of all, is the corruption of our own hearts. "Take fast hold of instruction" says the text. "Why," I hear a brother say, "my dear sir, sometimes it is as much as I can do to take hold of it at all. I have to question whether I have been converted. I go down into such depths of despondency that unless the truth holds me, I shall never hold it." Well, but I hope this is all a means of helping you to hold it all the more firmly. You now see that salvation must

be by grace from first to last. By this very process you will be compelled to hold the doctrines of grace the more intensely, because you are made to see how utterly unable you are, in and of yourselves to think a good thought, much less to remain steadfast in the whole truth of Christ.

And then there is Satan, too; how busy he is in trying to undermine the fundamentals of the faith! Has he not suggested to some of us all kind of doubts? Yes. I said to a man one day who had uttered some blasphemy in my presence against a certain truth, "You think you stagger me! My dear man, I have had more doubts pass through my thoughts a great deal than you could tell me, or fifty like you." The doubts which the devil insinuates into the minds of the people of God are at times quite as horrible as any which a Voltaire or a Tom Paine was ever able to invent, and yet by God's grace we have not given up the gospel, nor shall we, though heaven and earth shall pass away. Because we are one with Christ, we shall live in the truth of Christ, for he will keep and preserve us even to the end.

III. Thirdly let us consider the benefits of taking fast hold. I wish I had an hour in which to dilate upon the benefit of so doing, but I must briefly say that it gives stability to the Christian character to have a firm grip of the gospel. Men who take fast hold are the backbone of a church. All through the dark reign of moderatism in Scotland, who kept up the testimony for truth? Why, those solid Christians who were known as "the men" who held the faith and walked with God in the power of it. These were men much in prayer and much in meditation, who lived on when all sound teaching had left the pulpits, because their souls were sustained by secret communion with God on the hill-side. When the time came for pure truth to revive in Scotland these men came to the front and were honored as the men who had kept the flame alive in the land. What was it delivered our country in still earlier times from being altogether under the hoof of Rome? When prelates forsook Christ, and preachers by hundreds in Mary's day turned from Protestantism to Popery, the true faith lived on in the hearts of poor men and women, weavers and cobblers, who believed what they did believe and could not deny the truth. Everybody in the parish knew that they were "stubborn heretics" who could not be frightened or argued down. They knew, they were sure, they were confident, and therefore they spoke. It did not matter to them that they were in a minority, for they knew that a minority of one on God's side is a majority. "I Athanasius against the world," said that grand old confessor, when they told him everybody had gone over to Arianism, and that nobody believed in the deity of Christ. "The earth and all the inhabitants thereof are dissolved, I bear up the pillars of it," said one of old; and happy is that man to whom such an office is given.

A firm grip of the gospel will give you strength for service. The man who can "hold the fort" at one time is the very man who can capture a fort at another time. He who can stand well can march well. The hand of the church is made of the same material as its backbone. It is of no use sending poor hesitating professors into the field of holy labor. If you hardly know what you believe how can you teach other people? But when the truth is written upon your very soul and graven as with the point of a diamond upon your heart, you will speak with confidence; and there will be a power about your utterances which none shall be able to withstand or gainsay. For the sake then of your spiritual strength, I press the exhortation of the text, "Take fast hold of instruction."

And this, too, will bring you joy. The outskirts of our Jerusalem are dreary; her glory lies within. Where shines the brightest light? It is in the holy of holies, in the innermost shrine. The skin and husks of religion are poor things, but the juice, the life, the vital power of religion,—therein lies the sweetness. You must not be satisfied with the "name to live"; it will never comfort you, it will

even distress you. The life of Christ mightily developed in you must be the joy of your heart. Multitudes of Christian professors get next to nothing out of Christianity. How can they? They hold their religion as some rich farmers hold “off-hand farms.” Nobody ever makes anything out of off-hand farms: the man who makes farming pay lives on the spot, and gives his whole time and energy to it. So is it in the things of God: if you make your minister your bailiff in religion you will get nothing out of it; you must live in it and upon it, and then you will prosper. I want you to say, “If there be anything in godliness I am going to know it; if prayer has power I am going to pray; if there be such a thing as communion with God I will enjoy it; if there be such a thing as likeness to Christ I will obtain it. Godliness shall not be an addition to my life, but it shall be my life itself.” Ah brother, you are the man of the shining countenance, you are the man of the sparkling eye; you drink deep, and you find that the deeper you drink the sweeter the draught becomes.

Lastly, with regard to this summary of benefits;—persons of this kind are the very glory of the church, they are the persons in whom true religion displays its brightest beams. They may be humble cottagers, or obscure members of a large church who are scarcely known, but those who live with them, those who are at all acquainted with them, say of them, “These men are a credit to the church and an honor to the name of Christianity.” Not your frothy talkers, not your flimsy professors, but your deep taught, grace-instructed men and women, these are they who are the beauty of the church and the glory of Christ. I would to God we had many more such. I look around and see that the cause does not prosper as I could wish throughout the land, and then I recollect in one spot an earnest village preacher, in another a holy laborious deacon, in a third a gracious woman, zealous in every good work, and I am comforted. Thank God, there is life in the old church yet. There is hope for her yet because of her fast-holding people. If I study the statistics of the churches, I have to say, “What is the good of these figures? Probably a church of two hundred members might be cut down to twenty earnest effectives.” For my part, I would sooner stand on this platform with twelve holy men and women to back me up than with twelve thousand mere pretenders to religion, such as can be found in crowds anywhere. No, it is the fast grip of faith, it is vital godliness which makes a man to be a real power in the church.

IV. Now lastly I have to mention the arguments of the text, which are three. All through the sermon I have been using argument, therefore I shall be the more brief and draw to a close.

The first argument is, take fast hold of true religion because it is your best friend. Read the text: “Take fast hold of instruction; let her not go.” You cannot find your way to heaven without this guide, therefore do not suffer it to leave you. Do as Moses did, who when his father-in-law, Hobab, was with him, would not suffer him to depart, “for” he said, “thou shalt be to us instead of eyes, for thou knowest where to encamp in the wilderness.” As Moses kept Hobab, so do you keep the faith, for you cannot find your road except by holding the true gospel with a true heart. What a sweet companion the gospel is! How often it has cheered you! How easy has the road become while you have been in intercourse with it. Do you what the disciples at Emmaus did when Jesus talked with them: they constrained him, saying “Abide with us.” Do not let him go; you will be a lonely pilgrim if you do. No, if you could be led by an angel but must lose the presence of your God, you would be wise to cry out against such an evil, and like Moses plead: “If thy Spirit go not with us, carry us not up hence.”

The next argument is that true godliness should be held fast, for it is your treasure. “Keep it,” says our text. It is your best inheritance at the present moment, and it is to be your eternal inheritance: keep it then. Let everything else go, but do not part with a particle of truth. The slightest fragment

of truth is more valuable than a diamond. Hold it then with all firmness. You are so much the richer by every truth you know; you will be so much the poorer by every truth you forget. Hold it then, and hide it in your heart. A certain king who had a rare diamond sent it to a foreign court, entrusting it to a very faithful servant. This servant was attacked however on the road by a band of robbers, and as they could not find the diamond, they drew their swords and killed him. He was found dead, but his master exclaimed, "He has not lost the diamond, I am sure!" He judged truly, for the trusty servant had swallowed the gem and so preserved it with his life. We also should thus place the truth in our inward parts, and then we shall never be deprived of it. A priest took a Testament from an Irish boy. "But" cried the boy, "you cannot take away those six chapters of Matthew that I learned by heart." They may take away our books but they cannot take away what we have fed upon and made our own. "His flesh is meat indeed, his blood is drink indeed," for when we have fed upon him our Lord Jesus remains in us the hope of glory. Hold fast the truth, O believers in Jesus, for it is your treasure.

Lastly, it is your "lift." Mr. Arnot, in his very beautiful book upon the Proverbs, tells a story to illustrate this text. He says that in the Southern seas an American vessel was attacked by a wounded whale. The huge monster ran out for the length of a mile from the ship, and then turned round, and with the whole force of its acquired speed struck the ship and made it leak at every timber, so as to begin to go down. The sailors got out all their boats, filled them as quickly as they could with the necessaries of life, and began to pull away from the ship. Just then two strong men might be seen leaping into the water who swam to the vessel, leaped on board, disappeared for a moment, and then came up bringing something in their hands. Just as they sprang into the sea, down went the vessel, and they were carried round in the vortex, but they were observed to be both of them swimming, not as if struggling to get away, but as if looking for something, which at last they both seized and carried to the boats. What was this treasure? What article could be so valued as to lead them to risk their lives? It was the ship's compass which had been left behind, without which they could not have found their way out of those lonely southern seas into the high road of commerce. That compass was life to them, and the gospel of the living God is the same to us. You and I must venture all for the gospel: this infallible word of God must be guarded to the death. Men may tell us what they please, and say what they will, but we will risk everything sooner than give up those eternal principles by which we have been saved. The Lord give all of us his abundant grace that we may take fast hold of divine instruction. Amen.

The Great Reservoir

A sermon (No. 179) delivered on Sabbath morning, February 21, 1858
At The Music Hall, Royal Surrey Gardens,
by C. H. Spurgeon.

“Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.”—Proverbs
4:23.

If I should vainly attempt to fashion my discourse after lofty models, I should this morning compare the human heart to the ancient city of Thebes, out of whose hundred gates multitudes of warriors were wont to march. As was the city, such were her armies, as was her inward strength, such were they who came forth of her. I might then urge the necessity of keeping the heart because it is the metropolis of our manhood, the citadel and armory of our humanity. Let the chief fortress surrender to the enemy, and the occupation of the rest must be an easy task. Let the principal stronghold be possessed by evil, the whole land must be overrun thereby. Instead however of doing this, I shall attempt what possibly I may be able to perform by a humble metaphor and a simple figure, which will be easily understood; I shall endeavor to set forth the wise man’s doctrine that our life issues from the heart, and thus I shall labor to show the absolute necessity of keeping the heart with all diligence.

You have seen the great reservoirs provided by our water companies, in which the water that is to supply hundreds of streets and thousands of houses is kept. Now the heart is just the reservoir of man, and our life is allowed to flow in its proper season. That life may flow through different pipes—the mouth, the hand, the eye; but still all the issues of hand, of eye, of lip, derive their source from the great fountain and central reservoir, the heart; and hence there is no difficulty in showing the great necessity that exists for keeping this reservoir, the heart, in a proper state and condition, since otherwise that which flows through the pipes must be tainted and corrupt. May the Holy Spirit now direct our meditations.

Mere moralists very often forget the heart, and deal exclusively with the lesser powers. Some of them say, “If a man’s life be wrong, it is better to alter the principles upon which his conduct is modeled: we had better adopt another scheme of living; society must be re-modeled so that man may have an opportunity for the display of virtues, and less temptation to indulge in vice.” It is as if, when the reservoir was filled with poisonous or polluted fluid, some sage counsellor should propose that all the piping had better be taken up and fresh pipes laid down so that the water might run through fresh channels; but who does not perceive that it would be all in vain if the fountain-head were polluted, however good the channels. So in vain the rules by which men hope to fashion their lives; in vain the regimen by which we seek to constrain ourselves to the semblance of goodness, unless the heart be right, the very best scheme of life shall fall to the ground and fail to effect its design. Others say, “Well, if the life be wrong, it would be better to set the understanding right: you must inform man’s judgment, educate him, teach him better, and when his head is well informed then his life will be improved. Now understanding is, if I may use such a figure, the stopcock which controls the emotions, lets them flow on or stops them; and it is as if some very wise man, when a reservoir had been poisoned, proposed that there should be a new person employed to turn the water

off or on in hope that the whole difficulty would thus be obviated. If we followed his advice, if we found the wisest man in the world to have control of the fountain, Mr. Understanding would still be incapable of supplying us with healthy streams until we had first of all purged the cistern whence they flowed. The Arminian divine too, sometimes suggests another way of improving man's life. He deals with the will. He says, the will must first of all be conquered, and if the will be right then every thing will be in order. Now will is like the great engine which forces the water out of the fountain-head along the pipes, so that it is made to flow into our dwellings. The learned counsellor proposes that there should be a new steam-engine employed to force the water along the pipes. "If" says he "we had the proper machinery for forcing the fluid, then all would be well." No, sir; if the stream be poisonous you may have axles to turn on diamonds, and you may have a machine that is made of gold, and a force as potent as Omnipotence, but even then you have not accomplished your purpose until you have cleansed the polluted fountain, and purged the issues of life which flow therefrom. The wise man in our text seems to say "Beware of misapplying your energies, be careful to begin in the right place." It is very necessary the understanding should be right; it is quite needful the will should have its proper predominance; it is very necessary that you should keep every part of man in a healthy condition; "but" says he, "if you want to promote true holiness you must begin with the heart, for out of it are the issues of life; and when you have purged it, when you have made its waters pure and limpid then shall the current flow and bless the inhabitants with clear water; but not till then." Here let us pause and ask the solemn and vital question, "Is my heart right in the sight of God?" For unless the inner man has been renewed by the grace of God through the Holy Spirit, our heart is full of rottenness, filth, and abominations. And if so, here must all our cleansing begin, if it be real and satisfactory. Unrenewed men, I beseech you, ponder the words of an ancient Christian which I here repeat in thine ear:—"It is no matter what is the sign, though an angel, that hangs without, if the devil and sin dwell therein. New trimmings upon an old garment will not make it new, but only give it a new appearance; and truly it is no good husbandry to bestow a great deal of cost in mending up an old suit that will soon drop to tatters and rags, when a little more might purchase a new one that is lasting. And is it not better to labor to get a new heart that all thou dost may be accepted, and thou saved, than to lose all the pains thou takest in religion, and thyself also for want of it?"

Now, ye who love the Lord, let me take you to the reservoir of your heart, and let me urge upon you the great necessity of keeping the heart right if you would have the stream of your life happy for yourselves and beneficial to others.

I. First, keep the heart full. However pure the water may be in the central reservoir, it will not be possible for the company to provide us with an abundant supply of water unless the reservoir itself be full. An empty fountain will most assuredly beget empty pipes; and let the machinery be never so accurate, let every thing else be well ordered, yet if that reservoir be dry we may wait in vain for any of the water that we require. Now, you know many people —(you are sure to meet with them in your own society and your own circle; for I know of no one so happy as to be without such acquaintances)—whose lives are just dry, good-for-nothing emptiness. They never accomplish anything; they have no mental force; they have no moral power; what they say nobody thinks of noticing; what they do is scarcely ever imitated. We have known fathers whose moral force has been so despicable that even their children have scarcely been able to imitate them. Though imitation was strong enough in them, yet have they unconsciously felt even in their childhood that their father was after all but a child like themselves, and had not grown to be a man. Do you not know many

people, who, if they were to espouse a cause and it were entrusted to them, would most certainly pilot it to shipwreck. Failure would be the total result. You could not use them as clerks in your office without feeling certain that your business would be nearly murdered. If you were to employ them to manage a concern for you, you would be sure they would manage to spend all the money, but could never produce a bit. If they were placed in comfortable circumstances for a few months they would go on carelessly till all was gone. They are just the flats, preyed on by the sharpers in the world; they have no manly strength, no power at all. See these people in religion: it does not matter much what are their doctrinal sentiments, it is quite certain they will never affect the minds of others. Put them in the pulpit: they are the slaves of the deacons, or else they are over-ridden by the church; they never have an opinion of their own, can not come out with a thing; they have not the heart to say, "Such a thing is, and I know it is." These men just live on, but as far as any utility to the world is concerned they might almost as well never have been created, except it were to be fed upon by other people. Now some say that this is the fault of men's heads: "Such a one" they say, "could not get on; he had a small head; it was clean impossible for him to prosper, his head was small, he could not do anything; he had not enough force." Now that may be true, but I know what was truer still—he had got a small heart and that heart was empty. For mark you, a man's force in the world, other things being equal, is just in the ratio of the force and strength of his heart. A full-hearted man is always a powerful man: if he be erroneous then he is powerful for error; if the thing is in his heart he is sure to make it notorious, even though it may be a downright falsehood. Let a man be never so ignorant, still if his heart be full of love to a cause he becomes a powerful man for that object because he has got heart-power, heart-force. A man may be deficient in many of the advantages of education, in many of those niceties which are so much looked upon in society; but once give him a good strong heart that beats hard, and there is no mistake about his power. Let him have a heart that is right full up to the brim with an object and that man will do the thing, or else he will die gloriously defeated, and will glory in his defeat. Heart is power. It is the emptiness of men's hearts that makes them so feeble. Men do not feel what they are at. Now the man in business that goes heart and soul into his business is more likely to prosper than anybody else. That is the preacher we want, the man that has a full soul. Let him have a head—the more he knows the better; but after all give him a big heart; and when his heart beats, if his heart be full, it will under God either make the hearts of his congregation beat after him or else make them conscious that he is laboring hard to compel them to follow. O! if we had more heart in our Master's service, how much more labor we could endure. You are a Sunday-school teacher young man, and you are complaining that you can not get on in the Sunday-school. Sir, the service-pipe would give out plenty of water if the heart were full. Perhaps you do not love your work. O, strive to love your work more and then when your heart is full you will go on well enough. "O," saith the preacher, "I am weary of my work in preaching; I have little success; I find it a hard toil." The answer to that question is, "Your heart is not full of it, for if you loved preaching you would breathe preaching, feed upon preaching, and find a compulsion upon you to follow preaching; and your heart being full of the thing, you would be happy in the employment. O for a heart that is full, and deep, and broad! Find the man that hath such a soul as that, and that is the man from whom the living waters shall flow to make the world glad with their refreshing streams.

Learn then the necessity of keeping the heart full; and let the necessity make you ask this question—"But how can I keep my heart full? How can my emotions be strong? How can I keep my desires burning and my zeal inflamed?" Christian! there is one text which will explain all this.

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“All my springs are in thee,” said David. If thou hast all thy springs in God thy heart will be full enough. If thou dost go to the foot of Calvary, there will thy heart be bathed in love and gratitude. If thou dost frequent the vale of retirement and there talk with thy God, it is there that thy heart shall be full of calm resolve. If thou goest out with thy Master to the hill of Olivet, and dost with him look down upon a wicked Jerusalem and weep over it with him, then will thy heart be full of love for never-dying souls. If thou dost continually draw thine impulse, thy life, the whole of thy being from the Holy Spirit, without whom thou canst do nothing; and if thou dost live in close communion with Christ, there will be no fear of thy having a dry heart. He who lives without prayer—he who lives with little prayer—he who seldom reads the Word—he who seldom looks up to heaven for a fresh influence from on high—he will be the man whose heart will become dry and barren; but he who calls in secret on his God—who spends much time in holy retirement—who delights to meditate on the words of the Most High—whose soul is given up to Christ—who delights in his fullness, rejoices in his all-sufficiency, prays for his second coming, and delights in the thought of his glorious advent—such a man, I say, must have an overflowing heart; and as his heart is, such will his life be. It will be a full life; it will be a life that will speak from the sepulcher, and wake the echoes of the future. “Keep thine heart with all diligence,” and entreat the Holy Spirit to keep it full; for otherwise the issues of thy life will be feeble, shallow, and superficial; and thou mayest as well not have lived at all.

II. Secondly it would be of little use for our water companies to keep their reservoirs full if they did not also keep them pure. I remember to have read a complaint in the newspaper of a certain provincial town, that a tradesman had been frequently supplied with fish from the water company, large eels having crept down the pipe, and sometimes creatures a little more loathsome. We have known such a thing as water companies supplying us with solids when they ought to have given us nothing but pure crystal. Now no one likes that. The reservoir should be kept pure and clean; and unless the water comes from a pure spring and is not impregnated with deleterious substances, however full the reservoir may be, the company will fail of satisfying or of benefiting its customers. Now it is essential for us to do with our hearts as the company must do with its reservoir. We must keep our hearts pure; for if the heart be not pure the life can not be pure. It is quite impossible that it should be so. You see a man whose whole conversation is impure and unholy; when he speaks he lards his language with oaths; his mind is low and groveling; none but the things of unrighteousness are sweet to him, for he has no soul above the kennel and the dunghill. You meet with another man who understands enough to avoid violating the decencies of life; but still at the same time he likes filthiness; any low joke, anything that will in some way stir unholy thoughts is just the thing that he desires. For the ways of God he has no relish; in God’s house he finds no pleasure, in his Word no delight. What is the cause of this? Say some it is because of his family connections—because of the situation in which he stands—because of his early education, and all that. No, no; the simple answer to that is the answer we gave to the other inquiry; the heart is not right; for if the heart were pure the life would be pure too. The unclean stream betrays the fountain. A valuable book of German parables by old Christian Scriver contains the following homely metaphor:—“A drink was brought to Gotthold which tasted of the vessel in which it had been contained, and this led him to observe: we have here an emblem of our thoughts, words, and works. Our heart is defiled by sin and hence a taint of sinfulness cleaves unfortunately to everything we take in hand; and although from the force of habit this may be imperceptible to us, it does not escape the eye of the omniscient, holy, and righteous God.” Whence come our carnality, covetousness,

pride, sloth and unbelief? Are they not all to be traced to the corruption of our hearts? When the hands of a clock move in an irregular manner, and when the bell strikes the wrong hour, be assured there is something wrong within. O how needful that the main-spring of our motives be in proper order and the wheels in a right condition.

Ah! Christian keep thy heart pure. Thou sayest, "How can I do this?" Well, there was of old a stream of Marah to which the thirsty pilgrims in the desert came to drink; and when they came to taste of it, it was so brackish that though their tongues were like torches and the roofs of their mouths were parched with heat, yet they could not drink of that bitter water. Do you remember the remedy which Moses prescribed? It is the remedy which we prescribe to you this morning. He took a certain tree and he cast it into the waters, and they became sweet and clear. Your heart is by nature like Marah's water, bitter and impure. There is a certain tree, you know its name, that tree on which the Saviour hung, the cross. Take that tree, put it into your heart, and though it were even more impure than it is, that sweet cross, applied by the Holy Spirit, would soon transform it into its own nature and make it pure. Christ Jesus in the heart is the sweet purification. He is made unto us sanctification. Elijah cast salt into the waters; but we must cast the blood of Jesus there. Once let us know and love Jesus, once let his cross become the object of our adoration and the theme of our delight, the heart will beam its cleansing, and the life will become pure also. Oh! that we all did learn the sacred lesson of fixing the cross in the heart! Christian man! love thy Saviour more; cry to the Holy Spirit that thou mayest have more affection for Jesus; and then, how ever gainful may be thy sin, thou wilt say with the poet,

"Now for the love I bear his name,
What was my gain I count my loss;
My former pride I call my shame,
And nail my glory to his cross."

The cross in the heart is the purifier of the soul; it purges and it cleanses the chambers of the mind. Christian! keep thy heart pure, "for out of it are the issues of life."

III. In the third place there is one thing to which our water companies need never pay much attention; that is to say, if their water be pure and the reservoir be full, they need not care to keep it peaceable and quiet, for let it be stirred to a storm, we should receive our water in the same condition as usual. It is not so however, with the heart. Unless the heart be kept peaceable, the life will not be happy. If calm doth not reign over that inner lake within the soul which feeds the rivers of our life, the rivers themselves will always be in storm. Our outward acts will always tell that they were born in tempests by rolling in tempests themselves. Let us just understand this first, with regard to ourselves. We all desire to lead a joyous life; the bright eye and the elastic foot are things which we each of us desire; to carry about a contented mind is that to which most men are continually aspiring. Let us all remember that the only way to keep our life peaceful and happy is to keep the heart at rest; for come poverty, come wealth, come honor, come shame, come plenty, or come scarcity, if the heart be quiet there will be happiness anywhere. But whatever the sunshine and the brightness, if the heart be troubled the whole life must be troubled too. There is a sweet story told in one of the German martyrologies well worth both my telling and your remembering. A holy martyr who had been kept for a long time in prison, and had there exhibited to the wonderment of all who saw him, the strongest constancy and patience, was at last, upon the day of execution, brought out and tied to the stake preparatory to the lighting of the fire. While in this position he

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craved permission to speak once more to the Judge, who according to the Swiss custom was required to be also present at the execution. After repeatedly refusing, the judge at last came forward when the peasant addressed him thus: You have this day condemned me to death. Now I freely admit that I am a poor sinner, but positively deny that I am a heretic, because from my heart I believe and confess all that is contained in the Apostles' Creed (which he thereupon repeated from beginning to end). Now then sir, he proceeded to say, I have but one last request to make, which is that you will approach and place your hand first upon my breast and then upon your own, and afterwards frankly and truthfully declare before this assembled multitude which of the two, mine or yours, is beating most violently with fear and anxiety. For my part I quit the world with alacrity and joy, to go and be with Christ in whom I have always believed; what your feelings are at this moment is best known to yourself. The judge could make no answer, and commanded them instantly to light the pile. It was evident however from his looks that he was more afraid than the martyr.

Now, keep your heart right. Do not let it smite you. The Holy Spirit says of David, "David's heart smote him." The smiting of the heart is more painful to a good man than the rough blows of the fist. It is a blow that can be felt; it is iron that enters into the soul. Keep your heart in good temper. Do not let that get fighting with you. Seek that the peace of God which passeth all understanding may keep your heart and mind through Christ Jesus. Bend your knee at night, and with a full confession of sin express your faith in Christ, then you may "dread the grave as little as your bed." Rise in the morning and give your heart to God, and put the sweet angels of perfect love and holy faith therein, and you may go into the world, and were it full of lions and of tigers you would no more need to dread it than Daniel when he was cast into the lion's den. Keep the heart peaceable and your life will be happy.

Remember in the second place that it is just the same with regard to other men. I should hope we all wish to lead quiet lives, and as much as lieth in us to live peaceably with all men. There is a particular breed of men—I do not know where they come from, but they are mixed up now with the English race and to be met with here and there—men who seem to be born for no other reason whatever but to fight—always quarreling, and never pleased. They say that all Englishmen are a little hat way—that we are never happy unless we have something to grumble at, and that the worst thing that ever could be done with us would be to give us some entertainment at which we could not grumble, because we should be mortally offended, because we had not the opportunity of displaying our English propensities. I do not know whether that is true of all of us, but it is of some. You can not sit with them in a room but they introduce a topic upon which you are quite certain to disagree with them. You could not walk with them half a mile along the public streets but they would be sure to make an observation against every body and every thing they saw. They talk about ministers: one man's doctrine is too high, another's is too low; one man they think is a great deal too effeminate and precise, another they say is so vulgar they would not hear him at all. They say of another man that they do not think he attends to visiting his people; of another, that he visits so much that he never prepares for the pulpit. No one can be right for them.

Why is this? Whence arises this continual snarling? The heart must again supply the answer, they are morose and sullen in the inward parts, and hence their speech betrayeth them. They have not had their hearts brought to feel that God hath made of one blood all nations that dwell upon the face of the earth, or if they have felt that they have never been brought to spell in their hearts—"By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye love one another." Whichever may have been put there of the other ten, the eleventh commandment was never written there. "A new commandment

give I unto you, that ye love one another.” That they forgot. Oh! dear Christian people, seek to have your hearts full of love, and if you have had little hearts till now that could not hold love enough for more than your own denomination, get your hearts enlarged so that you may have enough to send out service-pipes to all God’s people throughout the habitable globe; so that whenever you meet a man who is a true-born heir of heaven, he has nothing to do but to turn to the tap and out of your loving heart will begin to flow issues of true, fervent, unconstrained, willing, living love. Keep thine heart peaceable that thy life may be so; for out of the heart are the issues of life.

How is this to be done? We reply again, we must ask the Holy Spirit to pacify the heart. No voice but that which on Galilee lake said to the storm “Be still,” can ever lay the troubled waters of a stormy heart. No strength but Omnipotence can still the tempest of human nature. Cry out mightily unto him. He still sleeps in the vessel with his church. Ask him to awake lest your piety should perish in the waters of contention. Cry unto him that he may give your heart peace and happiness. Then shall your life be peaceful; spend ye it where ye may, in trouble or in joy.

IV. A little further. When the water-works company have gathered an abundance of water in the reservoir there is one thing they must always attend to, and that is they must take care they do not attempt too much, or otherwise they will fail. Suppose they lay on a great main pipe in one place to serve one city, and another main pipe to serve another, and the supply which was intended to fill one channel is diverted into a score of streams, what would be the result? Why nothing would be done well, but everyone would have cause to complain. Now man’s heart is after all so little that there is only one great direction in which its living water can ever flow; and my fourth piece of advice to you from this text is, keep your heart undivided. Suppose you see a lake and there are twenty or thirty streamlets running from it: why, there will not be one strong river in the whole country; there will be a number of little brooks which will be dried up in the summer, and will be temporary torrents in the winter. They will every one of them be useless for any great purposes because there is not water enough in the lake to feed more than one great stream. Now a man’s heart has only enough life in it to pursue one object fully. Ye must not give half your love to Christ and the other half to the world. No man can serve God and mammon because there is not enough life in the heart to serve the two. Alas! many people try this, and they fail both ways. I have known a man who has tried to let some of his heart run into the world, and another part he allowed to drip into the church, and the effect has been this: when he came into the church he was suspected of hypocrisy. “Why,” they said, “if he were truly with us, could he have done yesterday what he did and then come and profess so much to-day?” The church looks upon him as a suspicious one: or if he deceive them they feel he is not of much use to them, because they have not got all his heart. What is the effect of his conduct in the world? Why, his religion is a fetter to him there. The world will not have him, and the church will not have him; he wants to go between the two, and both despise him. I never saw anybody try to walk on both sides of the street but a drunken man: he tried it and it was very awkward work indeed; but I have seen many people in a moral point of view try to walk on both sides of the street, and I thought there was some kind of intoxication in them, or else they would have given it up as a very foolish thing. Now if I thought this world and the pleasures thereof worth my seeking, I would just seek them and go after them and I would not pretend to be religious; but if Christ be Christ and if God be God, let us give our whole hearts to him and not go shares with the world. Many a church member manages to walk on both sides of the street in the following manner: His sun is very low indeed—it has not much light, not much heat, and is come almost to its setting. Now, sinking suns cast long shadows, and this man stands on the world’s side

of the street, and casts a long shadow right across the road to the opposite side of the wall just across the pavement. Ay, it is all we get with many of you. You come and you take the sacramental bread and wine; you are baptized; you join the church; and what we get is just your shadow; there is your substance on the other side of the street, after all. What is the good of the empty chrysalis of a man? And yet many of our church members are little better. They just do as the snake does that leaves its slough behind. They give us their slough, their skin, the chrysalis case in which life once was, and then they go themselves hither and thither after their own wanton wills; they give us the outward, and then give the world the inward. O how foolish this, Christian! Thy master gave himself wholly for thee; give thyself unreservedly to him. Keep not back part of the price. Make a full surrender of every motion of thy heart; labor to have but one object and one aim. And for this purpose give God the keeping of thine heart. Cry out for more of the divine influences of the Holy Spirit, that so when thy soul is preserved and protected by him it may be directed into one channel, and one only, that thy life may run deep and pure and clear and peaceful; its only banks being God's will, its only channel the love of Christ and a desire to please him. Thus wrote Spencer in days long gone by: "Indeed, by nature man's heart is a very divided, broken thing, scattered and parceled out, a piece to this creature and a piece to that lust. One while this vanity hires him (as Leah did Jacob of Rachel), anon when he hath done some drudgery for that he lets out himself to another: thus divided is man and his affections. Now the elect, whom God hath decreed to be vessels of honor, consecrated for his holy use and service, he throws into the fire of his word, that being there softened and melted he may by his transforming Spirit cast them anew, as it were, into a holy oneness; so that he who before was divided from God and lost among the creatures and his lusts, that shared him among them, now his heart is gathered into God from them all; it looks with a single eye on God, and acts for him in all that he doth: if therefore thou wouldest know whether thy heart be sincere, inquire whether it be thus made anew."

V. Now my last point is rather a strange one perhaps. Once upon a time, when one of our kings came back from a captivity, old historians tell us that there were fountains in Cheapside that did run with wine. So bounteous was the king, and so glad the people, that instead of water they made wine flow free to everybody. There is a way of making our life so rich, so full, so blessed to our fellow men, that the metaphor may be applicable to us, and men may say that our life flows with wine when other men's lives flow with water. Ye have known some such men. There was a Howard. John Howard's life was not like our poor common lives; he was so benevolent, his sympathy with the race so self-denying, that the streams of his life were like generous wine. You have known another, an eminent saint, one who lived very near to Jesus: when you talked yourself you felt your conversation was poor watery stuff; but when he talked to you there was an unction and a savor about his words, a solidity, and a strength about his utterances which you could appreciate, though you could not attain unto it. You have sometimes said "I wish my words were as full, as sweet, as mellow, and as unctuous as the words of such an one! Oh! I wish my actions were just as rich, had as deep a color, and as pure a taste as the acts of so-and-so. All I can do seems but little and empty when compared with his high attainments. Oh, that I could do more! Oh, that I could send streams of pure gold into every house instead of my poor dross." Well Christian, this should teach thee to keep thine heart full of rich things. Never, never neglect the Word of God; that will make thy heart rich with precept, rich with understanding; and then thy conversation, when it flows from thy mouth, will be like thine heart; rich, unctuous, and savory. Make thy heart full of rich, generous love, and then the stream that flows from thy hand will be just as rich and generous as thine heart. Above

all, get Jesus to live in thine heart, and then out of thy belly shall flow rivers of living water, more rich, more satisfying than the water of the well of Sychar of which Jacob drank. Oh! go Christians, to the great mine of riches and cry unto the Holy Spirit to make thy heart rich unto salvation. So shall thy life and conversation be a boon to thy fellows; and when they see thee thy face shall be as the angel of God. Thou shalt wash thy feet in butter and thy steps in oil; they that sit in the gate shall rise up when they see thee, and men shall do thee reverence.

But one single sentence, and we have done. Some of your hearts are not worth keeping. The sooner you get rid of them the better. They are hearts of stone. Do you feel today that you have a stony heart? Go home, and I pray the Lord hear my desire that thy polluted heart may be removed. Cry unto God and say "Take away my heart of stone, and give me a heart of flesh;" for a stony heart is an impure heart, a divided heart, an unpeaceful heart. It is a heart that is poor and poverty-stricken, a heart that is void of all goodness, and thou canst neither bless thyself nor others if thy heart be such. O Lord Jesus! wilt thou be pleased this day to renew many hearts? Wilt thou break the rock in pieces, and put flesh instead of stone, and thou shalt have the glory, world without end!

Letter From Mr. Spurgeon.

Beloved friends,

We are in our measure partaking in the change of weather which plunged England from an almost summer heat into cold and fog, for we have a cold wind blowing with a force which overpowers the warm sun. This has a depressing influence upon many invalids, but does not affect me. Each day I make a little progress. I could not yet stand through a discourse, much less walk a mile; but I can walk further than I could a week ago, and I am conscious of renewed vigor. I thank God that the swelling of the feet is also decreasing, and so I may look for complete restoration, and then for a speedy return to my happy work. I hope and pray that this week's sermon may prove useful. Purposely I have made it striking and plain, with the design that it should be suitable for wide distribution. It contains the gospel in its simplicity, stated in a pleasant manner.

I have prepared three sermons, as a double number, to close the year with, and I hope they will be a fit top-stone to the thirty-fourth volume, which I am glad to have completed.

Receive my sincere love in Christ Jesus. May all grace abound towards you.

Yours till death,

C. H. Spurgeon.

Mentone, Dec. 13th, 1888.

Eyes Right

A sermon (No. 2058) by C. H. Spurgeon

“Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee.”——Proverbs 4:25.

These words occur in a passage wherein the wise man exhorts us to take care of all parts of our nature, which he indicates by members of the body. “Keep thy heart,” says he “with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life. Put away from thee a froward mouth, and perverse lips put far from thee. Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee. Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established. Turn not to the right hand nor to the left: remove thy foot from evil.” It is clear that every part of our nature needs to be carefully watched lest in any way it should become the cause of sin. Any one member or faculty is readily able to defile all the rest, and therefore every part must be guarded with care. We have selected for our meditation the verse which deals with the eye. These windows of light need to be watched in their incomings, lest that which we take into our soul should be darkness rather than light; and they need to be watched in their outgoings lest the glances of the eye should be full of iniquity, or should suggest foolish thoughts. Hence the wise man advises, “Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee.” Have eyes and use them. Using them, take care to use them honestly.

Some persons are always as if they were asleep. They go though the world mooning about, seeing nothing, or seeing men as if they were trees with a sight which is not sight, but blindness hidden. The shadows of this transient life impress them and that is all: they have never awakened yet to the true life and its solemn realities. They have never seen anything in very truth; for it is faith that sees, and of faith they have none. That which is apart from faith is not visible to the soul however clear it may be to the eye. We have thousands around us who need to be startled out of that slumber in which they see the fabrics of their dreams, and the unsubstantial fancies of the hour. They say, “We see,” but scales are on their eyes. I fear we have such in all our congregations, lulled to sleep even by the preacher’s tones, to whom the fact of coming to their accustomed seat and listening to the usual hymns, tends rather to confirm them in a sluggard’s slumber than to stir their souls to action. O ye sluggards, may God awaken you by grace lest he arouse you by the thunderbolts of his vengeance! It is time that your eyes began to look right on, and your eyelids straight before you.

Many others are somewhat awake mentally but they are not looking right on, neither do their eyelids look straight before them. They are staring about them, star-gazing, wondering what will be seen next: always ready like the Athenians to hear and see some new thing. They move, it is true, but it is in a labyrinth which leads to nothing, in a circle which ends where it began; they toil and slave but it is all in the shadowland: of substantial work they do nothing. An active idleness, a diligent laziness, is all that their life is made up of; for as yet they have no purpose—no purpose worth being the aim of an immortal soul. An arrow will never strike the mark if it travels in a zigzag direction; and the man whose life has no aim whatever, who pursues this, and then that, and then the other, what will he achieve? Are not many like “dumb driven cattle” going they know not where? They have never yet discovered that this life is a preface to a life of diviner mold. They do

not regard the present as the lowly porch of the glorious edifice of the future. They have not thought that time is but the doorstep of eternity, a thing of small account, save that it is linked with the endless ages; and so they seek after this, and then after that, and then after the other; and always after that which is too poor, too trifling to be the object of a mind capable of fellowship with God. How many there are whose spirit is agitated by a mere nothing, resembling

“Ocean into tempest tost
To waft a feather or to drown a fly”!

To beings who lead such purposeless lives we would address the words of the wise man, “Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee.” Have something to do and do it. Have something to live for and live for it. Get to know the right way, and knowing the right way keep to it with full purpose of heart and concentration of faculty. O man, see whither thou art going and go that way with thine eyes open, resolutely marking every step as thou takest it. Look where thou oughtest to look and then follow thine eyes, which shall thus be useful outriders to thy life, and help to make thy way safe and wise. When thou hast sent thine eyes before thee to make sure of the way, it will be safe to follow. Look before you leap, and only leap when looking bids you do so. If a man is to let his eyes look right on and his eyelids straight before him, then he is to have a way, and that way is to be a straight way, and in that straight way he is to persevere. You cannot see to the end of a crooked way. You can only see a small part of a way that twists and winds. Choose then a direct path which has an end which you dare think of and look upon. Some men’s lives are such that they dare not think of what the end of them must be. They would not long pursue their present track if they were forced to gaze into that dread abyss which is the only possible close of an evil course. The way of transgressors is hard in itself, but it is hardest of all when we behold their dreadful end. “Surely thou hast set them in slippery places. Thou castest them down into destruction.” You need to have a way, and a straight way, and a way whose end you dare contemplate, or else you cannot carry out the advice of Solomon, “Let thine eyes look right on and let thine eyelids look straight before thee.”

Every wise man will conclude that the best way for a man is the way which God has made for him. He that made us knows what he made us for, and he knows by what means we may best arrive at that end. According to divine teaching, as gracious as it is certain, we learn that the way of eternal life is Jesus Christ. Christ himself says, “I am the way, the truth, and the life”; and he that would pursue life after a right fashion must look to Jesus, and must continue looking unto Jesus, not only as the author but as the finisher of his faith. It shall be to him a golden rule of life when he has chosen Christ to be his way, to let his eyes look right on, and his eyelids straight before him. He need not be afraid to contemplate the end of that way, for the end of the way of Christ is life and glory with Christ for ever. “It doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.” A friend said to me the other day, “How happy are we to know that whatever happens to us in this life, it is well!” “Yes,” I added, “and to know that if this life ends it is equally well, or better.” Then we joined hands in common joy to think that we were equally ready for life or death, and did not need five minutes’ anxiety as to whether it should be the one or the other. Brethren, when you are on the King’s highway, and that way is a perfectly straight one, you may go ahead without fear and sing on the road.

With all my heart I invite any who have never yet begun to live after a right fashion, to take Christ to be the way of life to them; and then I entreat them to let their eyes look straight on, and

their eyelids straight before them, and to follow Jesus without giving a glance either to the right hand or to the left till it shall be said of them, even in glory, "These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth."

I. I shall make my earnest appeals to the heart and conscience by beginning with this first exhortation: let Christ be your way. You that are young, let him be your way from your youth. You that have hitherto gone the wrong road until your hairs have grown grey in the service of iniquity, turn I beseech you, and take to the way of salvation. May his Spirit turn you, and you will be turned, then will Jesus become your way from henceforth.

If Christ be your way, you will begin first to seek to have Christ. "How shall I have him?" says one. Dost thou desire him? Wilt thou accept him? He is thine. The act of accepting Christ secures Christ to us, for the Father freely gives him to all who freely accept him. Some are troubled through ignorant and unbelieving fears, and are saying, "I wish I could lay hold on Jesus! I wish I knew that Christ was mine!" Art thou willing to have him? Who made thee willing? Dost thou desire him? Who made thee desire him? Who but the Spirit of the Lord? Wilt thou now take Jesus to be thy Savior to save thee from thy sin? Then depend on it, he is thine. There was never any difficulty with him to give himself to thee; the difficulty was to bring thee to receive him; and now that thou dost receive him, remember this—"As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name." Jesus himself has said it, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out"; and therefore, since thou comest, thou shalt never be cast out. Jesus has accepted thee, for thou hast accepted him. But I pray you, none of you rest until you have Christ. Let your eyes look right on and your eyelids straight before you till you find him. Look nowhere else but to him and after him. Shut yourself up in your room determine not to come out again until you have him, and it shall not be long before you find him. Concentrating all your gaze upon the Crucified, light shall come from him, causing the scales to fall from your eyes, and you shall see him, even you that could not see; and you shall cry in delight, "He is mine, he is mine." Remember how David said to his son, "If thou seek him, he will be found of thee." Think of the words of the prophet, "Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near." When you have Christ, the next business of your life must be to know Christ. Seek to know more of him, to know him better, to know him more practically, to know him more assuredly. "That I may know him," said the apostle, after he had been a believer in him for fifteen years. That same man of God speaks of "the love of Christ which passeth knowledge," even his knowledge, which was of the fullest sort; so that he meant to go on learning more and more of Christ, and he did not count himself to have attained. Christian men and women, you do not know your great Master yet. Here have some of us been nearly forty years in his service, and yet we could not describe him to our own satisfaction. Why, we hardly know the power of the hem of his garment yet. We have not descended far down into the mines of his perfections. How little know we of our hidden wealth in Christ Jesus! Oh, that we studied Scripture more, that we were more teachable, and waited more humbly upon the Lord for the light of his Spirit from day to day! Well says our singer—

"Hoard up his sacred word,
And feed thereon and grow;
Go on to seek to know the Lord,
And practice what you know."

In this matter let your eyes look right on, and your eyelids straight before you. Other men may have their pursuits, this is yours; stick to it earnestly. The science of a crucified Savior shines like the moon in the midst of the stars as compared with all the other sciences which men may know; study it with your whole power of mind and heart. The angels on the mercy-seat of the ark stood always looking downward and bending over. Hence the apostle says, "Which things the angels desire to look into"; and if they desire to look into the ark of the covenant and its sacred mysteries, how much more should we!

When you come to know somewhat of what he is, then go on to obey Christ. Is there anything that he has bidden you do? Do it. Some Christians have never yet been baptized: how will they answer for wilful neglect of a known duty? Others have been Christians for years and yet have never communed at the Lord's table. Jesus said "If ye love me, keep my commandments." Do they keep his commandments? It was his dying request, "This do in remembrance of me," and yet they will not fulfill it. Even such a tender request they slight, as though it were of no importance whatever, as if their Lord was a mere nobody whose wishes might well be overlooked. What shall I say of many of the biddings of our holy gospel, many of those sweet precepts which are to be used in the family, and in the business, and in the field? What forgetfulness there is of them! What refusings to follow Christ! He might come to us and say, "If I be a Master, where is mine honor?" Truly it ought to be one of the first thoughts of a Christian to find out the Lord's will; and when he knows it, obedience should follow immediately. His eyes should look right on, and his eyelids straight before him. What said the blessed virgin to those who were at the feast? Note the words, "Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it." It was well spoken of the favored mother and it remains as a golden precept for us all — "Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it." Make no reserve, exercise no choice but obey his command. When you know what he commands, do not hesitate, question, or try to avoid it, but "do it": do it at once, do it heartily, do it cheerfully, do it to the full. It is but a little thing that, as our Lord has bought us with the price of his own blood, we should be his servants. The apostles frequently call themselves the bond-slaves of Christ. Where our Authorized Version softly puts it "servant" it really is "bond-slave." The early saints delighted to count themselves Christ's absolute property, bought by him, owned by him, and wholly at his disposal. Paul even went so far as to rejoice that he had the marks of his Master's brand on him, and he cries, "Let no man trouble me: for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus." There was the end of all debate: he was the Lord's, and the marks of the scourges, the rods, and the stones were the broad-arrow of the King which marked Paul's body as the property of Jesus the Lord. Now if the saints of old time gloried in obeying Christ, I pray that you and I, forgetting the sect to which we may belong, or even the nation of which we form a part, may feel that our first object in life is to obey our Lord and not to follow a human leader, or to promote a religious or political party. This one thing we mean to do, and so follow the advice of Solomon as he says, "Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee." Beloved, let us endeavor to be obedient in the minute as well as in the greater matters, for it is in details that true obedience is best seen. Let us copy the faintest touches in the life of our great Exemplar.

That being attended to, remember, if Christ be your way you have further to seek to be like him, not only to do as he did, but to be as he was; for "as he was, so are we in this world." What a man does is important, but what a man is, is all-important. The ring of the metal is something, but if its ring could be imitated by a base coin it would be nothing. It is after all the substance of the

metal that decides its value. O man, what art thou? If thou be a twice-born man thou art a partaker of the nature of Christ; but if not thou art under the curse which cleaves to the old nature as leprosy cleaves to the leper. "As we have borne the image of the earthy we shall also bear the image of the heavenly"; and we must begin to bear that heavenly image even now. As born again into the headship of the Second Adam, we should seek to be as much like the Second Adam as we are already by nature like the first Adam through our first birth. The second birth should be as operative to produce the image of the second Adam, as the first was to produce the image of the first Adam. Alas! "the earthy" is impressed upon us very distinctly; we cannot spend an hour without discovering the clear stamp of nature's die. Oh that "the heavenly" could be quite as clearly discerned! This therefore we must aim at, though as yet we have not attained it. Here is something to be thought of very carefully, and I charge you by the Holy Ghost, let your eyes look right on and your eyelids straight before you, that you may be transformed from glory to glory into the image of the Lord. God grant that it may be so with every one of us!

Now supposing that we have attended to all this, if Christ is our way and our model there is something more; namely, that we seek to glorify Christ and labor to win others to him. Here is a grand field for all our energies. O Christian people, what are we left in this world for except to bring others to Jesus? Are we not left in this wilderness that we may find out more of the good Shepherd's stray sheep, and work for him and with him to bring them in. I fear we forget this. Are not some of you indifferent as to whether your fellow-men are lost or saved? Have not some of you, in your families, come to this pass - that you see your brother an infidel, your sister frivolous, your parents godless, and yet it does not fret you? I think that if I had a godless relative it would break my night's rest, not now and then, but always. A brother, a father, a child unsaved! What mean ye by taking your ease? If the spirit of Christ be in us, the tears that fell from the eyes of Jesus will find their like upon our cheeks. We shall weep day and night because men are not gathered unto eternal life. Nor will this be a loss to us for blessed are the mourners in Zion. Blessed are they that mourn because others abide in sin and reject the Lord!

Now concerning the salvation of our fellow-men; we shall never compass it unless our eyes look right on and our eyelids straight before us. Before we win souls we must live for souls. We need men and women who live to convert others to Christ. The minister had better quit his pulpit if it be not his one burning desire to bring hearts to Jesus' feet. If a divine impulse be not upon him driving him to seek the souls of men, let him go elsewhere with his windy periods. Professors have little right to be in Christ's church unless they are passionately in earnest to increase his kingdom by the salvation of their fellow-men. O my brothers and sisters on whom is the blood-mark of redemption, I charge you concerning this matter to "let your eyes look right on and let your eyelids look straight before you"! Seek souls as dogs hunt their game; eye, nostril, ear all open, and every muscle strained. Converts are not gained by dreamers. We cannot imitate Jesus as a Savior of men by being dull and heartless. In any point in which we follow our Lord let us do it with all our soul.

Thus much upon the first point: let Christ be your way in all things, and keep to that way.

II. Following the text again, only working it a little differently, the second exhortation is set your eyes on him as your way. If Christ be your way and you follow him to have him, to know him, to obey him, to be like him, and to glorify him, then set your eyes on him as the way. Think of him, consider him, study him, and in all things regard him as first and last to you.

First, that you may know the way of life, let your eyes be fixed on him. Soul, art thou in the dark? Kneel down and pray and look Christward. Saint, art thou bewildered? Go by the way of the

cross, the way of the Crucified, for that is the true and sure path. Sinner, art thou burdened? Wouldst thou be rid of thy burden? Run Christward. Any direction given thee to go anywhere else will misdirect thee. I say not to any one I meet to-night, "Go to the wicket-gate." Neither will I bid you look to any light within and run that way. My only direction is "Go to Jesus." You see that cross and him who bled thereon! Stand still and look that way, and your burden shall fall from your shoulders. Where Jesus died, you shall live. Where Christ was wounded, you shall be healed. "Let your eyes look right on and let your eyelids look straight before you." Know the road; you will never know it too well: the more you know it the happier you will be in it. "To Christ!" "To Christ!" "To Christ!" That is the sole inscription upon every finger-post of the road to heaven. Keep you to the King's highway.

Since Christ is the way, let your eyes be fixed on him as the way, that you may follow him well, may follow him wholly. Gather up all your faculties to go after your Lord. Be not like Lot's wife who longed, and looked, and lingered, and was lost. Away, away, away from Sodom, altogether away: let no eye steal in that direction. Away, away, away to Christ, to Christ alone. All eyes must be for Jesus who cries "Look unto me and be ye saved." As the ploughman looks to the end of the furrow and keeps right on, even so must you look only to Jesus. What hast thou to do with anything but Christ, sinner? I tell thee that thou hast nothing even to do with thine own sins, but to lay them down at his feet. He is all; the beginning and the end. "Let thine eyes look right on and let thine eyelids look straight before thee."

Look alone to Jesus and do this to keep your spirits up. Some men's eyes do not look right on and their eyelids do not look straight before them, for they look back upon that part of the road which they have traversed, and grow content with that which they have already attained. They live in retrospection. When you begin to look back at what you have done and rub your hands and say with self-satisfaction, "I remember when I did right well," wisdom warns you that this is not the right kind of look. What have you to look back upon? Poor, weak creature! Forget that which is behind and press forward to something better and higher. When you sinful souls get looking back upon your past bad lives, I am glad of that, but still I do not want even you to keep your eyes always in that direction. You will get no comfort in looking into the foul ditch of your own transgressions. Look, look, look before you! Look where the cross stands. Run that way. Let thine eyelids look straight before thee to the atoning sacrifice; away from the past, which he will graciously blot out, to Jesus only. Some spend much of their time in what is called introspection. Now introspection, like retrospection, is a useful thing in a measure; but it can readily be overdone, and then it breeds morbid emotions, and creates despair. Some are always looking into their own feelings. A healthy man hardly knows whether he has a stomach or a liver; it is your sickly man who grows more sickly by the study of his inward complaints. Too many wound themselves by studying themselves. Every morning they think of what they should feel: all day long they dwell upon what they are not feeling; and at night they make diligent search for what they have been feeling. It looks to me like shutting up your shop and then living in the counting-house, taking account of what is not sold. Small profits will be made in this way. You may look a long while into an empty pocket before you find a sovereign, and you may look a long time into fallen nature before you find comfort. A man might as well try to find burning coals under the ice as to find anything good in our poor human nature. When you look within it should be to see with grief what the filthiness is; but to get rid of that filthiness you must look beyond yourself. I remember Mr. Moody saying that a looking-glass was a capital thing to show you the spots on your face; but you could not wash in a looking-glass. You

want something very different when you would make your face clean. So let your eyes look right on—

“To the full atonement made,
To the utmost ransom paid.”

Forget yourself and think only of Christ.

Some not only unduly practice retrospection and introspection, but they carry much too far a sort of circumspection. They look all around them: they look upon their past, and their present, and their fears and their doubts, and from all these things they judge their condition, and decide their state of mind. You recollect Peter. He cried to his Lord, “Bid me come unto thee on the water.” He receives permission. Down the side over the boat goes Peter. To his intense surprise he is standing on a wave. Peter had never done such a thing before in his life as walk on the water. He might have kept on standing on the wave and he might have walked all the way to Jesus, if he had kept his eyes on his Master until he reached him. The waters would have borne him up as well as a granite pavement; but Peter began to look at the billows, and he listened to the howling of the wind, and then to the beating of his own heart; and down he went; and then he had to cry to his Master. “Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee”: thou canst walk the waters all the way to the golden shore if thou canst but stop thine eyes to all things else. Surely I may use the text as an illustration of that closing of the eyes. “Let thine eyes look right on.” “I understand that,” says one, “for I trust. But you cannot look with your eyelids.” What can that mean? Remember that you can shut your eyes with your eyelids to a great many things, and so cease to see them; and in the matter of faith-sight a great many things are best not seen. So, when you would otherwise see the danger and all the difficulties and the doubts, do not look with your eyes, but look with your eyelids. Not to look at the difficulties at all is all the look they deserve. Let your eyelids shut out the view which would create distrust. Do not see, do not feel, “only believe.” Believe Christ, and believe nothing else. “Let God be true but every man a liar.” If all the sins thou hast ever done should come rolling up like Atlantic billows, and if all the devils in hell should come riding on the crests of those waves howling as they come, take no notice of them. Christ has said he that believeth in him hath everlasting life; believe thou in him, and thou hast the everlasting life as surely as Christ is the Christ of God. Draw down the blind and see nothing, know nothing, believe nothing but the living word of the living Savior. “Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee.” When thou closest thine eyes to consider, thou canst see a good deal with closed eyes, but still look thou right on to the one and only trust.

You must also let your eyes look right on, dear friends; for if you begin to look two ways at a time you will miss the Lord Jesus, who is your way. Under the Jewish law no man who had a squint was allowed to be a priest. He is described as one who had “a blemish in his eye.” I wish they would make a similar law with regard to spiritual sight in preachers nowadays, for certain of them are sadly cross-eyed. When they preach free grace they squint fearfully towards free-will; and if they look to the atonement they must needs see in it more of man than of Christ. See how they look to Moses and to Darwin; to revelation and to speculation! A great many people would fain be saved, but they squint: they look a little towards sin, and the flesh, and the world, and they make provision for personal gain, and personal ease. In this case they fail to see Christ’s strait and narrow way of the denial of self, and the crucifixion of the flesh. If thou wouldst have salvation, “Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee.” Look not a little this way and a little

that way, or thou wilt never run aright. "I could believe that I was a Christian," says one, "if I felt more happy. I could trust Christ if I felt my nature changed." That is a squint which ruins the faith-look. That is trying to look two ways at once. You cannot do it: it will ruin you. It would spoil the beauty of the sweetest countenance if we could use our eyes to look otherwise than straight on. We have some friends who if they wish to see us, look over there, and yet we are not there. Avoid this spiritual blemish; it has no advantages—"Let thine eyes look right on." Look to Christ alone, to him as thy whole salvation. Have nothing to do with thy good works as a ground of trust, or thou art a lost man. I charge thee have nothing to do even with thy faith and thy repentance as a ground of trust. Trust not thy trust, but trust alone in what Christ has done. If thou shalt trust thy best feelings or thy worst feelings, thy prayers or thy praises, thy almsgivings or thy consecration in any degree, thou hast made an antichrist of them. Strip thyself of thy last rag and let Christ clothe thee from top to toe. Be thou hungry unto famishing, and clean out the last crumb thou hast in the pantry, for then only wilt thou feed on Christ the bread of life. Let him be both bread and wine, and make up the whole of a feast for thee. Thou shalt have salvation surely enough if this be what thou dost. But let not Jesus bring the bread, and carnal confidence the wine: take a whole Christ to be all thy salvation and all thy desire, and thy peace shall be unbroken. Let the Holy Spirit bring thee to that oneness of trust which makes both eyes meet at their proper focus, and let that focus be the Lord Jesus. "Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee."

III. But my time has almost expired and I have only to lay emphasis on one more matter. Let your eyes distinctly and directly look to Christ alone. I have gone over this before, but I need to hammer at it again in order to clench the nail. Look not to any human guide but look to Christ Jesus alone. We have no faith in priests; but it is a very easy thing to fix your faith upon a minister and hear what he says, and believe it because he says it. I charge you, believe nothing that I tell you if it cannot be supported by the Word of God. I am content to stand or to fall by this: "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, there is no light in them." I will quote the authority of no other book whoever may have composed it; no ancient book, let it belong even to the earliest days of the church. This one inspired volume is the text-book of our religion. Follow Holy Scripture and you have an infallible chart. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the one apostle and high priest of our profession: follow him. Not even mother or father or the brightest saint that ever lived must divide you from your perfect Guide. "Let your eyes look right on and let your eyelids look straight before you," and hear the gracious words of him who bought you with his blood as he cries, "Follow me."

Then again look to Christ directly and distinctly for yourself. I warn you against putting any trust in national religion, or in family and birthright godliness. A personal Christ must be laid hold of by a personal faith. You must yourself repent, yourself believe, yourself get a grip of him, and of none but him. You must use your own eyes: "Let your eyes look right on and let your eyelids look straight before you."

Again, look not to any secondary aims. Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. In seeking Christ make no bargain with gain or reputation; be content to lose all gold and all honor if you may but win Christ. To follow religion for self would be a mean act of hypocrisy, and to leave it for the same reason is equally vile. Let your eyes be fixed on following your Lord, and as to any worldly consequences, bring your eyelids into use, keep them fast closed, and go right on in implicit obedience to your Lord.

Forget all things else when seeking Christ and when you have found Christ. It is no ill thing for a man, when he is under concern of soul, to let his business and everything go till he finds his Savior. I urge no one to such a course, but I have noticed many converts who have done this who have soon found rest. If a captain were busy about the comfort of his passengers in their cabins but all the while knew that there was a great leak in the ship, and that it would soon go down, and to this he paid no heed whatever, you would say to him "How foolish you are to mind the little and neglect the great!" But if he told the passengers, "Breakfast cannot be prepared with our usual care for all hands are pumping or repairing the vessel," you could not blame him when you knew that every man's help was needed to save the ship from going down. In times of extreme danger, secondary things must give place to the main thing. If this house were to take fire you would not stay to sing the last hymn, even if I gave it out. May the Holy Spirit lead some of you to feel that you must be saved! You must be saved, and therefore you must put other things into a second place. Remember how Bunyan pictures the man running for his life, and when his neighbors called to him to stop, he put his fingers in his ears, and as he ran he shouted "Eternal life! Eternal life! Eternal life!" That man was a wise man. Imitate him; if you have not found eternal life run for it with your "eyes right on, and your eyelids straight before you."

And lastly, take care that you continue gazing upon Christ until you have faith in him. "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Go on hearing the Word of God till faith come thereby. Do you ask me how faith comes? It is the gift of God, but it usually comes in a certain way. Thinking of Jesus and meditating upon Jesus will breed faith in Jesus. I was struck with what one said the other day of a certain preacher. The hearer was in deep concern of soul, and the minister preached a very pretty sermon indeed, decorated abundantly with word-painting. I scarcely know any brother who can paint so daintily as this good minister can; but this poor soul under a sense of sin said, "There was too much landscape, sir. I did not want landscape; I wanted salvation." Dear friend, never crave word-painting when you attend a sermon; but crave Christ. You must have Christ to be your own by faith or you are a lost man. When I was seeking the Savior I remember hearing a very good doctrinal sermon; but when it was over I longed to tell the minister that there was a poor lad there who wanted to know how he could be saved. How I wished he had given half a minute to that subject! Dr. Manton, who was usually a clear and full preacher of the gospel, when he preached before the Lord Mayor, gave his lordship something a cut above the common citizens and so the poorer folk missed their portion. After he had done preaching his sermon an aged woman cried, "Dr. Manton, I came here this morning under concern of soul, wanting a blessing, and I have not got it for I could not understand you." The preacher meekly replied, "The Lord forgive me! I will not so offend again." He had overlooked the poor, and had thought mainly of my Lord Mayor. Special sermons before Mayors and Queens and assemblies are seldom worth a penny a thousand. The gospel does not lend itself to show performances. I am not here to give you intellectual treats: my eyes look right on to your salvation. Oh that yours may look that way! Go after Christ, dear friend. Seek after Christ with your whole heart and soul. Feel that the one thing you must have is to be reconciled to God by the death of his Son. Keep on with that cry, "None but Christ: none but Christ." Make this your continual litany—

"Give me Christ, or else I die;
Give me Christ, or else I die."

Then you will soon find him. “Let your eyes look right on and let your eyelids look straight before you,” and you shall see the Lord of grace appearing to you through the mist and through the cloud; that self-same Savior who stands in the midst of us even now and cries, “Look unto me and be ye saved all the ends of the earth: for I am God and there is none else.”

Last Things

A sermon (No. 667) delivered on Sunday morning, December 31, 1865
at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington,
by C. H. Spurgeon.

“At the last.”—Proverbs 5:11.

The wise man saw the young and simple straying into the house of the strange woman. The house seemed so completely different from what he knew it to be that he desired to shed a light upon it, that the young man might not sin in the dark, but might understand the nature of his deeds. The wise man looked abroad and he saw but one lamp suitable to his purpose; it was named “At the last;” so snatching this he held it up in the midst of the strange woman’s den of infamy, and everything was changed from what it had been before: the truth had come to light and the deceptive had vanished. The young man dreamed of pleasure, in wanton dalliance he hoped to find delight; but when the lamp of “At the last” began to shine, he saw rottenness in his bones, filthiness in his flesh, pains and griefs and sorrows as the necessary consequence of sin, and wisely guided, wisely taught, the simple-minded started back and listened to the admonitions of the teacher, “Come not nigh the door of her house, for her gates lead down to the chambers of death.”

Now if this lamp of “At the last” was found so useful in this one particular case, methinks it must be equally useful everywhere else, and it may help us all to understand the truth of matters if we will look at them in the light which this wonderful lamp yields. I can only compare my text in its matchless power to Ithuriel’s spear, with which according to Milton, he touched the toad and straightway Satan appeared in his true colors. If I can apply my text to certain things to-day they will come out in their true light; “At the last,” shall be the rod in my hand with which I shall touch tinsel, and it shall disappear and you will see it is not gold, and I will touch varnish and paint and graining, and you shall understand that they are really what they are, and not what they profess to be. The light of “At the last” shall be the light of truth, the light of wisdom to our souls. It seems to me a fitting occasion for holding up this light this morning, when we have come to the end of the year and shall in a few short hours be at the beginning of another. This period, like Janus, hath two faces, looking back on the year that is past and looking forward on the year that is to come, and my four-sided lamp will perhaps gleam afar. I wish that you may have courage enough to look down the vista of the years that you have already lived, and think of everything that you have thought, and spoken, and done, in the light of the beams of this lamp “At the last,” and then I hope you will have holy daring enough to let the same light shine forward on the years yet to come, when your hair shall be grey and the grinders shall fail, and they that look out of the windows shall be darkened. We will then, examine the past and the future of life in the light of “At the last.” May it teach us wisdom and make us walk as in the fear of God.

I have said that my lamp has four sides to it, and so it has: we will look at it first in the light which streams from death.

I. Death is at the last. In some sense it is the last of this mortal life; it is the last of our period of trial here below; it is the last of the day of grace; it is the last of the day of mortal sin. The tree falleth when we die, and it sprouteth not again; the house is washed from the foundations and it is

built no more if it hath been founded on sin. Death is the end of this present life. And how certain is it to all of us! This year we have had many tokens of its certainty. One might almost compose an almanac for the year 1865, and put down the name of some one of note at least to every month, and I should scarcely exaggerate if I said to every week, in the year. All ranks and classes have been made to feel the arrow of the insatiable archer. From royalty down to poverty the grave has been glutted with its prey. Not late in the year there fell one, whose benevolence mingled with sagacity had blessed our land, and who being dead is still remembered by the needy because he cheapened their bread, and broke down the laws which while they might have fattened the rich, certainly impoverished the poor. His sagacity could not spare him, and though he is embalmed in the hearts of thousands, yet to the dust he has returned. Swiftly after him there fell one who ruled a mighty people in the flush of victory, when what threatened to be a disruption and a separation had ended in triumph to one side, and the nation seemed as if it were about to start on a fresh course of prosperity. By the assassin's hand he fell. Whatever question there might have been about him in his life, all men conspired to honor him in his death. The ruler of a nation who could subdue a gallant and a mighty foe could not subdue that old foeman who conquers whom he wills. Abraham Lincoln died as well as Cobden. And there was he who had saved many precious lives by warning mariners of the approaching storm, and thus many a ship had remained in harbor and been delivered from the merciless jaws of the deep, but he could not forecast or escape himself the last dread storm; he too must go down into that fathomless deep which swalloweth all mankind. Then when the year was ripe and the flowers were all in bloom—fit season for his going—there was taken away the man who has garnished our nation with objects of beauty and of joy, a man who loved the flowers and sleeps beneath them now. Like flowers he withered as all of us must do—Sir Joseph Paxton died. Then in the month of September, when the year began to wane, three men at least who had walked with their staff to heaven and read the spheres, astronomers who predicted eclipses and told of comets, men of fame and name—three fell at once. They might tell the eclipse, but they themselves must be eclipsed; and the comet they might foretell the track of, but they themselves are gone from us as those meteoric stars are gone. Then you will remember well, when the year had waned, grown old, it is but a day or two ago that all were startled by the death of that young-old man who had ruled our nation so long and on the whole so well. We shall not forget that he was taken away from us who was in some respects a king throughout our land. Wisdom, cheerfulness, youthful strength such as he possessed could not avert the time of death. And then as if the muster roll were not completed, as if death could not be satisfied till the year had yielded up yet another grave, we heard that the oldest of monarchs had been taken away; and though his goodness and his wisdom had guided well the little nation over which he ruled, and given him an influence far more extensive than his own sphere, yet death spared him not, and Leopold must die. It has been a year of dying rather than of living, and you may look upon yourselves and wonder that you are here. Some greener than we are have been cut down. You that are ripe, are you ready? It is marvellous that although so ripe you should have been spared so long.

Now in the light of all these deaths, I want you to look upon mortal sins. They sculpture angels upon gravestones sometimes; then let each angel from the gravestone speak to us this morning, and we will listen to his words, for wise and solemn they will surely be, and worthy of our notice, as if he had risen from the dead.

Let me take you upstairs to your own dying chamber, for there perhaps the lamp will burn best for you. Look at actions which you have thought to be great, and upon which you have prided

yourself— how will they look at the last? You made money; you made money fast; you did the thing very cleverly; you praised yourself for it, just as others have praised themselves for conquering nations or forcing their way to fame, or lifting themselves into eminence. Now you are dying, and what do you think of all that? Is it so great as it seemed to be? Oh, how you leaped up to it, how you strained yourself to reach it, and you have got it, and you are dying. What do you think of it now? The greatest of human actions will appear to be insignificant when we come to die, and especially those upon which men most pride themselves —these will yield them the bitterest humiliation. We shall then say what madmen we must have been to have wasted so much time and energy upon such paltry things. When we shall discover that they were not real, that they were but mere bubbles, mere pretences, we shall then look upon ourselves as demented to have spent the whole of our life and of our energy upon them.

Let us look at our selfish actions in that light. A man says, "I know how to make money," "and I know how to keep it too," says he—and he prides himself that he is not such a fool as to be generous, nor such a simpleton as to give either to God or to the poor. Now, there he lies. Ah! do you know how to keep it now? Can you take it with you? Can you bear so much as a single farthing of it across the river of death? You are come to the water's side—how much of it will you carry through? Ah fool! how much wiser hadst thou been if thou hadst laid up thy treasure in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt! Thou calledst such men fools when thou wast living. What dost thou think of them now that thou art dying? Who is the fool, he that sent his goods beforehand, or he that stored them up here to leave them everlastingly? Everything that is selfish will look beggarly when we come to die; but everything which in the sight of God we have done for Christ's sake that has been generous, and self-denying, and noble, will even amidst the vaults of death sparkle with celestial splendor. Some of you during this week have been giving to the cause of God right generously, for which I thank you—I think I may also do it in my Master's name—and when I have thought of it I have said to myself, "Surely, when they come to die they shall none of them regret that they have served the cause of God. Ah, if they have even given to the pinching of themselves, it shall be no source of sorrow when they come to the dying bed that they did it unto one of the least of God's little ones." Look at your actions in the light of death, and the selfish ones shall soon pass. I would also, dear friends, that some of you would look at your self-righteousness in the light of death. You have been very good people, very upright, honest, moral, amiable, generous, and so on, and you are resting on what you are. Do you think this will bear your weight when you come to die? When you are in good health, any form of religion may satisfy, but a dying soul wants more than sand to rest on. You will want the Rock of Ages. Then let me assure you that in the light of the grave, all confidence except confidence in the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ is a clear delusion. Fly from it, I beseech thee. Wherefore wilt thou repose beneath a Jonah's gourd that will die before the worm? Seek thou a better shelter; cling thou to the Rock of Ages; find thou the shadow of a great rock in a weary land. The same, I may say, of all confidence in the efficacy of ceremonies and sacraments. When we are in good health it seems a sufficiently satisfactory thing to have been baptized, and to have taken the sacrament, and to go to church, and read prayers and all that, and one can get some little water out of those wells while one is strong and joyous; but when you come to be sick and to die let me tell you, sacraments will be nothing to you. Baptism and the Lord's Supper will alike deceive you if you rest on them; when you come to die you will find them to be supports too frail to bear the weight of an immortal soul's eternal interests. It will be in vain when you lie dying, if God gives you a quickened conscience,

to say, “I went to church or to meeting so many times a day.” You will find it a poor plaister to your soul’s wounds to be able to say, “I made a profession of godliness.” Oh your shams will all be rent away from you by the rough hand of the skeleton: Death; you will want a real Savior, vital godliness, true regeneration, not baptismal regeneration; you will want Christ not sacraments; and nothing short of this will do “at the last.”

And dear friends, let me ask as I hold up the light, how will sin appear when we come to die? It is pleasant now and we can excuse it, calling it a peccadillo, a little trivial mistake, a juvenile error, and imprudence, and so on; but how will sin appear when you come to die? The grim ghosts of our iniquities, if they have not been laid in the grave of Christ Jesus, will haunt our dying bed. That ghastly chamberlain, with finger bloody and red, will draw the curtain round about us. What a horrid prospect to be shut in with our sins for ever, to be dying with no comrades about the bed to comfort, but with the remembrances of the past to terrify and to alarm!

Think, I pray you, not only upon the root and principle of evil but upon the fruit of it. Remember that the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life. Do not consider what the thing looks like to-day, but what will it be in the end thereof? Thou warmest the viper in thy bosom, but how wilt thou bear its sting when thou shalt come to lie upon thy last bed? The sea I know is smooth and calm to thee for a moment; but remember there are storms, there are hurricanes that sweep it, and what will thy poor bark do without Christ for its pilot when the dread storm of death shall come? I wish I could in imagination take you down, down, down to the waters of death, where you shall feel your feet sinking in the dread sand of uncertainty, and hear the booming of the distant sea, and your spirit shall begin to ask, “What is that ocean that I hear?” And there shall come back an answer, “Ye hear the breaking of the everlasting waves; the bottomless sea of eternity is that to which you are descending.” You shall feel its chill floods as they come from the ankles to the knees, and from the knees to the loins; and you will find it (if you are without Christ) not a river to swim in, but an ocean to be drowned in for ever, for ever, for ever. Oh, God help you to look at present joys, and actions, and thoughts, and doings, in the light of death! What a contrast there is often between the life of man and his death! You would praise some men if you only saw their lives, but when you see their deaths you shift your estimation. There is Moses: he may be the King of Egypt, but he gives up royalty and all its tempting joys. On the mount it is offered to him to be made the founder of a mighty race—a desire always prominent in the Eastern mind, but instead of desiring himself to be made a great nation he unselfishly desires even to be blotted out of the Book of Life, if God will will but spare his people Israel. And what does Moses get for it all? His only earthly reward is to be the leader of a crew of slaves who are perpetually rebelling against him and vexing his holy spirit. Now there is Balaam on the other hand, he has visitations from God; and when Balak the son of Zippor begs him to curse Israel, he cannot curse, though he is quite willing to go as far as he can. He is compelled by the inward Spirit to bless the people, but after he has done that for gain and for reward, he plots a plan against Israel by which they were cursed: he bids them send out the women of Moab to lead astray the children of Israel. Now there he goes with his treasures of silver and gold back to his own house, and the shrewd busy worldly man says, “That is the man for me: do not tell me about your meek Moses that is afraid of doing this and that and will not look after the main chance. He has thrown away a kingdom, and now he has thrown away the chance of being the head of a nation. That is the man to make money—Balaam. He will be a common councilor, or an alderman, or lord mayor one day—that Balaam. A man must not stick too much at things; he must go ahead and make hay while the sun shines.

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“There is a tide in the affairs of men,
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune.”

That is the man for me who knows when to launch out on the waters, and who does not ask if they are dirty or clean if they only waft him onward to wealth and success.” Ah, but they come to die, and Balaam dies—where? He had prayed, “Let my last end be like his”—like the righteous—and he died in battle fighting against the righteous and against the God of the righteous. And hard by that very spot Moses also died, and you know how—with visions of Canaan upon his eye, melting into visions of the Canaan which is above, the New Jerusalem, which is the mother of us all. In that death who would not be Moses? let who will be Balaam in life. Be it yours and mine to aspire to be like Moses, both living and dying. “At the last!” think of that, and whenever you are tempted by sin, or tempted by gain, look at it—“At the last,” “At the last.” God help you to judge righteous judgment.

II. And now we will turn to the second side of our lantern. The second of these last things is judgment. After death, the judgment. When we die, we die not. When a man dieth, shall he live again? Ay, that he shall—for his spirit dieth never. God hath made us such strange wondrous beings, with such wide reaching hopes, and such far darting aspirations, that it is not possible we should die and become extinct. The beast hath no longing for immortality; you never hear it sigh for celestial regions: it hath no dread of judgment because there is no second life, no judgment for the beast that perisheth. But the God who gives to man the dread of things to come, and makes him feel and long after something better than this small globe affords us, cannot have mocked us, cannot have made us more wretched than the beast that perisheth by giving us passions and desires never to be gratified. We are immortal, every one of us, and when the stars go out and Sol’s great furnace is extinguished for want of fuel, and like a vesture God’s wide universe shall be rolled up, we shall be living still, a life as eternal as the Eternal God himself. Oh, when we leave this world we are told that after death there comes a judgment to us. I do not know how it is with you—you may be more accustomed to courts of justice than I am—but there always creeps a solemnity over me, even in a common court of justice among men, and especially when a man is being tried for his life. Laughter seems hushed there, and everything is solemn. How much more dread will be that Court where men shall be tried for their eternal lives, where their souls rather than their bodies shall be at stake! The judgment of one’s fellows is not to be despised. A bold good man can afford to laugh at the world’s opinion, still it is trying to him for one’s fellows may be right: multitudes of men, if they have really thought upon the matter, may not all be wrong. It is not easy to stand at the bar of public opinion and receive the verdict of condemnation; but what will it be to stand at the bar of God who is greater than all, and to receive from him the sentence of damnation! God save us from that!

Let us think of this judgment a moment. We shall rise from the dead: we shall be there in body as well as spirit. These very bodies will stand upon the earth at the latter day: when Christ shall come and the trumpet shall sound his people shall rise at the first resurrection, and the wicked shall rise also, and in their flesh shall they see God. Let me think of all that I have done then in the light of that. There will be present every man who has ever lived on earth. How shall I like to have all my doings published there? My very thoughts—how shall I feel when they are read aloud; what I whispered in the ear in the closet—how shall I like to have that proclaimed with sound of trumpet! And what I did in the dark—how shall I care to have that revealed in the light? And yet these things

must be made known before the assembled universe. There will be present there my enemies. If I have treated them ill, if I have been a backbiter, a slanderer, it will be then declared: if I have been a hypocrite and a dissembler and made others think me true when I have been false, I shall be unmasked then. Those I have injured will be there. With what alarm will the debauchee see those whom he has seduced stand with fiery eyes to accuse him there! With what horror will the oppressor see the widow and the fatherless whom he drove to poverty stand there, swift witnesses against him to condemnation! If I have spread false doctrine, a moral pestilence destroying human souls, my victims shall be there to gather round me in a circle and like dogs that bay the stag, demanding each of them my blood. They shall all be there, friends and foes; more solemn still, "He" shall be there—the man of men, the grandest among men because God as well as man, and if I have despised and rejected his salvation I shall then see him in another fashion and after another sort.

"The Lord shall come! but not the same
As once in lowliness he came,
A silent Lamb before his foes,
A weary man, and full of woes.
The Lord shall come! a dreadful form,
With rainbow-wreath and robes of storm;
On cherub wings, and wings of wind,
Appointed Judge of all mankind!"

How will you face him, you that have despised him? You who have doubted his deity, how will you bear the blaze of it? You rejected and trampled on his precious blood, how will you bear the weight of his almighty arm? when on the cross you would not receive him, and when on the throne you shall not escape from him. That silver scepter which he stretches out now to you, if you refuse to touch it, shall be laid aside and he will take one of another metal, a rod of iron, and he shall break you in pieces, yea, he shall dash you in pieces like potters' vessels. And God shall be there, manifestly there, that God who is here this morning on the last day of this year, and who sees your thoughts and reads your minds at this moment, but who is so invisible that you forget that he fills this place and fills all places; you shall not be able to forget him then. Your eyes shall see him in that day; you shall understand his presence. You will try to be hidden from him; would desire hell itself and think it a place of shelter if you could escape from him; but everywhere that fire shall encircle you, shall consume you, for "our God is a consuming fire." You shall no more be able to escape from yourself than from God. You shall find him as present with you as your own soul will be, and you shall feel his hand of fire searching for the chords of your soul, and sweeping with a doleful Miserere all the heart-strings of your spirit. Misery unspeakable must be yours when the voice of the God-man shall say, "Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire in hell." I would to God that ye would look at all your actions in the light of the day of judgment. Our secret thoughts, let us turn them out this morning; they have been lying by till they are mouldy; let us bring them forth to-day. My thoughts, how will you look in the light of judgment? My professions, my imaginations, my conceptions, how will ye all be when the judgment day shall gleam upon you? My profession, how does that look? I have been baptized in Christ professedly, I wear a Christian name, I preach the gospel, I am a Church officer or a Church member, how will all this bear the light of that tremendous day? When I am put in the scales and weighed, shall I be the weight that I am labelled? In that dreadful day shall I see the handwriting on the wall, "Mene, Tekel, Upharsin"—"Thou art

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weighed in the balances, and found wanting"? or shall I hear the gracious sentence which shall pronounce me saved in Jesus Christ? As to my graces, what must they be in the light of judgment? my own salvation, all the matters of experience and knowledge—how do they all look in that light! I think I have believed: I think I love the Savior: I sometimes hope that I am his; but am I so? Shall I be found to be a true believer at the last? Will my love be mere cant or true affection? Will my graces be mere talk, or will they be found to be the work of God the Holy Ghost? Am I vitally united to Christ or not? Am I a mere pretender, or a true possessor of the things eternal? Oh my soul, set thou these questions in the light of that tremendous day. I would to God we could now go forward to the day of judgment, in thought at any rate; and since I feel myself quite unable to lead you thither, let me adopt my Savior's words: He says that the day cometh when he shall separate the righteous from the wicked as the shepherd divideth the sheep from the goats. There shall be some on his left hand to whom he shall say, "I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. Depart, ye cursed." Will he say that to you and to me? There will be some on his right hand to whom he will say, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from before the foundation of the world." Shall he say that to you and to me? The one or the other it must be. As I stand here this morning, I seem to feel on my own account, and I wish you all did on yours, what a certain man in court once felt. Sentence was about to be given in his case, or at least he thought the case would be called on immediately, and he rushed to his solicitor and he said, "Is there nothing left undone? Are you sure? for if I lose this case I am a ruined man." His face was white with anxiety. And so it is with you. Is there nothing left undone? for if you lose this case at God's judgment-seat you are a ruined man. Come hearer, hast thou believed on Christ Jesus, or is faith left undone? Hast thou given up self-righteousness? hast thou left thy sin? Hast thou given thy heart to the Savior? Is regeneration still unaccomplished? Art thou born again? Art thou in Christ? Art thou saved? If thy case be lost thou art a ruined man. A man ruined here may still retrieve his fortunes; the bankrupt may start again and yet be rich; the captain who has lost a battle may renew the fight and win the successive victory and begin the campaign anew; but lose the battle of life and the fight shall be no more. Make bankruptcy in this life's business, and you have no more trading. This is the business of eternity. Soul, is there anything left undone? Brother, sister, is there anything left undone? for if you lose this case you are ruined, and that to all eternity. I pray you to look at this day and at all your days, the past and the future, in the light of the day of judgment.

III. But my lamp—this matchless lamp—has a third side to it, bright, gleaming like a cluster of stars. The third of the last things is Heaven, the portion I trust of many of us. We hope when days and years have passed that full many of us will meet to part no more on the other side of Jordan, in heaven. Now, let us see if we can cast a little light from heaven upon the things present and the things past. You have been toiling—toiling very hard, and wiping the sweat from your brow and saying, "My lot is not a desirable one. Oh how weary am I! I cannot bear it." Courage, brother, courage, sister; there is rest for the weary; there is eternal rest for the beloved of the Lord, and when thou shalt arrive in heaven, how little, how utterly insignificant thy toil will seem, even if it shall have lasted threescore years and ten. You are pained much; even now pain shoots through your body; you do not often know what it is to have an easy hour, and you half murmur, "Why am I thus? Why did God deal so hardly with me?" Think of heaven where the inhabitants shall no more say, "I am sick;" where there are no groans to mingle with the songs that warble from immortal

tongues. Courage, tried one. Oh! it will soon be over; it is but a pin's prick or a moment's pang, and then eternal glory. Be of good cheer and let not thy patience fail thee. And so thou hast been slandered. On thy face for Christ's dear name shame and reproach have been cast, and thou art ready to give up. Come, man, look before thee! Canst thou not hear the acclamations of the angels as the conquerors receive one by one their eternal crowns? What! wilt thou not fight when there is so much to be won? Must thou be carried to the skies on flowery beds of ease? Thou must fight if thou wouldst reign. Gird up the loins of thy mind and have respect to the recompense of reward. In the light of heaven, the shame of earth will seem to be less than nothing and vanity. And so you have had many losses and crosses: you were once well-to-do, but you are poor now. You will have to go home to-day to a very poor abode and to a scanty meal. Oh, but beloved, you will not be there long. "In my Father's house are many mansions." It is but an inn thou art tarrying at awhile, and, if the accommodation be rough, thou art gone to-morrow; so complain not. I would to God we could look upon all our actions in the light of heaven—I mean those who are believers in Jesus Christ. If we could have regrets hereafter I think it would be that we did not do more than we did for Christ here below. In heaven they cannot feed Christ's poor, cannot teach the ignorant. They can extol him with songs of praise, but there are some things in which we have the preference over them: they cannot clothe the naked, or visit the sick, or speak words of cheer to those that are disconsolate. If there is anything that can give joy in heaven surely it will be in looking back on the grace which enabled us to serve the Master. Oh, if I can win souls to Christ I shall be a gainer as well as you. I shall have another heaven in their heaven, another joy as it were in their life, and another happiness in their souls' happiness. And dear brethren and sisters, if in your Sunday-school teaching, or visiting, or talking to others, you can bring any to glory, you will, if it be possible, multiply your heaven and make it all the more glad and joyful. Now look at the life of some Christians. They come here, and if I preach what they call a good sermon, they like it and drink it in. They are willing to eat the fat and drink the sweet, but what do they do for Christ? Nothing. What do they give for Christ? Hardly anything. There are a few such among us, and these are generally the most miserable people you meet with—neither a comfort to others nor yet any joy to themselves. Now, even in heaven, methinks, though no sorrow should be there, it will be only God's wiping it away that will keep them from regretting that they did not do what they might have done on earth. We are saved by grace, blessed be God—by grace alone; but being saved, we do desire to make known the savor of Christ in every place, and we believe in heaven we shall have joy in having made this known among the sons of men. Look at your joy in the light of heaven, and you will make it other than it now looks.

IV. We now turn to the fourth of the four last things, and that is, let us look at all things in the light of Hell, that dread and dismal light, the glare of the fiery abyss. Bring that lantern here. Here is a young man very merry. "Ho! ho!" he sings, "Christians are fools." Hold my light up. There you are without God, without hope, with the great iron gate of death shut upon you and barred forever, your body in the flames of Tophet and your soul in the yet more horrible flames of the wrath of God. Who is the fool now? Oh, when your spirits are damned—as they must be if you live without a Savior—you will think laughing a poor thing. Laugh now, sir! Scoff now! For a few minutes' merriment you sold eternal joys. You had a mess of pottage and you ate it in haste, and you sold your birthright. What think you of it now? It is an awful thing that men should be content for a few short hours of silly mirth to fling away their souls. Look at merriment in the glare of the flames of hell. Mark that man in agony down in the vault of hell, he made money by sin and there

he is; he gained the whole world and lost his own soul. How does it look now? "I would give thirty thousand pounds," said an English gentleman when he lay dying, "if any man would prove to me to a demonstration that there is no hell." Ay, but if he had given thirty thousand worlds that could not be proved, and now, with pangs unutterable, he knows it so. What would you give when once you are lost, if you could throw back your gains? If lost spirits could return here, surely they would do what Judas did—throw down the thirty pieces of silver in the temple and curse themselves that they ever took the gain of this world and destroyed their souls.

And how will unbelief look in the flames of hell? There are no infidels anywhere but on earth: there are none in heaven, and there are none in hell. Atheism is a strange thing. Even the devils never fell into that vice, for "the devils believe and tremble." And there are some of the devil's children that have gone beyond their father in sin, but how will it look when they are forever lost? When God's foot crushes them they will not be able to doubt his existence. When he tears them in pieces and there is none to deliver, then their sophistical syllogisms, their empty logic, their brags and bravadoes, will be of no avail. Oh, that they had been wise and had not darkened their foolish hearts, but had turned unto the living God!

And my dear hearers, I have another thought which will come home to some of your spirits with peculiar power. How will procrastination seem when once you get there? Some of you have been attending this place a long time: you have often had impressions, but you have always said "By and by," "By and by." You have been aroused and aroused again, but still it has been "To-morrow, to-morrow, to-morrow." How will to-morrow ring in your ears when once you are lost! What would you not give for another day of mercy, another hour of grace? I feel this morning as if I would do with you what the Roman Ambassadors did with Antiochus. They met him and asked him whether he meant war or peace. He said he must see; and one of them taking his staff, made a circle round him where he stood, and said, "You must answer before you leave that spot. If you step out of that it is war. Now, war or peace?" And I too would draw a secret circle round you in the pew this morning and say to you, "Which shall it be, sin or holiness, self or Christ? Shall it be grace or enmity, heaven or hell? And I pray you answer that question in the light of hell. It is a dread light, but it is a revealing one. It is a fire that will devour the scales that are about your blind eyes. God grant that it may scorch those scales away, that you may see now how dreadful a thing it is to be an enemy to God, and be led by his Holy Spirit to apply to Jesus Christ even now. And how will the gospel seem in the light of hell, and how will your indifference to it seem? When I was thinking of preaching this morning, I wished that I could preach as in that light. To think that there are some to whom I have spoken again and again, who during this year have passed away from the world of hope, we fear into the land of despair, is a dreadful thought. Persons that occupied these pews, sat in these aisles, stood far away there, and listened and heard the gospel—and they are gone! Did I warn them fairly, truly? If not—if thou warn them not they shall perish, but their blood will I require at thy hands. My God, by the blood of the Savior, set me free from these men! Oh deliver us from that solemn condemnation. But with those of you that still live, I would be clear of you. Dear hearers, do not you feel that you are mortal? Have not you within you a sense that you are dying? It is a thought that is always with me; life seems so short. It was not so always with me; but the shortness of life now seems to hang over my mind perpetually, and I suppose it must do so over those of you who are thirty, forty, fifty, or sixty, and who frequently see your friends taken away. Now since you must soon be gone, since there is a world to come, and you believe there is, how can some of you play with these things? How is it that while you are attentive to your

business, you leave your soul's business neglected? What are you waiting for, my hearer? Are you waiting for another season? Does not God say, "Now is the accepted time; now is the day of salvation"? What are you waiting for? Does not the time past suffice? Oh that you were wise and would think of your latter end, and seek after God! I do conjure you by the shortness of life, by the certainty of death, by the terrors of judgment, by the glories of heaven, by the pains of hell, ask after the right way and walk therein. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. This is the gospel, "Whosoever believeth is not condemned." To believe is to trust. Oh that you may have grace to trust your souls with the Lord Jesus now and ever, and then we shall not need to fear those words, "At the last," nor the light of the four last things, Death and Judgment, Heaven and Hell. God bless you, for his name's sake.

"Soon the whole, like a parched scroll,
Shall before my amazed sight uproll,
And without a screen at one burst be seen,
The presence wherein I have ever been."

Portion of Scripture read before sermon—Psalm 148. and 2 Corinthians 6.

Sinners Bound with the Cords of Sin

A Sermon (No. 915) delivered on Sabbath morning, February 13th, 1870
at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington,
by C. H. Spurgeon.

“His own iniquities shall take the wicked himself, and he shall be holden with the cords of his sins.” — Proverbs 5:22.

The first sentence has reference to a net in which birds or beasts are taken. The ungodly man first of all finds sin to be a bait, and charmed by its apparent pleasantness he indulges in it and then he becomes entangled in its meshes so that he cannot escape. That which first attracted the sinner afterwards detains him. Evil habits are soon formed, the soul readily becomes accustomed to evil, and then even if the man should have lingering thoughts of better things and form frail resolutions to amend, his iniquities hold him captive like a bird in the fowler’s snare. You have seen the foolish fly descend into the sweet which is spread to destroy him, he sips, and sips again, and by-and-by he plunges boldly in to feast himself greedily: when satisfied he attempts to fly, but the sweet holds him by the feet and clogs his wings; he is a victim, and the more he struggles the more surely is he held. Even so is it with the sins of ungodly men, they are at first a tempting bait, and afterwards a snare. Having sinned, they become so bewitched with sin that the scriptural statement is no exaggeration: “Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil.”

The first sentence of the text also may have reference to an arrest by an officer of law. The transgressor’s own sins shall take him, shall seize him; they bear a warrant for arresting him, they shall judge him, they shall even execute him. Sin which at the first bringeth to man a specious pleasure, ere long turneth into bitterness, remorse, and fear. Sin is a dragon with eyes like stars, but it carrieth a deadly sting in its tail. The cup of sin with rainbow bubbles on its brim, is black with deep damnation in its dregs. O that men would consider this and turn from their delusions. To bring torment to the guilty, there is little need that God should literally in the world to come pile up Tophet with its wood and much smoke, nor even that the pit should be digged for the ungodly in order to make them miserable; sin shall of itself bring forth death. Leave a man to his own sins, and hell itself surrounds him; only suffer a sinner to do what he wills, and to give his lusts unbridled headway, and you have secured him boundless misery; only allow the seething caldron of his corruptions to boil at its own pleasure, and the man must inevitably become a vessel filled with sorrow. Be assured that sin is the root of bitterness. Gild the pill as you may, iniquity is death. Sweet is an unholy morsel in the mouth, but it will be wormwood in the bowels. Let but man heartily believe this, and surely he will not so readily be led astray. “Surely in vain is the net spread in the sight of any bird,” and shall man be more foolish than the fowls of the air? will he wilfully pursue his own destruction? will he wrong his own soul? Sin then, becomes first a net to hold the sinner by the force of custom and habit, and afterwards a sheriffs officer to arrest him and to scourge him with its inevitable results.

The second sentence of our text speaks of the sinner being holden with cords, and a parable may be readily fashioned out of the expression. The lifelong occupation of the ungodly man is to

twist ropes of sin. All his sins are as so much twine and cord out of which ropes may be made. His thoughts and his imaginations are so much raw material, and while he thinks of evil, while he contrives transgression, while he lusts after filthiness, while he follows after evil devices, while with head, and hand, and heart he pursues eagerly after mischief, he is still twisting evermore the cords of sin which are afterwards to bind him. The binding meant is that of a culprit pinioned for execution. Iniquity pinions a man, disables him from delivering himself from its power, enchains his soul, and inflicts a bondage on the spirit far worse than chaining of the body. Sin cripples all desires after holiness, damps every aspiration after goodness, and thus fettering the man hand and foot delivers him over to the executioner, which executioner shall be the wrath of God—but also sin itself—in the natural consequences which in every case must flow from it. Samson could burst asunder green withes and new ropes, but when at last his darling sin had bound him to his Delilah, that bond he could not snap, though it cost him his eyes. Make a man's will a prisoner, and he is a captive indeed. Determined independence of spirit walks at freedom in a tyrant's Bastille, and defies a despot's hosts; but a mind enslaved by sin builds its own dungeon, forges its own fetters, and rivets on its chains. It is slavery indeed when the iron enters into the soul. Who would not scorn to make himself a slave to his baser passions? and yet the mass of men are such—the cords of their sins bind them.

Thus having introduced to you the truth which this verse teaches, namely the captivating enslaving power of sin, I shall advance to our first point of consideration. This is a solution to a great mystery; but then secondly, it is itself a greater mystery; and when we have considered these two matters it will be time for us to note what is the practical conclusion from this line of thought.

I. First then the doctrine of the text, that iniquity entraps the wicked as in a net, and binds them as with cords is a solution of a great mystery.

When you and I first began to do good by telling out the gospel, we labored under the delusion that as soon as our neighbors heard of the blessed way of salvation they would joyfully receive it, and be saved in crowds. We have long ago seen that pleasant delusion dispelled; we find that our position is that of the serpent-charmer with the deaf adder, charm we ever so wisely, men will not hear so as to receive the truth. Like the ardent reformer, we have found out that old Adam is too strong for young Melancthon. We now perceive that for a sinner to receive the gospel involves a work of grace that shall change his heart and renew his nature. Yet none the less is it a great mystery that it should be so. It is one of the prodigies of the god of this world that he makes men love sin, and abide in indifference as if they were fully content to be lost. It is a marvel of marvels that man should be so base as to reject Christ, and abide in wilful and wicked unbelief. I will try and set forth this mystery, in the way in which, I dare say, it has struck many an honest hearted worker for Jesus Christ.

Is it not a mysterious thing that men should be content to abide in a state of imminent peril? Every unconverted man is already condemned. Our Lord has said it: "He that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed on the Son of God." Every unregenerate man is not only liable to the wrath of God in the future, but the wrath of God abideth on him. It is on him now, it always will remain upon him; as long as he is what he is it abideth on him. And yet in this state men do not start, they are not amazed or alarmed, they are not even anxious. Sabbath after Sabbath they are reminded of their unhappy position: it makes us unhappy to think they should be in such a state, but they are strangely at ease. The sword of vengeance hangs over them by a single hair, yet sit they at their banquets, and they laugh and sport as though there were no God, no wrath

to come, no certainty of appearing before the judgment-seat of Christ. See a number of persons in a train that has broken down. The guard has only to intimate that another train is approaching, and that it may perhaps dash into the carriages and mangle the passengers; he has only to give half a hint and see how the carriage doors fly open, how the travelers rush up the embankment, each one so eager for his own preservation as to forget his fellow's. Yet here are men and women by hundreds and thousands with the fast-rushing train of divine vengeance close behind them; they may almost hear the sound of its thundering wheels and, lo, they sit in all quietness, exposed to present peril and in danger of a speedy and overwhelming destruction. "'Tis strange. 'tis passing strange, 'tis wonderful.'" Here is a mystery indeed that can only be understood in the light of the fact that these foolish beings are taken by their sins, and bound by the cords of their iniquities.

Be it ever remembered that before very long these unconverted men and women, many of whom are present this morning, will be in a state whose wretchedness it is not possible for language fully to express. Within four-and-twenty hours their spirits may be summoned before the bar of God; and according to this book, which partially uplifts the veil of the future, the very least punishment that can fall upon an unconverted soul will cause it "weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth." All they had endured, of whom it is written, that they wept and gnashed their teeth, was to be shut out into outer darkness, nothing more; no stripes had then fallen, they had not yet been shut up in the prison-house of hell, only the gate of heaven was shut, only the light of glory was hid; and straightway there was weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth. What then will be the woe of the lost when positive punishment is inflicted? As for what they will endure who have heard the gospel but have wilfully rejected it, we have some faint notion from the Master's words: "It shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for them." We know that it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God, for "our God is a consuming fire." From this platform there rings full often that question, "How shall ye escape if ye neglect so great salvation?" And yet for all this men are willing to pass on through time into eternity regardless of the escape which God provides, turning aside from the only salvation which can rescue them from enduring "the blackness of darkness for ever." O reason, art thou utterly fled? Is every sinner altogether brutish? If we should meet with a man condemned to die and tell him that pardon was to be had, would he hear us with indifference? Would he abide in the condemned cell and use no means for obtaining the boon of life and liberty? Yes, there awaits the sinner a more awful doom and a more terrible sentence, and we are sent to publish a sure pardon from the God of heaven; and yet thousands upon thousands give us no deep heartfelt attention, but turn aside and perish in their sins. O that my head were waters and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep for the folly of the race to which I belong and mourn over the destruction of my fellow men!

It often strikes us with wonder that men do not receive the gospel of Jesus Christ when we recollect that the gospel is so plain. If it were a great mystery one might excuse the illiterate from attending to it. If the plan of salvation could only be discovered by the attentive perusal of a long series of volumes, and if it required a classical training and a thorough education, why then the multitude of the poor and needy, whose time is taken up with earning their bread, might have some excuse; but there is under heaven no truth more plain than this, "He that believeth on the Lord Jesus hath everlasting life;" "He that believeth and is baptised, shall be saved." To believe—that is, simply to trust Christ. How plain! There is no road, though it ran straight as an arrow, that can be more plain than this. Legible only by the light they give, but all so legible that he who runs may read, stand these soul-quickening words, "Believe and live." Trust Christ and your sins are forgiven; you

are saved. This is so plain a precept that I may call it a very A B C for infants, yet men receive it not. Are they not indeed holden by the cords of their sins when they refuse to obey?

Moreover brethren, there is a wonderful attractiveness in the gospel. If the gospel could possibly be a revelation of horrors piled on horrors, if there were something in it utterly inconsistent with reason, or something that shocked all the sensitive affections of our better part, we might excuse mankind, but the gospel is just this: man is lost but God becomes man to save him; "The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." Out of infinite love to his enemies the Son of God took upon himself human flesh, that he might suffer in the room and stead of men what they ought to have suffered. The doctrine of substitution, while it wondrously magnifies the grace of God and satisfies the justice of God, methinks ought to strike you all with love because of the disinterested affection which it reveals on Jesus Christ's part. O King of Glory, dost thou bleed for me? O Prince of Life, canst thou lie shrouded in the grave for me? Doth God stoop from his glory to be spat upon by sinful lips? Doth he stoop from the splendor of heaven to be "despised and rejected of men," that men may be saved? Why, it ought to win every human ear, it ought to entrance every human heart. Was ever love like this? Go ye to your poets, and see if they have ever imagined anything nobler than the love of Christ the Son of God for the dying sons of men! Go to your philosophers, and see if in all their maxims they have ever taught a diviner philosophy than that of Christ's life, or ever have imagined in their pictures of what men ought to be an heroic love like that which Christ in very deed displayed! We lift before you no gory banner that might sicken your hearts; we bring before you no rattling chains of a tyrant's domination; but we lift up Jesus crucified, and "Love" is written on the banner that is waved in the forefront of our hosts; we bid you yield to the gentle sway of love, and not to the tyranny of terror. Alas! men must be bound indeed, and fettered fast by an accursed love to sin, or else the divine attractions of a crucified Redeemer would win their hearts.

Consider my friends, you who love the souls of your fellow men, how marvellous it is that men should not receive the gospel when the commandment of the gospel is not burdensome! Methinks if it had been written that no man should enter heaven except by the way of martyrdom, it had been wisdom for every one of us to give our bodies to be burned, or to be stretched upon the rack; yea, if there had been no path to escape from the wrath of God, but to be flayed alive with Bartholomew, enduring present but exquisite torture, it would have been but a cheap price for an escape from wrath, and an entrance into heaven. But I find in God's word prescribed as the way of salvation no such physical agonies. No austerities are commanded; not even the milder law which governed the Pharisee when he "fasted thrice in the week." Only this is written—"Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved;" and the precept of the Christian's life is "Love thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbor as thyself." Most pleasant duties, these of love! What more sweet? What more delightful than to permit the soul to flow out in streams of affection? The ways of true religion are not irksome, her ways are pleasantness and all her paths are peace. What, heaven given for believing? What, heaven's gate opened only for knocking, and boons all priceless bestowed for nothing but the asking? Yet they will not ask, they will not knock. Alas my God, what creatures are men! Alas O sin, what monsters hast thou made mankind that they will forget their own interests and wrong their own souls!

Further, it is clear that men must be fast held by the bondage of their sins when we recollect that according to the confession of the most of them, the pleasures of sin are by no means great. I have heard them say themselves that they have been satiated after a short season of indulgence.

We know how true the word is “Who hath woe? who hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine.” No form of sin has ever been discovered yet that has yielded satisfaction. You shall look at those who have had all that heart could wish, and have without restraint indulged their passions, and you shall find them to be in their latter end amongst the most wretched rather than the most satisfied of mankind. Yet for these pleasures—I think I degrade the word when I call them pleasures—for these pleasures they are willing to pawn their souls and risk everlasting woe; and all this while, be it remembered to add to the wonder, there are pleasures to be found in godliness; they do not deny this, they cannot without belying their own observation. We who are at least as honest as they are bear our testimony that we never knew what true happiness was till we gave our hearts to Christ; but since then our peace has been like a river. We have had our afflictions, we have suffered grievous bodily pain, we have endured mental depression, we have been heavily burdened, we have borne many trials; but we can say—

“We would not change our blest estate
For all the world calls good or great.”

“Happy are the people whose God is the LORD!” We can set our seal to this experimentally. See ye then my brethren, these poor souls will prefer the pleasures that mock them to the pleasures that alone can satisfy. If we had to die like dogs it would be worth while to be a Christian. If there were no hereafter and our only consideration were who should enjoy this life the best, it would be the wisest thing to be a servant of God and a soldier of the cross. I say not it would ensure our being rich, I say not it would ensure our being respected, I say not it would ensure our walking smoothly and free from outward trouble; but I do say that because of “the secret something which sweetens all,” because of the profound serenity which true religion brings, the Christian life out-masters every other, and there is none to be compared therewith. But think ye for awhile what is the ungodly man’s life! I can only compare it to that famous diabolical invention of the Inquisition of ancient times. They had as a fatal punishment for heretics what they called the “Virgin’s Kiss.” There stood in a long corridor the image of the Virgin. She outstretched her arms to receive her heretic child; she looked fair, and her dress was adorned with gold and tinsel, but as soon as the poor victim came into her arms the machinery within began to work, and the arms closed and pressed the wretch closer and closer to her bosom, which was set with knives and daggers and lancets and razors, and everything that could cut and tear him, till he was ground to pieces in the horrible embrace; and such is the ungodly man’s life. It standeth like a fair virgin, and with witching smile it seems to say, “Come to my bosom, no place so warm and blissful as this;” and then anon it begins to fold its arms of habit about the sinner, and he sins again and again, brings misery into his body, perhaps if he fall into some form of sin, stings his soul, makes his thoughts a case of knives to torture him, and grinds him to powder beneath the force of his own iniquities. Men perceive this and dare not deny it; and yet into this virgin’s bosom they still thrust themselves and reap the deep damnation that iniquity must everywhere involve. Alas, alas, my God!

And now, once more, this terrible mystery which is only solved by men’s being held by their sins has this added to it, that all the while in the case of most of you now present, all that I have said is believed, and a great deal of it is felt. I mean this: if I were talking with persons who did not believe they had a soul, or believe in the judgment to come, or believe in the penalty of sin, or believe in the reward of righteousness, I should see some reason why they rejected the great salvation; but the most of you who attend this house of prayer—I think I might say all—have scarcely ever

had a doubt about these things. You would be very much horrified if any one would insinuate that you did not believe the Bible to be the word of God. You have a little Pharisaism in your soul, that you think you are not as scoffers are, nor infidels. I own you are not, but I grieve to say I think you are more inconsistent than they. If these things be a fiction, well sirs, your course is rational; but if these things be realities, what shall I say for you when I plead with God on your behalf? What excuse can I make for you? If you profess to believe these things act as though you believe them; if you do not, practically act so. Why do you profess to own them as the truth? The case is worse, for you not only believe these things to be true, but some of you have felt their power. You have gone home from this place and you could not help it, you have sought your chamber and bowed your knee in prayer; such prayer as it was, for alas! your goodness has been like the morning cloud and the early dew. I know some of you who have had to break off some of your sins, for your conscience would not let you rest in them. Yet you are unbelievers still, still you are undecided, still you are unsaved, and at this moment if your soul were required of you, nothing would be in prospect but a fearful looking for of judgment and of fiery indignation. O my hearer, you whose conscience has been at times awakened, in whom the arrows of the great King have found a lodging place, in whom they are rankling still, yield I pray thee, yield to the divine thrusts, and give up thy contrite spirit to thy Redeemer's hands. But if thou do not, what shall I say to thee? The kingdom of God has been thrust from you by yourselves. Be sure of this, it has come near you, and in coming near it has involved solemn responsibilities which I pray you may not have to feel the weight of in the world to come.

Here then stands the riddle, that man is so set against God and his Christ that he never will accept eternal salvation until the Holy Spirit by a supernatural work overcomes his will and turns the current of his affections; and why is this? The answer lies in the text, because his own iniquities have taken him, and he is holden with the cords of his sin. For this reason he will not come unto Christ that he may have life; for this reason he cannot come except the Father which hath sent Christ draw him.

II. But now secondly, I pass on to observe that though this is the solution of one mystery, it is in itself a greater mystery.

It is a terrible mystery that man should be so great a fool, so mad a creature as to be held by cords apparently so feeble as the cords of his own sins. To be bound by reason is honorable; to be held by compulsion, if you cannot resist it, is at least not discreditable; but to be held simply by sin, by sin and nothing else, is a bondage which is disgraceful to the human name. It lowers man to the last degree, to think that he should want no fetter to hold him but the fetter of his own evil lusts and desires. Let us just think of one or two cords, and you will see this.

One reason why men receive not Christ and are not saved is because they are hampered by the sin of forgetting God. Think of that for a minute. Men forget God altogether. The commission of many a sin has been prevented by the presence of a child. In the presence of a fellow creature, ordinarily a man will feel himself under some degree of restraint. Yet that eye which never sleeps, the eye of the eternal God, exercises no restraint on the host of men. If there were a child in that chamber thou wouldst respect it—but God being there thou canst sin with impunity. If thy mother or thy father were there thou wouldst not dare offend, but God who made thee and whose will can crush thee, thy lawful sovereign, thou takest no more account of him than though he were a dog, yea, not so much as that. Oh, strange thing that men should thus act! And yet with many it is not because of the difficulty of thinking of God. Men of study for instance, if they are considering the

works of God, must be led up to thoughts of God. Galen was converted from being an atheist while in the process of dissecting the human body; he could not but see the finger of God in the nerves and sinews, and all the rest of the wonderful embroidery of the human frame. There is not an emmet or an infusorial animalcule beneath the microscope but what as plainly as tongue can speak, saith, "Mortal, think of God who made thee and me." Some men travel daily over scenes that naturally suggest the Creator; they go down to the sea in ships and do business on great waters where they must see the works of the Lord, and yet they even manage to become the most boisterous blasphemers against the sacred majesty of the Most High in his very temple, where everything speaks of his glory. But you will tell me perhaps, some of you, that you are not engaged in such pursuits. I reply, I know it. Many of you have to labor with your hands for your daily bread in occupations requiring but little mental exercise. So much the more guilty then are you that when your mind is not necessarily taken up with other things, you still divert it from all thoughts of God. The working man often find is it very possible to spend his leisure hours in politics, and to amuse his working hours by meditating upon schemes more or less rational concerning the government of his country, and will he dare to tell me therefore that he could not during that time think of God? There is an aversion to God in your heart, my brother, or else it would not be that from Monday morning to Saturday night you forget him altogether. Even when sitting here you find it by no means a pleasant thing to be reminded of your God, and yet if I brought up the recollection of your mother, perhaps in heaven, the topic would not be displeasing to you. What owe you to your mother compared with what you owe to your God? If I spoke to you of some dear friend who has assisted you in times of distress, you would be pleased that I had touched upon such a chord; and may I not talk with you concerning your God, and ask you why do you forget him? Have you good thoughts for all but the best? Have you kind thoughts of gratitude for every friend but the best friend that man can have? My God! my God! why do men treat thee thus? Brightest, fairest, best, kindest, and most tender, and yet forgotten by the objects of thy care!

If men were far away from God and it were a topic abstruse and altogether beyond reach, something might be said. But imagine a fish that despised the ocean and yet lived in it, a man who should be unconscious of the air he breathes! "In him we live and move and have our being; we are also his offspring." He sends the frost, and he will send the spring; he sends the seed-time and the harvest and every shower that drops with plenty comes from him, and every wind that blows with health speeds forth from his mouth. Wherefore then is he to be forgotten when everything reminds you of him? This is a sin, a cruel sin, a cursed sin, a sin indeed that binds men hard and fast, that they will not come to Christ that they may have life; but it is strange, it is beyond all miracles a miracle, that such a folly as this should hold men from coming to Christ.

Another sin binds all unregenerate hearts; it is the sin of not loving the Christ of God. I am not about to charge any person here with such sins as adultery or theft or blasphemy, but I will venture to say that this is a sin masterly and gigantic, which towers as high as any other—the sin of not loving the Christ of God. Think a minute. Here is one who came into the world out of pure love, for no motive but mercy, with nothing to gain, but though he was rich yet for our sakes he became poor; why then is he not loved? The other day there rode through these streets a true hero, a brave bold man who set his country free, and I do remember how I heard your shouts in yonder street, and you thronged to look into the lion-like face of Italy's liberator. I blame you not, I longed to do the same myself, he well deserved your shouts and your loudest praises. But what had he done compared with what the Christ of God has done in actually laying down his life to redeem men

from bondage, yielding up himself to the accursed death of the cross that man might be saved through him? Where are your acclamations, sirs, for this greater Hero? Where are the laurels that you cast at his feet? Is it nothing to you, is it nothing to you all ye that pass by, is it nothing to you that Jesus should die? Such a character so inexpressibly lovely, and yet despised! Such a salvation so inexpressibly precious, and yet rejected! Oh, mystery of iniquity! indeed the depths of sin are almost as fathomless as the depths of God, and the transgressions of the wicked all but as infinite in infamy as God is infinite in love.

I might also speak of sins against the Holy Ghost that men commit, in that they live and even die without reverential thoughts of him or care about him; but I shall speak of one sin, and that is the mystery that men should be held by the sin of neglecting their souls. You meet with a person who neglects his body, you call him fool if knowing that there is a disease he will not seek a remedy. If suffering from some fatal malady he never attempts to find a cure, you think the man is fit only for a lunatic asylum. But a person who neglects his soul, he is but one of so numerous a class that we overlook the madness. Your body will soon die, it is but as it were the garment of yourself and will be worn out; but you yourself are better than your body as a man is better than the dress he wears. Why spend you then all thoughts about this present life and give none to the life to come?

It has long been a mystery who was the man in the iron mask. We believe that the mystery was solved some years ago by the conjecture that he was the twin brother of Louis XIV., King of France, who, fearful lest he might have his throne disturbed by his twin brother whose features were extremely like his own, encased his face in a mask of iron and shut him up in the Bastille for life. Your body and your soul are twin brothers. Your body, as though it were jealous of your soul, encases it as in an iron mask of spiritual ignorance, lest its true lineaments, its immortal lineage should be discovered, and shuts it up within the Bastille of sin, lest getting liberty and discovering its royalty it should win the mastery over the baser nature. But what a wretch was that Louis XIV. to do such a thing to his own brother! How brutal, how worse than the beasts that perish! But sir, what art thou if thou doest thus to thine own soul, merely that thy body may be satisfied and thy earthly nature may have a present gratification? O sirs, be not so unkind, so cruel to yourselves. But yet this sin of living for the mouth and living for the eye, this sin of living for what ye shall eat and what ye shall drink and wherewithal ye shall be clothed, this sin of living by the clock within the narrow limits of the time that ticks by the pendulum, this sin of living as if this earth were all, and there were nought beyond—this is the sin that holds this City of London, and holds the world, and binds it like a martyr to the stake to perish, unless it be set free.

Generally however, there also lies some distinct form of actual sin at the bottom of most men's impenitence. I will not attempt to make a guess my dear hearer, as to what it may be that keeps thee from Christ, but without difficulty I could I think state what these sins generally are. Some men would fain be saved, but they would not like to take up the cross and be despised as Christians. Some would fain follow Christ, but they will not give up their self-righteous pride; they want to have a part of the glory of salvation. Some men have a temper which they do not intend to try to restrain. Others have a secret sin too sweet for them to give it up; it is like a right arm and they cannot come to the cutting of it off. Some enjoy company which is attractive but destructive, and from that company they cannot fly. Men one way or another are held fast like birds with birdlime, till the fowler comes and takes them to their destruction. O that they were wise, for then they might be awakened out of this folly! But this still remaineth the mystery of mysteries, that those sins absurd and deadly bind men as with cords, and hold them fast like a bull in a net.

III. The conclusion of the whole matter is this, a message sinner to thee, and saint, to thee.

Sinner, to thee. Thou art held fast by thy sins, and I fear me much thou wilt be held so till thou perish, perish everlastingly. Man, does not this concern you? I lay last night by the hour together on my bed awake, tossing with a burden on my heart, and I tell thee that only burden that I had was thy soul. I cannot endure it, man, that thou shouldst be cast into the "lake that burneth with fire and brimstone." I believe that book as thou dost; believing it I am alarmed at the prospect which awaits the unconverted. The more I look into the subject of the world to come, the more I am impressed that all those who would lessen our ideas of the judgment that God will bring upon the wicked are waging war against God, and against virtue and the best interests of men. "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." Do not try it my friend, I pray thee do not try it. Run not this risk, this certainty of endless misery I beseech thee, dare it not! What sayest thou, "What then should I do?" I venture to reply in the words of one of old, "Break off thy sins by righteousness, for it is time to seek the Lord." But thou repliest, "How can I break them off? they are like cords and bonds." Ah, soul, here is another part of thy misery, that thou hast destroyed thyself, but thou canst not save thyself; thou hast woven the net, thou hast made it fast and firm, but thou canst not tear it in pieces. But there is One who can, there is One upon whom the Spirit of the Lord descended that he might loose the prisoner. There is a heart that feels for thee in heaven, and there is One mighty to save who can rescue thee. Breathe that prayer, "O set me free thou Liberator of captive souls;" breathe the prayer now and believe that he can deliver thee, and thou shalt yet, captive as thou art, go free, and this shall be thy ransom price, his precious blood; and this shall be the privilege of thy ransomed life, to love and praise him who hath redeemed thee from going down into the pit.

But I said the conclusion of the whole matter had something to do with the child of God. It has this to do with him. Dear brother and sister in Christ, by the love you bear to your fellow sinners, never help to make the bonds of their sins stronger than they are—you will do so if you are inconsistent. They will say, "Why, such a one professes to be a saved man, and yet see how he lives!" Will you make excuses for sinners? It was said of Judah by the prophet that she had become a comfort to Sodom and Gomorrah. O never do this; never let the ungodly have to say "There is nothing in it; it is all a lie; it is all a mere pretense; we may as well continue in sin, for see how these Christians act!" No brethren, they have bonds enough without your tightening them or adding to them.

In the next place never cease to warn sinners. Do not stand by and see them die without lifting up a warning note. A house is on fire and you see it as you go to your morning's labor, and yet never lift up the cry of "Fire!" A man perishing and yet no tears for him! Can it be so? At the foot of Mr. Richard Knill's likeness I notice these words, "Brethren, the heathen are perishing, will you let them perish?" I would like to have each of you apply to your own conscience the question, "Sinners are perishing, will you let them perish without giving them at least a warning of what the result of sin must be?" My brethren, I earnestly entreat you who know the gospel to tell it out to others. It is God's way of cutting the bonds which confine men's souls; be instant in season and out of season in publishing the good news of liberty to the captives through the redeeming Christ.

And lastly, as you and I cannot set these captives free, let us look to him who can. O let our prayers go up and let our tears drop down for sinners. Let it come to an agony, for I am persuaded we shall never get much from God by way of conversion till we feel we must have it, until our soul breaketh for the longing that it hath for the salvation of souls: when your cry is like that of Rachel, "Give me children or I die I" you shall not long be spiritually barren. When you must have converts,

or your heart will break, God will hear you and send you an answer. The Lord bless you! May none of you be held by the cords of your sins, but may ye be bound with cords to the horns of God's altar as a happy and willing sacrifice to him that loved you. The Lord bless you for Jesus' sake.

An Appeal to Children of Godly Parents

A sermon (No. 2406) intended for reading on Lord's Day, March 31st, 1895,
delivered by C. H. Spurgeon at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington,
on Lord's Day evening, March 27th, 1887.

“My son, keep thy father’s commandment, and forsake not the law of thy mother: Bind them continually upon thine heart, and tie them about thy neck. When thou goest, it shall lead thee; when thou sleepest, it shall keep thee; and when thou awakest, it shall talk with thee. For the commandment is a lamp; and the law is light; and reproofs of instruction are the way of life.”—Proverbs 6:20-23.

You have here before you the advice of King Solomon, rightly reckoned to be one of the wisest of men; and verily he must be wise indeed who could excel in wisdom the son of David, the King of Israel. It is worth while to listen to what Solomon has to say; it must be good for the most intelligent young person to listen and to listen carefully to what so experienced a man as Solomon has to say to young men. But I must remind you that a greater than Solomon is here, for the Spirit of God inspired the Proverbs. They are not merely jewels from earthly mines, but they are also precious treasures from the heavenly hills; so that the advice we have here is not only the counsel of a wise man, but the advice of that Incarnate Wisdom who speaks to us out of the Word of God. Would you become the sons of wisdom? Come and sit at the feet of Solomon. Would you become spiritually wise? Come and hear what the Spirit of God has to say by the mouth of the wise man.

In considering this subject I am going first of all to show you that true godliness, of which the wise man here speaks, comes to many of us recommended by parental example: “My son, keep thy father’s commandment, and forsake not the law of thy mother: bind them continually upon thine heart, and tie them about thy neck.” But in addition to that true religion comes to us commended by practical uses, by its beneficial effect upon our lives: “When thou goest, it shall lead thee; when thou sleepest, it shall keep thee; and when thou awakest, it shall talk with thee. For the commandment is a lamp; and the law is light; and reproofs of instruction are the way of life.”

I. Now in the first place I want to show you that true religion comes to many of us recommended by parental example.

Unhappily it is not so with all of you. There are some who had an evil example in their childhood, and who never learnt anything that was good from their parents. I adore the sovereignty of divine grace that there are among us tonight many who are the first in their families that ever made a profession of faith in Christ. They were born and brought up in the midst of everything that was opposed to godliness; yet here they are, they can themselves hardly tell you how, brought out from the world as Abraham was brought from Ur of the Chaldees. The Lord in his grace has taken one of a city, and two of a family, and brought them to Zion. You, dear friends, have special cause for thankfulness; but it should be a note to be entered in your diary that your children shall not be subjected to the same disadvantages as you yourselves suffered. Since the Lord has looked in love upon you, let your households be holiness to the LORD, and so bring up your children that they shall have every advantage that religious training can give, and every opportunity to serve the living God.

But there are many among us, I believe the larger proportion of those gathered here, who have had the immense privilege of godly training. Now, to my mind it seems that a father's experience is the best evidence that a young man can have of the truth of anything. My father would not say that which was false anywhere to anyone; but I am sure that he would not say it to his son; and if after serving God for fifty years he has found religion to be a failure, even if he had not the courage to communicate it to the whole world, I feel persuaded that he would have whispered in my ear, "My son, I have misled you. I was mistaken, and I have found it out." But when I saw the old man the other day he had no such information to convey to me. Our conversation was concerning the faithfulness of God; and he delights to tell of the faithfulness of God to him and to his father, my dear grandfather, who has now gone up above. How often have they told me that in a long lifetime of testing and proving the promises, they have found them all true, and they could say in the language of the hymn —

"'Tis religion that can give
Sweetest pleasures while we live;
'Tis religion must supply
Solid comfort when we die."

As for myself, if I had found out that I was mistaken, I should not have been so foolish as to rejoice that my sons should follow the same way of life, and should addict themselves with all their might to preaching the same truth that I delight to proclaim. Dear son, if thou hast a godly father believe that the religion upon which he has fixed his faith is true. He tells thee that it is so; he is, at any rate, a sincere and honest witness to thee; I beseech thee therefore, forsake not thy father's God.

Then I think that one of the most tender bonds that can ever bind man or woman is the affection of a mother. Many would perhaps break away from the law of the father; but the love of the mother, who among us can break away from that? So next, a mother's affection is the best of arguments. You remember how she prayed for you. Among your earliest recollections is that of her taking you between her knees and teaching you to say,—

"Gentle Jesus, meek and mild,
Look upon a little child."

Perhaps you have tried to disbelieve, but your mother's firm faith prevents it. I have heard of one who said that he could easily have been an infidel if it had not been for his mother's life and his mother's death. Yes, these are hard arguments to get over, and I trust that you will not get over them. You remember well her quiet patience in the house when there was much that might have ruffled her. You remember her gentleness with you when you were going a little wild. You hardly know perhaps, how you cut her to the heart, how her nights were sleepless because her boy did not love his mother's God. I do charge you by the love you bear her, if you have received any impressions that are good, cherish them, and cast them not aside. Or if you have received no such impressions, yet at least let the sincerity of your mother, for whom it was impossible to have been untrue,—let the deep affection of your mother who could not and would not betray you into a lie,—persuade you that there is truth in this religion which now, perhaps, some of your companions are trying to teach you to deride. "My son, keep thy father's commandment, and forsake not the law of thy mother."

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I think that to any young man, or any young woman either, who has had a godly father and mother, the best way of life that they can mark out for themselves is to follow the road in which their father's and mother's principle would conduct them. Of course we make great advances on the old folks, do we not? The young men are wonderfully bright and intelligent, and the old people are a good deal behind them. Yes, yes; that is the way we talk before our beards have grown. Possibly when we have more sense we shall not be quite so conceited of it. At any rate, I, who am not very old, and who dare not any longer call myself young, venture to say that for myself I desire nothing so much as to continue the traditions of my household. I wish to find no course but that which shall run parallel with that of those who have gone before me. And I think dear friends, that you who have seen the holy and happy lives of Christian ancestors will be wise to pause a good deal before you begin to make a deviation, either to the right or to the left, from the course of those godly ones. I do not believe that he begins life in a way which God is likely to bless, and which he himself in the long run will judge to be wise, who begins with the notion that he shall upset everything; that all that belonged to his godly family shall be cast to the winds. I do not seek to have heirlooms of gold or silver; but though I die a thousand deaths I can never give up my father's God, my grandsire's God, and his father's God, and his father's God. I must hold this to be the chief possession that I have; and I pray young men and women to think the same. Do not stain the glorious traditions of noble lives that have been handed down to you; do not disgrace your father's shield, bespatter not the escutcheons of your honored predecessors by any sins and transgressions on your part. God help you to feel that the best way of leading a noble life will be to do as they did who trained you in God's fear!

Solomon tells us to do two things with the teachings which we have learned of our parents. First he says, "Bind them continually upon thine heart," for they are worthy of loving adherence. Show that you love these things by binding them upon your heart. The heart is the vital point; let godliness lie there, love the things of God. If we could take young men and women and make them professedly religious without their truly loving godliness, that would be simply to make them hypocrites, which is not what we desire. We do not want you to say that you believe what you do not believe, or that you rejoice in what you do not rejoice in. But our prayer—and oh that it might be your prayer too!—is that you may be helped to bind these things about your heart. They are worth living for, they are worth dying for, they are worth more than all the world besides; the immortal principles of the divine life which comes from the death of Christ. "Bind them continually upon thine heart."

And then Solomon, because he would not have us keep these things secret as if we were ashamed of them, adds, "and tie them about thy neck," for they are worthy of boldest display. Did you ever see my Lord Mayor wearing his chain of office? He is not at all ashamed to wear it. And the sheriffs with their brooches; I have a lively recollection of the enormous size to which those ornaments attain; and they take care to wear them too. Now then, you who have any love to God, tie your religion about your neck. Do not be ashamed of it, put it on as an ornament, wear it as the mayor does his chain. When you go into company never be ashamed to say that you are a Christian; and if there is any company where you cannot go as a Christian, well, do not go there at all. Say to yourself, "I will not be where I could not introduce my Master; I will not go where he could not go with me." You will find that resolve to be a great help to you in the choice of where you will go and where you will not go; therefore bind it upon your heart, tie it about your neck. God help you to do this and so to follow those godly ones who have gone before you!

I hope that I am not weak in wishing that some here may be touched by affection to their parents. I have had very sorrowful sights sometimes in the course of my ministry. A dear father, an honest, upright, godly man, is perhaps present; but he will not mind my saying what lines of grief I saw upon his face when he came to say to me, "Oh, sir, my boy is in prison!" I am sure that if his boy could have seen his father's face as I saw it, it would have been worse than prison to him. I have known young men who have come to this Tabernacle with their parents—nice boys too, they were—and they have gone into situations in the city where they have been tempted to steal, and they have yielded to the tempter and they have lost their character. Sometimes the deficiency has been met, and they have been rescued from a criminal's career; but alas, sometimes they have fallen into the hands of a wicked woman, and then woe betide them! Occasionally it has seemed to be sheer wantonness and wickedness that has made them act unrighteously. I wish I could fetch those young men—I do not suppose that they are here to-night—and let them see not merely the misery they will bring upon themselves, but show them their mother at home when news came that John had lost his position because he had been acting dishonestly, or give them a glimpse of the father's face when the evil tidings reached him. The poor man stood aghast; he said "There was never a stain upon the character of any of my family before." If the earth had opened under the godly man's feet, or if the good mother could have gone down straight into the grave, they would have preferred it to the lifelong tribulation which has come upon them. Therefore I charge you, young man, or young woman, do not kill the parents who gave you life, do not disgrace those who brought you up; but I pray you, instead thereof, seek the God of your father and the God of your mother, and give yourselves to the Lord Jesus Christ and live wholly to him.

II. Now I must turn to my second point, which is that true religion comes to us commended by practical uses. This is a less sentimental argument than the one I have been pleading; but to many, vital godliness appeals because of its immense utility in the actual everyday life of men.

Solomon tells us first that true godliness serves us for instruction: "For the commandment is a lamp." If thou wouldst know all that thou oughtest to know, read this Book. If thou wouldst know in thy heart that which shall be for thy present and eternal good, love this Book, believe the truth it teaches and obey it, "for the commandment is a lamp."

Next, true religion serves us for direction: "and the law is light." If we want to know what we should do, we cannot do better than yield ourselves up to the guidance of the Divine Spirit and take this Word as our map, for—

"'Tis like the sun, a heavenly light,
That guides us all the day;
And through the dangers of the night,
A lamp to lead our way."

Solomon also tells us that true religion guides us under all circumstances. He says in the 22nd verse that when we are active, there is nothing like true godliness to help us: "When thou goest, it shall lead thee." He tells us that when we are resting there is nothing better than this for our preservation: "When thou sleepest, it shall keep thee." And when we are just waking, there is nothing better than this with which to delight the mind: "When thou awakest, it shall talk with thee." I do not intend to expand those three thoughts except just to say this, when thou art busiest, thy religion shall be thy best help. When thy hands are full of toil, and thy head is full of thought, nothing can do thee more service than to have a God to go to, a Savior to trust in, a heaven to look forward to. And

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when thou goest to thy bed to sleep or to be sick, thou canst have nothing better to smooth thy pillow and to give thee rest than to know that thou art forgiven through the precious blood of Christ, and saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation. Often ere I fall asleep, I say to myself those words of Watts,—

“Sprinkled afresh with pardoning blood,
I lay me down to rest,
As in the embraces of my God,
Or on my Savior’s breast;”

and there is no more delicious sleep in the world than that sleep which even in dreams keeps near to Christ. Some of us know what it is, even in those wanderings of our mind in sleep, not to quit the holy ground of communion with our Lord. It is not always so, but it is sometimes so; and even then when the mind has lost power to control its thoughts, even the thoughts seem to dance like Miriam to the praise of God. Oh, happy men, whose religion is their protection even in their sleep! And then Solomon says, “when thou awakest, it shall talk with thee.” This Bible is a wonderful talking book; there is a great mass of blessed talk in this precious volume. It has told me a great many of my faults; it would tell you yours if you would let it. It has told me much to comfort me; and it has much to tell you if you will but incline your ear to it. It is a book that is wonderfully communicative; it knows all about you, all the ins and outs of where you are and where you ought to be, it can tell you everything. The best communion that a man can have is when he commences with God in prayer and the reading of the Word: “When thou awakest, it shall talk with thee.”

I have hurried over that point because I want to say something else to you. Dear friends, those of you who are unconverted, our great anxiety is that you should know the Lord at once; and our reason is this, that it will prepare you for the world to come. Whatever that world may be, full of vast mysteries, yet no man is so prepared to launch upon the unknown sea as the one who is reconciled to God, who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ, who trusts him, and rejoices in the pardon of his sin through the great atoning sacrifice, and experiences in his own heart the marvelous change which has made him a new creature in Christ Jesus. The great reason, I say again, why we wish to have our dear friends converted, is that they may be ready for the world to come. You will soon die, all of you: I think it was last Sunday evening that there sat in that pew just over there, a friend who was generally here in the morning and evening; but on Wednesday he died quite suddenly. He appeared to be in good health, but he died at the railway station, away from home. That seat where he used to sit ought to have a warning voice to all of us, crying aloud, “Prepare to meet thy God.” It might have been myself; it might have been any of these friends around me on the platform; it might have been any of you in the congregation. Who can tell who will go this week? Probably some one or other of us (our number is so large) will be taken away ere another Sabbath bell shall be heard.

I think that is a very good reason for seeking the Lord, that you may be prepared for eternity. One day this week I saw an aged friend who cannot live much longer; she is eighty-six, and her faculties are failing her; but she said to me, “I have no fear, I have no fear of death; I am on the Rock, I am on the Rock Christ Jesus. I know whom I have believed, and I know where I am going.” It was delightful to hear the aged saint speak like that; and we are always hearing such talk from our dear friends when they are going home, they never seem to have any doubts. I have known

some who, while they were well, had many doubts; but when they came to die they seemed to have none at all, but were joyously confident in Christ.

But there is another reason why we want our friends converted, and that is that they may be prepared for this life. I do not know what kind of life you have set before yourself. Perhaps I may be addressing some young men who are going to the University, and they hope to have lives consecrated to learning and crowned with honor. Possibly some here have no prospect but that of working hard to earn their bread with the sweat of their brow; some have begun to lay bricks, or to drive the plane, or to wield the pen. There are all sorts of ways of mortal life; but there is no better provision and preparation for any kind of life on earth than to know the Lord, and to have a new heart and a right spirit. He that rules millions of men will do it better with the grace of God in his heart; and he that had to be a slave would be the happier in his lot for having the grace of God in his heart. You that are old and you that are young, you that are masters and you that are servants, true religion cannot disqualify you for playing your part here in the great drama of life; but the best preparation for that part, if it is a part that ought to be played, is to know the Lord and feel the power of divine grace upon your soul.

Let me just show you how this is the case. The man who lives before God, who calls God his Father, and feels the Spirit of God working within him a hatred of sin and a love of righteousness, he is the man who will be conscientious in the discharge of his duties; and you know, that is the kind of man, and the kind of woman, too, that we want nowadays. We have so many people who want looking after; if you give them anything to do they will do it quickly enough if you stand and look on; but the moment you turn your back they will do it as slovenly, or as slowly, and as badly as can be. They are eye-servants only. If you were to advertise for an eye servant I do not suppose anybody would come to you; yet they might come in shoals for there are plenty of them about. Well now, a truly Christian man, a man who is really converted, sees that he serves God in doing his duty to his fellow men. "Thou God seest me," is the power that ever influences him; and he desires to be conscientious in the discharge of his duties whatever those duties may be. I once told you the story of the servant girl who said that she hoped she was converted. Her minister asked her this question, "What evidence can you give of your conversion?" She gave this among a great many other proofs, but it was not a bad one; she said, "Now, sir, I always sweep under the mats." It was a small matter, but if you carry out in daily life that principle of sweeping under the mats, that is the kind of thing we want. Many people have a little corner where they stow away all the fluff and the dust, and the room looks as if it was nicely swept, but it is not. There is a way of doing everything so that nothing is really done, but that is not the case where there is grace in the heart. Grace in the heart makes a man feel that he would wish to live wholly to God, and serve God in serving man. If you get that grace you will have a grand preparation for life as well as for death.

The next thing is that a man who has a new heart has imparted to him a purity which preserves him in the midst of temptation. Oh, this dreadful city of London! I wonder that God endures the filth of it. I frequently converse with good young men who come up from the country to their first situation in London, and the first week they live in London is a revelation to them which makes their hair almost stand on end. They see what they never dreamt of. Well now, you young fellows who have just come to London, perhaps this is your first Sunday, give yourselves to the Lord at once I pray you. Yield yourselves to Jesus Christ tonight, for another week in London may be your damnation. Only a week in London may have led you into acts of impurity that shall ruin you forever. Before you have gone into those things devote yourselves to God and to his Christ, that

with pure hearts and with right spirits you may be preserved from “the pestilence that walketh in darkness, and the destruction that wasteth at noonday,” in this terribly wicked city. There is no hope for you young men and young women in this great world of wickedness, unless your hearts are right towards God. If you go in thoroughly to follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth, he will keep and preserve you even to the end; but if you do not give yourselves to the Lord, whatever good resolutions you may have formed, you are doomed—I am sure you are—to be carried away with the torrents of iniquity that run down our streets today. Purity of heart then, which comes from faith in Christ, is a splendid preparation for life.

So also is truthfulness of speech. Oh, what a wretched thing it is when people will tell lies! Now the heart that is purified by the grace of God hates the thought of a lie. The man speaks the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth; and he is the man who shall pass through life unscathed, and shall be honored, and in the long run successful. He may have to suffer for a time through his truthfulness, but in the end nothing shall clear a way for him so well as being true in thought and word and deed.

If you love the Lord with all your heart you will also learn honesty in dealing; and that is a grand help in life. I know that the trickster does sometimes seem to succeed for a time; but what is his success? It is a success which is only another name for ruin. Oh, dear sirs, if all men could be made honest, how much more of happiness there would be in the world! And the way to be upright among men is to be sincere towards God, and to have the Spirit of God dwelling within you.

Again, true religion is of this value, that it comforts a man under great troubles. You do not expect many troubles my young friend, but you will have them. You expect that you will be married and then your troubles will be over; some say that then they begin. I do not endorse that statement; but I am sure that they are not over, for there is another set of trials that begin then. But you are going to get out of your apprenticeship and then it will be all right; will it? Journeymen do not always find it so. But you do not mean always to be a journeyman; you are going to be a little master. Ask the masters whether everything is pleasant with them in these times. If you want to escape trouble altogether you had better go up in a balloon; and then I am sure that you would be in trouble for fear of going up too high or coming down too fast. But troubles will come; and what is there that can preserve a man in the midst of trouble like feeling that things are safe in his Father’s hands? If you can say, “I am his child, and all things are working together for my good. I have committed myself entirely into the hands of him who cannot err, and will never do me an unkindness,” why, sir, you have on a breastplate which the darts of care cannot pierce, you are shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace, and you may tread on the briars of the wilderness with an unwounded foot.

True religion will also build up in you firmness of character, and that is another quality that I want to see in our young people nowadays. We have some splendid men in this place, and some splendid women too. I should not be afraid if the devil himself were to preach here that he would pervert them from the faith; and if all the new heresies that can rise were to be proclaimed in their presence, they know too well what the truth is ever to be led astray. But on the other hand, we have a number of people who are led by their ears. If I pull their ear one way, they come after me; if they happen to go somewhere else and somebody pulls their ear the other way, they go after him. There are lots of people who never do their own thinking, but put it out as they put out their washing; they do not think of doing it at home. Well now, these people are just like the chaff on the threshing-floor, and when the wind begins to blow, away they go. Do not be like that. Dear young

sons and daughters of the church-members here, know the Lord. May he reveal himself to you at once; and when you do know him, and get a grip of the gospel, bind it to your heart and tie it about your neck, and say “Yes, I am going to follow in the footsteps of those I love, and especially in the footsteps of the Lord Jesus Christ.

“Through floods and flames, if Jesus lead,
I’ll follow where he goes.”

God help you to do it! But first believe in the Lord Jesus Christ; trust yourselves wholly to him and he will give you grace to stand fast even to the end.

The Talking Book

A Sermon (No. 1017) Delivered on Lord's Day Morning, October 22nd, 1871
at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington,
by C. H. Spurgeon.

“When thou awakest, it shall talk with thee.”—Proverbs 6:22.

It is a very happy circumstance when the commandment of our father and the law of our mother are also the commandment of God and the law of the Lord. Happy are they who have a double force to draw them to the right—the bonds of nature, and the cords of grace. They sin with a vengeance who sin both against a father on earth and the great Father in heaven, and they exhibit a virulence and a violence of sin who do despite to the tender obligations of childhood, as well as to the demands of conscience and God. Solomon, in the passage before us, evidently speaks of those who find in the parents' law and in God's law the same thing, and he admonishes such to bind the law of God about their heart and to tie it about their neck; by which he intends inward affection and open avowal. The law of God should be so dear to us that it should be bound about the most vital organ of our being; braided about our heart. That which a man carries in his hand he may forget and lose, that which he wears upon his person may be torn from him, but that which is bound about his heart will remain there as long as life remains. We are to love the Word of God with all our heart, and mind, and soul, and strength; with the full force of our nature we are to embrace it; all our warmest affections are to be bound up with it. When the wise man tells us also to wear it about our necks, he means that we are never to be ashamed of it. No blush is to mantle our cheek when we are called Christians; we are never to speak with bated breath in any company concerning the things of God. Manfully must we take up the cross of Christ; cheerfully must we avow ourselves to belong to those who have respect unto the divine testimonies. Let us count true religion to be our highest ornament; and as magistrates put upon them their gold chains, and think themselves adorned thereby, so let us tie about our neck the commands and the gospel of the Lord our God.

In order that we may be persuaded so to do Solomon gives us three telling reasons. He says that God's law, by which I understand the whole run of Scripture and especially the gospel of Jesus Christ, will be a guide to us:—“When thou goest, it shall lead thee.” It will be a guardian to us: “When thou sleepest”—when thou art defenseless and off thy guard —“it shall keep thee.” And it shall also be a dear companion to us: “When thou awakest, it shall talk with thee.” Any one of these three arguments might surely suffice to make us seek a nearer acquaintance with the sacred word. We all need a guide, for “it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.” Left to our own way, we soon excel in folly. There are dilemmas in all lives where a guide is more precious than a wedge of gold. The Word of God, as an infallible director for human life, should be sought unto by us, and it will lead us in the highway of safety. Equally powerful is the second reason: the Word of God will become the guardian of our days; whoso hearkeneth unto it shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil. Unguarded moments there may be; times, inevitable to our imperfection, there will be, when, unless some other power protect us we shall fall into the hands of the foe.

Blessed is he who has God's law so written on his heart, and wears it about his neck as armour of proof, that at all times he is invulnerable, kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.

But I prefer this morning to keep to the third reason for loving God's word. It is this, that it becomes our sweet companion: "When thou awakest, it shall talk with thee." The inspired law of God, which David in the hundred and nineteenth Psalm calls God's testimonies, precepts, statutes, and the like, is the friend of the righteous. Its essence and marrow is the gospel of Jesus, the law-fulfiller, and this also is the special solace of believers. Of the whole sacred volume it may be said, "When thou awakest, it shall talk with thee." I gather four or five thoughts from this expression, and upon these we will speak.

I. We perceive here that the word is living. How else could it be said: "It shall talk with thee"? A dead book cannot talk, nor can a dumb book speak. It is clearly a living book then, and a speaking book: "The word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever." How many of us have found this to be most certainly true! A large proportion of human books are long ago dead and even shrivelled like Egyptian mummies; the mere course of years has rendered them worthless, their teaching is disproved, and they have no life for us. Entomb them in your public libraries if you will, but henceforth they will stir no man's pulse and warm no man's heart. But this thrice blessed book of God, though it has been extant among us these many hundreds of years, is immortal in its life, unwithering in its strength: the dew of its youth is still upon it; its speech still drops as the rain fresh from heaven; its truths are overflowing fountains of ever fresh consolation. Never book spake like this book; its voice, like the voice of God, is powerful and full of majesty.

Whence comes it that the word of God is living? Is it not, first, because it is pure truth? Error is death, truth is life. No matter how well established an error may be by philosophy, or by force of arms, or the current of human thought, the day cometh that shall burn as an oven, and all untruth shall be as stubble before the fire. The tooth of time devours all lies. Falsehoods are soon cut down and they wither as the green herb. Truth never dies, it dates its origin from the immortals. Kindled at the source of light, its flame cannot be quenched; if by persecution it be for a time covered, it shall blaze forth anew to take reprisals upon its adversaries. Many a once venerated system of error now rots in the dead past among the tombs of the forgotten; but the truth as it is in Jesus knows no sepulchre and fears no funeral; it lives on, and must live while the Eternal fills His throne.

The word of God is living because it is the utterance of an immutable, self-existing God. God doth not speak to-day what He meant not yesterday, neither will He to-morrow blot out what He records to-day. When I read a promise spoken three thousand years ago, it is as fresh as though it fell from the eternal lips to-day. There are indeed no dates to the Divine promises; they are not of private interpretation, nor to be monopolised by any generation. I say again, as fresh to-day the eternal word drops from the Almighty's lips as when He uttered it to Moses, or to Elias, or spake it by the tongue of Esaias or Jeremiah. The word is always sure, steadfast, and full of power. It is never out of date. Scripture bubbles up evermore with good matters, it is an eternal Geyser, a spiritual Niagara of grace, for ever falling, flashing, and flowing on; it is never stagnant, never brackish or defiled, but always clear, crystal, fresh, and refreshing; so therefore ever living.

The word lives, again, because it enshrines the living heart of Christ. The heart of Christ is the most living of all existences. It was once pierced with a spear, but it lives on and yearns towards sinners, and is as tender and compassionate as in the days of the Redeemer's flesh. Jesus, the Sinner's Friend, walks in the avenues of Scripture as once He traversed the plains and hills of Palestine: you can still see Him if you have opened eyes in the ancient prophecies; you can behold Him more

clearly in the devout evangelists; He opens and lays bare His inmost soul to you in the epistles, and makes you hear the footsteps of His approaching advent in the symbols of the Apocalypse. The living Christ is in the book; you behold His face almost in every page; and consequently it is a book that can talk. The Christ of the mount of benedictions speaks in it still; the God who said "Let there be light" gives forth from its pages the same divine fiat; while the incorruptible truth which saturated every line and syllable of it when first it was penned, abides therein in full force, and preserves it from the finger of decay. "The grass withereth and the flower thereof falleth away: but the word of the LORD endureth for ever."

Over and above all this, the Holy Spirit has a peculiar connection with the word of God. I know that He works in the ministries of all His servants whom He hath ordained to preach; but for the most part I have remarked that the work of the Spirit of God in men's hearts is rather in connection with the texts we quote than with our explanations of them. "Depend upon it," says a deeply spiritual writer, "it is God's word, not man's comment on it, which saves souls." God does save souls by our comment, by still it is true that the majority of conversions have been wrought by the agency of a text of Scripture. It is the word of God that is living, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword. There must be life in it, for by it men are born again. As for believers, the Holy Spirit often sets the word on a blaze while they are studying it. The letters were at one time before us as mere letters, but the Holy Ghost suddenly came upon them, and they spake with tongues. The chapter is lowly as the bush at Horeb, but the Spirit descends upon it, and lo! it glows with celestial splendour, God appearing in the words, so that we feel like Moses when he put off his shoes from his feet, because the place whereon he stood was holy ground. It is true, the mass of readers understand not this and look upon the Bible as a common book; but if they understand it not, at least let them allow the truthfulness of our assertion when we declare that hundreds of times we have as surely felt the presence of God in the page of Scripture as ever Elijah did when he heard the Lord speaking in a still small voice. The Bible has often appeared to us as a temple God, and the posts of its doors have moved at the voice of Him that cried, whose train also has filled the temple. We have been constrained adoringly to cry with the seraphim. "Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD God of Hosts." God the Holy Spirit vivifies the letter with His presence, and then it is to us a living word indeed.

And now dear brethren, if these things be so—and our experience certifies them—let us take care how we trifle with a book which is so instinct with life. Might not many of you remember your faults this day were we to ask you whether you are habitual students of holy writ? Readers of it I believe you are; but are you searchers? for the promise is not to those who merely read, but to those who delight in the law of the Lord and meditate therein both day and night. Are you sitting at the feet of Jesus with His word as your school-book? If not, remember, though you may be saved you lacked very much of the blessing which otherwise you might enjoy. Have you been backsliding? Refresh your soul by meditating in the divine statues, and you will say with David, "Thy word hath quickened me." Are you faint and weary? Go and talk with this living book: it will give you back your energy, and you shall mount again as with the wings of eagles. But are you unconverted altogether? Then I cannot direct you to Bible-reading as being the way of salvation, nor speak of it as though it had any merit in it; but I would nevertheless urge upon you unconverted people great reverence for Scripture, an intimate acquaintance with its contents, and a frequent perusal of its pages, for it has occurred ten thousand times over that when men have been studying the word of life, the word has brought life to them. "The entrance of thy word giveth light." Like Elijah and

the dead child, the word has stretched itself upon them, and their dead souls have been made to live. One of the likeliest places in which to find Christ is in the garden of the Scriptures, for there He delights to walk. As of old, the blind men were wont to sit by the wayside begging, so that if Jesus passed by they might cry to Him; so would I have you sit down by the wayside of the Holy Scriptures. Hear the promises, listen to their gracious words; they are the footsteps of the Saviour; and as you hear them, may you be led to cry "Thou Son of David, have mercy upon me!" Attend most those ministries which preach God's Word most. Do not select those that are fullest of fine speaking, and that dazzle you with expressions which are ornamental rather than edifying; but get to a ministry that is full of God's own Word, and above all learn God's Word itself. Read it with a desire to know its meaning, and I am persuaded that thereby many of you who are now far from God will be brought near to him, and led to a saving faith in Jesus, for "the Word of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul." "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."

II. If the text says, "When thou awakest, it shall talk with thee," then it is clear the word is personal. "It shall talk with thee." It is not written, "It shall speak to the air, and thou shalt hear its voice," but "It shall talk with thee." You know exactly what the expression means. I am not exactly talking with any one of you this morning; there are too many of you, and I am but one; but when you are on the road home each one will talk with his fellow: then it is truly talk when man speaks to man. Now the word of God has the condescending habit of talking to men, speaking personally to them; and herein I desire to commend the word of God to your love. Oh! that you might esteem it very precious for this reason!

"It shall talk with thee," that is to say, God's word talks about men, and about modern men; it speaks of ourselves and of these latter days as precisely as if it had only appeared this last week. Some go to the word of God with the idea that they shall find historical information about the ancient ages, and so they will, but that is not the object of the Word. Others look for facts upon geology, and great attempts have been made either to bring geology round to Scripture, or Scripture to geology. We may always rest assured that truth never contradicts itself; but as nobody knows anything yet about geology—for its theory is a dream and an imagination altogether—we will wait till the philosophers settle their own private matters, being confident that when they find out the truth, it will be quite consistent with what God has revealed. At any rate, we may leave that. The main teachings of Holy Scripture are about men, about the Paradise of unfallen manhood, the fall, the degeneracy of the race, and the means of its redemption. The book speaks of victims and sacrifices, priests and washings, and so points us to the divine plan by which man can be elevated from the fall and be reconciled to God. Read Scripture through and you shall find that its great subject is that which concerns the race as to their most important interests. It is a book that talks, talks personally, for it deals with things not in the moon, nor in the planet Jupiter, nor in the distant ages long gone by, nor does it say much of the periods yet to come, but it deals with us, with the business of to-day; how sin may be to-day forgiven, and our souls brought at once into union with Christ.

Moreover, this book is so personal that it speaks to men in all states and conditions before God. How it talks to sinners— talks, I say, for its puts it thus: "Come, now, and let us reason together; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as wool; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as snow." It has many very tender expostulations for sinners. It stoops to their condition and position. If they will not stoop to God, it makes, as it were, eternal mercy stoop to them. It talks of feasts of fat things, of fat things full of marrow; and the book, as it talks, reasons with men's hunger and

bids them eat and be satisfied. In all conditions into which the sinner can be cast there is a word that precisely meets his condition.

And certainly, when we become the children of God, the book talks with us wondrously. In the family of heaven it is the child's own book. We no sooner know our Father than this dear book comes at once as a love letter from the far-off country, signed with our own Father's hand, and perfumed with our Father's love. If we grow in grace, or if we backslide, in either case Scripture still talks with us. Whatever our position before the eternal God the book seems to be written on purpose to meet that position. It talks to you as you are, not only as you should be or as others have been, but with you, with you personally about your present condition.

Have you never noticed how personal the book is as to all your states of mind, in reference to sadness or to joy? There was a time with some of us when we were very gloomy and sore depressed, and then the book of Job mourned to the same dolorous tune. I have mourned over the Lamentations Jeremiah wrote. It mourns unto us when we lament. On the other hand when the soul gets up to the exceeding high mountains, to the top of Amana and Lebanon, when we behold visions of glory and see our Beloved face to face, lo! The word is at our side; and in the delightful language of the Psalms, or in the yet sweeter expressions of the Song of Solomon, it tells us all that is in our heart, and talks to us as a living thing that has been in the deeps, and has been on the heights, that has known the overwhelmings of affliction, and has rejoiced in the triumphs of delight. The word of God is to me my own book: I have no doubt brother, it is the same to you. There could not be a Bible that suited me better: it seems written on purpose for me. Dear sister, have not you often felt as you have put your finger on a promise, "Ah, that is my promise; if there be no other soul whose tearful eyes can bedew that page and say, 'It is mine,' yet I, a poor afflicted one, can do so!" Oh, yes; the book is very personal, for it goes into all the details of our case, let our state be what it may.

And, how very faithful it always is. You never find the word of God keeping back that which is profitable to you. Like Nathan it cries "Thou art the man." It never allows our sins to go unrebuked, nor our backslidings to escape notice till they grow into overt sin. It gives us timely notice; it cries to us as soon as we begin to go aside, "Awake thou that sleepest," "Watch and pray," "Keep thine heart with all diligence," and a thousand other words of warning does it address personally to each one of us.

Now I would suggest before I leave this point a little self-examination as healthful for each of us. Does the word of God after this fashion speak to my soul? Then it is a gross folly to lose by generalisations that precious thing which can only be realised by a personal grasp. How sayest thou, dear hearer? Dost thou read the book for thyself, and does the book speak to thee? Has it ever condemned thee, and has thou trembled before the word of God? Has it ever pointed thee to Christ, and has thou looked to Jesus the incarnate Saviour? Does the book now seal, as with the witness of the Spirit, the witness of thine own spirit that thou art born of God? Art thou in the habit of going to the book to know thine own condition, to see thine own face as in a glass? Is it thy family medicine? Is it thy test and tell-tale to let thee know thy spiritual condition? Oh, do not treat the book otherwise than this, for if thou dost thus unto it and takest it to be thy personal friend, happy art thou, since God will dwell with the man that trembles at His word; but if you treat it as anybody's book rather than your own, then beware lest you be numbered with the wicked who despise God's statutes.

III. From the text we learn that holy Scripture is very familiar. "When thou awakest, it shall talk with thee." To talk signifies fellowship, communion, familiarity. It does not say, "It shall preach to thee." Many persons have a high esteem for the book, but they look upon it as though it were some very elevated teacher speaking to them from a lofty tribunal, while they stand far below. I will not altogether condemn that reverence, but it were far better if they would understand the familiarity of God's word; it does not so much preach to us as talk to us. It is not, "When thou awakest, it shall lecture thee," or, "it shall scold thee;" no, no, "it shall talk with thee." We sit at its feet, or rather at the feet of Jesus in the Word, and it comes down to us; it is familiar with us, as a man talketh to his friend. And here let me remind you of the delightful familiarity of Scripture in this respect, that it speaks the language of men. If God had written us a book in His own language we could not have comprehended it, or what little we understood would have so alarmed us that we should have besought that those words should not be spoken to us any more; but the Lord in His Word often uses language which, though it be infallibly true in its meaning, is not after the knowledge of God, but according to the manner of man. I mean this, that the word uses similes and analogies of which we may say that they speak humanly, and not according to the absolute truth as God Himself sees it. As men conversing with babes use their broken speech, so doth the condescending word. It is not written in the celestial tongue, but in the patois of this lowland country, condescending to men of low estate. It feeds us on bread broken down to our capacity, "food convenient for us." It speaks of God's arm, His hand, His finger, His wings, and even of His feathers. Now, all this is familiar picturing to meet our childish capacities; for the Infinite One is not to be conceived of as though such similitudes were literal facts. It is an amazing instance of divine love that He puts those things so that we may be helped to grasp sublime truths. Let us thank the Lord of the word for this.

How tenderly Scripture comes down to simplicity. Suppose the sacred volume had all been like the book of the prophet Ezekiel, small would have been its service to the generality of mankind. Imagine that the entire volume had been as mysterious as the Book of Revelation: it might have been our duty to study it, but if its benefit depended upon our understanding it we should have failed to attain it. But how simple are the gospels, how plain these words, "He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved"; how deliciously clear those parables about the lost piece of money, the lost sheep, and the prodigal son. Wherever the word touches upon vital points, it is as bright as a sunbeam. Mysteries there are, and profound doctrines, deeps where Leviathan can swim; but where it has to do immediately with what concerns us for eternity, it is so plain that the babe in grace may safely wade in its refreshing streams. In the gospel narrative the wayfaring man, though a fool, need not err. It is familiar talk; it is God's great mind brought down to our littleness that it may lift us up.

How familiar the book is too—I speak now as to my own feelings—as to all that concerns us. It talks about my flesh and my corruptions and my sins as only one that knew me could speak. It talks of my trials in the wisest way; some I dare not tell it knows all about. It talks about my difficulties; some would sneer at them and laugh, but this book sympathises with them, knows my tremblings, and my fears, and my doubts, and all the storm that rages within the little world of my nature. The book has been through all my experience; somehow or other it maps it all out and talks with me as if it were a fellow-pilgrim. It does not speak to me unpractically, and scold me, and look down on me from an awful height of stern perfection, as if it were an angel and could not sympathise with fallen men; but like the Lord whom it reveals, the book seems as if it were touched

with a feeling of my infirmities, and had been tempted in all points like as I am. Have you not often wondered at the human utterances of the divine word: it thunders like God and yet weeps like man. It seems impossible that anything should be too little for the word of God to notice, or too bitter, or even too sinful for that book to overlook. It touches humanity at all points. Everywhere it is a personal, familiar acquaintance, and seems to say to itself, "Shall I hide this thing from Abraham my friend?"

And how often the book has answered enquiries! I have been amazed in times of difficulties to see how plain the oracle is. You have asked friends and they could not advise you; but you have gone to your knees, and God has told you. You have questioned, and you have puzzled, and you have tried to elucidate the problem, and lo! In the chapter read at morning prayer, or in a passage of Scripture that lay open before you, the direction has been given. Have we not seen a text, as it were, plume its wings, and fly from the word like a seraph, and touch our lips with a live altar coal? It lay like a slumbering angel amidst the beds of spices of the sacred word, but it received a divine mission, and brought consolation and instruction to your heart.

The word of God then, talks with us in the sense of being familiar with us. Do we understand this? I will close this point by another word of application. Who then that finds God's word so dear and kind a friend would spurn or neglect it? If any of you have despised it, what shall I say to you? If it were a dreary book written within and without with curses and lamentations, whose every letter flashed with declarations of vengeance, I might see some reason why we should not read it; but O precious priceless companion, dear friend of all my sorrows, making my bed in my sickness, the light of my darkness and the joy of my soul, how can I forget thee—how can I forsake thee? I have heard of one who said that the dust on some men's Bibles lay there so thick and long that you might write "Damnation" on it. I am afraid that such is that case with some of you. Mr. Rogers of Dedham on one occasion, after preaching about the preciousness of the Bible, took it away from the front of the pulpit, and putting it down behind him, pictured God as saying "You do not read the book: you do not care about it; I will take it back—you shall not be wearied with it any more." And then he portrayed the grief of wise men's hearts when they found the blessed revelation withdrawn from men; and how they would besiege the throne of grace day and night to ask it back. I am sure he spoke the truth. Though we too much neglect it, yet ought we to prize it beyond all price, for if it were taken from us we should have lost our kindest comforter in the hour of need. God grant us to love the Scriptures more!

IV. Fourthly, and with brevity, our text evidently shows that the word is responsive. "When thou awakest, it shall talk with thee," not to thee. Now, talk with a man is not all on one side. To talk with a man needs answering talk from him. You have both of you something to say when you talk together. It is a conversation to which each one contributes his part. Now Scripture is a marvellously conversational book; it talks, and makes men talk. It is ever ready to respond to us. Suppose you go to the Scriptures in a certain state of spiritual life: you must have noticed I think, that the word answered to that state. If you are dark and gloomy it will appear as though it had put itself in mourning, so that it might lament with you. When you are on the dunghill, there sits Scripture with dust and ashes on its head weeping side by side with you, and not upbraiding like Job's miserable comforters. But suppose you come to the book with gleaming eyes of joy, you will hear it laugh; it will sing and play to you as with psaltery and harp, it will bring forth the high-sounding cymbals. Enter its goodly land in a happy state, and you shall go forth with you and be led forth with peace, its mountains and its hills shall break before you into singing, and all the

trees of the field shall clap their hands. As in water the face is reflected, so in the living stream of revealed truth a man sees his own image.

If you come to Holy Scripture with growth in grace, and with aspirations for yet higher attainments, the book grows with you, grows upon you. It is ever beyond you, and cheerily cries, "Higher yet; Excelsior!" Many books in my library are now behind and beneath me; I read them years ago with considerable pleasure; I have read them since with disappointment; I shall never read them again for they are of no service to me. They were good in their way once, and so were the clothes I wore when I was ten years old; but I have outgrown them I know more than these books know, and know wherein they are faulty. Nobody ever outgrows Scripture; the Book widens and deepens with our years. It is true it cannot really grow, for it is perfect; but it does so to our apprehension. The deeper you dig into Scripture the more you find that it is a great abyss of truth. The beginner learns four or five points of orthodoxy and says, "I understand the gospel, I have grasped all the Bible." Wait a bit, and when his soul grows and knows more of Christ he will confess, "Thy commandment is exceeding broad, I have only begun to understand it."

There is one thing about God's word which shows its responsiveness to us, and that is when you reveal your heart to it, it reveals its heart to you. If as you read the word you say, "O blessed truth, thou art indeed realised in my experience; come thou still further into my heart. I give up my prejudices, I assign myself, like the wax, to be stamped with thy seal,"—when you do that, and open your heart to Scripture, Scripture will open its heart to you; for it has secrets which it does not tell to the casual reader, it has precious things of the everlasting hills which can only be discovered by miners who know how to dig and open the secret places, and penetrate great veins of everlasting riches. Give thyself up to the Bible, and the Bible will give itself up to thee. Be candid with it, and honest with thy soul, and the Scripture will take down its golden key and open one door after another, and show to thy astonished gaze ingots of silver which thou couldst not weigh, and heaps of gold which thou couldst not measure. Happy is that man who, in talking with the Bible, tells it all his heart, and learns the secret of the Lord which is with them that fear Him.

And how, too, if you love the bible and talk out your love to it, the Bible will love you! Its wisdom says, "I love them that love me." Embrace the word of God and the word of God embraces you at once. When you prize its every letter, then it smiles upon you graciously, greets you with many welcomes, and treats you as an honoured guest. I am always sorry to be on bad terms with the Bible, for then I must be on bad terms with God. Whenever my creed does not square with God's word, I think it is time to mold my creed into another form. As for God's words, they must not be touched with hammer or axe. Oh, the chiselling, and cutting, and hammering in certain commentaries to make God's Bible orthodox and systematic! How much better to leave it alone! The word is right, and we are wrong, wherein we agree not with it. The teachings of God's word are infallible and must be revered as such. Now, when you love it so well that you would not touch a single line of it, and prize it so much that you would even die for the defence of one of its truths, then, as it is dear to you, you will be dear to it, and it will grasp you and unfold itself to you as it does not to the world.

Dear brethren and sisters, I must leave this point, but it shall be with this remark—Do you talk to God? Does God talk to you? Does your heart go up to heaven and does His Word come fresh from heaven to your soul? If not, you do not know the experience of the living child of God, and I can earnestly pray you may. May you this day be brought to see Christ Jesus in the word, to see

a crucified Saviour there, and to put your trust in Him, and then from this day forward the word will echo to your heart—it will respond to your emotions.

V. Lastly, Scripture is influential. That I gather from the fact that Solomon says, “When thou wakest, it shall talk with thee”; and follows it up with the remark that it keeps man from the strange woman, and from other sins which he goes on to mention. When the word of God talks with us it influences us. All talk influences more or less. I believe there is more done in this world for good or bad by talk than there is by preaching; indeed, the preacher preaches best when he talks; there is no oratory in the world that is equal to simple talk; it is the model of eloquence; and all your rhetorician’s action and verbiage are so much rubbish. The most efficient way of preaching is simply talking; the man permitting his heart to run over at his lips into other men’s hearts. Now this book, as it talks with us, influences us, and it does so in many ways.

It soothes our sorrows and encourages us. Many a warrior has been ready to steal away from God’s battle, but the word has laid its hand on him and said, “Stand on thy feet, be not discouraged, be of good cheer, I will strengthen thee, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.” Brave saints we have read of, but we little know how often they would have been arrant cowards; only the good word came and strengthened them and they went back to be stronger than lions and swifter than eagles.

While the book thus soothes and cheers, it has a wonderfully elevating power. Have you never felt it put fresh life-blood into you? You have thought, “How can I continue to live at such a dying rate as I have lived? something nobler must I gain.” Read that part of the word which tells of the agonies of your Master, and you will feel—

“Now for the love I bear His name,
What was my gain I count my loss;
My former pride I call my shame,
And nail my glory to His cross.”

Read of the glories of heaven which this book reveals, and you will feel that you can run the race with quickened speed because a crown so bright is glittering in your view. Nothing can so lift a man above the gross considerations of carnal gain or human applause as to have his soul saturated with the spirit of truth. It elevates as well as cheers.

Then too, how often it warns and restrains. I had gone to the right or to the left if the law of the Lord had not said, “Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee.”

This book’s consecrated talk sanctifies and molds the mind into the image of Christ. You cannot expect to grow in grace if you do not read the Scriptures. If you are not familiar with the word you cannot expect to become like Him that spake it. Our experience is, as it were, the potter’s wheel on which we revolve; and the hand of God is in the Scriptures to mold us after the fashion and image which He intends to bring us to. Oh, be much with the holy word of God, and you will be holy. Be much with the silly novels of the day, and the foolish trifles of the hour, and you will degenerate into vapid wasters of your time; but be much with the solid teaching of God’s word, and you will become solid and substantial men and women: drink them in and feed upon them, and they shall produce in you a Christ-likeness at which the world shall stand astonished.

Lastly, let the Scripture talk with you and it will confirm and settle you. We hear every now and then of apostates from the gospel. They must have been little taught in the truth as it is in Jesus. A great outcry is made every now and then about our all being perverted to Rome. I was assured

the other day by a good man with a great deal of alarm, that all England was going over to Popery. I told him I did not know what kind of God he worshipped, but my God was a good deal bigger than the devil, and did not intend to let the devil have his way after all, and that I was not half as much afraid of the Pope at Rome as of the Ritualists at home. But mark it, there is some truth in these fears. There will be a going over to one form of error or another unless there be in the Christian church a more honest, industrious, and general reading of Holy Scripture. What if I were to say most of you church members do not read your Bibles, should I be slandering you? You hear on Sabbath day a chapter read, and you perhaps read a passage at family prayer, but a very large number never read the Bible privately for themselves; they take their religion out of the monthly magazine, or accept it from the minister's lips. Oh, for the Berean spirit back again to search the Scriptures whether these things be so. I would like to see a huge pile of all the books that were ever written, good and bad; prayer-books, and sermons, and hymn-books, and all, smoking like Sodom of old, if the reading of those books keeps you away from the reading of the Bible; for a ton weight of human literature is not worth an ounce of Scripture; one single drop of the essential tincture of the word of God is better than a sea full of our commenting and sermonisings and the like. The word, the simple, pure, infallible word of God, we must live upon if we are to become strong against error, and tenacious of truth. Brethren, may you be established in the faith, rooted, grounded, built up; but I know you cannot be except ye search the Scriptures continually.

The time is coming when we shall all fall asleep in death. Oh, how blessed it will be to find when we awake that the word of God will talk with us then, and remember its ancient friendship. Then the promise which we loved before shall be fulfilled; the charming intimations of a blessed future shall be all realised, and the face of Christ whom we saw as through a glass darkly shall be all uncovered, and He shall shine upon us as the sun in its strength. God grant us to love the word and feed thereon, and the Lord shall have the glory for ever and ever. Amen and amen.

The Waterer Watered

A sermon (No. 626) delivered on Sunday Morning, April 23, 1865,
at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington,
by C. H. Spurgeon.

“He that watereth shall be watered also himself.”—Proverbs 11:25.

The general principle is that in living for the good of others, we shall be profited also ourselves. We must not isolate our own interests, but feel that we live for others. This teaching is sustained by the analogy of nature, for in nature there is a law that no one thing can be independent of the rest of creation, but there is a mutual action and reaction of all upon all. All the constituent parts of the universe are bound to one another by invisible chains, and there is not a single creature in it which springeth up, or flourisheth, or decayeth for itself alone. The very planets, though they float far from one another, exercise attraction; and the fixed stars, though they seem to be infinitely remote, are still linked to one another by mysterious bonds. God has so constituted this universe that selfishness is the greatest possible offense against his law, and living for others, and ministering to others, is the strictest obedience to his will. Our surest road to our own happiness is to seek the good of our fellows. We store up in God’s own bank what we generously expend on the behalf of our race. The little spring bubbling forth from the ancient pipe on the hill side overflows the stone basin, and liberally supplies all the villagers with pure and cooling drink. In its flowing it does not waste itself, for the deep fountains in the bowels of the earth continue unceasingly to supply it, and both in winter’s frost and summer’s drought the spring-head yields its crystal stream. The little brook which babbles through the wood, hiding among stones, leaping down the moss-grown rocks, and anon deepening and swelling its stream, pours all its gatherings into the river hoarding not a drop, and though its treasure is constantly being lavished with unstinting liberality, yet heaven and earth see to it that the brook shall never fail to sing its joyous song,

“Men may come and go
But I go on for ever.”

The river hastens with its greater floods towards the all-receiving ocean, pouring itself out every hour with happy plenteousness as though it only existed to empty itself; yet the abundant tributaries which come streaming from the hills and draining the valleys are careful that the river shall know no lack, but shall be kept constantly brimming, a joyous and bounding river evermore. The ocean perpetually sends up its steaming exhalations to the sky, grudging nothing it puts no doors to its roiling waves, but uncovereth all its treasure to the sun, and the sun makes large draughts upon the royal exchequer of the deep; nevertheless the ocean is not diminished, for all the rivers are constantly conspiring to keep the sea full to the shore. The clouds of heaven when they are full of rain empty themselves upon the earth, and yet the clouds cease not to be, for “they return after the rain,” and the ocean down below seems but to be too glad to be continually feeding its sister ocean on the other side the firmament. So as wheels with bands are made to work together, as wheels with cogs working upon one another, the whole watery machinery is kept in motion by each part acting upon its next neighbor, and the next upon the next. Each wheel expends its force upon its fellow, and

the whole find a recompense in their mutual action upon one another. The same truth might be illustrated from other departments of nature. If we view this microcosm, the human body, we shall find that the heart does not receive the blood to store it up, but while it pumps it in at one valve it sends it forth at another. The blood is always circulating everywhere and is stagnant nowhere; the same is true of all the fluids in a healthy body, they are in a constant state of expenditure. If one cell stores for a few moments its peculiar secretion, it only retains it till it is perfectly fitted for its appointed use in the body, for if any cell in the body should begin to store up its secretion, its store would soon become the cause of inveterate disease; nay, the organ would soon lose the power to secrete at all if it did not give forth its products. The whole of the human system lives by giving. The eye cannot say to the foot I have no need of thee and will not guide thee, for if it does not perform its watchful office the whole man will be in the ditch, and the eye will be covered with mire. If the members refuse to contribute to the general stock the whole body will become poverty-stricken, and be given up to the bankruptcy of death. Let us learn then from the analogy of nature, the great lesson that to get we must give; that to accumulate we must scatter; that to make ourselves happy we must make others happy; and that to get good and become spiritually vigorous we must do good and seek the spiritual good of others. This is the general principle.

The text suggests a particular personal application of the general principle. We shall consider it first in its narrowest sense, as belonging to ourselves personally; secondly, in a wider sense as it may refer to us as a Church; then thirdly, in its widest sense as it may be referred to the entire body of Christ, showing that still it is true that as it watereth so it shall be watered itself.

I. First then, in reference to ourselves personally.

There are some works my brethren, in which we cannot all engage. Peculiar men are called to be God's great woodmen, to clear the way with the axe, to go before his army like our sappers and miners—such men as Martin Luther, and Calvin, and Zwingle—that glorious trio of heroes marching in front of reformation and evangelization; they are cutting down the tall trees, tunnelling the hills, and bridging the rivers, and we smaller men feel that there is little of this work for us to do. But when the backwoodsmen have cleared the forest, after all the roots are grubbed and the soil is burned and ploughed, then comes the sowing and the planting, and in this all the household can take a place; and when the plants have sprung up and need water, it is not only the stalwart man with the axe who can now apply himself to watering, but even the little children can take a share in this lighter work. Watering is work for persons of all grades and all sorts. If I cannot carry about me some ponderous load as the Eastern water-bearer can, yet I will take my little waterpot, my little jug or pitcher, and go to the well; for if I cannot water the forest tree I may water the tiny plant which grows at its root. Watering is work for all sorts of people; so then, we will make a personal application to every Christian here this morning: you can all do something in watering, and this promise can therefore be realized by you all, "He that watereth shall be watered also himself."

All God's plants more or less want watering. You and I do. We cannot live long without fresh supplies of grace. Hence the value of the promise, "I, the LORD, do keep it; I will water it every moment." There are no rills at our root as we grow in the soil of nature; it is only in the garden of grace that we are "like trees planted by the rivers of water, bringing forth our fruit in our season." If the Lord Jesus who is the stem of the vine should cease to supply us with the fresh sap of grace, should we not be like the withered branch which is cast over the wall to be burned in the fire?

The Lord's people usually get this watering through instrumentality. God does not speak to us out of heaven with his own voice—perhaps the thunder might appal us; he doth not write texts of Scripture with his own finger in letters of fire across the sky, but he waters us by instrumentality, by his Word written and his Word preached, or otherwise uttered by his servants. His Holy Spirit waters us by the admonitions of parents, by the kind suggestions of friends, by the teaching of his ministers, by the example of all his saints. The Holy Spirit waters us, but he takes care to do it by our fellow-workers, putting an honor upon his own servants by using them in instrumentality.

This being fully believed by us all, we may proceed to another truth, namely that some of his servants especially want watering and should therefore be the objects of our constant care. Some plants need watering from their peculiar nature. A gardener will tell you that certain flowers require very little water, perhaps for months they will grow in a stony soil, but others must be watered regularly and plenteously or they will soon droop. Some of you, my dear brothers and sisters, are so desponding that if you did not receive much comfort you would hardly hold up your heads at all; you are so weak in the faith that if you were not fed with milk continually you would scarcely be alive. “Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people, saith your God” —is especially applicable to the mourners in Zion. Their constitutional temperament is such that to maintain the lamp of their joy they require much oil of comfort.

Perhaps too they are ignorant, and the ignorant want much watering. If they knew the doctrines of grace more fully they might go to the wells themselves: but not knowing where the water is, or feeling like the woman at the well that the well is deep, and that there is nothing to draw with, they cannot get the water; and we who are instructed in the way of God must take care that we bring up the water for them with our longer length of the line of knowledge, so that they may not fail to be watered.

It may be the need is not so much caused by the nature of the plant, but by the position in which it is placed. Many of you, dear brethren, are very happily situated where you can constantly attend the means of grace, where the family altar smokes with sweet perfume, where you cannot well help growing for you are like plants in a hothouse. But there are others on the contrary who live in houses where the jeer is far more frequently heard than the voice of praise; where instead of being helped in your devotions you are hindered; your spirit is driven to and fro with distractions; from the very closet where you wanted to commune with God, you are forced out by cruel mocking. We ought to be very tender over your condition, as being planted on no fruitful hill, but on a very thirsty land where no water is; your position should lead God's people to watch you with deepest interest, and see to it that you are well watered.

I may mention also the sick. When our dear friends are tried with bodily pain, when they are shut up week after week from the public gatherings, then they want watering. Their position is such that we ought to be specially mindful of them. It is written, “He carrieth the lambs in his bosom, and gently leadeth those that are with young;” and we must note the peculiar condition of the saints of God, being most careful of those who most need our tenderness.

Let me also suggest the young to you. These want watering, both, let me say, from their character and from their position. With little experience and little knowledge they are prone to wander or to be seized by the wolf. Tend them with parental affection. When slips of flowers are first put into the ground they want more water than they will do afterwards; when they have sent out more roots, and these roots have abundant fibres searching through the soil for moisture, they may not require

much of the gardener's care; but just now they must have it or die. Therefore I say, let the feeble, the weak, the young, the sick, the persecuted, be watered most anxiously and lovingly by you all.

Certain dear friends need watering, not so much from their position and character, as from the present trials through which they are passing. Certain plants, after long standing in the sun, droop their leaves and look as if they must wither and die; but as soon as water is poured to their roots it has sometimes perfectly surprised me to see how they will recover. I could scarcely think that they were the same plants, their recovery was so sudden. The little roots beneath sent the message up to the main roots and said, "We have found out moisture, a friendly hand has given us a supply," and the root talked to the stem, and the stem rejoiced, and the great leaves drank up their share, and the little leaves sucked up their drops, till the whole plant to the very summit was verdant once more and rejoiced. Times will come to all of us when we want water. I myself get very desponding at seasons, as I suppose you do. Unbelief dries us up. Oh that devil of unbelief! Why, if that demon were dead the other devil we might very well contend with. Personal affliction, losses, crosses, burdens, make us just like the withering shrub, and then we want to have the consolations of some kind friend to water us.

Dear friends, sometimes there are those in the Church who particularly want watering because they are actually withering. It is not to maintain verdure in their case, but to restore it. Those backsliding ones, those who have slipped with their feet, do not cast them off, for God casts not off the backsliding one. When they begin to forsake the House of God, do not forsake them; follow them with your tears. In such a Church as this if you do not exercise mutual oversight over one another we shall simply become a mass of corruption, instead of being a mountain of holiness. Watch over your brethren as soon as you see the first signs of declension. When they forsake the prayer-meetings, gently give them a hint of the evil of lukewarmness, and the danger of falling by little and little. When you mark the first sign in their outward carriage of laxity with regard to divine things, when you see coldness where there was formerly zeal, be sure to give a gentle word of earnest, pathetic admonition. As I look around this Tabernacle, I can but compare these rising seats to shelves in the conservatory, and you are the plants which must all be watered or you will languish and wither; and I who have to be my Master's under-gardener am very anxious to say to all of you who have any water in your wateringpots, help me to water these plants, that by the gracious operations of God the Holy Ghost they may be kept fruitful, green, verdant in spiritual things even to the end.

We now enter more thoroughly into our text and observe that all believers have power to water others. You may not have much ability or influence, but you all have some power in this matter. In thinking over what Solomon meant, it struck me that he had in his mind's eye the plan of irrigation which is followed in some Eastern countries. The rivers at certain seasons overflow their banks. The careful husbandmen whose farms are close along the sides of the bank, have large tanks and reservoirs in which they store up the water. After the flood, the river is comparatively empty, and the little farms, the vineyards, and pastures on the banks begin to cry out for water; then the careful husbandman lets out the water from his tank or reservoir by slow degrees, and uses it with great economy. It would sometimes happen that one of these farmers would have his reservoirs filled, and his next neighbor, perhaps through the bursting of a tank, or the falling down of the bank of earth, might have little or no water. At such times a churlish man would say, "I shall want all my water for myself, I will not lend or give so much as a drop of it. I have none to spare." But the generous man says, "I do not know whether God may be pleased to send a drought or no, but I

cannot let my neighbor lose all his crops for the want of a little water while I have a good stock in hand;" so he pulls up the sluice and lets such a stream as he thinks he can spare flow into his neighbour's channel, that he may water his fields therewith. Now Solomon says that those who water others shall be watered; hence, next season it may happen that this good man may have no water himself; well then, all the farmers round about will say, "Why, he helped us when his tank was full, and we will return his kindness into his bosom." "Ah," says one, "he saved me from ruin; I should not have had a crop at all last season if it had not been for him." So they all lend a portion till he finds no difficulty whatever; even in a season of drought when men cannot get water for love or money, he is sure to have it. The common feeling of men, as a usual rule, recognises the law of gratitude, and men say, "He watered others, he shall be watered himself." My dear brother, you may be a man of talent, you may be a man of wealth: just turn on the big tap and let your ignorant or poor neighbors benefit a little by your abundance; pull up the flood-gates and let the more needy brethren be enriched by your fullness: open that mouth of yours that your wisdom may feed many; tell of what God has done for your soul that the humble may hear thereof and be glad. Do not be a reservoir brimmed up till the banks are ready to burst out through the weight which presses upon them, but just let some of the treasure run out, and when your need of it shalt come—and who knows when it may overtake any of us?—you shall find willing friends who shall run with swift feet to cheer your adversity.

This simile needs to be supplemented by another: many true saints are unable to do much. See then the gardeners going down to the pond and dipping in their watering-pots to carry the refreshing liquid to the flowers. A child comes into the garden and wishes to help; and yonder is a little watering-pot for him. Now, see that little water-pot, though it does not carry so much, yet carries the same water; and it does not make any difference to the half-dozen flowers which get that water whether it came out of the big pot or the little pot, so long as it is the same water and they get it. You who are like children in God's Church, you who do not know much, yet try and tell to others what you do know, and if it be the same gospel truth and it be blest by the same Spirit it will not matter to the souls who get blessed by you whether they were blessed by a man of one or ten talents. What difference will it make to me whether I was converted to God by means of a poor woman who was never made a blessing to anybody else, or by one who had brought his thousands to the Savior's feet? Go, my dear brethren, and exercise the holy art of watering. You say "How?" Why, a word may do it, a look may do it, an action may do it; only zealously desire to offer sympathy, to afford instruction, to give needed help, to impart what you may be favored with to others, and you shall be watering yourselves.

The main point is that in so watering others we shall be watered ourselves. I am sure we shall, for God promises it and he always keeps his promise. If I want to get water I must give water. Though that seems a strange way of self-serving, I pray you try it. Was not that a very singular thing that when the poor woman of Sarepta had nearly exhausted all her meal, the prophet asked for a cake for himself? She had been very saving of it; I dare say she had eaten only a mouthful or two every day. She and her poor boy were looking very thin. They had come to the last handful. She thought, "I will make one cake for my son and myself and then we will die." She is outside picking up sticks that she may bake this cake. God intends to bless her. How does he do it? There comes his prophet, the hairy man, and the first word he says to her is, "Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel that I may drink." She is quite ready to serve any one, and away she hastens for the water, when Elijah cries aloud, "Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand."

What, out of that little handful—only enough for one? “Yes,” he says, “make me thereof a little cake first, and after make for thee and thy son.” “After that!” she might have said, “what will be left after that? When there is only a handful of meal and a little oil in a cruse, not enough for one, am I to give that to you and afterwards see to myself and child?” Faith enabled her to obey, and from that very moment neither she nor her son ever knew what want was. She gave from her little, and her little multiplied. The case of the woman of Zarephath is but one of thousands establishing the rule of God’s mode of action with his Church, a rule which shall not be broken till the end shall come.

Let me show you how you will get watered yourself. In the first place, if you try to do good to others it will do you good by waking up your powers. Thousands of men do not know what they are made of. You have no idea what a fine fellow you are, young man, till you begin to shake yourself a little and go forth to fight the Lord’s battles. We do not know what sinews we have till we climb the mountains; we do not know what strength there may be in our backs and arms till we have to carry a ponderous load, and then we find it out. You have latent talents, dormant faculties which would work wonders if you could call them forth. Some people are not awake more than skin deep; all underneath the skin is sound asleep. They are like the great candle which I showed you one night with a small wick, which was only melted a little in the middle while all the outside was still cold hard tallow, and did not contribute to the light. You have not become warmed through yet, your whole souls have not been wound up to the right pitch for serving God, you have only a little earnestness, a little zeal; but if you ventured upon holy enterprises you would bestir yourself so thoroughly that you would scarcely know yourself again. That would be a blessing indeed.

But next you would often find that in trying to water others, you gained instruction. Go talk to some poor saint to comfort her, and she will tell you what will comfort you. Oh, what gracious lessons some of us have learned at sick beds! We went to teach the Scriptures, we came away blushing that we knew so little of them. We went to talk experimental truth, and we found we were only up to the ankles while here were God’s poor saints breast-deep in the river of divine love. We learn by teaching, and our pupils often teach us.

You will also get comfort in your work. Rest assured that working for others is very happy exercise. Like the two men in the snow; one chafed the other’s limbs to keep him from dying, and in so doing he kept his own blood in circulation, and his own life was preserved. Comfort God’s people and the comfort will return into your own soul.

Watering others will make you humble. You will find better people in the world than yourself. You will be astonished to find how much grace there is where you thought there was none, and how much knowledge some have gained while you as yet have made little progress with far greater opportunities.

You will also win many prayers. Those who work for others get prayed for, and that is a swift way of growing rich in grace. Let me have your prayers and I can do anything! Let me be without my people’s prayers, and I can do nothing. You Sunday-school teachers, if you are blessed to the conversion of the children, you will get your children’s prayers. You that conduct the larger classes, in the conversion of your young people you will be sure to have a wealth of love come back into your own bosoms, swimming upon the stream of supplication. You will thus be a blessing to yourselves.

In watering others you will get honor to yourselves, and that will help to water you by stimulating your future exertions. The Romans appointed censors in their State, not only to censure men for

gross immoralities, but to require every man to give an account of what he was doing for the good of the Republic. We have deacons and elders—would it not be an additional blessing to have censors in the Church to go round and ask the members, all of them, what they are doing for the good of the Christian Church? A Greek historian desired very intensely to say a word about the people of the city where he was born. He felt he could not write his history without saying something of his own native place, and accordingly he wrote this—“While Athens was building temples and Sparta was waging war, my countrymen were doing nothing.” I am afraid there are too many Christians of whom, if the book were written as to what they are doing in the Church, it would have to be said they have been doing nothing all their lives. You would be delivered from that reproach if you began to water others.

Let me cease from this subject by saying while you are watering others, you will be manifesting and showing your love to Christ, and that will make you more like him, and so you will be watered while you are seeking to benefit your neighbors. To serve Jesus! what need I say of that? Look into that face bedewed with bloody sweat for you, and can you not sweat for him? Look to those hands pierced for you, and shall your hands hang idly down and not be used for him? Look at those feet fastened to the wood with nails for you! Can I ask of you any pilgrimage too long to repay the toil which those feet endured for your sake? My brethren and sisters, remember what Christ Jesus has done for you, from whence he came, the riches which he left, to what he came, the poverty and shame which he endured, and how he went down into the depths that he might take us up to the heights. If you will think of these, you will have the best motive methinks for beginning to look after his lambs and fighting with those lions which seek to devour his flock; and in that moving motive will be the main means by which you shall be conformed to his image, and shall become like him, self-sacrificing, doing your Father’s business.

I wish I could speak more powerfully this morning but the matter ought to speak for itself with Christians. If we love Jesus we shall not want any pleading with to water his plants. If you really love him it will not be a question of whether you shall do something, the only question will be “What can I do?” and you will say in your pew this morning, “What shall I render to the LORD for all his benefits toward me?” He has spared your lives, he has given you health and strength, provided you with spirituals and temporals, he has made your heart leap for joy at the sound of his name, he has plucked you out of the horrible pit and out of the miry clay, he has taken you out of the black bondage of the prince of darkness and made you his sons and daughters; he has put the ring of his eternal love upon your finger, your feet are shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace —

“This world is yours, and worlds to come,
Earth is your lodge, and heaven your home.”

There is a crown for your head and a palm branch for your hand and pavements of gold for your feet, and felicities for ever for your entire soul; and even your body is to be raised again from the dust and fashioned like unto Christ’s glorious body. “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for you.” Now what will you do for him? Will you not win the promise that your soul shall be watered by seeking to water the souls of others?

II. a brief exhortation shall suffice for the second point—this general principle is worthy of a wider application.

We as a Church, dear friends, have enjoyed singular prosperity. While many Churches have been depressed and decreased in numbers, we have increased. While other Churches have had the hectic flush of a spurious revival, we have had one perpetual revival lasting for nearly twelve years. I do not know that we have increased at a more or a less rapid rate; we could not increase more quickly for we have not officers enough, or time enough to see the converts as it is; we have never, I think, increased less, for the work seems to have ever the same prosperity about it. I praise God that I can say of my ministry in this place and elsewhere, that to this day it hath the dew of its youth upon it, and there are as many rejoicing to find Christ through the agencies employed in this Church to-day as in the first day when we came among you in the freshness and vigor of our youth. We have had no schism; we have had no division; we have not been vexed with heresy. We have been blessed with something like persecution, but this has only bound us the faster to one another till we are like a three-fold cord which cannot be broken, and like iron bars made red hot in the furnace and hammered together, we are not soon to be sundered from one another. Now, dear friends, up to this time the policy which we have pursued has been this: if members of other Churches want to know, we hereby tell them, we have endeavored to water others. Your minister has journeyed all over the three kingdoms preaching the Word, and you have not grumbled at his absence. We have undertaken many enterprises for Christ; we hope to undertake a great many more. We have never husbanded our strength; we have undertaken enterprises that were enough to exhaust us, to which we became accustomed in due season, and then we have gone on to something more. We have never sought to hinder the uprising of other Churches from our midst or in our neighborhood. It is with cheerfulness that we dismiss our twelves, our twenties, our fifties, to form other Churches. We encourage our members to leave us to found other Churches; nay, we seek to persuade them to do it. We ask them to scatter throughout the land to become the goodly seed which God shall bless. I believe that so long as we do this we shall prosper. I have marked other Churches that have adopted the other way, and they have not succeeded. This is what I have heard from some ministers: "I do not encourage village stations, or if I do, I do not encourage their becoming distinct Churches and breaking bread together. I do not encourage too many young men going out to preach, for to have a knot of people who can preach a little may very soon cause dissatisfaction with my own preaching." I have marked those who have followed this course, and I have seen that the effect of trying to keep all the blood in the heart is to bring on congestion, and very soon the whole body has been out of health. My brethren, if you can do more good elsewhere than you can do here, for God's sake, go, and happy shalt I be that you have gone. If you can serve my Master in the little rooms in the neighborhood, if by forming yourselves into smaller Churches you can increase the honor of my Master's name, I shall love you none the less for going, but I shall delight to think that you have Christ's spirit in you, and can do and dare for his name's sake. At the present moment we rejoice to know that many a Sunday School in this neighborhood is indebted to the members of this Church for teachers. It is right. We do not want you at home, and are therefore glad to see you at work elsewhere. No matter, so long as Christ is preached, whether you throw your strength into that Church or into this Church. Here, as being members with us, we have the first claim upon you; but when we do not need you by reason of our abundance of men, go and give your strength to any other part of Christ's Church that may desire you.

While I speak thus much in your praise my brethren and sisters, let me say we must keep this up. If we say, "We have the College to support, and we do as much as other Churches for various societies, and we can be content to sit still," this Church will begin to go rotten at the core the

moment we are not working for God with might and main. Sometimes I get a pull at my coat-tail by very kind, judicious friends, who think I shall ask you to do too much. My brethren are welcome to pull my coat-tail, but it will come off before I shall stand back for a moment. As long as I live I must serve my Master with my whole soul, and when you think I go too fast, you can stand back if you dare, for mark, you will be responsible to God if you do; you may start back if you will and if you dare, but I must go on, must go, MUST go on, or else you and I that are worthy of the day in which you live will follow me, step by step, in any good project, and though I should seem too rash, you will redeem me from the charge of rashness by the enthusiasm and the earnestness with which you carry out my plans. Here is this great city! Was there ever such spiritual destitution? A million of people who could not go to a place of worship, if they had the heart to go there! And here we have the priestcraft of the Church of England increasing the spiritual destitution by building fresh Churches—not providing for it, but increasing it I say, for I reckon that wherever Puseyism is preached there is an increase of spiritual destitution; wherever broad Churchism comes, there is an increase of spiritual destitution, and it is little better where they go who preach the gospel in the pulpit, and read Popery at the font, the grave, and the bedside. In this last case public morality is shocked by the perjury of those who swear to a Prayer Book in which they do not believe. Much as I respect and even love believers in the Anglican Establishment, I can only feel that their presence in so corrupt a body is the reason why it exists; and I therefore think them to be doing mischief by buttressing a falling and ruinous cause. True Protestants, we must take upon ourselves to work for London, as if there were no other agencies at work except those of the Free Churches; for the Hagar Church, the Church which has a mortal for its head, the harlot Church which lives in alliance with the State, has too many sins of her own to repent of to be of much use in this hour of peril. The good she can do is so insignificant that it is not worth while to compute it, because the monstrous evil which she fosters and perpetrates is a more than sufficient set-off against it. We must work and toil and labor to scatter in every lane, amid alley and court of London, the pure gospel of the blessed God; and let men know that Sacramentarianism is a lie, and that there is no salvation but in the uplifted cross of Christ, and no salvation through ceremonies but only through a simple faith in him who loved us and gave himself for us. If ye, among others, are come to the kingdom for such a time as this, it shall be well with you; but if not, ye shall be put away as things abhorred, and this place shall be a hissing and a bye-word in generations yet to come, and it shall be said of you, there lived a people who were led by a man, who, with all his faults, was in earnest and was honest, and they would not follow him, but proved unworthy of him, and they have passed away, and their names are writ in water. They had opportunities which they did not use; work was allotted them which they were not worthy to take up, God said to them in answer to their request to be excused, “Ye shall be excused;” and they went back—

“To the vile dust from whence they sprung,
Unwept, unhonoured, and unsung.”

But it shall not be so with you my brethren, though I thus speak; I know your zeal, and love, and earnestness, and that you will continue to water others, and then you shall be watered yourselves. We will pray and strive together for the faith once delivered to the saints; we will cleave closer and closer to one another, and foot to foot, and shoulder to shoulder, we will march to battle for God and for his truth, and come what may, whoever may prove cravens in these days of charity and compromise, we will be found, in God’s name, by the help of God’s Spirit, faithful and true.

III. And now dear friends, another sentence or two will close the sermon.

On the widest scale, this is true. This is true of our denomination and of every Church. If we will water others, we shall be watered. From the very day when Carey, and Fuller, and Pearce went forth to send the gospel to the heathen, a blessing rested upon our denomination, I believe, and if we had done more for the heathen we should have been stronger to do more at home. You may rest assured, though some may not think it, that our missionary operations are an infinite blessing to the churches at home—that relinquishing them, giving them up, staying them, would bring such a blight and a curse that we had need to go down on our knees and pray, God send the missionary work back again. Give us an outlet for our liberality and our zeal, for without it we become like a pool dammed up, that is full of filth, and toads, and frogs, and all sorts of foul things. Lord, open the river for our zeal and let us once again have an opportunity to serve thee for the nations that are far away!” But I must leave you to preach on that point for my time has gone, and you can do so more practically than I can. My sermon is reported, and I will undertake that what you preach shall not be forgotten, it shall all be taken down in those boxes which shall be passed round. Say each of you as much as ever you can upon this subject by your contributions, and remember, “He that watereth others, shall himself be watered.”

Withholding Corn

A sermon (No. 642) delivered on Sunday morning, July 30, 1865,
at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington,
by C. H. Spurgeon.

“He that withholdeth corn, the people shall curse him: but blessing shall be upon the head of him that selleth it.”—Proverbs 11:26.

If I dared, I should always preach upon the comfortable promises and gracious doctrines of God’s Word. I find it most delightful and easy work to expatiate upon those themes of revelation which abound in sweetness, and are full of savor and preciousness to the child of God. I said, “If I dared,” and you will ask me why I dare not? The answer is because I have a solemn conviction on my mind, that if I would be clear of the blood of all men, I must strive to make my range of ministry as wide as the range of revelation, and I must not shun to declare the whole counsel of God. I feel bound to go, not where my wishes would lead me, but where Holy Scripture has made a track for my feet. There are certain texts in the Scriptures which are very seldom preached upon because it is thought that there is little gospel in them, and that the people when they go home will say to one another, “Well, I was not fed this morning.” Those who aim at pleasing men may well be shy of such subjects. But I hold that since God in his wisdom has placed these passages in the Bible, he intended his servants, the preachers of the Word, to expound them. We are, it strikes me, not to preach from selections of Scripture only, but from the whole of the Sacred Volume, for “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” I freely confess that I do not know why I have selected this text this morning, except that it haunted and hunted me until I could not forbear to preach upon it. It seems to force itself upon me, and to bore its way into my soul like a rifle shot. I thought it over and over and could not make much of it, until I yielded up myself to it, saying within myself, “If the Lord has anything to say to the people out of my mouth, here it is—let him use it.” If there should be any persons among our country-friends, or our corn-dealing townsmen, who this morning feel at all touched by the text, I cannot help it; there is my Master’s message to them, and I can only deliver it with the best intentions, hoping that those to whom it comes home may be profited by it. It will, however, soon be clear to you that the verse before us has, besides its first meaning, a weight of very important spiritual teaching in it, to which we shall all do well to take heed.

The text, as it stands, has to do, as you clearly see, with owners of corn and dealers in it. In Solomon’s days there were very frequent famines. Communication between one nation and another was so extremely difficult that the transportation of wheat in any large quantities was not attempted; and therefore, if a failure in the crops occurred in one district, the scarcity in that neighborhood was not compensated by abundance in another, and terrible famines prevailed. Certain persons in those days not only stored up all the corn which grew on their own fields, but purchased as much as they could of others, so as to raise the market above its natural level. This, under the circumstances, was a very high affront put upon God, for instead of bearing their part in his judgments, these men enriched themselves by the poverty of their starving neighbors. There have been such people ever

since Solomon's day, and although the present system of free trade has nearly put an end to that kind of thing, there are doubtless some who would again withhold their corn, even at famine prices, if they could raise the price still higher. How does Scripture deal with this peculiar form of greed in trade?

I cannot but admire the wonderful reserve of Holy Scripture, for as Mr. Arnot well observes, "in this brief maxim no arbitrary rule is laid down to the possessor of corn, that he must sell at a certain period and at a certain price: and yet the hungry are not left without a protecting law. The protection of the weak is entrusted not to small police regulations, but to great self-acting providential arrangements. The double fact is recorded in terms of peculiar distinctness, that he who in times of scarcity keeps up his corn in order to enrich himself is loathed by the people, and he who sells it freely is loved. This is all. There is no further legislation on the subject." Our narrow wisdom might have wished for some definite law upon the subject, something like a slidingscale, but the great ruler of heaven and earth falls into no such error. Laws which interfere between buyer and seller, master and workman, by any form of law, are blunders and nuisances. Parliaments and princes have hung on to the antiquated absurdity of regulating prices, but the Holy Ghost does nothing of the kind. All the attempts of men to control the price of bread and wheat is sheer folly, as the history of France may well prove. The market goes best when it is left alone, and so in our text, there is no law enacted and no penalty threatened, except that which the nature of things makes inevitable. God knows political economy, whether men do or not, and leaving the coarse machinery of police regulations, he puts the offender under a form of self-acting legislature which is far more efficient. The text seems to say, "Well, if you have no love to your neighbor and choose to keep your wheat, I make no law to break open your granary or pull down your ricks, but you will most certainly gain the hatred, contempt, and curse of the people among whom you dwell."

You see dear friends, that the man may do as he pleases about selling or not, but he cannot escape from the curse of the people if he chooses to lock up his grain; and on the other hand if he will sell at a proper price, or as another translation reads it, break his bread, that is to say, give it to the starving if they cannot buy it, he will receive blessings not only from the people but from heaven itself.

Brethren, this is a matter of fact, that any man of any observation must have seen, that there is no transaction which ever brings such ill-will upon a man, such general condemnation, especially from the poor, as withholding the corn. Common consent condemns the hoarder, and human nature revolts at his offense. Ask any one you choose to meet, except he be himself deep in the same mire, and he will join you in crying out against it. Of course there are many ways of defending the deed, but there is no way of escaping the fact that the people curse the doer of it in their hearts. "Well," says one, "it is my own corn, I may do as I like with it." Just so, nobody said you could not; nobody disputed your rights—only you are warned that in hoarding it you are sure to get the people's curse. You cannot alter that; it will follow and hang about your heels, and as far as the fact is known, it will make men curl the lip at you and sneer if they are your equals, while the working-men deep in their hearts will abhor you. No matter how kind you may be to the poor in other matters, or how you may have given your money in other ways, your holding the corn will be a scorn among your enemies and an offense to your best friends. It is not always an ill sign when the voice of the people is against a man, but in this case Scripture endorses it, and he who dares to run the risk is none too wise.

“Ah,” says another, “I do not see the wrong of withholding. There are laws of supply and demand, and the preacher does not understand political economy.” The preacher however thinks he does understand it, and even if he does not a child can comprehend the text before him, and with that we have to deal just now. Solomon here tells you that if you like to carry out political economy in the withholding way, you will get cursed for it, and depend upon it, you will. Facts are stubborn things, and this is one—that withholding corn earns me the curse of the people, and that is what no Christian man would wish to bear.

“But what business is that of the preacher’s?” He answers that he thanks God that he has no share in it whatever, but he is set in his place to rebuke what God rebukes, and he is doing no more than expounding God’s own word upon the matter. Whether you hear or forbear, there is the truth, and may the Lord bless it to you. “Well, we ought not to hear such things on Sundays.” What, not read our Bibles on Sundays—not explain the meaning of a text on Sundays? You would not have heard me on a Monday some of you, and therefore you have it to-day. Do not be angry with the text, but look at it and read it, and then afterwards choose you as you will. “He that withholdeth corn,” God says, “the people shall curse him;” and if you wish to have ill-will, and the bad word of thousands of poor cottagers and all others who have human sympathies, then withhold your corn. Thank God, the worst monopoliser cannot do much mischief now-a-days, for by the gracious providence of God which has burst the fetters of commerce, we are not likely to feel any very great straitness for bread in this country. Should our own crops fail, the harvests of other lands supply the masses with their food. The crime is growing scarcer and scarcer; but if any cases still survive and men choose to follow so ruinous a course, they will get cursed for it in mutterings deep, if silent, and in sneers as bitter as they are well deserved.

By your leave I shall now take a step above my text, using it as a ladder to mount to a yet higher truth. If it brings a curse upon a man to withhold the bread which perisheth, what a weight of curse will light upon that man who withholds the bread of eternal life. If the people shall curse the man who keeps back the bread which merely sustains the body, what shall be the withering denunciations which shall overwhelm the soul of him who deals deceitfully with the bread of eternal life? That seems to me to be a fair deduction from the text, and at that truth we will aim this morning. First, I shall attempt to show the ways in which the bread of life may be withheld from the people, and the curse which will follow; secondly, I shall try to depict the blessedness of the man who “breaketh it,” as another translation hath it, to the people; and then thirdly, we shall conclude by opening our own granaries and breaking some of this bread among the assembled multitude.

I. First, he that withholdeth the bread of life will surely get the people’s curse upon him. How can this be done?

1. It may be readily accomplished by locking up the Word of God in an unknown language, or by delivering and preaching it in such a style that the people shalt not comprehend it. The Romish Church for many years kept the sacred Scriptures in an unknown tongue, and resisted all attempts to translate the book of God into the vulgar language of the people. What a curse Rome has had resting on her head. To those who know the enormity of this wickedness in holding back the word of life, it is scarcely possible to think of Rome without invoking judgement upon her. What myriads of souls went down to the pit perishing through lack of knowledge during what were called the Dark Ages! What fearful imprecations they must be uttering even now upon Popes and Cardinals and Priests who had the key of the kingdom, but would neither enter themselves nor suffer others to enter there! They had the light but they concealed it in a dark lantern, and the nations were

compelled to sit in the darkness of profound ignorance and superstition because they would not give them the light. Surely the people shall curse such for ever. But are these the only offenders? Is not their crime prolonged by those ministers who aim at delivering themselves in an oratorical style, with flowers of rhetoric far too fine to be reached by the common people? We have heard of some, and we fear we know some, who would rather round a period than win a soul, to whom it is the first and the last object to deliver refined thoughts in elegant and elaborate language, and having so done, having soared aloft on the spread-eagle's wing far out of sight, they are content to have dazzled the many, and displayed themselves. Truly such men withhold the corn. What can the poor countrymen and servants who are sitting in the aisles make out of their eloquence? What can the work-people, who come in to hear something that may do them good, make out of their outlandish big talk? The terms of theology, the phrases of art, the definitions of philosophy, the jargon of science, are an unknown tongue to the young godly ploughmen or praying shopkeepers. "Alas!" says he, "this does not come to me—I cannot get at it." Possibly, in their ignorance, some people think the highflyers very learned men, but in reality they are far from it; for plainness of speech is a better sign of learning than high-sounding words and soaring sentences.

Oh, dear friends, when we preach the gospel plainly, I am sure we have our reward! When preaching in some village chapel, or from a waggon in a field, it is no small delight to watch the faces of the men in smockfrocks and the women in their print gowns, as they catch or feel the force of an inspired truth; plain speech wins their blessing. But to stand and talk right over the people's heads—what is it but having the corn and keeping it from those who want it? Simplicity is the authorised style of true gospel ministry. "Having this ministry," says the apostle, "we use great plainness of speech." The common people heard the Master gladly, which they would not have done if he had spoken in highflown language. Whitfield, the prince of preachers, was mainly so because of the market language which he used. Let all of us who have the bread of life try to be very plain. You who write tracts or preach in the street, or you that teach children, break the large slices of truth into small pieces, and crack the shells of the hard nuts. Take away the crust for the babes, and pick out the stones from the fruit. Beware lest in seeking an excess of refinement you withhold the corn and win the people's curse.

2. But secondly, we may fall into this sin by keeping back the most important and vital truths of Revelation, and giving a prominence to other things which are but secondary. My brethren, if I were to stand in this pulpit and for the next few months address you upon moral precepts, the excellence of virtue or the faultiness of vice; if you could come out of this place and say, time after time, "We hear nothing about Jesus Christ; we do not know whether there be any Holy Ghost:" if I were gifted with ever so much of ability—if these were my themes, however earnestly I pressed them, I should be guilty of withholding the corn, the true food of souls. Morality brings no food to hungry souls, although it is a good thing in its place. Dissuasives from vice are not the bread of heaven, though well enough in their way. We need to have the great doctrines of grace brought forward, for the Word of God is the sword of the Spirit, and it is by preaching the truth as it is in Jesus that souls are won to him. I grieve to think how indistinct some preachers are upon the doctrines of grace: they dare not say "Election," or if they do they tremble directly and guard their words with shields so huge that the poor truth is crushed beneath them. As to final perseverance, effectual calling, particular redemption, or any of those grand truths wherein the fatness and savor and marrow of the gospel is to be found, you may listen to some of them from the beginning of January to the end of December without hearing a word. This will not do: this is taking away the

backbone from the spiritual man; it is tearing away the vitals of the gospel; it is giving to the people husks for wheat, and straw and chaff, instead of corn. Above all, that ministry is an abomination which puts Jesus Christ in the background. My brethren and sisters, we must not only hear something about Jesus Christ but our preaching must be mainly about Him. He must be its head and front; nay, let me say, in some sense, he must be all that the preacher has to preach. Christ crucified must be the general summary of his ministry; and he must be able to say when he retires from it and is called up higher, "I have preached Christ. Of the things which I have spoken this is the sum: I have preached my Master and what my Master gave me." O my brethren, what a guilty ministry is that in which the blood has no place—the ministry which denies or undervalues the atoning sacrifice of the great Redeemer! God have mercy upon us that we have not preached this fundamental truth so earnestly as we ought to have done, but still, we can plead before him and say we have truly desired to do it.

"E'er since by faith I saw the stream
His flowing wounds supply,
Redeeming love has been my theme,
And shall be till I die."

What is the use of any ministry of which that is not true? It is withholding corn, and in eternity the lost will curse their destroyer.

But we must not talk about ministers, of whom there are not many here: we will come down to you. Many of you are Sunday-school teachers: now you can sin in this way in the very same sense. Suppose as a Sunday-school teacher you are content with making the little ones read through the lesson, satisfied with filling up the hour or the hour and-a-half, and feeling you have done a good deal in making the little fellows sit still, and so on. Ah! my brother and sister, it is very solemn work. You have undertaken to teach these young immortals, and if you are satisfied with just making them go through the routine, take heed lest when they grow up they come to curse you. I am afraid that many Sunday-school addresses have no gospel in them. I do not see why the same gospel should not be preached to children as to grown-up people. I think it should. To stand up in a Sunday-school and say, "Now, be good boys and girls and God will love you," is telling lies. I know the teachers of our school feel the importance of delivering the truth as it is in Jesus to their children, and you therefore tell them: "You are lost and ruined, and your salvation is in Jesus Christ: look to him and live." The teacher whose general teaching is not full of Christ will be called to a sad account in the day when Christ shall come. Dear teachers of the school, whatever you do not know, do know your Lord, and whatever you cannot get into the youngsters' heads, do make it a matter of prayer that you may get a knowledge of Christ and his atoning blood into their young hearts by the Holy Ghost. The same is also true of those of our beloved friends who conduct Bible classes, or who in any way teach the people. I do not know that I have any necessity to say this to the most of you here, but still I will say it for the good of others; you must not my brethren get away from your great theme. It is of no use to go to the people empty-handed, we must take them bread; we only mock them by offering them stones if we talk to them about the histories and precepts of Scripture and forget the cross. Let our teaching be full of grace and truth: let us deliver our souls of every doctrine as we find it in Scripture, and let us be determined that if men do perish it shall not be for want of knowing the way of salvation.

3. We may withhold the bread of life dear friends, by a want of loving in our labor; because the mere telling out the plan of salvation is of no great service; God may bless it, but he does not often do so.

That which God blesses to the saving of sinners is truth attended by the earnestness of the speaker, the loving anguish of a heart which stirs the preacher's soul. What shall I say here? for if I speak I do but condemn myself. Think of the preaching of Baxter. He preached for many years but he said he never went into his pulpit without his knees knocking together; and Martin Luther said the same. Truly it is enough to make any man tremble when he feels that he is God's mouth to immortal souls. "If they perish and thou warn them not, their blood will I require at thy hand." Surely this ought to give a melting heart and streaming eyes to God's ministers! But, I say, I remember reading of Baxter's ministry—oh what pleading there was in it! The man seemed as if he never would go out of the pulpit till his hearers had received the truth, he wept, and sighed, and sobbed, unless they came to Jesus Christ. You know how he followed them to their houses, watched them through the streets of Kidderminster, and would give them no rest till they thought about eternal things, and he was privileged thus to break the bread of life to many thousands, although his body was as full of physical pain as his heart was of holy anxiety. O for something of Mr. Baxter's spirit to make us love the souls of men as he did! We are guilty of withholding corn unless we preach with a sympathising, loving, tender, affectionate, earnest, anxious soul. Brethren and sisters, you are most of you doing something for Jesus Christ; let me therefore put this very plainly to you. If you get through your work for God as a mere matter of form, however true may be that which you have to say, and however carefully you may deliver it, yet still if the truth you deliver is not delivered with holy anxiety, with earnestness, with fervor, with love, with affection, and above all, if it be not attended with prayer, take heed lest in some day to come you get the curse of those from whom you withheld the bread. How would you like, Sunday-school teachers, to see a lad in your class grow up and go into sin? How would you like to meet him some day on a sick bed when his vices had at last brought him to his end; how would you like that he should look into your face and say, "Ah! teacher, you were never earnest with me: you told me the truth, but you told it me so coldly that I did not believe it. If I had seen one tear in your eye I think there would have been one in mine. If I thought you felt what you were saying, I sometimes think I should have felt it too; but you merely kept me still and told me it all as if it were no great matter, and so I doubted the whole, and from doubt went on to unbelief and ran into sin, and here I am. O that you had wept over me as such-and-such a teacher did with my brother! How different is my brother from what I am. He was in another class, and his teacher took him before God in prayer; prayed with him as well as for him, told him the truth, but did more: labored to drive it home as with a great hammer while he pleaded with him to lay hold on eternal life. Teacher, would to God that you had been more earnest with me." Beloved, seek to rid yourselves of any future regrets in this matter. It is no small satisfaction when you hear the death-bell toll, to say, "Well, I did all I could for that soul, and whether it be in heaven or hell my conscience is clear. You cannot save, but still, God who works by means may make you the instrument of conveying salvation to sinners: or on the other hand, you may be made instruments of unrighteousness through whom Satan may harden these children's hearts, even to their everlasting ruin. I take the case of a Sunday-school teacher, but I intend the remarks for every worker. O let us work for God with our whole hearts. God make us more awfully in earnest. Life is earnest, death is earnest, heaven is earnest, hell is earnest, Christ

is earnest, God is earnest; let us be clad with zeal as with a cloak, and go forth to serve the Lord with all our soul and strength as his Holy Spirit shall enable us.

4. Fourthly, we may be found guilty of withholding corn by refusing to labor zealously for the spread of the kingdom of Christ and the conversion of sinners. I am afraid that the Churches of the past were not altogether without a curse because of their deficiency in the matter of missions and home evangelization. During the pastorate of my venerated predecessor, Dr. Gill, this Church, instead of increasing, gradually decreased; and although the age in which he lived was honored with many great and excellent men, yet the state of our own denomination, and the Presbyterian body, and the Independent body, in England was most lamentable. Many of the Churches were gradually sliding into Unitarianism, and the simple gospel of Jesus Christ was scarcely preached, or, where preached, it was without any power whatever: and I take it that the reason was very much that the Churches were content to be edified themselves, but had no bowels of compassion for the perishing multitudes around and abroad. But mark this, from the day when Fuller, Carey, Sutcliffe, and others met together to send out missionaries to India, the sun began to dawn on a gracious revival which is not over yet; for bad as the state of the Churches now is, yet it is marvellously an improvement upon anything before the age of missions. Though not as zealous as we ought to be, the zeal of Christendom is one hundred times greater than it was then; and as for what is done for winning souls brethren, the Churches now are like a garden of the Lord compared with what they were then. I believe that the neglect of sending the word to the heathen brought a blight and a curse upon the Churches, which is now happily removed. Yet even to-day we find professors who are always doubting. They never get beyond —

“‘Tis a point I long to know.”

There they stick, and never know whether they are saved or not. Full assurance is to be a tempting morsel which they have not yet tasted. Their eyes do not sparkle with heavenly delight; they know not what it is to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus; their raptures are very few, their joys very shallow. I will tell you why. In almost every case these people do nothing for souls; they withhold the corn and therefore they get this curse in their souls, that they shall not enjoy their own religion because they do not want to lead other people into it. If you put your hands into your pockets and say, “Well, glory be to God; I trust I am one of the elect, and whatever becomes of the rest of mankind really is not my concern. Every man for himself, say I.” That is such an unchristian spirit, so antagonistic to the whole life of Jesus Christ, that if you get sorely whipped in providence I can only hope you may be blessed by it; but I would not pray that the rod may be removed until you are scourged into a better temper. Commend me to the Christian who says, “I bless God I am saved; now what can I do for others?” The first thing in the morning he prays, “God help me to say a word to some soul this day.” During the day, wherever he may be, he is watching his opportunity, and will do good if he can. He is concerned about his children: it sometimes breaks his heart to think that they are not saved. If he happens to have an ungodly wife it is his daily burden: “Oh God, save my wife!” When he goes to a place of worship, he does not expect the minister to make sermons always on purpose for him, but he says “I shall sit here and pray God to bless the word,” and if he looks round the chapel and sees one that he loves, he prays for him, “God send the word home to him.” When service is over, a man of this kind will waylay the unconverted, and try to get a personal word with them; and see if he cannot discover some beginnings of grace in their souls. This is how earnest Christians live; and let me tell you, as a rule, though they have the griefs of other men’s

souls to carry, they do not have much grief about their own. As a rule their Master favors them with the light of his countenance; they are watering others and they are watered themselves also. May this be your work and mine! But some of you say nothing for Christ at all. You are too timid, and others of you are too indifferent, too thoughtless about others. Oh, the opportunities many of you have lost! Oh, the many who have died to whom you might have spoken, but you did not! Oh, the people that are now in the darkness of ignorance who get no light from you! You have light, but you keep it. They are dying, and you have the healing medicine, but you will not tell them of it. May God deliver you from the curse of those who thus withhold the corn.

We will only mention one more form of this evil. Some may be said to be guilty of withholding the corn, because while they themselves do not speak for Christ, they do not help those who can. No Christian man ought to go to bed with an easy conscience if he has thousands of pounds which he does not require, which lies by unused for God. There must be many Christians in this rich country who have not consecrated their substance to the Lord. When a man can say, "I have money which I really do not need, and my children do not require it; and this is money absolutely needed for God's cause," ought he to keep it from the Lord Jesus? Must you confess that so many missionaries might be sent out to-morrow if you just drew a cheque and handed it over to the proper quarter—then why not do it? A destitute neighborhood needs a place of worship, and if I can build it if I would, how am I to answer for it to my Lord?

I cannot understand how a man can love God when he only lives to heap up riches. I can with great difficulty imagine such a case, but I fear that such cannot be real piety. It seems to me that if I have any religion in my soul, it will make me not only say with Dr. Watts: —

"Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine
Demands my soul, my life, my all"

but I think it would make me carry it out. I will not propose to you that you should act indiscreetly in giving, so as to beggar your families or deprive yourselves of what is necessary; you know I am not so foolish. But I am speaking to many Christians who have not only enough, but to spare, and who will continue to accumulate and accumulate and accumulate, and I cannot think that they can feel that they are doing right in the sight of God. O God! this great city needing preachers, needing the gospel—thousands needing even bread to keep them from starving—and for thy professing people to be heaping their coffers fuller and fuller! Why surely, if I do this, I am heaping up wrath against the day of wrath, and I shall find it come into my bosom hot and fierce from the God of Sabaoth, to whom my gold and my silver will cry out against me. Let us not be guilty of this, but 'each in our own station, as far as we can, let us be aiding others to preach the word if we cannot preach it ourselves. Dozens of young men are desirous to enter our College, and you can help them to go forth to preach if you cannot preach yourself.

II. I am pleased to turn to the other subject for a minute or two. I am to speak upon the blessedness which those possess who break the bread of life.

To describe it is altogether beyond my power. You must know and taste and feel it, beloved. There are many blessednesses in doing good to others. God is a good paymaster; he pays his servants while at work as well as when they have done it; and one of his payments is this, an easy conscience. If you have spoken faithfully only to one person, when you go to bed at night you feel happy in

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thinking "I have this day discharged my conscience of that man's blood." You do not know how delightful a Sabbath evening is to some of us when God has helped us to be faithful; how sweet to feel "I have made many blunders, shown many infirmities of the flesh, and so on, but I have preached the gospel and preached it with my whole heart to the best of my ability." One feels a burden taken off one's back, and there is a joy and satisfaction unknown to those who sit at home doing nothing. You in your class at the Sunday-school, I know you feel when Sunday is over, though it is a very hard day's work for some of you after the six days' toil in the week, you feel "I thank God I did not spend that afternoon in lolling about at home, but I did speak a word for Jesus." You will find such a peace of mind that you would not give it up for all the world. Then there is a great comfort in doing something for Jesus. Look into his face—what would you not do for him? When first converted did you not think you could do ten thousand things for Jesus; the moment your burden was off your back and your sins forgiven, how you felt you could follow him through floods and flames! Have you lived up to your resolutions, brethren? Have you kept up to your own ideas of Christian duties? I do not suppose any of us can say that we have. Still, what little we have done has been an unspeakable delight, when we have felt that we have been crowning his head and strewing palm-branches in his path. Oh! what a happiness to place jewels in his crown and give him to see of the travail of his soul! Beloved, there is very great reward in watching the first buddings of conviction in a young soul! To say of that girl in the class, "She seems so tender of heart, I do hope that there is the Lord's work there." To go home and pray over that boy who said something in the afternoon to make you think he must know something more than he seemed to know! Oh, the joy of hope! But as for the joy of success! It is unspeakable. I recollect the first soul that God ever gave me—she is in heaven now—but I remember when my good deacon said to me, "God has set his seal on your ministry in this place, sir." Oh, if anybody had said to me, "Somebody has left you twenty thousand pounds," I should not have given a snap of my fingers for it compared with that joy which I felt when I was told that God had set his seal on my ministry. "Who is it?" I asked. "Why, it is a poor laboring man's wife! she went home broken-hearted by the sermon two or three Sundays ago, and she has been in great trouble of soul, but she has found peace, and she says she would like to speak to you." I felt like the boy who has earned his first guinea, like a diver who has been down to the depths of the sea and brought up a rare pearl—I prize each one whom God has given me, but I prize that woman most. Since then my God has given me many thousands of souls, who profess to have found the Savior by hearing or reading words which have come from my lips. Well, this joy, overwhelming as it is, is a hungry sort of joy—you want more of it: for the more you have of spiritual children the more your soul desires to see them multiplied. Let me tell you that to be a soul-winner is the happiest thing in this world, and with every soul you bring to Jesus Christ you seem to get a new heaven here upon earth. But what will be the joy of soul-winning when we get up above! What happiness to the Christian minister to be saluted on his entrance into heaven by many spiritual children! They will call him "Father," for though they are not married nor given in marriage, though natural relations are all over, yet spiritual relations last for ever. Oh! how sweet is that sentence, "Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." Do you know what the joy of Christ is over a saved sinner? You cannot guess it. You would need to know the griefs he suffered to save that sinner. O the joys he must feel when he sees that sinner saved as the result of his griefs; this is the very joy which you and I are to possess in heaven: "Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." Yes, when he mounts the throne you shall mount with him. When the heaven rings with "Well done, well done," you shall partake in the reward; you have toiled with him, you have suffered with

him, you shall now reign with him; you have sown with him, you shall reap with him; you were despised with him, you shall now be honored with him; your face was covered with sweat like his, and your soul was grieved for the sins of men as his soul was, now shall your face be bright with heaven's splendor as is his countenance, and now shall your soul be filled with beatific joys even as his soul is. He that breaketh bread, blessings shall be upon his head.

III. Now I have to open the granary for a minute myself.

Hungry sinners, wanting a Savior, we cannot withhold the bread from you. You may never come to hear the gospel again; we therefore will open the granary very wide. Christ Jesus, the Son of God, became man to save men, and inasmuch as God's wrath was due to sin, Christ took the sin of all who have ever believed, or ever shall believe on him, and, taking all their sins, he was punished in their room and place, and stood so that God can now justly forgive sin because Christ was punished in the stead of sinners, and suffered divine wrath for them. Now this is the way of salvation, that thou trust this Son of God with thy soul and if thou dost so then know that thy sins are now forgiven thee, and that thou art saved. Concerning this salvation, hear thou just these few words.

It is a satisfying salvation. Here is all that thou canst want. Thy conscience shall be at ease for ever if thou believest in Jesus: thy biggest sins shall no longer trouble thee, thy blackest iniquities shall no longer haunt thee. Believing in Jesus, every sin thou hast of thought and word and deed shall be cast into the depths of the sea and never shall be mentioned against thee any more for ever.

It is an all-sufficient salvation too. However great thy sins, Christ's blood can take all away. However deep thy needs, Christ can supply them. Thou canst not be so big a sinner as he is a Savior. Thou mayest be the worst sinner out of hell, but thou art not too great for him to remove; he can carry elephantine sinners upon his shoulders, and bear gigantic mountains of guilt upon his head into the wilderness of forgetfulness. He has enough for thee, however deep thy necessity.

It is moreover a complete salvation. Sovereign mercy does not stand on the mountain and cry to you, climb up hither and I will save you. Eternal mercy comes down the valley to you just where you are, and meets your case just as it is, and never leaves you till it has made you meet to be a partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light. Christ does not want you to pay one talent out of the hundred and promise to pay for you the ninety-nine. He will discharge all your debts of sin. All that you want to take you up to heaven is provided in Jesus.

This is a present salvation—a salvation which if it come to you, will save you now. You shall be a child of God this very hour, and ere that clock shall strike again you shall rejoice in the peace which the Spirit of God gives you, if you believe on him.

It is an available salvation, freely presented to you in Christ Jesus. Remember the text of two or three Sundays ago: "Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely." Jesus casts out none that come to him. Oh that thou mayest be led to come this morning.

Thus have I tried to avoid the sin of withholding corn; and if any in this house of prayer have been guilty of it, I pray you avoid the curse of the people, and seek the blessing of the Most High God by this day endeavoring to scatter everywhere the bread of life. Go and work for God wherever you have an opportunity, and help us in our prayers and efforts to send forth more laborers into the harvest, for the harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few. Amen.

The Soul Winner

A sermon (No. 1292) delivered on Thursday evening, January 20th, 1876,
at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington,
by C. H. Spurgeon.

“The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life; and he that winneth souls is wise.”—Proverbs 11:30.

I had very great joy last night—many of you know why but some do not. We held our annual meeting of the church, and it was a very pleasant sight to see so many brethren and sisters knit together in the heartiest love, welded together as one mass by common sympathies, and holding firmly to “one Lord, one faith, and one baptism.” Think of a church with 4,900 members! Such a community has seldom been gathered in any age, and in the present century it is without a parallel. “O Lord, thou hast multiplied the people and increased the joy. They joy before thee as the joy of harvest.” It brings tears into one’s eyes to look upon so many who declare themselves to be members of the body of Christ. The hope that so many are plucked as brands from the burning and delivered from the wrath to come is in itself exceedingly consoling, and I felt the joy of it while communing with the brethren and sisters in Christ Jesus. On thinking it over afterwards however, it seemed to me that there was a higher joy in looking at a body of believers than that which arises from merely regarding them as saved. Not but what there is a great joy in salvation, a joy worthy to stir the angelic harps. Think of the Savior’s agony in the ransom of every one of his redeemed, think of the work of the Holy Spirit in every renewed heart, think of the love of the Father as resting upon every one of the regenerate: I could not, if I took up my parable for a month, set forth all the mass of joy that is to be seen in a multitude of believers if we only look at what God has done for them, and promised to them, and will fulfill in them. But there is yet a wider field of thought, and my mind has been traversing it all this day—the thought of the capacities of service contained in a numerous band of believers, the possibilities of blessing others which lie within the bosoms of regenerate persons. We must not think so much of what we already are that we forget what the Lord may accomplish by us for others. Here are the coals of fire, but who shall describe the conflagration which they may cause?

We ought to regard the Christian Church, not as a luxurious hostelry where Christian gentlemen may each one dwell at his ease in his own inn, but as a barracks in which soldiers are gathered together to be drilled and trained for war. We should regard the Christian church not as an association for mutual admiration and comfort, but as an army with banners, marching to the fray to achieve victories for Christ, to storm the strongholds of the foe and to add province after province to the Redeemer’s kingdom. We may view converted persons when gathered into church membership as so much wheat in the granary. God be thanked that it is there, and that so far the harvest has rewarded the sower; but far more soul-inspiring is the view when we regard those believers as each one likely to be made a living center for the extension of the kingdom of Jesus, for then we see them sowing the fertile valleys of our land and promising ere long to bring forth some thirty, some forty, some fifty, and some a hundredfold. The capacities of life are enormous; one becomes a thousand in a marvellously brief space. Within a short time a few grains of wheat would suffice to seed the whole

world, and a few true saints might suffice for the conversion of all nations. Only take that which comes of one ear, store it well, sow it all, again store it next year, and then sow it all again, and the multiplication almost exceeds the power of computation. O that every Christian were thus year by year the Lord's seed corn! If all the wheat in the world had perished except a single grain, it would not take many years to replenish all the earth and sow her fields and plains; but in a far shorter time, in the power of the Holy Spirit, one Paul or one Peter would have evangelised all lands. View yourselves as grains of wheat predestinated to seed the world. That man lives grandly who is as earnest as if the very existence of Christianity depended upon himself, and is determined that to all men within his reach shall be made known the unsearchable riches of Christ.

If we whom Christ is pleased to use as his seed corn were only all scattered and sown as we ought to be, and were all to sprout and bring forth the green blade and the corn in the ear, what a harvest there would be! Again would it be fulfilled, "There shall be an handful of corn in the earth upon the top of the mountains;"—a very bad position for it—"the fruit thereof shall shake like Lebanon: and they of the city shall flourish like grass of the earth." May God grant us to feel to-night some degree of the Holy Spirit's quickening power while we talk together, not so much about what God has done for us as about what God may do by us, and how far we may put ourselves into a right position to be used by him.

There are two things in the text, and these are found laid out with much distinctness in its two sentences. The first is—the life of the believer is, or ought to be, full of soul blessing—"The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life." In the second place—the pursuit of the believer ought always to be soul winning. The second is much the same as the first, only the first head sets forth our unconscious influence and the second our efforts which we put forth with the avowed object of winning souls for Christ.

I. Let us begin at the beginning, because the second cannot be carried out without the first: without fullness of life within there cannot be an overflow of life to others. It is of no use for any of you to try to be soul winners if you are not bearing fruit in your own lives. How can you serve the Lord with your lips if you do not serve him with your lives? How can you preach with your tongues his gospel, when with hands, feet, and hearts you are preaching the devil's gospel, and setting up antichrist by your practical unholiness? We must first have life and bear personal fruit to the divine glory, and then out of our example will spring the conversion of others. Let us go to the fountain head and see how the man's own life is essential to his being useful to others. The Life Of The Believer Is Full Of Soul Blessing: this fact we shall consider by means of a few observations growing out of the text; and first let us remark that the believer's outward life comes as a matter of fruit from him. This is important to notice. The fruit of the righteous—that is to say his life—is not a thing fastened upon him, but it grows out of him. It is not a garment which he puts off and on, but it is inseparable from himself. The sincere man's religion is the man himself, and not a cloak for his concealment. True godliness is the natural outgrowth of a renewed nature, not the forced growth of pious hothouse excitement. Is it not natural for a vine to bear clusters of grapes? natural for a palm tree to bear dates? Certainly it is as natural for the apples of Sodom to be found on the trees of Sodom as for noxious plants to produce poisonous berries. When God gives a new nature to his people, the life which comes out of that new nature springs spontaneously from it. The man who has a religion which is not part and parcel of himself will by-and-by discover that it is worse than useless to him. The man who wears his piety like a mask at a carnival, so that when he gets home he changes from a saint to a savage, from an angel to a devil, from John to Judas,

from a benefactor to a bully—such a man I say, knows very well what formalism and hypocrisy can do for him, but he has no vestige of true religion. Fig trees do not bear figs on certain days and thorns at other times, but they are true to their nature at all seasons.

Those who think that godliness is a matter of vestment and has an intimate relation with blue and scarlet, and fine linen, are consistent if they keep their religion to the proper time for the wearing of their sacred pomposities; but he who has discovered what Christianity is knows that it is much more a life than an act, a form, or a profession. Much as I love the creed of Christendom, I am ready to say that true Christianity is far more a life than a creed. It is a creed, and it has its ceremonies, but it is mainly a life; it is a divine spark of heaven's own flame which falls into the human bosom and burns within, consuming much that lies hidden in the soul, and then at last, as a heavenly life, flaming forth so as to be seen and felt by those around. Under the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit a regenerate person becomes like that bush in Horeb, which was all aglow with Deity. The God within him makes him shine so that the place around him is holy ground, and those who look at him feel the power of his hallowed life. Dear brethren, we must take care that our religion is more and more a matter of outgrowth from our souls. Many professors are hedged about with, "You must not do this, or that," and are driven onward with, "You must do this, and you must do that." But there is a doctrine, too often perverted, which is nevertheless a blessed truth, and ought to dwell in your hearts. "Ye are not under the law but under grace": hence you do not obey the will of God because you hope to earn heaven thereby, or dream of escaping from divine wrath by your own doings, but because there is a life in you which seeks after that which is holy, pure, right, and true, and cannot endure that which is evil. You are careful to maintain good works, not from either legal hopes or legal fears, but because there is a holy thing within you born of God, which seeks, according to its nature, to do that which is pleasing to God. Look to it more and more that your religion is real, true, natural, vital—not artificial, constrained, superficial, a thing of times, days, places, a fungus produced by excitement, a fermentation generated by meetings and stirred by oratory. We all need a religion which can live either in a wilderness or in a crowd; a religion which will show itself in every walk of life and in every company. Give me the godliness which is seen at home, especially around the fireside, for it is never more beautiful than there; that is seen in the battle and tussle of ordinary business among scoffers and gainsayers as well as among Christian men. Show me the faith which can defy the lynx eyes of the world and walk fearlessly where all scowl with the fierce eyes of hate, as well as where there are observers to sympathize and friends to judge leniently. May you be filled with the life of the Spirit, and your whole conduct and conversation be the natural and blessed outgrowth of that Spirit's indwelling!

Note next that the fruit which comes from a Christian is fruit worthy of his character—"The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life." Each tree bears its own fruit and is known by it. The righteous man bears righteous fruit; and do not let us be at all deceived brethren, or fall into any error about this, "he that doeth righteousness is righteous," and "he that doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother." We are prepared, I hope, to die for the doctrine of justification by faith, and to assert before all adversaries that salvation is not of works; but we also confess that we are justified by a faith which produces works, and if any man has a faith which does not produce good works it is the faith of devils. Saving faith appropriates the finished work of the Lord Jesus and so saves by itself alone, for we are justified by faith without works; but the faith which is without works cannot bring salvation to any man. We are saved by faith without works, but not by a faith that is without works, for the real faith that saves the soul works by love and purifies the

character. If you can cheat across the counter your hope of heaven is a cheat too; though you can pray as prettily as anybody and practice acts of outward piety as well as any other hypocrite, you are deceived if you expect to be right at last. If as a servant you are lazy, lying, and loitering, or if as a master you are hard, tyrannical, and unchristianlike towards your men, your fruit shows that you are a tree of Satan's own orchard and bear apples which will suit his tooth. If you can practice tricks of trade, and if you can lie—and how many do lie every day about their neighbors or about their goods—you may talk as you like about being justified by faith, but all liars will have their portion in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone, and amongst the biggest liars you will be for you are guilty of the lie of saying, "I am a Christian," whereas you are not. A false profession is one of the worst of lies since it brings the utmost dishonor upon Christ and his people. The fruit of the righteous is righteousness: the fig tree will not bring forth thorns, neither shall we gather grapes from thistles. The tree is known by its fruit, and if we cannot judge men's hearts, and must not try to do so, we can judge their lives, and I pray God we may all be ready to judge our own lives and see if we are bringing forth righteous fruit, for if not ye are not righteous men.

Let it however never be forgotten that the fruit of the righteous, though it comes from him naturally, for his newborn nature yields the sweet fruit of obedience, yet it is always the result of grace and the gift of God. No truth ought to be remembered more than this, "From me is thy fruit found." We can bring forth no fruit except as we abide in Christ. The righteous shall flourish as a branch, and only as a branch. How does a branch flourish? By its connection with the stem, and the consequent inflowing of the sap; and so, though the righteous man's righteous actions are his own, yet they are always produced by the grace which is imparted to him and he never dares to take any credit for them, but he sings, "Not unto us, but unto thy name give praise." If he fails he blames himself; if he succeeds he glorifies God. Imitate his example. Lay every fault, every weakness, every infirmity at your own door, and if you fall short of perfection in any respect—and I am sure you do—take all that to yourself and do not excuse yourself; but if there be any virtue, any praise, any true desire, any real prayer, anything that is good, ascribe it all to the Spirit of God. Remember, the righteous man would not be righteous unless God had made him righteous, and the fruit of righteousness would never come from him unless the divine sap within him had produced that acceptable fruit. To God alone be all honor and glory.

The main lesson of the passage is that this outburst of life from the Christian, this consequence of life within him, this fruit of his soul, becomes a blessing to others. Like a tree it yields shade and sustenance to all around. It is a tree of life, an expression which I cannot fully work out to-night as I would wish, for there is a world of instruction compressed into the illustration. That which to the believer himself is fruit becomes to others a tree: it is a singular metaphor, but by no means a lame one. From the child of God there falls the fruit of holy living, even as an acorn drops from the oak; this holy living becomes influential and produces the best results in others, even as the acorn becomes itself an oak and lends its shade to the birds of the air. The Christian's holiness becomes a tree of life. I suppose it means a living tree, a tree calculated to give life and sustain it in others. A fruit becomes a tree! A tree of life! Wonderful result this! Christ in the Christian produces a character which becomes a tree of life. The outward character is the fruit of the inner life; this outer life itself grows from a fruit into a tree, and as a tree it bears fruit in others to the praise and glory of God. Dear brothers and sisters, I know some of God's saints who live very near to him and they are evidently a tree of life, for their very shadow is comforting, cooling, and refreshing to many weary souls. I have known the young, the tried, the downcast, go to them, sit

beneath their shade, and pour out the tale of their troubles, and they have felt it a rich blessing to receive their sympathy, to be told of the faithfulness of the Lord, and to be guided in the way of wisdom. There are a few good men in this world whom to know is to be rich. Such men are libraries of gospel truth, but they are better than books, for the truth in them is written on living pages. Their character is a true and living tree; it is not a mere post of the dead wood of doctrine bearing an inscription and rotting while it does so, but it is a vital, organized, fruit-producing thing, a plant of the Lord's right hand planting.

Not only do some saints give comfort to others, but they also yield them spiritual nourishment. Well-trained Christians become nursing fathers and nursing mothers, strengthening the weak and binding up the wounds of the broken hearted. So too, the strong, bold, generous deeds of large-hearted Christians are of great service to their fellow Christians, and tend to raise them to a higher level. You feel refreshed by observing how they act; their patience in suffering, their courage in danger, their holy faith in God, their happy faces under trial—all these nerve you for your own conflicts. In a thousand ways the sanctified believer's example acts in a healing and comforting way to his brethren, and assists in raising them above anxiety and unbelief. Even as the leaves of the tree of life are for the healing of the nations, so the words and deeds of saints are medicine for a thousand maladies.

And then what fruit, sweet to the taste of the godly, instructed believers bear! We can never trust in men as we trust in the Lord, but the Lord can cause the members to bless us in their measure, even as their Head is ever ready to do. Jesus alone is the Tree of Life, but he makes some of his servants to be instrumentally to us little trees of life, by whom he gives us fruit of the same sort that he bears himself, for he puts it there, and it is himself in his saints causing them to bring forth golden apples with which our souls are gladdened. May we every one of us be made like our Lord, and may his fruit be found upon our boughs.

We have put into the tomb during last year many of the saints who have fallen asleep, and among them there were some of whom I will not at this moment speak particularly, whose lives as I look back upon them are still a tree of life to me. I pray God that I may be like them. Many of you knew them, and if you will only recall their holy, devoted lives, the influence they have left behind will still be a tree of life to you. They being dead yet speak, hear ye their eloquent exhortations! Even in their ashes live their wonted fires; kindle your souls at their warmth. Their noble examples are the endowments of the church, her children are ennobled and enriched as they remember their walk of faith and labor of love. Beloved, may we every one of us be true benedictions to the churches in whose gardens we are planted. "Oh," says one, "I am afraid I am not much like a tree, for I feel so weak and insignificant." If you have faith as a grain of mustard seed you have the commencement of the tree beneath whose branches the birds of the air will yet find a lodging. The very birds that would have eaten the tiny seed come and find lodgment in the tree which grows out of it; and people who despise and mock at you now that you are a young beginner, will one of these days, if God blesses you, be glad to borrow comfort from your example and experience.

But one other thought on this point. Remember that the completeness and development of the holy life will be seen above. There is a city of which it is written, "In the midst of the street thereof, and on every side of the river was there the tree of life." The tree of life is a heavenly plant, and so the fruit of the Christian is a thing of heaven; though not transplanted to the glory land, it is getting fit for its final abode. What is holiness but heaven on earth? What is living unto God but the essence of heaven? What are uprightness, integrity, Christ-likeness? Have not these even more to do with

heaven than harps and palms and streets of purest gold? Holiness, purity, loveliness of character, these make a heaven within a man's own bosom, and even if there were no place called heaven, that heart would have a heavenly happiness which is set free from sin and made like the Lord Jesus. See then dear brethren, what an important thing it is for us to be indeed righteous before God, for then the outcome of that righteousness shall be fruit which will be a tree of life to others, and a tree of life in heaven above, world without end. O blessed Spirit make it so, and thou shalt have all the praise.

II. This brings us to our second head. The pursuit of the believer should be soul winning. For "he that winneth souls is wise." The two things are put together—the life first, the effort next: what God hath joined together let no man put asunder.

It is implied in our text that there are souls which need winning. Ah me, all souls of men are lost by nature. You might walk through the streets of London and say of the masses of men you meet upon those crowded pavements with sighs and tears—"Lost, lost, lost!" Wherever Christ is not trusted, and the Spirit has not created a new heart, and the soul has not come to the great Father, there is a lost soul. But here is the mercy—these lost souls can be won. They are not hopelessly lost; not yet has God determined that they shall for ever abide as they are. It is not yet said, "He that is filthy, let him be filthy still," but they are in the land of hope where mercy may reach them, for they are spoken of as capable of being won. They may yet be delivered, but the phrase hints that it will need all our efforts. "He that winneth souls."

What do we mean by that word win. We use it in lovemaking. We speak of the bridegroom who wins his bride, and sometimes there is a large expense of love, many a pleading word, and many a wooing act, ere yet the valued heart is all the suitor's own. I use this explanation because in some respects it is the very best, for souls will have to be won for Christ in this fashion, that they may be espoused unto him. We must make love to the sinner for Christ; that is how hearts are to be won for him. Jesus is the bridegroom, and we must speak for him, and tell of his beauty as Abraham's servant, when he went to seek a wife for Isaac acted as a wooer in his stead. Have you never read the story? Then turn to it when you get home and see how he talked about his master, what possessions he had, and how Isaac was to be heir of it all and so on, and then he finished his address by urging Rebecca to go with him. The question was put home to her, "Wilt thou go with this man?" So the minister's business is to commend his Master and his Master's riches and then to say to souls, "Will you be wedded to Christ?" He who can succeed in this very delicate business is a wise man.

We also use the term in a military fashion. We speak of winning a city, a castle, or a battle. We do not win victories by going to sleep. Believe me, castles are not captured by men who are only half awake. To win a battle needs the best skill, the greatest endurance, and the utmost courage. To storm fortresses which are regarded as almost impregnable, men need to burn the midnight oil and study well the arts of attack; and when the time comes for the assault, not a soldier must be a laggard, but all force of artillery and manhood must be brought to bear on the point assailed. To carry man's heart by main force of grace, to capture it, to break down the bars of brass and dash the gates of iron in pieces, requires the exercise of a skill which only Christ can give. To bring up the big battering rams and shake every stone in the sinner's conscience, to make his heart rock and reel within him for fear of the wrath to come, in a word, to assail a soul with all the artillery of the gospel, needs a wise man, and one aroused to his work. To hold up the white flag of mercy, and if that be despised, to use the battering ram of threatening until a breach is made, and then with the

sword of the Spirit in his hand to capture the city, to tear down the black flag of sin and run up the banner of the cross, needs all the force the choicest preacher can command and a great deal more. Those whose souls are as cold as the Arctic regions, and whose energy is reduced to the vanishing point, are not likely to take the city of Mansoul for Prince Emanuel. If you think you are going to win souls, you must throw your soul into your work just as a warrior must throw his soul into a battle, or victory will not be yours.

We use the words "to win" in reference to making a fortune, and we all know that the man who becomes a millionaire has to rise up early and sit up late and eat the bread of carefulness, and it takes a deal of toiling and saving, and I know not what besides, to amass immense wealth. We have to go in for winning souls with the same ardor and concentration of our faculties as old Astor of New York went in to build up that fortune of so many millions which he has now left behind him.

It is indeed a race, and you know that in a race nobody wins unless he strains every muscle and sinew. They that run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize; and that one is generally he who had more strength than the rest; certainly, whether he had more strength or not, he put out all he had, and we shall not win souls unless we imitate him in this.

Solomon in the text declares that "He that winneth souls is wise," and such a declaration is all the more valuable as coming from so wise a man. Let me show you why a true soul-winner is wise. First, he must be taught of God before he will attempt it. The man who does not know that whereas he was once blind, now he sees, had better think of his own blindness before he attempts to lead his friends in the right way. If not saved yourself, you cannot be the means of saving others. He that winneth souls must be wise unto salvation first for himself. That being taken for granted, he is a wise man to select such a pursuit. Young man, are you choosing an object worthy to be the great aim of your life? I do hope you will judge wisely and select a noble ambition. If God has given you great gifts, I hope they will not be wasted on any low, sordid, or selfish design. Suppose I am now addressing one who has great talents, and has an opportunity of being what he likes, of going into Parliament and helping to pass wise measures, or of going into business and making himself a man of importance; I hope he will weigh the claims of Jesus and immortal souls as well as other claims. Shall I addict myself to study? Shall I surrender myself to business? Shall I travel? Shall I spend my time in pleasure? Shall I become the principal fox-hunter of the county? Shall I lay out my time in promoting political and social reforms? Think them all over; but if you are a Christian man, my dear friend, nothing will equal in enjoyment, in usefulness, in honor, and in lasting recompense the giving yourself up to the winning of souls. Oh, it is grand hunting, I can tell you, and beats all the fox hunting in the world in excitement and exhilaration. Have I not sometimes gone with a cry over hedge and ditch after some poor sinner, and kept well up with him in every twist and turn he took till I have overtaken him by God's grace, and been in at the death, and rejoiced exceedingly when I have seen him captured by my Master. Our Lord Jesus calls his ministers fishermen, and no other fishermen have such labor, such sorrow, and such delight as we have. What a happy thing it is that you may win souls for Jesus, and may do this though you abide in your secular callings. Some of you would never win souls in pulpits, it would be a great pity if you tried, but you can win souls in the workshop, and in the laundry, in the nursery, and in the drawing-room. Our hunting grounds are everywhere: by the wayside, by the fireside, in the corner, and in the crowd. Among the common people Jesus is our theme, and among the great ones we have no other. You will be wise, my brother, if for you the one absorbing desire is that you may

turn the ungodly from the error of their ways. For you there will be a crown glittering with many stars, which you shall cast at Jesus' feet in the day of his appearing.

Further, it is not only wise to make this your aim, but you will have to be very wise if you succeed in it because the souls to be won are so different in their constitutions, feelings, and conditions, and you will have to adapt yourselves to them all. The trappers of North America have to find out the habits of the animals they wish to catch, and so you will have to learn how to deal with each class of cases. Some are very depressed, you will have to comfort them. Perhaps you will comfort them too much, and make them unbelieving; and therefore possibly instead of comforting them you will need sometimes to administer a sharp word to cure the sulkiness into which they have fallen. Another person may be frivolous, and if you put on a serious face you will frighten your bird away; you will have to be cheerful and drop a word of admonition as if by accident. Some people, again, will not let you speak to them, but will talk to you; you must know the art of putting a word in edgeways. You will have to be very wise and become all things to all men, and your success will prove your wisdom. Theories of dealing with souls may look very wise, but they often prove to be useless when actually tried: he who by God's grace accomplishes the work is a wise man, though perhaps he knows no theory whatever. This work will need all your wit, and far more, and you will have to cry to the great winner of souls above to give you of his Holy Spirit.

But mark you, he that wins souls is wise because he is engaged in a business which makes men wiser as they proceed with it. You will bungle at first, and very likely drive sinners off from Christ by your attempts to draw them to him. I have tried to move some souls with all my might with a certain passage of Scripture, but they have taken it in an opposite light to what it was intended, and have started off in the wrong direction. It is very difficult to know how to act with bewildered enquirers. If you want some people to go forward you must pull them backwards; if you want them to go to the right you must insist upon their going to the left, and then they go to the right directly. You must be ready for these follies of poor human nature. I know a poor aged Christian woman who had been a child of God fifty years, but she was in a state of melancholy and distress from which nobody could arouse her. I called several times and endeavored to cheer her up, but generally when I left she was worse than before. So the next time I called to see her I did not say anything to her about Christ or religion. She soon introduced those topics herself, and then I remarked that I was not going to talk to her about such holy things for she did not know anything about them, for she was not a believer in Christ, and had been, no doubt, a hypocrite for many years. She could not stand that, and asserted, in self-defense that the Lord above knew her better than I did, and he was her witness that she did love the Lord Jesus Christ. She scarcely forgave herself afterwards for that admission, but she could never talk to me quite so despairingly any more. True lovers of men's souls learn the art of dealing with them, and the Holy Spirit makes them expert soul surgeons for Jesus. It is not because a man has more abilities, nor altogether because he has more grace, but the Lord makes him to love the souls of men intensely, and this imparts a secret skill, since for the most part the way to get sinners to Christ is to love them to Christ.

Beloved brethren, I will say once more he who really wins souls for Jesus, however he wins them, is a wise man. Some of you are slow to admit this. You say—Well, so-and-so, I dare say, has been very useful, but he is very rough. What does his roughness matter if he wins souls? Ah, says another, but I am not built up under him. Why do you go to hear him, to get built up? If the Lord has sent him to pull down, let him pull down, and do you go elsewhere for edification; but do not grumble at a man who does one work because he cannot do another. We are also too apt to

pit one minister against another, and say "you should hear my minister." Perhaps we should, but it would be better for you to hear the man who edifies you, and let others go where they also are instructed. "He that winneth souls is wise." I do not ask you how he did it. He sang the gospel and you did not like it, but if he won souls he was wise. Soul-winners have all their own ways, and if they do but win souls they are wise. I will tell you what is not wise, and will not be thought so at the last, namely, to go about the churches doing nothing yourself and railing at all the Lord's useful servants. Here is a dear brother on his dying bed, he has the sweet thought that the Lord enabled him to bring many souls to Jesus, and the expectation when he comes to the gates that many spirits will come to meet him. They will throng the ascent to the New Jerusalem, and welcome the man who brought them to Jesus. They are immortal monuments to his labors. He is wise. Here is another who has spent all his time in interpreting the prophecies; so that everything he read of in the newspapers he could see in Daniel or the Revelation. He is wise, so some say, but I had rather spend my time in winning souls. I would sooner bring one sinner to Jesus Christ than unpick all the mysteries of the divine word, for salvation is the thing we are to live for. I would to God that I understood all mysteries, yet chief of all would I proclaim the mystery of soul-saving by faith in the blood of the Lamb. It is comparatively a small matter for a minister to have been a staunch upholder of orthodoxy all his days, and to have spent himself in keeping up the hedges of his church; soul winning is the main concern. It is a very good thing to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints; but I do not think I should like to say in my last account, "Lord, I have lived to fight the Romanists and the State church, and to put down the various erroneous sects, but I never led a sinner to the cross." No, we will fight the good fight of faith, but the winning of souls is the greater matter, and he who attends to it is wise. Another brother has preached the truth, but he did so polish up his sermons that the gospel was hidden. Never a sermon was fit to preach, he thought, until he had written it out a dozen times to see whether every sentence would be according to the canons of Cicero and Quintillian, and then he went and delivered the gospel as a grand oration. Is that wise? Well, it takes a wise man to be a thorough orator; but it is better not to be an orator if fine speech prevents your being understood. Let eloquence be flung to the dogs rather than souls be lost. What we want is to win souls, and they are not to be won by flowery speeches. We must have the winning of souls at heart, and be red hot with zeal for their salvation, and then however much we blunder according to the critics, we shall be numbered among those whom the Lord calls wise.

Now, Christian men and women, I want you to take this matter up practically, and to determine that you will try this very night to win a soul. Try the one next to you in the seat if you cannot think of anybody else. Try on the way home; try with your own children. Have I not told you of what happened one Sunday six months ago? In my sermon I said "Now you mothers, have you ever prayed with each of your children, one by one, and urged them to lay hold on Christ? Perhaps dear Jane is now in bed, and you have never yet pleaded with her about eternal things. Go home to-night, wake her up and say, "Jane, I am sorry I have never told you about the Savior personally and prayed with you, but I mean to do it now." Wake her up, and put your arms round her neck, and pour out your heart to God with her. Well, there was a good sister here who had a daughter named Jane. What do you think? She came on Monday to bring her daughter Jane to see me in the vestry, for when she woke her up and began, "I have not spoken to you about Jesus," or something to that effect, "Oh, dear mother," said Jane, "I have loved the Savior these six months, and wondered you had not spoken to me about him;" and then there was such kissing and rejoicing. Perhaps you may

find that to be the case with a dear child at home, and if you do not, so much the more reason why you should begin at once to speak. Did you never win a soul for Jesus? You shall have a crown in heaven, but no jewels in it. You will go to heaven childless; and you know how it was in the old times, how the women dreaded lest they should be childless. Let it be so with Christian people; let them dread being spiritually childless. We must hear the cries of those whom God has given to be born unto himself by our means. We must hear them, or else cry out in anguish, "Give me converts or I die." Young men, and old men, and sisters of all ages, if you love the Lord get a passion for souls. Do you not see them? they are going down to hell by thousands; as often as the hand upon the dial completes its circuit, hell devours multitudes, some of them ignorant of Christ, and others wilfully rejecting him. The world lies in darkness: this great city still pines for the light, your own friends and kinsfolk are unsaved and they may be dead ere this week is over. Oh, if you have any humanity, let alone Christianity, if you have found the remedy tell the diseased about it. If you have found life, proclaim it to the dead; if you have found liberty, publish it to the captives; if you have found Christ, tell of him to others. My brethren in the college, let this be your choice work while studying, and let it be the one object of your lives when you go forth from us. Do not be content when you get a congregation but labor to win souls, and as you do this God will bless you. As for us, we hope during the rest of our lives to follow him who is the soul-winner, and to put ourselves in his hands who maketh us soul-winners, so that our life may not be a long folly, but may be proved by results to have been directed by wisdom. O you souls not won to Jesus, remember that faith in Christ saves you. Trust in him. May you be led to trust in him for his name's sake. Amen.

Portion of Scripture read before sermon—Romans 10.
Hymns From "Our Own Hymn Book"—906, 957.

Soul Winning

A sermon (No. 850) delivered at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington,
by C. H. Spurgeon.

“He that winneth souls is wise.”—Proverbs 11:30.

The text does not say “he that winneth sovereigns is wise,” though no doubt he thinks himself wise, and perhaps in a certain grovelling sense in these days of competition he must be so; but such wisdom is of the earth and ends with the earth; and there is another world where the currencies of Europe will not be accepted, nor their past possession be any sign of wealth or wisdom. Solomon in the text before us awards no crown for wisdom to crafty statesmen, or even to the ablest of rulers; he issues no diplomas even to philosophers, poets, or men of wit; he crowns with laurel only those who win souls. He does not declare that he who preaches is necessarily wise—and alas! there are multitudes who preach and gain much applause and eminence who win no souls, and who shall find it go hard with them at the last, because in all probability they have run and the Master has never sent them. He does not say that he who talks about winning souls is wise, since to lay down rules for others is a very simple thing, but to carry them out one’s self is far more difficult. He who actually, really, and truly turns men from the error of their ways to God, and so is made the means of saving them from going down to hell, is a wise man; and that is true of him whatever his style of soul-winning may be. He may be a Paul, deeply logical, profound in doctrine, able to command all candid judgments; and if he thus win souls he is wise. He may be an Apollos, grandly rhetorical, whose lofty genius soars into the very heaven of eloquence; and if he wins souls in that way he is wise, but not otherwise. Or he may be a Cephas, rough and rugged, using uncouth metaphor and stern declamation, but if he win souls he is no less wise than his polished brother or his argumentative friend, but not else. The great wisdom of soul-winners, according to the text, is proven only by their actual success in really winning souls. To their own Master they are accountable for the ways in which they go to work, not to us. Do not let us be comparing and contrasting this minister and that. Who art thou that judgest another man’s servants? Wisdom is justified in all her children. Only children wrangle about incidental methods: men look at sublime results. Do these workers of many sorts and divers manners win souls? Then they are wise; and you who criticise them, being yourselves unfruitful, cannot be wise, even though you affect to be their judges. God proclaims soul-winners to be wise, dispute it who dare. This degree from the College of Heaven may surely stand them in good stead, let their fellow mortals say what they will of them.

“He that winneth souls is wise,” and this can be seen very clearly. He must be a wise man in even ordinary respects who can by grace achieve so divine a marvel. Great soul-winners never have been fools. A man whom God qualifies to win souls could probably do anything else which providence might allot him. Take Martin Luther. Why, sirs, the man was not only fit to work a Reformation, but he could have ruled a nation or have commanded an army. Think of Whitfield, and remember that the thundering eloquence which stirred all England was not associated with a weak judgment, or an absence of brain-power; the man was a master-orator, and if he had addicted himself to commerce would have taken a chief place amongst the merchants, or had he been a politician, amid admiring senates would have commanded the listening ear. He that winneth souls

is usually a man who could have done anything else if God had called him to it. I know the Lord uses what means he wills, but he always uses means suitable to the end; and if you tell me that David slew Goliath with a sling, I answer—it was the best weapon in the world to reach so tall a giant, and the very fittest weapon that David could have used, for he had been skilled in it from his youth up. There is always an adaptation in the instruments which God uses to produce the ordained result, and though the glory is not to them, nor the excellence in them, but all is to be ascribed to God, yet is there a fitness and preparedness which God seeth, even if we do not. It is assuredly true that soul-winners are by no means idiots or simpletons, but such as God maketh wise for himself, though vainglorious wiseacres may dub them fools.

“He that winneth souls is wise,” because he has selected a wise object. I think it was Michaelangelo who once carved certain magnificent statues in snow. They are gone; the material readily compacted by the frost as readily melted in the heat. Far wiser was he when he fashioned the enduring marble, and produced works which will last all down the ages. But even marble itself is consumed and fretted by the tooth of time; and he is wise who selects for his raw material immortal souls, whose existence shall outlast the stars. If God shall bless us to the winning of souls, our work shall remain when the wood, and hay, and stubble of earth’s art and science shall have gone to the dust from which they sprang. In heaven itself, the soul-winner, blessed of God, shall have memorials of his work preserved for ever in the galleries of the skies. He has selected a wise object, for what can be wiser than to glorify God, and what, next to that, can be wiser than in the highest sense to bless our fellow men; to snatch a soul from the gulf that yawns, to lift it up to the heaven that glorifies; to deliver an immortal from the thralldom of Satan, and to bring him into the liberty of Christ? What more excellent than this? I say that such an aim would commend itself to all right minds, and that angels themselves may envy us poor sons of men that we are permitted to make this our life-object, to win souls for Jesus Christ. Wisdom herself assents to the excellence of the design.

To accomplish such a work a man must be wise, for to win a soul requires infinite wisdom. God himself wins not souls without wisdom, for the eternal plan of salvation was dictated by an infallible judgment, and in every line of it infinite skill is apparent. Christ, God’s great soul-winner, is “the wisdom of God,” as well as “the power of God.” There is as much wisdom to be seen in the new creation as in the old. In a sinner saved, there is as much of God to be beheld as in a universe rising out of nothing; and we then, who are to be workers together with God, proceeding side by side with him to the great work of soul-winning, must be wise too. It is a work which filled a Savior’s heart—a work which moved the Eternal mind or ever the earth was. It is no child’s play, nor a thing to be achieved while we are half asleep, nor to be attempted without deep consideration, nor to be carried on without gracious help from the only-wise God, our Savior. The pursuit is wise.

Mark ye well, my brethren, that he who is successful in soul-winning, will prove to have been a wise man in the judgment of those who see the end as well as the beginning. Even if I were utterly selfish, and had no care for anything but my own happiness, I would choose, if I might, under God, to be a soul-winner, for never did I know perfect, overflowing, unutterable happiness of the purest and most ennobling order, till I first heard of one who had sought and found a Savior through my means. I recollect the thrill of joy which went through me! No young mother ever rejoiced so much over her first-born child—no warrior was so exultant over a hard-won victory. Oh! the joy of knowing that a sinner once at enmity has been reconciled to God by the Holy Spirit, through the words spoken by our feeble lips. Since then, by grace given to me, the thought of which prostrates

me in self-abasement, I have seen and—heard of, not hundreds only, but even thousands of sinners turned from the error of their ways by the testimony of God in me. Let afflictions come, let trials be multiplied as God willeth, still this joy preponderates above all others, the joy that we are unto God a sweet savor of Christ in every place, and that as often as we preach the Word, hearts are unlocked, bosoms heave with a new life, eyes weep for sin, and their tears are wiped away as they see the great Substitute for sin, and live. Beyond all controversy it is a joy worth worlds to win souls, and thank God, it is a joy that does not cease with this mortal life. It must be no small bliss to hear as one wings his flight up to the eternal throne, the wings of others fluttering at one's side towards the same glory, and turning round and questioning them, to hear them say, "We are entering with you through the gates of pearl; you brought us to the Savior." To be welcomed to the skies by those who call us father in God—father in better bonds than those of earth, father through grace and sire for immortality, it will be bliss beyond compare to meet in your eternal seats with those begotten of us in Christ Jesus, for whom we travailed in birth till Christ was formed in them, the hope of glory. This is to have many heavens—a heaven in every one won for Christ; according to the Master's promise "they that turn many to righteousness, shall shine as the stars for ever and ever."

I have said enough brethren, I trust, to make some of you desire to occupy the position of soul-winners: but before I further address myself to my text I should like to remind you, that the honor does not belong to ministers only; they may take their full share of it, but it belongs to every one of you who have devoted yourselves to Christ: such honor have all the saints. Every man here, every woman here, every child here, whose heart is right with God, may be a soul-winner. There is no man placed by God's providence where he cannot do some good. There is not a glowworm under a hedge but gives a needed light; and there is not a laboring man, a suffering woman, a servant-girl, a chimney-sweeper, or a crossing-sweeper, but what has opportunities for serving God; and what I have said of soul-winners belongs not to the learned doctor of divinity, or to the eloquent preacher alone, but to you all who are in Christ Jesus. You can, each of you, if grace enable you, be thus wise, and win the happiness of turning souls to Christ through the Holy Spirit.

I am about to dwell upon my text in this way—"He that winneth souls is wise;" I shall first make that fact stand out a little clearer by explaining the metaphor used in the text—winning souls; and then secondly by giving you some lessons in the matter of soul-winning, through which I trust the conviction will be forced upon each believing mind that the work needs the highest wisdom.

I. First let us consider the metaphor used in the text—"He that winneth souls is wise."

We use the word "win" in many ways. It is sometimes found in very bad company, in those games of chance, juggling tricks and sleight-of-hand, or thimble-rigging (to use a plain word), which sharpers are so fond of winning by. I am sorry to say that much of legerdemain and trickery are to be met with in the religious world. Why, there are those who pretend to save souls by curious tricks, intricate manoeuvres, and dexterous posture making. A bason of water, half-a-dozen drops, certain syllables—heigh, presto!—the infant is a child of grace, and becomes a member of Christ and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven. This aqueous regeneration surpasses my belief; it is a trick which I do not understand: the initiated only can perform the beautiful piece of magic, which excels anything ever attempted by the Wizard of the North. There is a way, too, of winning souls by laying hands upon heads, only the elbows of aforesaid hands must be encased in lawn, and then the machinery acta, and there is grace conferred by blessed fingers! I must confess I do not understand the occult science, but at this I need not wonder, for the profession of saving souls by

such juggling can only be carried out by certain favored persons who have received apostolical succession direct from Judas Iscariot. This episcopal confirmation, when men pretend that it confers grace, is an infamous piece of juggling. The whole thing is an abomination. Only to think that in this nineteenth century there should be men who preach up salvation by sacraments, and salvation by themselves forsooth! Why, sirs, it is surely too late in the day to come to us with this drive! Priestcraft, let us hope, is an anachronism, and the sacramental theory out of date. These things might have done for those who could not read and for the days when books were scarce, but ever since the day when the glorious Luther was helped by God to proclaim with thunder-claps the emancipating truth, “By grace are ye saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God,” there has been too much light for these Popish owls. Let them go back to their ivy-mantled towers and complain to the moon of those who spoiled of old their kingdom of darkness. Let shaven crowns go to Bedlam, and scarlet hats to the scarlet harlot, but let not Englishmen yield them respect. Modern Tractarianism is a bastard Popery, too mean, too shifty, too double-dealing to delude men of honest minds. If we win souls it shall be by other arts than Jesuits and shavelings can teach us. Trust not in any man who pretends to priesthood. Priests are liars by trade and deceivers by profession. We cannot save souls in their theatrical way, and do not want to do so, for we know that with such jugglery as that Satan will hold the best hand, and laugh at priests as he turns the cards against them at the last.

How do we win souls then? Why, the word “win” has a better meaning far. It is used in warfare. Warriors win cities and provinces. Now, to win a soul is a much more difficult thing than to win a city. Observe the earnest soul-winner at his work; how cautiously he seeks his great Captain’s directions to know when to hang out the white flag to invite the heart to surrender to the sweet love of a dying Savior; when, at the proper time, to hang out the black flag of threatening, showing that if grace be not received judgment will surely follow; and when to unfurl, with dread reluctance, the red flag of the terrors of God against stubborn, impenitent souls. The soul-winner has to sit down before a soul as a great captain before a walled town; to draw his lines of circumvallation, to cast up his intrenchments and fix his batteries. He must not advance too fast—he may overdo the fighting; he must not move too slowly, for he may seem not to be in earnest, and may do mischief. Then he must know which gate to attack—how to plant his guns at Ear-gate, and how to discharge them; how, sometimes, to keep the batteries going day and night with red-hot shot, if perhaps he may make a breach in the walls; at other times to lay by and cease, and then on a sudden to open all the batteries with terrific violence, if peradventure he may take the soul by surprise or cast in a truth when it was not expected, to burst like a shell in the soul and do damage to the dominions of sin. The Christian soldier must know how to advance by little and little—to sap that prejudice, to undermine that old enmity, to blow into the air that lust, and at the last, to storm the citadel. It is his to throw the scaling ladder up and to have his ears gladdened as he hears a clicking on the wall of the heart, telling that the scaling ladder has grasped and has gained firm hold; and then, with his sabre between his teeth, to climb up and spring on the man and slay his unbelief in the name of God, and capture the city, and run up the blood-red flag of the cross of Christ and say, “The heart is won, won for Christ at last.” This needs a warrior well trained—a master in his art. After many days’ attack, many weeks of waiting, many an hour of storming by prayer and battering by entreaty, to carry the Malakoff of depravity, this is the work, this the difficulty. It takes no fool to do this. God’s grace must make a man wise thus to capture Mansoul, to lead its captivity captive, and open wide the heart’s gates that the Prince Immanuel may come in. This is winning a soul.

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The word “win” was commonly used among the ancients, to signify winning in the wrestling match. When the Greek sought to win the laurel, or the ivy crown, he was compelled a long time before to put himself through a course of training, and when he came forth at last stripped for the encounter, he had no sooner exercised himself in the first few efforts than you saw how every muscle and every nerve had been developed in him. He had a stern opponent, and he knew it, and therefore left none of his energy unused. While the wrestling was going on you could see the man’s eye, how he watched every motion, every feint of his antagonist, and how his hand, his foot, and his whole body were thrown into the encounter. He feared to meet with a fall: he hoped to give one to his foe. Now, a true soul-winner has often to come to close quarters with the devil within men. He has to struggle with their prejudice, with their love of sin, with their unbelief, with their pride, and then again, all of a sudden, to grapple with their despair; at one moment he strives with their self-righteousness, at the next moment with their unbelief in God. Ten thousand arts are used to prevent the soul-winner from being conqueror in the encounter, but if God has sent him he will never renounce his hold of the soul he seeks till he has given a throw to the power of sin, and won another soul for Christ.

Besides that, there is another meaning to the word “win” upon which I cannot expatiate here. We use the word, you know, in a softer sense than these which have been mentioned, when we come to deal with hearts. There are secret and mysterious ways by which those who love win the object of their affection, which are wise in their fitness to the purpose. I cannot tell you how the lover wins his fond one, but experience has probably taught you. The weapon of this warfare is not always the same, yet where that victory is won the wisdom of the means becomes clear to every eye. The weapon of love is sometimes a look, or a soft word whispered and eagerly listened to; sometimes it is a tear; but this I know, that we have, most of us in our turn, cast around another heart a chain which that other would not care to break, and which has linked us twain in a blessed captivity which has cheered our life. Yes, and that is very nearly the way in which we have to save souls. That illustration is nearer the mark than any of the others. Love is the true way of soul-winning, for when I spoke of storming the walls, and when I spoke of wrestling, those were but metaphors, but this is near the fact. We win by love. We win hearts for Jesus by love, by sympathy with their sorrow, by anxiety lest they should perish, by pleading with God for them with all our hearts that they should not be left to die unsaved, by pleading with them for God that, for their own sake, they would seek mercy and find grace. Yes sirs, there is a spiritual wooing and winning of hearts for the Lord Jesus; and if you would learn the way, you must ask God to give you a tender heart and a sympathising soul. I believe that much of the secret of soul-winning lies in having bowels of compassion, in having spirits that can be touched with the feeling of human infirmities. Carve a preacher out of granite, and even if you give him an angel’s tongue he will convert nobody. Put him into the most fashionable pulpit, make his elocution faultless, and his matter profoundly orthodox, but so long as he bears within his bosom a hard heart he can never win a soul. Soul-saving requires a heart that beats hard against the ribs. It requires a soul full of the milk of human kindness; this is the sine qua non of success. This is the chief natural qualification for a soul-winner, which under God and blessed of him will accomplish wonders.

I have not looked at the Hebrew of the text, but I find—and you will find who have margins to your Bibles—that it is, “He that taketh souls is wise,” which word refers to fishing, or to bird-catching. Every Sunday when I leave my house, I cannot help seeing as I come along, men with their little cages and their stuffed birds, trying all around the common and in the fields, to

catch poor little warblers. They understand the method of alluring and entrapping their little victims. Soul-winners might learn much from them. We must have our lures for souls adapted to attract, to fascinate, to grasp. We must go forth with our bird-lime, our decoys, our nets, our baits, so that we may but catch the souls of men. Their enemy is a fowler possessed of the basest and most astounding cunning; we must outwit him with the guile of honesty, the craft of grace. But the art is to be learned only by divine teaching, and herein we must be wise and willing to learn. The man who takes fish must also have some art in him. Washington Irving, I think it is, tells us of some three gentlemen who had read in Izaak Walton all about the delights of fishing. So they must needs enter upon the same amusement, and accordingly they became disciples of the gentle art. They went into New York and bought the best rods and lines that could be purchased, and they found out the exact fly for the particular day or month, so that the fish might bite at once, and as it were, fly into the basket with alacrity. They fished, and fished, and fished the live-long day, but the basket was empty. They were getting disgusted with a sport that had no sport in it, when a ragged boy came down from the hills without shoes or stockings, and humiliated them to the last degree. He had a bit of a bough pulled from off a tree, and a piece of string, and a bent pin; he put a worm on it, threw it in, and out came a fish directly, as if it were a needle drawn to a magnet. In again went the line, and out came another fish, and so on, till his basket was quite full. They asked him how he did it. Ah! he said, he could not tell them that, but it was easy enough when you had the way of it. Much the same is it in fishing for men. Some preachers who have silk lines and fine rods, preach very eloquently and exceedingly gracefully, but they never win souls. I know not how it is, but another man comes, with very simple language, but with a warm heart, and straightway men are converted to God. Surely there must be a sympathy between the minister and the souls he would win. God gives to those whom he makes soul-winners a natural love to their work, and a spiritual fitness for it. There is a sympathy between those who are to be blessed and those who are to be the means of blessing, and very much by this sympathy, under God, souls are taken; but it is as clear as noonday that to be a fisher of men a man must be wise. "He that winneth souls is wise."

II. And now brethren and sisters, you who are engaged in the Lord's work from week to week, and who seek to win men's souls to Christ, I am, in the second place, to illustrate this by telling you of some of the ways by which souls are won.

The preacher himself wins souls best, I believe, when he believes in the reality of his work, when he believes in instantaneous conversions. How can he expect God to do what he does not believe God will do? He succeeds best who expects conversion every time he preaches. According to his faith so shall it be done unto him. To be content without conversions is the surest way never to have them: to drive with a single aim entirely at the saving of souls is the surest method of usefulness. If we sigh and cry till men are saved, saved they will be.

He will succeed best who keeps closest to soul-saving truth. Now, all truth is not soul-saving, though all truth may be edifying. He that keeps to the simple story of the cross, tells men over and over again that whosoever believeth in Christ is not condemned, that to be saved nothing is wanted but a simple trust in the crucified Redeemer; he whose ministry is much made up of the glorious story of the cross, the sufferings of the dying Lamb, the mercy of God, the willingness of the great Father to receive returning prodigals; he who cries, in fact, from day to day, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world," he is likely to be a soul-winner, especially if he adds to this much prayer for souls, much anxious desire that men may be brought to Jesus, and then in

his private life seeks as much as in his public ministry to be telling out to others of the love of the dear Savior of men.

But I am not talking to ministers, but to you who sit in the pew, and therefore to you let me turn myself more directly. Brothers and sisters, you have different gifts. I hope you use them all. Perhaps some of you, though members of the church, think you have none; but every believer has his gift and his portion of work. What can you do to win souls? Let me recommend to those who think they can do nothing the bringing of others to hear the word. That is a duty much neglected. I can hardly ask you to bring anybody here, but many of you attend other places which are not perhaps half filled. Fill them. Do not grumble at the small congregation, but make it larger. Take somebody with you to the very next sermon, and at once the congregation will be increased. Go up with the prayer that your minister's sermon may be blessed, and if you cannot preach yourselves, yet by bringing others under the sound of the word you may be doing what is next best. This is a very common-place and simple remark, but let me press it upon you, for it is of great practical value. Many churches and chapels which are almost empty might soon have large audiences if those who profit by the word would tell others about the profit they have received, and induce them to attend the same ministry. Especially in this London of ours, where so many will not go up to the house of God—persuade your neighbors to come forth to the place of worship; look after them; make them feel that it is a wrong thing to stop at home on the Sunday from morning till night. I do not say upbraid them, that does little good; but I do say entice them, persuade them. Let them have your tickets for the Tabernacle for instance sometimes, or stand in the aisles yourself, and let them have your seat. Get them under the word, and who knoweth what may be the result? Oh, what a blessing it would be to you if you heard that what you could not do, for you could scarcely speak for Christ, was done by your pastor by the power of the Holy Spirit, through your inducing one to come within gunshot of the gospel!

Next to that, soul-winners, the preacher may have missed the mark—you need not miss it; or the preacher may have struck the mark and you can help to make the impression deeper by a kind word. I recollect several persons joining the church who traced their conversion to the ministry in the Surrey Music Hall, but who said it was not that alone but another agency cooperating therewith. They were fresh from the country, and some good man, I knew him well, I think he is in heaven now, met two of them at the gate, spoke to them, said he hoped they had enjoyed what they had heard; heard their answer; asked them if they were coming in the evening; said he would be glad if they would drop into his house to tea; they did, and he had a word with them about the Master. The next Sunday it was the same, and at last those whom the sermons had not much impressed were brought to hear with other ears, till by-and-by through the good old man's persuasive words, and the good Lord's gracious work, they were converted to God. There is a fine hunting-ground here, and indeed in every large congregation for you who really want to do good. How many come into this house every morning and evening with no thought about receiving Christ. Oh! if you would all help me, you who love the Master, if you would all help me by speaking to your neighbors who sit near to you, how much might be accomplished! Never let anybody say, "I came to the Tabernacle three months and nobody spoke to me;" but do, by a sweet familiarity which ought always to be allowable in the house of God, seek with your whole heart to impress upon your friends the truth which I can only put into the ear, but which God may help you to put into the heart.

Further, let me commend to you dear friends, the art of button-holing acquaintances and relatives. If you cannot preach to a hundred, preach to one. Get a hold of the man alone, and in

love, quietly and prayerfully, talk to him; “One!” say you. Well, is not one enough? I know your ambition young man: you want to preach here to these thousands; be content and begin with the ones. Your Master was not ashamed to sit on the well and preach to one, and when he had finished his sermon he had really done good to all the city of Samaria, for that one woman became a missionary to her friends. Timidity often prevents our being useful in this direction, but we must not give way to it; it must not be tolerated that Christ should be unknown through our silence, and sinners unwarned through our negligence. We must school and train ourselves to deal personally with the unconverted. We must not excuse ourselves, but force ourselves to the irksome task till it becomes easy. This is one of the most honorable modes of soul-winning, and if it requires more than ordinary zeal and courage, so much the more reason for our resolving to master it. Beloved, we must win souls, we cannot live and see men damned; we must have them brought to Jesus. Oh! then, be up and doing, and let none around you die unwarned, unwept, uncared for. A tract is a useful thing, but a living word is better. Your eye, and face, and voice will all help. Do not be so cowardly as to give a piece of paper where your own speech would be so much better. I charge you, attend to this, for Jesus’ sake.

Some of you could write letters for your Lord and Master. To far-off friends a few loving lines may be most influential for good. Be like the men of Issachar, who handled the pen. Paper and ink are never better used than in soul-winning. Much has been done by this method. Could not you do it? Will you not try? Some of you, at any rate, if you could not speak or write much, could live much. That is a fine way of reaching, that of preaching with your feet, I mean preaching by your life, and conduct, and conversation. That loving wife who weeps in secret over an infidel husband, but is always so kind to him; that dear child whose heart is broken with a father’s blasphemy, but is so much more obedient than he used to be before conversion; that servant whom the master swears at, but whom he could trust with his purse and the gold uncounted in it; that man in trade who is sneered at as a Presbyterian, but who nevertheless is straight as a line, and would not be compelled to do a dirty action, no, not for all the mint; these are the men and women who preach the best sermons; these are your practical preachers. Give us your holy living, and with your holy living as the leverage we will move the world. Under God’s blessing we will find tongues, if we can, but we need greatly the lives of our people to illustrate what our tongues have to say. The gospel is something like an illustrated paper. The preacher’s words are the letterpress, but the pictures are the living men and women who form our [magazine(?). Apparently there is/are missing word(s) that should go here] (W)hen people take up such a newspaper, they very often do not read the letterpress, but they always look at the pictures —so in a church, outsiders may not come to hear the preacher, but they always consider, observe, and criticise the lives of the members. If you would be soul-winners then, dear brethren and sisters, see that you live the gospel. I have no greater joy than this, that my children walk in the truth.

One thing more, the soul-winner must be a master of the art of prayer. You cannot bring souls to God if you go not to God yourself. You must get your battle-axe and your weapons of war from the armoury of sacred communion with Christ. If you are much alone with Jesus you will catch his Spirit; you will be fired with the flame that burned in his breast and consumed his life. You will weep with the tears that fell upon Jerusalem when he saw it perishing, and if you cannot speak so eloquently as he did, yet shall there be about what you say somewhat of the same power which in him thrilled the hearts and awoke the consciences of men. My dear hearers, specially you members of the church, I am always so anxious lest any of you should begin to lie upon your oars, and take

things easy in the matters of God's kingdom. There are some of you—I bless you, and I bless God at the remembrance of you—who are in earnest for winning souls, in season, and out of season, and you are the truly wise: but I fear there are others whose hands are slack, who are satisfied to let me preach, but do not preach themselves; who take these seats and occupy these pews and hope the cause goes well, but that is all they do. Oh, do let me see you all in earnest! A great host of four thousand members—for that is now as nearly as possible the accurate counting of our numbers—what ought we not to do if we are all alive, and all in earnest! But such a host, without the spirit of enthusiasm, becomes a mere mob, an unwieldy mass out of which mischief grows and no good results arise. If you were all firebrands for Christ you might set the nation on a blaze. If you were all wells of living water, how many thirsty souls might drink and be refreshed! One thing more you can do. If some of you feel you cannot do much personally, you can always help the College, and there it is that we find tongues for the dumb. Our young men are called out by God to preach; we give them some little education and training, and then away they go to Australia, to Canada, to the islands of the sea, to Scotland, to Wales, and throughout England, preaching the Word; and it is often, it must be often, a consolation to some of you, to think that if you have not spoken with your own tongues as you could desire you have at least spoken by the tongues of others, so that through you the word of God has been sounded abroad throughout all this region.

Beloved, there is one question I will ask and I have done, and that is, are your own souls won? You cannot win others else. Are you yourselves saved? My hearers, every one of you under that gallery there, and you behind here, are you yourselves saved? What if this night you should have to answer that question to another and greater than I am? What if the bony finger of the last great orator should be uplifted instead of mine? What if his unconquerable eloquence should turn those bones to stone, and glaze those eyes, and make the blood chill in your veins? Could you hope in your last extremity that you were saved? If not saved, how will you ever be? When will you be saved if not now? Will any time be better than now? The way to be saved is simply to trust in what the Son of man did when he became man, and suffered the punishment for all those who trust him. For all his people Christ was a substitute. His people are those who trust him. If you trust him, he was punished for your sins and you cannot be punished for them; for God cannot punish sin twice, first in Christ and then in you. If you trust Jesus who now liveth at the right hand of God, you are this moment pardoned, and you shall for ever be saved. O that you would trust him now! Perhaps it may be now or never with you. May it be now, even now, and then, trusting in Jesus, dear friends, you will have no need to hesitate when the question is asked, "Are you saved?" for you can answer, "Ay, that I am, for it is written, 'He that believeth in him is not condemned.'" Trust him then, trust him now, and then God help you to be a soul-winner, and you shall be wise, and God shall be glorified.

Portion of Scripture read before sermon—Psalm 51.

How a Man's Conduct Comes Home to Him

A sermon (No. 1235) delivered on Lord's Day Morning, May 16th, 1875,
at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington,
by C. H. Spurgeon.

“The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways: and a good man shall be satisfied from himself.”—Proverbs 14:14.

A common principle is here laid down and declared to be equally true in reference to two characters, who in other respects are a contrast. Men are affected by the course which they pursue; for good or bad, their own conduct comes home to them. The backslider and the good man are very different, but in each of them the same rule is exemplified—they are both filled by the result of their lives. The backslider becomes filled by that which is within him, as seen in his life, and the good man also is filled by that which grace implants within his soul. The evil leaven in the backslider leavens his entire being and sours his existence, while the gracious fountain in the sanctified believer saturates his whole manhood, and baptizes his entire life. In each case the fullness arises from that which is within the man, and is in its nature like the man's character; the fullness of the backslider's misery will come out of his own ways, and the fullness of the good man's content will spring out of the love of God which is shed abroad in his heart.

The meaning of this passage will come out better if we begin with an illustration. Here are two pieces of sponge, and we wish to fill them: you shall place one of them in a pool of foul water, it will be filled, and filled with that which it lies in; you shall put the other sponge into a pure crystal stream, and it will also become full, full of the element in which it is placed. The backslider lies asoak in the dead sea of his own ways, and the brine fills him; the good man is plunged like a pitcher into “Siloa's brook, which flows hard by the oracle of God,” and the river of the water of life fills him to the brim. A wandering heart will be filled with sorrow, and a heart confiding in the Lord will be satisfied with joy and peace. Or, take two farmsteads; one farmer sows tares in his field, and in due time his barns are filled therewith; another sows wheat, and his garners are stored with precious grain. Or follow out our Lord's parable: one builder places his frail dwelling on the sand, and when the tempest rages he is swept away in it naturally enough; another lays deep the foundations of his house and sets it fast on a rock, and as an equally natural consequence he smiles upon the storm, protected by his well-founded dwelling-place. What a man is by sin or by grace will be the cause of his sorrow or of his satisfaction.

I. I shall take the two characters without further preface, and first let us speak awhile about the backslider. This is a very solemn subject, but one which it is needful to bring before the present audience, since we all have some share in it. I trust there may not be many present who are backsliders in the worst sense of the term, but very, very few among us are quite free from the charge of having backslidden in some measure at some time or other since conversion. Even those who sincerely love the Master sometimes wander, and we all need to take heed lest there be in any of us an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God.

There are several kinds of persons who may with more or less propriety be comprehended under the term “backsliders,” and these will each in his own measure be filled with his own ways.

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There are first, apostates, those who unite themselves with the church of Christ, and for a time act as if they were subjects of a real change of heart. These persons are frequently very zealous for a season, and may become prominent if not eminent in the church of God. They did run well like those mentioned by the apostle, but by some means they are, first of all, hindered, and slacken their pace; after that they linger and loiter, and leave the crown of the causeway for the side of the road. By-and-by in their hearts they go back into Egypt, and at last, finding an opportunity to return, they break loose from all the restraints of their profession and openly forsake the Lord. Truly the last end of such men is worse than the first. Judas is the great type of these pre-eminent backsliders. Judas was a professed believer in Jesus, a follower of the Lord, a minister of the gospel, an apostle of Christ, the trusted treasurer of the college of the apostles, and after all turned out to be the "son of perdition" who sold his Master for thirty pieces of silver. He ere long was filled with his own ways, for, tormented with remorse, he threw down the blood-money he had so dearly earned, hanged himself, and went to his own place. The story of Judas has been written over and over again in the lives of other traitors. We have heard of Judas as a deacon, and as an elder; we have heard Judas preach, we have read the works of Judas the bishop, and seen Judas the missionary. Judas sometimes continues in his profession for many years, but sooner or later the true character of the man is discovered; his sin returns upon his own head, and if he does not make an end of himself, I do not doubt but what, even in this life, he often lives in such horrible remorse that his soul would choose strangling rather than life. He has gathered the grapes of Gomorrah and he has to drink the wine; he has planted a bitter tree and he must eat the fruit thereof. Oh sirs, may none of you betray your Lord and Master. God grant I never may. "Traitor! Traitor!" Shall that ever be written across your brow? You have been baptised into the name of the adorable Trinity, you have eaten the tokens of the Redeemer's body and blood, you have sung the Songs of Zion, you have stood forward to pray in the midst of the people of God, and will you act so base a part as to betray your Lord? Shall it ever be said of you, "Take him to the place from whence he came, for he is a traitor"? I cannot conceive of anything more ignominious than for a soldier to be drummed out of a regiment of Her Majesty's soldiers, but what must it be to be cast out of the host of God! What must it be to be set up as the target of eternal shame and everlasting contempt for having crucified the Lord afresh, and put him to an open shame! How shameful will it be to be branded as an apostate from truth and holiness, from Christ and his ways. Better never to have made a profession than to have belied it so wretchedly, and to have it said of us, "it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, the dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire." Of such John has said, "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us."

This title of backslider applies also to another class, not so desperate but still most sad, of which not Judas but David may serve as the type: we refer to backsliders who go into open sin. There are men who descend from purity to careless living, and from careless living to indulgence of the flesh, and from indulgence of the flesh in little matters into known sin, and from one sin to another till they plunge into uncleanness. They have been born again and therefore the trembling and almost extinct life within must and shall revive and bring them to repentance: they will come back weary, weeping, humbled, and brokenhearted, and they will be restored, but they will never be what they were before; their voices will be hoarse like that of David after his crime, for he never again sung so jubilantly as in his former days. Life will be more full of trembling and trial, and manifest less

of buoyancy and joy of spirit. Broken bones make hard travelling, and even when they are set they are very subject to shooting pains when ill weathers are abroad. I may be addressing some of this sort this morning, and if so I would speak with much faithful love. Dear brother, if you are now following Jesus afar off you will ere long, like Peter, deny him. Even though you will obtain mercy of the Lord, yet the text will certainly be fulfilled in you, and you will be “filled with your own ways.” As certainly as Moses took the golden calf and ground it into powder, and then mixed it with the water which the sinful Israelites had to drink till they all tasted the grit in their mouths, so will the Lord do with you if you are indeed his child: he will take your idol of sin and grind it to powder, and your life shall be made bitter with it for years to come. When the gall and wormwood are most manifest in the cup of life, it will be a mournful thing to feel “I procured this unto myself by my shameful folly.” O Lord, hold thou us up, and keep us from falling by little and little lest we plunge into overt sin and continue in it for a season; for surely the anguish which comes of such an evil is terrible as death itself. If David could rise from his grave and appear before you with his face seamed with sorrow and his brow wrinkled with his many griefs, he would say to you “keep your hearts with all diligence lest ye bring woe upon yourselves. Watch unto prayer, and guard against the beginnings of sin lest your bones wax old through your roarings, and your moisture be turned into the drought of summer.” O beware of a wandering heart, for it will be an awful thing to be filled with your own backslidings.

But there is a third sort of backsliding, and I am afraid a very large number of us have at times come under the title—I mean those who in any measure or degree, even for a very little time, decline from the point which they have reached. Perhaps such a man hardly ought to be called a backslider because it is not his predominant character, yet he backslides. If he does not believe as firmly, and love as intensely, and serve as zealously as he formerly did, he has in a measure backslidden, and any measure of backsliding, be it less or be it more, is sinful, and will in proportion as it is real backsliding fill us with our own ways. If you only sow two or three seeds of the thistle there will not be so many of the ill weeds on your farm as if you had emptied out a whole sack, but still there will be enough and more than enough. Every little backsliding, as men call it, is a great mischief; every little going back even in heart from God, if it never comes to words or deeds, yet will involve us in some measure of sorrow. If sin were clean removed from us, sorrow would be removed also, in fact we should be in heaven since a state of perfect holiness must involve perfect blessedness. Sin in any degree will bear its own fruit, and that fruit will be sure to set our teeth on edge; it is ill therefore to be a backslider even in the least degree.

Having said so much, let me now continue to think of the last two kinds of backsliders, and leave out the apostate. Let us first read his name, and then let us read his history, we have both in our text.

The first part of his name is “backslider.” He is not a back runner, nor a back leaper, but a backslider, that is to say he slides back with an easy, effortless motion, softly, quietly, perhaps unsuspected by himself or anybody else. The Christian life is very much like climbing a hill of ice. You cannot slide up, nay, you have to cut every step with an ice axe; only with incessant labor in cutting and chipping can you make any progress; you need a guide to help you, and you are not safe unless you are fastened to the guide, for you may slip into a crevasse. Nobody ever slides up, but if great care be not taken they will slide down, slide back, or in other words backslide. This is very easily done. If you want to know how to backslide, the answer is leave off going forward and you will slide backward, cease going upward and you will go downward of necessity, for stand

still you never can. To lead us to backslide, Satan acts with us as engineers do with a road down the mountains side. If they desire to carry the road from yonder alp right down into the valley far below, they never think of making the road plunge over a precipice, or straight down the face of the rock, for nobody would ever use such a road; but the road makers wind and twist. See, the track descends very gently to the right, you can hardly see that it does run downwards; anon it turns to the left with a small incline, and so by turning this way and then that, the traveler finds himself in the vale below. Thus the crafty enemy of souls fetches saints down from their high places; whenever he gets a good man down it is usually by slow degrees. Now and then, by sudden opportunity and strong temptation, the Christian man has been plunged right from the pinnacle of the temple into the dungeon of despair in a moment, but it is not often the case; the gentle decline is the devil's favourite piece of engineering, and he manages it with amazing skill. The soul scarcely knows it is going down, it seems to be maintaining the even tenor of its way, but ere long it is far below the line of peace and consecration. Our dear brother, Dr. Arnot, of the Free Church, illustrates this very beautifully by supposing a balance. This is the heavy scale loaded with seeds, and the other is high in the air. One morning you are very much surprised to find that what had been the heavier scale is aloft, while the other has descended. You do not understand it till you discover that certain little insects had silently transferred the seeds one by one. At first they made no apparent change, by-and-bye there was a little motion, one more little seed was laid in the scales and the balance turned in a moment. Thus silently the balance of a man's soul may be affected, and everything made ready for that one temptation by which the fatal turn is made, and the man becomes an open transgressor. Apparently insignificant agencies may gradually convey our strength from the right side to the wrong by grains and half-grains, till at last the balance is turned in the actual life and we are no more fit to be numbered with the visible saints of God.

Think again of this man's name. He is a "backslider," but what from? He is a man who knows the sweetness of the things of God and yet leaves off feeding upon them. He is one who has been favored to wait at the Lord's own table, and yet he deserts his honorable post, backslides from the things which he has known, and felt, and tasted, and handled, and rejoiced in— things that are the priceless gifts of God. He is a backslider from the condition in which he has enjoyed a heaven below; he is a backslider from the love of him who bought him with his blood; he slides back from the wounds of Christ, from the works of the Eternal Spirit, from the crown of life which hangs over his head, and from a familiar intercourse with God which angels might envy him. Had he not been so highly favored he could not have been so basely wicked. O fool and slow of heart to slide from wealth to poverty, from health to disease, from liberty to bondage, from light to darkness; from the love of God, from abiding in Christ, and from the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, into lukewarmness, worldliness, and sin. The text however, gives the man's name at greater length, "The backslider in heart." Now the heart is the fountain of evil. A man need not be a backslider in action to get the text fulfilled in him, he need only be a backslider in heart. All backsliding begins within, begins with the heart's growing lukewarm, begins with the love of Christ being less powerful in the soul. Perhaps you think that so long as backsliding is confined to the heart it does not matter much; but consider for a minute, and you will confess your error. If you went to your physician and said, "Sir, I feel a severe pain in my body," would you feel comforted if he replied "There is no local cause for your suffering, it arises entirely from disease of the heart"? Would you not be far more alarmed than before? A case is serious indeed when it involves the heart. The heart is hard to reach and difficult to understand, and moreover it is so powerful over the rest of the system, and has such

power to injure all the members of the body, that a disease in the heart is an injury to a vital organ, a pollution of the springs of life. A wound wherein there are a thousand wounds, a complicated wounding of all the members with a stroke. Look ye well then to your hearts, and pray, "O Lord cleanse thou the secret parts of our spirit and preserve us to thy eternal kingdom and glory!"

Now let us read this man's history—"he shall be filled with his own ways," from which it is clear that he falls into ways of his own. When he was in his right state he followed the Lord's ways, he delighted himself in the law of the Lord, and he gave him the desire of his heart; but now he has ways of his own which he prefers to the ways of God. And what comes of this perverseness? Does he prosper? No; he is before long filled with his own ways; we will see what that means.

The first kind of fullness with his own ways is absorption in his carnal pursuits. He has not much time to spend upon religion; he has other things to attend to. If you speak to him of the deep things of God he is weary of you, and even of the daily necessities of godliness he has no care to hear much, except at service time. He has his business to see to, or he has to go out to a dinner party, or a few friends are coming to spend the evening: in any case, his answer to you is "I pray thee have me excused." Now, this pre-occupation with trifles is always mischievous, for when the soul is filled with chaff there is no room left for wheat; when all your mind is taken up with frivolities, the weighty matters of eternity cannot enter. Many professed Christians spend far too much time in amusements, which they call recreation, but which I fear is far rather a restruction than a recreation. The pleasures, cares, pursuits, and ambitions of the world swell in the heart when they once enter, and by-and-bye they fill it completely. Like the young cuckoo in the sparrow's nest, worldliness grows and grows and tries its best to cast out the true owner of the heart. Whatever your soul is full of, if it be not full of Christ, it is in an evil case.

Then backsliders generally proceed a stage further, and become full of their own ways by beginning to pride themselves upon their condition and to glory in their shame. Not that they really are satisfied at heart, on the contrary, they have a suspicion that things are not quite as they ought to be, and therefore they put on a bold front and try to deceive themselves and others. It is rather dangerous to tell them of their faults, for they will not accept your rebuke, but will defend themselves, and even carry the war into your camp. They will say, "Ah, you are puritanical, strict and straight-laced, and your manners and ways do mischief rather than good." They would not bring up their children as you do yours, so they say. Their mouths are very full because their hearts are empty, and they talk very loudly in defense of themselves because their conscience has been making a great stir within them. They call sinful pleasure a little unbending of the bow, greed is prudence, covetousness is economy, and dishonesty is cleverness. It is dreadful to think that men who know better should attempt thus to excuse themselves. Generally the warmest defender of a sinful practice is the man who has the most qualms of conscience about it. He himself knows that he is not living as he should, but he does not intend to cave in just yet, nor at all if he can help it. He is filled with his ways in a boasted self-content as to them.

Ere long this fullness reaches another stage, for if the backslider is a gracious man at all, he encounters chastisement, and that from a rod of his own making. A considerable time elapses before you can eat bread of your own growing: the ground must be ploughed and sown, and the wheat has to come up, to ripen, and to be reaped and threshed and ground in the mill, and the flour must be kneaded and baked in the oven; but the bread comes to the table and is eaten at last. Even so the backslider must eat of the fruit of his own ways. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked, whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." Now look at the backslider eating the fruit of his ways. He

neglected prayer, and when he tries to pray he cannot; his powers of desire, emotion, faith, and entreaty have failed; he kneels awhile, but he cannot pray; the Spirit of supplications is grieved, and no longer helps his infirmities. He reaches down his Bible; he commences to read a chapter, but he has disregarded the word of God so long that he finds it to be more like a dead letter than a living voice, though it used to be a sweet book before he became a backslider. The minister, too, is altered; he used to hear him with delight; but now the poor preacher has lost all his early power, so the backslider thinks. Other people do not think so, the place is just as crowded, there are as many saints edified and sinners saved as before; but the wanderer in heart began criticizing, and now he is entangled in the habit, and he criticises every thing, but never feeds upon the truth at all. Like a madman at table he puts his fork into the morsel and holds it up, looks at it, finds fault with it, and throws it on the floor. Nor does he act better towards the saints in whose company he once delighted; they are dull society and he shuns them. Of all the things which bear upon his spiritual life he is weary, he has trifled with them, and now he cannot enjoy them. Hear him sing, or rather sigh —

“Thy saints are comforted, I know,
And love thy house of prayer;
I sometimes go where others go,
But find no comfort there.”

How can it be otherwise? He is drinking water out of his own cistern and eating the bread of which he sowed the corn some years ago. His ways have come home to him.

Chastisement also comes out of his conduct in other ways. He was very worldly and gave gay parties, and his girls have grown up and grieved him by their conduct. He himself went into sin, and now that his sons outdo his example, what can he say? Can he wonder at anything? Look at David's case. David fell into a gross sin, and soon Amnon his son rivalled him in iniquity. He murdered Uriah the Hittite, and Absalom murdered his brother Amnon. He rebelled against God, and lo, Absalom lifted up the standard of revolt against him. He disturbed the relationships of another man's family in a disgraceful manner, and behold his own family rent in pieces, and never restored to peace; so that even when he lay a-dying he had to say, “My house is not so with God.” He was filled with his own ways and it always will be so, even if the sin be forgotten. If you have sent forth a dove or a raven from the ark of your soul, it will come back to you just as you sent it out. May God save us from being backsliders lest the smooth current of our life should turn into a raging torrent of woe.

The fourth stage, blessed be God, is at length reached by gracious men and women, and what a mercy it is they ever do reach it! At last they become filled with their own ways in another sense; namely, satiated and dissatisfied, miserable and discontented. They sought the world and they gained it, but now it has lost all charms to them. They went after other lovers, but these deceivers have been false to them, and they wring their hands and say, “Oh that I could return to my first husband for it was better with me then than now.” Many have lived at a distance from Jesus Christ, but now they can bear it no longer; they cannot be happy till they return. Hear them cry in the language of the fifty-first psalm, “Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit.” But, I tell you, they cannot get back very easily. It is hard to retrace your steps from backsliding, even if it be but a small measure of it; but to get back from great wanderings is hard indeed, much harder than going over the road the first time. I believe that if the mental sufferings

of some returning backsliders could be written and faithfully published they would astound you, and be a more horrible story to read than all the torments of the Inquisition. What racks a man is stretched upon who has been unfaithful to his covenant with God! What fires have burned within the souls of those men who have been untrue to Christ and his cause! What dungeons, what grim and dark prisons under ground have saints of God lain in who have gone aside into By-path Meadow instead of keeping to The King's Highway. Their sighs and cries, for which after all they have learned to be thankful, are dolorous and terrible to listen to, and make us learn that he who sins must smart, and especially if he be a child of God, for the Lord has said of his people, "you only have I known of all the people of the earth, therefore I will punish you for your iniquities." Whoever may go unchastised, a child of God never shall: the Lord will let his adversaries do a thousand things and not punish them in this life, since he reserves vengeance for them in the life to come, but as for his own children, they cannot sin without being visited with stripes.

Beloved friends, let all go straight away to the cross at once for fear we should be backsliders—

"Come, let us to the Lord our God
With contrite hearts return
Our God is gracious, nor will leave
The penitent to mourn."

Let us confess every degree and form of backsliding, every wandering of heart, every decline of love, every wavering of faith, every flagging of zeal, every dulness of desire, every failure of confidence. Behold, the Lord says unto us, "Return"; therefore let us return. Even if we be not backsliders it will do us no hurt to come to the cross as penitents, indeed, it is well to abide there evermore. O Spirit of the living God, preserve us in believing penitence all our days.

II. I have but little time for the second part of my text. Excuse me therefore if I do not attempt to go into it very deeply. As it is true of the backslider that he grows at last full of that which is within him and his wickedness, it is true also of the Christian, that in pursuing the paths of righteousness and the way of faith, he becomes filled and contented too. That which grace has placed within him fills him in due time.

Here then we have the good man's name and history.

Notice first, his name. It is a very remarkable thing that as a backslider, if you call out his name, will not as a rule answer to it, even so a good man will not acknowledge the title here assigned him. Where is the good man? Know that every man here who is right before God will pass the question on, saying, "There is none good save One, that is, God." The good man will also question my text and say "I cannot feel satisfied with myself." No, dear friend, but mind you read the words aright. It does not say "satisfied with himself," no truly good man ever was self-satisfied, and when any talk as if they are self-satisfied it is time to doubt whether they know much about the matter. All the good men I have ever met with have always wanted to be better; they have longed for something higher than as yet they have reached. They would not own to it that they were satisfied, and they certainly were by no means satisfied with themselves. The text does not say that they are, but it says something that reads so much like it that care is needed. Now, if I should seem to say this morning that a good man looks within and is quite satisfied with what he finds there, please let me say at once, I mean nothing of the sort. I should like to say exactly what the text means, but I do not know quite whether I shall manage to do it, except you will help me by not misunderstanding me, even if there should be a strong temptation to do so. Here is the good man's history, he is

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“satisfied from himself,” but first I must read his name again, though he does not own to it, what is he good for? He says, “good for nothing,” but in truth he is good for much when the Lord uses him. Remember that he is good because the Lord has made him over again by the Holy Spirit. Is not that good which God makes? When he created nature at the first he said of all things that they were very good; how could they be otherwise, since he made them? So in the new creation a new heart and right spirit are from God, and must be good. Where there is grace in the heart the grace is good and makes the heart good. A man who has the righteousness of Jesus, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is good in the sight of God.

A good man is on the side of good. If I were to ask, who is on the side of good? we would not pass on that question. No, we would step out and say “I am. I am not all I ought to be, or wish to be, but I am on the side of justice, truth, and holiness; I would live to promote goodness, and even die rather than become the advocate of evil.” And what is the man who loves that which is good? Is he evil? I trow not. He who truly loves that which is good must be in a measure good himself. Who is he that strives to be good, and groans and sighs over his failures, yea and rules his daily life by the laws of God? Is he not one of the world’s best men? I trust without self-righteousness the grace of God has made some of us good in this sense, for what the Spirit of God has made is good, and if in Christ Jesus we are new creatures, we cannot contradict Solomon, nor criticize the Bible if it calls such persons good, though we dare not call ourselves good.

Now, a good man’s history is this, “He is satisfied from himself.”

That means first that he is independent of outward circumstances. He does not derive satisfaction from his birth, or honors, or properties; but that which fills him with content is within himself. Our hymn puts it so truly—

I need not go abroad for joys,
 I have a feast at home,
 My sighs are turned into songs,
 My heart has ceased to roam.
 Down from above the blessed Dove
 Is come into my breast,
 To witness thine eternal love
 And give my spirit rest.”

Other men must bring music from abroad if they have any, but in the gracious man’s bosom there lives a little bird that sings sweetly to him. He has a flower in his own garden more sweet than any he could buy in the market or find in the king’s palace. He may be poor, but still he would not change his estate in the kingdom of heaven for all the grandeur of the rich. His joy and peace are not even dependent upon the health of his body, he is often well in soul when sick as to his flesh; he is frequently full of pain and yet perfectly satisfied. He may carry about with him an incurable disease which he knows will shorten and eventually end his life, but he does not look to this poor life for satisfaction, he carries that within him which creates immortal joy: the love of God shed abroad in his soul by the Holy Ghost yields a perfume sweeter than the flowers of Paradise. The fulfillment of the text is partly found in the fact that the good man is independent of his surroundings.

And he is also independent of the praise of others. The backslider keeps easy because the minister thinks well of him and Christian friends think well of him, but the genuine Christian who is living near to God thinks little of the verdict of men. What other people think of him is not his

chief concern; he is sure that he is a child of God, he knows he can say, "Abba, Father," he glories that for him to live is Christ, and to die is gain, and therefore he does not need the approbation of others to buoy up his confidence. He runs alone, and does not need, like a weakly child, to be carried in arms. He knows whom he has believed, and his heart rests in Jesus; thus he is satisfied not from other people and from their judgment, but "from himself."

Then again, the Christian man is content with the well of upspringing water of life which the Lord has placed within him. There, my brethren, up on the everlasting hills is the divine reservoir of all-sufficient grace, and down here in our bosom is a spring which bubbles up unto everlasting life. It has been welling up in some of us these five and-twenty years, but why is it so? The grand secret is that there is an unbroken connection between the little spring within the renewed breast and that vast unfathomed fount of God, and because of this the well-spring never fails; in summer it still continues to flow. And now if you ask me if I am dissatisfied with the spring within my soul which is fed by the all-sufficiency of God, I reply, no, I am not. If you could by any possibility cut the connection between my soul and my Lord I should despair altogether, but as long as none can separate me from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord, I am satisfied and at rest. Like Naphtali we are "satisfied with favor and full of the blessing of the LORD."

Faith is in the good man's heart and he is satisfied with what faith brings him, for it conveys to him the perfect pardon of his sin. Faith brings him nearer to Christ. Faith brings him adoption into the family of God. Faith secures him conquest over temptation. Faith procures for him everything he requires. He finds that by believing he has all the blessings of the covenant daily to enjoy. Well may he be satisfied with such an enriching grace. The just shall live by faith.

In addition to faith, he has another filling grace called hope, which reveals to him the world to come, and gives him assurance that when he falls asleep he will sleep in Jesus, and that when he awakes he will arise in the likeness of Jesus. Hope delights him with the promise that his body shall rise, and that in his flesh he shall see God. This hope of his sets the pearly gates wide open before him, reveals the streets of gold, and makes him hear the music of the celestial harpers. Surely a man may well be satisfied with this.

The godly heart is also satisfied with what love brings him; for love though it seem but a gentle maid, is strong as a giant, and becomes in some respects the most potent of all the graces. Love first opens wide herself like the flowers in the sunshine, and drinks in the love of God, and then she joys in God and begins to sing:—

"I am so glad that Jesus loves me."

She loves Jesus, and there is such an interchange of delight between the love of her soul to Christ and the love of Christ to her, that heaven itself can scarce be sweeter. He who knew this deep mysterious love will be more than filled with it, he will need to be enlarged to hold the bliss which it creates. The love of Jesus is known, but yet it passeth knowledge. It fills the entire man, so that he has no room for the idolatrous love of the creature, he is satisfied from himself and asks no other joy.

Beloved, when the good man is enabled by divine grace to live in obedience to God, he must as a necessary consequence, enjoy peace of mind. His hope is alone fixed on Jesus, but a life which evidences his possession of salvation casts many a sweet ingredient into his cup. He who takes the yoke of Christ upon him and learns of him finds rest unto his soul. When we keep his commandments we consciously enjoy his love, which we could not do if we walked in opposition to his will. To

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know that you have acted from a pure motive, to know that you have done the right is a grand means of full content. What matters the frown of foes or the prejudice of friends, if the testimony of a good conscience is heard within? We dare not rely upon our own works, neither have we had a desire or need to do so, for our Lord Jesus has saved us everlastingly; still, “Our rejoicing is this, the testimony our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world.”

The Christian needs to maintain unbroken fellowship with Jesus his Lord if he would be good as a soldier of Christ, but if his communion be broken his satisfaction will depart. If Jesus be within we shall be satisfied from within, but not else; if our fellowship with him be kept up, and it may be from day to day, and month to month, and year to year (and why should it ever be snapped at all), then the satisfaction will continue and the soul will continue to be full even to the brim with the bliss which God alone can give. If we are by the Holy Spirit made to be abundant in labor or patient in suffering, if, in a word, we resign ourselves fully up to God, we shall find a fullness of his grace placed within ourselves. An enemy compared some of us to cracked vessels, and we may humbly accept the description. We do find it difficult to retain good things, they run away from our leaking pitchers; but I will tell how a cracked pitcher can be kept continually full. Put it in the bottom of an ever-flowing river, and it must be full. Even so though we are leaking and broken, if we abide in the love of Christ we shall be filled with his fullness. Such an experience is possible; we may be

“Plunged in the Godhead’s deepest sea,
And lost in his immensity,”

Then we shall be full—full to running over; as the Psalmist says, “my cup runneth over.” The man who walks in God’s ways, obediently resting wholly upon Christ, looking for all his supplies to the great eternal deeps, that is the man who will be filled—filled with the very things which he has chosen for his own, filled with those things which are his daily delight and desire. Well may the faithful believer be filled, for he has eternity to fill him—The Lord has loved him with an everlasting love; —there is the eternity past: “The mountains shall depart and the hills be removed, but my covenant shall not depart from thee”—there is the eternity to come. He has infinity, yea the infinite One himself, for the Father is his Father, the Son is his Savior, the Spirit of God dwells within him—the Trinity may well fill the heart of man. The believer has omnipotence to fill him, for all power is given unto Christ, and of that power Christ will give to us according as we have need. Living in Christ and hanging upon him from day to day, beloved, we shall have a “peace of God which passeth all understanding to keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” May we enjoy this peace and magnify the name of the Lord for ever and ever. Amen.

Portion of Scripture read before sermon—John 15:1-17.
Hymns from “Our Own Hymn Book”—757, 775, 809.

Godly Fear and its Goodly Consequence

A sermon (No. 1290) delivered at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington,
by C. H. Spurgeon.

“In the fear of the LORD is strong confidence: and his children shall have a place of refuge.”—Proverbs 14:26.

In the Book of Proverbs you meet with sentences of pithy wisdom, which to all appearance belong entirely to this world, and pertain to the economy of the life that now is. I do not know whether it is true, but it was said that years ago our friends in Scotland had a little book widely circulated and read by all their children which consisted of the Proverbs of Solomon, and that it was the means of making the Scotch, as a generation, more canny, shrewd, and wiser in business than any other people. If it be so, I should suggest that such a book be scattered throughout England as well, and indeed, anywhere and everywhere. The book might have been written in some parts of it by Franklin or Poor Richard, for it contains aphorisms and maxims of worldly wisdom, pithy but profound, sometimes poetic, but always practical. Has it never surprised you that there should be such sentences as these in the book of inspiration—secular proverbs, for so they are—secular proverbs intermixed with spiritual proverbs—the secular and the spiritual all put together without any division or classification? You might have expected to find one chapter dedicated to worldly business, and another chapter devoted to golden rules concerning the spiritual life; but it is not so. They occur without any apparent order, or at any rate without any order of marked division between the secular and the spiritual: and I am very glad of it. The more I read the Book of Proverbs the more thankful I am that there is no such division, because the hard and fast line by which men of the world, and I fear some Christians, have divided the secular from the spiritual, is fraught with innumerable injuries. Religion, my dear friends, is not a thing for churches and chapels alone; it is equally meant for counting-houses and workshops, for kitchens and drawing-rooms. The true Christian is not only to be seen in the singing of hymns and the offerings, of prayers, but he is to be distinguished by the honesty and integrity, the courage and the faithfulness of his ordinary character. In the streets and in the marketplaces or wherever else the providence of God may call him, he witnesses the good confession. It is easy to secularize religion in a wrong sense. There are many I doubt not that desecrate the pulpit to worldly ends. How can it be otherwise if “livings” are to be bought and sold? I cannot doubt that the sacred desk has been a place simply for earning emoluments, or for gathering fame, and that sacred oratory has been as mean in the sight of God as the common language of the streets. I do not doubt that many people have put religion as a show-card into their business, and have tried to make money by it. Like Mr. By-ends, they thought that if by being religious they could get a good smile—if by being religious they could be introduced into respectable society—if by being religious they would bring some excellent religious customers to their shop, and if indeed, by being religious they could get themselves to be esteemed, it would be a very proper thing. Now, this is making religion into irreligion; this is turning Christianity into selfishness; this is the Judas-spirit of putting Christ up for pieces of silver, and making as good a bargain as you can out of him; and this will lead to damnation, and nothing short of it, in the case of anybody who deliberately attempts it. Woe to that man! He is a son of perdition. Better for him

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had he never been born. Instead of profaning the spiritual, the right thing is to spiritualize the secular till the purity of your motives and the sanctity of your conscience in ordinary pursuits shall cause the division to vanish. Why, there should be about an ordinary meal enough religion to make it resemble a sacrament. Our garments we should wear, and wear them out in the service of the Lord until they acquired as much sanctity as the very vestments of a consecrated priesthood. There should be a devout spirit in everything we do. "Whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do it in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks unto God and the Father by him." No, it is not a less holy thing to be the Christian merchant than to be the Christian minister. It is not a less holy thing to be the mother of mercy to your own children than to be the sister of mercy to the sick children of other people in the hospital ward. It is not a less sacred thing to be the married wife than it is to be the virgin consecrated to Christ. Wherever ye are, if ye discharge the duties of your calling as in the sight of God, ye can by prayer and thanksgiving saturate your lives with godliness and make every action drip with sanctity, till, like Ashur of old, it shall be said of you that you have dipped your foot in oil. So shall you leave the mark of grace wherever your footstep is put. Let us endeavor to be so minded, and forbear to sort out our actions, saying to ourselves, "In this thing I am to be a Christian: in the other thing I am to be a business man." "Business is business," says somebody. Yes, I know it is, and it has no business to be such business as it very often is. It ought to be Christianized, and the Christian that does not Christianize business is a dead Christian—a savourless salt; wherewith shall such salt be savoured when the salt itself has lost its savor? Mix up your proverbs. Be as practical as Poor Richard counsels, and then be as spiritual as Christ commands. You need not be a fool because you are a Christian. There is no necessity to be outwitted in business.

There is no necessity to be less shrewd, less sharp. There is no necessity to be less pushing because you are a Christian. True religion is sanctified common sense, and if some people had got a little common sense with their religion, and some others had got a little more religion with their common sense, they would both be the better for it. And this Book of Proverbs is just this common sense, which is the rarest of all senses, saturated and sanctified by the presence of God and the power of the gospel ennobling the pursuits of the creature.

Let this suffice by way of introduction. Now we are going to plunge into the text. "In the fear of the LORD is strong confidence: and his children shall have a place of refuge."

I. What is this fear of the LORD? The expression is used in Scripture for all true godliness. It is constantly the short way of expressing real faith, hope, love, holiness of living, and every grace which makes up true godliness. But why was fear selected? Why did not it say, "Trust in God is strong confidence"? Has not religion been commonly described by faith rather than by fear? In legal indictments it is said sometimes of a man that he, "not having the fear of God before his eyes," did so and so. Why is the fear of God selected? One would say that according to the general theology of this period we ought to have selected faith. But the Spirit of God has not given us the phrase—faith in God. He puts fear, because after all, there is a something more tender, more touching, more real about fear than there is about some people's faith, which faith may very readily verge upon presumption. But in speaking of fear we must always discriminate. There is a fear with which a Christian has nothing to do. The fear of the slave who dreads a task-master we have now escaped from. At least we ought to be free from such bondage, for we are not under the law, which is the task-master, but we are under grace, which is a paternal spirit and has given us the liberty of sons. Brethren, if you labor under any dread of God which amounts to a slavish fear of him, do not cultivate it. But ask God to give you that perfect love of which John tells us that it casteth out fear,

because fear hath torment. Do not be afraid of God whatever he does with you. The kind of fear commended in the text is not such as appals the senses and scares the thoughts. It is a fear that has not anything like being afraid mixed with it. It is quite another kind of fear. It is what we commonly call filial fear of God, like the child's fear of his father. Just think for a minute, what is a child's fear of his father? I do not mean a naughty child, a child that is obstinate, but a young man who loves his father—who is his father's friend, his father's most familiar acquaintance. Thank God some of us have children whom we can look upon as near and dear friends as well as dutiful sons and daughters, to whom we can speak with much confidence and love. What is the fear that a well-ordered, well-disciplined, beloved child has of his own father?

Well, first, he has an awe of him which arises out of admiration of his character. If his father be what he should be, he is to that son a real model. The youth looks upon what his father does as exactly what he would like to do, and what he aims to copy. His judgment is to his son almost infallible. At any rate, if he sees reason to differ from his father, he is a long while before he brings himself to prefer his own judgment. He has seen his father's wisdom in other matters so often that he mistrusts his own apprehension, and would rather trust to what his father tells him. He has a profound conviction that his father is good, kind, wise, and could not do anything, or ask him to do anything, which would not promote his own good. So he feels a sort of awe of him—a fear of him—which prevents his questioning what his father does as he would have questioned anybody else. He is prone to conjecture that his father may have got some reason behind that would explain what he does not understand. He would not give another person credit for having that concealed virtue, but he has such an esteem for his father—his dear father, that he fears to raise any questions about his father's character, his conduct, or his conclusions. In fact, that character so rules his admiration and commands his respect that he does not think of questioning it. Well now dear friends, how far higher must be our fear of God in this view of the matter. How could we question him? Nay, whatever he does we say, "It is the LORD; let him do what seemeth him good." Like Aaron, when his two sons were stricken down, and that as a summary punishment of their transgression, it should be said of us as it was recorded of him—"He held his peace." Aaron could not say anything against God, however severe the stroke was. So brethren, we cannot judge God. I hope we have given that folly over. We ought to be afraid to do it. Sometimes terrible horror takes hold upon me, when I now and then meet with a brother or sister (I hope in Christ) who will tell me that God has taken away a dear child and they cannot forgive him. "That cannot be right, sir." Oh, it is a dreadful thing for us once to get into such a state of heart that we question anything that God does! No: "Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?" Is it meet, think you, to imagine that our heavenly Father can do anything that is unkind or unwise towards us? It is not possible. The Lord has done it. Let that be your ultimatum. We fear him too much to question what he does. Our reverence of him makes us jealous of ourselves.

A child, also, without any fear of his father in the wrong sense, is sure to be very deferential in his father's presence. If his father be in the way, and if quiet be wanted in the house, he will draw his shoes off his feet and check the ebullition of his spirits, lest his father should hear and he should disturb the unruffled calm. He watches carefully, and studiously guards his conduct, lest anything he does amiss should reach his father's ear and grieve his father's heart. Now it would be very wrong for a child merely to restrain himself in his father's presence out of respect for him, and then break the bounds with unbridled licentiousness in his father's absence, as I fear many do. But you and I need not fall into this danger because we are always in the presence of our heavenly Father

in every place. Who among us that fears God as he ought would wish to do anything anywhere which is wrong and offensive to him, seeing that

“Where e’er we roam, where e’er we rest,
We are surrounded still with God”?

Daring were the hardihood that could insult a king to his face and commit trespass in his presence. A sense of the presence of God, a conscience that prompts one to say, “Thou God seest me,” fosters in the soul a healthy fear which you can easily see would rather inspire than intimidate a man. It is a filial, childlike fear, in the presence of one whom we deeply reverence, lest we should do anything contrary to his mind and will. So then, there is a fear which arises out of a high appreciation of God’s character, and a fear of the same kind which arises out of a sense of his presence.

Further, every child of the sort I have described fears at any time to intrude upon the father’s prerogative. When he is at home he feels that there are some points in which he may take many liberties. Is it not his own home? has he not always been there? But there are some things of which, if they were suggested to him to do, he would say, “Why, it is impossible. Only my father may do that. I cannot give orders as if I were the master. I cannot expect to govern. I am here and I am glad to be here, but I am under my father and I must not presume to exercise the control to which he has an exclusive right.” Now that is one of the fears which a child of God has. “No,” says he, “how should I venture to stand in the place of God? God bids me: it is not for me to demur or to ask, ‘Shall I or shall I not?’ That were to usurp the place of ruler, to be a master to myself, to ignore the fact that the Lord is alone the ruler. Such a thing God appoints;” then it is not for me to wish the appointment different. Should it be according to my mind? Am I the comptroller? Is divine providence put under my supervision? “No,” says the child of God, “I cannot do anything so inconsistent with a dutiful allegiance.” Some things there are which he feels would be arrogating a position unbecoming altogether in a creature, and much more unbecoming in a creature that has received the spirit of fear whereby he cries “Abba, Father.” O brethren and sisters, it is well to have a fear of getting to feel great—a fear of getting to feel good—a fear of getting to feel anything that should violate your fealty, or disregard the worshipful reverence you owe to the Most High, as if you took sinister license because you were given a sacred liberty, or refused to do homage because you had received favor. Oh no, the virtuous child does not thus slight his indulgent father; neither must we ever think irreverently of our covenant God.

Holy fear leads us to dread anything which might cause our Father’s displeasure. A good child would not do anything which would make his father feel vexed with him. “It vexes me,” says he, “if it vexes my father.” So let there be always with us a fear to offend our loving God. He is jealous, remember that. It is one of the most solemn truths in the Bible, “The LORD thy God is a jealous God.” We might have guessed it, for great love has always that dangerous neighbor jealousy not far off. They that love not have no hate, no jealousy, but where there is an intense, a definite love, like that which glows in the bosom of God, there must be jealousy. And oh, how jealous he is of the hearts of his people! How determined he is to have all their love! How I have known him to take away the objects of their attachment, one after another—break their idols, and deprive them of their precious vanities—all to get their hearts wholly to himself, because he knew it would never be right with them while they had a divided heart. It was injurious to themselves and so he is jealous of that which injures them, and jealous of that which dishonors him.

Let us have this holy fear very strong upon us, and we shall avoid anything which might grieve the Spirit of God. A true child of the kind I have tried to describe—and I hope there are some about—is always afraid of doing anything which might cast a suspicion upon his love and his respect to his father. If he feels that he has done something which might appear discourteous, or be interpreted as akin to rebellion, he is eager to explain at once that he did not mean it so. Or, if he has made a mistake, he is eager at once to rectify it, and would say, “Father, do not read my conduct severely. I love you with all my heart. I may have erred; I have erred; I beg to express my deep regret and repentance.” He could not bear it that his father should think, “My child has no esteem for me, no respect for me, no love for me.” It ought to go hard with every Christian when he thinks he has given God cause to doubt his love. I should suspect he has when he finds cause to suspect it himself. When you say in your soul, “Do I love the Lord or not?”—just think whether God may not be saying it—whether Jesus Christ, the ever blessed, may not feel cause next time he meets you to say to you, “Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Indeed, dost thou love me?” Three times he may have to put that question because you have given him a treble cause for mistrusting you, as to whether, indeed, your heart is right before him. We know that the Lord knows all things, and he knows that we love him. We fall back on that, but still we would not so act that the action should look as if we did not. We do not want so to think, or speak, or do, that anything about us should give just cause for suspicion to the All-wise One as to the reality of our professions of love.

Fear, then—this blessed fear—is what we must all cultivate, and the Lord grant that we may have it, fully matured and fitly exercised, for “blessed is the man that feareth always.”

II. But now, giving our meditation a more cheerful turn, let us follow the teaching of our text. It says that this fear has strong confidence in it.

Wherein is that confidence seen? The history of men that have feared God may perhaps enlighten us a little on this matter. It is written concerning Job that he was a man that “feared God and eschewed evil.” Satan was permitted to tempt him and he came into deep trouble, but how blessed was the confidence of Job in all his trouble. How brave a thing it was to say, “The LORD gave and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD!” How grand it was of him to say in answer to his wife, “What? shall we receive good at the hand of the LORD, and shall we not receive evil?” Best of all, that was one of the noblest resolves that ever mortal uttered, “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.” A man up to his neck in trouble—nay, with the billows going over him, and yet his confidence in God is not moved—nay, not for a single moment. He declares that if God does not set him right now while he lives, yet he believes that his God, his kinsman, lives, and that if he dies, yet after his death God would avenge him. “I know,” says he, “that my avenger liveth, and though after my death the worms devour this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God, and I shall get right somehow.” He feels sure about that so his confidence is strong, and it relaxes not in time of trouble. You see the like implicit confidence in Habakkuk. He draws a dreadful picture—“Though the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labor of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stall.” He foresees the full stress of the calamity, and prophecies that it shall come to pass. “Yet,” saith he, “will I rejoice in the LORD. I will joy in the God of my salvation.” That was the simple consequence of his fear of the Lord. He feared and therefore trusted. He knew the grandeur of the divine character. He trembled to impute wrong or unfaithfulness to God; he feared him too much to have one hard thought of him, or to utter one mistrustful word about him; so in the grandeur of that fear he felt a strong confidence. Both Job and Habakkuk experienced and

even tested this, and many there be schooled in the same school who have spoken after the same valiant fashion when all God's waves and billows have gone over them.

That confidence will not only appear in time of trouble, but it will appear in acts of obedience. The Lord calls his people to obey him, and sometimes obedience requires great self-denial. We may have to surrender what we greatly prize for Christ's sake. It is not always easy to be confident in doing that which demands quick decision. We may be prone to parley, or to do as though we were driven, yielding to stern compulsion rather than surrendering with sweet submission. But to do it with strong confidence can only come to us from having the fear of God before us. Now, Abraham feared the Lord with all his heart, and when the Lord said, "Take now thy son, thy only son, Isaac, whom thou lovest, and offer him up for a burnt offering upon a mountain which I will tell thee of"—if he had not feared God wonderfully, and dreaded to do anything that would look like rebellion against his orders, he would have said, "What! commit murder—for it will come to that—slay my own dear child!" But no, though he could not understand it, he felt sure that God had some meaning in it—that God could not be ordering him to do what was wrong—that there must be a way by which it would be made right. Besides, he remembered that in Isaac was his seed to be called, and his descendants were to come out of Isaac. How, then, can God keep his promise? How can he fulfill the covenant? This also did not distress Abraham, but being "strong in faith, he staggered not through unbelief." Hence he rose up early in the morning and prepared the wood. I have looked with tears at the spectacle of that old man, far advanced in years, preparing the wood, and then getting up early and putting the wood upon Isaac, and then going with him, and telling the servants at the bottom of the hill that they must stay lest they should interrupt the consummation of that wondrous deed of faith. And then Isaac says to him, "My father, behold the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" It must have brought the heart of the father into his mouth. Still he seemed to swallow that dreadful thought and he said, "My son, God will provide himself a lamb." And so he takes him and lays him on the altar, and draws a knife—going through with it—right through with it, to the very last, with wondrous heroism; till the Lord stayed his hand. But for his deep fear of God he never would have had the confidence to go through with such an act of obedience.

Although the Lord does not call you and me to such strong tests as that, yet he does try our faith. I have known sometimes when a man in order to do his duty has had before him what appeared to be a terrible dilemma—"I shall have to give up that situation. If I do that, what is to become of my children? Were I a single man I would do it without hesitation. I would face poverty; I would go down to the docks to ask for day labor. But there are the children. The children—what is to become of the children?" You see you cannot feel like Abraham who gave up the darling child for God. You are staggered. Yes, but if your fear of God is very strong you will say, "I cannot make a compromise with any sin. I cannot persevere with that sinful line of business in which I am engaged. Is this the ultimatum? then it admits of no alternative. If God should leave me and my little children to starve, yet I must cede all into God's hands. It is his to provide, not mine. He does not allow me to do a wrong thing under any circumstances. So here goes for God and for righteousness." If you have got a great fear of God that is what you will do, but if you have not the reverence you will not have the confidence. For lack thereof you will timorously shrink back into the sin which galls you. May God give you the heroic confidence which springs of a deep fear of him.

The same confidence, the same loyalty to God will develop itself when persecution is involved. There are in this world men who hate true religion, and the experiences which occur to true believers are consequently often very painful. If we have much fear of God we shall have strong confidence, but if we have not the fear of God then the fear of man will make us waver. See yonder; Nebuchadnezzar's image of gold on the plains of Dura. A great many people stand about the colossal figure who are of the race of Shem, monotheists— that is to say, believers in one God; not polytheists whose creed might excuse their idolatry. Hark now! At the sound of flute, harp, sackbut and all kinds of music, the herald proclaims that whosoever will not bow down and worship the image that Nebuchadnezzar the king has set up shall be cast into a burning fiery furnace. How quickly does this recreant race of Protestant people swallow their principles. See how they succumb with their heads in the dust, worshipping the golden image. They had not much fear of the one God, and so they break all his laws. They have more fear of Nebuchadnezzar and his furnace than they have of Jehovah the God of Israel. But here are three young men, captives in Babylon, who stand before the king, and when asked why it is that they have not worshipped his gods and the image which he has set up declare that they will not worship his god or fall down before his image. They speak positively. They say, "Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us, but, if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not worship thy gods or the image which thou hast set up." Look at the king's fury. See how the devil lights up his face with lurid glare, how a legion of devils possesses him. "Heat that furnace seven times hotter than it is wont," says he, "and cast these daring rebels therein." The men are calm, unrushed by his rage, unmoved by his threats. They do not even take off their hats to him. There they stand in their hosen and their hats calm and quiet. They defy the king because who need have a fear of Nebuchadnezzar that has a fear of Jehovah? Who need fear a king that fears the king of kings? So they consent to be put into the furnace, for in the fear of the Lord there is strong confidence. It was bravely done by old Hugh Latimer when he preached before Henry the Eighth. It was the custom of the Court preacher to present the king with something on his birthday, and Latimer presented Henry VIII with a pocket-handkerchief with this text in the corner, "Whoremongers and adulterers God will judge"; a very suitable text for bluff Henry. And then he preached a sermon before his most gracious majesty against sins of lust, and he delivered himself with tremendous force, not forgetting or abridging the personal application. And the king said that next time Latimer preached—the next Sunday—he should apologize, and he would make him so mold his sermon as to eat his own words. Latimer thanked the king for letting him off so easily. When the next Sunday came he stood up in the pulpit and said: "Hugh Latimer, thou art this day to preach before the high and mighty prince Henry, King of Great Britain and France. If thou sayest one single word that displeases his Majesty he will take thy head off; therefore, mind what thou art at." But then said he, "Hugh Latimer, thou art this day to preach before the Lord God Almighty, who is able to cast both body and soul into hell, and so tell the king the truth outright." And so he did. His performance was equal to his resolution. However, the king did not take off his head, he respected him all the more. The fear of the Lord gave him strong confidence, as it will any who cleave close to their colors.

"Fear him, ye saints, and ye will then
Have nothing else to fear."

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Drive right straight ahead in the fear of the everlasting God, and whoever comes in your way had better mind what he is at. It is yours to do what is right, and bear everything they devise that is wrong. God will bless you therein, and you shall praise him therefore.

Moreover this fear of God declares itself in other things besides braving trouble and enduring. It will be a tower of strength to you when you stand up to bear witness to the truth. Have you anything to say for Jesus, you will say it in a very cowardly and sneaking manner if you have not a great fear of God; but if you fear God much you will be like Peter and John, of whom when the council saw them it is said, “they wondered at their boldness.” The fear of God will make you bold in speaking God’s word. Or should you fall down in sheer exhaustion, instead of standing up in sound enthusiasm, the fear of God will prove a potent restorative. Even if you are overthrown for a time you shall overcome at the last. In the Book of Micah we read, “Rejoice not over me, O mine enemy, for though I fall, yet shall I rise again.” He that really fears God expects to conquer, even though for a time he seems to be defeated. This fear will come out gloriously in confidence in the hour of death. If we fear God we shall like Stephen fall asleep, even if it be amid a shower of stones. Glorious is the confidence with which Christians depart from this life when they can depend on the God whom they fear with reverence and serve with readiness.

III. I must hasten on to notice in the third place, though not to dwell upon it as I could wish, whereupon this confidence is built. The fear of the Lord brings strong confidence, but why?

Why; because they that fear God know God to be infinitely loving to them, to be immutable and unchangeable, to be unsearchably wise, and omnipotently strong on their behalf. How can they help having confidence in such a God? They know next, that a full atonement has been made for their sins. Jesus has borne the wrath of God for them: how can they help being confident? They know that this same Jesus has risen from the dead and lives to plead for them, and in their ears they can hear the almighty plea of Jesus ever speaking in their favor. How can they help having confidence? They believe that this same Jesus is head over all things to his church, and ruler of providence. How can they help being confident in him? To him all power is given in heaven and in earth. They believe that everything is working together for their good. How can they help being confident, I say again? They believe that the Spirit of God is in them, dwells in them. What confidence can be too staunch and steadfast for men who know this to be true? They know that there is a mysterious union between them and the Son of God; that they are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. What confidence can be too implicit? They know that there are two immutable things in which it is impossible for God to lie— his promise and his oath, whereby he has given them strong consolation. With such strong consolation they may well have strong confidence.

“The gospel bears my spirits up;
A faithful and unchanging God
Lays the foundation of my hope
In oaths and promises and blood.”

Oh, what unwavering confidence may be based on this firm foundation which God has laid for his people. But time fails me; I cannot enlarge upon it.

IV. Let me therefore close with a fourth reflection, how this confidence and this fear are favored of God! Observe the promise: “His children shall have a place of refuge.” So then, you see that those who fear God and have confidence in him are his children. They have a childlike fear, and

then they have a childlike confidence, and these are the marks that they are his children. And what a favor is this! “To as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God.” Oh, dear friends, there is a heaven lying asleep inside those words—his children. There is paradise eternal couched within that word—Abba, Father. If you know how to say it with the spirit of adoption, you have the earnest of the inheritance within you: you have got a heaven, a young heaven within your spirit. Oh, be glad! To be a child of God is greater than to be an angel. Why, were Gabriel capable of envy he would envy you who are the children of the Most High, however poor or sick or downcast you may be. “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the sons of God.”

“His children shall have a place of refuge.” Take heart, for this is a grand thought for you that fear him and confide in him; you shall have a place of refuge. There is Noah. All the world is about to be drowned. In vain might one climb to the tops of the mountains, for the waters will cover their highest pinnacle. Must Noah be drowned then? Is his destruction inevitable? No, but there is an ark for him. God will not pull up the flood-gates of heaven till Noah is shut in the ark. There is Lot—naughty Lot. He has been acting very badly, and has got away there down in Sodom. Still, he is a child of God and he is vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked, proving that he has some fear of God in his heart. Well, what does the Lord say? “Haste thee,” he says, “for I cannot do anything till thou hast come out hither.” Lot must get to Zoar. There must be a little city to shelter Lot. God cannot burn Sodom and Gomorrah till he has got Lot safe out of the way. He must find a refuge for his children. Well, there are his people down in Egypt. God is going to smite the firstborn and he has loosed an angel to do it, and that angel is swift in his message—swift to do his bidding, and he will slay the firstborn of Israel as well as of Egypt when he goes upon his terrible errand. He will make no distinctions. Yes, but there are the bloodmarks over the door, and the angel sees that the bloody sacrifice has been offered in that house and he passes by. God’s people must have a place of refuge, and he found them one in Egypt when the angel was let loose, and the angel of death was there. So it happened all along through Scripture history. God sent a famine into the land, and after the famine some that had fled the country came back, and among the rest, Naomi and Ruth. What is to become of Ruth? She has been a heathen. She has come to fear God. She has put her trust under the shadow of the Almighty’s wings. What is to become of Ruth? Well, she must go and glean in the fields of him who is next of kin and she found a place of refuge in his bosom. God takes care, you see, of those that fear him and have confidence in him. But there is another great famine, and all the country is barren for three years long. According to the word of God there is neither dew nor rain, and there is no food, but there is one man there who fears the Lord above all the rest, and that is Elijah. Well, he must have a place of refuge. There, you see, by the brook Cherith he sits him down, and ravens that were more likely to rob him than to feed him come to bring him bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening. I heard some time ago of a poor woman who was very hard pressed for food, but she remembered the promise of God, and she knelt down and appealed to him that he would provide her bread. Just afterwards a friend came in who brought a loaf of bread to her, saying that this loaf of bread was bought for her husband, but her husband was not well and he was unable to eat it because they found that a mouse had been eating it, and it so turned him that he could not eat the bread. But the loaf was not hurt: “and,” said the friend, “I dare say you will eat it; I have cut away the part that the mouse touched.” Oh, yes, God can make a mouse do it or a raven do it. His people shall have a place of refuge. When the brooks are dried up and the ravens are gone there is a widow woman over there

who has to sustain Elijah, and that woman's cruse is nearly empty and her barrel of meal nearly all spent; but still her house is the place of refuge for Elijah, and God provides for him there. When the Lord Jesus was here he knew that Jerusalem was to be destroyed, and he knew that his disciples were to be there, but if history is to be believed—and I suppose it is—no Christians perished in the destruction of Jerusalem; yet they were very numerous. There is no mention of them by Josephus. They were all gone away, many of them to the little city called Pella, and other places beyond the river Jordan, because Jesus told them when they saw Jerusalem compassed with armies they might know that the desolation thereof was nigh. So he counselled such as were in Judea to flee to the mountains. Thus when that destruction came which was the most terrible calamity that ever happened on the face of the earth, his people had a place of refuge. And now brethren, whatever is going to happen—and there are some that predict dreadful things—as for me, I do not know what is going to happen, and, which is another thing, I do not care—his people shall have a place of refuge. “Though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swellings thereof. There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the Most High. God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved: God shall help her, and that right early. The heathen raged, the kingdoms were moved: he uttered his voice, the earth melted. The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.” If it should ever come to this—that the whole earth should rock and reel, or burn and smoke and seethe, or burn like a cauldron into one boiling mass—if there is no room for God's people on the earth to find a refuge, he will find a refuge for them in the clouds. They shall be caught up together to meet the Lord in the air. But somehow or other his people shall have a place of refuge. His children shall have a place of refuge. Lay hold on that. There is a refuge for you somewhere, Christian, even in the matter of ordinary providence, and there is always a mercy-seat for you to go to. There is always the bosom of Christ for you to fly to. The fear of the Lord does not drive you from him. It drives you to him, and when it drives you to him you have got a place of refuge. I find that Moses Stewart reads the text differently from anybody else, and I am not sure that he is wrong. He says the text means that the children of those that fear God shall have a place of refuge, and if so, this is not the only passage of Scripture that proves it. There are many precious texts that speak of our children. Let us try to grasp the promise for our children as well as for ourselves, and pray for them that they may have a place of refuge. There are some believers going to be baptized to-night. I hope they have got a firm grip of that gospel promise that Paul uttered, where he says, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.” The jailer did, you know, and we find that it is said, “He was baptized, and all his house;” and for this reason—that he believed in the Lord, rejoicing with all his house. Oh, we can never be satisfied till we see all our house converted, and all our household baptized, and all those that belong to us belonging also to the Lord our God, for thus it is “His children shall have a place of refuge.” May God bless you, dear friends, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Portion of Scripture read before sermon—Psalm 38.

God, the All-Seeing One

A sermon (No. 177) delivered on Sabbath morning, February 14, 1858
At The Music Hall, Royal Surrey Gardens
by C. H. Spurgeon.

“Hell and destruction are before the LORD: how much more then the hearts of the children of men?” — Proverbs 15:11.

You have often smiled at the ignorance of heathens who bow themselves before gods of wood and stone. You have quoted the words of Scripture and you have said, “Eyes have they, but they see not; ears have they, but they hear not.” You have therefore argued that they could not be gods at all, because they could neither see nor hear, and you have smiled contemptuously at the men who could so debase their understandings as to make such things objects of adoration. May I ask you one question—but one? Your God can both see and hear: would your conduct be in any respect different if you had a god such as those that the heathen worship? Suppose for one minute that Jehovah, who is nominally adored in this land, could be (though it is almost blasphemy to suppose it) smitten with such a blindness that he could not see the works and know the thoughts of man: would you then become more careless concerning him than you are now? I trow not. In nine cases out of ten, and perhaps in a far larger and sadder proportion, the doctrine of Divine Omniscience, although it is received and believed, has no practical effect upon our lives at all. The mass of mankind forget God: whole nations who know his existence and believe that he beholds them, live as if they had no God at all. Merchants, farmers, men in their shops, and in their fields, husbands in their families, and wives in the midst of their households, live as if there were no God; no eye inspecting them; no ear listening to the voice of their lips, and no eternal mind always treasuring up the recollection of their acts. Ah! we are practical Atheists, the mass of us; yea, all but those that have been born again and have passed from death unto life, be their creeds what they may, are Atheists, after all, in life; for if there were no God and no hereafter, multitudes of men would never be affected by the change; they would live the same as they do now—their lives being so full of disregard of God and his ways that the absence of a God could not affect them in any great degree. Permit me then this morning, as God shall help me, to stir up your hearts; and may God grant that something I may say may drive some of your practical Atheism out of you. I would endeavor to set before you God, the all-seeing one, and press upon your solemn consideration the tremendous fact that in all our acts, in all our ways, and in all our thoughts, we are continually under his observing eye.

We have in our text first of all, a great fact declared, — “Hell and destruction are before the LORD;” we have secondly a great fact inferred,— “How much more then the hearts of the children of men?”

I. We will begin with the great fact which is declared—a fact which furnishes us with premises from which we deduce the practical conclusion of the second sentence— “How much more then the hearts of the children of men?” The best interpretation that you can give of those two words, “hell” and “destruction,” is I think comprehended in a sentence something like this—“Death and hell are before the LORD.” The separate state of departed spirits, and destruction, Abaddon, as the

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Hebrew has it, the place of torment, are both of them, although solemnly mysterious to us, manifest enough to God.

1. First then, the word here translated “hell,” might just as well be translated “death,” or the state of departed spirits. Now, death, with all its solemn consequences, is visible before the Lord. Between us and the hereafter of departed spirits a great black cloud is hanging. Here and there the Holy Spirit hath made chinks as it were in the black wall of separation, through which by faith we can see; for he hath “revealed unto us by the Spirit” the things which “eye hath not seen nor ear heard,” and which the human intellect could never compass. Yet what we know is but very little. When men die they pass beyond the realm of our knowledge: both in body and in soul they go beyond our understandings. But God understands all the secrets of death. Let us divide these into several heads, and enumerate them.

God knows the burial-places of all his people. He notes as well the resting-place of the man who is buried tombless and alone as the man over whom a mighty mausoleum has been raised. The traveler who fell in the barren desert, whose body became the prey of the vulture and whose bones were bleached in the sun—the mariner who was wrecked far out at sea and over whose corpse no dirge was ever wailed, except the howling of the winds and the murmuring of the wild waves—the thousands who have perished in battle unnumbered and unnoticed—the many who have died alone amid dreary forests, frozen seas, and devouring snow-storms—all these, and the places of their sepulchre, are known to God. That silent grot within the sea where pearls lie deep, where now the shipwrecked one is sleeping, is marked by God as the death-place of one of his redeemed; that place upon the mountain-side, the deep ravine into which the traveler fell and was buried in a snow-drift, is marked in the memory of God as the tomb of one of the human race. No body of man, however it may have been interred or uninterred, has passed beyond the range of God’s knowledge. Blessed be his name, if I shall die and lie where the rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep, in some neglected corner of the churchyard, I shall be known as well, and rise as well, recognized by my glorious Father as if interred in the cathedral where forests of gothic pillars proudly stand erect, and where the songs of myriads perpetually salute high heaven. I shall be known as well as if I had been buried there in solemn pomp, and had been interred with music and with dread solemnities, and I shall be recognized as well as if the marble trophy and the famous pillar had been raised to my remembrance; for God knoweth no such thing as forgetfulness of the burying-places of his children. Moses sleeps in some spot that eye hath not seen. God kissed away his soul, and he buried him where Israel could never find him, though they may have searched for him. But God knoweth where Moses sleeps; and if he knows that, he understands where all his children are hidden. Ye cannot tell me where is the tomb of Adam; ye could not point out to me the sleeping place of Abel. Is any man able to discover the tomb of Methuselah and those long-lived dwellers in the time before the flood? Who shall tell where the once-treasured body of Joseph now sleeps in faith? Can any of you discover the tombs of the kings, and mark the exact spot where David and Solomon rest in solitary grandeur? No, those things have passed from human recollection and we know not where the great and mighty of the past are buried; but God knoweth, for death and Hades are open before the Lord.

And again, further, not only does he know the place where they were buried, but he is cognizant of the history of all their bodies after sepulture or after death. It has often been asked by the infidel, “How can the body of man be restored when it may have been eaten by the cannibal, or devoured by wild beasts?” Our simple reply is that God can track every atom of it if he pleases. We do not

think it necessary to resurrection that he should do so, but if he so willed it he could bring every atom of every body that hath ever died: although it hath passed through the most complicated machinery of nature, and become entangled in its passage with plants and beasts, yea, and with the bodies of other men, God hath it still within the range of his knowledge to know where every atom is, and it is within the might of his Omnipotence to call every atom from its wandering, and restore it to its proper sphere, and rebuild the body of which it was a part. It is true, we could not track the dust that long since has moldered. Buried with exactest care, preserved with the most scrupulous reverence, years passed away, and the body of the monarch which had long slept well guarded and protected, was at last reached by the careless hand. The coffin had moldered, and the metal was broken for the sake of its own value; a handful of dust was discovered, the last relics of one who was master of many nations. That dust by sacrilegious hand was cast in the aisle of the church, or thrown into the churchyard and blown by the winds into the neighboring field. It was impossible for ever to preserve it; the greatest care was defeated; and at last the monarch was on a level with his slave, "alike unknowing and unknown." But God knows where every particle of the handful of dust has gone: he has marked in his book the wandering of every one of its atoms. He hath death so open before his view that he can bring all these together, bone to bone, and clothe them with the very flesh that robed them in the days of yore, and make them live again. Death is open before the Lord.

And as the body, so the soul when separated from the body is before the Lord. We look upon the countenance of our dying friend, and on a sudden a mysterious change passes over his frame. "His soul has fled," we say. But have we any idea of what his soul is? Can we form even a conjecture of what the flying of that soul may be, and what the august presence into which it is ushered when it is disentangled from its earthly coil? Is it possible for us to guess what is that state where spirits without bodies, perpetually blest, behold their God? It is possible for us to compass some imagination of what heaven is to be, when bodies and souls, reunited, shall before God's throne enjoying the highest bliss; but I do think that so gross are our conceptions whilst we are in our bodies that it is almost, if not quite impossible, for any of us to form any idea whatever as to the position of souls whilst in the disembodied state, between the hour of death and the time of resurrection.

"This much, and this is all, we know;
They are supremely blest:
Have done with sin, and care, and woe,
And with their Saviour rest."

But the best of the saints can tell us nothing more than this. They are blest, and in paradise they are reigning with their Lord. Brethren, these things are known to God. The separate state of the dead, the heaven of disembodied spirits is within the gaze of the Most High, and at this hour, if so he pleased, he could reveal to us the condition of every man that is dead—whether he has mounted to Elysian fields to dwell for ever in the sunlight of his Master's countenance, or has been plunged into hell, dragged down by iron chains to wait in dreary woe the result of the awful trial, when "Depart ye cursed," must be the re-affirmation of a sentence once pronounced, and already in part endured. God understands the separate doom of every man's spirit before the great tribunal day—before the last sentence shall have been pronounced, death is open before the Lord.

2. The next word, "destruction," signifies hell, or the place of the damned. That also is open before the Lord. Where hell is and what are its miseries, we know not; except "through a glass

darkly” we have never seen the invisible things of horror. That land of terror is a land unknown. We have much reason to thank God that he has put it so far off from the habitations of living mortals that the pains, the groans, the shrieks, the yells, are not to be heard here, or else earth itself would have become a hell, the solemn prelude and the ante-past of unutterable torment. God has put somewhere, far on the edge of his dominions, a tearful lake that burneth with fire and brimstone; into that he cast the rebel angels, who (though by a license they are now allowed to walk the earth) do carry a hell within their bosoms, and are by-and-by to be bound with chains, reserved in blackness and darkness for ever for them that kept not their first estate, but lifted the arm of their rebellion against God. Into that place we dare not look. Perhaps it would not be possible for any man to get a fair idea of the torments of the lost without at once becoming mad. Reason would reel at such a sight of horror. One moment of listening to the shrill screams of spirits tortured, might forever drive us into the depths of despair and make us only fit to be bound in chains whilst we lived on earth. Raving lunatics surely we must become. But whilst God has mercifully covered all these things from us, they are all known to him; he looks upon them; yea, it is his look that makes hell what it is. His eyes, full of fury, flash the lightnings that scathe his enemies; his lips, full of dreadful thunders, make the thunders that now fright the wicked. Could they escape the eye of God, could they shut out that dreary vision of the face of the incensed Majesty of heaven, then might hell be quenched; then might the wheels of Ixion stand still; then might doomed Tantalus quench his thirst and eat to his very full. But there, whilst they lie in their chains, they look upward, and they see ever that fearful vision of the Most High; the dreadful hands that grasp the thunderbolts, the dreadful lips that speak the thunders, and the fearful eyes that flash the flames that burn their souls with horrors deeper than despair. Yes, hell, horrible as it is, and veiled in many clouds, and covered over with darkness, is naked before the vision of the Most High.

There is the grand fact stated—“Hell and destruction are before the LORD.” After this the inference seems to be easy —“How much more then the hearts of the children of men?”

II. We now come to the grand fact inferred.

In briefly entering upon this second part I will discuss the subject thus: You notice there an argument—“How much more then the hearts of the children of men?” I will therefore begin by asking, why does it follow that the hearts of men are seen by God? Why—how—what—when—shall be four questions into which we shall divide what we have now to say.

1. Why is it so clear that if “hell and destruction are open before the LORD,” the hearts of men must be very plainly viewed by him?

We answer, because the hearts of men are not so extensive as the realms of death and torment. What is man’s heart? what is man’s self? Is he not in Scripture compared to a grasshopper? Does not God declare that he “takes up the isles”—whole islands full of men—“as a very little thing; And the nations before him are but as the drop of a bucket?” If then the all-seeing eye of God takes in at one glance the wide regions of death—and wide they are, wide enough to startle any man who shall try to range them through—if, I say, with one glance God seeth death and seeth hell through with all its bottomless depths, with all its boundlessness of misery, surely then he is quite able to behold all the actions of the little thing called man’s heart. Suppose a man so wise as to be able to know the wants of a nation and to remember the feelings of myriads of men, you can not suppose it difficult for him to know the actions of his own family and to understand the emotions of his own household. If the man is able to stretch his arm over a great sphere and to say, “I am monarch of all this,” surely he shall be able to control the less. He who in his wisdom can walk through centuries

shall not say that he is ignorant of the history of a year; he who can dive into the depths of science and understand the history of the whole world from its creation, is not to be alarmed by some small riddle that happens at his own door. No, the God who seeth death and hell seeth our hearts, for they are far less extensive.

Reflect again, that they are far less aged too. Death is an ancient monarch; he is the only king whose dynasty stands fast. Ever since the days of Adam he has never been succeeded by another, and has never had an interregnum in his reign. His black ebon sceptre hath swept away generation after generation; his scythe hath mowed the fair fields of this earth a hundred times and is sharp to mow us down, and when another crop shall succeed us he is still ready to devour the multitudes and sweep the earth clean again. The regions of death are old domains; his pillars of black granite are ancient as the eternal hills. Death made his prey on earth long ere Adam was here. Those mighty creatures that made the deep hoary with their strength, and stirred the earth with their trappings—those elder born of natures sons, the mighty creatures that lived here long ere Adam walked in Eden—death made them his prey: like a mighty hunter he speared the mighty lizard and laid it low, and now we dig it from the stony tomb and wonder at it. He is our ancient monarch; but ancient as he is, his whole monarchy is in the records of God, and until death itself is dead and swallowed up in victory, death shall be open before the Lord. How old too, is death—old as the first sin. In that day when Satan tempted the angels and led astray the third part of the stars of heaven, then hell was digged; then was that bottomless pit first struck out of solid rocks of vengeance, that it might stand a marvelous record of what God's wrath can do. The fires of hell are not the kindlings of yesterday: they are ancient flames that burned long ere Vesuvius cast forth its lurid flame. Long ere the first charred ashes fell upon the plain from earth's red volcanoes hell's flames we're burning; for "Tophet is prepared of old, the pile thereof is wood and much smoke; the breath of the LORD like a stream of brimstone, doth kindle it." If then the ancient things, these old ones, death and hell, have been observed by God, and if their total history is known to him, how much more then shall he know the history of those mere animalculae, those ephemera of an hour that we call men! You are here to-day and gone to-morrow; born yesterday—the next hour shall see our tomb prepared, and another minute shall hear, "ashes to ashes, dust to dust," and the falling of the clod upon the coffin lid. We are the creatures of a day and know nothing. We are scarcely here; we are only living and dead. "Gone!" is the greatest part of our history. Scarcely have we time enough to tell the story ere it comes to its finis. Surely then God may easily understand the history of a beast when he knows the history of the monarchies of death and hell.

This is the why. I need not give further arguments, though there be abundance deducible from the text. "How much more then the hearts of the children of men?"

2. But now, how does God know the heart? I mean to what degree and to what extent does he understand and know that which is in man? I answer, Holy Scripture in divers places gives us most precise information. God knows the heart so well that he is said to "search" it. We all understand the figure of a search. There is a search-warrant out against some man who is supposed to be harboring a traitor in his house. The officer goes into the lower room, opens the door of every cupboard, looks into every closet, peers into every cranny, takes the key, descends into the cellar, turns over the coals, disturbs the wood, lest any one should be hidden there. Up stairs he goes: there is an old room that has not been open for years—it is opened. There is a huge chest: the lock is forced and it is broken open. The very top of the house is searched lest upon the slates or upon the tiles some one should be concealed. At last, when the search has been complete, the officer says,

“It is impossible that there can be anybody here, for from the tiles to the foundation I have searched the house thoroughly through; I know the very spiders well, for I have seen the house completely.” Now, it is just so that God knows our heart. He searches it—searches into every nook, corner, crevice, and secret part; and the figure of the Lord is pushed further still. “The candle of the LORD,” we are told, “searches the secret parts of the belly.” As when we wish to find something we take a candle and look down upon the ground with great care, and turn up the dust. If it is some little piece of money we desire to find, we light a candle and sweep the house and search diligently till we find it. Even so it is with God. He searches Jerusalem with candles and pulls every thing to day-light. No partial search like that of Laban, when he went into Rachel's tent to look for his idols. She put them in the camel's furniture, and sat upon them; but God looks into the camel's furniture, and all. “Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the LORD.” His eye searches the heart, and looks into every part of it.

In another passage we are told that God tries the reins. That is even more than searching. The goldsmith when he takes gold, looks at it, and examines it carefully. “Ah!” says he, “but I don't understand this gold yet: I must try it.” He thrusts it into the furnace; there coals are heaped upon it, and it is fused and melted till he knows what there is of dross, and what there is of gold. Now God knows to the very carat how much there is of sound gold in us, and how much of dross. There is no deceiving him. He has put our hearts into the furnace of his Omniscience; the furnace—his knowledge—tries us as completely as the goldsmith's crucible doth try the gold—how much there is of hypocrisy, how much of truth—how much of steam, how much of real—how much of ignorance, how much of knowledge—how much of devotion, how much of blasphemy—how much of carefulness, how much of carelessness. God knows the ingredients of the heart; he reduces the soul to its pristine metals; he divides it asunder—so much of quartz, so much of gold, so much of dung, of dross, of wood, of hay, of stubble, so much of gold, silver, and precious stones. “The LORD trieth the hearts and searcheth the reins of the children of men.”

Here is another description of God's knowledge of the heart. In one place of Sacred Writ—(it will be well if you set your children to find out these places at home)—God is said to ponder the heart. Now, you know the Latin word ponder means weigh. The Lord weighs the heart. Old Master Quarles has got a picture of a great one putting a heart into one scale, and then putting the law, the Bible, into the other scale, to weigh it. This is what God does with men's hearts. They are often great, puffed-up, blown-out things, and people say, “What a great-hearted man that is!” But God does not judge by the appearance of a man's great heart nor the outside appearance of a good heart; but he puts it in the scales and weighs it—puts his own Word in one scale and the heart in the other. He knows the exact weight—knows whether we have grace in the heart which makes us good weight, or only pretence in the heart, which makes us weigh light weight when put into the scale. He searches the heart in every possible way, he puts it into the fire, and then thrusts it into the balances. Oh, might not God say of many of you, “I have searched your heart, and I have found vanity therein? Reprobate silver shall men call you; for God has put you in the furnace and rejected you.” And then he might conclude his verdict by saying, “Mene, mene, tekel—thou art weighed in the balances and found wanting.” This then is the answer to the question, How?

The next question was, What? What is it that God sees in man's heart? God sees in man's heart a great deal more than we think of God sees, and has seen in our hearts, lust, and blasphemy, and murder, and adultery, and malice and wrath, and all uncharitableness. The heart never can be painted too black, unless you daub it with something blacker than the devil himself. It is as base as it can

be. You have never committed murder, but yet you have had murder in your heart; you may never have stained your hands with lusts and the aspersions of uncleanness, but still it is in the heart. Have you never imagined an evil thing? Has your soul never for a moment doted on a pleasure which you were too chaste to indulge in, but which for a moment you surveyed with at least some little complacency and delight? Has not imagination often pictured, even to the solitary monk in his cell, greater vice than men in public life have ever dreamed of? And may not even the divine in his closet be conscious that blasphemies, and murders, and lusts of the vilest class, can find a ready harbor even in the heart which he hopes is dedicated to God? Oh! beloved, it is a sight that no human eye could endure: the sight of a heart really laid bare before one's own inspection would startle us almost into insanity: but God sees the heart in all its bestial sensuousness, in all its wanderings and rebellions, in all its high mindedness and pride; God has searched and knows it altogether.

God sees all the heart's imaginations, and what they are let us not presume to tell. O children of God, these have made you cry and groan full many a time, and though the worldling groans not over them, yet he hath them. Oh, what a filthy sty of Stygian imaginations is the heart; all full of every thing that is hideous when it once begins to dance and make carnival and revelry concerning sin. But God sees the heart's imaginations.

Again, God sees the heart's devices. You, perhaps, O sinner, have determined to curse God; you have not done so, but you intend to do it. He knows your devices—reads them all. You perhaps will not be permitted to run into the excess of riotousness into which you purpose to go; but your very purpose is now undergoing the inspection of the Most High. There is never a design forged in the fires of the heart, before it is beaten on the anvil of resolve, that is not known and seen and noted by Jehovah our God.

He knows, next, the resolves of the heart. He knows, O sinner, how many times you have resolved to repent, and have resolved and re-resolved and then have continued the same. He knows, O thou that hast been sick, how thou didst resolve to seek God, but how thou didst despise thine own resolution when good health had put thee beyond the temporary danger. Thy resolves have been filed in heaven, and thy broken promises, and thy vows despised, shall be brought out in their order as swift witnesses for thy condemnation. All these things are known of God. We have often had very clear proof of God's knowing what is in man's heart even in the ministry. Some months ago whilst standing here preaching, I deliberately pointed to a man in the midst of the crowd, and said these words—"There is a man sitting there that is a shoemaker, keeps his shop open on Sunday, had his shop open last Sabbath morning, took ninepence, and there was fourpence profit out of it. His soul is sold to Satan for fourpence." A City Missionary, when going round the West end of the town, met with a poor man, of whom he asked this question: "Do you know Mr. Spurgeon?" He found him reading a sermon. "Yes," he said, "I have every reason to know him; I have been to hear him, and under God's grace I have become a new man." "But," said he, "shall I tell you how it was? I went to the Music Hall and took my seat in the middle of the place, and the man looked at me as if he knew me, and deliberately told the congregation that I was a shoemaker, and that I sold shoes on a Sunday; and I did, sir. But sir, I should not have minded that; but he said I took ninepence the Sunday before, and that there was fourpence profit; and so I did take ninepence, and fourpence was just the profit, and how he should know that I'm sure I can not tell. It struck me it was God had spoken to my soul through him; and I shut my shop last Sunday and was afraid to open it and go there, lest he should speak about me again." I could tell as many as a dozen authentic stories of

cases that have happened in this Hall, where I have deliberately pointed at some body without the slightest knowledge of the person, or ever having in the least degree any inkling or idea that what I said was right, except that I believed I was moved thereto by the Spirit; and so striking has been the description that the persons have gone away and said, "Come, see a man that told me all things that ever I did: he was sent of God to my soul beyond a doubt, or else he could not have painted my case so clearly."

And not only so, but we have known cases in which the thoughts of men have been revealed from the pulpit. I have sometimes seen persons nudge with their elbows because they have got a smart hit, and I have heard them say when they went out, "That is just what I said to you when I went in at the door." "Ah!" says the other, "I was thinking of the very thing he said, and he told me of it." Now, if God thus proves his own Omniscience by helping his poor ignorant servant to state the very thing thought and done, when he did not know it, then it must remain decisively proved that God does know everything that is secret because we see he tells it to men, and enables them to tell it to others. Oh, ye may endeavor as much as ye can to hide your faults from God, but beyond a doubt he shall discover you. He discovers you this day. His Word is "a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart," and "pierces to the dividing asunder of the joints and of the marrow;" and in that last day when the book shall be opened and he shall give to every man his sentence, then shall it be seen how exact, how careful, how precious, how personal was God's knowledge of the heart of every man whom he had made.

4. And now the last question: When? When does God see us? The answer is he sees us everywhere and in every place. O foolish man, who thinks to hide himself from the Most High! It is night! no human eye sees thee; the curtain is drawn and thou art hidden. There are his eyes lowering at thee through the gloom. It is a far-off country; no one knows thee; parents and friends have been left behind, restraints are cast off. There is a Father near thee who looks upon thee even now. It is a lone spot, and if the deed be done no tongue shall tell it. There is a tongue in heaven that shall tell it; yea, the beam out of the wall and the stones in the field shall raise up themselves as witnesses against thee. Canst thou hide thyself anywhere where God shall not detect thee? Is not this whole world like a glass hive wherein we put our bees? and does not God stand and see all our motions when we think we are hidden? Ah, it is but a glass hiding-place. He looketh from heaven, and through stone walls and rocks; yea, to the very centre itself does his eye pierce and in the thickest darkness he beholds our deeds.

Come then, let me make a personal application of the matter and I have done. If this be true, hypocrite, what a fool thou art! If God can read the heart, O man, what a sorry, sorry thing thy fair pretense must be! Ah! ah! ah! what a change will come over some of you! This world is a masquerade, and ye, many of you, wear the mask of religion. Ye dance your giddy hours, and men think you to be the saints of God. How changed will you be when at the door of eternity you must drop the visor, and must announce the theatricals in which you live! How you will blush when the paint is washed from off your cheek—when you stand before God naked to your own shame, a hypocrite, unclean, diseased, covered up before with the gew-gaws and the trickery of pretended formality in religion, but now standing there, base, vile, and hideous! There is many a man that bears about him a cancer that would make one sick to see. Oh, how shall hypocrites look when their cancerous hearts are laid bare! Deacon! how you will tremble when your old heart is torn open and your vile pretences rent away! Minister! how black you will look when your surplice is off, and when your grand pretensions are cast to the dogs! How will you tremble! There will be no

sermonizing others then. You yourself will be preached to, and the sermon shall be from that text, “Depart ye cursed.” O brethren, above all things shun hypocrisy. If ye mean to be damned, make up your minds to it and be damned like honest men; but do not I beseech you pretend to go to heaven while all the time you are going to hell. If ye mean to make your abodes in torment forever, then serve the devil and do not be ashamed of it; stand it right out and let the world know what you are. But oh! never put on the cloak of religion. I beseech you, do not add to your eternal misery being a wolf in sheep’s clothing. Show the cloven foot; do not hide it. If you mean to go to hell, say so. “If God be God, serve him. If Baal be God, serve him.” Do not serve Baal and then pretend to be serving God.

One other practical conclusion. If God sees and knows everything, how this ought to make you tremble—you that have lived in sin for many years! I have known a man who was once stopped from an act of sin by the fact of there being a cat in the room. He could not bear even the eyes of that poor creature to see him. Oh, I would ye could carry about with you the recollection of those eyes that are always on you. Swearer! could you swear if you could see God’s eye looking at you? Thief! drunkard! harlot! could ye indulge in your sins if ye saw his eyes on you? Oh, methinks they would startle you and bid you pause before ye did in God’s own sight rebel against his law. There is a story told of the American War, that one of the prisoners taken by the Americans was subjected to a torture of the most refined character. He says, “I was put into a narrow dungeon; I was comfortably provided for with all I needed; but there was a round slit in the wall, and through that, both night and day, a soldier always looked at me.” He says, “I could not rest, I could not eat nor drink, nor do anything in comfort because there was always that eye—an eye that seemed never to be turned away and never shut—always following me round that little apartment. Nothing ever hidden from it.” Now take home that figure. Recollect that is your position; you are shut in by the narrow walls of time, when ye eat, and when ye drink, when ye rise, and when ye lie upon your beds; when ye walk the streets, or when ye sit at home, that eye is always fixed upon you. Go home now and sin against God if ye dare; go home now and break his laws to his face and despise him, and set him at nought! Rush on your own destruction; dash yourselves against the buckler of Jehovah, and destroy your selves upon his own sword! Nay, rather, “turn ye, turn ye.” Turn ye, ye that have followed the ways of sin, turn ye to Christ and live; and then the same Omniscience which is now your horror shall be your pleasure. Sinner! if thou now dost pray, he seeth thee; if thou now dost weep he seeth thee. “When he was yet a great way off his father saw him, and ran, and fell on his neck and kissed him.” It shall be even so with thee, if now thou turnest to God and dost believe in his Son Jesus Christ.

The Hedge of Thorns and the Plain Way

A sermon (No. 1948) delivered at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington,
by C. H. Spurgeon.

“The way of the slothful man is as an hedge of thorns: but the way of the righteous is made plain.”—Proverbs 15:19.

You must have noticed how frequently godly people almost wear out their Bibles in certain places. The Psalms, the Gospel of John, and parts of the Epistles are favourite portions, and are thumbed in many an old believer’s Bible till the fact is very noticeable. There are certain sheep-tracks up the slopes of Scripture which are much more trodden than the rest of the holy fields. I suppose it has always been so, and I will not quarrel with the instincts of the saints.

I do however regret that any portion of Holy Writ should be neglected. There are Bible-readers who keep clear of the historical parts of Scripture, and also greatly avoid the Book of Proverbs: indeed, they almost wonder how Proverbs and Ecclesiastes come to be a part of the Word of God. Very singular it must seem to them that this Book of Proverbs should be placed so very near to Solomon’s Song—that sacred canticle which is the center and climax of inspired Scripture: a book which I do not hesitate to call “the holy of holies”—the innermost sanctuary of divine love. Concerning that deeply mystical, mysterious, and rapturous canticle, it would be impossible to speak too highly: it is indeed the Song of songs—a song however which none can sing but such as are made songsters by God himself by partaking of the inspiration, not of the fount which gushed from Mount Parnassus, but of that fount of every blessing which flows from the mount of everlasting love. It is certainly remarkable that hard by such a deeply-spiritual Book there should be placed the Book of Proverbs, which mainly consists of instructions for this life. Doubtless there is a meaning in that arrangement. The Lord would not have the highest spirituality divorced from common-sense. God has made us body and soul, and he would have us serve him with both. There is a part of us that is material and there is a part that is spiritual; and both need guidance such as the Holy Spirit affords us in the inspired Book. The Lord Jesus Christ has redeemed us, not as to our soul alone, nor our spirit alone, but as to our body also; and he would have us recognize this fact.

While we are in the world we are not to regard ourselves as if we were pure spirits, having nothing to do with earth; but we are to look to our lower nature and our earthly surroundings, and order all these in accordance with the will of the Lord. It is not enough that our hearts are cleansed; our bodies are to be washed with pure water. We are in the world, and we must eat and drink and work and trade even as other men do; and all this must be as much brought under the rule of wisdom as our higher nature and its actions. The Christian’s faith does not come to him merely to create holy raptures and heavenly emotions, but it comes to help him in the business of every day.

Grace is intended to sanctify all the relations of life. There is no necessity that a man who is wise unto salvation should in other respects be a fool; but the reverse should be constantly seen: sanctity should beget sagacity, and purity should be the mother of prudence. We are to make the common things of this world sacred to God, so that the bells of the horses may be as truly “Holiness unto the LORD” as was the mitre of the consecrated priest who served at the altar.

I pray my friends not to be so spiritual that they cannot do a good day's work, or give full measure, or sell honest wares. To my disgust I have known persons professing to have reached perfect purity who have done very dirty things. I have been suspicious of superfine spirituality since I knew one who took no interest in the affairs of this world, and yet speculated till he lost thousands of other people's money. Do not get to be so heavenly-minded that you cannot put up with the little vexations of the family; for we have heard of people of whom it was said that the sooner they went to heaven the better, for they were too disagreeable to live with below.

As the religion of the Lord Jesus Christ is meant for this world as well as for worlds to come, so the volume of Holy Scripture is fitly made to contain Proverbs as well as Psalms. I have been told, but I do not know how true it is, that Scotland owes very much of its practical shrewdness to the fact that the Book of Proverbs used to be printed in a small form, and was one of the first books read by all the children at the public schools. I can only say that if it was so, it showed much wisdom on the part of those who made the arrangement; and I have no doubt that if it were so still, it would be a clear gain to the rising generation. It is a right thing to have practical teaching in connection with sound doctrine, and common-sense in conjunction with deep spirituality. Let the Gospels, and Psalms, and Prophets, and Epistles be your bread, and let the Book of Proverbs be your salt. Neglect neither the one nor the other.

I preach at this time from the word of Solomon which is now before us, and I shall not withhold from you its everyday meaning; but I shall also exhibit its higher lights, for I believe that there is not a moral truth in the Book of Proverbs which does not also wear a spiritual aspect. I shall try to show you that our text, while it has its temporal bearings, which we will not conceal, has beyond these its higher and spiritual teachings, with which we will conclude.

I. First then, take the text in its temporal bearings. It runs thus—"The way of the slothful man is as an hedge of thorns: but the way of the righteous is made plain."

Note then first of all that a slothful man is the opposite of a righteous man. In the text they are set in opposition. "The way of the slothful man" is placed in contrast, not with the way of the diligent man, but with "the way of the righteous," as if to show that the slothful man is the very opposite of being a righteous man. A sluggard is not a righteous man, and he cannot be, he misses a main part of rightness. It is very seldom that a sluggard is honest: he owes at least more labor to the world than he pays. He is guilty of sins of omission, for he fails in obedience to one of the laws laid upon manhood since the fall: "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread." He aspires to eat his bread without earning it: he would if he could eat bread for nought, or eat the bread for which others toil, and this verges upon coveting and stealing and generally leads up to one or both of these sins. The sluggard evades the common law of society; and equally does he offend against the rule which our apostle promulgated in the church: "If any would not work, neither should he eat." The sluggard is not righteous for he does not render to God according to the strength lent to him, nor to man according to the work assigned him. A slothful man is a soldier who would let others fight the battle of life while he lies under the baggage-wagon asleep, until rations are served out. He is a husbandman who only husbands his own strength, and would eat the grapes while others trim the vines. He would, if possible, be carried on his bed into the kingdom of heaven; he is much too great a lover of ease to go on pilgrimage over rough and weary ways. If the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence from others it will never suffer violence from him. He is too idle to be importunate, too slothful to be earnest.

He cannot be a righteous man for slothfulness leads to the neglect of duty in many ways, and very soon it leads to lying about those neglects of duty, and no liar can have a portion in heaven. Idleness is selfishness, and this is not consistent with the love of our neighbor, nor with any high degree of virtue. Every good thing withers in the drought of idleness. In fact, all kinds of vices are comprehended in the one vice of sloth, and if you tell me that a man is a sluggard I have his whole character before me in the blackest of letters. His fallow fields are well adapted for evil seed, and no doubt Satan will raise a fine crop of weeds in every corner of his life. What this world would have been if we had all been gentlemen with nothing to do, I cannot tell. The millions that have to work are largely kept out of mischief by their toil, and although crimes are abundant enough in our great city as it is, what would they have been if there had not been daily tasks to keep men from excessive indulgence in drink and other forms of evil? Without labor, the ale-houses would have been crammed every one of the twenty-four hours; folly would have held unbroken carnival, and licentiousness would have burst all bounds. Amongst the sanitary and salutary regulations of the moral universe there is none much better than this—that men must work. He who does not work is not a righteous man for he is out of accord with that which makes for righteousness. In some form or other, with either brain or hand, either by working or enduring, we share the common labors of the race appointed them of heaven; and if we are not doing so, we are not righteous. I call to your remembrance the remarkable words of the Savior, “Thou wicked and slothful servant.” Those two adjectives are nearly related—“wicked and slothful.” Might not our Lord have said “slothful” alone? He might, but he knew how much of wickedness goes with sloth and is inherent in it, and therefore he branded it with the condemning word.

Our second observation is this: if we avoid sloth we have not done enough, we must also be righteous. If it had been sufficient to shake off idleness and become industrious the text would have run thus: “The way of the slothful is as an hedge of thorns: but the way of the diligent is made plain.” Ah, dear friends! a man may be very industrious, and energetic, and earnest, but if it is in a wrong cause he might have been less mischievous had he been slothful. To be exhibiting industry by doing a great deal of mischief is not commendable. To be actively disseminating your opinions if those opinions are false is to be doing grievous harm. To rise up early, and to sit up late, and to eat the bread of carefulness merely for selfish ends is not to secure a blessing. There is a diligence which is produced by greed or ambition; and this is no better than the selfishness which is the cause of it. Many wear themselves to skin and bone to gather that which is not bread, to hoard up that which can never satisfy them. We are to become the servants of righteousness when we escape from the servitude of sloth. “Not slothful in business” is very well; but to complete the change we must be gracious in our diligence, being “fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.” We must do that which is right, and kind, and holy; and so we must live to the honor and glory of him to whom we owe all things.

Young men who are beginning life, it is well that you should be urged to be diligent, but it is better that you should be led to be righteous! Worldlings would have you industrious, but saints would have you righteous. You can be made righteous in state through faith in Jesus Christ, and righteous in character through the renewal of your heart by the Holy Ghost. Mind this.

The text leads us to make a third observation which repeats its very words: namely, that a slothful man’s way is like a hedge of thorns. Here we enlarge. The idler’s way is not a desirable way. Unthinking persons suppose that the sluggard lives a happy life and travels an easy road. It is not so. Many believe in “the sweet doing of nothing,” but it is a sheer fiction. Surface appearances

are not the truth: though it may seem that idleness is rest, it is not so: though sloth promises ease, it cheats its votaries. Of all unrest there is none more wearisome than that of having nothing whatever to do. The severest toil is far more endurable than utter sloth. I have heard of retired business men going back to the counter from absolute weariness of idleness. It is far more desirable to be righteous than it is to be at ease. Labour of a holy sort has ten thousand times more joy in it than purposeless leisure.

The way of the sluggard is also difficult. The idle man walks a hard road in his own apprehension: he has to break through thorns. Every mole-hill is a mountain to him; every straw is a stumbling-block. There is a lion in the way, he will be slain in the streets. You look out and can only see the smallest possible dog, but he is sure that it is a roaring lion and he must stay at home and go to bed. He cannot plough by reason of the cold. The clods are frozen he is sure; they are hard as iron and will break the plough-share. If you look out of doors you will see the neighbours' teams going, but he has another excuse if you beat him out of the one he has given you. The difficulties that he sees are created in his own mind by his natural sluggishness; but he has such a creative faculty that he has always twenty arguments against exerting himself once. The first thing such persons do in the morning when they open their window is to look out and see a difficulty. Whenever they are sent about a task or on an errand they straightway begin to consider the great labor that will be involved in it, the imminent risk that will surely come of it, and the great advantages of leaving it undone. To the slothful man, his way, when he gets so far as having a way at all, always appears to be as hard to pursue as a hedge of thorns; and mark you! if he continues slothful it will actually become a hedge of thorns. Difficulties imagined are apt to arrive. Duty neglected to-day will have to be done some time or other; and the arrears of neglected service are grim debts. The slothful is like the spendthrift who does not reckon what he spends, but contents himself with crying, "Put it down." The score increases and again he cries, "Put it down." He resolves to do better and then gives a bill, or renews a former bill and dreams that the debt is paid. But the debt remains, accumulates, and follows the man's track. Old debts pursue a man. Like wolves which hunt the flying traveler across the snowy plains of Russia, neglects and obligations follow a man with swift and sure pursuit, and there is no way of escape. It is the past which makes the present and the future so difficult. The sluggard's way appears to lie not only over a thorny brake, but over a compacted mass of thorns of set purpose planted for a hedge. Dear friends, do not put off till to-morrow that which can be done to-day. Keep the road clear of arrears. Do the day's work in the day. I am persuaded that in your ordinary business work some of you Christian people need to be warned against shiftless delay. Believe me, there is a piety in keeping your work well in hand, in having the house right, the business in order, the daily task well done. True religion seeks to honor God in all the transactions of life and this cannot be done by idling, by postponement, and by allowing work to run behind. No slut can be a saint; no sluggard can glorify God. Life grows hard and unenviable to men who try to make it easy. A man who neglects his duty, whether he be a carpenter, a bricklayer, a clerk, a minister, or an archbishop, will find his way increase in difficulty until it becomes almost impassable.

Before long the sluggard's course becomes a very painful way, for a way of thorns tears a man's garments and wounds his flesh; and you cannot be neglectful of the ordinary duties of life without by-and-by suffering for it. Loss of character, loss of position, and actual want all come from idleness.

Continue in that course and you will find your way become a hedge of thorns in a further sense, for it will be blocked up altogether. You will be unable to go on at all. You took it easy once, but

what will you do now? You neglected duty, you forbore to do the service of the day, and at last your sins have found you out; nobody will have you and you are a burden to yourself. Now have you found a hedge of thorns in your way. This is clear enough, and it has been seen by most of us in actual life in several cases.

The other truth of the text is equally clear—a righteous man's way becomes plain: "The way of the righteous is made plain." When a man by the Holy Spirit's gracious influence upon him is made thoroughly truthful, thoroughly honest so that he walks in his integrity, it is most pleasant to note how soon by some means or other his way opens up before him. We have seen good men in great straits and adversities: their own conscientiousness may appear to narrow their course, and of course the depressions of business fall upon righteous men as much as upon the unrighteous; but in the long run you will see that if a man keeps straight, and walks in strict integrity and faith, the Lord will make darkness light before him and crooked things straight. Ask the aged man of God whose life has been full of grace and truth, and he will tell you that though he was brought low the Lord has helped him. He will interest you with his account of the struggles of his younger days, and how when he had his large family of little children about him he was tempted to do a questionable act, but was enabled to hold fast his integrity and found in his steadfastness the way to success. Those stories which some of us heard as boys at our father's fireside, or which our grandsires told us before they were taken up to heaven, are to some of us heirlooms treasured as tokens for good, and proofs of the faithfulness of God. We know that integrity and uprightness are the best preservatives. If we will not put forth our hand unto iniquity even during the worst pinch, we shall come forth as the light. But if in trouble you try to get out of it by indirect means, you will involve yourself in tenfold difficulty. It is far better to be poor than dishonest; ay, it is better to die than to dishonor our profession. It is God's business to provide for us, and he will do it. We are not to be too fast in providing for ourselves. We must not command the stones to be made bread by forestalling the Lord in that which is his own peculiar province. Remember our Lord's answer to the tempter, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." We shall dwell in the land, and verily we shall be fed; but how this is to be accomplished is the Lord's business rather than ours. "The way of the righteous is made plain." Only wait and watch and you shall see the salvation of God.

Thus I have set before you the moral or temporal meaning of the text, commending it earnestly to the consideration of all, especially of men of business, begging them to see to it that there be no neglect about any part of their calling, for a Christian's business ought to be the best done of any man's in the world.

Look to it also that there be no swerving from righteousness in aught that you do, for the safest and surest road is the way of truth, the path of righteousness. If you keep close to God and make him your guide even unto death, you will have no need to trouble yourself about your way—the Lord will make it plain.

II. Now I come to the spiritual teaching of the text; and may the Lord anoint our eyes by his Holy Spirit that we may see!

Take the first side of the text, the spiritual sluggard, what is said of him? His way is "as an hedge of thorns." I gather from the opposition of the text that the spiritual sluggard's way is the way of unbelief, because the opposite of his way is the way of the righteous. Now, the way of the righteous is the way of faith—"We walk by faith." Therefore the spiritual sluggard's way is the way of unbelief.

I will describe him. He has a way, for he is not altogether dead to religious matters. He hears sermons, and attends the house of God. He sometimes reads his Bible, and he often has a correct notion of what the gospel is. But he fails in faith: he has not faith enough in the truth of the things which he professes to believe ever to be affected by them in his daily life, or in his truest feelings. If he did really believe these things to be true, his life would not be slothful. When a man believes that there is a hell, he labors to escape from it. When a man verily believes that there is a heaven, unless he is demented he has an ambition to partake in its glories. When a man really and truly accepts the fact of his having sinned against a righteous God, and believes in the evil of sin, he pines to be cleansed from sin. When he heartily believes in the power of the precious blood of Christ to make him clean, he seeks to be washed therein that he may be pure before the sight of God. The spiritual sluggard does not believe after that practical fashion. He says "It is true," but he acts as if it were false. He is too much a sluggard to become an infidel; he is too lethargic to argue against the truth which condemns him; he nods assent, it is the nod of sleep. We might have more hope of him if he would begin to contradict. If he would think enough of the truth to endeavor to justify his unbelief of it, we might hope that he had opened one of his eyes; but while he continues to cry "Yes; oh, yes;" and to do all that is proper, but nothing that is decided and earnest, we have small hope of him. He prays at times, but it is a dreamy devotion. He has not faith enough in prayer to continue in it till he is heard in heaven. He listens to the preaching of the gospel, but as a sluggard he lets what is said go in at one ear and out at the other: he grasps nothing, feels nothing, retains nothing. He is often on the verge of some good and great thing, but it ends in smoke. He has resolved in real earnest to look to his eternal state and seek the Lord with all his might, but his resolves are frail as bubbles. If you were to tell him that in seven years' time he would be just as dull, stupid, and sinful as he now is, he would angrily deny it; but such will be the case. He intends only to delay a very little longer, and then he is going to entertain the great question in the most serious manner. If I recollect rightly he was in the same mind twenty years ago, and I fear he will continue in the same mind when death comes upon the scene and ends all his dreaming. I fear that of him it will be true, "in hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torments." He will not open his eyes till then.

I must not forget that this sluggard did once make an effort. He gave up one of his vices: that is to say he almost did so, but he soon returned to it. He was a drunkard, and he went the length of not drinking quite so much. Perhaps he even went so far as not drinking at all, which was a good thing for him, but then he made up for his self-denial in that direction by indulgence in another way. If you cannot sink a ship by a hole in one place you can do so by boring a hole in another: while some go down to perdition by one sin, others destroy themselves by another. The sluggard spent all his strength in tinkering one breakage, and he had no energy left to mend a second flaw. He was so much asleep that he murmured in his dream, "Well done! I am a splendid fellow." Even when a friend shook him, he yawned, and turned over, and went to sleep again. He was almost awakened but he preferred to doze till a more convenient season. He heard a sermon the other day upon "One thing thou lackest," and he cried, "That's me!" and slumbered again. He heard a discourse upon judgment to come and he at once admitted the absolute need of being prepared for death and judgment; but he did not prepare, and in all probability he will die in his sins. The man has no resolution, no soul for action, no spirit for anything good. He is given up to slumber; he pleads always for a little more folding of the arms to sleep. He will, he will; he assures you that he will wake up; but he never does. Oh that by the grace of God this dreamer could be aroused! His way is the way of unbelief, and he keeps to it with a deadly persistence which must end in destruction.

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Now, that way is full of thorns. It is a very hard way. I will show you in a minute that it is so. People who are in this state cannot quite give up religion, and yet they have never really taken to it. Do you notice how hard everything is to them? To begin with, ministers always preach such dreadfully long sermons. The sermon is not long to you who feed upon the word; but to those who sleep at the table it is intolerably tedious. The whole service is dreary to them, though to believers it is bright and happy. And Sundays! To me the Sabbath is the pearl of the week, but to these sluggards in religion it is a day of gloom. We hear them speak of “dreary English Sundays.” They piteously describe the closed shops and theatres and museums; and enquire what a man is to do in so sad a case. To go to church? To hear of the best things? This is much too hard a task for sluggish minds. Poor dear souls! As for a prayer-meeting, they never condescend to consider such a gathering; it is too dreary. Or if perchance they go nobody ever prays to please them; their ideal of devotion is not reached. Ask them whether they read the Bible at home. They might do so if they were flogged to it, but the Bible does not interest them, and it requires so much thought: they cannot muster mind enough for it. To us it is a Book which sparkles with the divinest truth: it is the Book of God: the Lord of books: there is no volume like it. But to these people Bible-reading is hard labor, and worse. Prayer also is slavery; repentance is impossible. The revival plan of “Believe, and live,” without any repentance—they rather take to for a time till they begin to understand more of what the evangelist means.

They go into the enquiry-room and get “converted” in five minutes, and have done with godliness for the rest of their lives. Possibly some time after they hear of a sanctification to be had in the same manner: they believe themselves to be perfect and feel that there is no more need for watchfulness or striving; for sin is dead and they are perfect. When they are told what repentance and faith really are, and that these are for daily, life-long use, and that we must every day watch and strive against temptation without and within, they disappear from among our hearers for they do not wish to trouble themselves with so great an enterprise. If they could be carried to heaven in a sedan chair or trip there in their slippers they would be glad of it; but to go on pilgrimage up hill and down dale is another matter. Their way is as full of difficulties as a thorn-hedge is full of prickles.

Moreover, it is full of perplexities. Do you ever meet with these sluggards? I do. They sometimes come to see me, and when they come this is their style of talk. They say, “Well sir, I have heard about believing in the Lord Jesus Christ. Can you tell me what it means?” I explain that it is a simple acceptance of God’s testimony and trust in the Lord Jesus. Do you understand that? They say “Yes.” Then they raise a difficulty, which I explain. Do you quite comprehend that? “Yes sir, I see that, but”—and then follows a further doubt. This also is cleared up in time to make room for another. Again and again it is —“Yes, but then—.” Thus I continue grinding wind by the hour together. Their minds are bottomless buckets and their memories are bags full of holes: it is very unprofitable work to endeavor to fill them. I seem to be trying to catch a fox. I stop up its hole but it is out at another opening. This also I stop and fifty more, and to my surprise I hear the shout, “Hark, away!” My fox has gone across country. He is further off than ever: it was great folly on my part to imagine that I could bring him to earth, or dig him out of his burrow. These people are great at questions, the whole difficulty really lying in their unbelief—they are unwilling to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. When a man does not wish to believe, reasons for doubting gather about him in swarms like flies. Besides, it is such a fashionable thing, you know, to doubt. You are aware that all the cultured folk display great facility in fashioning doubts, while those who believe God

to be true and do not mistrust his word are common-place persons of a very low order of mind. You smile; but this is a very convincing argument to our sleepy friend. No great logic is needed to lull a sluggard to repose. It is the fashion to doubt, and you may as well be dead and buried as out of the fashion! These sluggish people will not take the trouble to sift evidence; they have no wish to be driven to turn from their sins and seek a Savior, and be reconciled to God: this would be too much exertion and involve too many self-denials and heart-searchings. They prefer a way full of perplexities to the new and living way: they choose a thorn-hedge rather than the King's highway of righteousness.

Nor is this all. In addition to perplexities their way becomes full of miseries. The sermon which pleases the believer and cheers his heart, saddens the sluggard. The prayer which is to us a delight is to them a cause of anxiety, if they enter into it at all. The sight of bread is a great joy to a hungry man; but suppose he does not eat it, and there it stands—well then it becomes an instrument of torture fit for Tantalus to use. I should suppose that nothing could aggravate thirst much more than the mirage of the desert when the traveler sees a stream of bright sparkling water rippling at his feet, and yet not a drop is there. His fancy torments his thirst. So for some of you to hear of the feast of love and to see the joy of the children of God must be horrible if you yourselves have neither part nor lot therein. That promise quoted by the preacher, how it must have grated on your ear if you knew its value and yet did not embrace it by faith! Painful is this predicament. You are sadly placed, for you enjoy neither good nor evil. If you were to go straight out into the world and plunge into the pleasures of it you would at least know one side of life; but you dare not do that, you have too much conscience, too much training in religious ways to run with the worldling in his wantonness; so that you neither know the pleasures of the world nor the pleasures of grace. You feel restraints from both sides but you know not the liberties of either side. Betwixt two stools you come to the ground. Neither heaven nor hell is on your side; both saints and sinners are shy of you, and so your way is as a thorn-hedge. It is dreadful for a man to have enough conscience to know that he is lost, but not enough grace to find salvation; to have enough religion to make him uncomfortable in sin but not enough to make him happy in Christ. I know some who continue in sin and yet at night have terrible dreams, and wake up in a cold sweat of fear. They dare not think of the course of conduct which they nevertheless persevere in: they go onward to destruction, and by-and-by they will take a leap in the dark because they are too idle to wake up. O mighty grace, wake these sluggards or else they will sleep themselves into eternal misery!

“The way of the slothful man is as an hedge of thorns.” One of these days he will come to the end of his way, and he will see that hedge of thorns blocking him out of heaven—blocking him out from God. His sins like a thick hedge will stand in front of him as he is about to die, and will shut him out from hope while his despairing soul will cry, “Oh, that I could find mercy! Oh, that I could find deliverance!” Recollection of wasted opportunities and of a rejected gospel and of despised Sabbaths will come up before him, and through that thornhedge his naked soul will be unable to force its way into hope and peace. God grant that we may not be among the sluggards at the end of the way!

We will now consider the other side of the text very briefly and notice that the righteous man's way shall be made plain. This is a cheering promise, especially to any of you who are walking in the dark at this time. “The way of the righteous is made plain.” The Lord will see to this. The way of the righteous is the way of faith. They see him who is invisible, and they trust in God. They look for their pardon to the precious blood of Jesus Christ; in fact they look to God in Christ Jesus for

everything. Their way has impediments in it: crooked things are in it, mountains are in it, and deep gulfs; but see the beauty of the promise, "The way of the righteous is made plain." Difficulties shall be removed, the valleys shall be exalted, and the mountains and hills shall be laid low, the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain. Child-like confidence in God shall march on as upon a raised causeway and always find for itself a road. Faith travels by an unseen track to honor and glory, neither shall anything turn her aside. Her way may not be plain at this moment, but it shall be made so. God is with those who trust in him, and what or whom shall we fear when God is with us? In due time the hand of the Lord shall be seen. To the moment the divine power will time its interposition. The Red Sea was not divided a single second before Israel passed through it. The Jordan only flowed apart when the feet of the Lord's priests actually came to the water's brim. To-morrow's difficulties are real, and to-morrow's grace will be real. When to-morrow comes, sufficient unto the day shall be the divine help thereof. When you come to the sepulcher you shall find that the stone is rolled away from its mouth. In due time the way of the righteous shall be made plain, and that is all the righteous should desire or expect.

Sometimes the way of the righteous is mysterious and perplexing. I have known the best of men say, "I long to do the right and by God's grace I will not stoop to anything which is evil; but which out of the two ways now before me is the right way? Each of them seems to be both hopeful and doubtful; which way shall I turn?" This is a condition which causes great anxiety to one who is deeply earnest to be right. Oh for an oracle which could plainly indicate the path! Superstition and fanaticism shall not be gratified by either voice or dream, but yet the way of the righteous shall be made plain. Brother, when you do not know your way ask your guide. Stand still and pray. If you cannot find the way upon the chart, commit yourself to the divine guidance by prayer. Down on your knees and cry to the Lord! Few go wrong when they pray over their movements and use the judgment which God has given them. The last is not to be omitted, for I have known persons pray about a matter which was perfectly clear to any one with half a grain of sense. In order to escape from an evident but unpleasant duty they have talked about praying over it. Where a plain command is given an unmistakable finger points the way, and hesitation is rebellion. Sluggards make prayer an excuse for doing nothing; on the other hand wilful people make up their mind and then pray, and this is sheer hypocrisy.

God is insulted by prayers which only mean that the petitioner would be glad of divine allowance to do wrong—glad of an event which might be twisted into guidance in a doubtful direction. Such prayers God will never hear, but the way of the righteous shall be made plain. The path of faith shall end in peace, the way of holiness shall conduct to happiness. Your way may be so dark that you cannot see your hand before you, but God will before long make it bright as noonday. At this moment all the wise men in the world might not be able to predict your path; but the Lord will direct you. Only trust in the Lord and do good, and he will light your candle, yea, he will cause his sun to shine upon you. There is a blessing in the very act of waiting upon God, and out of it comes this joy, that your way shall be made plain.

I find one excellent translation runs thus—"The way of the righteous is a highway." The righteous do not follow the blind alleys and back streets of craft and policy: "The way of the righteous is a highway;" it is the open road where none may challenge the traveler. It is the King's highway where the passenger has a right to be. It is a grand thing to feel that in your position in life you are where you have a right to be, and that you came there by no trespass or breaking of hedges; that you are doing what you have a right to do before the living God and none may gainsay you. He that is in

the King's highway is under the King's protection, and he that stops him by daylight shall come under the strong hand of the law. Our King has said, "No lion shall be there, neither shall any ravenous beast go up thereon."

He that is on the King's highway will come to a good end, for the King has completed that way so that it does not fall short, but leads to a city of habitations whose Builder and Maker is God. Oh, to be right with God; yea, to be right with him in our daily life and private walk! Let that be the case, and our way shall be judged of by the Lord as his own royal highway, and upon it the light of his love shall shine so that it shall become brighter and brighter unto the perfect day.

O God of great mercy, keep us in thy fear, and through thy grace lead us in imitation of thy dear Son to abide in holiness! And to thy name be praise for ever and ever! Amen.

Portion of Scripture read before sermon—Isaiah 35 and Hebrews 12:1-13.
Hymns from "Our Own Hymn Book"—241, 210, 126.

Unsound Spiritual Trading

A sermon (No. 849) delivered on Lord's Day morning, January 10th, 1869,
at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington,
by C. H. Spurgeon.

“All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes; but the LORD weigheth the spirits.”——Proverbs 16:2.

During the last two years some of the most notable commercial reputations have been hopelessly destroyed. Men in the great world of trade who were trusted for hundreds of thousands of pounds, around whose characters there hovered no cloud of suspicion nor even the shade of doubt, have proved themselves reckless of honesty and devoid of principle. The fiery trial has been too much for the wood, hay, and stubble of many a gigantic firm. Houses of business which seemed to be founded upon a rock, and to stand as fast as the commonwealth of England itself, have been shaken to their foundations and have caved in with a tremendous crash: on all sides we see the wrecks of great reputations and colossal fortunes. There is wailing in the palaces of sham, and desolation in the halls of pretense. Bubbles are bursting, windbags are collapsing, paint is cracking, gilt is peeling off. Probably we have more of this to come, more revelations still to be made of apparent wealth which covered insolvency, as a rich paper may cover a mud wall; crafty schemes which duped the public with profits never made, and tempted them to advance to deeper speculations, even as the mirage of the desert mocks the traveler. We have seen in the public prints month after month, fresh discoveries of the modes of financing adopted by the villainy of this present age, to accomplish robbery respectably, and achieve felony with credit. We have been astonished and amazed at the vile tricks and shameless devices to which men of eminence have condescended. And yet we have been compelled to hear justifications of gigantic frauds, and have even been compelled to believe that the perpetrators of them did not consider themselves to be acting disreputably, their own previous successes, and the low state of morality, together having lulled them into a state in which conscience, if not dead, was thoroughly asleep. I say, we may probably have yet more to see of this school of dishonesty; but it is a pity that we should—and altogether needless—for the whole trade of financing is now to be examined by the diligent student, with models and living examples, more than enough to illustrate every single portion of the art. Some ages may have been great in science, others in art, and others in war, but our era overtops every other in the proficiency of its rascals; this is the classic period of chicanery, the golden age of fraud. Let a man have a base heart, and a seared conscience, and a plausible mode of address, and let him resolve upon deluding the public out of millions, he need not travel to learn the readiest method, he can find examples near at home amongst high professors and the great ones of the earth. My brethren, these noises of falling towers on the right, these sounds of crumbling battlements on the left, these cries of the shipwrecked everywhere along the coasts of trade, have not only awakened within me many thoughts relative to themselves and the rottenness of modern society, but they have made me muse upon similar catastrophes evermore occurring in the spiritual world. Unrecorded in the journals, and unmourned by unregenerate men, there are failures and frauds and bankruptcies of soul most horrible to think upon. There is a spiritual trading just as pretentious and apparently just as successful as your vaunted

limited liability juggle, but really just as rotten and as sure to end in hopeless overthrow. Speculation is a spiritual vice as well as a commercial one— trading without capital is common in the religious world, and puffery and deception are every-day practices. The outer world is always the representative of the inner; the life which clusters round the Exchange illustrates that which gathers within the church; and if our eyes were opened and our ears were able to hear, the sights and the sounds of the spirit world would far more interest us and sadden us than the doings which begin in the directors' board-room and end we know not where. We should see at this moment colossal religious fortunes melting into abject spiritual poverty. We should see high professors, much revered and held in esteem, brought into shame and everlasting contempt. We should see the wealthy in divine matters, whom men have unwisely trusted as their guides and counsellors as to their souls' best interests, unmasked and proved to be deceitful through and through. I seem at this moment to be peering into the world of spiritual things, and I see many a Babel tower tottering and ready to fall; many a fair tree decaying at the heart; many a blooming cheek undermined by disease. Yes, a sound comes to my ear of men in the church, apparently rich and increased in goods, who are naked, and poor, and miserable, and great men whose towering glories are but a fading flower. There ever have been such, there are many now, and there will be to the end.

The supply of deceivers is sure to be maintained since the text tells us that all the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes; there is a propensity in human nature which leads men, even when they are most wrong, to judge themselves most right. The text at the same time suggests the terrible conclusion to which all self-deception will certainly come, for the judgment of man concerning himself is not final, and there comes a day when the Lord who weigheth the spirits will reverse the verdict of a perjured conscience, and make the man to stand no longer in the false light which his conceit has thrown around him, but in the true light, in which all his fancied glory shall vanish as a dream.

Travelling some time ago in an iron steamboat to the Continent, the captain told me that the compass was far from trustworthy where so much iron was on every side, and that sometimes, when so far as he knew he had steered correctly, he had found himself very considerably out of his course. Though the compass was fixed aloft so as to be as much as possible out of the region of the metallic attraction, yet the deflection and aberrations in the case of his own compass had been occasionally most remarkable. In like manner our conscience originally as it came from God was no doubt an exceedingly correct standard of right and wrong, and if we had sailed by it we must have reached the haven safely enough; but conscience is now placed in connection with a depraved nature which forbids its accurate working. Now, if the laws of nature would vary to make up for its defects when the compass erred, the aberrations would not matter; but if the man is misled by the perverted needle he may unexpectedly be upon a rock, and will be as surely wrecked as if the helmsman had neglected the compass altogether. So, if God's law could be shaped to suit the errors of our judgment it might not matter; but the laws of God stand sternly and inflexibly the same, and if we deviate from the right way through this false judgment of ours we shall be none the less guilty, and we shall find our fate to be none the less terrible. Hence I do approach this matter with a greater vehemence and earnestness this morning, on your account, and with more brokenness and humility of spirit on my own, desiring to speak with divers classes among you, urging you not to be so flattered by your own conceptions of your position as to get out of the course in which you ought to steer; beseeching you to remember that however well you may cajole yourselves with the idea that your way is right and clear, yet the inevitable judgment-day will come to end all delusions,

however pleasant. Spiritual traders, I speak to you this day, reminding you of the great audit which hastens on, and warning you lest you make a fair show for awhile, and then in the end come down with a crash. I am sure there is much rotten spiritual trading abroad, and to save you from it I pray the Holy Ghost to help me speak plainly and searchingly this morning.

As God shall help me, I intend to address the text to different characters. We will endeavor to be practical throughout the sermon, and to push home vital truth with great earnestness upon each one.

I. The ways of the openly wicked are clean in their own eyes, but the LORD will weigh their spirits.

At first sight this statement seems to be rash. The drunkard, the blasphemer, the Sabbath-breaker, can it be that these people are right in their own eyes? Solomon was a profound student of human nature, and when he penned this sentence you may rest assured he knew what he wrote. They who are best acquainted with mankind will tell you that self-righteousness is not the peculiar sin of the virtuous, but that most remarkably it flourishes best where there appears to be the least soil for it. Those men who in the judgment of their fellows distinctly and plainly have no righteousness in which they can glory, are the very persons who, when you come to search into the depth of their nature, are relying upon a fancied goodness which they dream about and rest upon. Take the outwardly immoral for a moment and begin to talk with them about their sins, and you will find that they are accustomed to speak of their faults under very different names from those which Scripture and right reason would use. They do not call drunkenness “drunkenness,” for instance, but it is “taking a glass.” They would not for a moment advocate downright blasphemy, but it is “strong language which a fellow must use if he’s to get on,” or “letting slip an ugly word or so, because you were plagued so.” They disguise vice to themselves as pleasure; they label their uncleanness as gaiety, their filthiness as lightheartedness. They speak of their sins as though they had no enormity about them, but were trifles light as air—if wrong at all, themes rather for the feather lash of ridicule than for the scourge of reproof. Moreover, the most of them will claim that they are not so bad as others. There is some one point in their character in which they do not go so far as some of their fellows, and this is a grand point and a vast comfort to them. They will confess that they are sinners, not meaning it for a moment; and if you come to particulars and details, if they are in an honest frame of mind they will recede step by step, admitting fault after fault, till they come to a particular point, and there they take their footing with virtuous indignation. “Here I am right beyond all rebuke, and even deserving of praise. So far my sin has come, but how thoroughly sound at heart must I be that I have never permitted it to advance further!” This boasted line is frequently so singular and mysterious in its direction, that no one but the man himself can see any reason or consistency in it; and the satirist who shoots at folly as it flies, finds abundant objects for his arrows. Yet to that man himself, his pausing there is the saving clause of his life; he looks to that as the sheet anchor of his character. The woman whose character long since has gone, will yet boast some limit to her licentiousness which is merit in her esteem—merit sufficient to make all her ways clean in her own eyes.

Moreover, the worst of men conceive that they have some excellences and virtues, which, if they do not quite atone for their faults, yet at any rate greatly diminish the measure of blame which should be awarded them. The man is a spendthrift, “But sir, he was always freehearted, and nobody’s enemy but his own.” The man, it is true, would curse God, but then, well, it was a mere habit, he always was a dashing blade, but he meant no harm; and besides he never was such a liar as

So-and-So; and indeed, he scorned to tell a lie upon any business subject. Another has cheated his creditors, but he was such a nice man; and although, poor fellow, he never could keep accounts or manage money matters, yet he always had a good word for everybody. The immoral man, if he sits down to write his own character, and summons all the partiality he is capable of, will say "I am a sad dog in some respects, sowing a great many wild oats, but I have a fine character underlying it all which will no doubt come up some day, so that my end shall be bright and glorious notwithstanding all. That last point that I hinted at is very often the righteousness of men who have no other, namely, their intention one of these days much to amend and improve. To make up for present poverty of righteousness they draw a bill upon the future. Their promises and resolves are a sort of paper currency on which they imagine they can trade for eternity. "Is it not often done in business?" say they: "A man who has no present income may have a reversionary interest in an estate; he gets advances thereon—why should not we?" Thus the open sinner, easing his all too ready conscience with the imaginary picture of his future repentance and amendment, begins to feel himself already meritorious and bids defiance to all the threatenings of the word of God.

I may be speaking to some to whom these remarks are very applicable, and if so I pray that they may lead to serious thought. My hearer, you must know, or at any rate a few sober moments of reflection would make you know, that there is no truth in the pleas, excuses, and promises with which you now quiet your conscience; your peace is founded on a lie, and is upheld by the father of lies. Whilst you are continuing recklessly to break the laws of God in your ordinary life and to take pleasure in sin, you most assuredly are under the anger of God and you are heaping up wrath against the day of wrath, and when the measure of your iniquity is full then shall you receive the terrible reward of transgression. The Judge of all the earth will not pay regard to the idle preterites which now stultify your conscience. He is not a man that he should be flattered as you flatter and deceive yourself. You would not have the impertinence to tell your excuses to him. Dare you kneel down now and speak to the great God in heaven and tell him all these fine things with which you are now smoothing your downward road? I hope you have not come to such a brazen pitch of impertinence as that, but if you have let me remind you of that second sentence of my text, "The LORD weigheth the spirits." A just and true balance will be used upon you ere long. When the Lord puts such as you are into the scale, there will be no need for delay; the sentence will go forth at once and from it there shall be no appeal: "Thou art weighed in the balances and found wanting." Ah then my hearer, when that conscience of yours wakes up, how it will torment you! It sleeps now, drugged by the opiates of your ignorance and perverseness; but it will start up soon like a giant refreshed with new wine, and then with strength and fury unthought of before it will pull down the temple of your peace about your ears, even as Samson smote the Philistines. An awakened conscience in another world is the worm that dieth not and the fire which never can be quenched. O sirs, it is a dreadful thing to be delivered up to one's own conscience when that conscience is enlisted on the side of right. Old tyrants had their terrible headsmen with grim masks across their brows who carried the bright and gleaming axe; the old inquisitors had their familiars arrayed in gowns of serge and cowls, from the loopholes of which their fierce eyes gleamed like wolves; but no tormentors, yea, no fiends of hell, can ever prove more terrible to a man than his conscience when its lash is corded with truth and weighted with honesty. Did you ever spell the burning letters of that word remorse? Within the bowels of that single word there lieth hell with all its torments. O sirs, if you be but a little aroused now by an earnest sermon or a sudden death, how wretched you feel and how desperately you plunge into fresh gaiety and wantonness to drown your thoughts;

but what will you do with thoughts which no dissipation can drown, and remembrances which no mirth can banish? What will it be to be haunted by your sins for ever and for ever? What to have it made sure to you that from the guilt and punishment no way of escape can ever be discovered?

O you who fondly dream that the broad road to destruction is the upward path to celestial bliss, I beseech you, learn wisdom and hearken to the voice of instruction; consider your ways and seek unto the precious blood which alone can blot out your sins.

II. A second class I will now address. The ways of the godless man are clean in his own eyes, but the LORD weigheth the spirits.

The godless man is often exceedingly upright and moral in his outward behavior to his fellow men. He has no religion, but he glories in a multitude of virtues of another kind. It is unhappily true that there are many who have much that is amiable about them who nevertheless are unamiable and unjust towards the one Being who ought to have the most of their love, and who should have been respected in their conduct first of all. How often have I met with the ungodly man who has said, "You talk to me about fearing God! I know him not, neither do I regard him, but I am much better than those who do." He will sometimes say, "Your religion I look upon as a mere farce: I regard Christians as being made up of two sorts, knaves and fools. They are either duped by others, or else for purposes of their own they are deceiving others. Their talk about God, sir, it is all cant; with some of them I grant you it is not quite that, but then they have too few brains to be able to discover that they are deceived. However, take the whole thing for all in all, it is all a piece of nonsense, and if people just behave as they ought towards their neighbors and do their duty in their station in life, that is enough." Yes, and there are in this city of London thousands, and hundreds of thousands, who think this to be good logic, and indeed who open their eyes with astonishment if for a single moment you are supposed to contradict their statement that such a style of life is the best and most commendable; and yet if they would but think, nothing can be more unsound than their life and its supposed excellence. Here is a man created by his God, and he is put down amongst his fellow creatures; surely the first duty that he owes is towards his Creator. His life depends entirely upon that Creator's will—it must be his first duty to have respect to him in whose hands his breath is; but this man not only refuses to be obedient to the law of his Creator and have regard to him in his daily actions, but turns round to his neighbours who are mere creatures like himself, and he says "I will have respect to you, but not to God. Any laws of the state which bind me in my relation to you I will obey; but any laws which describe my relation to God I will not consider except it be to ridicule and laugh at them. I will be obedient to any but to God; I will do the right thing to any but to the Most High. I have a sense of right and wrong but I will restrict its action to my fellow men, and that sense of right and wrong when it comes in relation to God I will utterly obliterate." Now if there were no God this man were wise enough, but as there is a God who created us, and who shall surely come in the clouds of heaven to call every one of us to account for the things which we have done in the body, what think you will be the judgment dealt out to this unfaithful servant? Will he dare to say unto his King, "I knew that thou wast my Maker and Lord, but I considered that if I served my fellow servants it would be enough. I knew what was right to them, but I disregarded the doing of anything that was right towards thee"? Shall not the answer be, "Thou wicked and faithless servant, thou knewest what was right and wrong, and yet towards me, having first claim upon thee, thou hast acted unjustly, and whilst thou wouldst bow thy neck to others thou wouldst not yield to me. Depart from me, I know thee not. Thou didst not know me, neither do I know thee. I weigh thee in the balances, and I find thee utterly reprobate. Thou art cast

away for ever.” O ungodly man, let this warning, if thou be here this morning, sound in thy heart as well as thy ears: no longer set thyself in defiance to thy Creator or live in negligence of him, but say, “I will arise and go unto my Father; I will confess that I have forgotten him and despised him, and I will seek peace through the blood of Jesus Christ.”

III. Further, I shall address myself to another class of persons. In all ages of the church, and especially at this time, there are numbers of persons who are outwardly religious, but whose religion ends there. Now it seems to some of us amazingly strange that a man should be acting viciously, should be living wickedly, and yet should think that his ways are clean because he takes a sacrament or attends a certain place of worship. I must confess to my mind this seems a very strange phenomenon, that there should exist men of intelligence in this world who know that their conduct is altogether blameworthy and yet feel perfectly at ease because a chosen ritual has been diligently observed; as if bowing and scraping, singing or groaning could be a substitute for holiness of heart. Look at the Pharisee and tell me if he be not a moral wonder! He devours widows’ houses, he is ready to prey on everything that comes to hand; he is a detestable hypocrite, but the man is perfectly at ease because he has made broad the border of his garments, because he fasts twice in the week, and strains out gnats from the wine that he drinks; he is quite content with himself and all his ways seem right, so right, indeed, that other men who are better than he, he passes by with contempt, afraid lest they should come between the wind and his nobility. He thanks God that he is not as other men, when so far as you and I can judge he is ten thousand fathoms deeper down in dark damnation in his horribly hypocritical character. Yet brethren, some form or other of this is very common. All the ways of a man are clean unto him when he once imbibes the idea that ceremonial religion, or religious talk, or religious profession, can make up for moral sin. Ah brethren, this evil may even creep in among ourselves. Let us not be so swift in condemning the Pharisee when perhaps the same sin may pollute our own souls. I have known the man who was reckoned a sound Calvinist and believed in very high doctrine, live a very unhallowed life. He despised “Arminians,” as he chose to call them, though some of these despised ones lived very near to God and walked in holiness and integrity. The Arminian, forsooth, godly man as he was, would be lost; but this self-righteous orthodox man who could at the same time drink and cheat thought that he should be saved because he had been able to see the truth of certain doctrines, which also the devil sees as well as he. I have known another who thought he had a deep and memorable experience who would talk by the yard of the depravity of his heart. Some people thinking that he ought to be able to talk about that very truly, for he proved it in his life; and yet because he could repeat cant phrases and had picked up certain rich expressions of experience from books, he verily thought within himself that he was not only as good as others but a very pattern for others to copy. Right and left such men as these will hurl curses and anathemas upon the best and most earnest of saints. They are the men—wisdom will die with them. Holiness being dead already with them, it is no wonder that wisdom should die too. Ah! take care lest you and I drink in the same spirit in another shape. Ah! preacher, thy preaching may be all well and good, it may be sound enough and right enough, and it may be even edifying to the people of God and arousing to the unconverted. But remember, God will not judge thee by thy sermons but by thy spirit, for he weigheth not thy words but thy motive, thy desire, thine object in preaching the gospel. Deacon of the church, you may have walked in all honor for many years and may be universally respected, and thine office may have been well maintained in all the outward duties of it, but if thy heart be not right, if some secret sin be indulged, if there be a canker upon thy profession which none know but thine own self, the Lord who weighs

the spirit will make nothing of thy deaconship and thy carrying round the cups and bread at the communion, but thou shalt be found wanting and cast away. Thou too, brother elder, thy labors and thy prayers are nothing if the heart be evil. Thou mayst have visited others and instructed them and been a judge of their state; still, if thou hast not served God and his church out of a pure desire for his glory, thou too, put into the scales, shall be rejected with abhorrence. I often pray—I wish however I prayed it more—that none of us here may be preached into the idea that we are all right if we are all wrong. It is not your coming to the Tabernacle, it is not your joining the church, your being baptised, your attending prayer-meetings, or your doing anything that will be the slightest matter in this business—it is your giving up your hearts to God truly, and your living in conformity with your profession; and unless the grace of God be really given you, helping you to do this, your ways may be clean unto you because of your outward profession; but the Lord who weigheth the spirits will make short work of these bubbles, he will break this confectionery, smash to pieces these shams, and leave the man who ought to have a palace over his head throughout eternity to sit down and shiver amongst the ruins of his Babylon, and cry out and weep and wail amongst dragons and fiends.

IV. But to pass on, there is another character that must be addressed. “All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes,” so are the ways of the covetous professor.

It is marvellous to some of us that a man whose object in life is merely to get money and who withholds what he has from the cause of God should take up the profession of being a Christian man, because none of all the vices is more contrary to true religion than covetousness. Where will you find an instance of a single saint in Scripture that ever fell into covetousness? Into all other sins have they fallen, but into this one I do not remember that one child of God mentioned in Scripture ever descended. Grace may exist where there are many occasional sins, but never where there is abiding covetousness. Think of Paul’s words: “Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither, fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.” Luther used to say, “I have been tempted to all sins but covetousness.” This he so detested that he distributed gifts made to him lest he should have his portion in this world. Adams, in his book on Peter, well remarks, “Noah was once drunk with wine but never with the world; Lot, twice incestuous, never covetous; Peter denied his Master thrice, but it was not the love but the fear of the world that brought him to it. Once David was overcome by the flesh, never by covetousness. Why did not these purge themselves from adultery, anger, and the like? Because into these sins the infirmities of a saint may fall, but if once into covetousness there is nothing of a saint left—not even the name. Covetousness hath the brand of God’s hate full on its brow.” “If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him;” and when a professor shows the love of the world in its grossest shape, when he gives way to being the slave of “Mammon, the least erect of all the fiends,” he bears evidence to all who judge righteously according to Scripture that the love of God is not in him, and cannot be in him; the two things are inconsistent. Yet, strange to say we do know not a few whose way seems very clean to them. They screw here and there, now their servants, and now their customers: the widow and the fatherless would not be safe from them if they could pick their bones. What they scrape together is held with an iron grasp. Let souls be damned, they shall have no missionary sent to them by their money. Let this London fester with sin, let it be covered with the ulcers of the most fearful depravity, they are never stirred to give any assistance towards the healing of the city’s wounds. And yet while

their damnation awaits them certainly, and their condemnation stares them in the face as plainly as the sun in the heavens, yet their ways seem clean unto them. Strange it should be so, but the Lord weigheth the spirits, and what a weighing that shall be when men who escape church censure because theirs was a sin of which the church could not deal with, shall be found guilty of it, and God shall cast them away! Vain will be their pretensions that they ate and they drank in God's house, for the answer shall come, "I was an hungered and ye gave me no meat; I was thirsty and ye gave me no drink; naked, and ye clothed me not. I was sick and in prison, and ye did not minister unto me. Verily I say unto you, I know ye not!" O let this truth, for truth it is, pierce like a two-edged sword right through the hearts of any of you who are beginning to yield to this damning vice. Cry unto God that as he gives you substance you may use it for his glory. Ask him that you may never perish with a millstone about your neck; for even if that killing weight be made of gold it will be no better perishing for all that.

V. Another character must have a word also: we will now note the ways of the worldly professor.

It is amazing how some people making a profession of religion, square it with their conscience that they live as they do live. You could not with a microscope detect any difference between them and common worldlings, and yet they think there is a vast difference, and they would be insulted if you did not allow it. Here they come up to the house of God to-day, but to what amusements have they been during the week? How are they dressed? How are their children educated? Is there any family prayer? Is there anything in the household that is Christian? Look at them in business. Do not they trade precisely like those who make no pretensions to religion? Ask their workpeople, just go yourselves and watch them—see if they cannot tell white lies as well as others, whether they are not for all the world as alike as two peas are to one another, like other unregenerate and unconverted people! and yet their ways seem very clean unto them, very clean indeed, and their conscience does not trouble them in any way whatever. I have but this word to say in all affection to such, earnestly desiring that they may be plucked out of this fire, "the LORD will weigh the spirits." The whole of our life is known to him. He will not judge us without book. When he comes to the account he will not be like a judge who has to learn the facts; he will come to the last assize, having seen with those eyes of fire the secret thoughts, the private feelings of our life. God be merciful to us sinners, we may all of us say; but God especially save us from being like the ungodly.

VI. Yet another word, and this is addressed to all professors here more or less: it is a solemn word concerning the ways of secure backsliders.

Do you not know brethren and sisters, that very often our ways seem very clean to us when they are not. I have learned by experience most painful to my own soul, that I am not in the least qualified to judge of my own spiritual health: I have thought myself gradually advancing in the ways of God when I have been going back, and I have had the conceit crossing my mind that I had now overcome a certain besetting sin, when to my surprise I had found it return with greater force than before. Fellow professor, you may be at this moment walking as you think very rightly, and going off very well and comfortably, but let me ask you a few questions: are you not less in private prayer than you used to be? Do you not now hurry over it, do you not sometimes omit it altogether? Do you not frequently come from your closet without really having spoken to God, having merely gone through the form for the sake of quieting yourself? Your way may seem clean, but is it not foul when the mercy-seat becomes neglected? How about your Bible, is that read as it once was, and are the promises as sweet to you? Do they ever rise from the page and talk with you? Oh, but if your Bible be neglected my brother, you may be just as diligent in attending to the house of God

as you used to be, but is not yours a sad state of decay? Let me come closer still. Is there the vitality about your profession that there used to be? There are some in this house this morning who if they could speak, would tell you that when to their great sorrow they fell into sin, it was because by little and little their piety began to lose its force and power of life. They have been restored, but their bones still ache where they were once broken, and I am sure they would say to their brethren "Take care of allowing a gracious spirit to evaporate, as it were, by slow degrees. Watch carefully over it, lest settling upon your lees and not being emptied from vessel to vessel you should by-and-by become carnally secure, and afterwards fall into actual sin. I ask some of my brethren here, and I ask the question because I have asked it of my own soul and answered it very tearfully, may not some of us be growing hardened in heart with regard to the salvation of our fellow creatures? Do we not love less now than we used to do, those who are crying to us, "Come over and help us"? Do we not think ourselves getting to be experienced saints? We are not the poor sinners we once used to be. We do not come broken-heartedly to the mercy-seat as we did. We begin to judge our fellow Christians and we think far less of them than we did years ago when we used almost to love the ground that the Lord's saints did tread upon, thinking ourselves to be less than nothing in their sight. Now if it were the case in others, that they were growing proud, or becoming cold, or waxing hard of heart, we should say of them, "they are in great danger," but what about ourselves if that be the case with us? For my own self, I dread lest I should come to this pulpit merely to preach to you because the time has come and I must get through an hour or an hour-and-a-half of worship. I dread getting to be a mere preaching machine without my heart and soul being exercised in this solemn duty; and I dread for you, my dear friends who hear me constantly, lest it should be a mere piece of clock-work that you should be in the seats at certain times in the week, and should sit there and patiently hear the din which my noise makes in your ears. We must have vital godliness, and the vitality of it must be maintained, and the force and energy of our religion must go on to increase day by day, or else though our ways may seem to be very clean the Lord will soon weigh our spirits to our eternal confusion. Do you know that to his people the divine weighing in fatherly chastisement is rough work, for he can put the soul into the scale to our own consciousness, and when we think that it weighs pounds he can reveal to us that it does not even reach to drachms! "There," saith he, "see what you are!" and he begins to strip off the veil of self-conceit, and we see the loathsomeness and falsehood of our nature, and we are utterly dismayed. Or perhaps the Lord does worse than that. He suffers a temptation to come when we do not expect it, and then the evil bolls up within us, and we who thought we were next door to the cherubs find ourselves near akin to the demons; wondering too that such a wild beast should have slumbered in the den of our hearts, whereas we ought to have known it was always there and to have walked humbly with God, and watched and guarded ourselves. Rest assured beloved, great falls and terrible mischief never come to a Christian man at once, they are a work of slow degrees; and be assured too that you may glide down the smooth waters of the river and never dream of the Niagara beyond, and yet you may be speeding towards it. An awful crash may yet come to the highest professor among us that shall make the world to ring with blasphemy against God, and the church to resound with bitter lamentations because the mighty have fallen. God will keep his own, but how if I should turn out not to be his own! He will keep the feet of his saints, but what if I leave off to watch and my feet should not be kept, and I should turn out to be no saint of his, but a mere intruder into his family, and a pretender to have what I never had! O God, through Christ Jesus deliver each of us from this.

VII. Had time not failed me I meant to speak concerning the seventh and last character, namely, the ways of the deceived man.

There are, no doubt, many in the world who will never find out that their ways which they thought to be so clean are all foul till they enter upon another world. There are some men who are Christians in all but this, that they have not true faith in Jesus. There are others who apparently are saved, but they have never been really born again. There are many who have everything but the one thing needful, and who think they have that, and persuade their fellows that they have that. How near a man may come to being a Christian and yet miss salvation it were difficult to tell; but certainly he may come so near that no man nor yet the angels of God shall be able to tell the difference between him and a saved soul, only God shall discern the difference when he comes to weigh the spirits.

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter. It is this: let us come my brethren, all of us, to the place of confession of sin and acknowledge that we have broken God's law, and deserve his just displeasure. Let us go by the help of his Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of supplication, and let us confess the depravity of our nature and the error of our hearts. Let us pray that instead of thinking our ways clean, we may know them to be foul, may mourn over them, and may learn to see them as God sees them, as crooked ways and wrong ways in themselves not to be boasted of, but to be remembered with shame and confusion of face. Blessed is he who is delivered from any rejoicing in himself. Happy is that man who can see no speck of soundness in his own flesh, but who feels that the leprosy of sin hath covered him without and within from head to foot. And brethren, if we come to such deep humiliation of spirit, the next word is this: let us go together to the great salvation which God has provided in the person of Christ Jesus. Come, linking hand in hand, saint and sinner, now all sinners consciously, let us stand and see where sin has pierced the body of the blessed Substitute with yonder bleeding wounds. Let us read the lines of grief written upon that blessed face; let us gaze into the depth of his soul filled with an ocean of anguish, lashed to a tempest of suffering; let us believe that he suffered in our stead and so roll our sin and our sinfulness on him. Jesus, accept a sinner, a poor sinner still; though these twenty years I have known thy name, yet still a sinner I come to thee, the chief of sinners! Ah, brethren and sisters, we are never safer I am sure, never healthier, never in a better frame than when we are right flat down on the ground before the cross. When you feel yourself to be utterly unworthy you have hit the truth. When you think you are doing something and are rich and flourishing, you are poor, and naked, and miserable; but when you are consciously weak and sinful, then you are rich. When you are weak you are strong; but O God, save us from letting our ways seem clean in our own sight, but may we weigh our spirits by the help of thy Spirit, and condemn ourselves that we may not be condemned of the Lord.

The Lord bless you richly and freely for his name's sake. Amen.

Portion of Scripture read before sermon—Psalm 51.

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Trust in God—True Wisdom

A sermon (No. 392) delivered on Sunday Morning, May 12th, 1861,
at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington,
by C. H. Spurgeon.

“He that handleth a matter wisely shall find good: and whoso trusteth in the
LORD, happy is he.”—Proverbs 16:20.

Wisdom is man’s true path—that which enables him to accomplish best the end of his being, and which therefore gives to him the richest enjoyment and the fullest play for all his powers. Wisdom is the compass by which man is to steer across the trackless waste of life. Without wisdom man is as the wild asses’ colt; he runs hither and thither, wasting strength which might be profitably employed. Without wisdom, man may be compared to a soil untilled, which may yield some fair flowers but can never field a harvest which shall repay the labor of the reaper, or even the toil of the gleaner. Give man wisdom, wisdom in the true sense of the term, and he rises to all the dignity that manhood can possibly know; he becomes a fit companion for the angels, and between him and God there is no creature; he standeth next to the Eternal One because Christ has espoused his nature, and so has linked humanity with divinity. But where shall this wisdom be found? Many have dreamed that they discovered it, but they have not possessed it. Where shall we find it? ‘Twere worth while to pierce the bowels of the earth, to scale the heights of heaven, to traverse the deserts, to plough the sea, to fly through the illimitable fields of ether—all were too little if we might but find this precious thing at last. But “the depth saith, It is not in me: and the sea saith, It is not with me. It cannot be gotten for gold, neither shall silver be weighted for the price thereof. It cannot be valued with the gold of Ophir, with the precious onyx, or the sapphire. The gold and the crystal cannot equal it: and the exchange of it shall not be for jewels of fine gold. No mention shall be made of coral or of pearls: for the price of wisdom is above rubies. The topaz of Ethiopia shall not equal it, neither shall it be valued with pure gold. Whence then cometh wisdom? and where is the place of understanding? seeing it is hid from the eyes of all living, and kept close from the fowls of the air. Destruction and death say, We have heard the fame thereof with our ears. God understandeth the way thereof, and he knoweth the place thereof.

Let us listen then to the voice of the Lord, for he hath declared the secret; he hath revealed to the sons of men wherein true wisdom lieth, and we have it in the text, “whoso trusteth in the LORD, happy is he;” and that sentence is put in conjunction with another which teaches us this truth, that to handle a matter wisely is to find good, and the true way to handle a matter wisely is to trust God. This is the short and brief method of escaping the greatest difficulties: this is the clue to the most intricate labyrinths; this is the lever which shall lift the most tremendous weights. He that trusts in the LORD has found out the way to handle matters wisely, and happy is he.

I shall take the text this morning by God’s assistance in two ways. First, we shall apply it to the wise handling of matters with regard to time and this present state; and then secondly with regard to the handling of the eternal matters relating to our destiny beyond the grave, and endeavor to show how trusting in the LORD is handling this matter wisely.

I. First then my dear friends, with regard to the wise handling of matters of time which concern our bodies and our souls, whilst we are here below.

A man must be prudent in such a world as this. He will soon cut his feet if he does not pick his steps. He will soon tear his garments with thorns and briars if he does not choose his way. This is a land full of enemies; we must be wise or the arrow will suddenly find out a vulnerable place in our armor. We must be cautious, for we are not travelling in noon-day on the king's highway, but rather at night-fall, and we may therefore be attacked by robbers and may lose our precious treasures. He who is in a wilderness, and in a wilderness infested with robber bands, must handle matters wisely if he would find good.

How shall we handle these matters wisely? Three or four come forward to instruct us, and the first lesson is one which Satan often teaches the young and foolish spirit. He says, "To handle a matter wisely is to make your own will your law, and to do that which seemeth to be the best for you, be it right or be it wrong." This was the lesson which he taught to Eve when in the serpent's form he spoke the serpent's wisdom, "Ye be shall be as gods," said he. "Mistrust the goodness of your Maker; believe that he is afraid lest you should attain to equal power and dignity with himself. Pluck the fruit. 'Tis true he forbids, but who is Jehovah that you should obey his voice? 'Tis true he threatens to punish, but do not believe the threatening, or if you believe it, dare it. He who cannot risk anything will never win. He that will not venture something shall never make great gains. Do and dare, and you will be handling the matter wisely." She plucked the fruit and the next instant she must have perceived somewhat of her folly; but ere many hours had passed over man's head, his discovered nakedness, pains of body, weariness, toil, expulsion from Paradise, and tilling a thankless, thorny land, taught man that he had not handled the matter wisely, for he had not found good. And you too, ye sons and daughters of Eve, when the old serpent whispers in your ear, "Sin, and you shall escape from difficulty; be just when you can afford to be so, but if you cannot live except by dishonesty, be dishonest; if you cannot prosper except by lies, then lie" —oh! men, listen not to his voice I pray you. Harken to a better wisdom than this. This is a deception which shall destroy you; you shall find no good, but you shall find much evil; you shall sow the wind and you shall reap the whirlwind. You think that you dive into these depths for pearls, but the jagged rocks shall break you, and from the deep waters you shall never rise, except your lifeless corpse swim on the surface of the pestilential waves. Be wise, and learn of God, and close your ears to him who would have you destroy yourself that he may gloat his malicious spirit over your eternal misery. It is never wise to sin, brethren, never. However it may seem to be the best thing you can do, it must always be the worst. There never was a man in such a position that it would be really profitable to him to sin. "But," say you, "some men have become rich by it!" Sirs, they have had sorrow with their riches; they have inherited the blasting curse of God, and so they have been really poorer than poverty could have made them. "But," say you, "men have mounted to the throne by breaking their oaths." I know they have; but temporary success is no sure sign of constant happiness; the Emperor's career is not ended yet; wait ye in patience; but should he escape in this life, the perjurer shall meet his Judge, and then—. He that measures what man gains by what he seems to gain hath taken a wrong standard. There was never yet —I will repeat it—there was never yet any man who broke his word, who forfeited his oath, who turned aside from God's Word or God's law, who in the end found it be profitable to him. He heaped up deceptions, he gathered together delusions, and when God awoke, and when that man awoke, as a dream when one awaketh, so did he, or so shall he, despise the image on which his soul had doted.

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But now the serpent moderates his hiss. "Do not sin," saith he; "there is no necessity for downright dishonesty or theft; do not absolutely plunge yourself into vice, but be wise," saith he, by which he means, "Be crafty; trim your sails when the wind changes, how can you reach your haven unless you learn to tack about? The straight road is thorny; take the bye-path; there will be another path which will bring you back after the thorns and flints are passed. Why?" says he, "will you dash your head against a stone? If there be a mountain in your way, why not wind about the base; why climb the summit? Doth not wisdom teach you that that which is easiest must be best, and that which is most in consistence with the dictates of your own nature must after all be best for you?" Ah! slimy serpent! Ah! base deceiver, how many multitudes have been thus deceived! Why, brethren, the reason why we have not more men in this age whom one could trust, why we have not in our high places more men in whom we could place confidence, is because policy has been the law of individuals, and the law of nations too, instead of that course of honesty which is like the flight of the arrow, certain and sure to reach its mark, not by tortuous windings, but by one onward straight line. Why do persons so frequently inquire what they ought to do in such a case, not meaning what God's law would have them do, but what will bring the best result? The rules of modern craft and time-serving morality are difficult because they are inconsistent, but honesty is simple and clear as the sunlight. It takes years to make a clever lawyer, grace however can make an honest man in one hour. Brethren believe me, policy is not wisdom, and craft is not understanding. Let me give you the case of another woman—Rebecca. Rebecca heard that God had decreed that her favourite son Jacob should be ruler of the twain. "The elder shall serve the younger." She could not wait for God's providence to fulfill God's purpose, but must needs deceive her blind husband. She dresses up her son with skins of goats and wool, provides the savoury meat, and sends Jacob who was, though a good man, the very picture of a politic and prudent professor, to meet his father and to deceive him. Ah! if Rebecca had been wise she had not done this. Little did she foresee that the effect of this stratagem would be to drive her favourite son away from his affectionate mother, give him years of toil under Laban, cause him to make the great mistake of his life, the commission of the error of polygamy, and make him a far more afflicted man than he might have been had he been like Abraham or Isaac who leaned not to their own understandings, but trusted in God with all their hearts. Brethren, you shall never find in any case that any turning aside from a straightforward course will be for your profit. After all, you may depend on it that the way to be most renowned among men is to have the strange singularity of being a downright honest man. Say what you mean; mean what you say. Do what you believe to be right, and ever hold it for a maxim that if the skies fall through your doing right, honest men will survive the ruin. How can the godly sin? If the earth should reel, would he fail? No, blessed be God, he should find himself in the honorable position of David of old when he said, "The earth is removed; I bear up the pillars thereof."

But now the serpent changes his note and he says, "Well, if you be not sinful or crafty, at any rate, to succeed in life you must be very careful. You must fret, and worry, and think much about it; that is the way to handle a matter wisely. Why" saith he, "see how many are ruined from want of thought and want of care. Be you careful over it. Rise up early, sit up late, and eat the bread of carefulness. Stint yourself; deny yourself. Do not give to the poor; be a miser, and you shall succeed. Take care; watch; be thoughtful." And this is the path of wisdom according to him. My brethren, it is a path which very many have tried, very many have persevered in it all their lives, but I must say to you this is not handling a matter wisely after all. God forbid we should say a single word against prudence, and care, and necessary forethought, industry and providence. These are virtues;

they are not only commendable, but a Christian's character would be sadly at fault if he had them not. But when these are looked upon as the foundations, the staple materials of success, men are desperately in error. It is vain for you in that sense to rise up early, and sit up late, and eat the bread of carefulness, for "so he giveth his beloved sleep." Oh! there be many who have realized that picture of old Care, which old Spenser gives in his Faery Queene.

"Rude was his garment, and to rags all rent;
So better had he, nor for better cared;
With blistered hands, among the cinders burnt,
And fingers filthy, with long nails unpared,

Right fit to rend the food ere which he fared:
His name was Care: a blacksmith by his trade,
That neither day nor night from working spared,
But to small purpose iron wedges made:
Those be unquiet thoughts that careful minds invade."

Who wishes to have that picture come true of himself? I would infinitely rather that we could be photographed as being like Luther's bird, which ate upon the tree and sang,

"Mortal cease from care and sorrow, God provideth
for the morrow."

Care is good, mark, if it be good care; but care is ill when it cometh to be ill care, and it is ill care if I dare not cast it upon him who careth for me. Cotton has well said of covetous earthworms, "After hypocrites, the greatest dupes the devil has are those who exhaust an anxious existence in the disappointments and vexations of business, and live miserably and meanly, only to die magnificently and rich. For like the hypocrites, the only disinterested action these men can accuse themselves of is that of serving the devil without receiving his wages: he that stands every day of his life behind a counter until he drops from it into the grave may negotiate many very profitable bargains; but he has made a single bad one, so bad indeed that it counter balances all the rest; for the empty foolery of dying rich, he has paid down his health, his happiness, and his integrity."

Once again, there is another way of handling a matter wisely which is often suggested to young men, and suggested too, I am sorry to say, by Christian men who little know that they are giving Satanic advice. "Well," say they, "young man, if you will not be exceeding careful and watch night and day, at least be self-reliant. Go out and tell the world that you are a match for it, and that you know it; that you mean to carve your way to glory, to build yet for yourself an edifice at which men shall gaze. Say to the little men round about you, 'I mean to tower above you all and bestride this narrow world like a Colossus. Be independent young men. Rest on yourselves. There is something wonderful in you; quit yourselves like men; be strong.'" Well brethren, there be many who have tried this self-reliance, and their deception in this case has been fearful too, for when the day of fiery trial has come they have discovered that "Cursed is he that trusteth in man," even though that man be himself, "and maketh flesh his arm," though it be his own flesh. Broken in pieces they have been left as wrecks upon the sand, though they sailed out of harbour gaily with all their sails filled with the wind. They have come back like knights unhorsed and dishonored, though they went out with their lance in hand and their proudly flaunting pennon, intending to push like the horns of

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unicorns and drive the whole earth before them. No man was ever so much deceived by others as by himself. Be warned, Christian man, that this is not handling a matter wisely.

But what then is the way of wisdom? The text answers the question —“He that trusteth in the LORD, happy is he.” So then, if I understand the text aright, if we learn to trust in God in temporal things we shall be happy. We are not to be idle, that would show we did not trust in God who worketh hitherto, but in the devil who is the father of idleness. We are not to be impudent and rash; that were to trust chance, but not to trust God, for God is a God of economy and order. We are to trust God; acting in all prudence and in all uprightness, we are to rely simply and entirely upon him. Now I have no doubt there are many here who say, “Well, that is not the way to get on in the world; that can never be the path of success, simply trusting in God.” Ay, but it is so, only one must have grace in the heart to do it. One must first be made a child of God and then he can trust his affairs in his Father’s hands; one must come to depend upon the Eternal One, because the Eternal One has enabled him to use this Christian grace which is the fruit of the Holy Spirit. I am persuaded that faith is as much the rule of temporal as of spiritual life, and that we ought to have faith in God for our shops as well as for our souls. Wordly men may sneer at this, but it is none the less true; at any rate I pray that it may be my course as long as I live.

My dear friends, let me commend to you a life of trust in God in temporal things by these few advantages among a great many others. First, trusting in God you will not have to mourn because you have used sinful means to grow rich. Should you become poor through it, better to be poor with a clear conscience than to be rich and guilty. You will have always this comfort should you come to the lowest position of nature, that you have come there through no fault of your own. You have served God with integrity, and what if some should say you have missed your mark, not achieved to success, at least there is no sin upon your conscience.

And then again, trusting God you will not be guilty of self-contradiction. He who trusts in craft sails this way to-day and that way the next, like a vessel propelled by the fickle wind; but he that trusteth in the Lord is like a vessel propelled by steam, she cuts through the waves, defies the wind, and makes one bright silvery track to her desired haven. Be you such a man as that; never bow to the varying customs of worldly wisdom. Let men see that the world has changed, not you,—that man’s opinions and man’s maxims have veered round to another quarter, but that you are still invincibly strong in the strength which trusting in God alone can confer. And then dear brethren, let me say you will be delivered from carking care, you will not be troubled with evil tidings, your heart will be fixed, trusting in the LORD. I have read a story of an old Doctor of the Church who, going out one morning, met a beggar and said to him, “I wish you a good day.” “Sir,” said he, “I never had an ill day in my life.” “But,” said the Doctor, “your clothes are torn to rags and your wallet seems to be exceedingly empty.” Said he, “My clothes are as good as God wants them to be, and my wallet is as full as the Lord has been pleased to make it, and what pleases him pleases me.” “But,” said the Doctor, “suppose God should cast you into hell?” “Indeed, sir,” said he, “but that would never be; but if it were I would be contented, for I have two long and strong arms—faith and love—and I would throw these about the neck of my Savior, and I would never let him go, so that if I went there he would be with me, and it would be a heaven to me.” Oh, those two strong arms of faith and love! if you can but hang about the Savior’s neck, indeed, you may fear no ill weather. No fatal shipwreck shall I fear, for Christ is in my vessel, he holds the helm, and holds the winds too.

“Though winds and waves assault my keel,
 He doth preserve it, he doth steer,
 Even when the bark seems most to reel.
 Storms are the triumphs of his art,
 Sure he may close his eyes, but not his heart.”

The practical lesson from all this is—“trust in the LORD with all thine heart, and lean not to thine own understanding.” Whatever thy trouble be, take it to God this morning; do not bear it till the night. Whatever your difficulty and peculiar exercise of mind, tell it unto the Lord your God. He is as able as he is willing, and as willing as he is able; having sent the trial he will surely make a way of escape for you.

II. But now I turn to the second part of our discourse. In spiritual matters, he that handleth a matter wisely shall find good.

But what is the right way of handling this dread matter which stands between our soul and God? We have immortal spirits, and spirits that are responsible. The day of judgment draweth nigh, and with it heaven’s happiness or hell’s torment. What, my brethren, shall we do to handle this matter wisely? And here comes up the old serpent again and he says, “Young man, the easiest way to handle this matter is to let it alone altogether, you are young as yet, there is plenty of time—why put old heads on young shoulders? You will have need enough to think of religion by-and-bye, but at present, you see, it will be much in your way. Better leave it alone; it is only these ministers that try and make you thoughtful, but they only bother you and trouble you, so drop it. You can think of it if there be anything in it by-and-bye; but for the present, rejoice in your youth and let your joy be in the morning of your days, for the evil days come, and then let your thoughtfulness come with them.”

Well now young man, does this strike you after all as being the wisest course? I will tell you one thing, whatever you may think it, such a course as that is the direct road to hell. Do you know the road to heaven? Well, it might take us some little time to tell you about that, but if you want to go to hell we will tell you that in one moment. You need not go and swear, you need not be drunk, you need not become a monster in iniquity or a fiend in cruelty. No, no, it is easier than that, it is just a little matter of neglect, that is all, and your soul is lost to a certainty. Remember how the apostle puts it, “How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation”? Now, can that which is the surest road to hell be a wise way? I think I may leave it with your reason, certainly I may leave it with your conscience. You know it is not the right way, ay, and I have noticed this, that men who laugh most at religion when they are well and are most careless, are the most frightened when they meet with a little accident. If they have a little illness, oh how bad they feel! It is an awful thing for them to be ill, they know it is, they are dreadfully shaken, and the strangest thing is that the minister they hated most when they were well becomes the very man they have the most faith in, and most long to see when they become sick. I know when the cholera was here last, there was a certain man for whom no word in the English language could be found that was bad enough to describe me, and in the cholera when he lay sick, who should be sent for? The clergyman of the parish? No, certainly not. Who should be sent for? Some minister of good repute? No, send for the man whom he had cursed before; and until that man should come and speak to him and offer prayer, he could not even indulge a hope—though, alas! poor soul, I fear he had no hope even then. Yet so is it, God will honor his ministers, he will prove the utter futility of man’s brag and boast. You

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may be careless sir while you are well, you may neglect this great salvation, but a little sickness shall make you tremble and thy knees shall shake, and thou shalt be convulsed with agony and find that this is not handling the matter wisely. You are something like a bankrupt who knows that his accounts are going wrong and fears that he is insolvent, he does not look at his books, he does not like to look at them for there is no very pleasant reading there; there may be a few assets, but the entries are mostly on the other side and so at last he does not keep any book, it would be troublesome to him to know where he was. So is it with you. It is because things are not right, you do not like to sift them and try them lest you should find out the black reality. Be wise I pray you, and look a little beyond you. Why shut your eyes and perish? Man, I charge thee by the living God, awake, or hell shall wake thee; look man, or eternity shall soon amaze thee.

But Satan comes to some and he says, "If you won't be careless the next easiest thing is to be credulous. There," says he, "is a man over there with a shaven crown who says he'd manage the thing for you. Now, he ought to know. Does not he belong to a Church that has an infallible head? Give yourself up to him," saith he, "and it will be all right. Or," saith he, "I hate popery; but there is a clergyman, let him give you the sacrament; rely upon him and it will be all safe. Or," says he, "if you could but join the Church and be baptized; there, that will do—take it for granted that it is all right. Why should you trouble yourself with theological squabbles? let these things alone; be credulous, don't search into the root of the matter; be content so long as you swim on the surface and do not care whether there be rocks down deep at the bottom of the sea." And is this the way—is this the way to handle this matter wisely? Assuredly not, sir. Better trust a lawyer with your property than a priest with your soul. Better hand your purse to a highwayman upon the heath than commit your soul to a Romish priest. What will he do for you but make his penny of you, and your soul may be penniless for him. So shall it be with the best of men, if you make saviours of them. Go, lean upon a reed; go, build a throne of bubbles; go, sleep in a powder magazine with your candle burning in a bag of gunpowder; but do not trust even a good man with your soul. See to it that you handle this matter wisely, and you cannot do it thus.

"Ah, well!" says Satan, "if this will not do, then try the way of working out your own salvation with fear and trembling. Do good," saith he, "say a great many prayers, perform a great many good works, and this is handling the matter wisely." Now, I will take you to Switzerland for a minute to give you a picture. There was a poor women who lived in one of those sweet villages under the Alps, where the fountains are always pouring out their streams of water into the great stone tanks, and the huge overhanging roofs cover the peasant homes. She had been accustomed to climb the mountain to gather fodder for her cows, and she had driven her goats to the wild crags and the sheer solitudes where no sound is heard except the tinkling of the bell. She, good soul, had read nothing but the Bible, and her dreams and thoughts were all of heavenly things, and she dreamed thus, that she was walking along a smooth meadow where there were many fair flowers, and much soft grass. The pathway was smooth, and there were thousands winding their way along it, but they took no notice of her; she seemed alone. Suddenly the thought crossed her that this was the path to destruction; and these were selfish sinners; she sought another way for she feared to meet their doom. She saw a path up the mountain-side exceedingly steep and rugged, as mountain paths are, but up this she saw men and women carrying tremendous burdens, as some of us have seen them carry them, till they stoop right down under the tremendous weight as they climb the stony staircase. Here there was a tree across the road, and there a bramble, and there a brook was gushing down the mountain-side, and the path was lined with stones, and she slipped. So she turned aside again,

but those that went up the hill looked at her with such sorrow that she turned back again, and began to climb once more, but only to find the way rough and impossible. She turned aside again into the green meadow, but the climbers seemed to be very sad, yet though they pitied her, she did not pity them, for their toil made them wet with perspiration and faint with fatigue. She dreamed she went along the green meadow till she came to a fair house, out of which looked a bright spirit. The side of the house where she was was all windows without a door, and the spirit said to her, "You have come the wrong road, you cannot come in this way, there is no entrance here," and she woke. She told a Christian woman who visited her of this dream, and she said, "I am sore troubled for I cannot go up that mountain path, I know. I understand that to be the way of holiness, I cannot climb it, and I fear that I shall choose the green meadow, and when I come at last to the gates of heaven, they will tell me that is not the way and I cannot enter there." So her kind instructress said to her, "I have not dreamed, but I have read in my Bible this morning that one day when the corn was ripening and the sun was shining brightly, there went three men out of a city called Jerusalem, one of them was the Savior of the world and the other two were thieves. One of them, as he hung upon the cross, found his way to the bright city of heaven; and it was said 'To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise.' Did he go up that hilly path do you think?" "No," said the poor woman, "he believed and was saved." "Ah," said her friend, "and this is your way to heaven. That hilly path you cannot climb; those who were ascending it with so much labor perished ere they reached the summit, tottering from some dizzy height, they were dashed to pieces upon some jagged rock. Believe, and this shall be the path of salvation for you." And so I come to the poor soul and I say, if thou wouldst handle matters rightly, happy is he that trusteth in the Lord. You have done the right thing for eternity, with all its solemnities, when you have cast your soul just as it is on him who is "able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by him."

And let me now tell you what are the excellencies of so doing. That man who believes in Christ and can say, "Salvation is finished; all is of Christ and all is free; my faith is in Jesus Christ and in him alone,"—that man is freed from fears; he is not afraid to die, Christ has finished the work for him: he is not afraid to live, he shall not perish, for his soul is in Jesus Christ: and he is not afraid of trial, or of trouble, for he that bought him with his blood shall keep him with his arm. He is free from present fears, and he is free from present cares too. He has no need to toil and labor, to fret and strive, to do this or to do that. He feels no more the whip of the slave-driver on his back; his life is happy and his service light, the yoke he wears he scarce knows to be a yoke, the road is pleasant, and the path is peace—no climbing upwards except as angel hands assist him to climb the road which else no mortal feet could traverse. He is free too from all fatal delusion. He is not a deceived man, he shall never open his eyes to find himself mistaken, he has something which shall last him long as life shall last, which shall be with him when he wakes from his bed of clay to conduct him joyously to realms of light and endless day. This man is such a man that if I compared him with the very angels I should not do amiss. He is on earth but his heart is in heaven; he is here below, but yet he sits together with Christ in heavenly places, he has his troubles but they work his lasting good; he has his trials but they are only the precursors of victory, he has weakness, but he glories in infirmity because the power of Christ doth rest upon him, he is sometimes cast down, but he is not destroyed, he is perplexed, he is not in despair, he does not grovel, but he walks upright; his foot may be in the mire, but his eye is above the stars; his body may be covered with rags, but his soul is robed in light, he may go to a miserable pallet to find an unresting rest, but his soul sleeps in the bosom of his beloved, and he has a perfect peace, "a peace which passeth all

understanding, which keeps his heart and mind through Jesus Christ.” Christians, I would that you and I could believe God better and get rid of these wicked fears of ours. Gracious Father, I do to-day cast all I have on thee, and all I have not, too, I would cast on thee. My cares, my sorrows, my labors, my joys, my present, my past, my future—take thou and manage all. I will be nothing, be thou all.

“O God, I cast my care on thee,
I triumph and adore,
Henceforth my chief concern shall be
To love and serve thee more.”

Brethren, believers in Jesus, do the same, and you shall find that happy is the man who trusteth in the LORD. As for you who fear not the Lord Jesus—may his Holy Spirit visit you this morning, may he quicken you, for you are dead in sin; may he give you power, for you are strengthless of yourselves. Remember, the way of salvation is simple and plain before you—“Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.” Trust my Master’s blood, depend upon his finished righteousness and you must, you shall be saved; you cannot, you will not be lost.

“Oh believe the promise true
God to you his Son has given.”

Depend on his Son, and you shall thus escape from hell, and find your path to heaven.
The Lord add now his own best blessing for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

The Unrivalled Friend

A sermon (No. 899) delivered on Lord's Day morning, November 7th, 1869,
at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington,
by C. H. Spurgeon.

“A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.”—Proverbs
17:17.

There is one thing about the usefulness of which all men are agreed, namely, friendship; but most men are soon aware that counterfeits of friendship are common as autumn leaves. Few men enjoy from others the highest and truest form of friendship. The friendships of this world are hollow, they are as unsubstantial as a dream, as soon dissipated as a bubble, as light as thistledown. Those airy compliments, those empty sentences of praise, how glibly they fall from the lip, but how little have they to do with the heart! He must be a fool indeed who believes that there is aught in the complimentary affection but mere flattery or matter of form. The loving cup means not love, and the loud cheering of the toast means not sincere fellowship. With very many friendship sits very loosely: they could almost write as Horace Walpole does in one of his letters. He says he takes every thing very easily, “and if,” saith he, “a friend should die, I drive down to the St. James's coffee-house and bring home another,” doubtless as cordial and enraptured with the new friend as with the old. Friends in this world are too often like the bees which swarm around the plants while they are covered with flowers and those flowers contain nectar for their honey; but let November send its biting frosts, the flowers are nipped, and their friends the bees forsake them. Swallow friendship lives out with us our summer but finds other loves in winter. It has always been so from of old, even until now; Ahithophel has deserted David and Judas has sold his Lord. The greatest of kings who have been fawned upon by their courtiers while in power, have been treated as if they were but dogs in the time of their extremity; we may, as the poet of the passions—

“Sing Darius, great and good-Deserted
in his utmost need,
By those his former bounty fed;
On the cold ground exposed he lies,
With not a friend to close his eyes.”

Of all friendship which is not based on principle, we may say with the prophet, “Thou art weighed in the balances and found wanting.” But there is a higher friendship than this by far, and it subsists among Christian men, among men of principle, among men of virtue where profession is not all, but where there is real meaning in the words they use. Damon and Pythias still have their followers among us, Jonathan and David are not without their imitators. All hearts are not traitorous; fidelity still lingers among men: where godliness builds her house true friendship finds a rest. Solomon speaking not of the world's sham friends but of friends indeed, saith, “A friend loveth at all times.” Having once given his heart to his chosen companion he clings to him in all weathers, fair or foul; he loves him none the less because he becometh poor, or because his fame suffers an eclipse, but his friendship like a lamp shines the brighter, or is made more manifest because of the darkness

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that surrounds it. True friendship is not fed from the barn-floor or the winefat; it is not like the rainbow dependent upon the sunshine, it is fixed as a rock and firm as granite, and smiles superior to wind and tempest. If we have friendship at all, brethren and sisters, let this be the form it takes: let us be willing to be brought to the test of the wise man, and being tried, may we not be found wanting. "A friend loveth at all times."

But I am not about to talk of friendship at all as it exists between man and man; I prefer to uplift the text into a still higher sphere. There is a Friend, blessed for ever be his name, who loveth at all times; there is a Brother who in an emphatic sense was born for adversity. That friend is Jesus, the friend of sinners, the friend of man, the brother of our souls, born into this world that he might succor us in our adversities. I shall take the text then and refer it to the Lord Jesus Christ; and unless time should fail us I shall then refer it to ourselves as in connection with the Lord Jesus Christ, showing that we also ought to love him even as he has loved us, always and under all adversities.

I. First then in reference to the Lord Jesus Christ. The first sentence is, "a friend loveth at all times," and this leads us to consider first, the endurance of the love of Jesus Christ.

My dear brethren, when we read "a friend loveth at all times" and refer that to Christ, the sentence, full as it is, falls short of what we mean, for our Lord Jesus is a friend who loved us before there was any time. Before time began the Lord Jesus Christ had entered into covenant that he would redeem a people unto himself, who should show forth his Father's praise. Before time began his prescient eye had foreseen the creatures whom he determined to redeem by blood. These he took to himself by election, these the Father also gave to him by divine donation, and upon these, as he saw them in the glass of futurity, he set his heart. Long before days began to be counted or moons to wax and wane, or suns to rise and set, Jehovah Jesus had set apart a people to himself whom he espoused unto himself, whose names he engraved upon his heart and upon his hands, that they might be taken into union with himself for ever and ever. Meditate on that love which preceded the first rays of the morning, and went forth to you before the mountains were brought forth or ever he had formed the earth and the world. My brethren, you believe the doctrine of eternal love, meditate thereon, and let it be very sweet unto your hearts:—

"Before thy hands had made
The sun to rule the day,
Or earth's foundation laid,
Or fashioned Adam's clay,
What thoughts of peace and mercy flow'd
In thy dear bosom, O my God!"

He loved you when time began, in the elder days before the flood, and in the far-off periods; for those promises which were spoken in love had reference to you as well as to all the believing seed. All the deeds of love which were wrought as a preface to his coming, all had some bearing towards you as one of his people. There never was a point in the antiquity of our world in which this friend did not love you, every era of time has been a time of love. Love, like a silver thread, runs adown the ages. Chiefly did he lay bare his love eighteen hundred years ago, when down with joyful haste he sped to lie in the manger; and hang as a babe at the virgin's breast. He proved his love to you to a degree surpassing thought when as a carpenter's son he condescended for thirty years to live in obscurity, working out a perfect righteousness for you, and then spent three years of arduous toil to be ended by a death of bitterness unutterable. You had no being then, but he loved you and gave

himself for you. For you the bloody sweat that fell amidst the olives of Gethsemane; for you the scourging and the crowning with thorns; for you the nails and spear, the vinegar and lance; for you the cry of agony; the exceeding sorrow “even unto death.” He is a friend that loved you in that darkest and most doleful hour when your sins were laid upon him and with their crushing weight pressed him down, as it were, in spirit, to the lowest hell.

Beloved, having thus redeemed you, he loved you when time began with you. As soon as you were born the eye of his tenderness was fixed upon you. “When Ephraim was a child, then I loved him.” It was lovingkindness which arranged your parents’ native place and time of birth. You came not into this world, as it were, by chance, or as the young ostrich bereft of a parent’s care—the Lord was your guardian; the Lord Jesus Christ looked upon you in your cradle and bade his angels keep ward around you. He would not let you die unconverted, though fierce diseases waited around you to hurry you to hell. And when you grew up to manhood and ripened the follies of youth into the crimes of mature years, yet still he loved you. O let your heart be humbled as you remember that if you ever fell into blasphemy, he loved you as you cursed him; that if you indulged in Sabbath-breaking, he loved you when you despised his day; that your neglected Bible could not wean his heart from you, that your neglected prayer closet could not make him cease his affection. Alas! to what an excess of riot did some of his people run! but he loved them notwithstanding all. He was a friend that loved under the most provoking circumstances.

“Loved when a wretch defiled with sin,
At war with heaven, in league with hell,
A slave to every lust obscene,
Who, living, lived but to rebel.”

When justice would have said, “Let the rebel go O Jesus; be not bound any longer by cords of love to such a wretch,” our ever-faithful Redeemer would not cast us away but threw another band of grace around us and loved us still. Consider well “his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses and sins.”

I feel as if this were rather matter for you to think over in private, than for me thus hastily to introduce to you in public. May the Holy Spirit however now bedew your hearts with grateful drops of celestial love as I remind you of the love at all times of this best of friends. You recollect when you were constrained to seek him, when your heart began to be weary of its sin, and to be alarmed at the doom that would surely follow unpardoned transgression; it was his love that sowed the first seeds of desire and anxiety in your heart. You had never desired him if he had not first desired you. There was never a good thought towards Christ in any human breast, unless Christ first put it there. He drew you and then you began to run after him; but had he left you alone your running would have been from him, and never towards him. It was a bitter time when we were seeking the Savior, a time of anguish and sore travail. We recollect the tears and prayers that we poured out day and night, asking for mercy; but Jesus our friend was loving to us then, taking delight in those penitential tears, putting them into his bottle, telling the angels that we were praying, and making them string their harps afresh to sweet notes of praise over sinners that repented. He knew us, knew us in the gloom, in the thick darkness in which we sought after God, if haply we might find him. He was near the prodigal’s side when in all his rags and filth he was saying, “I will arise, and go to my Father,” and it was Jesus through whom we were introduced to the Father’s bosom, and received

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the parental kiss, and were made to sit down where there are music and dancing, because the dead are alive, and the lost is found.

My brethren, since that happy day this friend has loved us at all times. I wish I could say that since that sacred hour when we first came to his feet and saw ourselves saved through him, we had always walked worthily of the privileges we have received; but it has been very much the reverse. There have been times in which we have honored him, his grace has abounded, and our holiness has been manifest; but alas! there have been other seasons in which we have backslidden, our hearts have grown cold, and we were on the road to become like Nabal when his heart was turned to a stone within him. We have been half persuaded like Orpah to go back to the land of idols, and not like Ruth to cleave unto the Lord our God. Our heart has played the harlot from the love of Christ, desiring the leeks and garlick and onions of Egypt rather than the treasures of the land of promise. But at such times when our piety has been at a low ebb, he has loved us still; there has not been the slightest diminution in the affection of Christ even when our piety has been diminished; he does not set his clock by our watch, or stint his love to the narrow measure of ours. I fear we have often gone further than merely getting poor in grace within; there have been times when God's people have even actually fallen into overt sin; ay, and have descended to sin grievously too, and to dishonor the name of Christ; but herein is mercy, even those actual and accursed sins of ours have not rent away the promise from us, nor turned away the heart of Christ for his beloved. Sinned though we have to our abounding sorrow, I was about to say, for if there could be sorrow in heaven we might eternally regret that we have sinned against such love and mercy, yet for all that our Lord and Savior would not cast us off, nor will he abjure us come what may.

Reflect, my dear friends, upon all the trying and changeful scenes through which you have passed since the time of your conversion. You have been rich perhaps and increased in goods: you were tempted to forget your Lord, but he was a friend who loved you at all times, and he would not suffer your prosperity to ruin you, but still made his love to dart with healing beams into your soul. But you have been also very poor. The cupboard has been bare and you have said, "Whence shall I find sufficient to supply my need?" But Christ has not gone away because your suit was threadbare, or your house ill furnished; nay, he has been nearer than ever, and if he revealed himself to you in your prosperity, much more in your adversity. You have found him a faithful friend when all others were unfaithful, true when every one else was a liar. You have been sore sick sometimes, but he it was that made the pillow, and that softened the bed of your affliction. It may be you have been slandered and those who loved you have passed you by. Some ill word has been spoken in which there was no truth, but it has sufficed to turn away the esteem of many; but your Lord has gone with you through shame and abuse, and never for a single moment has he even hinted that he only loved you because you were had in respect by men. Ever faithful, ever true has been this friend who loveth at all times. Ah, there have been times, it may be with you, when you could fain have thrown your very self away, for you felt so empty, so good-for-nothing, so undeserving, ill deserving, hell deserving; you felt fitter to die than to live; you could hardly entertain a hope that any good thing could ever spring from you: but when you have least esteemed yourself, his esteem of you has been just the same; when you were ready to die in a ditch, he has been ready to lift you to a throne; when you felt yourself a castaway, you have still been pressed to his dear bosom, an object of his peculiar regard.

Soon, very soon, your time will come to die: you shall pass through the valley of deathshade, but you need not fear for the friend that loveth at all times will be with you then. That eminent

servant of God, Jonathan Edwards, when he was at his last, said, “Where is Jesus of Nazareth, my old and faithful friend? I know he will be with me now that I need his help,” and so he was, for that faithful servant died triumphant. You shall enquire in that last day for Jesus of Nazareth and you shall hear him say, “Here I am;” you shall find the death-shade vale lit up with supernal splendor, it shall be no death to you, but a passing into life eternal, because he who is the resurrection and the life shall be your helper.

Thus I have hastily run through the life of Christ’s love from the beginning that had no beginning, down to the end that knoweth no end, and in every case we see that he is a friend that loveth at all times.

Now brethren, I shall vary the strain though still keeping to the same subject. Let us consider the reality of Christ’s love at all times. The text says, “A friend loveth at all times,” not professes to love, not talks of love, but really does so. Now in Christ’s case the love has become intensely practical. His love has never been a thing of mere words or pretensions; his love has acted out itself in mighty deeds, and signs, and wonders, worthy of a God, such as heaven itself shall not sufficiently extol with all its golden harps.

See then brethren, Christ has practically loved us at all times. It is not long ago that you and I were slaves to sin, we wore the fetters, nor could we break them from our wrists. We were held fast by evil passions and worldly habits, and there seemed no hope of liberty for us. Jesus loved us at all times, but the love did not let us lie prisoners any longer. He came and paid the ransom price for us. In drops of blood from his own heart he counted down the price of our redemption, and by his eternal Spirit he broke every fetter from us, and to-day his believing people rejoice in the liberty wherewith Christ makes them free. See how practical his love was! He did not leave the slave in his chains and let him remain a captive, but he loved us right out of our prison-house into a sacred freedom. Our Lord found us not long ago standing upon our trial. There we were prisoners at the bar, we had nothing to plead in our defense. The accuser stood up to plead against us, and as he laid many charges and heavy, we were not able to answer so much as one of them. Our great High Priest stood there and saw us thus arraigned as prisoners at the bar; he loved us, but oh! how efficient was his love—he became an advocate for us; he did more, he stood in our place and stead, stood where the felon ought to stand. He suffered what was due to us and then covering us with his perfect righteousness, he said before the blaze of the ineffable throne of justice, “Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect? It is Christ that died, yea, rather that hath risen again.” He did not love the prisoner at the bar and leave him there to be condemned; he loved him until this day we stand acquitted, and there is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus. Believer, lift up your heart now, and bless his name who hath done all this for thee.

Our Lord when he came in mercy to us, found us in the rags of our self-righteousness, and in the abject poverty of our natural condition. We were houseless, fatherless; we were without spiritual bread, we were sick and sore, we were as low and degraded as sin could make us. He loved us but he did not leave us where love found us. Ah! do you not remember how he washed us in the fountain which flowed from his veins; how he wrapped us about with the fair white linen, which is the righteousness of his saints; how he gave us bread to eat that the world knoweth not of; how he supplied all our wants and gave us a promise that whatsoever we should ask in prayer, if we did but believe his name, we should receive it? We were aliens, but his love has made us citizens; we were far off, but his love has brought us nigh; we were perishing, but his love hath enriched us; we

were serfs, but his love has made us sons; we were condemned criminals, but his love has made us "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ."

I shall not enlarge here, but I shall appeal to the experience of every believer. In your needs, has not Christ always helped you? you have been in doubt which way to take and you have gone to him for guidance: did you ever go wrong when you left it to him? Your heart has been very heavy and you had no friend that you could communicate with, but you have talked with him, and have not you always found solace in pouring out your hearts before him? When did he ever fail you? when did you find his arm shortened, or his ear heavy? Up to this moment has it been mere talk with Christ? no, you know it has been most true and real love—and now in the recollection of it, I beseech you give him true and real praise, not that of the head only, or of the lip, but of your whole spirit, soul, and body, as you consecrate yourself afresh to him. See then the endurance of Christ's love, and see then also the reality of it.

By your patience, I shall notice in the next place the nature of the love of Christ, accounting for its endurance and reality. The love of our good friend to us sprang from the purest possible motives, he has nought to gain by loving us. Some friendship may be supposed to be tinged with a desire of self advantage, to that extent it is degraded and valueless. But Jesus Christ had nought to gain, but everything to lose. "Though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor." The love he bears to his people was not a love which sprang from anything in them. I have no doubt it had a reason, for Christ never acts unreasonably, but that reason did not lie in us. Love between us and our fellows sometimes springs from personal beauty, sometimes for traits of character which we admire, and at other times from obligations which we have incurred, but with Christ none of these things could avail. There was no personal beauty in any one of his elect: there were no traits of character in them that could enchant him, very much on the other hand that might have disgusted him; he certainly was under no obligations to us, for we had not a being then when his heart was set upon us. The love of man to man is sustained by something drawn from the object of love, but the love of Christ to us has its deep springs within himself. As his own courts maintain the grandeur of his throne without drawing a revenue from the creatures, so his own love maintains itself without drawing any motives and reasons from us, and hence my brethren, you see why this love is the same at all times. If it had to subsist upon us and what we do and what we merit, ah! it would always be at the lowest conceivable ebb, but since it leaps up from the great deep of the divine heart, it never changes, it never shall.

Be it also remembered that Christ's love was a wise love, not blind as ours often is. He loved us knowing exactly what we were whom he loved. There is nothing in the constitution of man that Jesus Christ had not perceived; there is nothing in your individuality but what Christ had foreknown. Remember Christ loved his people before they began to sin, but not in the dark. He knew exactly everything they would think or do or be; and if he resolved to love them at all you may rest assured he never will change in that love, since nothing fresh can ever occur to his divine mind. Had he begun to love us and we had deceived and disappointed him, he might have turned us out of doors, but he knew right well that we should revolt, that we should backslide and should provoke him to jealousy; he loved us knowing all this, and therefore it is that his love abides and endures and shall even remain faithful to the end.

Brethren, the love of Christ is associated continually with an infinite degree of patience and pity. Our Lord knows that we are but dust, and like as a father pitieth his children so he pities us. We are but short-tempered, but our Lord is longsuffering. When he sees us sin he saith within

himself, "Alas! poor souls, what folly in them thus to injure themselves." He takes not our cold words in umbrage so as to put himself in wrathful fume therewith; but he saith, "Poor child, how he hurteth himself by this, and how much he loseth thereby." He even hath a kind look for us when we sin, for he knows it is blotted out through his own blood, and he sees rather the mischief which it is quite sure to bring to the poor soul than the evil of the sin itself. Jesus hath infinite condescension and patience, and we cannot so provoke him as to turn him from his purpose of grace. He is at all times ready to pardon and never slow to be moved to forgiveness. Oh, the provocations of men! but the patience of Christ reacheth over the mountains of our provocation and drowns them all.

Methinks one reason why Christ is so constant in his love and so patient with us is that he sees us as what we are to be. He does not look at us merely as what we are to-day in Adam's fall—ruined and lost, nor as we are to-day but partly delivered from indwelling sin; but he remembers that we are to lie in his bosom for ever, that we are to be exactly like himself and to be partakers of his glory; and as he sees us in the glass of futurity, as by-and-by to be his companions in the world of the perfect, he passes by transgression, iniquity and sin, and like a true friend he loveth us at all times.

I shall not weary those who know this love. They need no gaudy sentences or eloquent periods to set it forth. Its sweetness lies in itself. You may drink such wine as this out of any cup. He that knoweth the flavour of this divine dainty, asketh not that it be carved this way or that, he rejoiceth but to have it, for the meditation upon it must be sweet. "A friend loveth at all times."

The next sentence of the text is, "and a brother is born for adversity." That is to say, a true brother comes out and shows his brotherhood in the time of the trouble of the family. Now let every believer in Jesus here catch the meaning of this with regard to Christ. Jesus Christ was born for you. "Unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given;" but if at any one time more than another Christ is peculiarly yours by birth, it is in the time of adversity. A brother born for adversity.

Observe that Christ was born in the first place for our adversity, to deliver us from the great adversity of the fall. When our parents' sin had blasted Eden and destroyed our hopes, when the summer of our joy had turned into the winter of our discontent, then Christ was born in Bethlehem's manger that the race might be lifted up to hope, and his elect be elevated to salvation. He restored that which he took not away, he rebuilt that which he cast not down. He had never come to be a Savior if we had not been lost; because our adversity was so great, therefore so great a Savior was required, and so great a Savior came.

Our Lord is born for adversity because he has the peculiar art of sympathising with all in adversity. No other but he can claim that he has ranged high and low through all the territories of grief, but this, Jesus Christ can justly claim. Every pang that ever rends a human heart has first tried its keen edge on him. It is not possible even in the extremities of anguish to which some are exposed, that any man can go beyond Christ in the endurance of pain. Christ is crowned king of misery, he is the emperor of the domains of woe. He is able therefore to succor all such as are tempted and tried, seeing he is compassed about himself also with a feeling of our infirmities. Look to him suffering on the tree, look to him throughout all his life of shame and pain and you will see that he was born into adversity, and through being born into it, was born to sympathise with our trials, having learned, as the Captain of our salvation, to be made perfect in sympathy with those many sons whom he brings to glory.

Brethren, the text means more than this however. Jesus Christ is a brother born for adversity because he always gives his choicest presence to his saints when they are in tribulation. I know

many men will think that the presence of Christ with the sick and with the depressed is mere fancy. Ah, blessed fancy! such a fancy as makes them laugh at pain and rejoice in deep distress, and take joyfully the spoiling of their goods. A blessed fancy truly! Let me declare my heart's witness, and assert that if there be anything real anywhere to the spiritual mind, the presence of Christ is intensely so. Though we do not see his form bending over us, nor mark the lovely light of those eyes that once were red with weeping, though we touch not that hand which felt the nails, and hear no soft footfalls of the feet that were fastened to the cross, yet are we inwardly as certainly conscious of the shadow of Christ falling upon us as ever were his disciples when he stood in the tempest-tossed vessel, and said to winds and waves, "Peace, be still." Believe me, it is not imagination, nor is it barely faith. It is faith that brings him, but there is a kind of spiritual sense that discovers his presence and that rejoices in the bliss flowing therefrom. We speak what we do know and testify what we have seen when we say that he is a brother born for adversity in very deed, most tenderly revealing himself to his people, as he doth not unto the world.

He is born for adversity I think in this sense, that you can hardly know him except through adversity. You may know Christ so as to be saved by him by a single act of faith, but for a full discovery of his beauty it needs that you go through the furnace. Those children of God whose grassy paths are always newly mown and freshly smoothed, learn comparatively but little fellowship with Christ and have but slender knowledge of him, but they that do business on great waters, these see the works of the LORD and his wonders in the deep, and these know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge. "It is good for me that I have been afflicted," many can say, not only because of the restoring effect of sorrow, but because their afflictions have acted like windows, to let them gaze into the very heart of Christ, and read his pity and understand his nature, as they never could have done by other means. Furnace light is memorably clear. Jesus is a brother born for adversity because in the glimmer of the world's eventide, when all the lamps are going out, a glory shines around him, transforming midnight into day.

He is a brother born for adversity, in the last place, because in adversity it is that through his people's patience he is glorified. I warrant you the sweetest songs that ever come up from these lowlands to the eternal throne are from sick beds. "They shall sing his high praises in the fires." God's children are too often dumb when they have much of this world's earth in their mouths, but when the Lord is pleased to take away their comforts and possessions, then, like birds in cages they begin to sing with all their hearts. Praise him, ye suffering ones, your praise will be grateful to him. Extol him ye mourners, exchange by faith your sorrows for hopes, and bless his name who deserveth to be praised.

II. Now I shall leave this and only for a moment turn the text round to a practical purpose by referring it to the Christian. I hope that what has been spoken has been only the echo of the experience of the most of you. You have found Jesus Christ to be a true brother and a blessed friend, now let the same be true of you. He that would have friends must show himself friendly. If Christ be such a friend to us, what manner of people ought we to be towards him? So, beloved, let us pray and labor to be friends that love Christ at all times. Alas! some professors seem to love him at no time at all. They give him lip homage, but they refuse to give him the exercise of their talents, or the contribution of their substance. They love him only with words that are but air, but they offer him no sweet cane with money, neither do they fill him with the fat of their sacrifices. Such people are windbag lovers, and do nothing substantial to prove their affection. Let it not be so with us. Let our love to Christ be so true as to constrain us to make sacrifices for him. Let us deny ourselves

that we may spread abroad the knowledge of his truth, and never be content unless in very deed and act we are giving proofs of our love.

We ought to love him at all times. Alas! there are some that prosper in business who grow too great to love their Savior. They hold their heads too high to associate with his saints. Aforetime they were with his people, content to worship with them when they were in humble circumstances, but they have prospered in trade, they have laid by a good store of wealth, and now they feel half ashamed to attend the conventicle that was once the very joy of their hearts. They must seek out the world's religion, and they must worship after the world's fashion, for they must not be left behind in society. The people of God are not good enough for them; though they be kings and princes in Christ's esteem, yet are they too poor company for those that have risen so high in the world. Alas, alas! that professed lovers of Jesus should rise too high to walk truthfully and faithfully with Christ: it is no rise at all, but a lamentable fall. Let us cling to him in days of joy as well as nights of grief, and prove to all mankind that there are no enchantments in this world that can win our hearts away from our best beloved.

We should love Jesus Christ at all times, that is to say, in times when the church seems dull and dead. Perhaps some of you are living in a district just now where the ministry is painfully devoid of power. The lamp burns very low in your sanctuary, the members worshipping are few and zeal is altogether dead. Do not desert the church, do not flee away from her in the time of her necessity. Keep to your post, come what may. Be the last man to leave the sinking vessel, if sink she must. Resolve as a friend of Christ to love him at all times, and as a brother born into that church, feel that now, beyond all other times, in the season of adversity, you must adhere to her. It may happen that some here present may to-morrow be found in a workshop or in some other place where their business brings them, where some dear child of God will be laughed at and ridiculed. That same man you would have cheerfully owned on the Sabbath as your brother, you delighted to unite your voice with him in prayer, but now while he stands in the midst of a ribald throng will you own him, or rather, own Christ in him? They are making cruel jokes, they are vexing his gracious spirit; now it is possible that a cowardly fear may make you slink away to the other end of the shop, but oh, if you remember that a friend loveth at all times you will take up this man's quarrel as being Christ's quarrel, and you, as being a part of the body of Christ, will be willing to share whatever contumely may come upon your fellow Christian, and you will say "If you mock at him you may mock also at me, for I also have been with Jesus of Nazareth, and him whom you scoff at I adore." O let us never, by the love that Christ has borne to us, keep back a truth because it may expose us to shame. Let us never be such cowards as to palter with the word of God because we may then live in silken ease and delicacy. These are not times in which one single particle of truth ought to be repressed. Whatever the Spirit of God and the word of God may have taught you my brethren, out with it for Christ's sake, and let it bring what it will to you, bear that with joy. Since your Savior bore far more for you, count it joy to bear anything for him. Be a brother born on purpose for adversity. Do you expect to be carried to heaven on beds of ease? do you reckon to win the everlasting laurels without a conflict? What, sirs, would ye stand beneath the waving banners of victory without having first endured the smoke and the dust of battle? Nay, rather with consecrated courage follow in the steps of your Master. Love him at all times, give up all for him, and then shall you soon be with him in his glory world without end. God grant a blessing for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Portion of Scripture read before sermon— Proverbs 17.

Our Stronghold

A sermon (No. 491) delivered on Lord's Day Evening, October 26th, 1862,
at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington,
by C. H. Spurgeon.

“The name of the LORD is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe.” {safe: Heb. set aloft}—— Proverbs 18:10.

Strong towers were a greater security in a bygone age than they are now. Then, when troops of marauders invaded the land, strong castles were set upon the various hill-tops and the inhabitants gathered up their little wealth and fled thither at once. Castles were looked upon as being very difficult places for attack; and ancient troops would rather fight a hundred battles than endure a single siege. Towns which would be taken by modern artillery in twelve hours held out for twelve years against the most potent forces of the ancient times. He that possessed a castle was lord of all the region round about, and made their inhabitants either his clients who sought his protection or his dependents whom he ruled at will. He who owned a strong tower felt, however potent might be his adversary, his walls and bulwarks would be his sure salvation. Generous rulers provided strongholds for their people; mountain fortresses where the peasantry might be sheltered from marauders. Transfer your thoughts to a thousand years ago, and picture a people who after ploughing and sowing, have gathered in their harvest, but when they are about to make merry with the harvest festival, a startling signal banishes their joy. A trumpet is blown from yonder mountain, the tocsin answers it from the village tower, hordes of ferocious robbers are approaching, their corn will be devoured by strangers; burying their corn and furniture and gathering up the little portable wealth they have, they hasten with all their might to their tower of defense which stands on yonder ridge. The gates are shut; the drawbridge is pulled up; the portcullis is let down; the warders are on the battlements, and the inhabitants within feel that they are safe. The enemy will rifle their deserted farms, and search for hidden treasure, and finding that the inhabitants are quite beyond their reach, they will betake themselves to some other place. Such is the figure which is in the text. “The name of the LORD is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe.”

I. Of course we all know that by the name of God is meant the character of the Most High, so that our first lesson is that the character of God furnishes the righteous with an abundant security.

The character of God is the refuge of the Christian, in opposition to other refuges which godless men have chosen. Solomon suggestively puts the following words in the next verse— “The rich man's wealth is his strong city, and as an high wall in his own conceit.” The rich man feels that his wealth may afford him comfort. Should he be attacked in law, his wealth can procure him an advocate; should he be insulted in the streets, the dignity of a full purse will avenge him; should he be sick, he can fee the best physicians; should he need ministers to his pleasures, or helpers of his infirmities, they will be at his call; should famine stalk through the land, it will avoid his door; should war itself break forth he can purchase an escape from the sword, for his wealth is his strong tower. In contra-distinction to this, the righteous man finds in his God all that the wealthy man finds in his substance, and a vast deal more. “The LORD is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I trust in him.” God is our treasure; he is to us better than the fullest purse, or the most magnificent

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income; broad acres yield not such peace as a well attested interest in the love and faithfulness of our heavenly Father. Provinces under our sway could not bring to us greater revenues than we possess in him who makes us heirs of all things by Christ Jesus. Other men who trust not in their wealth, nevertheless make their own names a strong tower. To say the truth, a man's good name is no mean defense against the attacks of his fellow-men. To wrap one's self about in the garment of integrity is to defy the chill blast of calumny, and to be mailed against the arrows of slander. If we can appeal to God and say, "Lord, thou knowest that in this thing I am not wicked," then let the mouth of the liar pour forth his slanders, let him scatter his venom where he may, we bear an antidote within before which his poison yields its power. But this is only true in a very limited sense; death soon proves to men that their own good name can afford them no consolation, and under conviction of sin a good repute is no shelter. When conscience is awake, when the judgment is unbiassed, when we come to know something of the law of God and of the justice of his character, we soon discover that self-righteousness is no hiding-place for us, a crumbling battlement which will fall on the neck of him that hides behind it—a pasteboard fortification yielding to the first shock of the law—a refuge of lies to be beaten down with the great hailstones of eternal vengeance—such is the righteousness of man. The righteous trusteth not in this; not his own name, but the name of his God, not his own character, but the character of the Most High is his strong tower. Numberless are those castles in the air to which men hasten in the hour of peril: ceremonies lift their towers into the clouds; professions pile their walls high as mountains, and works of the flesh paint their delusions till they seem substantial bulwarks; but all, all shall melt like snow and vanish like a mist. Happy is he who leaves the sand for the rock, the phantom for the substance.

The name of the LORD is a strong tower to the Christian, not only in opposition to other men's refuges, but as a matter of fact and reality. Even when he is not able to perceive it by experience, yet God's character is the refuge of the saint. If we come to the bottom of things, we shall find that the basis of the security of the believer lies in the character of God. I know you will tell me it is the covenant; but what is the covenant worth if God were changeable, unjust, untrue? I know you will tell me that the confidence of the believer is in the blood of Christ; but what were the blood of Christ if God were false; if after Christ had paid the ransom the Lord should deny him the ransomed, if after Christ had stood the substitute, the judge of men should yet visit upon our heads for whom he suffered our own guilt; if Jehovah could be unrighteous; if he could violate his promise and become faithless as we are, then I say that even the blood of Christ would afford us no security. You tell me that there is his promise, but again I remind you that the value of a man's promise must depend on his character. If God were not such that he cannot lie, if he were not so faithful that he cannot repent, if he were not so mighty that he cannot be frustrated when he intends to perform, then his promise were but waste paper; his words like our words would be but wind, and afford no satisfactory shelter for a soul distressed and anxious. But you will tell me he has sworn with an oath. Brethren, I know he has. He has given us two immutable things in which it is impossible for him to lie that we may have strong consolation. But still what is a man's oath worth irrespective of his character? Is it not after all what a man is that makes his asseveration to be eminently mistrusted or profoundly believed? And it is because our God cannot by any means forswear himself but must be true, that his oath becomes of value to you and to me. Brethren, after all, let us remember that the purpose of God in our salvation is the glorifying of his own character, and this it is that makes our salvation positively sure. If everyone that trusts in Christ be not saved then is God dishonored, the LORD of Hosts hath hung up his escutcheon, and if in the face of the whole

earth he accomplisheth not that which he declares he will perform in this book, then is his escutcheon stained. I say it, he hath flung down the gauntlet to sin, and death, and hell, and if he be not the conqueror over all these in the heart of every soul that trusteth in him, then he is no more the God of Victories, nor can we shout his everlasting praise as the LORD mighty in battle. His character then, you see, when we come to the basis of all, is the great granite formation upon which must rest all the pillars of the covenant of grace and the sure mercies thereof. His wisdom, truth, mercy, justice, power, eternity, and immutability, are the seven pillars of the house of sure salvation. If we would have comfort, we can surely find it in the character of God. This is our strong tower, we run into it and we are safe.

Mark you beloved, not only is this true as a matter of fact, but it is true as a matter of experience. I hope I shall now speak the feelings of your hearts while I say we have found the character of God to be an abundant safeguard to us. We have known full well the trials of life; thank God we have, for what would any of us be worth if we had no troubles? Troubles like files take away our rust; like furnaces they consume our dross; like winnowing-fans they drive away the chaff, and we should have had but little value, we should have had but little usefulness if we had not been made to pass through the furnace. But in all our troubles we have found the character of God a comfort. You have been poor—very poor: I know some of you here have been out of work a long time, and you have wondered where your bread would come from even for the next meal. Now what has been your comfort? Have you not said, “God is too good to let me starve; he is too bountiful to let me want.” And so you see you have found his character to be your strong tower. Or else you have had personal sickness; you have long lain on the bed of weariness, tossing to and fro, and then the temptation has come into your heart to be impatient: “God has dealt hardly with you,” so the Evil One whispers; but how do you escape? Why, you say, “No, he is no tyrant, I know him to be a sympathizing God.” “In all their afflictions he was afflicted, the angel of his presence saved them.” Or else you have had losses—many losses, and you have been apt to ask, “How can these things be? How is it I have to work so long and plod so hard, and have to look about me with all my wits to earn but little, and yet when I have made money it melts? I see my wealth, like a flock of birds upon the fields, here one moment and gone the next, for a passer-by claps his hand and everything takes to itself wings and flies away.” Then we are apt to think that God is unwise to let us toil for naught; but lo, we run into our strong tower and we feel it cannot be. No; the God who sent this affliction could not have acted in a thoughtless, reckless, wisdomless manner; there must be something here that shall work for my good. You know brethren, it is useless for me to attempt to describe the various ways in which your trials come; but I am sure they that know Jehovah’s name will put their trust in him. Perhaps your trial has been want, and then you have said “His name is Jehovah-Jireh, the LORD will provide;” or else you have been banished from friends, perhaps from country, but you have said, “Ah! his name is Jehovah-Shammah, the LORD is there;” or else you have had a disturbance in your family; there has been war within and war without, but you have run into your strong tower, for you have said, “His name is Jehovah-Shalom, the LORD send peace;” or else the world has slandered you, and you yourself have been conscious of sin, but you have said, “His name is Jehovah-Tsidkenu, the LORD our righteousness,” and so you have gone there and been safe; or else many have been your enemies, then his name has been “Jehovah-Nissi, the LORD my banner;” and so he has been a strong tower to you. Defy then brethren—defy in God’s strength tribulations of every sort and size. Say with the poet,

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“There is a safe and secret place
 Beneath the wings divine,
 Reserved for all the heirs of grace;
 That refuge now is mine.
 The least and feeblest here may hide
 Uninjured and unawed;
 While thousands fall on every side, I rest secure in God.”

But, beloved, besides the trials of this life we have the sins of the flesh, and what a tribulation these are; but the name of our God is our strong tower then. At certain seasons we are more than ordinarily conscious of our guilt; and I would give little for your piety if you do not sometimes creep into a corner with the poor publican and say, “God be merciful to me a sinner.” Broken hearts and humble walkers, these are dear in Jesu’s eyes. There will be times with all of us when our saintship is not very clear, but our sinnership is very apparent; well then, the name of our God must be our defense: “He is very merciful”—“For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.” Yea, in the person of Christ we even dare to look at his justice with confidence, since “He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” Possibly it is not so much the guilt of sin that troubles you as the power of sin. You feel as if you must one day fall by the hand of this enemy within. You have been striving and struggling but the old Adam is too much for you. It is a stern conflict, and you fear that the sons of Anak will never be driven out. You feel you carry a bombshell within your heart; your passions are like a powder magazine; you are walking where the flakes of fire are flying, and you are afraid a spark may fall and then there will be a terrible destruction of everything Ah! then there is the power of God, there is the truth of God, there is the faithfulness of God, and despite all the desperate power of sin we find a shelter here in the character of the Most High. Sin sometimes cometh with all the terrors of the law; then, if thou knowest not how to hide thyself behind thy God, thou wilt be in an evil plight. It will come at times with all the fire of the flesh, and if thou canst not perceive that thy flesh was crucified in Christ and that thy life is a life in him, and not in thyself, then wilt thou soon be put to the rout. But he who lives in his God and not in himself, and he who wraps Christ’s righteousness about him, and is righteous in Christ, such a man may defy all the attacks of the flesh and all the temptations of the world; he shall overcome through the blood of the Lamb. “This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.”

Then beloved, there are the temptations of the devil, and these are very dreadful; but how sweet it is still to feel that the character of God is our strong tower. Without walls of grace and bulwarks of mercy how can a tempted soul escape the clutches of the archdestroyer? But where the soul lies in the entrenchments of divine promise, all the devils in hell cannot carry it by storm. I saw this week one whom many of you greatly respect—the former pastor of this Church, Mr. James Smith of Cheltenham [since departed “to be with Christ, which is far better.”]—a name well-known by his innumerable little works which are scattered everywhere and cannot fail to do good. You will remember that about a year ago he was struck with paralysis, and one half of his body is dead. But yet when I saw him on the bed I had not seen a more cheerful man in the full heyday of strength. I had been told that he was the subject of very fearful conflicts at times; so after I had shaken hands with him I said, “Friend Smith, I hear you have many doubts and fears!” “Who told you that?” said he, “for I have none.” “Never have any? why, I understood you had many conflicts.” “Yes,” he

said, "I have many conflicts, but I have no doubts; I have many wars within but I have no fears. Who could have told you that? I hope I have not led any one to think that. It is a hard battle but I know the victory is sure. After I have had an ill night's rest—of course, through physical debility—my mind is troubled, and then that old coward Satan who would be afraid to meddle with me perhaps if I were strong, attacks me when I am weak; but I am not afraid of him; don't you go away with that opinion; he does throw many fiery darts at me but I have no doubt as to my final victory." Then he said, in his own way, "I am just like a packet that is all ready to go by train, packed, corded, labelled, paid for, and on the platform, waiting for the express to come by and take me to glory. I wish I could hear the whistle now," said he, "I had hoped I should have been carried to heaven long ago; but still I am fine." "And then," he said, "I have been telling your George Moore over there that I am not only on the rock, but that I am cemented to the rock, and that the cement is as hard as the rock so there is no fear of my perishing; unless the rock falls I cannot; unless the gospel perishes I cannot perish." Now, here was a man attacked by Satan; he did not tell me of the bitter conflicts he had within, I know they were severe enough; he was anxious to bear a good testimony to the faithfulness of his gracious Lord; but you see it was his God that was his stronghold; he ran to this—the immutability, the faithfulness, the truthfulness, the mightiness of that God upon whose arm he leaned. If you and I will do the same, we can always find an attribute of God to oppose each suggestion of the Evil One. "God will leave thee," says the Evil One. "Thou old liar, he cannot for he is a faithful God." "But thou wilt perish after all." "O thou vile deceiver, that can never be for he is a mighty God and strong to deliver." "But one of these times he will abhor thee." "No; thou false accuser and father of lies, that cannot be for he is a God of love." "The time shall happen when he shall forget thee." "No, traitor; that cannot be for he is a God omniscient and knows and sees all things." I say, thus we may rebut every mischievous slander of Satan, running still into the character of God as our strong tower.

Brethren, even when the Lord himself chastens us, it is most blessed to appeal against God to God. Do you understand what I mean? He smites us with his rod, but then to look up and say, "Father, if I could believe what thy rod seems to say, I should say thou lovest me not; but I know thou art a God of love, and my faith tells me that thou lovest me none the less because of that hard blow." See here brethren, I will put myself in the case a moment—Lo, He spurns me as though he hated me; drives me from his presence; gives me no caresses; denies me sweet promises; shuts me up in prison, and gives me the water of affliction and the bread of distress; but my faith declares, "He is such a God that I cannot think hardly of him; he has been so good to me that I know he is good now, and in the teeth of all his providences, even when he puts a black mask over his face, I still believe that

"Behind a frowning providence,
He hides a smiling face."

But, friends, I hope you know, I hope each of us may know by experience the blessed art of running into the bosom of God and hiding therein.

This word is to the sinner who has not yet found peace. Do not you see, man, the Christian is not saved by what he is, but by what his God is, and this is the groundwork of our comfort—that God is perfect, not that we are perfect. When I preached last Thursday night about the snuffers of the temple and the golden snuffer trays, and the necessity there was for the lamps in the sanctuary to be trimmed, one foolish woman said, "Ah, you see, according to the minister's own confession

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these Christians are as bad as the rest of us, they have many faults; oh!" said she, "I dare say I shall be as well off at the last as they will." Poor soul! she did not see that the Christian's hope does not lie in what he is, but in what Christ is; our trust is not in what we suffer, but in what Jesus suffered; not in what we do, but in what He has done. It is not our name I say again that is a strong tower to us, it is not even our prayer, it is not our good works; it is the name, the promise, the truth, the work, the finished righteousness of our God in Christ Jesus. Here the believer finds his defense and nowhere besides. Run sinner, run, for the castle gate is free to all who seek a shelter, be they who they may.

II. By your leave I shall turn to the second point. How the righteous avail themselves of this strong tower. They run into it. Now running seems to me to imply that they do not stop to make any preparation. You will remember our Lord Jesus Christ said to his disciples that when the Romans surrounded Jerusalem, he that was on the house-top was not to come down into his house, but to run down the outer staircase and escape. So the Christian, when he is attacked by his enemies, should not stop for anything but just run into his God and be safe. There is no need for thee to tarry until thou hast prepared thy mind, until thou hast performed sundry ablutions, but run man, straight away at once. When the pigeons are attacked by the hawk their better plan is not to parley, nor to stay, but swift as they can cut the air and fly to the dove-cote. So be it with you. Leave fools who will to parley with the fiend of hell; but as for you, fly to your God and enter into his secret places till the tempest be over past. A gracious hint is this to you anxious souls who are seeking to fit yourselves for Jesus. Away with such legal rubbish, run at once; you are safe in following the good example of the righteous.

This running appears to me to imply that they have nothing to carry. A man who has a load, the heavier the load may be, the more will he be impeded in his flight. But the righteous run like racers in the games who have thrown off everything; their sins they leave to mercy and their righteousness to the moles and bats. If I had any righteousness I would not carry it, but run to the righteousness of Christ without it; for my own righteousness must be a drag upon me which I could not bear. Sinners I know, when they come to Christ, want to bring tons of good works, wagon loads of good feelings, and fitnesses, and repentings, and such like; but the righteous do no such thing; they just foreswear every thing they have of their own, and count it but dross and dung that they may run to Christ and be found in him. Gospel righteousness lies all in Jesus, not in the believer.

It seems to me too that this expression not only implies a want of preparation and having nothing to carry, but it imports that fear quickens them. Men do not run to a castle unless they are afraid. But when the avenger of death is close behind, then swiftly they fly. It is marvellous how godly fear helps faith. There is a man sinking there in the river; he cannot swim, he must be drowned! See! see he is going down! We push him a plank; with what a clutch he grasps it; and the more he is convinced that he has no power to float, the more firmly doth he grip at this one hope. Fear may even drive a man, I say, to faith, and lend him wings to fly where else he might have crept with laggard feet. The flight is the flight of fear, but the refuge is the refuge of faith. O sinner, if the righteous fly, what ought thy pace to be? Again, it seems to me that there is great eagerness here, as if the Christian did not feel safe till he had entered into his God. And therefore, as the stag pursued by the hounds quickens its flight by reason of the baying of the dogs as the clamor grows louder and louder, see how the stag leaps from crag to crag, dashes through the stream, flies over yonder hill, is lost in yonder brake and anon springs through the valley; so the Christian flies to his dear God for safety when the hounds of hell and the dogs of temptation are let loose against him.

Eagerness! Where indeed shall the like be found? “As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?” O convinced sinner, what should thine eagerness be if thus the righteous pant for God? Brethren, I may add here that there is an absence of all hesitation. He runs. You know if we want somebody to help us we put our hand to our brow and consider, “Let us see, where shall we go? I am in great straits, to whom shall I fly? Who will be the best friend to me?” The righteous never ask that question, at least when they are in a right mind they never do; but the moment their trouble comes they run at once to their God for they feel that they have full permission to repair to him; and again they feel they have nowhere else to fly. “To whom, or whither should I go if I could turn from thee?” is a question which is its own answer. Then understand in our text there is eagerness, the absence of all hesitation; there is fear and yet there is courage; there is no preparation, there is the flinging aside of every burden. “The righteous runneth into his high tower, and is safe.”

Beloved, I will leave that point when I have just said, please remember that when a man gets into a castle he is safe because of the impregnability of the castle; he is not safe because of the way in which he entered into the castle. You hear some man inside saying, “I shall never be hurt because I came into the castle the right way.” You will tell him, “No, no, no, it is not the way you came into the castle, but the castle itself is our defense.” So some of you may be thinking, “I do come to Christ, but I am afraid that I do not come aright.” But it is not your coming, it is Christ that saves you. If you are in Christ I do not care a pin how you got in, for I am sure you could not get in except by the door; if you are once in he will never throw you out; he will never drive away a soul that cometh unto him for any reason whatsoever. Your safety does not lie in how you came, for in very truth your safety is in Him. If a man should run into a castle and carry all the jewels of a kingdom with him, he would not be safer because of the jewels; and if another man should run in with hardly a fresh suit of clothes with him, he would not be any the more in danger because of his raggedness. It is the castle, it is the castle, not the man. The solid walls, the strong bastions, the frowning ramparts, the mighty munitions, these make up the defense, not the man, nor yet the man’s wealth, nor yet the way the man came. Beloved, it is most true that salvation is of the LORD, and whosoever shall look out of self to-night, whosoever shall look to Christ only shall find him to be a strong tower, he may run into his Lord and be safe.

III. And now for our third and closing remark. You that have Bibles with margins, just look at them. You will find that the second part of the text is put in the margin thus—“The righteous runneth into it, and is set aloft.” Our first rendering is, “The righteous runneth into it, and is safe”—there is the matter of fact. The other rendering is, “He is set aloft”—there is the matter of joyous experience.

1. Now first let us see to the matter of fact. The man that is sheltered in his God—a man that dwells in the secret places of the tabernacle of the Most High, who is hidden in his pavillion, and is set upon a rock, he is safe; for first, who can hurt him? The Devil? Christ has broken his head. Life? Christ has taken his life up to heaven; for we are dead, and “our life is hid with Christ in God.” Death? No; the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?” The law? That is satisfied and it is dead to the believer, and he is not under its curse. Sin? No; that cannot hurt the believer, for Christ has slain it. Christ took the believer’s sins upon himself and therefore they are not on the believer any more. Christ took the believer’s sins and threw them into the Red Sea of his atoning blood; the depths have covered them, not one

of them is left. All the sin the believer hath ever committed is now blotted out, and a debt that is cancelled can never put a man in prison; a debt that is paid, let it be never so heavy, can never make a man an insolvent—it is discharged, it has ceased to be. “Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth. 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.” Who can harm us? Let him have permission to do what he will; what is there that he can do? Who again has the power to reach us? We are in the hand of Christ. What arrow shall penetrate his hand to reach our souls? We are under the skirts of Deity. What strength shall tear away the mantle of God to reach his beloved? Our names are written on the hands of Jesus, who can erase those everlasting lines? We are jewels in Immanuel’s crown. What thievish fingers shall steal away those jewels? We are in Christ. Who shall be able to rend us from his innermost heart? We are members of his body. Who shall mutilate the Savior? “I bare you,” saith God, “as on eagles’ wings.” Who shall smite through the breast of the Eternal One, heaven’s great eagle? he must first do it ere he can reach the eaglets, the young sons of God, begotten unto a lively hope. Who can reach us? God interposes; Christ stands in the way; and the Holy Spirit guards us as a garrison. Who shall stand against the Omnipotent? Tens of thousands of created puissances must fall before him, for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength. What weapon is there that can be used against us? Shall they kill us? Then we begin to live. Shall they banish us? Then we are but nearer to our home. Shall they strip us? How can they rend away the garment of imputed righteousness? Shall they seize our property? How can they touch our treasure since it is all in heaven? Shall they scourge us? Sweet shall be the smart when Christ is present with us. Shall they cast us into a dungeon? Where shall the free spirit find a prison? What fetters can bind the man who is free in Christ? Shall the tongue attack us? Every tongue that riseth against us in judgment we shall condemn. I know not what new weapon can be formed, for certain it is that the anvil of the Church has broken all the hammers that were ever used to smite it, and it remains uninjured still. The believer is—he must be safe. I said this morning that if the believer in Christ be not saved for ever, then, beloved, there is no meaning whatever in God’s Word; and I say it once again, and I say it without any word of apology for so doing, I could never receive that book as the book of God at all if it could be proved to me that it did not teach the doctrine of the safety of those that trust in Christ. I could never believe that God would speak in such a manner as to make tens of thousands of us, yea millions of us, believe that He would keep us, and yet after all he should cast us away. Nor do I believe that he would use words which, to say the very least, seem to teach final perseverance if he had not intended to teach us the doctrine. All the Arminian divines that ever lived cannot prove the total apostacy of believers; they can attack some other points of the Calvinistic doctrine; there are some points of our form of doctrine which apparently are far more vulnerable. God forbid we should be so foolish as to deny that there are difficulties about every system of theology, but about the perseverance of the saints there is no difficulty. It is as easy to overthrow an opponent here as it would be to pierce with a spear through a shield of pasteboard. Be ye confident, believer, that this is God’s truth, that they who trust in God shall be as Mount Zion which shall never be removed, but abideth for ever.

2. But now we conclude by noticing that our text not only teaches us our safety, but our experience of it. “He shall set him up aloft.” The believer in his high-days, and they ought to be every day, is like an eagle perched aloft on a towering crag. Yonder is a hunter down below who would fain strike the royal bird; he has his rifle with him, but his rifle would not reach one third of the way; so the royal bird looks down upon him, sees him load and prime and aim, and looks in

quiet contempt on him, not intending even to take the trouble to stretch one of his wings; he sees him load again, hears the bullet down below, but he is quite safe for he is up aloft. Such is the faithful Christian's state before God. He can look down upon every trial and temptation; upon every adversary and every malicious attack, for God is his strong tower and "he is set up aloft." When some people go to the newspaper and write a very sharp, bitter, and cutting letter against the minister, oh, think they, "How he will feel that; how that will cut him to the quick!" And yet if they had seen the man read it through, double it up, and throw it into the fire, saying, "What a mercy it is to have somebody taking notice of me;" if they could see the man go to bed and sleep all the better because he thinks he has had a high honor conferred on him for being allowed to be abused for Christ, surely they would see that their efforts are only "hate's labor lost." I do not think our enemies would take so much trouble to make us happy if they knew how blessed we are under their malice. "Thou hast prepared a table before me in the presence of mine enemies," said David. Some soldiers never eat so well as when their enemies are looking on; for there is a sort of gusto about every mouthful which they eat, as they seem to say, "snatched from the jaw of the lion, and from the paw of the bear, and in defiance of you all, in the name of the Most High God I feast to the full, and then set up my banner." The Lord sets his people up aloft. There are many who do not appear to be much up aloft. You meet them on the corn market, and they say, "Wheats do not pay as they used to; farming is no good to anybody." Hear others after those gales, those equinoctial gales, when so many ships have gone down, say, "Ah! you may well pity us poor fellows that have to do with shipping, dreadful times these, we are all sure to be ruined." See many of our tradesmen—"This Exhibition has given us a little spurt, but as soon as this is over there will be nothing doing; trade never was so dull." Trade has been dull ever since I have been in London, and that is nine years! I do not know how it is, but our friends are always losing money, yet they get on pretty comfortably too. Some I know begun with nothing; and they are getting pretty rich now, but it is all with losing money if I am to believe what they tell me. Surely this is not sitting up aloft; surely this is not living up on high. This is a low kind of life for a child of God. We should not have liked to see the Prince of Wales in his boyhood playing with the children in the street, and I do not suppose you would like to see him now among coal-heavers at a wrestling match. Nor should the child of God be seen pushing and grasping as if this world were all, always using that muck-rake to scrape together the things of this world; instead of in full satisfaction being content with such things as he has, for God has said, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." I am not a little ashamed of myself that I do not live more on high, for I know when we get depressed in spirits and downcast and doubting we say many unbelieving and God-dishonoring words. It is all wrong. We ought not to stay here in these marshes of fleshly doubts. We ought never to doubt our God. Let the heathen doubt his God, for well he may, but our God made the heavens. What a happy people ye ought to be! When we are not we are not true to our principles. There are ten thousand arguments in Scripture for happiness in the Christian; but I do not know that there is one logical argument for misery. Those people who draw their faces down, and like the hypocrites pretend to be of a sad countenance, these, I say, cry, "Lord, what a wretched land is this that yields us no supplies." I should think they do not belong to the children of Israel; for the children of Israel find in the wilderness a rock following them with its streams of water, and manna dropping every day, and when they want them there are the quails and so the wretched land is filled with good supplies. Let us rather rejoice in our God. I should not like to have a serving man who always went about with a dreary countenance, because you know people would say "What a bad master that man has." And when we see Christians

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looking so sad we are apt to think they cannot have a good God to trust to. Come, beloved, let us change our notes, for we have a strong tower and are safe. Let us take a walk upon the ramparts, I do not see any reason for always being down in the dungeon; let us go up to the very top of the ramparts where the banner waves in the fresh air and let us sound the clarion of defiance to our foes again, and let it ring across the plain where yonder pale whitehorsed rider comes, bearing the lance of death; let us defy even him. Ring out the note again; salute the evening, and make the ontgoings of the morning to rejoice. Warder upon the castle-top, shout to thy companion yonder and let every tower and every turret of the grand old battlements be vocal with the praise of him who has said—

“Munitions of stupendous rock,
Thy dwelling-place shall be;
There shall thy soul without a shock
The wreck of nature see.”

Sinner, again I say the door is open; run to the mercy of God in Christ and be safe.

Portion of Scripture read before sermon— Proverbs 17.

Pride and Humility

A sermon (No. 97) delivered on Sabbath Morning, August 17, 1856
by C. H. Spurgeon.

“Before destruction the heart of man is haughty, and before honor is
humility.”—Proverbs 18:12.

Almost every event has its prophetic prelude. It is an old and common saying that “coming events cast their shadows before them;” the wise man teaches us the same lesson in the verse before us. When destruction walks through the land it casts its shadow; it is in the shape of pride. When honor visits a man’s house it casts its shadow before it; it is in the fashion of humility. “Before destruction the heart of man is haughty;” pride is as surely the sign of destruction as the change of mercury in the weather-glass is the sign of rain, and far more infallibly so than that. “Before honor is humility,” even as before the summer sweet birds return to sing in our land. Everything hath its prelude. The prelude of destruction is pride, and of honor, humility. There is nothing into which the heart of man so easily falls as pride, and yet there is no vice which is more frequently, more emphatically, and more eloquently condemned in Scripture. Against pride prophets have lifted up their voices, evangelists have spoken, and teachers have discoursed. Yea, more; the everlasting God has mounted to the very heights of eloquence when he would condemn the pride of man; and the full gushing of the Eternal’s mighty language has been most gloriously displayed in the condemnation of the pride of human nature. Perhaps the most eloquent passage of God’s Word is to be found toward the conclusion of the book of Job, where in most splendid strains of unanswerable eloquence God hides pride from man by utterly confounding him; and there is another very eloquent passage in the 14th chapter of Isaiah where the Lord’s holy choler seems to have risen up, and his anger to have waxed hot against the pride of man when he would utterly and effectually condemn it. He says concerning the great and mighty king of Babylon, “Hell from beneath is moved for thee to meet thee at thy coming: it stirreth up the dead for thee, even all the chief ones of the earth; it hath raised up from their thrones all the kings of the nations. All they shall speak and say unto thee, Art thou also become weak as we? art thou become like unto us? Thy pomp is brought down to the grave, and the noise of thy viols: the worm is spread under thee, and the worms cover thee. How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High. Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit. They that see thee shall narrowly look upon thee, and consider thee, saying, Is this the man that made the earth to tremble, that did shake kingdoms.” Mark how God addresses him, describing hell itself as being astonished at his fall, seeing that he had mounted so high; and yet declaring assuredly that his height and greatness were nothing to the Almighty, that he would pull him down, even though like an eagle he had built his nest among the stars. I say there is nothing more eloquently condemned in Scripture than pride, and yet there is no trap into which we poor silly birds so easily flee, no pitfall into which, like foolish beasts of the earth, we so continually run. On the other hand, humility is a grace that hath

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many promises given to it in the Scripture. Perhaps most promises are given to faith, and love is often considered to be the brightest of the train of virtues; yet humility holds by no means an inferior place in God's word, and there are hundreds of promises linked to it. Every grace seems to be like a nail on which precious blessings hang, and humility hath many a mercy suspended from it. "He that exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted;" "Blessed are the poor in spirit;" and in multitudes of other passages we are reminded that God loveth the humble, but that he "bringeth down the mighty from their seats, and exalteth the humble and meek." Now this morning we shall have a word to say concerning pride and humility. May the Holy Spirit preserve us from the one and produce in our hearts the other.

I. In the first place we shall have something to say concerning the vice of pride. "Before destruction the heart of man is haughty." Pride, what is it? Pride, where is its seat? The heart of man. And pride, what is its consequence? Destruction.

I. In the first place I must try to describe pride to you. I might paint it as being the worst malformation of all the monstrous things in creation; it hath nothing lovely in it, nothing in proportion, but everything in disorder. It is altogether the very reverse of the creatures which God hath made which are pure and holy. Pride, the first-born son of hell, is indeed like its parent, all unclean and vile, and in it there is neither form, fashion, nor comeliness.

In the first place pride is a groundless thing. It standeth on the sands; or worse than that, it puts its foot on the billows which yield beneath its tread; or worse still, it stands on bubbles which soon must burst beneath its feet. Of all things pride has the worst foothold; it has no solid rock on earth whereon to place itself. We have reasons for almost everything, but we have no reasons for pride. Pride is a thing which should be unnatural to us, for we have nothing to be proud of. What is there in man of which he should glory? Our very creation is enough to humble us; what are we but creatures of to-day? Our frailty should be sufficient to lay us low, for we shall be gone to-morrow. Our ignorance should tend to keep pride from our lips. What are we but like the wild ass's colt which knoweth nothing? And our sins ought effectually to stop our mouths and lay us in the dust. Of all things in the world pride towards God is that which hath the very least excuse; it hath neither stick nor stone whereon to build. Yet like the spider it carrieth its own web in its bowels, and can of itself spin that wherewith to catch its prey. It seems to stand upon itself, for it hath nothing besides whereon it can rest. Oh! man, learn to reject pride, seeing that thou hast no reason for it; whatever thou art thou hast nothing to make thee proud. The more thou hast the more thou art in debt to God; and thou shouldst not be proud of that which renders thee a debtor. Consider thine origin; look back to the hole of the pit whence thou wast digged. Consider what thou wouldst have been even now if it were not for Divine grace. And consider that thou will yet be lost in hell if grace does not hold thee up. Consider that amongst the damned there are none that would have been more damned than thyself if grace had not kept thee from destruction. Let this consideration humble thee, that thou hast nought whereon to ground thy pride.

Again, it is a brainless thing as well as a groundless thing; for it brings no profit with it. There is no wisdom in a self-exaltation. Other vices have some excuse for men seem to gain by them; avarice, pleasure, lust, have some plea; but the man who is proud sells his soul cheaply. He opens wide the flood-gates of his heart to let men see how deep is the flood within his soul; then suddenly it floweth out and all is gone—and all is nothing, for one puff of empty wind, one word of sweet applause—the soul is gone, and not a drop is left. In almost every other sin we gather up the ashes when the fire is gone; but here, what is left? The covetous man hath his shining gold, but what hath

the proud man? He has less than he would have had without his pride, and is no gainer whatever. Oh! man, if thou wert as mighty as Gabriel and had all his holiness, still thou wouldst be an arrant fool to be proud, for pride would sink thee from thine angel station to the rank of devils, and bring thee from the place where Lucifer son of the morning once dwelt to take up thine abode with hideous fiends in perdition. Pride exalts its head and seeks to honor itself, but it is of all things most despised. It sought to plant crowns upon its brow, and so it hath done, but its head was hot, and it put an ice crown there, and it melted all away. Poor pride has decked itself out finely sometimes; it hath put on its most gaudy apparel and said to others, “how brilliant I appear!” but, ah! pride, like a harlequin dressed in thy gay colours thou art all the more fool for that; thou art but a gazing stock for fools less foolish than thyself. Thou hast no crown as thou thinkest thou hast, nothing solid and real, all is empty and vain. If thou O man desirest shame, be proud. A monarch has waded through slaughter to a throne, and shut the gates of mercy on mankind to win a little glory; but when he has exalted himself and has been proud, worms have devoured him like Herod, or have devoured his empire till it passed away, and with it his pride and glory. Pride wins no crown; men never honor it, not even the menial slaves of earth; for all men look down on the proud man and think him less than themselves.

Again, pride is the maddest thing that can exist; it feeds upon its own vitals; it will take away its own life, that with its blood may make a purple cape for its shoulders: it sappeth and undermineth its own house that it may build its pinnacles a little higher, and then the whole structure tumbleth down. Nothing proves men so mad as pride. For this they have given up rest, and ease, and repose, to find rank and power among men: for this they have dared to risk their hope of salvation, to leave the gentle yoke of Jesus, and go toiling wearily along the way of life, seeking to save themselves by their own works, and at last to stagger into the mire of hell and despair. Oh! man, hate pride, flee from it, abhor it, let it not dwell with thee. If thou wantest to have a madman in thy heart, embrace pride, for thou shalt never find one more mad than he.

Then, pride is a protean thing; it changes its shape; it has all forms in the world; you may find it in any fashion you may choose, you may see it in the beggar’s rags as well as in the rich man’s garment. It dwells with the rich and with the poor. The man without a shoe to his foot may be as proud as if he were riding in a chariot. Pride can be found in every rank of society—among all classes of men. Sometimes it is an Arminian, and talks about the power of the creature; then it turns Calvinist and boasts of its fancied security—forgetful of the Maker who alone can keep our faith alive. Pride can profess any form of religion; it may be a Quaker and wear no collar to its coat; it may be a Churchman and worship God in splendid cathedrals; it may be a Dissenter and go to the common meeting-house; it is one of the most catholic things in the world, it attends all kinds of chapels and churches; go where you will, you will see pride. It cometh up with us to the house of God; it goeth with us to our houses; it is found on the mart, and the exchange, in the streets, and everywhere. Let me hint at one or two of the forms which it assumes. Sometimes pride takes the doctrinal shape; it teaches the doctrine of self-sufficiency; it tells us what man can do, and will not allow that we are lost, fallen, debased, and ruined creatures as we are. It hates divine sovereignty and rails at election. Then if it is driven from that, it takes another form; it allows that the doctrine of free grace is true but does not feel it. It acknowledges that salvation is of the Lord alone, but still it prompts men to seek heaven by their own works, even by the deeds of the law. And when driven from that, it will persuade men to join something with Christ in the matter of salvation; and when that is all rent up and the poor rag of our righteousness is all burned, pride will get into the Christian’s

heart as well as the sinner's—it will flourish under the name of self-sufficiency, teaching the Christian that he is “rich and increased in goods, having need of nothing.” It will tell him that he does not need daily grace, that past experience will do for to-morrow—that he knows enough, toils enough, prays enough. It will make him forget that he has “not yet attained;” it will not allow him to press forward to the things that are before, forgetting the things that are behind. It enters into his heart and tempts the believer to set up an independent business for himself, and until the Lord brings about a spiritual bankruptcy, pride will keep him from going to God. Pride has ten thousand shapes; it is not always that stiff and starched gentleman that you picture it; it is a vile, creeping, insinuating thing, that will twist itself like a serpent into our hearts. It will talk of humility and prate about being dust and ashes. I have known men talk about their corruption most marvellously, pretending to be all humility, while at the same time they were the proudest wretches that could be found this side the gulf of separation. Oh! my friends, ye cannot tell how many shapes pride will assume; look sharp about you or you will be deceived by it, and when you think you are entertaining angels you will find you have been receiving devils unawares.

2. Now, I have to speak of the seat of pride—the heart. The true throne of pride everywhere is the heart of man. If, my dear friends, we desire by God's grace to put down pride, the only way is to begin with the heart. Now let me tell you a parable in the form of an eastern story, which will set this truth in its proper light. A wise man in the east, called a dervish, in his wanderings came suddenly upon a mountain, and he saw beneath his feet a smiling valley in the midst of which there flowed a river. The sun was shining on the stream, and the water as it reflected the sunlight looked pure and beautiful. When he descended he found it was muddy, and the water utterly unfit for drinking. Hard by he saw a young man in the dress of a shepherd, who was with much diligence filtering the water for his flocks. At one moment he placed some water into a pitcher, and then allowing it to stand, after it had settled, he poured the clean fluid into a cistern. Then in another place he would be seen turning aside the current for a little and letting it ripple over the sand and stones, that it might be filtered and the impurities removed. The dervish watched the young man endeavouring to fill a large cistern with clear water, and he said to him, “My son, why all this toil?—what purpose dost thou answer by it?” The young man replied, “Father, I am a shepherd; this water is so filthy that my flock will not drink of it and therefore I am obliged to purify it little by little, so I collect enough in this way that they may drink, but it is hard work.” So saying, he wiped the sweat from his brow, for he was exhausted with his toil. “Right well hast thou laboured,” said the wise man, “but dost thou know thy toil is not well applied? With half the labour thou mightest attain a better end. I should conceive that the source of this stream must be impure and polluted; let us take a pilgrimage together and see.” They then walked some miles, climbing their way over many a rock, until they came to a spot where the stream took its rise. When they came near to it they saw flocks of wild fowls flying away, and wild beasts of the earth rushing into the forest; these had come to drink and had soiled the water with their feet. They found an open well which kept continually flowing, but by reason of these creatures which perpetually disturbed it, the stream was always turbid and muddy. “My son,” said the wise man, “set to work now to protect the fountain and guard the well, which is the source of this stream; and when thou hast done that, if thou canst keep these wild beasts and fowls away, the stream will flow of itself all pure and clear, and thou wilt have no longer need for thy toil.” The young man did it, and as he labored the wise man said to him, “My son, hear the word of wisdom; if thou art wrong, seek not to correct thine outward life, but seek first to get thy heart correct, for out of it are the issues of life, and thy life shall be

pure when once thy heart is so.” So, if we would get rid of pride, we should not proceed to arrange our dress by adopting some special costume, or to qualify our language by using an outlandish tongue, but let us seek of God that he would purify our hearts from pride, and then assuredly, if pride is purged from the heart, our life also shall be humble. Make the tree good and then the fruit shall be good; make the fountain pure, and the stream shall be sweet. Oh! that God might grant us all by his grace that our hearts may be kept with diligence so that pride may never enter there, lest we be haughty in our hearts and find that afterwards cometh wrath.

3. This brings me to the other point, which is the consequence of pride—destruction, a fact which we can prove by hundreds of instances in Scripture. When men have become proud, destruction has come upon them. See you yon bright angel chanting the loud anthem of praise before his Maker’s throne? Can anything tarnish that angel’s glory, rob him of his harp, despoil him of his crown? Yes, see, there enters a destroyer whose name is pride. He assaults the angel, and his harp-strings are snapped in twain. His crown is taken from his brow and his glory is departed, and yon falling spirit descending into hell is he who once was Lucifer, son of the morning. He has now become Father of nights, even the Lord of Darkness, Satan, the Fallen one. See you again that happy pair walking in the midst of luscious fruits and flowery walks and bowers of Paradise? Can aught spoil Eden and ruin those happy beings? Yes, pride comes in the shape of a serpent, and asks them to seek to be as gods. They eat of the forbidden fruit, and pride withers their paradise and blasts their Eden. Out they go to till the ground whence they were taken, to beget and to bring forth us who are their children—sons of toil and sorrow. Do you see that man after God’s own heart, continually singing his Maker’s praise? Can aught make him sad? Can you suppose that he shall ever be laid prostrate on the earth, groaning, and crying, and asking “that the bones which God hath broken may rejoice”? Yes, pride can do that. It will put into his heart that he will number his people, that he will count the tribes of Israel to show how great and mighty is his empire. It is done, and a terrible pestilence sweeps o’er his land on account of his pride. Let David’s aching heart show how destruction comes to a man’s glory when he once begins to make a god of it. See that other good and holy man who, like David, was much after God’s own heart. He is rich and increased in goods. The Babylonian ambassadors are come, and he shows them all he has. Do you not hear that threatening, “Thy treasures shall be carried away, and thy sons and thy daughters shall be servants to the king of Babylon”? The destruction of Hezekiah’s wealth must come because he is proud thereof. But, for the most notable instance of all, let me show you yonder palace, perhaps the most magnificent which has ever yet been built. In it there walks one who, lifting up his head on high as if he were more than mortal man, exclaims, “See ye this great Babylon that I have builded?” Oh! pride, what hast thou done? thou hast more power than a wizard’s wand! Mark the mighty builder of Babylon creeping on the earth. Like oxen he is devouring grass, his nails have grown like birds’ claws, his hair like eagles’ feathers, and his heart has gone from him. Pride did all that, that it might be fulfilled which God hath written, “Before destruction the heart of man is haughty.”

Is thine heart haughty, sinner, this morning? Dost thou despise God’s sovereignty? Wilt thou not submit thyself to Christ’s yoke? Dost thou seek to weave a righteousness of thine own? Art thou seeking to be or to do something? Art thou desirous of being great and mighty in thine own esteem? Hear me then sinner, destruction is coming upon thee. As truly as ever thou exaltest thyself thou shalt be abased; thy destruction, in the fullest and blackest sense of the word, is hurrying on to overwhelm thee. And oh! Christian, is thine heart haughty this morning? Art thou come here

glorying in thy graces? Art thou proud of thyself, that thou hast had such high frames and such sweet experiences? Mark thee brother, there is a destruction coming to thee also. Some of thy proud things will be pulled up by the roots, some of thy graces will be shattered, and thy good works perhaps will become loathsome to thee, and thou wilt abhor thyself in dust and ashes. As truly as ever thou exaltest thyself there will be a destruction come to thee, O saint—the destruction of thy joys and of thy comforts, though there can be no destruction of thy soul.

Pride, you know, is most likely to meet with destruction because it is too tall to walk upright. It is most likely to tumble down because it is always looking upward in its ambition, and never looks to its feet. There only needs to be a pitfall in the way, or even a stone, and down it goes. It is sure to tumble because it is never contented with being where it is. It is always seeking to be climbing, and boys that will climb must expect to fall. Pride is foolhardy, and will venture upon scaling any rock. Sometimes it holds on by a brier, and that pricks it; sometimes by a flint, and that cuts it. There it goes, toiling and laboring on, till it gets as high as it can, and then from its very height it is likely to fall. Nature itself tells us to avoid high things. Who is he that can stand upon an eminence without a reeling brain, and without a temptation to cast himself down? Pride, when most successful, stands in slippery places. Who would choose to dwell on a pinnacle of the temple? That is where pride has built its house, and verily it seems but natural that pride should fall down if pride will go up. God will carry out this saying, “Before destruction the heart of man is haughty.” Yet beloved, I am persuaded that all I can say to you, or to myself, can never keep pride from us. The Lord alone can bolt the door of the heart against pride. Pride is like the flies of Egypt; all Pharaoh’s soldiers could not keep them out; and I am sure all the strong resolutions and devout aspirations we may have cannot keep pride out unless the Lord God Almighty sends a strong wind of his Holy Spirit to sweep it away.

II. Now let us consider briefly the last part of the text, “before honor is humility.” So then, you see our heavenly Father does not say that we are not to have honor. He has not forbidden it; he has only forbidden us to be proud of it. A good man may have honor in this life. Daniel had honor before the people; Joseph rode in the second chariot, and the people bowed the knee before him. God often clothes his children with honor in the face of their adversaries, and makes the wicked confess that the Lord is with them in deed and in truth. But God forbids our making that honor a cloak for pride, and bids us seek humility which always accompanies as well as precedes true honor.

1. Now let us briefly enquire, in the first place, what is humility? The best definition I have ever met with is, “to think rightly of ourselves.” Humility is to make a right estimate of one’s self. It is no humility for a man to think less of himself than he ought, though it might rather puzzle him to do that. Some persons, when they know they can do a thing, tell you they cannot; but you do not call that humility. A man is asked to take part in some meeting. “No,” he says, “I have no ability;” yet if you were to say so yourself, he would be offended at you. It is not humility for a man to stand up and depreciate himself and say he cannot do this, that, or the other, when he knows that he is lying. If God gives a man a talent, do you think the man does not know it? If a man has ten talents he has no right to be dishonest to his Maker and to say, “Lord, thou hast only give me five.” It is not humility to underrate yourself. Humility is to think of yourself, if you can, as God thinks of you. It is to feel that if we have talents God has given them to us, and let it be seen that, like freight in a vessel, they tend to sink us low. The more we have the lower we ought to lie. Humility is not to say, “I have not this gift,” but it is to say, “I have the gift, and I must use it for my Master’s glory. I must never seek any honor for myself, for what have I that I have not received?” But, beloved,

humility is to feel ourselves lost, ruined, and undone. To be killed by the same hand which afterwards makes us alive, to be ground to pieces as to our own doings and willings, to know and trust in none but Jesus, to be brought to feel and sing—

“Nothing in my hands I bring,
Simply to thy cross I cling.”

Humility is to feel that we have no power of ourselves, but that it all cometh from God. Humility is to lean on our beloved, to believe that he has trodden the winepress alone, to lie on his bosom and slumber sweetly there, to exalt him, and think less than nothing of ourselves. It is in fact to annihilate self and to exalt the Lord Jesus Christ as all in all.

2. Now, what is the seat or throne of humility? The throne of humility must be the heart. I do hate of all things that humility which lives in the face. There are some persons who always seem to be so very humble when you are with them, but you can discover there is something underneath it all, and when they are in some other society they will brag and say how you told them your whole heart. Take heed of the men who allow you to lay your head in their lap and betray you into the hands of the Philistines. I have met with such persons. I remember a man who used to pray with great apparent humility, and then would go and abuse the servants and make a noise with all his farming men. He was the stiffest and proudest man in the church, yet he invariably used to tell the Lord in prayer that he was nothing but dust and ashes, that he laid his hand on his lip, and his mouth in the dust, and cried, “Unclean, unclean.” Indeed he talked of himself in the most despairing way, but I am sure if God had spoken to him, he must have said, “O, thou that liest before my throne, thou sayest this, but thou dost not feel it; for thou wilt go thy way and take thy brother by the throat, exalt thyself above all thy fellow-creatures, and be a very Diotrophes in the church, and a Herod in the world.” I dislike that humility which rests in outward things. There is a kind of oil, sanctimonious, proud humility, which is not the genuine article, though it is sometimes extremely like it. You may be deceived by it once or twice, but by-and-bye you discover that is a wolf dexterously covered with sheep’s clothing. It arrayeth itself in the simplest dress in the world; it talks in the gentlest and humblest style; it says, “We must not intrude our own peculiar sentiments, but must always walk in love and charity.” But after all, what is it? It is charitable to all except those who hold God’s truth, and it is humble to all when it is forced to humble. It is like one of whom, I dare say, you have read in your childish books,—

“So, stooping down, as needs he must
Who cannot stand upright.”

True humility does not continually talk about “dust and ashes,” and prate about its infirmities, but it feels all that which others say, for it possesses an inwrought feeling of its own nothingness.

Very likely the most humble man in the world won’t bend to anybody. John Knox was a truly humble man, yet if you had seen him march before Queen Mary with the Bible in his hand to reprove her, you would have rashly said, “What a proud man!”

Cringing men that bow before everybody are truly proud men; but humble men are those who think themselves so little, they do not think it worth while to stoop to serve themselves. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, were humble men, for they did not think their lives were worth enough to save them by a sin. Daniel was a humble man; he did not think his place, his station, his whole self, worth enough to save them by leaving off prayer. Humility is a thing which must be genuine;

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the imitation of it is the nearest thing in the world to pride. Seek of God, dear friends, the gift of true humility. Seek to have that breaking in pieces by the Holy Spirit, that breaking in the mortar with the pestle which God himself gives to his children. Seek that every twig of his rod may drive pride out of you, so that by the blueness of your wound your soul may be made better. Seek of him, if he does not show you the chambers of imagery within your own heart, that he may take you to Calvary, and that he may show you his brightness and his glory, that you may be humble before him. Never ask to be a mean, cringing, fawning thing: ask God to make you a man—those are scarce things now-a-days—a man who only fears God, who knows no fear of any other kind. Do not give yourselves up to any man's power, or guidance, or rule, but ask of God that you may have that humility towards him which gives you the noble bearing of a Christian before others. Some think that ministers are proud when they resent any interference with their ministry. I consider they would be proud if they allowed it for the sake of peace, which is only another word for their own self-seeking. It is a great mercy when God gives a man to be free from everybody, when he can go into his pulpit careless of what others may think of him. I conceive that a minister should be like a lighthouse-keeper; he is out at sea and nobody can suggest to him that he had better light his candles a little later, or anything of the kind. He knows his duty, and he keeps his lamps burning; if he were to follow the opinions of the people on shore, his light might be extinguished altogether. It is a merciful providence that they cannot get to him, so he goes on easily, obeys his regulations as he reads them, and cares little for other people's interpretation. So a minister should not be a weathercock that is turned by the wind, but he should be one who turns the wind; not one who is ruled by others, but one who knows how to stand firm and fast, and keep his light burning, trusting always in God; believing that if God has raised him up, he will not desert him, but will teach him by his Holy Spirit without the ever-changing advice of men.

3. Now in the last place, what comes of humility? "Before honor is humility." Humility is the herald which ushers in the great king; it walks before honor; and he who has humility will have honor afterwards. I will only apply this spiritually. Have you been brought to-day to feel that in yourself you are less than nothing, and vanity? Art thou humbled in the sight of God to know thine own unworthiness, thy fallen estate in Adam, and the ruin thou hast brought upon thyself by thine own sins? Hast thou been brought to feel thyself incapable of working out thy own salvation, unless God shall work in thee to will and to do of his own good pleasure? Hast thou been brought to say, "Lord, have mercy upon me, a sinner?" Well then, as true as the text is in the Bible thou shalt have honor by-and-bye. "Such honor have all the saints." Thou shalt have honor soon to be washed from all thy guilt; thou shalt have honor soon to be clothed in the robes of Jesus, in the royal garments of the King; thou shalt have honor soon to be adopted into his family, to be received amongst the blood-washed ones who have been justified by faith. Thou shalt have honor to be borne, as on eagles' wings, to be carried across the river and at last to sing his praise who has been the "Death of deaths, and hell's destruction." Thou shalt have honor to wear the crown and wave the palm one day, for thou hast now that humility which comes from God. You may fear that because you are now humbled by God you must perish. I beseech you do not think so; as truly as ever the Lord has humbled you, he will exalt you. And the more you are brought low, the less hope you have of mercy, the more you are in the dust, so much the more reason you have to hope. So far from the bottom of the sea being a place over which we cannot be carried to heaven, it is one of the nearest places to heaven's gate. And if thou art brought to the very lowest place to which even Jonah descended, thou art so much the nearer being accepted. The more thou knowest thy vileness,

remember, the blacker, the more filthy, the more unworthy thou art in thine own esteem, so much the more right hast thou to expect that thou wilt be saved. Verily, honor shall come after humility. Humble souls, rejoice; proud souls, go on in your proud ways, but know that they end in destruction. Climb up the ladder of your pride; you shall fall over on the other side and be dashed to pieces. Ascend the steep hill of your glory; the higher you climb the more terrible will be your fall. For know you this, that against none hath the Lord Almighty bent his bow more often, and against none has he shot his arrows more furiously than against the proud and mighty man that exalteth himself. Bow down, O man, bow down; “Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.”

(New Park Street Pulpit Volume 2, Sermon No. 97; delivered on Sabbath morning, August 17 1956 at the New Park Street Chapel, Southwark)

The Cause and Cure of a Wounded Spirit

A sermon (2494) intended for reading on Lord's Day, December 6th, 1896,
delivered by C. H. Spurgeon at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington
on Thursday Evening, April 16th, 1885.

“The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity; but a wounded spirit who can bear?”—Proverbs 18:14.

Every man sooner or later has some kind of infirmity to bear. It may be that his constitution from the very first will be inclined to certain disease and pains, or possibly he may in passing through life suffer from accident or decline of health. He may not however have any infirmity of the body, he may enjoy the great blessing of health; but he may have what is even worse, an infirmity of mind. There will be something about each man's infirmity which he would alter if he could; or if he should not have any infirmity of body or of mind, he will have a cross to carry of some kind—in his relatives, in his business, or in certain of his circumstances. His world is not the Garden of Eden, and you cannot make it to be so. It is like that garden in this respect—that the serpent is in it, and the trail of the serpent is over everything here. It is said that there is a skeleton in some closet or other of everybody's house. I will not say so much as that, but I am persuaded that there is no man in this world but has trial in some form or other, unless it be those whom God permits to have their portion in this life because they will have no portion of bliss in the life that is to come. There are some such people who appear to have no afflictions and trials; but as the apostle reminds us, “If ye be without chastisement, whereof all (the true seed of the Lord) are partakers, then are ye bastards and not sons;” and none of us would wish to have that terrible name truthfully applied to us. I should greatly prefer to come into the condition of the apostle when he said, “Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.” I say again that every man will have to bear an infirmity of some sort or other. To bear that infirmity is not difficult when the spirit is sound and strong: “The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity.”

I. Let me therefore first of all try to answer the question —what is that sound spirit which will sustain a man's infirmities?

Such a spirit may be found, in a minor degree, in merely natural men. Among the Stoics there were men who bore pain and poverty and reproach without evincing the slightest feeling. Among the Romans, in their heroic days, there was one named Scoevola who thrust his right hand into the fire and suffered it to be burnt off, in order to let the foreign tyrant know that there were Romans who did not care for pain. We have read wonderful stories of the patience and endurance of even natural men, for our text is true in that sense, “the spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity.” Whatever it was that was placed upon some men, they seemed as if they carried it without a care or without a thought, so brave was their heart within them; yet if we knew more of these people, we should find that there were some points in which their natural strength failed them; for it must be so, the creature at its best estate is altogether vanity. David truly said, “God has spoken once; twice have I heard this: that power belongeth unto God;” and the strength of mind by which Christian men are able to bear their infirmities is of a higher kind than that which comes from either stoicism, or from natural sternness, or from obedience to any of the precepts of human philosophy.

The spirit which will best bear infirmities is first of all, a gracious spirit wrought in us by the Spirit of God. If thou wouldst bear thy trouble without complaining, if thou wouldst sustain thy burden without fainting, if thou wouldst mount on wings as eagles, if thou wouldst run without weariness and walk without fainting, thou must have the life of God within thee, thou must be born again, thou must be in living union with him who is the Strong One, and who, by the life which he implants within thee, can give thee of his own strength. I do not believe that anything but that which is divine will stand the wear and tear of this world's temptations, and of this world's trials and troubles.

“Mere mortal power shall fade and die,
And youthful vigor cease;”

but they that trust in the Lord and derive their power from him shall press forward even to victory. So then, first, if you would sustain your infirmity you must have a gracious spirit, that is, a spirit renewed by grace divine. Further, I think that a sound spirit which can sustain infirmity will be a spirit cleansed in the precious blood of Christ. “Conscience does make cowards of us all;” and it is only when conscience is pacified by the application of the blood of sprinkling that we are able to sustain our infirmities. The restful child of God will say, “What matters it if I am consumptive? What matters it if I have a broken leg? My sin is forgiven me and I am on my way to heaven; what matters anything else? Have you not sometimes felt that if you had to spend the rest of your life in a dungeon, and to live on bread and water, or to lie there as John Bunyan would have said, till the moss grew on your eyelids, yet as long as you were sure that you were cleansed from sin by the precious blood of Christ you could bear it all. For after all, what are any pains and sufferings that the whips and scourges of this mortal life can lay upon us compared with the terrors that have to be endured when sin is discerned by an awakened conscience, and the wrath of God lies heavily upon us? Believe me when I say that I would rather suffer such physical pangs as may belong to hell itself than I would endure the wrath of God in my spirit; for there is nothing that can touch the very marrow of our being like a sense of divine anger when it comes upon the soul, when God seems to dip his arrows in the lake of fire and then shoot them at us till they wound the very apple of our eye, and our whole being seems to be a mass of pain and misery. Oh, this is dreadful! But once delivered from all fear of the righteous vengeance of God, and I can sing with Dr. Watts—

“If sin be pardon'd, I'm secure;
Death hath no sting beside;
The law gives sin its damning power;
But Christ, my ransom, died.”

Take sin away and give me a spirit washed in the fountain filled with blood, and I can patiently go through anything and everything, the Lord being my Helper.

The kind of spirit then that a man needs to sustain his infirmity is one which has been renewed by the Holy Ghost, and washed in the precious blood of Jesus.

Next it is a spirit which exercises itself daily unto a growing confidence in God. The spirit that is to sustain infirmity is not a spirit of doubt and fear and mistrust. There is no power about such a spirit as that; it is like a body without bone or sinew or muscle. Strength lieth in believing. He who can trust can work, he who can trust can suffer. The spirit that can sustain a man in his infirmity is the spirit that can say, “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him; come what may, I will not

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doubt my God, for his word is strong and steadfast. Although my house be not so with God, yet hath he made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure." O dear sir, I am sure that if God calls you to do business in great waters, you will want the great bow or anchor with you, you will not feel safe without it. When the Lord calls you to battle with your spiritual foes you will feel the necessity of having upon you the whole armor of God, and above all you will need to take the shield of faith wherewith you shall be able to quench the fiery darts of the enemy.

So beloved, our spirit must be a renewed spirit, a blood-washed spirit, and a believing spirit, if we are to sustain our infirmity.

I must also add my belief that no spirit can so well endure sickness, loss, trial, sorrow, as a perfectly-consecrated spirit. The man who is free from all secondary motives, who lives only for God's glory, says if he is sick, "How can I glorify God upon my bed?" If he is in health he cries, "How can I glorify God in my vigor?" If he is rich he asks, "How can I glorify God with the possessions which he has put under my stewardship?" If he is poor he says, "There must be some advantage about my poverty; how can I best use it to the glory of God?" He looks to see not how he can comfort himself, but how he can most successfully fight his Master's battles. A soldier who is in the fight must not enter into business on his own account. Paul wrote to Timothy, "No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier;" and the true soldier of the cross just says, "Up hill and down dale, wet or dry, in honor or dishonor, all I have to do is to lift on high the banner of my Lord and strike down the foe; and if needful, even lay down my own life for his sake." The perfectly consecrated spirit will enable a man to sustain his infirmity; but a selfish spirit will weaken him so that he will begin to complain of this and to lament that, and will not be made "strong in the Lord and in the power of his might."

So much then about the sound spirit that can sustain infirmity; may the Lord give it to every one of us! How many of us have it? "Oh!" says one, "I think I am all right; I have a sane mind in a sane body." Ah! yes, but there is another part of you that needs sanity: you need spiritual health, and there are times that will come to you who have nothing to depend upon but your bodily and mental vigor, and then you will find you want something more. There will come a trial that will touch you in a very tender spot, and you will cry out, "Oh! what is it that I want?" You will find that there was an unguarded place in your harness, and the arrow of the adversary has pierced you to the soul. You must be born again even for the bearing of your present infirmity; even for struggling through this life you must have a new heart and a right spirit or else sometime or other you will find yourself overthrown. "If thou hast run with the footmen and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? and if in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?" What wilt thou do then if thou hast not that divinely-given spirit which will sustain thine infirmity? When the death-sweat is on thy brow thou wilt need a better handkerchief than was ever made by human hands; and if the Lord thy God be not at thy side then to wipe the scalding tears from thine eyes, what wilt thou do? What wilt thou do?

II. But now I have to answer a second question, what is a wounded spirit? "A wounded spirit who can bear?" It cannot bear its own infirmity so it becomes a load to itself, and the question is not, "What can it bear?" but "Who can bear it?" "A wounded spirit, who can bear?" What then is a wounded spirit? Well, I have known some who have talked about having a wounded spirit, but the wound has been after all a very slight affair compared with the wounds that I mean. One has

been disappointed in love. That is very sad, but still it is a trial that can be endured. We have no right to love the creature so much as to make it our god or our idol. I have known some who have been disappointed in the object of their ambition, and in consequence they have had a wounded spirit. But who are you that you should not be disappointed, and what are you that you should have everything according to your mind? Surely if the Lord were to deal with you according to your sins you would have something to bear far worse than your present disappointment. As to those trials of which a person says, "Nobody ever suffered as I have done, nobody was ever treated I have been," such statements are altogether wrong. There are many others who have passed through equal or even greater trials. Do not therefore allow these things to fret you and to destroy your peace. Be not like the Spartan boy who put the fox into his bosom and carried it there, though it was gnawing at his flesh, and eating right into his heart. There are some people who are so unwise as to make earthly objects their supreme delight, and those objects become like foxes that gnaw to their soul's destruction. I will only say this about such wounded hearts as these; there is a good deal of sin mingled with the sorrow, and a great deal of pride, a great deal of creature-worship and of idolatry there. Depend upon it, if you make an idol and God loves you, he will break it. A Quaker lady once stood up to speak in a little meeting, and all that she said was "Verily, I perceive that children are idols." She did not know why she said it; but there was a mother there who had been wearing black for years after her child had been taken away; she had never forgiven her God for what he had done. Now this is an evil that is to be rebuked. I dare not comfort those whose spirits are wounded in this fashion. If they carry even their mourning too far, we must say to them, "Dear friend, is not this rebellion against God? May not this be petulance instead of patience? May there not be very much here which is not at all according to the mind of Christ?" We may sorrow and be grieved when we lose our loved ones, for we are men, but we must moderate our sorrow and bow our will to the will of the Lord, for are we not also men of God?

I will not dwell further upon that point, but there are some forms of a wounded spirit which are serious, and yet they are not quite what I am going afterwards to speak about. Some have a wounded spirit through the cruelty of men, the unkindness of children, the ingratitude of those whom they have helped, and for whom they have had such affection that they would almost have been willing to sacrifice their own lives. It is a terrible wounding when he who should have been your friend becomes your foe, and when, like your Lord, you also have your Judas Iscariot. It is not easy to bear misrepresentation and falsehood, to have your purest motives misjudged, and to be thought to be only seeking something for yourself when you have a pure desire for the good of others. This is a very painful kind of wounded spirit, but it must not be allowed to be carried too far. We should cry to God to help us bear this trial; for after all, who are we that we should not be despised? Who are we that we should not be belied? He is the wise man who expects this kind of trial, and expecting it, is not disappointed when it comes. "How"—asked one, of a person who had lived through the terrible French Revolution when almost all notable men were put to death—"how was it that you escaped?" He answered, "I made myself of no reputation, and nobody ever spoke of me, so I escaped." And I believe that, in this world, the happiest lot does not belong to those of us who are always being talked about, but to those who do not know anybody, and whom nobody knows; they can steal through the world very quietly. So do not be broken-hearted if men try to wound your spirit. When thirty years ago they abused me to the utmost, I felt that I need not care what they said, for I could hardly do anything worse than they said I had done. When you once get used to this kind of treatment—and you may as well do so for you will have plenty of it if you follow

Christ—it will not trouble you, and you will be able to bear your infirmity without being much wounded by the unkindness of men.

There are others who have been very grievously wounded by sorrow. They have had affliction upon affliction, loss after loss, bereavement after bereavement. And we ought to feel those things; indeed, it is by feeling them that we get the good out of them. Still, every Christian man should cry to God for strength to bear repeated losses and bereavements if they are his portion, and he should endeavor in the strength of God not to succumb whatever his trials may be. If we do yield to temptation and begin to complain of God for permitting such things to come upon us, we shall only be kicking against the pricks and so wound ourselves all the more. Let us be submissive to the hand that wields the rod of correction, and then very soon that rod will be taken from off our backs.

There are some who have been greatly wounded no doubt, through sickness. A wounded spirit may be the result of diseases which seriously shake the nervous system. Let us be very tender with brethren and sisters who get into that condition. I have heard some say, rather unkindly, “Sister So-and-so is so nervous, we can hardly speak in her presence.” Yes, but talking like that will not help her; there are many persons who have had this trying kind of nervousness greatly aggravated by the unkindness or thoughtlessness of friends. It is a real disease, it is not imaginary. Imagination no doubt contributes to it and increases it; but still, there is a reality about it. There are some forms of physical disorder in which a person lying in bed feels great pain through another person simply walking across the room. “Oh!” you say, “that is more imagination.” Well, you may think so if you like, but if you are ever in that painful condition—as I have been many a time—I will warrant that you will not talk in that fashion again. “But we cannot take notice of such fancies,” says one. I suppose that you would like to run a steam-roller across the room just for the sake of strengthening their nerves! But if you had the spirit of Christ you would want to walk across the room as though your foot were flakes of snow!; you would not wish to cause the poor sufferer any additional pain. I beg you, never grieve those upon whom the hand of God is lying in the form of depression of spirit, but be very tender and gentle with them. You need not encourage them in their sadness, but at the same time, let there be no roughness in dealing with them; they have many very sore places, and the hand that touches them should be soft as down.

Yet do I not wish to speak of that kind of wounded spirit alone for that is rather the business of the physician than of the divine. Still, it well illustrates this latter part of our text, “a wounded spirit, who can bear?” But this is the kind of wounded spirit I mean. When a soul is under a deep and terrible sense of sin—when conviction flashes into the mind with lightning swiftness and force, and the man says, “I am guilty;” when the notion of what guilt is first comes clearly home to him and he sees that God must be as certainly just as he is good, then he discovers that he has angered infinite love, that he has provoked almighty grace, and that he has made his best Friend to be, necessarily, his most terrible foe. A man in such a condition as that will have a wounded spirit such as none can bear. Then you may pipe to him, but he will not dance; you may try to charm him with your amusements, or to please him with your oratory, but you cannot give him peace or rest. “A wounded spirit, who can bear?” You know that there was one of old who said, “My soul chooseth strangling and death rather than my life,” and there was another, Judas, who actually did strangle himself under an awful sense of his guilt in betraying his Lord. Oh! I do trust that no one of you will act as he did, for that were to damn yourself irretrievably; but I do not wonder that you cry out, “Oh, that I could hide myself in the dust to escape from the terrors of a sense of divine wrath!” “A wounded spirit, who can bear?”

Sometimes the spirit is wounded by the fierce temptations of Satan. I hope that you do not all understand what this means; but there are some who do. Satan tempts them to doubt, tempts them to sin, tempts them to blasphemy. Some dear friends whom I know, who are among the purest-minded of mortals, and whose lives are models of everything that is devout and right, are worried by the great adversary from morning to night, scarcely ever waking in the night without some vile suggestion of Satan or some horrible howling in their ears, "You are lost; you are lost; you are shut out from mercy for ever." They are tempted even to curse God and die; and that temptation brings a wounded spirit, such as they scarcely know how to bear. Who can bear it? God save you from it if you have fallen under its terrible power!

A wounded spirit may also come through desertion by God. The believer has not walked carefully, he has fallen into sin, and God has hidden his face from him. Ah, my friends, whenever you trifle with sin, I wish you could feel as some of God's true people have done when they have been restored after a great fall! A burnt child dreads the fire, and so does a true child of God who has ever played with sin; he has been brought back to his Lord, but he has gone the rest of his life with an aching heart and limping limbs, and many a time in wintry weather he has felt that his broken bones start and cry out against him with the memory of his past sins. "Deliver me," says David, "from the sins of my youth;" and so may some of God's best servants say in their old age; and some who once were very bright stars but who have been for a while eclipsed, will never be able to escape from a certain sense of darkness which is still upon them. "I shall go softly all my years in the bitterness of my soul," may he say who has once grievously sinned against God after light and knowledge. Therefore beloved, be very careful that you do not backslide, for if you do you will have a wounded spirit which you will not know how to bear.

I believe however that some of God's children have a wounded spirit entirely through mistake. I am always afraid of those who got certain wild notions into their heads, ideas that are not true I mean; they are very happy while they hold those high notions, and they look down with contempt upon others of God's people who do not go kite-flying or balloon-sailing as they do. I think to myself sometimes—how will they come down when their precious balloon bursts? I have often wished them well down on the level again. I have seen them believe this, and believe that, which they were not warranted by the Scriptures to believe, and they have affected exalted ideas of their own attainments. Their position was something wonderful; they were far up in the sky looking down upon all the saints below! Yes, dear friends, that is all very pretty and very fine, undoubtedly; but when you come down again then you will begin to condemn yourself for things that you need not condemn, and you will be distressed and miserable in your spirit because of a disappointment which you need never have had if you had walked humbly with your God. For my own part, I can truly say that none of the novelties of this present evil age have any sort of charm for me; I am content still to abide in the old way, myself ever a poor, needy, helpless sinner, finding everything I need in Christ. If you ever hear me beginning to talk about what a fine fellow I am and how perfect I am getting, you just say, "He's off his head." Please put me in an asylum directly, for I must have lost my reason before I could have believed this modern nonsense. I feel sure that I, for one, shall not suffer any disappointment in this direction, for I shall keep just where Jack the huckster kept, and say with him,—

"I'm a poor sinner, and nothing at all,
But Jesus Christ is my all in all."

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Yet I am very fearful for others, for whom there awaits a terrible time of bondage when they once come back to the place where it would have been better for them to have stopped. If I were to set up to be a prince of the realm, and begin to spend at the rate of fifty thousand pounds a year, I am afraid that in a very few days I should have the sheriff's officer down upon me, and I should not be able to pay a penny in the pound of my debts. I think I would much rather go on in my own quiet way, and keep within my own means than do any thing of that kind. There are nowadays many spiritual spendthrifts who are pretending to spend money that does not exist, and they will very soon find a sense of their poverty forced upon them, and their want will come like an armed man, demanding their surrender.

So much then upon the words, "a wounded spirit who can bear?"

III. My time has almost fled; but I want to answer a third question—how are we to avoid a wounded spirit so far as it is evil?

I answer first, if you are happy in the Lord and full of joy and confidence, avoid a wounded spirit by never offending your conscience. Labor with all your might to be true to the light that God has given you, to be true to your understanding of God's Word, and to follow the Lord with all your heart. When Mr. Bunyan describes Christian as meeting with Apollyon in the Valley of Humiliation, and fighting that terrible battle which he so graphically describes, he told us that the pilgrim remembered then some of the slips that he had made when he was going down into the valley. While he was fighting with Apollyon he was remembering in his own heart the slips that he had previously made. Nothing will come to you in a time of sorrow and pain and brokenness of spirit so sharply as a sense of sins of omission or sins of commission. When the light of God's presence is gone from you, you will begin sadly to say, "Why did I do this? Why did I not do that?" Therefore dear friends, endeavor as much as lieth in you so to live in the time of your joy that, if there ever should come times of depression, you may not have to remember neglected duties or wilful wickedness.

Again, if you would avoid a wounded spirit get a clear view of the gospel. There are numbers of Christian people who have seen the gospel just as that half-opened eye of the blind man saw "men as trees walking." They do not yet know the difference between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. They do not know how a Christian stands in Christ. Get them to spell that glorious word grace if they can; ask them to say it like this,— "free grace." They will probably say to you, "Oh! free grace,—that is tautology." Never mind; give it to them, tautology or not. Spell it in your own bout, —free, rich, sovereign grace; and know that you, a guilty, lost sinner, are saved as a sinner, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, that in due time he died for the ungodly, and that your standing is not in yourself or in your own attainments, but wholly and entirely in the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ. It will often prevent your getting a wounded spirit if you understand the differences between things that do really differ, and do not mix them up as so many do. Again, you will avoid a wounded spirit by living very near to God. The sheep that gets bitten by the wolf is the one that does not keep near the shepherd. Ah! and I have known sheep to get bitten by the dog, and the dog did not mean them any hurt though he did bite them. It has often happened that when I have been preaching there has been somebody dreadfully hurt. Yes, even the Good Shepherd's dog bites sometimes; but if you had kept near the Shepherd his dog would not have bitten you, for neither the dog nor the wolf will bite those that are near him. Let your cry be—

"Oh, for a closer walk with God!"

Then will come “a calm and heavenly frame”; but if you get away from holy living and close communion with God, you may expect to get a wounded spirit.

So much then for the prevention which is better than a cure. God help us all to make good use of it!

IV. But lastly, suppose our spirit is wounded, how is it to be healed? Do you need that I should tell you that there is only One who can heal a wounded spirit? “By his stripes we are healed.” If you would be healed of the bleeding wounds of your heart, flee away to Christ. You did so once; do it again. Come to Christ now, though you may have come to him a hundred times before. Come now just as you are, without one plea, but that his blood was shed for you. Come to him. There is no peace for a soul that does not do this, and you must have peace if you will but come simply as you are, and trust yourself with Christ.

If however your wounded Spirit should not get peace at once, try to remove any mistakes which may be causing you unnecessary sorrow. Study your Bible more. Listen to plain preaching of the gospel. Let this be to you the mark of true gospel preaching—where Christ is everything and the creature is nothing; where it is salvation all of grace through the work of the Holy Spirit, applying to the soul the precious blood of Jesus. Try to get a clear view of the gospel and many a doubt and fear will fly away when knowledge takes the place of ignorance.

Endeavour also to get a clear view of your own troubles. We are never frightened so much by what we know as by what we do not know. The boy thinks as he sees something white, “That is a ghost,” and that is why he is frightened. He does not know what a ghost is; he supposes that it is something mysterious, and he is superstitious, so he is frightened by the object before him. If he would go right up to it he would see that it is a cow and he would not be frightened any more. Half the fears in the world have no real ground, and if we could but induce troubled persons dispassionately to look at their fears, their fears would vanish. Write it down in black and white if you can, and let some friend read it. Perhaps if you read it yourself you will laugh at it. I believe that oftentimes with regard to the most grievous afflictions that we have in our mind, if they fretted somebody else, we should say, “I cannot think how that person can be so stupid.” We almost know that we are ourselves stupid, but we do not like to confess it. I would therefore urge the wounded spirit to look at its wound; it is of no use to cover it over and to say, “Oh, it is an awful wound!” Perhaps if you would just have it thoroughly examined, the surgeon would say to you, “Oh, it is only a flesh wound; it will soon be all right again!” And so your drooping spirits would revive and your wounded self would begin to heal.

One thing however I would say to one who has a really wounded heart. Remember Christ’s sympathy with you. O thou who art tossed with tempest and not comforted, thy Lord’s vessel is in the storm with thee! Yea, he is in the vessel with thee. There is not a pang that rends the believer’s heart but he has felt it first. He drinks out of the cup with you. Is it very bitter? He has had a cup full of it for every drop that you taste. This ought to comfort you. I know of no better remedy for the heart’s trouble in a Christian than to feel, “My Master himself takes no better portion than that which he gives to me.”

Also let me recommend as a choice remedy for a wounded spirit; an enlarged view of the love of God. I wish that some of you who have a wounded spirit would give God credit for being as kind as you are yourself. You would not suffer your child to endure a needless pain if you could remove it; neither does God afflict willingly, or grieve the children of men. He would not allow

you to be cast down, but would cheer and comfort you if it was good for you. His delight is that you should be happy and joyful. Do not think that you may not take the comfort which he has set before you in his Word; he has put it there on purpose for you. Dare to take it and think well of God, and it shall be well with your soul. If this should not cure the evil, remember the great brevity of your afflictions, after all. What if you should be a child of God who has even to go to bed in the dark? You will wake up in the eternal daylight. What if for the time being you are in heaviness? There is a needs-be that you should be in heaviness through manifold temptations, and you will come out of it. You are not the first child of God who has been depressed or troubled. Ay, among the noblest men and women who ever lived there has been much of this kind of thing. I noticed in the life of Sir Isaac Newton—probably the greatest mind that God ever made apart from his own dear Son—the great Sir Isaac Newton, the master and teacher of the truest philosophy, during the middle part of his life was in great distress and deep depression. Robert Boyle again, whose name is well known to those who read works of depth of thought, at one time said that he counted life to be a very heavy burden to him. And there was that sweet charming spirit of the poet Cowper. You all know that throughout his life he was like a flower that blooms in the shade; yet he exhaled the sweetest perfume of holy piety and poetry. Do not therefore think that you are quite alone in your sorrow. Bow your head and bear it if it cannot be removed; for but a little while and every cloud shall be swept away, and you in the cloudless sunlight shall behold your God. Meanwhile, his strength is sufficient for you. He will not suffer you to be tempted above what you are able to bear; and if you cannot bear your infirmity because of your wounded spirit, he will bear for you both yourself and your infirmity. “O rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for him.” “Let not your heart be troubled, ye believe in God, believe also in your Christ.” Go away you Hannah of a sorrowful spirit, and be no more sad. The Lord grant his comforts to you for his Son Jesus Christ’s sake! Amen.

A Faithful Friend

A sermon (No. 120) delivered on Sabbath Morning, March 8, 1857,
by C. H. Spurgeon at The Music Hall, Royal Surrey Gardens.

“There is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother.”—Proverbs 18:24.

Cicero has well said, “Friendship is the only thing in the world concerning the usefulness of which all mankind are agreed.” Friendship seems as necessary an element of a comfortable existence in this world as fire or water, or even air itself. A man may drag along a miserable existence in proud solitary dignity, but his life is scarce life, it is nothing but an existence, the tree of life being stripped of the leaves of hope and the fruits of joy. He who would be happy here must have friends; and he who would be happy hereafter must, above all things, find a friend in the world to come in the person of God, the Father of his people.

Friendship however, though very pleasing and exceedingly blessed, has been the cause of the greatest misery to men when it has been unworthy and unfaithful; for just in proportion as a good friend is sweet, a false friend is full of bitterness. “A faithless friend is sharper than an adder’s tooth.” It is sweet to repose in some one; but O! how bitter to have that support snapped, and to receive a grievous fall as the effect of your confidence. Fidelity is an absolute necessary in a true friend; we can not rejoice in men unless they will stand faithful to us. Solomon declares that “there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother.” That friend I suppose he never found in the pomps and vanities of the world. He had tried them all, but he found them empty; he passed through all their joys, but he found them “vanity of vanities.” Poor Savage spoke from sad experience when he said —

“You’ll find the friendship of the world a show!
Mere outward show! 'Tis like the harlot’s tears,
The statesman’s promise, or false patriot’s zeal,
Full of fair seeming, but delusion all.”

And so for the most part they are. The world’s friendship is ever brittle. Trust to it, and you have trusted a robber; rely upon it, and you have leaned upon a thorn; ay, worse than that, upon a spear which shall pierce you to the soul with agony. Yet Solomon says he had found “a friend that sticketh closer than a brother.” Not in the haunts of his unbridled pleasures, nor in the wanderings of his unlimited resources, but in the pavilion of the Most High, the secret dwelling-place of God, in the person of Jesus, the Son of God, the Friend of sinners.

It is saying a great thing to affirm that “there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother,” for the love of brotherhood has produced most valiant deeds. We have read stories of what brotherhood could do, which we think could hardly be excelled in the annals of friendship. Timoleon, with his shield, stood over the body of his slain brother to defend him from the insults of the foe. It was reckoned a brave deed of brotherhood that he should dare the spears of an army in defense of his brother’s corpse. And many such instances have there been in ancient and modern warfare of the attachment of brethren. There is a story told of a Highland regiment, who while marching through the Highlands, lost their way; they were overtaken by one of the terrible storms which will sometimes come upon travelers unawares, and blinded by the snow they lost their way upon the mountains.

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Well nigh frozen to death, it was with difficulty they could continue their march. One man after another dropped into the snow and disappeared. There were two brothers however of the name of Forsythe; one of them fell prostrate on the earth and would have lain there to die, but his brother, though barely able to drag his own limbs across the white desert, took him on his back and carried him along, and as others fell one by one, this brave true-hearted brother carried his loved one on his back, until at last he himself fell down overcome with fatigue, and died. His brother however had received such warmth from his body that he was enabled to reach the end of his journey in safety, and so lived. Here we have an instance of one brother sacrificing his life for another. I hope there are some brothers here who would be prepared to do the same if they should ever be brought into the same difficulty. It is saying a great thing to declare that "there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother." It is putting that friend first of all in the list of loving ones; for surely, next to a mother's love, there is and there ought to be no higher affection in the world than the love of a brother to one begotten of the same father and dandled on the same knee. Those who have "grown in beauty side by side, and filled one house with glee," ought to love one another. And we think there have been many glorious instances and mighty proofs of the love of brethren. Yet says Solomon, "there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother."

To repeat our assertion, we believe that this friend is the blessed Redeemer, Jesus Christ. It shall be ours, first, to prove this morning the fact that he sticks closer than a brother; then as briefly as we can, to show you why he sticks closer than a brother; and then to finish up by giving you some lessons which may be drawn from the doctrine that Jesus Christ is a faithful Friend.

I. First then beloved, we assert that Christ is "a friend that sticketh closer than a brother." And in order to prove this from facts, we appeal to such of you as have had him for a friend. Will you not each of you at once give your verdict, that this is neither more nor less than an unexaggerated truth? He loved you before all worlds; long ere the day star flung his ray across the darkness, before the wing of angel had flapped the unnavigated ether, before aught of creation had struggled from the womb of nothingness, God, even our God, had set his heart upon all his children. Since that time has he once swerved, has he once turned aside, once changed? No, ye who have tasted of his love and know his grace will bear me witness, that he has been a certain friend in uncertain circumstances.

"He, near your side hath always stood.
His loving-kindness, O! how good."

You fell in Adam; did he cease to love you? No, he became the second Adam to redeem you. You sinned in practice and brought upon your head the condemnation of God; you deserved his wrath and his utter anger; did he then forsake you? No!

"He saw you ruined in the fall,
Yet loved you notwithstanding all."

He sent his minister after you; you despised him; he preached the gospel in your ears; you laughed at him; you broke God's Sabbath, you despised his Word. Did he then forsake you? No!

"Determined to save, he watched o'er your path,
Whilst, Satan's blind slave, you sported with death."

And at last he arrested you by his grace, he humbled you, he made you penitent, he brought you to his feet, and he forgave you all your sins. Since then has he left you? You have often left him; has he ever left you? You have had many trials and troubles; has he ever deserted you? Has he ever turned away his heart, and shut up his bowels of compassion? No, children of God, it is your solemn duty to say “No,” and bear witness to his faithfulness. You have been in severe afflictions and in dangerous circumstances; did your friend desert you then? Others have been faithless to you; he that ate bread with you has lifted up his heel against you, but has Christ ever forsaken you? Has there ever been a moment when you could go to him and say, “Master, thou hast betrayed me?” Could you once, in the blackest hour of your grief, dare to impugn his fidelity? Could you dare to say of him, “Lord, thou hast promised what thou didst not perform?” Will you not bear witness now, “Not one good thing hath failed of all that the LORD God hath promised, all hath come to pass”? And do you fear he will yet forsake you? Ask then the bright ones before the throne—“Ye glorified spirits! did Christ forsake you? Ye have passed through Jordan’s stream; did he leave you there? Ye have been baptized in the black flood of death; did he there forsake you? Ye have stood before the throne of God; did he then deny you?” And they answered, “No; through all the troubles of our life, in all the bitterness of death, in all the agonies of our expiring moments, and in all the terrors of God’s judgment, he hath been with us, ‘a friend that sticketh closer than a brother.’” Out of all the millions of God’s redeemed, there is not one he hath forsaken. Poor they have been, mean and distressed, but he hath never abhorred their prayer, never turned aside from doing them good. He hath been ever with them.

“For his mercy shall endure,
Ever faithful, ever sure.”

But I shall not longer stay since I can not prove this to the ungodly, and to the godly it is already proven, for they know it by experience; therefore it is but little necessary that I should do more than just certify the fact that Christ is a faithful friend—a friend in every hour of need and every time of distress.

II. And now I have to tell you the reasons why we may depend upon Christ as being a faithful friend.

There are some things in himself which render it certain that he will stick close to his people.

1. True friendship can only be made between true men. Hearts are the soul of honor. There can be no lasting friendship between bad men. Bad men may pretend to love each other, but their friendship is a rope of sand which shall be broken at any convenient season; but if a man have a sincere heart within him, and be true and noble, then we may confide in him. Spenser sings in fine old English verse—

“No, certes can that friendship long endure,
However gay and goodly be the style,
That doth ill cause or evil end enure,
For Vertue is the band that bindeth Harts most sure.”

But who can find a stain in the character of Jesus, or who can tarnish his honor? Has there ever been a spot on his escutcheon? Has his flag ever been trampled in the dust? Does he not stand the true witness in heaven, the faithful and just? Is it not declared of him that he is God who cannot lie? Have we not found him so up to this moment? and may we not, knowing that he is “Holy, holy,

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holy LORD,” confide in him, that he will stick closer to us than a brother? His goodness is the guaranty of his fidelity; he can not fail us.

2. Faithfulness to us in our faults is a certain sign of fidelity in a friend. You may depend upon that man who will tell you of your faults in a kind and considerate manner. Fawning hypocrites, insidious flatterers, are the sweepings and offal of friendship. They are but the parasites upon that noble tree. But true friends put enough trust in you to tell you openly of your faults. Give me for a friend the man who will speak honestly of me before my face; who will not tell first one neighbor and then another, but who will come straight to my house and say, “Sir, I feel there is such-and-such a thing in you, which, as my brother, I must tell you of.” That man is a true friend; he has proved himself to be so; for we never get any praise for telling people of their faults; we rather hazard their dislike; a man will sometimes thank you for it, but he does not often like you any the better. Praise is a thing we all love. I met with a man the other day who said he was impervious to flattery; I was walking with him at the time, and turning round rather sharply I said, “At any rate, sir, you seem to have a high gift in flattering yourself, for you are really doing so in saying you are impervious to flattery.” “You can not flatter me,” he said. I replied, “I can, if I like to try; and perhaps may do so before the day is out.” I found I could not flatter him directly, so I began by saying what a fine child that was of his; and he drank it in as a precious draught; and when I praised this thing and that thing belonging to him, I could see that he was very easily flattered; not directly, but indirectly. We are all pervious to flattery; we like the soothing cordial, only it must not be labeled flattery; for we have a religious abhorrence of flattery if it be so called; call it by any other name and we drink it in, even as the ox drinketh in water. Now, child of God, has Christ every flattered you? Has he not told you of your faults right truly? Has he not pricked your conscience even upon what you thought to gloss over—your little secret sins? Has he not provoked conscience to thunder in your ears notes of terror because of your misdeeds? Well then, you may trust him, for he shows that faithfulness which renders a man right trustworthy. Thus I have pointed out to you that there are reasons in himself for which we may trust him.

3. In the next place there are some things in his friendship which render us sure of not being deceived, when we put our confidence in him. True friendship must not be of hasty growth. As quaint old Master Fuller says: “Let friendship creep gently to a height; if it rush to it, it may soon run itself out of breath.” It is even so. I think it was Joanna Baillie said—

“Friendship is no plant of hasty growth.
Though planted in esteem’s deep fixed soil,
The gradual culture of kind intercourse
Must bring it to perfection.”

In vain thou trustest the gourd over thy head, O Jonah; it will not be of much use to thee; it came up in a night, it may wither in a night. It is the strong stiff oak of ages’ growth which shall abide the tempest; which shall alike put out its wings to shield thee from the sun, and shall afterward find thee a hovel in its heart, if necessary, in its gray old age when its branches tremble in the blast. Friendship is true when it begins; but we must have a man’s friendship long before we can say of him that he will stick closer than a brother. And how long has Christ loved you? That you can not tell. When the ages were not born he loved you; when this world was an infant wrapped in the swaddling clothes of mist he loved you; when the old pyramids had not begun to be builded his heart was set upon you; and ever since you have been born he has had a strong affection for you.

He looked on you in your cradle and he loved you then; he was affianced to you when you were an infant of a span long, and he has loved you ever since. Some of you I see with gray hairs, some with heads all bald with age; he has loved you up till now, and will he now forsake you? O! no, his friendship is so old that it must last; it has been matured by so many tempests, it has been rooted by so many winds of trouble that it can not but endure; it must stand. Even as the granite peak of the mountain shall not be melted, because unlike the snow it has braved the blast and borne the heat of the burning sun; it has stood out always, catching in its face every blow from the face of nature, and yet been unmoved and uninjured. It shall last for it has lasted. But when the elements shall melt and in a stream of dissolving fire shall run away, then shall Christ's friendship still exist, for it is of older growth than they. He must be "a friend that sticketh closer than a brother;" for his friendship is a hoary friendship—hoary as his own head, of which it is said, "His head and his hair are white like snow, as white as wool."

4. But note further, the friendship which lasts does not take its rise in the chambers of mirth, nor is it fed and fattened there. Young lady, you speak of a dear friend whom you acquired last night in a ball-room. Do not I beseech you misuse the word; he is not a friend if he was acquired merely there; friends are better things than those which grow in the hot-house of pleasure. Friendship is a more lasting plant than those. You have a friend, have you? Yes; and he keeps a pair of horses and has a good establishment. Ah! but your best way to prove your friend is to know that he will be your friend when you have not so much as a mean cottage, and when, houseless and without clothing, you are driven to beg your bread. Thus you would make true proof of a friend. Give me a friend who was born in the winter time, whose cradle was rocked in the storm; he will last. Our fair weather friends shall flee away from us. I had rather have a robin for a friend than a swallow; for a swallow abides with us only in the summer time, but a robin cometh to us in the winter. Those are tight friends that will come the nearest to us when we are in the most distress; but those are not friends who speed themselves away when ill times come. Believer, hast thou reason to fear that Christ will leave you now? Has he not been with you in the house of mourning? You found your friend where men find pearls, "in caverns deep, where darkness dwells;" you found Jesus in your hour of trouble. It was on the bed of sickness that you first learned the value of his name; it was in the hour of mental anguish that you first did lay hold of the hem of his garment; and since then your nearest and sweetest intercourse has been held with him in the hours of darkness. Well then, such a friend—proved in the house of sorrow—a friend who gave his heart's blood for you, and let his soul run out in one great river of gore—such a friend never can and never will forsake you; he sticketh closer than a brother.

5. Again, a friend who is acquired by folly is never a lasting friend. Do a foolish thing, and make a man your friend; 'tis but a confederacy in vice, and you will soon discover that his friendship is worthless; the friendship you acquire by doing wrong, you had better be without. O! how many silly friendships there are springing up, the mere fruit of a sentimentalism, having no root whatever, but like the plant of which our Saviour tells us, "It sprang up because it had no depth of earth." Jesus Christ's friendship is not like that; there is no ingredient of folly in it; he loves us discreetly, not winking or conniving at our follies, but instilling into us his wisdom. His love is wise; he hath chosen us according to the counsel of his wisdom; not blindly and rashly, but with all judgment and prudence.

Under this head I may like wise observe that the friendship of ignorance is not a very desirable one. I desire no man to call himself my friend if he doth not know me. Let him love me in proportion to his knowledge of me. If he loves me for the little he knows, when he knoweth more he may cast me aside. "That man," says one, "seems to be a very amiable man." "I am sure I can love him," says another as he scans his features. Ay, but do not write "friend" yet; wait a wee bit until you know more of him; just see him, examine him, try him, test him, and not till then enter him on the sacred list of friends. Be friendly to all, but make none your friends until they know you, and you know them. Many a friendship born in the darkness of ignorance hath died suddenly in the light of a better acquaintance with each other. You supposed men to be different from what they were, and when you discovered their real character you disregarded them. I remember one saying to me, "I have great affection for you, sir," and he mentioned a certain reason. I replied, "My dear fellow, your reason is absolutely false; the very thing you love me for I am not, and hope I never shall be." And so I said, "I really can not accept your friendship, if it be founded upon a misunderstanding of what I may have said." But our Lord Jesus never can forsake those whom once he loves, because he can discover nothing in us worse than he knew, for he knew all about us beforehand. He saw our leprosy, and yet he loved us; he knew our deceitfulness and unbelief, and yet he did press us to his bosom; he knew what poor fools we were, and yet he said he would never leave us nor forsake us. He knew that we should rebel against him and despise his counsel often times; he knew that even when we loved him our love would be cold and languid, but he loved for his own sake. Surely then he will stick closer than a brother.

6. Yet again, friendship and love, to be real, must not lie in words but in deeds. The friendship of bare compliment is the fashion of this age, because this age is the age of deceit. The world is the great house of sham. Go where you may in London, sham is staring you in the face; there are very few real things to be discovered. I allude not merely to tricks in business, adulterations in food, and such like. Deception is not confined to the tradesman's shop. It prevails throughout society; the sanctuary is not exempt. The preacher adopts a sham voice. You hardly ever hear a man speak in the pulpit in the same way he would speak in the parlor. Why, I hear my brethren sometimes, when they are at tea or dinner, speak in a very comfortable decent sort of English voice, but when they get into their pulpits they adopt a sanctimonious tone and fill their mouths with inflated utterance, or else whine most pitifully. They degrade the pulpit by pretending to honor it, speaking in a voice which God never intended any mortal to have. This is the great house of sham; and such little things show which way the wind blows. You leave your card at a friend's house; that is an act of friendship—the card! I wonder whether, if he were hard up for cash, you would leave your banker's book! You write "My dear sir," "Yours very truly;" it is a sham; you do not mean it. "Dear!" that is a sacred word; it ought to be used to none but those you regard with affection; but we tolerate falsehoods now as if they were truths, and we call them courtesies. Courtesies they may be, but untruths they are in many cases. Now Christ's love lieth not in words but in deeds. He saith not, "My dear people;" but he let his heart out, and we could see what that was. He doth not come to us and say, "Dearly beloved" simply; but he hangs upon the cross, and there we read "Dearly beloved" in red letters. He does not come to us with the kisses of his lips first—he giveth us blessings with both his hands; he giveth himself for us, and then he giveth himself to us. Trust no complimentary friend; rely upon the man who giveth you real tokens worth your having, who does for you deeds to show the truthfulness of his heart. Such a friend—and such is Jesus—"sticketh closer than a brother."

7. Once more, and I shall not weary you, I trust. A purchased friend will never last long. Give to a man nineteen times and deny him the twentieth, and he shall hate you; for his love sprang only from your gifts. The love which I could buy for gold I would sell for dross; the friendship that I could buy for pearls I would dispense with for pebbles; it were of no value, and therefore the sooner lost the better. But O believer, Christ's love was unpurchased love. Thou broughtest him no present. Jacob said when his sons went to Egypt, "Take the man a present, a little oil, a little balm, a few nuts and almonds;" but you took Christ no presents. When you came to him you said,

"Nothing in my hands I bring,
Simply to thy cross I cling."

You did not even promise that you would love him, for you had such a faithless heart you durst not say so. You asked him to make you love him; that was the most you could do. He loved you for nothing at all — simply because he would love you. Well, that love which so lived on nothing but its own resources will not starve through the scantiness of your returns; the love which grew in such a rocky heart as this will not die for want of soil. That love which sprang up in the barren desert, in your unirrigated soul, will never, never die for want of moisture; it must live, it can not expire. Jesus must be "a friend that sticketh closer than a brother."

8. Shall I stay to urge more reasons? I may but mention one other, namely this—that there can not, by any possibility, arise any cause which could make Christ love us less. You say, how is this? One man loves his friend, but he on a sudden grows rich, and now he says I am a greater man than I used to be, I forget my old acquaintances. But Christ can grow no richer; he is as rich as he can be, infinitely so. He loves you now; then it can not be possible that he will by reason of an increase in his own personal glory forsake you, for everlasting glories now crown his head; he can never be more glorious and great, and therefore he will love you still. Sometimes, on the other hand, one friend grows poorer, and then the other forsakes him; but you never can grow poorer than you are, for you are "a poor sinner and nothing at all" now; you have nothing of your own; all you have is borrowed, all given you by him. He can not love you then, less, because you grow poorer; for poverty that hath nothing is at least as poor as it can be, and can never sink lower in the scale. Christ therefore must love thee for all thy nakedness and all thy poverty.

"But I may prove sinful," sayest thou. Yes, but thou canst not be more so than he foreknew thou wouldst be; and yet he loved thee with the foreknowledge of all thy sins. Surely then when it happens it will occasion no surprise to him; he knew it all beforehand, and he can not swerve from his love; no circumstance can possibly arise that ever will divide the Saviour from his love to his people, and the saint from his love to his Saviour. He is "a friend that sticketh closer than a brother."

III. Now then, the inference to be derived from this. Lavater says, "The qualities of your friends will be those of your enemies; cold friends, cold enemies, half friends, half enemies, fervid enemies, warm friends." Knowing this to be a truth, I have often congratulated myself when my enemies have spoken fiercely against me. Well, I have thought, "My friends love me hard and fast; let my enemies be as hot as they please; it only indicates that the friends are proportionately firm in affection. Then we draw this inference, that if Christ sticks close and he is our friend, then our enemies will stick close and never leave us till we die. O, Christian, because Christ sticks close the devil will stick close too; he will be at you and with you; the dog of hell will never cease his howlings till you reach the other side of Jordan; no place in this world is out of bow-shot of that great enemy; till you have crossed the stream, his arrows can reach you, and they will. If Christ gave himself for

you, the devil will do all he can to destroy you; if Christ has been long-suffering to you, Satan will be persevering in hopes that Christ may forget you; he will strive after you, and strive until he shall see you safely landed in heaven. But be not disappointed: the louder Satan roars the more proof you shall have of Christ's love. "Give me," said old Rutherford, "give me a roaring devil rather than a sleeping one; for sleeping devils make me slumber, but roaring ones provoke me to run to my Master." O! be glad then if the world rant at thee, if thy foes attack thee fiercely. Christ is just as full of love to thee as they are of hatred. Therefore,

"Be firm and strong;
Be grace thy shield and Christ thy song."

And now I have a question to ask: that question I ask of every man and every woman in this place, and of every child too—Is Jesus Christ your friend? Have you a friend at court—at heaven's court? Is the judge of the quick and dead your friend? Can you say that you love him, and has he ever revealed himself in the way of love to you? Dear hearer, do not answer that question for thy neighbor, answer it for thyself. Peer or peasant, rich or poor, learned or illiterate, this question is for each of you; therefore ask it: is Christ my friend? Did you ever consider that question? Have you ever asked it? O! to be able to say "Christ is my friend," is one of the sweetest things in the world. A man who had lived much in sin one day casually entered a place of worship. Before the sermon, this hymn was sung—

"Jesus, lover of my soul."

The next day the man was met by an acquaintance who asked him how he liked the sermon. Said he, "I do not know, but there were two or three words that took such a hold of me that I did not know what to do with myself. The minister read that hymn, 'Jesus, lover of my soul.' Ah! said he, though he was by no means a religious man, "to be able to say that, I would give up all I have got! But do you think," he asked "that Jesus ever will be the lover of such a man as I am? 'Jesus, lover of my soul!' O! could I say it." And then he buried his head in his hands and wept. I have every reason to fear that he went back to his sin, and was the same afterwards as before. But you see, he had conscience enough to let him know how valuable it was to have Christ for his lover and his friend. Ah! rich man, thou hast many friends. There be some here who have toiled for their country's good, and deserve a meed of honor at their country's hands, who for one mistake—or what perhaps was a mistake—have been neglected by too many who once appeared to be their most trusty adherents. O! put no confidence, ye great men and ye rich, in the adherence of your friends. David said in his haste, "All men are liars;" you may one day have to say it at your leisure. And O! ye kind and affectionate hearts who are not rich in wealth, but who are rich in love—and that is the world's best wealth—put this golden coin among your silver ones, and it will sanctify them all. Get Christ's love shed abroad in your hearts, and your mother's love, your daughter's love, your husband's love, your wife's love, will become more sweet than ever. The love of Christ cast not out the love of relatives, but it sanctifies our loves, and makes them sweeter far. Remember dear hearer, the love of men and women is very sweet; but all must pass away; and what will you do if you have no wealth but the wealth that fadeth, and no love but the love which dies when death shall come? O! to have the love of Christ! You can take that across the river of death with you; you can wear it as your bracelet in heaven, and set it up as a seal upon your hand; for his love is "strong as death and mightier than the grave." Good old Bishop Beveridge, I think it was, when dying, did

not know his best friends. Said one, "Bishop Beveridge, do you know me?" Said he, "Who are you?" and when the name was mentioned he said, "No." "But don't you know your wife, Bishop?" "What is her name?" said he. Said she, "I am your wife." "I did not know I had got one," said he. Poor old man! his faculties all failed him. At last one stooped down and whispered, "Do you know the Lord Jesus Christ?" "Yes," said he, making an effort to speak, "I have known him these forty years and I never can forget him." It is marvelous how memory will hold the place with Jesus when it will with no one else; and it is equally marvelous that,

"When all created things are dry, Christ's fullness is the same."

My dear hearers, do think of this matter. O that you might get Christ for your friend; he will never be your friend while you are self-righteous; he will never be your friend while you live in sin. But do you believe yourselves guilty? Do you desire to leave off sin? Do you want to be saved? Do you desire to be renewed? Then let me tell you, my Master loves you! Poor, weak, and helpless worms, my Master's heart is full of love to you; his eyes at this moment are looking down with pity on you. "O! Jerusalem, Jerusalem!" He now bids me tell you that he died for all of you who confess yourselves to be sinners, and feel it. He bids me say to you, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved." He tells me to proclaim salvation full and free; full, needing nothing of yours to help it; free, needing nothing of yours to buy it.

"Come ye thirsty, come and welcome;
God's free bounty glorify:
True belief and true repentance,
Every grace that brings us nigh—
Without money,
Come to Jesus Christ, and buy."

There is nothing I feel that I fail so much in as addressing sinners. O! I wish I could cry my heart out and preach my heart out to you and at you.

"Dear Saviour, draw reluctant hearts,
To thee let sinners fly,
And take the bliss thy love imparts;
And drink, and never die."

Farewell with this one thought—we shall never all of us meet together here again. It is a very solemn thought, but according to the course of nature and the number of deaths, if all of you were willing to come here next Sabbath morning, it is not at all likely that all of you would be alive; one out of this congregation will be sure to have gone the way of all flesh. Farewell, thou that are appointed to death; I know not where thou art—yon strong man, or yon tender maiden with the hectic flush of consumption on her cheek. I know not who is appointed to death; but I do now most solemnly take my farewell of such an one. Farewell, poor soul; and is it farewell for ever? Shall we meet in the land of the hereafter in the home of the blessed; or do I bid you farewell now for ever? I do solemnly bid farewell to you for ever if you live and die without Christ. But I can not bear that dreary thought; and I therefore say, poor sinner! stop and consider—consider thy ways, and now "turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die?" "Why will ye die?" "Why will ye die?" "Why will

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ye die?" Ah! ye can not answer that question. May God help you to answer it in a better fashion, by saying, "Here Lord!

Just as I am, without one plea,
But that thy blood was shed for me,
O Son of God I come to thee.

I trust my soul in thy kind hands." The Lord bless you all for Christ's sake! Amen.

The Sluggard's Reproof

A Sermon (No. 2766) intended for reading on Lord's Day, February 16, 1902
delivered by C.H. Spurgeon at New Park Street Chapel, Southwark
on a Thursday Evening, during the Winter of 1859.

“The sluggard will not plow by reason of the cold; therefore shall he beg in
harvest, and have nothing.” {cold: or, winter}— Proverbs 20:4.

Laziness is the crying sin of Eastern nations. I believe that the peculiar genius of the Anglo-Saxon character prevents our being, as a nation, guilty of that sin. Perhaps we have many other vices more rife in our midst than that, but in the East almost every man is a lazy man. If you tell a Turk in Constantinople that his street is filthy— and it certainly is for there the offal lies and is never swept away—he says sitting with his legs crossed and smoking his pipe, “The Lord wills it.” If you tell him there is a fire at the bottom of the street he does not agitate himself, but he says “God wills it.” If you were to tell him that he was sitting on a heap of gunpowder and that he had better take heed lest a spark should blow him up, probably he would never move or take his pipe out of his mouth, except to say “God wills it.” Some of the most extraordinary instances of idleness are told us of those people by travelers in the East to this day. The further you go East, the less activity there is; the further you go West in the world, the more restless does the human mind become, and consequently I suppose, the more active.

Yet, while the fact of the superabundance of idleness in the East is a great explanation of the reason why Solomon speaks so much against it in the Proverbs, and seeing that this Book was meant to be read not only in the East but everywhere else, I should fear that there must be some laziness in the West also, and as this Book was meant to be read in England I should imagine there must be a few sluggards in England; and this happens to be not a matter of imagination with me at all, for I know there are many such. You can brush against them at the corners of our streets. There are to be found many such who are slothful in business, who certainly are not worth their salt, who do not earn a livelihood for themselves even with regard to the things of this life. There are still far too many to whom the familiar lines of Dr. Watts may be applied,—

“Tis the voice of the sluggard; I heard him complain,
‘You have waked me too soon, I must slumber again.’”

It sometimes happens too that these idle people are religious people, or profess to be so, though I have no faith in that man's religion who is lazy. He reminds me always of a certain monk who went to a monastery determined to give himself up entirely to contemplation and meditation. When he reached the place he saw all the monks at work tilling the ground, ploughing or trimming the vines round the monastery, so he very solemnly observed as he entered “Labour not for the meat that perisheth.” The brethren smiled, and they still continued their labors. He thought it his duty to reprove them a second time by saying, “Martha is cumbered with much serving, but I have chosen the good part which shall not be taken from me.” However, it was taken from him, for the bell did not ring for him at the usual time for meals; and our brother, after waiting some few hours in his cell in prayer, beginning to feel certain calls within, came out, and accosting the prior of the

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monastery enquired, "Do not the brethren eat?" "Do you eat?" said he; "I thought you were a spiritual man for you said to the brethren, 'Labour not for the meat that perisheth.'" "Oh, yes!" he replied, "I know I said that, but I thought the brethren ate." "Yes," answered the prior, "so they do, but we have a rule in our monastery that none eat but those that work. There is such a rule to be found in Scripture, too," he reminded the monk; "Paul himself hath said it, 'If any man would not work neither should he eat.'" I think the master of that monastery acted and spoke wisely. A man must work in this life. He was sent to this world that he might be diligent in his calling, in the position in life in which God has been pleased to place him.

However, I do not intend to treat now of this phase of the subject. I am about to direct your attention to spiritual things. I am no legalist; I know that the works of the law can save no man, for "by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified." I know that the work of salvation is by grace alone, and that all our good works are not our own, but are wrought in us by divine grace; yet at the same time I cannot shut my eyes to the fact that, although Scripture continually denies that salvation is by works, it always speaks of the work of grace in the heart of man, and of the experience of the believer as being a hard worker. For do we not continually hear the Christian described as a pilgrim, as one who is on a long and a weary journey? He is described not as a gentleman who is carried on other men's backs, or who is borne along in a vehicle, but as a pilgrim who has to toil along the road; and he is told not to be weary and faint in his mind; he is warned that the road will be very rough and very long, and that he will have to run with endurance the race that is set before him. The very use of such a figure as that does not look as if religion were a lazy thing. Then again, we find religion described as a battle. The Christian is continually exhorted to take unto himself the whole armor of God and to fight the good fight of faith. He is told to resist even unto blood striving against sin. That does not look as if it were a very easy thing to be a Christian—as if Christianity were a kind of thing to be kept in a band—box. It looks as if there were something to be done, some foe to fight, some great task to be accomplished. When I also find another figure used, which is perhaps yet more forcible because it combines the idea of pressing forward with that of fighting—when I find the figure of agonizing used—"Agonize to enter in at the strait gate"—press, push, labor, strive, toil—I cannot imagine that to be a Christian is to be an idler or a sluggard. No my brethren, though salvation is not by our works, yet as sure as ever the Lord puts divine life into us, we shall begin to labor for the meat that endureth to eternal life, we shall strive to enter in at the strait gate and we shall run perseveringly the race that is set before us, and we shall endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ.

Now it is just this point in religion that many men do not like. They prefer an easy religion—flowery meadows, flowing streams, and sunny glades—all those things they like; but they do not like the climbing of mountains or the swimming of rivers or going through fires or fighting, struggling, and wrestling. They go along the pilgrim's way till they come to some slough and then they are offended. When it was all clean walking they did not mind; but when they tumble into the bog and begin to bemire themselves, they straightway creep out on that side of the slough that is nearest to their own house, and like Mr. Pliable in "The Pilgrim's Progress," of whom you have often heard—they go back to their house in the City of Destruction. They went in the right road for a little while, but they found that religion was not so easy a thing as they expected and therefore they turned back.

Now, it is of these people I am going to talk. “The sluggard will not plough by reason of the cold; therefore shall he beg in harvest and have nothing.” When I have spoken about him, I shall talk a little to those of you who are ploughing in God’s field, exhorting you not to make excuses, not to be dilatory in your Master’s service, but to plough all the harder the colder it is because the day is coming when a joyful harvest shall reward all your pains.

I. First, I am going to speak of this sluggard.

Ploughing is hard work and the sluggard does not like it. If he does go up and down the field once or twice he makes a short turn of it, and leaves a wide headland; and moreover he leans on the handle of his plough, and therefore the plough does not go in very deep— not so deep as it would if he were to do as the active ploughman does, hold the handles up in order that the ploughshare may go deeply into the soil. But he goes nodding along, half-dragged by his horses, and glad to do nothing. He would be very pleased indeed if his feet would go without being moved, and if the clods would but move one another, and lift his feet up for him, so that he might not have the trouble of carrying himself after his plough. But the lazy man knows that he will be laughed at if he says ploughing is hard work, so he does not like to say that. “I must get a better excuse,” he thinks, so he says, “It is so cold; it is so cold! I would not mind going out to plough but I am frozen almost to death; I shall have chilblains; I have not clothes enough to keep me warm; it is so cold to my fingers. Oh, how the snow comes down! The ponds are all frozen; the ground is so hard; the ploughshare will get broken; it is so cold!” Lazy fellow! Why don’t you say that ploughing is hard work? That is the English of it. But no, he must have a more genteel excuse that he may not be so likely to be laughed at. Suppose it were not cold, do you know what he would say? “Oh, it is so hot! I cannot plough; the perspiration runs down my cheeks. You wouldn’t have me ploughing in this hot weather, would you?” Supposing it were neither hot nor cold, why, then he would say I believe that it rained; and if it didn’t rain, he would say the ground was too dry, for a bad excuse, he holds, is better than none; and therefore he will keep on making excuses to the end of the chapter; anything will he do rather than go and do the work he does not like—that is, ploughing.

Now I have made you smile. I wish I could make you cry, because there will be more to cry about than to smile at in this matter, when I come to show you that this is spiritually the case with many. There are men and women who would like to go to heaven without having any trouble. They want to enjoy the harvest, but they do not like the labor of ploughing. They have not the common honesty to say, “I do not like religion.” But what do you suppose they say? Why, they make another excuse. Sometimes it is this, “Well, I am as anxious as anybody to be a Christian; but you know, these are such hard times.” Hard times! The times always were hard to such people as you are. “But in these times,” say they, “there is no warmth in Christians; they are all so cold-hearted. Why, I go up to the chapel, and nobody speaks to me. There is not one-half the religion that there used to be; and what there is is not half so good as it once was. The article is depreciated. Now if I lived over in Ireland, then I would plough; if I lived over where there is the Revival, then I would be a saint; or if I had lived in the apostle Paul’s days and heard such a preacher as that, or if I could have talked to those early Christians, I would not object to be a Christian. But these are such coldhearted times—such lots of hypocrites, and so few Christians—I don’t think I shall trouble about religion at all.”

Ah! that is a pretty excuse, for you know that what you are saying is false. In the first place, you know that there is life in Christ’s Church even now, and that there are still (if you would but look) a few good, loving, warm-hearted Christian men to be found. You know that there are still

faithful preachers left. The faithful have not failed from among men; and although hypocrites are plentiful, still there are many sincere souls. And what if there were not? What business is that of yours? Are you content to be lost because the Church is not what it ought to be? Just look at the matter in that light. Because there are a great many hypocrites you have made up your mind to go to hell. Is that the English of it? Because there are such multitudes going there, you think you will go too and keep them company. Is that what you mean? “No!” say you, “not that.” That is it Mr. Sluggard, though you don’t like to say so. It is a bad excuse you have made. It won’t hold water, and you know it won’t. You know very well that, when your conscience speaks, it tells you that this excuse is a bad one. It is one that will not satisfy you when you are lying on your dying bed; and above all it is one that will vanish in the day of judgment, just as the mists vanish before the rising sun. What business can it be of yours what the Church is or what the Church is not? If you will not think about the things of God in these times, neither would you in the best of times; and if the present agency is not blessed to you, neither would you be converted though one rose from the dead.

“But,” says Mr. Sluggard, “if that is not a good excuse, I will give another. It is all very well for you, Mr. Minister, to talk about being religious, but you don’t know where I live; you don’t know my business and the sort of shopmates I am engaged with. You know very well it is a hard matter for me to hold my own as it is, with merely going to a place of worship; but if I really were to throw all my heart into it, I should have them all down upon me. I tell you, sir, my business is such that I could not carry it on, and yet be a Christian.” Then, Mr. Sluggard; if it is a business that you cannot carry on without going to hell with it—give it up sir. “Ah, but then sir, we must live!” “Yes sir, but then we must die. Will you please to recollect that also, for that seems to me to be a great deal more of a necessity? Sometimes, when people say to me, “Why, you know we must live,” I do not see any necessity for that. Some of them would be almost as well dead as alive. “But we must live.” I am not sure of that; I am sure of another thing, you must die. Oh, that you would think rather of dying than of living! Besides, it is all nonsense about your business being one that you cannot carry on and be a Christian. I tell you sir, there is no business that is a legitimate one which a man cannot carry on and adorn his Master in it; or if there be such a business, come out of it as you would out of the burning city of Sodom. “But then I am in such an ungodly household, sir; I am so laughed at.” Yes, sir; but if somebody were to leave you a thousand pounds on condition that you wore a red ribbon round your arm—you know you would be laughed at if you did, or suppose the condition was that you were to wear a fool’s-cap for a week and you would have a thousand pounds a-year for life afterwards, would you not wear it? Ah! I should not like to trust you. I believe you would put it on; and when people laughed you would say, “You may laugh but I am well rewarded for it;” yet here your soul is at stake, and a little laughter you say drives you back. I do not believe you, sir. I do not think you are such a fool as that, to be laughed into hell; for you cannot be laughed out again by all their laughter. I believe your second excuse is as bad as your first one; I shiver it into a thousand pieces. The fact is sir, you don’t like religion; that is the truth. You don’t want to give up your sins. You are willing to continue to be what you are—a sinner dead in trespasses and sins. That is the plain, simple English of it, and all the excuses you can make will not alter it.

“Nay,” says one, “but it is such a hard thing to be a Christian. Very often, when I hear the preacher saying what manner of persons we ought to be I think, Ah! I had better not set out for I shall never go all the way. When I hear of the trials and temptations and troubles of the child of

God, I think I will not go.” There you are again, Mr. Sluggard, you will not plough by reason of the cold. But do you not recollect what has been so often impressed upon your mind—though we have many troubles and many trials, yet grace is all-sufficient for us? Do you not know that though the way is long, yet our shoes are iron and brass; and though the work is hard, yet Omnipotence has promised to give us strength all-sufficient? You only look at one side of the subject, and not at the other. Why not think for a moment on that grace of God which guarantees to assist and to carry through all in whom it begins the good work? Sir, your excuse is an idle one. I tell you again that the naked truth is this, that you love your sins, that you love them better than heaven, better than eternal life, that you are a lazy fellow, that you do not like prayer, nor faith, nor repentance, and I warn you that your fate will be that of this sluggard who begged in harvest and had nothing.

Someone else says, “I have no time, I have not indeed.” Time for what, sir? What do you mean? “Why, I have no time to pray an hour in the morning!” Who said you had? “But I have no time to be attending to religion all the day long.” Who asked you to do so, sir? I suppose you find time for pleasure; perhaps you find time for what you call recreation, and the like. There are many precious portions of time that you sweep away and never use. Where there’s a will there’s a way, and if the Holy Spirit has made you love religion and the things of God, you will find time enough. That is a worse excuse than any other, for God has given you the time; and if you have not got it, you have lost it. Look for it, for you will be accountable for it at the last great day. You have been hiding your talent in a napkin, and now you say you cannot find it. You had it, sir; where it is is your business, not mine. Look it up; and God help you to shake off your sloth and may you in earnest be constrained by the Holy Spirit to be a Christian, and to espouse the life of the pilgrim, and run with diligence the race that is set before you!

I have thus tried to describe the sluggard as the man who would not plough by reason of the cold—the man who would like to be a Christian, only he does not like the cross; who would like to get to heaven, only he does not like the road there. He would be saved, but oh! he cannot give up his sin, he cannot live in holiness. He would like to be crowned conqueror but he does not like to fight the battle. He would like to reap a harvest, but he neither cares to plough nor to sow. Mr. Sluggard, I have three little sayings to repeat to you; will you try to treasure them up? No pains, no gains; no sweat, no sweet; no mill, no meal. Will you just recollect those three things? I will tell you again lest you should forget them. No pains, no gains; no sweat, no sweet; no mill, no meal. So just get up sir, and may God grant that you may get up to some purpose! “Awake” thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead and Christ shall give thee light.” “Let us not sleep as do others; but let us watch and be sober.”

But Mr. Sluggard, this life is the time of ploughing and sowing. It is winter-time with us now; but wait awhile and the spring-time shall come, and after that the harvest. There are some of us who are longing for the time when we shall reap the golden harvest, the harvest given to us by grace, but yet a harvest for which we have sown the seed; for Hosea beautifully puts it “Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy.” We sow in righteousness but the harvest is not given us as the effect of righteousness, it is given us by mercy. Reap in mercy! What a joyous day that will be when God’s true sowers shall reap their harvests! The angels shall be with us; they shall carry harvest home with us; and men and angels, hand in hand, shall enter the gates of paradise bringing their sheaves with them.

Where’s our friend the sluggard? Oh, there he is! Is he cold now? No; but how altered he looks! He looked to me quite a smart gentleman when he was sitting by the fire last winter-time, rubbing

his hands and saying that he would not plough. What does he look like now? What is his disembodied spirit like? Alas! poor wretch, he is begging. The saints are shouting, but he is moaning. They are rejoicing, but he is sorrowing. They are taken into heaven and housed in the Lord's garner; but he is a houseless wanderer, begging. Look at him; he has just gone up to the great golden gate and he has lifted that knocker of pearl—hark at the noise—and he cries "Lord, Lord, I have eaten and I have drunk in thy presence"—just like you, Mr. Sluggard; you are all for eating and drinking—"and thou hast taught in our streets;"—very likely, sir; you are just the man to be taught; but you never did anything that you were taught to do. Do you hear the terrible words of the loving Jesus, "I never knew you; depart from me you worker of iniquity"? The golden gate does not open to him. He is still begging but the answer comes, "Your time of sowing you neglected, and now your time of reaping must be a time of beggary for ever." Now he goes up to yonder angel, and he cries, "Bright spirit, introduce me to the courts of heaven. It is true, I wasted my time on earth; but oh, how bitterly do I repent it now! Oh, if I could but have back my wasted hours, what would I not do? If I could but hear the gospel preached again, I would hear it with both my ears, and I am sure I would receive it and be obedient to it." But the angel saith, "I have no power to let you in. Besides, if I could I would not. You had your day, and it is gone, and now you have your night. You had your lamp but you did not trim it. You took no care to have oil in your vessel for your lamp; and now your lamp is gone out, and the Bridegroom's door is shut, and you cannot enter." Now I see him for he is very sad indeed—begging of a saint who has just come up, and saying to him, "Give me of your oil, for my lamp is gone out." But the other replies "Not so, for there is not enough for me and for you. God has given me grace for myself; but I have none to spare for anybody else."

I remember a mother's dream—a mother who once after having exhorted her children, and talked, and prayed, and wrestled with them, retired to rest and dreamt at the day of judgment she and her children arose from the family tomb. The trumpet was rending the air with its terrific blast, and there was she—"saved," but her children still unregenerate. She dreamt that they clasped her round the waist, clung to her garments, and cried, "Mother, save us! take us into heaven with you." But she dreamt that a spirit came—some bright angel—dashed them from her, and wafted her aloft to heaven while they were left. And she remembered too in that dream that she had then no care for them, no thought for them; her spirit was so swallowed up with the one thought that God was dealing justly with them—that they had had their day for sowing, and that they had not sowed, and now must not expect a harvest. The justice of God so filled her breast that she could not even weep for them when she was taken from them.

Ah sluggard! you will be begging in another world, man; and though you will not think of your soul's concerns now, you will think of them then. There is a place where there is a dreadful prayer meeting every day, and every hour in the day; a prayer-meeting where all the attendants pray—not merely one, but all; and they pray too, with sighs and groans and tears; and yet they are never heard. That prayer-meeting is in hell. There is a begging meeting there, indeed. Oh that there were on earth half the prayer there will be there! Oh that the tears shed in eternity had but been shed in time! Oh that the agony that the lost ones now feel had but been felt beforehand! Oh that they had repented ere their life was ended! Oh that their hearts had been made tender before the terrible fire of judgment had melted them!

But notice that though the sluggard begs in harvest, he gets nothing. Now, in harvest time, when everything is plentiful, every man is generous. If a man sees a beggar in the streets in harvest time, he will refuse him nothing. He may go and glean in the field for there is enough and to spare for

all. It is a season of abundance; no man grudges his poor fellow-man then. But here is the terrible point, in that last harvest when the slothful man shall beg for bread, no man will give him anything. I see him standing at the gate of heaven, and he looks in. There they are feasting, and he says, "Give me a crumb, a crumb is all I ask, let me have what the dogs have that feed under their masters' table." But it is denied him. There he is, in the flames of he'll, and he cries, "Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue," but it is refused him. He begs in harvest and he has nothing; the beggary becomes all the more terrible because its results are so disappointing. "And to think that others should have so much yet I myself should have nothing; others be blessed but myself cursed."

I do think that one of the stings of hell will be for the sinner to see some of his own relatives and friends in heaven, and himself shut out. Think my dear hearer what you will feel if you should see your wife in paradise, and yourself be eternally excluded. Mother, what if you should see those babes of yours, those precious infants, who took an early flight to heaven—if you should see them above, but between you and them a great gulf fixed so that you can never reach them, but you are shut out and they are glorified! Turn that thought over, I beseech you, and may God grant grace to every one of you that by the love of Christ you may be constrained to escape from hell and fly to heaven; for thus saith the Lord unto you, "Escape, flee for your life, look not behind you, stay not in all the plain, but flee to the mountain of Christ Jesus—lest ye be consumed." Be wise today, O sinner; to-morrow may never come! Now, now, bethink thee; now repent; now cast thy soul on Christ; now give up thy sins; now may the Spirit help thee to begin a new life, and to be in earnest about salvation; for remember, though you laughed when I described the sluggard just now, it will be no laughing matter if you are found in his hot shoes at the day of judgment—if his rags shall be on you and his beggary shall be your everlasting portion. God grant that you may have done with your idle excuses; may you look truly at the matter as in the light of the day of judgment; and God grant you grace so to act that from this time you may be found among the most diligent, the most fervent, and the most anxious of the followers of Christ, ploughing every day with a plough drawn by a superior power, but a plough which shall enter into the world and leave some furrow of usefulness behind it, so that in the day of harvest you may have your portion, and not like the sluggard, beg and have nothing.

II. Well now, having thus addressed the sluggard I have a few minutes to spare in which to address the people of God; and knowing you to be by far the larger portion of those whom I address, I am sorry that I have so little time for you, but can only make just these few remarks.

My dear brothers and sisters, the Lord has by his sovereign grace set our hand to the plough. We once like our poor fellow-sinners hated this plough, and we never should have come to it unless sovereign grace had brought us. Now we have shaken off that old sloth of ours, and we are in earnest about the matter of salvation; but do we not at times feel this old sluggishness creeping on us? When we are asked to do something for the cause of Christ, do we not make excuses? There is a brother over yonder, he ought to join the church but he does not, and his excuse is a very stupid one; I will not tell you what it is. There is another brother—never mind who it is—the man the cap fits, let him wear it till it is worn out, and may it be worn out soon! —he ought to teach in the Sabbath-school, he lives quite conveniently, but he does not like the school. There is another brother, he ought to be doing something or other, but he says that really, his position is just now such that he does not see that he can. The fact is, it is cold my brethren and you don't want to plough. Now recollect, those are always coldest that do not plough, for those that plough get warm. I have always

noticed that the people in a church who quarrel are the idle ones. Those that do nothing always grumble. They say, "Ah! there is no love in the church"—because you haven't any! "Ah" say you, "but they don't speak to one another,"—you mean you don't speak to them. "No," says one, "but they are not active." You mean you are not active, for that which you think they are, depend upon it, you are yourselves; for we mostly see ourselves in other people, and the idea we get of others is close upon the heels of the idea we ought to have of ourselves, except when it is a good notion, and then the less we indulge the thought as being a picture of ourselves, the better.

But whenever this sluggishness creeps upon you, I want you to think of One whom you love, who will be an example to you. Now, who do you suppose it is to whom I am about to direct your eye, if you begin to be weary and faint in your minds? Ah, it is not to a deacon of the church, or to a minister; it is not to some renowned preacher of the olden time;—yes it is—I have made a mistake there; it is to a renowned Preacher of the olden time—One whom you love. Whenever you feel faint and weary, will you think of One who ploughed more than you ever can plough, and deeper furrows too, and ploughed more terrible ploughing on a harder rock and a more terrible soil than you have to plough upon? Whenever you are weary and faint in your minds, consider him. "And who is that?" say you. Why, you know, it is your Lord and Master, Jesus Christ. Whenever sloth creeps on you and you begin to lean on the plough handles, and the devil whispers, "Look back," do not look back; look up and see him—the Crucified One—and you will no longer be weary I am sure.

Myconins, the friend of Luther, had made up his mind that he would not help Luther, but that he would keep in a monastery quiet and alone. The first night he went there, he had a dream to this effect; he dreamed that the Crucified One appeared to him, with the nail-prints still in his hands, and that he led him away to a fountain into which he plunged him—a fountain of blood. He beheld himself washed completely clean, and being very rejoiced thereat he was willing to sit down; but the Crucified One said "Follow me." He took him to the top of a hill, and down beneath there was a wide-spreading harvest, he put a sickle into his hand and he said, "Go and reap." He looked round him and he replied, "But the fields are so vast, I cannot reap them." The finger of the Crucified One pointed to a spot where there was one reaper at work, and that one reaper seemed to be mowing whole acres at once. He seemed to be a very giant, taking enormous strides. It was Martin Luther. "Stand by his side," said the Crucified One, "and work." He did so, and they reaped all day. The sweat stood upon his brow, and he rested for a moment. He was about to lie down when the Crucified One came to him and said, "For the love of souls, and for my sake, go on." He snatched up the sickle again, and on he worked, and at last he grew weary once more. Then the Crucified One came to him again, and said, "For the love of souls, and for my sake, go on." And he went on. But once he dared to pause and say, "But, Master, the winter is coming, and much of this good wheat will be spoiled." "No," said he, "reap on; it will all be gathered in before the winter comes—every sheaf. I will send more laborers into the harvest, only do thou thy best." So now, methinks, the Crucified One takes me to the brow of that hill, and yourselves with me, and shows us this great London and says, "See, this great field is ripe for the harvest, take your sickles and reap it." You say, "Lord, I cannot." "Nay," says he, "but for the love of souls, and for the sake of the Crucified One, go on and reap."

Ah brethren, I beseech you, cease not from your labor! Be more diligent than ever you have been. Think more of Christ; and that will nerve you to duty and remove all sense of weariness. And if this suffice not, remember brethren and sisters, it may be hard ploughing; it may be true that this

is a frozen time, that the winter is very sharp upon Christ's Church; but let us plough on very hard for the harvest will pay for all. Why, I can say that the harvest I have reaped already pays me for all my labors ten thousand times told. When I have grasped the hand of some poor woman who has been saved from sin through my ministry, I have felt it were worth while to die to snatch that one soul from hell. Ah, it is a blessed harvest that God gives us here; but what a harvest will that be when we shall see all the saved souls gathered above—when we shall see the face of Christ and lay our crowns at his feet! Then look, labor, hope. An hour with your God will make up for all you may endure here. Oh may God the Holy Ghost fill you with energy, give you fresh strength, and may you, all of you, begin to plough straighter, deeper, longer furrows than you ever made before! Never look back, never take your hand from the plough, for in due season you shall reap if you faint not. Keep at it still, and be ye not like the sluggard who would not plough by reason of the cold—who shall beg in harvest and have nothing.

One Lion Two Lions No Lion at All

A sermon (No. 1670) delivered on Thursday Evening, June 8th, 1882,
at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington,
by C. H. Spurgeon.

“The slothful man saith, There is a lion without, I shall be slain in the streets.”—Proverbs 22:13.

“The slothful man saith, There is a lion in the way; a lion is in the streets.”—Proverbs 26:13.

This slothful man seems to cherish that one dread of his about the lions, as if it were his favorite aversion and he felt it to be too much trouble to invent another excuse. Perhaps he hugs it to his soul all the more because it is a home-born fear, conjured up by his own imagination; and as mothers are said to love their weakest children best, so is he fondest of this most imbecile of excuses; at any rate, it serves him for a passable excuse for laziness and that is what he wants. If you can get the king of beasts to apologize for your idleness there is a sort of royalty about your pretences: he hopes his sloth will appear the less disgraceful if he can paint a rampant lion upon its shield.

I am not about to speak of slothful men in general, albeit that when a man does not diligently attend to his business he is committing great wrong to himself and to others. When a man is slothful as a servant he is unjust to his employers, and when he is in business on his own account, idleness is usually a wrong to his wife and family. I know one who is the cause of poverty and want to those for whom he ought to provide, and all because honest labor and himself have long since fallen out. He would not move an inch if he could help it, nor even open his eyes if he could manage to live and sleep all his life away. When a man is thoroughly eaten up with the dry rot of laziness he generally finds some kind of excuse, though his crime is really inexcusable. “There is a lion in the way,” and therefore the man judges it to be quite right that he should keep his bed, or that he should sit leisurely indoors and should not give himself too much trouble or run any risks: but all this is a mere make-up to screen his loathsome vice. No Christian ought to be slothful in his ordinary work: the apostle describes the good man as “not slothful in business”—of whatever kind that business may be. If you have a right to undertake it, if you have a right to continue in it, you have no right to be a sluggard in it. There should be as wide a division as between the poles, between the thought of a Christian and the idea of a sluggard. “Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily.” An idler is a disgrace to himself, and if he professes religion he is a dishonor to it. Paul would starve him, for he says, “If any would not work, neither should he eat,” and that is as near starvation as well can be. Popery may create and foster lazzaroni, but the true faith bids every man eat his own bread. I leave worldly sluggards to the moralist: doth not nature itself teach us to labor diligently? Man was not made for an idle life; labor is evidently his proper condition. Even when man was perfect he was placed in the garden, not to admire its flowers, but to keep it and to dress it. If he needed to work when he was perfect, much more does he require the discipline of labor now that he is fallen. Lions or no lions, men must work, or find disease and death in sloth.

But we have many spiritual sluggards, and it is to them that I speak. They are not sceptics, they are not confirmed infidels, they are not opposers of the gospel; perhaps their sluggish nature saves them from anything like energetic opposition to goodness. They claim that they are not averse to the gospel: on the contrary, they are rather friendly to it, and one of these days they intend to be obedient to its great commands and to yield themselves as servants to Christ; but not just yet, the good time has not fully arrived. They have a very comfortable bed of sloth upon which they lie, and they do not want to rise in a hurry and exert themselves too much. They want to take this matter very leisurely and turn to Christ when it is quite convenient—when it will not require so much self-denial as at the present moment. “Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep,” is their continual cry; and although God’s watchmen disturb them terribly, and cry aloud that they may wake them, yet they sleep so heavily that they just turn over when they are most disturbed and drop into their slumbers again. I want to cry aloud under the window of such sleepers to-night with the hope that peradventure some of them may be wakened. What meanest thou, O sleeper? Wilt thou sleep thy soul away? Wilt thou lose heaven rather than bestir thyself? Wilt thou never lift up thine eyes till hell’s torments are hopelessly about thee and within thee?

Our texts speak concerning the sluggard, and you first notice about him that his tongue is not slothful:—“The slothful man saith.” The man who is lazy all over is generally very busy with his tongue. “The slothful man saith, There is a lion without.” In both texts the slothful man is represented as having something to say, and I think that there are no people that have so much to say as those that have little to do. Where nothing is done, much is talked about. Their goodness begins and ends in mere lip service. They talk about repentance, but they do not repent. They are willing to hear about faith and even to speak about it, but they do not believe. They extol zeal and fervor, but they like to see these active graces rather than to feel them. They will talk till midnight, but all ends in smoke. When you sit down to speak with them about the reason that they have not given their hearts to Christ, they are not at all short of reasons and apologies and excuses. Indeed, a man must be desperately hard pushed when he cannot make an excuse. If our first parents made garments of fig-leaves, there is no fear that their descendants will fail to make coverings of some kind or other; and so the slothful man with his ready tongue declares that there is a lion in the way, and he shall be slain in the streets. He is not idle with his mouth. He has a short hand, but a long tongue.

His imagination also is not idle. There were no lions in the streets. One does not expect to find lions there. They may be in the desert; they may be in the jungle; they may be in the forest; but who expects to find lions in the streets of Jerusalem or the lanes of London? Laziness is a great lion-maker. He who does little dreams much. His imagination could create not only a lion but a whole menagerie of wild beasts; and if some mighty hunter could hunt down all the lions that his imagination has let loose, he would soon distribute herds more of the terrible animals, with wolves and bears and tigers to match. An idler will never be short of difficulties as long as he has no heart for work. As they say that any stick will do to beat a dog with, so any excuse will do to ruin your soul with; for this man’s objection, after all, was not to lions in the way: he objected to the way itself, and he was glad to place a lion there so that he might be excused from going into the street. He did not want to get to his work, and therefore there was a lion in the way to obstruct him. The lion was his friend. He had invented him on purpose to be the ally of his idleness. Yes, men will have their tongues busy and their imaginations busy, even though their hearts be idle and their hands are covered over with idle dirt.

This man, using both his imagination and his tongue, gives me the opportunity of saying that he took great pains to escape from pains. He had to use his inventive ability to get himself excused from doing his duty. It is an old proverb, that lazy people generally take the most trouble, and so they do; and when men are unwilling to come to Christ it is very wonderful what trouble they will take to keep away from him. Hear how they argue. Mark their ingenuity in avoiding the narrow way. Oh, if they were to argue half as well upon the question why they should be saved as they do upon the question why they should not be saved, their logic would be put to a much more useful purpose. When we have talked with them we have seen them invent all kinds of difficulties and doubts, disputes and dilemmas. They are ever ready with hard doctrines and texts that are hard to be understood. They seem as if they raked heaven and earth and hell to find reasons why they should be lost, and yet the only reason that they have for this is that they do not want to give up their sins; they do not want to give up their self-righteousness; they do not want to come to Jesus and be washed in his blood and owe everything to the charity of God through the Redeemer. They cannot be troubled with repenting and so they leave that doleful business, as they call it. They do not like to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling, and so they invent the lions. They do not care for faith, they do not delight in Christ, and so they invent difficulties and take a world of trouble to avoid trouble; storing up for themselves hereafter a heap of misery in order to escape from the blessedness of being found in Christ both now and at the last great day.

Now in dealing with sluggishness and its vain excuse, my divisions to-night will be such that every child can take them home and recollect them. The first head will be a lion; the second will be two lions; and the third will be no lions at all. Those three headings will surely abide in everybody's memory, and they are fairly derived from the two texts.

I. The first is "a lion." "The slothful man saith, There is a lion without, I shall be slain in the streets." That is to say, it is needful for him to get to the vineyard to work, but he does not get up and he pretends that he is best in bed, for there is a lion outside the door. Would you have him risk his precious life, so valuable to himself at any rate, if to nobody else? He turns over upon his bed to sleep again; for this is far more comfortable than to be meeting a lion, and falling a prey to his teeth.

He means I think that there is a great difficulty—a terrible difficulty, quite too much of a difficulty for him to overcome. He has heard of lion-tamers and lion-killers, but he is not one. He has not the strength and the vigor to attack this dreadful enemy; he will even confess that he has not sufficient courage for such an encounter. The terrible difficulty which he foresees is more than he can face: it is a lion, and he is neither Samson, nor David, nor Daniel, and therefore he had rather leave the monster alone. Are there not many here who say much the same? "Oh," they say to the preacher, "you do not know our position or the peculiar circumstances and special trials under which we labor. We would gladly be saved, but we cannot live as Christian men: our trade is a difficulty, our poverty is a difficulty, our want of education is a difficulty, and the whole put together make up an impossibility; there is a lion in the way."

Yes, I know, that is what your relative said many years ago, and as long as there is any of your family left there always will be lions about: and you, being a true descendant of the slothful one—to speak honestly to you—can hear the lion roar under your window just as your great grandfather's grandfather did in Solomon's time. I am persuaded that your sons and daughters, if they have the same mind as you have—that is, a mind unwilling to come to Christ—will hear the voice of the lions too; wonderful difficulties will be in their way as they are in yours. The ancient order of the

Donomores and the fruitful family of the Easys will keep their beds and their posts till the last trump shall sound. Though the promise is, “Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet,” they have no heart for the conflict and therefore never win a victory.

Yes, but in this sluggard’s case it was a very fierce lion. The Hebrew of the second text implies that it was a mighty lion that was in the street. His imagination pictured a very extraordinary monster, much larger than usual. And so, my dear friends, you have some difficulty much greater than anybody else ever had; at least you talk as if this were the case. True, the martyrs swam through seas of blood to win the crown, and thousands were burnt to ashes at the stake that they might be found faithful to Christ: but it would seem from your talk that those lions were nothing compared with your lion, which is of huge dimensions and extraordinary ferocity. What can this lion be? Perhaps if I were to examine a little closely it might come out that you are a great coward, and the lion a wretched cur not worth noticing. Your lion is a mere mouse: where is your manliness to tremble at so insignificant a trial? Perhaps you have an acquaintance who would be parted from you if you became a Christian. Is this your lion? It is a very young one. Or else you are following a bad trade and a bad business, and you know that you would have to give them up. Is this all? Your shop would have to be shut on Sunday—is this the secret of the matter? You know that the tricks that you now practice and that you find so profitable, you cannot practice if you become a Christian. Perhaps that is your lion. I should not wonder, though you try to make others believe that it is so terrible, that you really cannot tell what it is; and yet you fondly dream that it quite excuses you for being what you are—an idle lie—abed, sleeping when the light of the gospel is shining full in your face, and declining to decide for God and for Christ though you know what the Lord requires of you. I wish that Elijah were here to-night that he might cry as he did on Carmel, “If God be God, serve him. If Baal be God, serve him. How long halt ye between two opinions?”

“Wake, ye sleepers, wake! What mean you?
Sin besets you round about,
Up and search the foes within you
Slay or chase the traitor out.”

Still you halt, because this lion is such a terrible lion that there never was the like of it. In all the woods, in all the forests, never was such a roaring beast as this. So you say, if you are wide awake enough to say as much as that. I tell you that you are trying to make yourself believe a lie, for your difficulties are no greater than many of us have surmounted by God’s grace. Your difficulties are not half as great as were those of Paul, and of those who lived in his day who had to carry their lives in their hands, and seemed every day given over to death for Jesus Christ’s sake, and yet bravely followed their Lord’s will notwithstanding all.

Observe, again, that this sluggard said that there was a lion without, and he should be slain in the streets. It is rather a novel thing for people to be killed by lions in the streets. It has not occurred within my recollection, and I do not think that it is ever likely to occur; but still this man professed that he expected to be slain in the streets. In an age of liberty like this he is afraid to be a Christian because of persecution, for persecution would be the death of him, Oh, dear! In a time like this, when to be honest, to be upright, is, for certain, the best thing for this world as well as for the world to come, yet men still tell us that they would lose by being Christians; it would ruin their business, they could never make a living; they would be slain in the streets. If you had lived in Madagascar

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years ago, when to be a Christian involved your being hurled down a precipice or being speared, I could see something in the excuse; but in a land like this the persecutions which are endured may be bitter, and the losses which are incurred may be heavy, but they are hardly worth mentioning as compared with the sufferings of the first ages. I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the sufferings of the past times, and much less with the glory that shall be revealed in us. It will not do for you to talk so. It is idle talk; you do not believe it yourself though you whine like a coward, "I shall be slain in the streets." If you were half a man you would never fear the streets or think it at all probable that a wild beast would pounce upon you there.

And then look at the base conclusion,—“There is a lion without, I shall be slain in the streets,” as if the lion would be sure to look for him if it did not meddle with anybody else, as if he was the only man in the street, and not one among hundreds equally in danger, if such danger there really were. The lion for certain would kill him, he was quite sure of it; “I shall be slain in the streets.” This is how sluggards talk, as if all the troubles and trials that ever fell upon men that are decided for Christ would fall upon them; and whereas many of God’s Daniels have lived in dens of lions and have been none the worse for it, they cannot look to Daniel’s God, and they do not expect Daniel’s rescue. They are sure that they shall be torn in pieces, though there be but one lion and that lion in the streets, where there would be protection near and shelter at hand. If I did meet a lion at all I should best like to meet his roaring majesty in the streets, because there would probably be plenty of people at hand to help me. This consideration puts the case in a most ridiculous light. “Slain in the streets,” when there will be others there more courageous than himself who will rush to the rescue. Now, look ye, you that talk about the difficulties of being Christians. Are there no other Christians besides you? Will you be the only believer? When you are converted to God will you be all alone? Will there be none to help you? Is there no Christian brotherhood left among us? Are there no advanced saints who will help you as a young man to struggle against your doubts, and against the temptations that are in the way? Why, you know that you will not be alone in the streets of the Jerusalem of God. Once get into the city of God, which is his church, and you will be safe, for “no lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon, but the redeemed of the LORD shall walk there”; and thus you shall be in the blessed company. You shall be in the place of safety when once you get into the streets of the city of our God. Still, it is after such manner that idle people talk. They imagine perils. Then are they in fear where no fear is, frightened at their own shadows, troubled with imaginary ills.

The real lion after all is sluggishness itself, aversion to the things of God. Oh, how many we have in the Tabernacle whom I have looked to see coming forward to profess their faith in Christ, but they have not come, and for all that I can see they are just where they were ten, twelve, twenty years ago. The real difficulty lies in this— that their heart is not right towards God. They have not yet humbly acknowledged their need of Jesus: it is too much trouble to confess their sins. They have not yet accepted the Lord Jesus as God presents him, as the propitiation for sin. Oh, if they were in earnest about these things, if their hearts were really anxious to find Christ, they would not see this lion in the way. I am quite sure that the monster would soon disappear.

Dear friends, one very common species of lion is the plea of many that they cannot understand the way of salvation. Is that true? Then remember the text of last Sunday morning—“If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the god of this world hath blinded their minds.” It is an awful thing then, to say, “I cannot understand it,” for it proves that you are under the power of the devil. Another man says, “I cannot believe it.” That is an equally dreadful thing to say. What

is it, no, who is it that you cannot believe? Can you not believe God? Is he a liar? Remember how John puts it, and he is the most loving of all spirits,—“He that believeth not hath made God a liar, because he hath not believed on his Son.” It is a dreadful thing to say—“I cannot believe,” when God who cannot lie is the object of the remark. If you make such an observation to your fellow man you disgrace him; but if you say it to God, oh, how you dishonor him! That excuse will not do. If Jesus speaks the truth, why do you not believe him? The gospel is plain to the understanding of those who wish to know the truth, and it carries such evidence with it that it ought to be at once received without a cavil. Can you deny this? Then where is your lion? But, says one, “If I did come to Christ, I am persuaded that after a little while I should fall back.” Be not so sure of that. If you give your heart to Christ has he not promised to keep you? Is it not written, “I give unto my sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall any pluck them out of my hand”? Do you think that you are to keep yourself from falling? If so, read this doxology, and try to sing it —“Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy,—unto him be glory both now and ever.”

“Oh,” says another, “but I know that a great many Christians are hypocrites.” This is your lion, is it? Well, if there are so many hypocrites it is time that there should be one honest man; and why should not you be that one? Besides, what have you to do to call God’s people hypocrites? You know that they are not. “Oh, but,” you say, “they are full of faults: all of them are false.” You do not dare say that, do you? If they all were false, nobody would want to be thought a Christian. How is it that a bad sovereign will pass? Why, because there are so many good ones, and because good sovereigns are worth having; and the reason why a hypocrite passes through society is because there are so many genuine Christians to make him go down, and it is so good a thing to be a Christian. Instead of judging others, it is time that you sat and judged yourself, and that lion would soon be dead.

“Yes, but I have tried,” says one. Oh that is your lion is it? But how did you try? You tried in your own strength; and we do not invite you to do that any more for your strength is perfect weakness. Had you committed yourself to the keeping of Christ you would have another tale to tell and another song to sing, for he is faithful and he keeps those that are in his hand. If that is your lion, God grant that you may never hear it roar again. You are not asked to save yourself, or keep yourself, but to submit yourself to the grace of God, and surely that is able to keep you unto the end.

I have this to say to you before I pass to my second head. If there is a lion without, is there no lion within? That is to say, if you come to Christ and perish, you will most surely perish if you do not come to him. If you live as you are what must become of you? If you die as you are, what must be your lot? Without a Savior to wash you from sin, and a Mediator to plead for you before God, what must be your eternal portion? Why, it would be better to go out among a thousand lions than to stay within and to perish in your sins. The lion within doors in your case will certainly destroy you; therefore up and away. Escape as a bird out of the snare of the fowler: that fowler is Satan and his nets are the deceitfulness of sin. And what if there be a lion without? Can you not fight it? If you ask the Lord to go with you, can you not contend with the lion and destroy him, even as David did? Saints of old have overcome through the blood of the Lamb. None of those who are in heaven came there riding upon beds of ease, but—

“They wrestled hard, as we do now,

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With sins and doubts, and fears.”

Do you expect to be carried into heaven on a golden palanquin? You will be mightily mistaken. Did Jesus die on a cross, and are you to be crowned with roses?

“Must I be carried to the skies
On flowery beds of ease;
While others fought to win the prize,
And sail’d through bloody seas?”

No, my friend, there is no dainty road to glory. If you are afraid of difficulty and self-denial you judge yourself unworthy of the kingdom. Remember, among the condemned the fearful and unbelieving lead the van! Up, and slay the lion if lion there be, and it shall be your joy to find honey in his carcase before long.

If you do not feel that you can contend with the enemy—and certainly you cannot without divine help—can you not cry for help? Our God hears and answers prayer; why not cry to the strong One for deliverance? Your lion is in the way. Shout then for a friend to come and help you; and within call there stands One who is a wonderful lion-killer. There is the Son of David. Did he not destroy the works of the devil when he was here? Still he shows himself strong for the defense of all them that put their trust in him. Call to him, “My Jesus, deliver me from the lion,” and he will be with you and take the lion by the beard and slay him. Therefore sluggard, your excuses will not do. They are broken vessels that hold no water. God help you to be weary of them.

II. We leave our friend the sluggard for a little while in the twenty-second chapter of Proverbs, and we turn on three or four pages till we come to the twenty-sixth chapter at the thirteenth verse, and there we find the gentleman again. The slothful man is still talking, and he says, “There is a lion in the way; a lion is in the streets.” Is there any difference between this verse and the first one that I took for my text? Yes, I think there is this difference—that there are two lions here instead of one.

He has waited because of that one lion, and now he fancies that there are two lions. He has made a bad bargain of his delay. He said that he would have a more convenient season, but where is it? It was inconvenient then because there was a lion. Is it more convenient now? Not at all, for now there are two lions. “There is a lion in the way; a lion is in the street.” That is always the result of waiting: procrastination never profits; difficulties are doubled, dangers thicken. The countryman who had to cross the river foolishly determined to wait until the water had all gone past, for at the rate it was going he was quite sure that it must run dry; but when he had waited long, to his surprise he found that a flood had come down from the upland country, and the river was much deeper than it had been before: the river was not dried, but swollen. Those who think when they are young that it will be so much more easy to seek and to find the Savior when they reach manhood are greatly deceived. Those who think that they will wait till their family has grown up, or till they retire from business, for then they will be able to attend to it so much more easily, may live to discover that hardness of heart has come upon them as the result of delay. Life is like an evening; the longer you wait the darker it becomes. Delay bristles with danger, and the best fruit it can possibly bear is regret. When those who lingered are at length brought to Jesus, how much they wish that the precious years that have been wasted could come back to them. How heartily do they love that promise, “I will restore unto you the years which the locust hath eaten”! I said last Sunday evening what I am

sure is true—that our dear Savior knew the best time for the soul to come to him. And what does the Spirit say is the best time? He says, “To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.” “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD.” It is now that he gives the invitation, because now is the best time that is likely to come to us. You see in the second text there were two lions, and, according to the Hebrew, they were quite as bad as the other lion, for one of them was a young lion. “There is a young lion in the way.” And the second Hebrew word implies a great lion. “A strong lion is in the streets.” So now there were two active enemies—two unconquerable difficulties—instead of one; and as an old Puritan observes, the first time when the sluggard looked down the street and saw a lion lurking on the left, he could have gone the other way; but now when he looked out there was a lion to the right as well as to the left, and he could not go either way without facing a foe. With a lion at the front door and a lion at the back, there seemed to be no way of escape for him, and this was the wretched result of waiting. And do not some of you who years ago hesitated over the difficulties of being a Christian, find more difficulties now instead of less? When you were one-and-twenty you were deeply impressed, and conscience was aroused; only you said, “No, not just now. It will be easier soon.” Certain cords of sin held you. But now you are forty. Well, what about it? Are those cords weaker? I believe that now they are like cart-ropes to bind you, and whereas sin once chastised you with whips, it is now chastising you with scorpions. You are getting farther away from the melting power of the gospel, hardening to your own destruction. You can hear a sermon now, and hear it without prickings of conscience. The tears used to flow in years gone by, and you have gone out of this place feeling as if you never dared come into it again, for the preacher had cut and torn you to pieces. He tries to preach just the same, and he hopes that he does, but his words have not the same effect upon you now as in other days. You are gospel-hardened, and that is the worst kind of hardening. You have heard the gospel so long that there is no novelty in it; and you know the excuses so well that you have got to be one of the devil’s old soldiers, a veteran inured to war. You know how to get over the gospel somehow; like an old fox, you know all the traps and cannot be caught in them. You are sticking to the old trick about the lions; but now there are two lions, so you say. Thus you have a double-barrelled excuse. How can I be so unreasonable as to expect you to come out often to a week-night service? You have three or four shops. How can you come out on a Sunday evening, some of you? You have half-a-dozen children. How is it possible that you should give much time to prayer? You are here, and there, and everywhere in your worldly calling! “Oh!” say you, “do not talk to us. Years ago it might have been possible for us to be Christians, but now how can it be?” Therefore I say to you young people, hasten to be blest. I beseech you do not delay. An old man took a little child up into his arms and put his fingers into the abundant curls of his sunny hair, and he said, “Oh! dear child, while your mother sings to you and tells you about Jesus, think of him, and trust him.” “Grandpa,” said the little boy, “don’t you trust him?” “No, dear,” he said, “I might have done so years ago, but my old heart has got so hard now, nothing ever touches me now.” And the old man dropped a tear as he said it. “I wish,” said he, “that I had a curly head like yours and was beginning life like you.” Oh! old man, are you here to-night? Let me tell you a secret. You may become a boy again. I am sure you may, for you may be born again; and he that is born again is but an infant and starts on a new life with freshly given strength. He shall have softer feelings than nature lends to manhood. He shall have the feelings which grace alone can produce. In a spiritual sense his flesh shall come again unto him like that of a little child, though he cannot grow young again as to his

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bodily frame. The Holy Spirit can make him a new creature in Christ Jesus. But do not delay! Do not delay, you that are yet young. I am sure that Watts is right when he says—

“‘Tis easier work when we begin
To serve the Lord betimes.”

It is assuredly so. Although grace can bring in a person of any age, yet God delights to be found of them that seek him early. It matters not who he may be: if any man comes to Jesus he shall be received; but yet there is a susceptibility which pertains to the young which has often gone from those who year after year have heard the gospel and yet have not yielded to its demands.

Oh! I should like you who have two lions to frighten you to cry out to the Lord to-night to help you to go out and slay them both. “I am very old,” say you. Well, that is one of the lions but the grace of God can make a sinner who is a hundred years old into a babe in Christ. “Oh! but I have formed such bad habits.” Yes, those are horrible lions; but those habits can be broken by divine power. “Ah! but my heart is so hard.” Lay it asoak in the fountain filled with blood, and that will soften it. The Spirit of God —

Can take the flint away
That would not be refined,
And from the riches of his grace,
Bestow a softer mind.”

He can take away the heart of stone out of your flesh, and give you a heart of flesh. Let us have done with the lions, whether there be two or two hundred, for the Lord will help us. Oh! for a lion-hunt to-night. Drive away the one, and drive away the two. But that can never be while sluggards still are sluggards. The Lord quicken them and wake them up to real earnestness.

III. That brings me to my last point, which is no lion at all. If there be here a man who would have Christ, there is no lion in the way to prevent his having Christ.

“There are a thousand difficulties,” says one. If thou desirest Christ truly, there is no effectual difficulty that can really block thee out from coming to him. You notice that Solomon does not say that there were any lions in the way: he only tells us that the sluggard said so. Well, you need not believe a lazy man. The sluggard said it twice; but it did not make it true. Everybody knew what a poor fool he was, and that it was only in his own imagination that there were any lions at all. Do not believe your sluggish self then, and do not believe the sluggish speeches of others. There are no lions except in your own imagination. John Bunyan pictures lions at the gate of the interpreter’s house, and according to some commentators he meant the deacons and elders of the church that are outside to watch those who desire to join the church. I am one of those horrible lions; but the happy thought is that the lions are chained. Whenever you wish to join the church, if you will only have courage to come and face us who are the dreadful lions in front of the palace gate, you will find that we are chained; and what is more, if we were not chained we would not harm you. We do try to roar at those who are not our Master’s children, and we would drive away all who come as thieves and robbers, for it is our duty to do so; but if you have a true heart and wish to cast in your lot with the Lord’s people, you shall not find that we are any terror to you. We shall be glad to say, “Come in, thou blessed of the Lord. Wherefore standest thou without?” A believer’s duty is to join a Christian church, therefore fear not the face of man. I believe that some will never come to Christ until another and a real lion shall get at them, and then they will run to Jesus for shelter, lions or

no lions. I mean, if the lions of their sin should ever wake up and roar upon them terribly, then they will not say that there are lions in the way. I used to be terribly afraid to come to Christ until I came to be more afraid of my sin than of all things else in the world. And Mr. Bunyan, in one of his books, says that line pictured Christ in his own mind as standing with a drawn sword to keep him away, "but at last," says he, "I got so desperately worried by my convictions of sin that if the Lord Jesus had really stood within a pike in his hand, I would have thrown myself upon the point of it, for I felt that I must come at him or perish." Let some such desperate resolve impel you to his feet. Say—

"I can but perish if I go
I am resolved to try
For if I stay away, I know
I must for ever die."

Oh, throw yourself on the very point of the pike, for it is but in seeming that there is either pike or point. Hasten to Jesus, even though he seems to frown, for there is more love in a frowning Savior than in all the world beside. He cannot mean it. No sinner comes to him but Christ is more glad to receive him than the sinner is to be received. Nothing charms Jesus like seeing a poor troubled one come to him. He will in no wise cast out one who does so. If you were walking in the fields, and a poor bird should fly into your bosom for shelter from a hawk, would you take it out of your bosom and throw it away, and give it up to its enemies? I know that you would not. You would put your hands about it, and say, "Poor fluttering thing, you are safe enough now. Nobody shall harm you. You have trusted a man that has humanity, and he will take care of you." And if you fly into the bosom of Jesus Christ he will not give you over to your foe, but he will receive you and you shall be his for ever. I have heard of a king upon the crown of whose pavilion, when it was pitched, a pair of birds came and built their nests; and he was gentle of heart and truly royal, for he said to his chamberlain, "the tent shall never be taken down till the birds have hatched their young. They have found shelter in a king's pavilion, and they shall not have to rue it." And oh, if you will go like the swallows and the sparrows, and build your nests under the eaves of Christ, who is the temple of God, you shall never have your nest pulled down. Ay, and if you can lay your young there, they shall be safe too. There is no place half so secure for our children as Christ's bosom. All who are in Christ shall be kept in safety, and shall be cherished and blessed. Oh, come along with you. Come, you that are afraid of lions. There are no lions. The way is clear and open, for Jesus says, "I am the way," and "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." Why do you still say that you will come by-and-by? Do not trifle so. I had almost rather that you cried, "I will not come at all"; such perversity might end better than feigned promises and base delays. I pray God to give you a better mind than that and may you say, "Yes, this very night, please God, I will be saved. The sun has gone down, but there is a little twilight left, and I will yield ere darkness quite sets in, I will now trust my Savior and hasten to him, and seek him on my knees in prayer." May the Spirit of God sweetly lead you to do this; and oh, our heart will be so glad of it. The Lord grant it, for his dear name's sake. Amen.

All the Day Long

A sermon (No. 2150) delivered on Lord's Day Morning, June 22nd, 1890,
at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington,
by C. H. Spurgeon.

“Let not thine heart envy sinners: but be thou in the fear of the LORD all the day long. For surely there is an end; and thine expectation shall not be cut off.” {end: or, reward}—Proverbs 23:17, 18.

Last Lord's-day we had for our texts two promises. I trust they were full of comfort to the tried people of God, and to souls in the anguish of conviction. To-day we will consider two precepts, that we may not seem to neglect any part of the Word of God; for the precept is as divine as the promise. Here we have a command given of the Holy Spirit through the wisest of men; and therefore both on the divine and on the human side it is most weighty. I said that Solomon was the wisest of men, and yet he became in practice the most foolish. By his folly he gained a fresh store of experience of the saddest sort, and we trust that he turned to God with a penitent heart and so became wiser than ever—wiser with a second wisdom which the grace of God had given him to consecrate his earthly wisdom. He who had been a voluptuous prince became the wise preacher in Israel: let us give our hearts to know the wisdom which he taught.

The words of Solomon to his own son are not only wise, but full of tender anxiety, worthy therefore to be set in the highest degree as to value, and to be received with heartiness as the language of fatherly affection.

These verses are found in the Book of Proverbs: let them pass current as proverbs in the church of God as they did in Israel of old. Let them be “familiar in our mouths as household words.” Let them be often quoted, frequently weighed, and then carried into daily practice. God grant that this particular text may become proverbial in this church from this day forward. May the Holy Ghost impress it on every memory and heart! May it be embodied in all our lives!

If you will look steadily at the text you will see, first, the prescribed course of the godly man: “Be thou in the fear of the LORD all the day long.” Secondly you will note the probable interruption of that course. It occurred in those past ages and it occurs still: “Let not thine heart envy sinners.” We are often tempted to repine because the wicked prosper: the fear of the Lord within us is disturbed with envious thoughts—which will lead on to murmuring and to distrust of our heavenly Father unless they be speedily checked. So foolish and ignorant are we that we lose our walk with God by fretting because of evil-doers. Thirdly we shall notice before we close, the helpful consideration, which may enable us to hold on our way and to cease from fretting about the proud prosperity of the ungodly: “For surely there is an end; and thine expectation shall not be cut off.”

I. Oh, for grace to practice what the Spirit of God says with regard to our first point, the prescribed course of the believer—“Be thou in the fear of the LORD all the day long”! The fear of the Lord is a brief description for true religion. It is an inward condition betokening hearty submission to our heavenly Father. It consists very much in a holy reverence of God, and a sacred awe of him. This is accompanied by a child-like trust in him which leads to loving obedience, tender submission,

and lowly adoration. It is a filial fear. Not the fear which hath torment, but that which goes with joy when we “rejoice with trembling.”

We must first of all be in the fear of God, before we can remain in it “all the day long.” This can never be our condition except as the fruit of the new birth. To be in the fear of the LORD, “ye must be born again.” The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and we are taught therein by the Holy Spirit, who is the sole author of all our grace. Where this fear exists it is the token of eternal life, and it proves the abiding indwelling of the Holy Ghost. “Happy is the man that feareth always.” “The LORD taketh pleasure in them that fear him.” This holy fear of the living God is the life of God showing itself in the quickened ones.

This fear, according to the text, is for all the day and for every day: the longest day is not to be too long for our reverence, nor for our obedience. If our days are lengthened until the day of life declines into the evening of old age, still are we to be in the fear of God; yea, as the day grows longer our holy fear must be deeper.

This is contrary to the habit of those persons who have a religion of show; they are very fine, very holy, very devout when anybody looks at them; this is rather the love of human approbation than the fear of the Lord. The Pharisee, with a halfpenny in one hand and a trumpet in the other, is a picture of the man who gives an alms only that his praises may be sounded forth. The Pharisee, standing at the corner of the street saying his prayers, is a picture of the man who never prays in secret but is very glib in pious assemblies. “Verily, I say unto you, they have their reward.” Show religion is a vain show. Do nothing to be seen of men or you will ripen into a mere hypocrite.

Neither may we regard godliness as something off the common— an extraordinary thing. Have not a religion of spasms. We have heard of men and women who have been singularly excellent on one occasion, but never again: they blazed out like comets, the wonders of a season, and they disappeared like comets never to be seen again. Religion produced at high pressure for a supreme occasion is not a healthy growth. We need an ordinary, common-place, every-day godliness, which may be compared to the light of the fixed stars which shineth evermore. Religion must not be thought of as something apart from daily life; it should be the most vital part of our existence. Our praying should be like our breathing, natural and constant; our communion with God should be like our taking of food, a happy and natural privilege. Brethren, it is a great pity when people draw a hard and fast line across their life, dividing it into the sacred and the secular. Say not, “This is religion, and the other is business,” but sanctify all things. Our commonest acts should be sanctified by the Word of God and prayer and thus made into sacred deeds. The best of men have the least of jar or change of tone in their lives. When the great Elijah knew that he was to be taken up, what did he do? If you knew that to-night you would be carried away to heaven, you would think of something special with which to quit this earthly scene; and yet the most fitting thing to do would be to continue in your duty, as you would have done if nothing had been revealed to you. It was Elijah’s business to go to the schools of the prophets and instruct the young students; and he went about that business until he took his seat in the chariot of fire. He said to Elisha, “The LORD hath sent me to Bethel.” When he had exhorted the Bethel students he thought of the other college, and said to his attendant, “The LORD hath sent me to Jericho.” He took his journey with as much composure as if he had a lifetime before him, and thus fulfilled his tutorship till the Lord sent him to Jordan, whence he went up by a whirlwind into heaven. What is there better for a man of God than to abide in his calling wherein he glorifies God? That which God has given you to do, you should do. That, and nothing else, come what may. If any of you should to-morrow have a revelation

that you must die, it would not be wise to go upstairs and sit down, and read, or pray, until the usual day's work was finished. Go on good woman, and send the children to school, and cook the dinner and go about the proper business of the day, and then if you are to die you will have left no ends of life's web to ravel out. So live that your death shall not be a piece of strange metal soldered on to your life, but part and parcel of all that has gone before. "Be thou in the fear of the LORD all the day long." Living or dying we are the Lord's, and let us live as such.

Ours must never be a religion that is periodic in its flow, like certain intermittent springs which flow and ebb, and flow only to ebb again. Beware of the spirit which is in a rapture one hour and in a rage the next. Beware of serving Christ on Sunday, and Mammon on Monday. Beware of the godliness which varies with the calendar. Every Sunday morning some folks take out their godliness and touch it up while they are turning the brush round their best hat. Many women, after a fashion, put on the fear of God with their new bonnet. When the Sunday is over and their best things are put away, they have also put away their best thoughts and their best behavior. We must have a seven-days' religion, or else we have none at all. Periodical godliness is perpetual hypocrisy. He that towards Jesus can be enemy and friend by turns is in truth always an enemy. We need a religion which, like the poor, we have always with us; which like our heart is always throbbing, and like our breath is always moving. Some people have strange notions on this point: they are holy only on holy days and in holy places. There was a man who was always pious on Good Friday. He showed no token of religion on any other Friday, or indeed on any other day; but on Good Friday nothing would stop him from going to church in the morning, after he had eaten a hotcross bun for breakfast. That day he took the Sacrament and felt much better: surely he might well enough do so, since on his theory he had taken in grace enough to last him for another year. You and I believe such ideas to be ignorant and superstitious; but we must take heed that we do not err after a similar manner. Every Friday must be a Good Friday to us. May we become so truly gracious that to us every day becomes a holy day; our garments, vestments; our meals, sacraments; our houses, temples; our families, churches; our lives, sacrifices; ourselves kings and priests unto God! May the bells upon our horses be "holiness unto the LORD"! God send us religion of this kind, for this will involve our being "in the fear of the LORD all the day long."

Let us practically note the details which are comprised in the exhortation, "Be thou in the fear of the LORD all the day long." The sun is up and we awake. May we each one feel, "When I awake I am still with thee." It is wise to rise in proper time, for drowsiness may waste an hour and cause us to be behindhand all the day, so that we cannot get into order and act as those who quietly walk with God. If I am bound to be in the fear of God all the day long, I am bound to begin well with earnest prayer and sweet communion with God. On rising, it is as essential to prepare the heart as to wash the face; as necessary to put on Christ as to put on one's garments. Our first word should be with our heavenly Father. It is good for the soul's health to begin the day by taking a satisfying draught from the river of the water of life. Very much more depends upon beginnings than some men think. How you go to bed to-night may be determined by your getting up this morning. If you get out of bed on the wrong side you may keep on the wrong side all the day. If your heart be right in the waking, it will be a help towards its being right till sleeping. Go not forth into a dry world till the morning dew lies on thy branch. Baptize thy heart in devotion ere thou wade into the stream of daily care. See not the face of man until thou hast first seen the face of God. Let thy first thoughts fly heavenward, and let thy first breathings be prayer.

And now we are downstairs and are off to business or to labor. As you hurry along the street think of these words, "Be thou in the fear of the LORD all the day long." Leave not thy God at home: thou needest him most abroad. In mingling with thy fellow-men, be with them but be not of them, if that would involve thy forgetting thy Lord. That early interview which thou hast had with thy Beloved should perfume thy conversation all the day. A "smile from Jesus in the morning will be sunshine all the day. Endeavor when thou art plying the trowel or driving the plane, or guiding the plough, or using the needle or the pen, to keep up constant communication with thy Father and thy Lord. Let the telephone between thee and the Eternal never cease from its use: do thou put thine ear to it and hear what the Lord shall speak to thee; and do thou put thy mouth to it and ask counsel from the oracle above. Whether you work long hours or short hours, "Be in the fear of the LORD all the day long."

But it is time for meals. Be thou in the fear of the LORD at thy table. The soul may be poisoned while the body is being nourished if we turn the hour of refreshment into an hour of indulgence. Some have been gluttonous, more have been drunken. Do not think of thy table as though it were a hog's trough where the animal might gorge to the full; but watch thine appetite, and by holy thanksgiving make thy table to be the Lord's table. So eat the bread of earth as to eat bread at last in the kingdom of God. So drink that thy head and heart may be in the best condition to serve God. When God feeds thee, do not profane the occasion by excess or defile it by loose conversation.

During the day our business calls us into company. Our associations in labor may not be so choice as we could wish; but he that earns his bread is often thrown where his own will would not lead him. If we were never to deal with ungodly men it would be necessary for us to go out of the world. He that is in the fear of God all the day long will watch his own spirit and language and actions, that these may be such as becometh the gospel of Christ in whatever society his lot may be cast. Seek not to be a hermit or a monk, but be a man of God among men. When making a bargain or selling thy goods to customers, be thou in the fear of God. It may be needful to go into the market or on the exchange, but be in the fear of the Lord amid the throng. It may be thou wilt seldom be able to speak of that which is most dear to thee lest thou cast pearls before swine; but thou must abide always under holy and heavenly influence so as to be always ready to give a reason for the hope which is in thee with meekness and fear. "Be thou in the fear of the LORD all the day long," though thine ears may be vexed and thy heart grieved with the evil around thee. He that cannot be in the fear of God in London cannot in the country.

The company have now gone and you are alone; maintain the fear of the Lord in thy solitude. Beware of falling into solitary sin. Certain young men and women, when alone, pull out a wicked novel which they would not like to be seen reading; and others will have their sly nips though they would be reputed very temperate. If a man be right with God he is in his best company when alone; and he seeks therein to honor his God and not to grieve him. Surely when I am alone with God I am bound to use my best manners. Do nothing which you would be afraid to have known. Be in the fear of the Lord when you are so much alone that you have no fear of men. The evening draws in, the shop is closed, and you have a little time to yourself. Our young people in shops need a rest and a walk. Is this your case? "Be thou in the fear of the LORD all the day long." In the evening as well as in the morning be true to your Lord. Beware of ill company in the evening! Take care that you never say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me." "Be thou in the fear of the LORD" when sinners entice thee, and at once refuse any offer which is not pleasing to God.

“Recreation,” says one. Yes, recreation. There are many helpful and healthy recreations which can in moderation be used to advantage; but engage in no pastime which would hinder your continuing in the fear of the Lord. In your recreation forget not your higher recreation wherein you were created anew in Christ Jesus. Our chief rest lies in a change of service for our Lord; our fullest pleasure in fellowship with Jesus.

Night has fallen around us and we are home with our families: let us not forget to close the day with family prayer and private prayer, as we opened it. Our chamber must see nothing which angels might blush to look upon. Those holy beings come and go where holy ones repose. Angels have a special liking for sleeping saints. Did they not put a ladder from heaven down to the place where Jacob lay? Though he had only a stone for his pillow, the earth for his bed, the hedges for his curtains, and the skies for his canopy, yet God was there, and angels flocked about him. Between God’s throne and the beds of holy men there has long been a much frequented road. Sleep in Jesus every night, so that you may sleep in Jesus at the last. From dawn to midnight “be thou in the fear of the LORD.”

Let us now remember special occasions. All days are not quite the same. Exceptional events will happen, and these are all included in the day. You sustain perhaps one day a great loss, and unexpectedly find yourself far poorer than when you left your bed. “Be thou in the fear of the LORD” when under losses and adversities. When the great waterfloods prevail and storms of trials sweep over thee, remain in the ark of the fear of the Lord and thou shalt be as safe as Noah was.

Possibly you may have a wonderful day of success; but be not always gaping for it. Yet your ship may come home; your windfall may drop at your feet. Beyond anything you have expected a surprising gain may fall into your lap: be not unduly excited but remain in the fear of the Lord. Take heed that thou be not lifted up with pride so as to dote upon thy wealth; for then thy God may find it needful to afflict thee out of love to thy soul.

It may happen during the day that you are assailed by an unusual temptation. Christian men are well armed against common temptations, but sudden assaults may injure them; therefore, “be in the fear of the LORD all the day long,” and then surprises will not overthrow you. You shall not be afraid of evil tidings, neither shall you be betrayed by evil suggestions if you are rooted and grounded in the constant fear of the Lord.

During the day perhaps you are maliciously provoked. An evil person assails you with envenomed speech, and if you a little lose your temper your adversary takes advantage of your weakness and becomes more bitter and slanderous. He hurls at you things which ought not to be thought of, much less to be said. “Be thou in the fear of the LORD all the day long”; “Cease from anger, and forsake wrath”; “Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.” The adversary knows your tender place, and therefore he says the most atrocious things against God and holy things. Heed him not but in patience possess your soul, and in the fear of the Lord you will find an armor which his poisoned arrows cannot pierce. “May the peace of God which passeth all understanding keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

It may be that during the day you will have to act in a very difficult business. Common transactions between man and man are easy enough to honest minds; but every now and then a nice point is raised, a point of conscience, a matter not to be decided off-hand: “Be thou in the fear of the LORD all the day long.” Spread the hard case before the Lord. Judge a matter as it will be judged before his bar; and if this be too much for thy judgment, then wait upon God for further light. No man goes astray even in a difficult case if he is accustomed to cry like David, “Bring hither the

ephod.” This holy Book and the divine Spirit will guide us aright when our best judgment wavers. “Be thou in the fear of the LORD all the day long.”

But, alas! you are feeling very unwell; this day will differ from those of activity. You cannot go to business; you have to keep to your bed. Fret not, but “be in the fear of the LORD all the day long.” If the day has to last through the night because sleep forsakes you, be still with your thoughts soaring toward heaven, your desires quiet in your Father’s bosom, and your mind happy in the sympathy of Christ. To have our whole being bathed and baptized in the Holy Ghost is to find health in sickness, and joy in pain.

It may be also that you suffer from a mental sickness in the form of depression of spirit. Things look very dark and your heart is very heavy. Mourner, “Be thou in the fear of the LORD all the day long.” When life is like a foggy day—when providence is cloudy and stormy and you are caught in a hurricane—still, “be in the fear of the LORD.” When your soul is exceeding sorrowful and you are bruised as a cluster trodden in the wine-press, yet cling close to God and never let go your reverent fear of him. However exceptional and unusual may be your trial, yet grow within your soul, “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.”

I have sketched the matter roughly. Let me now suggest to you excellent reasons for being always in the fear of the Lord. Ought we not to be in the fear of the Lord all the day long since he sees us all the day long? Does the Lord ever take his eye from off us? Doth the keeper of Israel ever slumber? If God were not our God, but only our lawful master, I should say, “Let us not be eye-servants”; but since we cannot escape his all-seeing eye, let us be the more careful how we behave ourselves. “Be thou in the fear of the LORD all the day long”, for Jehovah whom thou fearest sees thee without ceasing.

Remember also that sin is equally evil all the day long. Is there an hour when it would be right to disobey God? Is there some interval in which the law of holiness has no force? I trow not. Therefore, never consent to sin. To fear God is always right: to put away the fear of God from before our eyes would be always criminal; therefore, be ever in the fear of God. Remember the strictness of Nehemiah’s integrity, and how he said, “So did not I because of the fear of the LORD.”

Walk in the fear of the Lord at all times because you always belong to Christ. The blood-mark is always upon you; will you ever belie it? You have been chosen, and you are always chosen; you have been bought with a price, and you are always your Lord’s; you have been called out from the world by the Holy Spirit, and he is always calling you; you have been preserved by sovereign grace, and you are always so preserved: therefore, by the privileges you enjoy you are bound to abide in the fear of the Lord. How could you lay down your God-given and heaven-honored character of a child of God? Nay, rather cling for ever to your adoption and the heritage it secures you.

You can never tell when Satan will attack you, therefore be always in the fear of the Lord. You are in an enemy’s country. Soldiers, be always on the watch! Soldiers, keep in order of fight! You might straggle from the ranks and begin to lie about in the hedges, and sleep without sentries if you were in your own country; but you are marching through the foeman’s land where an enemy lurks behind every bush. The fear of the Lord is your sword and shield; never lay it down.

Furthermore, remember that your Lord may come at any hour. Before the word can travel from my lip to your ear Jesus may be here. While you are in business, or on your bed, or in the field, the flaming heavens may proclaim his advent. Stand therefore with your loins girt and your lamps trimmed, ready to go in to the supper whenever the Bridegroom comes. Or, you may die. As a church we have had a double warning during the last few days in the departure of our two beloved

elders, Messrs. Hellier and Croker. They have been carried home like shocks of corn, fully ripe. They have departed in peace, and have joyfully entered into rest. We also are on the margin of the dividing stream: our feet are dipped in the waters which wash the river's brim. We too shall soon ford the black torrent. In a moment, suddenly, we may be called away: let every action be such that we would not object to have it quoted as our last action. Let every day be so spent that it might fitly be the close of life on earth. Let our near and approaching end help to keep us "in the fear of the LORD all the day long."

If we keep in that state, observe the admirable results! To abide in the fear of the Lord is to dwell safely. To forsake the Lord would be to court danger. In the fear of the Lord there is strong confidence, but apart from it there is no security. How honorable is such a state! Men ridicule the religion which is not uniform. I heard of a brother who claimed to have long been a teetotaler; but some doubted. When he was asked how long he had been an abstainer, he replied, "Off and on for twenty years." You should have seen the significant smile upon all faces. An abstainer off and on! His example did not stand for much. Certain professors are Christians "off and on", and nobody respects them. Such seed as this will not grow: there is no vitality in it. Constancy is the proof of sincerity. "Be thou in the fear of the LORD all the day long": this is to be happy. God has spoiled the believer for being easy in sin. If you are a Christian you will never find happiness in departing from God. I say again, God has spoiled you for such pleasure. Your joy lies in a closer walk with God: your heaven on earth is in communion with the Lord.

If you abide in the fear of the Lord, how useful you will be! Your "off and on" people are worth nothing: nobody is influenced by them. What little good they do, they undo. The abiding man is also the growing man. He that is "in the fear of the LORD all the day long" gets to have more of that fear; and it has more practical power over his life and heart. What a poor life they lead who are alternately zealous and lukewarm! Like Penelope, they weave by day but unravel by night. They blow hot and cold, and so melt and freeze by turns. They build and then break down, and so are never at rest. Children of God, let your conduct be consistent. Let not your lives be like a draught-board, with as many blacks as whites. Do not be speckled birds, like magpies, more famed for chatter than anything else. Oh, that God would make us white doves! I pray you be not bold one day and cowardly another; be not one day sound in the faith, and the next day on the down-grade. Be not under excitement generous, and in cool blood mean as a miser. Oh that we might become like our Father in heaven in holiness, and then become like him in immutability, so as to be for ever holy!

From all this let us infer our great need. I think I hear somebody say, "You are cutting out a nice bit of work for us." Am I? Believe me, I am looking to a stronger hand than yours. To be in the fear of the Lord for a single day is not to be accomplished by unrenewed nature; it is a work of grace. See then what great grace you will need for all the days of your life. Go for it, and get it. See how little you can do without the Spirit of God: without his indwelling you will soon cast off all fear of the Lord. Plead the covenant promise, "I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me." Depend upon God for everything; and as you know that salvation is of faith that it might be by grace, exercise much faith towards God. Believe that he can make you to be in his fear all the day long. "According to your faith, be it unto you." Believe holiness to be possible; seek after it and possess it. Faith, as it is the channel of grace, must always be associated with truth. True faith lives on truth. If you give up the doctrines of the gospel you will not be in the fear of God at all; and if you begin to doubt them, you will not be "in the fear of the LORD all the day long."

Get solid truth for the foundation of your faith and let your firm faith bring you daily grace, that you may manifestly be always in the fear of the Lord.

II. Now, I have rightly taken up the most of my time with the principal topic, and we will only have a word or two upon the next theme. Let us consider the probable interruption. It has happened to godly men in all ages to see the wicked prosper, and they have been staggered by the sight. You see a man who has no conscience making money in your trade, while you make none. Sometimes you think that your conscientiousness hinders you; and I hope it is nothing else. You see another person scheming and cheating: to him honesty is mere policy, and Sabbath-labor is no difficulty, for the Word of God is nothing to him. You cannot do as he does, and therefore you do not seem to get on as he does. Be it so: but let not his prosperity grieve you. There is something better to live for than mere money-making. If your life pleases God, let it please you. Never envy the ungodly. Suppose God allows them to succeed—what then? You should no more envy them than you envy fat bullocks the ribbons which adorn them at the show: they are ready for the slaughter. Do you wish yourself in their place? The fate of the prosperous sinner is one to be dreaded: he is set on high to be cast down.

Do not even in your wish deprive the ungodly of their transient happiness. Their present prosperity is the only heaven they will ever know. Let them have as much of it as they can. I have heard of a wife who treated her unkind and ungodly husband with great gentleness for this very reason. She said, "I have prayed for him, and entreated him to think about his soul; but at last I have come to fear that he will die in his sins, and therefore I have made up my mind that I will make him as happy as I can in this life. I tremble to think of what his misery must be in the world to come, and therefore I will make him happy now." O, men in your senses, surely you will not grudge poor swine their husks and swill! Nay, fill the trough and let the creature feed, for it has neither part nor lot in a higher life. Believer, take thou thy bitter cup and drink it without complaining; for an hour with thy God will be a hundredfold recompense for a life of trial.

One is the more tried because these men are very apt to boast. They crow over the suffering believer, saying, "What comes of your religion? You are worse off than I am. See how splendidly I get on without God!" Care nothing for their boasting; it will end so soon. Their tongue walketh through the earth, but it only utters vanity.

It is galling to see the enemies of God triumphant. Their policy for a time beats the plain protest of the lover of truth. Their deceit baffles the plain man. The lovers of error outnumber the men of God. Such men tread on creeds and trust-deeds and every other legal protection of honest people. What care they? They despise the old-fashioned folk whom they oppress. Remember Haman in the Book of Esther, and note how glorious he was till he was hung up on the gallows.

There is no real cause for envying the wicked; for their present is danger, their future is doom. I see them now on yonder island, sporting, dancing, feasting merrily. I am standing as on a bare rock, and I might well envy them their island of roses and lilies; but as I watch I see that their fairy island is gradually sinking to destruction. The ocean is rising all around; the waves are carrying away the shores: even while they dance, the floods advance. Lo, yonder is one infatuated wretch sinking amidst the devouring flood. The rest continue at their play, but it cannot last much longer. They will soon be gone. Let me stand on my lone rock rather than sink amid their fleeting luxury. Let me abide in safety rather than dance where danger is all around.

Ay, dear friends, if you envy the wicked it will do you serious harm.

Envy helps in no way, but it hinders in many ways. If you envy the wicked you may soon wish to be like them. If you do so wish, you are like them now! He that would be willing to be wicked in order to prosper is wicked already. He who says, "I should like to do as they do that I might grow rich as they do"; why, he is a man that has his price and would sell his soul if he could meet a purchaser. No, not for all the world would we share the lot of unbelievers. We would sit in the gate with Mordecai sooner than feast with the king with Haman. God help us, dear friends, that we may not be disturbed by seeing the prosperity of the wicked.

III. We close with the helpful consideration. The text says, "For surely there is an end; and thine expectation shall not be cut off."

First then, there is an end of this life. These things are not for ever: on the contrary all that we see is a dissolving view. Surely, every man walketh in a vain show: even as a show it is vain. You talk of spiritual things as though they were shadows; but in very truth these are the only substance. Temporal things are as the mirage of the desert. The things about us are such stuff as dreams are made of; and when we truly awake we shall despise their image. In all wealth and honor there are a worm and a moth. Think of the sinner's end, and you will no longer be troubled when he spreads himself like a green bay tree.

Next, there is an end of the worldling's prosperity. He makes his money. What then? He makes more. What then? He makes more. What then? He dies; and there is a little notice in the newspaper which says that he died worth so much; which being interpreted means that he was taken away from so much which he never possessed, but guarded for his heir. There is an end in death, and after death the judgment; "for God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing." What an end will that be! The sinner may live as carelessly as he pleases, but he must answer for it at the judgment-seat of Christ. Loud may be his laughter, sarcastic and bitter may be his criticisms upon religion; but there is an end; and when the death-sweat beads his brow he will lower his key, and need help from that very gospel which he criticized. "There is an end." Let us not spend our lives for that which hath an end: an immortal soul should seek immortal joys.

Dear friends, to you there is an end in quite another sense. God has an end in your present trouble and exercise. Your difficulties and trials are sent as messenger from God with gracious design. "Be thou in the fear of the LORD all the day long"; for every part of the day hath its tendency to work out your spiritual education, your preparation for the heaven to come. In everything that happens to you your heavenly Father has an end. The arrows of calamity are aimed at your sins. Your bitter cups are moans to purify the inward parts of the soul. Fret not, but trust. There is an old proverb that you should never let children and fools see half-finished works: even so, the work of God in providence cannot be judged of by such poor children as we are, for we cannot see to the end of the Lord's design. My brethren, when we see the end from the beginning and behold God's work complete, we shall have a very different view of things from what we have now, while the work is still proceeding.

Lastly, whilst there is an end to the wicked there will be no failure to your expectation. What are you expecting? That God will keep his promise? And so he will. That God will give you peace in the end? And so he will. That he will raise you from the dead and set you in heavenly places with Christ? And so he will. And that you shall be for ever with the Lord, and he will grant you glory and bliss? And so he will. "Your expectation shall not be cut off." Every Christian is a man of great expectations, and none of them will fail. Let him cultivate his hope and enlarge its scope; for the hopes which are built on Jesus and his grace will never disappoint us. In our case, the birds

in the bush are better birds than those in the hand; and they are quite as sure. The promise of God is in itself a possession, and our expectation of it is in itself an enjoyment.

I have done, dear friends. May the Holy Spirit speak these things home to your hearts! Christian people ought to be exceedingly glad; for if they have but a small estate, they have it on an endless tenure. The worldling may have a large house but he has it only upon a short lease: he will have nothing soon. Just now there is a great noise made about leaseholds falling in. Every ungodly man may have his life-lease run out to-morrow! But the believer has a freehold. What he has is his without reserve. "Their inheritance shall be for ever." By faith grasp the eternal. Treasure the spiritual. Rejoice in God, and "be in the fear of the LORD all the day long." God grant you this in his great grace, for Christ's sake! Amen.

Portion of Scripture Read Before Sermon—Psalm 37.
Hymns from "Our Own Hymn Book"—917, 37, 703.

Three Important Precepts

A sermon (No. 2152) intended for reading on Lord's Day, July 13th, 1890, delivered by C. H. Spurgeon at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington, on Lord's Day Evening, June 22nd, 1890.

“Hear thou, my son, and be wise, and guide thine heart in the way.”—Proverbs 23:19.

The words are very direct and personal; and that is what I wish my sermon to be. My soul is more and more set upon immediate conversions. I have no voice with which to play the orator; I have only enough strength to be an earnest pleader with your souls. I want to come to close quarters with you, and to plead with each man and woman here as if there were but one. Specially would I press my entreaties upon the young, that they may immediately begin that blessed walk which will lead them to the right hand of God. Here and now I desire your salvation. I may never preach again, and you may never hear me again. “Now is the accepted time.”

Solomon, in this verse, gave forth three precepts. I am not very careful as to what limited meaning he personally attached to his words. I am going to baptize his precepts into the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ. I shall put into them a fullness of gospel meaning and I shall press them home upon the heart, praying the Holy Spirit to lead every unconverted person to whom these words shall come to obey these three precepts at once. My voice is to each one. I think I have a message from God for thee, and for thee. Be not disobedient to the heavenly summons.

The first precept in my text is “Hear”; and the second is, “Be wise”; and the third is, “Guide thine heart in the way.”

I. We will begin with the first precept which is contained in the word “Hear.” Perhaps you will say, “We are all here ready to hear and do not therefore need the exhortation.” That you are in this great audience-chamber in the posture of attention is a matter in which I rejoice. So far, so good. But let me say to you this exhortation to hear is not only given in this verse, but it is often repeated in Holy Scripture. “Hear, O Israel!” is the voice of the law and of the prophets. This is not optional: it is a matter of command and promise. “Incline your ear, and come unto me; hear, and your soul shall live.” “Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good.” The very existence of a revelation is a call to hear it. You cannot find eternal life through the eye of the body. No actual brazen serpent is to be looked upon. You need not now look for solemn ceremonies, bleeding sacrifices, and smoking incense. These shadows have vanished. The high road of truth to the heart runs through the ear. “Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” The apostolic word is, “Men, brethren, and fathers, hearken unto me.”

The exhortation to hear is a very important one. As I understand it and use it at this time, it means hear the gospel. “Take heed what ye hear.” There is only one way of salvation. Mind that you hear the one and only gospel. Be very careful of your Sundays: you will not have many of them. Do not go on the Sabbath to hear whatever comes in your way, or you may hear to your ruin. Go to hear the gospel. “How shall I know where the gospel is preached?” Well, you will not have to enquire long: you may readily judge for yourself. Unless the name of Jesus is sounded out often, depend upon it, you are in the wrong place. Unless you hear the words “grace,” “faith,” “salvation,”

you may conclude that you are not on gospel ground. It is true that mere terms may not always be a sufficient guide, but as a rule, as straws show which way the wind blows, so will these terms by their presence or absence be a guide to you. It will not take you long to find out whether the man preaches of works or grace, ceremonies or faith, man or Christ. You can soon discover the gospel sermon or the moral essay, for the very temperature of them differs. Mere morality teaches men to dance, but it does not discern the fact that they have lost their legs. The gospel gives the lame man his feet and then shows him how to use them. You need a Savior: you do not want to be deluded with some theory of saving yourself. Go where you hear about the Lord Jesus and his redeeming blood. If you hear no mention of "the blood," clear out of the place, and never go again.

When you have found out the gospel-house, take care that you hear with the view of obtaining faith in the Lord Jesus. Aim at that blessed thing. "Faith cometh by hearing." It will be idle for you to stop at home and say, "I will try to believe." This is unreasonable and not according to the laws of mind. It is folly to attempt to try to believe; there is a far better way. Go and hear what it is which you are to believe, and as you hear it, if it be faithfully told out, and if the preacher is in his own person a witness to the truth, you will be greatly helped in the matter of believing. Faith comes of knowledge and evidence, and hearing brings you these. Besides, there is a power about the gospel which tends to create faith, and the Holy Spirit is pleased to use the foolishness of preaching to breed faith and so to save them that believe. If the gospel be allowed to work in its own way, the most unbelieving mind will soon yield itself to faith. The persons who do not believe the Bible as a rule have never read it. Those who do not believe in Jesus Christ our Lord as a rule know nothing about him; while for certain those who know his gospel best find it easy to believe. A frequent hearer is likely to become a fervent believer. Do not fall into the error of some who only patronize the house of God occasionally and think they are doing something very meritorious. If you are often hearing with an earnest mind you will not fail to get the blessing. He that only eats once a month will not grow very strong, and he that only hears the gospel now and then is not likely to be profited. Beware of hearing sermons as a pastime: this is no trifling matter. Hear the gospel with the view of being saved by it.

Next, hear without prejudice. The Word of God does not please some people. That is not at all wonderful, for many people ought not to be pleased. Some have a preconceived idea of what the plan of salvation ought to be. They are in no humor to receive with meekness the engrafted word which is able to save their souls, but their object is to find fault with the preacher, to pick a hole in his doctrine or in his manner. They must have something or other to criticize or censure. Do you wonder that such folks are not profited? They do not hear, but they sit in judgment. I have read that in the reign of Queen Elizabeth there was a law made that everybody should go to his parish church, but many sincere Romanists loathed to go and hear Protestant doctrine. Through fear of persecution they attended the parish church, but they took care to fill their ears with wool so that they should not hear what their priests condemned. It is wretched work preaching to a congregation whose ears are stopped with prejudices. Are there not many such? The world, the flesh, the devil, the priests, the sceptics, and the down-graders, have stopped their ears, and what good is likely to come of their attendance? If you come to carp at everything how are you likely to be blessed? Hear! Hear! Hear what God the Lord will speak, and there will be a message of peace for your soul. I would say like the old pleader, "Strike, but hear!" Abuse me, but hear me. Do not shut the door of mercy against yourself.

Next I would say, hear for yourself. The great object of a hearer should be to hear what God speaks to him. I am glad that God should speak to my neighbor, but my neighbor must listen for himself and not for me. The Roman orator began—

“Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears.”

He needs much the loan, for people usually lend their ears to one another and not to the speaker. They will sit and wonder what Mrs. So-and-so thinks of the sermon: it is so pat for her. Leave her alone, friend! Think about what is pat for yourself. Do you not know that in every sermon there is something for yourself, and your first duty is to give heed to that which is for you? Come with me to a house. A will is to be read. A dozen people have come home from the funeral and they are going to hear the will read. Perhaps they cried a good deal at the funeral, but they will not cry now if the person they have buried has left a decent sum among them. They are all ear for what the lawyer has to read. They want to hear that will much more than many want to hear a sermon. See how they listen! There are long ugly words about tenements and hereditaments, and this, and that, and the other; but they set themselves to hear it all as much as if it were a choice poem. Are they going to sleep? By no means. John Smith over yonder, the man’s brother, see how he doubles his attention at a certain point! As for the eldest son, how eagerly he drinks in about all the farm and message, and freehold land, and such like, all in the parish of A., in the county of B.! It takes a long time to go through it, but each legatee loves every word which relates to him. He listens and his ears seem to grow longer while he hears. That poor relative who gets nineteen guineas lays the codicil to heart, and can almost repeat it word for word, only wishing it had been five hundred pounds. John Smith does not care so much about the rest of the document; in fact he hopes there are not many more items. The extract which relates to himself he would like to copy out. Will you be wise enough to treat a sermon in that fashion? Please listen to that which concerns you most, take it down, and carry it home. This is the exhortation of the text—“Hear;” but especially hear that which has most to do with you, whether it be rebuke or promise or command.

And then dear friends, hear when the sermon is done. “How can I hear when it is all done?” This is a very important point. I went to see a poor woman in the hospital one day and she said to me, speaking of the sermons she had heard, “Sir, you seem to talk to me all day and all night while I am lying here.” I said, “Well, I hope I do not keep you awake.” “No,” she said, “but as I am awake I hear you talking to me through everything I see. You have used so many things as illustrations that everywhere I have you in my memory.” I was pleased and inwardly wished that I could always preach in the way which she described; and I should do so if I always had hearers such as that sick woman had evidently been. Ah, dear friends! the way to hear a sermon is to hear it when you get home. Pray, remember my sermon of this morning, “Be in the fear of the LORD all the day long.” I want you to hear that word when you are dressing to-morrow, when you are taking down the shutters, when you are dealing across the counter, and when you are among the children. If you are tempted to do a dishonest deed, I would have you hear a still small voice saying to you, “Be in the fear of the LORD all the day long.” A sermon ought to be like a musical box: we wind it up when we preach it, and then it goes on playing till its tune is through. It should be said of a good sermon, “It being ended still speaketh.” Hear what you hear in such a way that it shall be like a seed which will grow in the garden of your heart.

Above all hear the gospel as the voice of God. When a man hears the preacher not as a man speaking on his own account but as God’s servant, and when the truth spoken is not measured by

its oratory, nor weighed by its logic, but is judged of by the Bible, as to whether it is the very truth of God or not; then it is that men hear to profit. Those who compare sermons with Scripture are noble like the Bereans of old. If you can say, "I hear the word, not as the word of man but as the word of God," it will have its effect upon your heart. Oh that the word may come to you with demonstration of the Spirit! You will never lose the good effect of gospel preaching if the Spirit of God seals it on your mind. Is it so or not? Do you come here to listen to me? Yours is a poor errand. If you come to listen to what God the Lord shall speak, however poorly I may interpret his mind as I find it in the Scripture, yet you will find a blessing in what you hear. A good many things are sold nowadays by means of pretty wrappings, and in the same way worthless doctrines are spread by the fine style in which they are done up. But as you do not want the wrappings but the goods, so in sermons the manner is not the main concern. If we should set a thing before you with all the grandeur of oratory and it did not come from God, it would be a gaudy nothing. Though we spoke falsehood with the tongues of men and of angels we should not be so good as a sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. But though we give you the gospel of the blessed God in great feebleness and trembling, yet it is what you want, and through it the blessing will come to you. He that hath an ear towards God will find that God hath an ear towards him.

Thus have we dwelt upon the first exhortation. Hear often. Hear the gospel. Hear for yourself. Hear attentively. Hear with a holy purpose. Hear the gospel as a message from God.

II. The next precept is "be wise." What does that mean in this connection?

It means first try to understand what you hear. Get to the bottom of it. Look it up, look it down, look it through. Look over it, but do not overlook it. When you have heard the words of the gospel say to yourself, "I would know what this gospel is. With the ins and outs of it I am going to make myself acquainted if the Lord will teach me. I will know what I must do to be saved, and why I must do it, and how it will save me." How much I wish that a sacred curiosity would seize upon my hearers so that they would say, "We must know the soul and spirit of this Word of the Lord. We want to know each one for himself who the Savior is and how he can be ours"! God give you thus to be wise by getting an understanding of the gospel! I should not wonder, if I were to come round the congregation, if I found many here who do not know the gospel, simple as it is. I will not come round so do not be frightened, but I sadly fear that some of you who have been for years to places of worship are still ignorant of the elements of the faith. Should it be so? Do try to know saving truth. Whatever else you do not learn, do learn the answer to that question, "What must I do to be saved?"

Next, "Be wise": that is, believe the gospel as it comes from God. You will not be wise to doubt it but you will be wise to believe it, for it is true and sure. This is an age of doubt; it is in the air. No man is nowadays thought to have any sense if he does not doubt even the best established truths, and yet I do not think that it takes any great quantity of brain to be a doubter. With a very strong effort I might manage to doubt—to doubt my father's word (I have never done it mark you!); to doubt my brother's faithfulness; to doubt my wife's love to me. By such efforts I should doubt myself into an abyss of misery and should become a glorious fool. To turn the power of doubting upon spiritual realities would be even more fatal, for that would take away my hope beyond the grave and plunge me in despair. Doubt is sterile; it produces nothing; it destroys, but it cannot create. I have long been a believer, and I find that my joys all come to me by the road of believing, and none of them by the wretched lane of doubting. I have believed this Bible to be God's Word; and after all the destructive criticism which I have heard I still believe it. I have believed Christ to

be my Savior; and after all the doubts of his Deity and atonement lately vented and invented, I still believe it; ay, and believe it none the less. I have believed God to be my Father, and though I have seen his Fatherhood dragged in the mire, I still believe it. I believe heaven to be my home; despite the insinuations of Satan, I still believe it. I have never yet gained health, joy, comfort, holiness, through doubting; nay, I have never gained a piece of bread or a drop of water through doubting. So many are doing the doubting, and doing it very completely that I need not trouble myself to assist them, but may quietly go on believing and enjoying the sweet results of faith. Our experience proves that it is wisdom to believe the Lord. He is God that cannot lie. Why should we doubt him?

Next, "be wise": that is, be affected by what you have heard. Yield your heart up to the Word of God. Some people are hard to move; they are more like stone than flesh. There are congregations where you may preach your own heart out but you cannot get at their hearts. You might as well preach to the statues in St. Paul's Cathedral or Westminster Abbey as preach to them; they are impenetrable and immovable. He that is wise permits the truth to come into full contact with him. Be wise, my hearer! Yield yourself up to the truth, for it will do you good and no harm. Do not resist it, do not evade it. Let the heavenly wind blow on you, for it brings healing. If it bids you hate sin, hate sin. If it bids you repent, repent. If it entreats you to believe, believe. Be what the gospel is meant to make you. You cannot make yourself a saint, but the Holy Spirit can do it through the word of truth.

And then take care that you do not wander into evil company. You say, "Surely you are leaving your text. Why bring that in?" Solomon brought it in: "Hear thou my son and be wise. Be not among winebibbers among riotous eaters of flesh," and so on. If you are wise you will keep out of bad company, especially out of the society of revellers, drunkards, and gluttons. This warning may be very necessary to some to whom this sermon will come. You have lately come from the country to this wicked city. I am sure that you must be very sorry to have come to this horrible wilderness of bricks and mortar. Oh, for an hour or two of the green fields and the leafy woods and the blue sky! Alas! designing persons are surrounding you; they are trying to draw you into evil. Be wise. "If sinners entice thee, consent thou not." Be wise. Keep out of the way of their enticements. In ten years' time if you have gone into evil company in the interval, you will be yourself the best witness of how unwise you have been; and if you are kept out of it, kept especially from the wine-cup and vice, I am sure you will thank God that you were wise in time. Choose good companions. Make saints your friends. Trust the true and good, and quit the gay and frivolous.

Once more, "Be wise"; that is, take care to do what you hear. Have you never seen persons crowding into a place of worship? Do they not in this place often press upon one another to hear the word? Yes, yes; and when they have come and they have heard it, what have they done with it? The great mass of them have done nothing with it. Did you ever go to a physician? Did you ever wait in the room for an hour or two before your turn came to see the great man? Did you give him your guinea? Did he hand you a prescription? Tell me, did you leave it on the table? Did you fold it up carefully and put it into your pocket? Did you keep it there? Did you not have the medicine made up? Did you not take it? Suppose that in a month's time some one should say, "Did you see the doctor?" You say, "Yes, I went to see him." "Did you have a prescription?" "He gave me a bit of paper with something or other upon it, but I do not know what it was, for I cannot read Latin." "You do not mean to say that you have not had it made up at the chemist's?" "No," you say, "I was satisfied with seeing the doctor." Dear friends, you smile at this description of folly for it is such gross unwisdom. Be wise then, do not hear the gospel in vain by neglecting its commands. If you

know how to be saved, obey the command. Do not be lost in darkness with light shining upon your eyeballs. Do not go to hell with the gate of heaven standing open before you. I pray you, hear and be wise. Turn what you hear into speedy practice. God help you to do so for his mercy's sake!

I am talking to you in a very feeble and commonplace manner; but what more could I say if I had the eloquence of the greatest orator? What better could I do than in a loving and brotherly manner to plead with every one of you not to play the fool with your souls? Hear the gospel, but be not hearers only. Be wise enough to be diligent in practicing what you are taught. Believe in Jesus unto life eternal. May the good Spirit make you wise unto salvation! Why will you perish? Why run risks with your never-dying soul? Come now and seek the Lord. If you seek him he will be found of you.

III. Now comes the last of the three precepts: "guide thine heart in the way."

There is but one way. "In the way," mark: that is to say, in the way of wisdom; and this is one and one only. There are not two Gods, but one God; there are not two Christs, but one Christ; there are not two gospels, but one gospel; there are not two heavens, but one heaven; and there are not two ways of life, but one way. There is "one Lord, one faith, one baptism," and one Holy Spirit, and one life by his indwelling; and there is no going to heaven by any but the one way. Some people get comparing the different ways of salvation. This is frivolous and foolish; for he that preaches any other than the one gospel is accursed. Suppose a man wants to go to York, and he says, "Well, I want to go to York, but the road to London is a better road and a wider road." What matters the character of the road if it does not lead where you want to go? You say you want to go to York, then what have you to do with any road but that which leads to York? There are many ways, but what have you to do with any but the way everlasting? There is one royal road which leads to God and eternal life and heaven. Never mind what the other ways are or are not; go you the right way. When I go from this place I want to go home to Norwood. The road down the Borough is level, but my road home is up a very steep hill to Norwood. Suppose I were to say, "I shall take the level road and cross London Bridge, and drive into the county of Essex"—what then? Why, I shall not get home if I take any other road than that which leads to the top of Norwood Hill. If it is steep I cannot help it, but I must say with John Bunyan at the Hill Difficulty, "This hill, though high, I covet to ascend." So with you, dear friend. There is only one road to heaven, and although there are a dozen roads which do not lead to holiness and God, it is idle to praise them up for they will not serve your turn. Take the hilly road of Self-denial. Climb up to heaven on your hands and knees if it must be, but make up your mind that you are going there by God's way.

That way is often described in the Scripture. Shall I tell you what the Bible says about this way? Well, it calls it the way of the Lord; and you are not in the right way unless you walk with God day by day. A religion that has not God in it is irreligion. Atheism cannot bring you to heaven, nor can any form of deism, even though it be baptized into the name of Christianity. If God be not Chief, Head, King, Lord, Sovereign, you are not in the right road. It is Christ's way too, for Christ says "I am the way." You are not on the right way unless Christ is first and last with you. His precious blood to put away your sin, his glorious resurrection to be your justification, his ascension to heaven to take possession of a place for you, his second coming to receive you to himself—all these are the way. Christ is all in all to the man who is on the right road. Note this!

Sometimes it is called the way of faith. That is the only way to heaven. The way of works might have taken us to heaven if we had not fallen in Adam and had never sinned on our own account, but having been once defiled by iniquity we cannot be saved by future innocence. Do what we may,

we cannot mend the life which we have marred; the flaws and fractures will appear. Justice will demand punishment for past transgressions: "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." We must be saved by grace through faith, as it is written "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." The way of faith is the way to glory.

This way is also called the way of truth. If your religion is based on a lie it must deceive and ruin you. If it is founded on the truth of God it will truly save you, but not else. Alas for many! The way of truth they have not known. Many hate truth and go about with a thousand inventions to get rid of it. If you love truth and follow it and believe in it as God has revealed it in the person of his Son, all is well with your soul.

It is also called the way of holiness. My dear hearer, are you in that way? This is the King's highway, and it leads to the city of the great King. Do you hate sin? Do you follow after righteousness? Would you scorn a lie? Do you keep your word even when it is to your personal loss? Do you endeavor to act fairly to your workmen, kindly to your servants, faithfully to your masters, uprightly to all? When you feel that you have erred, are you humbled and grieved? Do you endeavor for the future to guard the point in which experience has proved you to be weak? Do you watch against temptation and daily cry to God for strength to overcome it? Depend upon it, he that would be happy hereafter must be holy now.

The road to glory is also called the "way of peace." We must seek after peace of conscience, peace with God, peace with our fellowmen. If our end is to be peace, our way must be peace: a quiet, contented mind is a thing to cultivate. Keep in this way!

Let me tell you two or three more things which the Bible says about this way. It is the "old" way. It bids us ask for the old paths. True religion is no new thing. Your mother was saved: you could not doubt it. Be saved in the way which led your mother safely. If there might be a new way I would not try it: one cannot afford to play experiments with the only soul he has. That which has saved those who have gone before is quite good enough for me. I love to think of friends in glory: their footprints cheer me. I love

"The way the holy prophets went,
The road that leads from banishment."

The moderns have struck out a new path altogether; their road is both new and broad. What! were the saints of former ages all mistaken? The martyrs—did they die for a falsehood and shed their blood for doctrines which criticism explodes? The men of whom the world was not worthy, were they all the dupes of theories which time has disproved? Did nobody know anything till Darwin appeared? Were those who believed that "the things which are seen were not made of things which do appear" downright fools? Is it quite so certain as some think it, that the things which were made grew out of things already existing? Of course I know that nowadays men are so wonderfully intelligent that they have discovered that human life has been "evolved" from lower life. We are the heirs of oysters, and the near descendants of apes. It has taken some time to compass the evolution, and yet I will grant that very hard shells are still to be met with, and some men are not much above animals—especially such men as can be duped by this hypothesis. Were the old-fashioned believers all wrong? No, my brethren, they were not wrong: their lives and their deaths prove that they were right. We shall be wrong if we leave the old and tried paths for these new cuts which lead into fathomless bogs of unbelief. It was enough to condemn the idols of Israel that they were new gods, newly set up; and it is enough to condemn the gospels of the hour that

they are such as were never heard of in the golden ages of the church. "The old is better." Yet it is strange but true, that the way to heaven is in Scripture called the "new" way; the "new and living way"—that is to say, Christ's blood: for when Christ came men began to understand the way of salvation more clearly, and it came to them with a freshness of power of which the old ceremonial law knew nothing. The incarnate Savior by his death has opened a new and living way to the secret pavilion of God. We want nothing newer than the opened way which is made by the death of our Lord Jesus Christ. That gospel which came in with a dying and risen Savior is the gospel for us.

Again, we are told in the Bible that it is a "narrow" way. We are expressly told that "Wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life." "Oh," says one, "I like a man who is broad in his views." Do you? Possibly you are in the broad road yourself; and if so "a fellow-feeling makes us wondrous kind." How can you, in the teeth of Holy Scripture, admire the broad way? for it surely leads to destruction. "I cannot endure narrow views," cries one. Cannot you? Then what are you going to do? Do you refuse to follow the narrow way? Yet that way leads to life, and though "few there be that find it," I should have thought it well worth your while to be one of the few. Of course great thinkers and great doubters shun it, because it does not afford room enough for their greatness; but common-place men should choose it because it leads to the right place. It is curious, is it not? that our Lord Jesus Christ should describe this heavenly way as narrow, and yet some who are themselves Christians would if they could, make it out to be very broad. Everything broad commends itself to their taste. Well, well, however unpopular may be my teaching, I exhort the young men here to follow the narrow way, to keep close to Christ and the crimson way of his precious blood, and to defy all ridicule on that account. Follow after holiness, and let the gaieties and vanities of the world go to those who love them. Keep you to the narrow way of secret prayer and hallowed fellowship with God; and let those who want sing-song and theatricals go their own way. It may be you will appear to be losers by quitting the fellowship of the worldly religious, but your loss will be unspeakable gain to you in the long run. Dare to be Puritanic, conscientious, scrupulous. Venture to follow Christ, even if you go alone; for so shall you go aright. But I will not keep you much longer. I am still speaking upon this third precept: you are to put your heart into your religion. In no business can a man prosper if he is half-hearted. Religion without heart is a wretched affair. That man who professes to fear the Lord and yet only puts half his heart into his godliness will make a great failure of it. He is a poor, miserable creature who has enough religion to prevent his enjoying sin, and not enough to make him enjoy holiness. He that goes right into the heart of godliness will be made happy by it, but no one else. I am speaking to young men, and I would drive home this truth in their case. They will recollect that when they were boys, they went down to the river for a bath, and certain of the lads went paddling in just above their ankles or their knees. How they shivered with the cold! They did not much appreciate the bath. But one of the boys mounted the spring-board, and leaped right into the water head-first. I see him now coming up all glowing and rosy, and I hear his cheery voice shouting, "Splendid!"

Just so, if you go in for it, you will find true religion to be splendid; but if you go paddling about in the shallows of it you will become chilled with doubts and fears and the comfort of it will be far from you. If religion is important, it is all-important. If it is anything, it is everything. If false, leave it altogether: if true, love it altogether. To show how the joy of religion is proportioned to the degree of it I sometimes tell a story. It is a parable most instructive and fully to the point, and

therefore I cannot help repeating it. It is a story of a man in America who was fond of growing the choicest apples. He asked a neighbor to come up to his orchard and taste his apples, which he greatly praised as the best in the world. This high praise he sang many times in his friend's ear, but he could not get him to come to his place to taste the fruit. He asked him again and again, and still the friend did not come. He therefore hinted that there must be a reason for his refusal. "Well," said the other, "the truth is that one day as I was driving by your orchard, I saw an apple or two that had dropped into the road, and I picked one up and tasted it, and it was out of sight the sourest thing in all creation. I am very much obliged to you but I have had enough for one lifetime." "Oh," said the owner, "do you know I went forty miles to buy those sour apples, and I planted them all along the hedge; for I thought they would be good for the boys and keep them from picking and stealing. They are a fine sort for that particular purpose. But if you will come and see me I will lead you inside the orchard, past those first two or three rows, and you will find a sweetness and a flavor which will fill your mouth with delight." "I see," said the other, "I see." Do you also see my drift? All round the outside of religion there are sour fruits of prohibitions, rebukes, repentances, and self-denials, to keep the hypocrites out. Have you never seen how long they pull their faces as if their religion did not agree with them? and that is because they have eaten the sour apples on the outskirts. But, oh! if you would come near to the faith and joy which are in Christ Jesus, if you would give all your heart to heavenly pursuits you would find it quite another thing. Then would your heart "rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory."

The text says, "Guide your heart in the way"; that is, get your very soul into the way of salvation. Get every portion of your being under holy influence. Let every fragment of your heart and mind and soul and strength be consecrated. Your heart grows like a luxuriant plant, and you must train every tendril, every shoot in the right direction. Nail every branch to the wall and keep it there. Try to guide your heart into the way of truth, life, and holiness; let none of it stray. Then will you be filled with delight. Then will you in very deed know that you are saved.

The last word I have to say is, oh, that everyone here present who is not saved would attend to these three precepts now! Hear now! Make up your mind that if there be salvation to be had, you will have it. Be wise at once lest you be wise too late. Say, "It would be folly to delay, for I may soon be dead and buried. I will have Christ to-day, my mother's Christ, my father's God." Be wise and cry to God to help you, cry for the Holy Spirit to enable you to lay hold on eternal life, and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ for immediate salvation. Trust him. Remember what I told you of Luther the other night, when he said "I shall not save myself. Christ is a Savior; it is his business to save." Put your soul into your Redeemer's hand. He is a Savior, and he will save all who trust him. To trust Jesus is wise. It is wisest of all to do it at once, and here. How constantly do I hear of friends falling dead suddenly, or being taken away by unobserved disease! If I were to point to-night to the pews that have been emptied in this place since the first of January you would be greatly surprised. Your sitting was lately occupied by one who is now dead, and this makes the spot a solemn one. Someone else will soon sit in your pew. Be wise, be wise, and seek the Lord at once. Midsummer has come upon us. Let it not pass away without your soul being brought to Jesus. The hay-time is upon us, and death is sharpening his weapon. I can hear the rick-a-tink of that dread scythe at this very moment; and you too will soon be withered like the grass which has fallen before the mower. Wherefore now, even now, seek ye my Savior. I implore you, seek him without further delay! I wish that I were able to speak to you with a clear and powerful voice which would keep pace with my heart; but as I cannot do so, I do my best and use what voice I have. I would do

anything to draw you to the Lord Jesus who is the way of life. We shall soon stand at God's great judgment seat, and I shall have to answer for my preaching. Therefore I entreat you to be wise. Why should I give in my account with grief? "Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near." May the Lord lead you to do so, for Jesus' sake! Amen.

Portions of Scripture read before sermon—Proverbs 23:9-35.
Hymns from "Our Own Hymn Book"—331, 545, 518.

Buying the Truth

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“Buy the truth, and sell it not.”—Proverbs 23:23.

John Bunyan pictures the pilgrims as passing at one time through Vanity Fair, and in Vanity Fair there were to be found all kinds of merchandise, consisting of the pomps and vanities, the lusts and pleasures of this present life and of the flesh. Now all the dealers, when they saw these strange pilgrims come into the fair, began to cry as shopmen will do, “Buy, buy, buy—buy this, and buy that.” There were the priests in the Italian row with their crucifixes and their beads. There were those in the German row with their philosophies and their metaphysics. There were those in the French row with their fashions and with their prettinesses. But the one answer that the pilgrims gave to all the dealers was this—they looked up and they said, “We buy the truth; we buy the truth,” and they would have gone on their way if the men of the Fair had not laid them by the heels in the cage and kept them there, one to go to heaven in a chariot of fire, and the other afterwards to pursue his journey alone. This is very much the description of the genuine Christian at all times. He is surrounded by vendors of all sorts of things, beautifully got up and looking exceedingly like the true article, and the only way in which he will be able to pass through Vanity Fair safely is to keep to this, that he buys the truth, and if he adds to that the second advice of the text, and never sells it, he will under divine guidance find his way rightly to the skies. “Buy the truth, and sell it not.”

Is not the parable we have just read a sort of enlargement of our text? When the merchantman all over the world had travelled to find out some pearl that should have no flaw, some diamond of the purest water fit to glisten in the crown of royalty, at last in his researches, he met with a gem the like of which he had never seen before, and knowing that here was wealth for him, in the joy of his discovery he sold all that he had that he might buy that pearl. Even so, the text seems to tell us that truth is the one pearl beneath the skies that is worth having; and whatever else we buy not, we must buy the truth; and whatever else we may have to sell, yet we must never sell the truth, but hold it fast as a treasure that will last us when gold has cankered and silver has rusted and the moth has eaten up all goodly garments, and when all the riches of men have gone like a puff of smoke, or melted in the heat of the judgment day like the dew in the beams of the morning sun. Buy the truth. Here is the treasure. Cost it what it may, buy you it. Here is the piece of merchandise which you must buy but must not sell. You may give all for it, but you may take nothing in exchange for it since there is nothing that can be likened unto it.

With this as a preface, let us now come straight up to the text, and we shall notice:—

I. The commodity that is mentioned: buy the truth.” I shall not speak tonight of those common forms of truth that relate to politics, to history, to science, or to ordinary life, yet would I say of all these—buy the truth. Never be afraid of the truth. Never be afraid in anything of having your prejudices knocked on the head. Always be determined, come what may, even though truth should prove you to be a fool, yet to accept the truth, and though it should cost you dear, yet still to pursue

it, for in the long run they who build mere speculations, fancies, and errors, though they may seem to build suitable structures for the time, shall find that they are wood, hay, and stubble, and shall be consumed; but he that keeps to what he knows, to matters of fact, and matters of truth, builds gold, silver, and precious stones, which the trying fire of the coming ages shall not be able to destroy. I would sooner discover one fact and lay down one certain truth than be the author of ten thousand theories, even though these theories should for a while rule all the thought of mankind.

But I speak now of religious truth. Buy that truth; buy that truth above all others. And here we must have three heads. First, in the matter of doctrinal truth, buy the truth. Holy Scripture is the standard of truth. To the law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this word it is because there is no truth in them. “Thy word is truth.” Here is silver tried in the furnace and purified seven times. Speak of Infallibility? It is not at Rome, but it is here in this Book. Here is an infallible witness to the truth of God, and he that is taught of the Holy Spirit to understand it gets at the truth. Now dear brethren, do aim to get the right truth, the real truth as to matters of doctrine. Count it not a trifle to be sound in the faith. Think no error to be harmless for truth is very precious, and error, even when we do not see it to be so, may lead to the most solemn consequences of mischief. In this world we see too much of salvation without Christ—I mean we meet with many who believe that they are saved because they have been baptized, or confirmed, or passed through the ceremonies of the church to which they belong. They have not looked to the precious blood; they are not depending simply upon the finished work of the Redeemer, but something else than Christ has become their confidence. Now, avoid that, and buy the truth which lies here, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” We hear too much nowadays of regeneration without faith—the supposed regeneration of unconscious babes, the new birth of people through drops of water when they are not able to understand what is performed upon them. I beseech you, believe that there is no new birth where there is not a confidence in Christ, and that the regeneration which does not lead to repentance and faith, which is not, indeed, immediately attended therewith, is no regeneration whatever. Buy the truth in this matter. Stand to it that it is the work of the Holy Spirit in rational and intelligent beings, leading them to hate sin and to lay hold of eternal life. Alas! we have in some quarters too much of faith is trusted in, which is not practical. Men say they believe, but they do not prove it by their lives. They remain in sin, and yet wrap themselves up in the belief that they are God’s chosen ones. From such turn away, and remember that a faith without works is dead, and only the faith that changes the character, sanctifies the life, and leads the man to God, is the faith which will save the soul. We must see to it that in our doctrine we bow our judgment to the teachings of Scripture, and try to be conformed to all the revelation of God, and especially to all the teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ. May we not fall into one error or another. Scylla is there, and Charybdis is there, and he is a happy helmsman who can steer between the two. You shall fall into this ism or into that unless you keep to the truth. Never mind whether you can make the truth always consistent to your own judgment or not. If it is the truth, believe it; and though it should seem to contradict another truth, yet hold to it if it is in the Word, waiting till clearer light shall reveal to you that all these truths stood in a wonderful harmony and consistency which, at first, you could not perceive. In doctrine, buy the truth.

But secondly, buy experimental truth. I know not another word to use; I mean truth within, the truth experienced. See that this be real truth. How easy it is to be deceived with the notion that we are converted when we still need to be converted; to fancy that because we have the approbation of our minister and of our Christian friends, we must therefore necessarily be the people of God.

There is only one true new birth, but there are fifty counterfeits of it. In this respect then, buy the truth. Let me have you beware of an experience which has a faith in it that was never attended with repentance. I am afraid of a dry-eyed faith. That faith seems to me to be the faith of God's elect, whose eyes are full of tears. If thou hast never felt thyself a sinner, never trembled under the law of God, never felt that thou hast deserved to be cast into hell, I am afraid thy faith is a mere presumption, and not the faith that looks to Christ. Beware of an experience that lies in talk, and not in feeling. Mr. Talkative, in Bunyan's Pilgrim, could speak very glibly about religion; no man more so than he; he was fit to take the chair in an assembly of divines, but it was not heart-work; it was all surface-work. Plough deep, my brethren. Feel what you believe. Let it be with you real homework, soul-work, the work of God the Holy Ghost—not a temporary excitement, not head-knowledge, not theory. May the truth be burned into your souls by the operation of the Holy Ghost. In this respect, buy the truth. Alas! we see nowadays in many professors a great deal of life without struggle, and I think I have learned that all spiritual life that is not attended with struggles is a mistake, for Isaac, the child of the promise, is sure to be mocked by Ishmael. No sooner does the seed of the woman come into the world than the seed of the serpent tries to destroy it. You must and will find a battle going on within you if you are a believer. Sin will contest with grace, and grace will seek to reign over sinful corruptions. Be afraid of too easy an experience. "Moab is at ease from his youth; he hath not been emptied from vessel to vessel"; "for the time cometh when the LORD will search Jerusalem with candles, and punish the men that are settled upon their lees." There must be strivings within or we may well beware of such an experience. And I think I have noticed a growing feeling abroad of confidence without self-examination. I would have you hold to believe God's Word, but do not take your own state at haphazard. Do not conclude that you are a Christian because you thought you were ten years ago. Day by day bring yourself to the touchstone. He that cannot bear examination will have to bear condemnation. He that dare not search himself will find that God will search him. He that is afraid to look himself in the face has need to be afraid to look the Judge in the face when the great white throne shall be placed, and all the world summoned to judgment. Confidence is quite consistent with self-examination, and I pray you in this thing buy the truth, and seek to have a religion that will bear the test—a true faith, a living faith, a faith that moves your soul, a deep-rooted faith, a faith which is the supernatural work of the Holy Ghost, for the time cometh when, as the Lord liveth, nothing short of this will stand you in good stead.

Again, I spoke of three sorts of truth—doctrinal truth, experimental truth, and now practical truth. By practical truth I mean our actions being consistent, and those of a right and straightforward course. In this matter, buy the truth. You profess to be a Christian: be a Christian. You say that you are a follower of Christ: follow him then. You know it is right to be a man of integrity and uprightness: be so. Let no dirty tricks of trade, let no meannesses, let none of those white lies which degrade commerce nowadays ever come across your path, except to be reprobated and abhorred. Walk straight forward. Learn not to tuck. Do not wish to understand policy and craft and cunning. Buy the truth. It will shame the world yet. He that speaks out his mind, says what he means and means what he says, does the just thing, does the right thing, fears no man and lifts his head boldly in the face of all creation if it dares to whisper that it will enrich him by his doing wrong—that is the man that buys the truth practically. You know how it can be carried out in commerce readily enough, in the parlour, in the drawing-room, and in the kitchen. There is a truthful way for a shoe-black to black shoes in the street, and there is a lying way of doing it. There is a truthful way of doing the commonest actions and there is a false method of doing the very self-same thing. In

this respect then buy the truth as to the straightforwardness, the clean, sharp transparency of your moral character and of your Christian conduct. Never seem to be what you are not, or if you must for a while be in that position, count that you are unfortunate and escape from it as soon as you can. Never do what you are ashamed of; it matters not who sees. Think always that God sees, and with God for a witness you have enough of observers. Only do that which you would have done if all eyes were fixed on you, and you were observed even of your most cruel critics. Never stifle conscience. Carry out your convictions. If the skies fall, stand upright. What God's Holy Spirit tells you, that do. What you find in this Book, carry out. If you bring any mischief to other people through it, that is their business. If I keep on the right side of the road and run over anybody—that is his fault; he should have kept out of the way. I would not run over him if I could help it, but I cannot turn aside from the right road. Stand in your place. Let malignant eyes look at you, but like the sun shine on, and if others envy you, yet fret not because of them, neither be you grieved to act the truth, but in this respect again fulfil the text and “buy the truth.”

So have I shown you what the commodity is—doctrinally, experimentally, and practically. “Buy the truth.” Now let us come and think specially to the first part of the text.

II. How this commodity is obtained. “Buy the truth.” Let us correct an error here. Some might suppose that Christ, and the gospel, and salvation—all of which are included in the truth—can be bought. They can, but they cannot. They can in the sense of the text; they cannot in any other sense. You cannot purchase salvation; merit cannot win it. Christ's price is: “Without money and without price.” Has not the prophet so worded it? “Yea, come, buy wine and milk, without money and without price.” Salvation is of free grace, and is from the very necessity of its nature, gratis. You cannot merit it; you cannot earn it. It is not of the will of man, nor of blood, nor of birth, but “he will have mercy on whom he will have mercy, and he will have compassion on whom he will have compassion.”

What then does the text mean? I will try to expound the Word. It means first to be saved, give up everything that must be given up in order to your receiving the free salvation. Every sin must be given up. No man shall go to heaven while he lives in and favours any one sin. A man may sin and be saved, but he cannot love sin and be saved. Give up then thy drunkenness if that be thy sin. Give up then thine unchaste living if that be thy sin. Conquer that angry temper, that love of greed—whatever it is that keeps thee back from Christ. Buy the truth and give up these. Thou wilt not merit salvation then, but if this must be given up let it not stand in thy way. Give it up, man! Since thou canst not have thy sin and have Christ too, get a divorce from thy sin and take holiness, and take the Saviour. Thou must also give up all thy self-righteousness. Some are trusting in their prayers, some are trusting in their tears, their repentances, their feelings, their church-goings, their chapel-goings, and I know not what men will not trust in. Give them all up. They are all lies together. There is no reliance to be placed on anything you can do. Come and trust what Christ has done, and if it be, as it certainly is, needful for you to give up your own righteousness to win Christ and be found in him, then do it, and in this sense part with all you have that you may buy Christ. Yourself, your sinful self, and your righteous self—oh! that you might be willing to part with both that you might buy the true salvation!

And the text means this, again, that if in order to be saved it should cost you a deep experience and much pain, yet never mind it. It is better that you should bear all that and get the truth, than that you should escape without this heart-searching work and be deceived at the last. If the price at which you shall have a true experience is that of sorrow, buy the truth at that price. Be willing

to let the doctor's lancet wound you if thereby he shall heal you. Be willing to lose the right eye or the right hand, if thereby you shall enter into life eternal.

It also means this—buy the truth; that is, be willing at all risks to hold to the truth. Buy it as the martyrs did when they gave their bodies to be burned for it. Buy it as many have done when they have gone to prison for it. Buy it if you should lose your situation for it. Lose your situation sooner than tell a lie. Like the three holy children, be rather willing to go into the fiery furnace than to worship the image which Nebuchadnezzar has set up. Run the risk of being poor. Do not believe, as all the world says, that you must live. There is no absolute necessity for it. Sometimes it is a grander thing to die. Let the necessity be, “We must be honest; we must do the right; we must serve God,” for that is a far greater necessity than that of merely living. Count all things but dross that you may be a true man, a godly man, a holy man, a Christly man, and in this sense make sacrifice of all and thus “buy the truth.”

I think that is what the word means. I expound it to mean this—give anything and everything sooner than part with Christ, than part with the living work of grace in your heart, or part with the integrity of your conduct.

III. And now let me Paraphrase these words. “Buy the truth.” Then I say, buy only the truth. Do not be throwing away your life and your abilities and your zeal and your earnestness, for a lie. Some are doing it. Thousands of pounds are given to erect edifices for doing mischief. Multitudes of sermons are preached very zealously to propagate falsehoods, and sea and land are compassed to make proselytes who shall be ten times more children of hell than they were before. Buy only the truth. Do not buy the glittering stuff they call truth. Never mind the label; look to see if it be truth. Bring everything that is propounded as truth to the test, to the trial. If it will not stand the fire of God's Word then do not buy it; nay, do not have it as a gift; nay, do not keep it in the house. Run away from it. It doth eat as doth a canker; let it not come near you. Buy only the truth.

“Buy the truth” at any price, and sell it at no price. Buy it at any price. If you lose your body for it, if you lose not your soul, you have made a good bargain. If you lose your estate for it, yet if you have heaven in return, how blessed the exchange! You certainly will not need for it to lose your peace of mind, but you may lose everything else, and you shall make a good bargain. Come to no terms with Christ. Throw all into the soul-bargain. Let all go as long as you may but have truth in the doctrine, truth in the heart, and truth in the life, and Christ who is the Truth, to be your treasure for ever.

Buy all the truth. When you come to the Bible do not pick and choose. Do not try to believe half of it, and leave out the other half. Buy the truth—that is, not a section of it that suits your particular idiosyncrasy, but buy the whole. Why need you break up pearls and dissolve them? Buy all that is true. One doctrine of God's Word balances another. He who is altogether and only a Calvinist probably only knows half the truth, but he who is willing to take the other side, as far as it is true, and to believe all he finds in the Word, will get the whole pearl.

Buy now the truth—buy tonight the truth. It may not be for you to buy tomorrow. You may be in that land where God hath cast for ever the lost soul away from all access to the truth, where truth's shadow, cold and chill, shall fall upon you, and you in outer darkness shall weep and wail and gnash your teeth because you shut out truth from you, and now truth has shut you out, and all your knockings at her door shall be answered with the dolorous cry, “Too late, too late! Ye cannot enter now!”

Thus I have paraphrased the text. Buy only the truth; buy all the truth; buy at any price the truth; and buy now the truth.

IV. Briefly let me give you the reasons for this purchase. You want the truth, and you will never be received by God at last unless you bring the truth in your right hand. Only the truthful can enter those gates of pearl. You want the truth now. You are not fit to live any more than to die without an interest in the truth as it is in Jesus. Accept Christ to be truly yours, so truly yours as to make you true. You know not how to fight the battle of life at all without the truth. Your life will be a blunder, and the close of it will be a disaster, except you buy the truth. God grant that you may buy the truth now. You need it. You need it now, and you will for ever need it. Oh! I would to God that that hymn we sang should not merely be heard by you, but felt by you:—

“Hasten, sinner, to be wise,
And stay not for the morrow’s sun.”

Oh! that fatal “tomorrow”! Over the cliffs of “tomorrow” millions have fallen to their ruin. Tomorrow, ay, tomorrow! Here are these put-offs and these delays, and yet God has never given you a promise of mercy tomorrow. His word is “Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.” A better day shall never come than this day. Oh! that you would accept it now.

“If you tarry till you're better,
You will never come at all.”

And till times are more propitious, if you wait you will wait on for ever and for aye. God grant you may buy the truth now, for the text is in the present tense, for now you need it.

V. Let me direct you to the market where you can buy it. These are the words of Jesus Christ when he appeared to his servant John: “I counsel thee, buy of me,” said he. There is no place where truth can be found in its power and life except in Jesus Christ. Truth is in his blood; it will wash away what is false in you. Truth is in his Spirit; it will eradicate what is dark and vile in you. His love will make you true by conforming you to himself. Come to Christ. Bring nothing with you. Come as you are, empty-handed, penniless, and poor. The rills of milk and wells of wine are all with him. He is the banquet-giver, and the banquet too. To trust him is to live. To look to him alone for salvation is to find salvation in that look. Oh! that these simple words might point someone to the place where he shall buy the truth! And now let me repeat my text again, “Buy the truth.”

Do not misread it. It does not say hear about the truth. That is a good thing, but hearing is not buying as many of you tradesmen know to your cost. You may tell people where to go, but you do not want them merely to hear; you are not content with that; you want them to buy. Oh! that some of you my hearers would become buyers of the truth! I know some of you. I happen to look about and find out here and there one—some of you whom I know, and respect, and esteem, and pray for—I had thought that you would have bought the truth long ago, and it often staggers me why you have not. Oh! that you were decided for God! I am afraid I am preaching some of you into a hardened state. If the gospel does not save you it will certainly be a curse to you, and I am afraid it is being so to some of you. Do think of this, I pray you! Why should you and I have the misery of doing each other hurt when our intention is on both sides, I am sure, to do that which is kind and good? Oh! yield you to my Master. The Light of the World with his hand is at your door knocking tonight softly. Do you not hear the knock of the hand that was pierced? Admit him! He comes not in wrath; he comes in mercy. Admit him! He has tarried long, even these many years, but no frown

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is yet upon his brow. Rise now and let him in. Be not ashamed. Though ashamed, be not afraid, but let him in, and blushing with tears in your face say to him, "My Lord, I will trust thee; worthless worm as I am, I will depend upon thee." Oh! that you would do it now this moment! The Lord give you grace to do it! Do not hear about it only, but buy the truth.

Do not merely commend the truth, by saying, "The preacher spoke well, and he spoke earnestly, and I love what he said." The preacher had almost rather that you said nothing than that, if you do not buy the truth. How it provokes the salesman when a customer says, "Yes, it is a beautiful article, and very cheap, and just what I want," and then walks out of the shop. Nay, buy the truth, and you shall commend it better afterwards, and your commendation shall be worth the hearing.

And I pray you, do not stand content with merely knowing about the truth. Oh! how much some of you know. How much more you know than even some of God's people. You could correct many of my blunders. But ah! he that knows is nowhere unless he also has. To know about bread will not stay my hunger; to know that there are riches at the bank will not fill my pocket. Buy the truth as well as know it; that is, make it your own.

And do not, I pray you, intend to buy it. Oh! intentions, intentions, intentions! The road to hell—not hell—that is a mistake of the proverb—the road to hell is paved with good intentions. Oh! ye laggards, pull up the paving-stones and hurl them at the devil's head. He is ruining you; he is decoying you to your destruction. Turn your intentions into actions and no longer intend to buy, but buy the truth.

And do not tonight wish that the truth were yours, but buy it. You say the cost is too great. Too great? It is nothing. It is "without money and without price." Do you mean however to say that it is too great a cost to give up a sin? What, will you burn in hell rather than give up a lust? Will you dwell in everlasting burnings for ever, sooner than give up those cups that intoxicate you? Must you have your silly wantonness and lascivious mirth, or any kind of sin? Must you have it? Will you sooner have it than heaven? Then, sirs, your blood be on your own heads. You have been warned. I hope you are sober and have not yet gone to madness, and if you be you will see that no pleasures of an hour can ever recompense for casting yourselves under the anger of God for ever and for ever. Buy the truth. Do not merely talk about it and wish for it, but buy, buy the truth.

VI. And then lastly a warning as to losing the purchase. "Sell it not." My time has gone, and therefore, as I never like to exceed it, there shall be but these few words. When you have once got the truth, I know you will not sell it. You will not, I am sure, at any price; but the exhortation nevertheless is a most proper one. There have been some who have sold the truth to be respectable. They used to hear the gospel, but now they have got on in the world, and keep a carriage, and they do not like to go where there are so many poor people, so, away they go where they can hear anything or nothing so that they may be respectable. Ah! I have the uttermost contempt for this affectation of gentility and respectability that leads men to be so mean as to forsake their Christian friends. Let them go; they are best gone. Such chaff had better not be with the wheat, and those that can be actuated by such motives are too base to be worth retaining.

Some sell the truth for a livelihood. I pity these far more. "I must have a situation; therefore, I must do what I am told there; I must break this law of God and that for I must keep my family." Ah! poor soul, I pity thine unfortunate position, but I pray that thou mayest have grace even now to play the man and never sell the truth, even for bread.

Some sell the truth for the pleasures of the world. They must have enjoyment, they say, and so they will mingle with the multitude that do evil and give up their Christian profession.

Others seem to sell the truth for nothing at all. They merely go away from Christ because religion has grown stale with them. They are weary of it, and they go away. I shall put the question painfully to all: Will ye also go away? Will ye to be respectable, will ye to have a livelihood, will ye to have the pleasures of sin for a season, will ye out of sheer weariness—will ye go away? Nay, we can add:—

“What anguish has that question stirred,
If I will also go!
Yet, Lord, relying on thy Word,
I humbly answer, No.”

Sell it not; sell it not; it cost Christ too dear. Sell it not; you made a good bargain when you bought it. Sell it not. Sell it not; it has not disappointed you; it has satisfied you and made you blessed. Sell it not; you want it. Sell it not; you will want it. The hour of death is coming on and the day of judgment is close upon its heels. Sell it not; you cannot buy its like again; you can never find a better. Sell it not; you are a lost man if you part with it. Remember Esau and the morsel of meat, and how he would again have found his birthright if he could. Remember Demas; remember Judas, the son of perdition. You are lost without it. It is your life. Skin for skin, yea all that you possess, part with for it, and be resolved, come fair or come foul, come storm or come calm, come sickness or come health, come poverty or come wealth, come death itself in the grimmest form, yet none shall separate you from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus your Lord, and none shall make you part from the truths you have learned and received from his Word, the truths you have felt and have had wrought into your soul by his Spirit, and the truths which in action you desire should tone and colour all your life.

God bless you, dear friends, and keep you, and when the Great Shepherd shall appear may you have the mark of truth upon you, and appear with him in glory.

The Heart: A Gift for God

A sermon (No. 1995) intended for reading on Lord's Day, December 11th, 1887.
at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington,
by C. H. Spurgeon.

“My son, give me thine heart.”—Proverbs 23:26.

These are the words of Solomon speaking in the name of wisdom, which wisdom is but another name for the Lord Jesus Christ, who is made of God unto us wisdom. If you ask “What is the highest wisdom upon the earth?” it is to believe in Jesus Christ whom God has sent—to become his follower and disciple, to trust him and imitate him. It is God in the person of his dear Son who says to each one of us, “My son, give me thine heart.” Can we answer, “Lord, I have given thee my heart”? Then we are his sons. Let us cry, “Abba, Father,” and bless the Lord for the high privilege of being his children. “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the sons of God.”

I. Let us look at this precept, “My son, give me thine heart,” and notice first that love prompts this request of wisdom.

Only love seeks after love. If I desire the love of another it can surely only be because I myself have love toward him. We care not to be loved by those whom we do not love. It were an embarrassment rather than an advantage to receive love from those to whom we would not return it. When God asks human love, it is because God is love. As the sparks mount toward the sun, the central fire, so ought our love to rise toward God, the central source of all pure and holy love. It is an instance of infinite condescension that God should say, “My son, give me thine heart.” Notice the strange position in which it puts God and man; the usual position is for the creature to say to God, “Give me”, but here the Creator cries to feeble man, “Give me.” The Great Benefactor himself becomes the Petitioner—stands at the door of his own creatures and asks, not for offerings, nor for words of praise, but for their hearts. Oh, it must be because of the great love of God that he condescends to put himself into such a position, and if we were right-minded our immediate response would be, “Dost thou seek my heart? here it is, my Lord.” But alas! few thus respond, and none do so except those who are like David, men after God's own heart. When God says to such, “Seek ye my face,” they answer at once “Thy face LORD, will we seek”: but this answer is prompted by divine grace. It can only be love that seeks for love.

Again, it can only be supreme love which leads wisdom to seek after the heart of such poor things as we are. The best saints are poor things; and as for some of us who are not the best, what poor, poor things we are! How foolish! How slow to learn! Does wisdom seek us for scholars? Then wisdom must be of a most condescending kind. We are so guilty, too. We shall rather disgrace than honor the courts of wisdom if she admits us to her school. Yet she says to each of us, “Give me thy heart. Come and learn of me.” Only love can invite such scholars as we are. I am afraid we shall never do much to glorify God; we have but small parts to begin with, and our position is obscure. Yet common-place people though we are, God says to each one of us, “My son, give me thine heart.” Only infinite love would come a-wooing to such wretched hearts as ours.

For what has God to gain? Brothers and sisters, if we did all give our hearts to him in what respect would he be the greater? If we gave him all we have would he be the richer? "The silver and the gold are mine," says he, "and the cattle on a thousand hills. If I were hungry, I would not tell thee." He is too great for us to make him greater, too good for us to make him better, too glorious for us to make him more illustrious. When he comes a-wooing, and cries, "Give me thine heart," it must be for our benefit and not for his own. Surely it is more blessed for us to give than for him to receive. He can gain nothing: we gain everything by the gift. Yet he does gain a son: that is a sweet thought. Everyone that gives God his heart becomes God's son, and a father esteems his children to be treasures; and I reckon that God sets a higher value upon his children than upon all the works of his hand besides. We see the Great Father's likeness in the story of the returning prodigal. The father thought more of his returning son than of all that he possessed besides. "It was meet," said he "that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found." Oh, I tell you, you that do not know the Lord, that if you give your hearts to him you will make him glad! The Eternal Father will be glad to get back his lost son, to press to his bosom a heart warm with affection for him, which heart aforetime had been cold and stony towards him. "My son, give me thine heart," says he, as if he longed for our love and could not bear to have children that had forgotten him. Do you not hear him speak? Speak, Spirit of God, and make each one hear thee say, "My son, give me thine heart"!

You who are sons of God already may take my text as a call to give God your heart anew, for—I do not know how it is—men are wonderfully scarce now; and men with hearts are rare. If preachers had larger hearts they would move more people to hear them. A sermon preached without love falls flat and dead. We have heard sermons, admirable in composition and excellent in doctrine, but like that palace which the Empress of Russia built upon the Neva of blocks of ice. Nothing more lustrous, nothing more sharply cut, nothing more charming; but oh, so cold, so very cold! Its very beauty a frost to the soul! "My son," says God to every preacher, "give me thine heart." O minister, if thou canst not speak with eloquent tongue, at least let thy heart run over like burning lava from thy lips! Let thy heart be like a geyser, scalding all that come near thee, permitting none to remain indifferent. You that teach in the school, you that work for God anyhow, do it thoroughly well. "Give me thine heart, my son," says God. It is one of the first and last qualifications of a good workman for God that he should put his heart into his work. I have heard mistresses tell servants when polishing tables that elbow-grease was a fine thing for such work; and so it is. Hard work is a splendid thing. It will make a way under a river, or through an Alp. Hard work will do almost everything; but in God's service it must not only be hard work, but hot work. The heart must be on fire. The heart must be set upon its design. See how a child cries! Though I am not fond of hearing it, yet I note that some children cry all over: when they want a thing, they cry from the tips of their toes to the last hair of their heads. That is the way to preach, and that is the way to pray, and that is the way to live: the whole man must be heartily engaged in holy work. Love prompts the request of wisdom. God knows that in his service we shall be miserable unless our hearts are fully engaged. Whenever we feel that preaching is heavy work, and Sunday-school teaching after six days' labor is tiresome, and going round a district with tracts is a terrible task—then we shall do nothing well. Put your heart into your service and all will be joyful, but not else.

II. Now I turn my text another way. Wisdom persuades us to obey this loving request. To take our hearts and give them up to God is the wisest thing that we can do. If we have done it before,

we had better do it over again, and hand over once more the sacred deposit into those dear hands which will surely keep that which we commit to their guardian care. "My son, give me thine heart."

Wisdom prompts us to do it; for first, many others crave our hearts, and our hearts will surely go one way or other. Let us see to it that they do not go where they will be ruined. I will not read you the next verse, but many a man has lost his heart and soul eternally by the lusts of the flesh. He has perished through "her that lieth in wait as for a prey, and increaseth the transgressors among men." Happy is that young man whose heart is never defiled with vice! There is no way of being kept from impurity except by giving up the heart to the holy Lord. In a city like this, the most pure-minded are surrounded with innumerable temptations; and many there are that slip with their feet before they are aware of it, being carried away because they have not time to think before the temptation has cast them to the ground. "Therefore, my son," says wisdom, "give me thine heart. Everybody will try to steal thy heart, therefore leave it in my charge. Then thou needest not fear the fascinations of the strange woman for I have thy heart, and I will keep it safe unto the day of my appearing." It is most wise to give Jesus our heart, for seducers will seek after it.

There is another destroyer of souls. I will not say much about it, but I will just read you what the context saith of it— "Who hath woe? Who hath sorrow? Who hath contentions? Who hath babbling? Who hath wounds without cause? Who hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine. They that go to seek mixed wine. Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his color in the cup, when it moveth itself aright. At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder. Thine eyes shall behold strange women, and thine heart shall utter perverse things." Read carefully the rest of the chapter, and then hear the voice of wisdom say, "My son, if thou wouldst be kept from drunkenness and gluttony, from wantonness and chambering, and everything that the heart inclineth to, give me thy heart."

It is well to guard your heart with all the apparatus that wisdom can provide. It is well totally to abstain from that which becomes a snare to you: but I charge you, do not rely upon abstinence but give your heart to Jesus; for nothing short of true godliness will preserve you from sin so that you shall be presented faultless before his presence with exceeding great joy. As you would wish to preserve an unblemished character and be found honorable to the end, my son I charge thee give to Christ thy heart.

Wisdom urges to immediate decision because it is well to have a heart at once occupied and taken up by Christ. It is an empty heart that the devil enters. You know how the boys always break the windows of empty houses, and the devil throws stones wherever the heart is empty. If you can say to the devil when you are tempted, "You are too late: I have given my heart to Christ, I cannot listen to your overtures, I am affianced to the Savior by bonds of love that never can be broken," what a blessed safeguard you have! I know of nothing that can so protect the young man in these perilous days as to be able to sing "O God, my heart is fixed; my heart is fixed! Others may flit to and fro and seek something to light upon, but my heart is fixed upon thee for ever. I am unable to turn aside through thy sweet grace." "My son," says the text, "give me thine heart" that Christ may dwell there, that when Satan comes, the One who is stronger than the strong man armed may keep his house, and drive the foeman back.

Give Jesus your hearts beloved friends, for wisdom bids you do it at once because it will please God. Have you a friend to whom you wish to make a present? I know what you do: you try to find out what that friend would value, for you say, "I should like to give him what would please him." Do you want to give God something that is sure to please him? You need not build a church of

matchless architecture—I do not know that God cares much about stones and wood. You need not wait till you shall have amassed money to endow a row of almshouses. It is well to bless the poor, but Jesus said that one who gave two mites, which made a farthing, gave more than all the rich men who cast in of their wealth into the treasury. What would God my Father like me to give? He answers, “My son, give me thine heart.” He will be pleased with that, for he himself seeks the gift.

If there are any here to whom this day is an anniversary of birth or of marriage, or of some other joyful occasion, let them make a present to God and give him their hearts. It is wonderful that he should word it so. “My son, give me thine heart.” I should not have dared to say such a thing if he had not said it, but he does put it so. This will please him better than a bullock that hath horns and hoofs, better than smoking incense in the silver censer, better than all you can contrive of art or purchase by wealth, or design for beauty. “My son, give me thine heart.”

For notice, again, that if you do not give him your heart you cannot please him at all. You may give God what you please, but without your heart it is all an abomination to him. To pray without your heart is solemn mockery; to sing without your heart is an empty sound; to give, to teach, to work without your heart is all an insult to the Most High. You cannot do God any service till you give him your heart. You must begin with this. Then shall your hand and purse give what they will, and your tongue and brain shall give what they can; but first your heart—first your heart—your inmost self—your love—your affection. You must give him your heart or you give him nothing.

And does he not deserve it? I am not going to use that argument because somehow if you press a man to give a thing, at last it comes not to be a gift but a tax. Our consecration to God must be unquestionable in its freeness. Religion is voluntary or else false. If I shall prove that your heart is God’s due, why then, you will not give but rather pay as though it were a debt; so I will touch that string very gently, lest in seeking to bring forth music I snap the chord. I will put it thus: surely it were well to give a heart for a heart. There was One who came and took human nature on him and wore a human heart within his bosom, and that human heart was pressed full sore with sorrow till it is written that he wept. It was pressed still more with anguish till it is written, “He sweat as it were great drops of blood falling to the ground.” He was still further overwhelmed with grief till at last he said, “Reproach hath broken my heart, and I am full of heaviness;” and then it is written, “One of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water.” A heart was given for you, will you not give your heart? I say no more.

I was about to say that I wished I could bring my Master here to stand on this platform, that you might see him; but I know that faith comes by hearing, not by seeing. Yet would I set him forth evidently crucified among you, and for you. Oh, give him then a heart for a heart, and yield yourself up to him! Is there not a sweet whisper in your spirit now that says, “Yield thy heart”? Harken to that still small voice and there shall be no need that I speak farther.

Believe me beloved friends, there is no getting wisdom except you give your heart to it. There is no understanding the science of Christ crucified, which is the most excellent of all the sciences, without giving your heart to it. Some of you have been trying to be religious. You have been trying to be saved, but you have done it in an off-handed sort of style. “My son, give me thine heart.” Wisdom suggests to you that you should do it, for unless your whole heart is thrown into it you will never prosper in it. Certain men never get on in business; they do not like their trade and so they never prosper. And certainly in the matter of religion no man can ever prosper if he does not love it, if his whole heart is not in it. Some people have just enough religion to make them miserable. If they had none, they would be able to enjoy the world; but they have too much religion to be able

to enjoy the world, and yet not enough to enjoy the world to come. Oh, you poor betweenities—you that hang like Mahomet's coffin, between earth and heaven—you that are like bats, neither birds nor beasts—you that are like a flying fish that tries to live in the air and water too and finds enemies in both elements—you that are neither this, nor that, nor the other, strangers in God's country, and yet not able to make yourselves at home with the devil—I do pity you. Oh, that I could give you a tug to get you to this side of the border-land! My Master bids me compel you to come in; but what can I do except repeat the message of the text? "My son, give me thine heart." Do not be shilly-shallying any longer. Let your heart go one way or the other. If the devil be worth loving, give him your heart and serve him; but if Christ be worth loving, give him your heart and have done with hesitation. Turn over to Jesus once for all. Oh, may his Spirit turn you, and you shall be turned, and his name shall have the praise!

III. And now I close with the third observation. Let us be wise enough at once to attend to this admonition of wisdom. Let us now give God our heart. "My son, give me thine heart."

When? At once. There is no intimation that God would have us wait a little. I wish that those persons who only mean to wait a little would fix a time when they will leave off waiting. They are always going to be right to-morrow. Which day of the month is that? I have searched the calendar and cannot find it. I have heard that there is such a thing as the fool's calendar, and that to-morrow is there; but then you are not fools and do not keep such a calendar. To-morrow, to-morrow, to-morrow, to-morrow, to-morrow, to-morrow; it is a raven's croak of evil omen. To-day, to-day, to-day, to-day, to-day; that is the silver trumpet of salvation, and he that hears it shall live. God grant that we may not for ever be crying out, "to-morrow," but at once give our hearts to him!

How? If we attend to this precept we shall notice that it calls upon us to act freely. "My son, give me thine heart." Do not need to have it led in fetters. It might, as I have already said, prevent a thing from being a gift if you too pressingly proved that it was due. It is due, but God puts it, as it were, upon free-will for once, and leaves it to free agency. He says, "My son, give me thine heart. All that thou hast from me comes as a gift of free grace; now give me back thy heart freely." Remember, wherever we speak about the power of grace we do not mean a physical force, but only such force as may be applied to free agents, and to responsible beings. The Lord begs you not to want to be crushed and pounded into repentance, nor whipped and spurred to holy living. But "My son, give me thine heart." I have heard that the richest juice of the grape is that which comes with the slightest pressure at the first touch. Oh, to give God our freest love! You know the old proverb that one volunteer is worth two pressed men. We shall all be pressed men in a certain sense; but yet it is written, "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power." May you be willing at once!

"My son, give me thine heart." It seems a pity that a man should have to live a long life of sin to learn that sin does not pay. It is a sad case when he comes to God with all his bones broken, and enlists in the divine army after he has spent all his youth in the service of the devil and has worn himself out. Christ will have him whenever he comes; but how much better it is while yet you are in the days of your youth to say, "Here, Lord, I give thee my heart. Constrained by thy sweet love I yield to thee in the dawn of my being"!

Now that is what the text means: give God your heart at once, and do it freely.

Do it thoroughly. "My son, give me thine heart." You cannot give Christ a piece of a heart, for a heart that is halved is killed. A heart that has even a little bit taken off is a dead heart. The devil does not mind having half your heart. He is quite satisfied with that, because he is like the woman

to whom the child did not belong: he does not mind if it be cut in halves. The true mother of the child said, "Oh, spare the child! Do not divide it;" and so Christ who is the true Lover of hearts will not have the heart divided. If it must go one way, and the wrong way, let it go that way: but if it will go the right way he is ready to accept it, cleanse it, and perfect it; only it must go all together and not be divided. "Give me thine heart."

Did I hear somebody say, "I am willing to give God my heart?" Very well then, let us look at it practically. Where is it now? You cannot give your heart up till you find out where it is. I knew a man who lost his heart. His wife had not got it and his children had not got it, and he did not seem as if he had got it himself. "That is odd," say you. Well, he used to starve himself; he scarcely had enough to eat. His clothes were threadbare. He starved all who were round him. He did not seem to have a heart. A poor woman owed him a little rent. Out she went into the street. He had no heart. A person had fallen back a little in the payment of money that he had lent him. The debtor's little children were crying for bread. The man did not care who cried for hunger, or what became of the children. He would have his money. He had lost his heart. I never could make out where it was till I went to his house one day and I saw a huge chest. I think they called it an iron safe. It stood behind the door of an inner room, and when he unlocked it with a heavy key and the bolts were shot, and the inside was opened, there was a musty, fussy thing within it, as dry and dead as the kernel of a walnut seven years old. It was his heart. If you have locked up your heart in an iron safe, get it out. Get it out as quickly as ever you can. It is a horrible thing to pack up a heart in five-pound notes, or bury it under heaps of silver and gold. Hearts are never healthy when covered up with hard metal. Your gold and silver are cankered if your heart is bound up with them.

I knew a young lady—I think I know several of that sort now—whose heart I could never see. I could not make out why she was so flighty, giddy, frothy, till I discovered that she had kept her heart in a wardrobe. A poor prison for an immortal soul, is it not? You had better fetch it out before the moth eats it as wool. When our garments become the idols of our hearts we are such foolish things that we can hardly be said to have hearts at all. Even such foolish hearts as these, it were well to get out of the wardrobe and give to Christ.

Where is your heart? I have known some leave it at the public-house, and some in places that I shall not mention lest the cheek of modesty should crimson. But wherever your heart is, it is in the wrong place if it is not with Christ. Go, fetch it, sir. Bring it here, and give it into the hand of him that bought it.

But in what state is it? "Ay, there's the rub." For as I told you that the miser's heart was musty and fussy, so men's hearts begin to smell of the places wherein they keep them. Some women's hearts are mouldy and ragged through their keeping them in the wardrobe. Some men's hearts are cankered through keeping them among their gold; and some are rotten through and through, through keeping them steeped in vice. Where is the drunkard's heart? In what state must it be? Foul and filthy. Still God says, "Give me thine heart." What! such a thing as that? Yes, did I not tell you that when he asked for your heart it was all for love of you, and not for what he should get out of you; for what is such a heart as yours, my friend, that has been in such a place and fallen into such a state? Yet still give it to him, for I will tell you what he will do: he will work wonders for your heart. You have heard of alchemists who took base metal, so they say, and transmuted it into gold: the Lord will do more than this. "Give me thine heart." Poor, filthy, defiled, polluted, depraved heart!—give it to him. It is stony now, corrupted now. He will take it, and in those sacred hands of Christ that heart shall lie, till, in its place you shall see a heart of flesh; pure, clean, heavenly.

“Oh,” say you, “I never could make out what to do with my hard heart.” Give it now to Christ and he will change it. Yield it up to the sweet power of his infinite grace and he will renew a right spirit within you. God help you to give Jesus your heart, and to do it now!

There is going to be a collection for the hospitals. Stop, you collectors, till I have said my last word. What are you going to give? I do not mind what you are going to put into the boxes, but I want to pass round an invisible plate for my Lord. I desire to pass it round to all of you; and please will you say to yourself when you drop your money into the box, “I am going to drop my heart into the invisible collection, and give it up to Jesus. It is all that I can do.” Collectors, pass round the boxes, and thou O Spirit of God, go from man to man and take possession of all hearts for Jesus our Lord! Amen.

Portion of Scripture read before sermon—Proverbs 8.
Hymns from “Our Own Hymn Book”—428, 522, 797.

The Broken Fence

A sermon (No. 3381) published on Thursday, November 20th 1913.
Delivered by C. H. Spurgeon at the Metropolitan Tabernacle,
Newington.

“I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding; and to, it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall thereof was broken down, Then I saw, and considered it well: I looked upon it and received instruction.”—Proverbs 24:30-32.

This slothful man did no hurt to his fellow-men: he was not a thief, nor a ruffian, nor a meddler in anybody else’s business. He did not trouble himself about other men’s concerns for he did not even attend to his own—it required too much exertion. He was not grossly vicious; he had not energy enough to care for that. He was one who liked to take things easily. He always let well alone, and for the matter of that, he let ill alone too, as the nettles and the thistles in his garden plainly proved. What was the use of disturbing himself? It would be all the same a hundred years hence, and so he took things just as they came. He was not a bad man, so some said of him; and yet perhaps it will be found at last that there is no worse man in the world than the man who is not good, for in some respects he is not good enough to be bad; he has not enough force of character about him to serve either God or Baal. He simply serves himself, worshipping his own ease and adoring his own comfort. Yet he always meant to be right. He was not going to sleep much longer; he would only have forty winks more and then he would be at his work and show you what he could do. One of these days he meant to be thoroughly in earnest, and make up for lost time. The time never actually came for him to begin, but it was always coming. He always meant to repent, but he went on in his sin. He meant to believe, but he died an unbeliever. He meant to be a Christian, but he lived without Christ. He halted between two opinions because he could not trouble himself to make up his mind; and so he perished of delay.

This picture of the slothful man and his garden and field overgrown with nettles and weeds represents many a man who has professed to be a Christian, but who has become slothful in the things of God. Spiritual life has withered in him. He has backslidden; he has come down from the condition of healthy spiritual energy into one of listlessness and indifference to the things of God; and while things have gone wrong within his heart and all sorts of mischiefs have come into him and grown up and seeded themselves in him, mischief is also taking place externally in his daily conduct. The stone wall which guarded his character is broken down, and he lies open to all evil. Upon this point we will now meditate. “The stone wall thereof was broken down.”

Come then, let us take a walk with Solomon and stand with him and consider and learn instruction while we look at this broken-down fence. When we have examined it, let us consider the consequences of broken-down walls; and then in the last place, let us try to rouse up this sluggard that his wall may yet be repaired. If this slothful person should be one of ourselves, may God’s infinite mercy rouse us up before this ruined wall has let in a herd of prowling vices.

I. First, let us take a look at this broken fence. You will see that in the beginning it was a very good fence, for it was a stone wall. Fields are often surrounded with wooden palings which soon

decay, or with hedges which may very easily have gaps made in them; but this was a stone wall. Such walls are very usual in the East, and are also common in some of our own counties where stone is plentiful. It was a substantial protection to begin with, and well shut in the pretty little estate which had fallen into such bad hands. The man had a field for agricultural purposes and another strip of land for a vineyard or a garden. It was fertile soil, for it produced thorns and nettles in abundance, and where these flourish better things can be produced; yet the idler took no care of his property, but allowed the wall to get into bad repair and in many places to be quite broken down.

Let me mention some of the stone walls that men permit to be broken down when they backslide. In many cases sound principles were instilled in youth, but these are forgotten. What a blessing is Christian education! Our parents, both by persuasion and example, taught many of us the things that are pure and honest and of good repute. We saw in their lives how to live. They also opened the Word of God before us, and they taught us the ways of right both toward God and toward men. They prayed for us and they prayed with us till the things of God were placed round about us and shut us in as with a stone wall. We have never been able to get rid of our early impressions. Even in times of wandering, before we knew the Lord savingly, these things had a healthy power over us; we were checked when we would have done evil, we were assisted when we were struggling towards Christ. It is very sad when people permit these first principles to be shaken and to be removed like stones which fall from a boundary wall. Young persons begin at first to talk lightly of the old-fashioned ways of their parents. By-and-by it is not merely the old-fashionedness of the ways, but the ways themselves that they despise. They seek other company, and from that other company they learn nothing but evil. They seek pleasure in places which it horrifies their parents to consider. This leads to worse, and if theft do not bring their fathers' grey hairs with sorrow to the grave, it is no virtue of theirs. I have known young men who really were Christians sadly backslide through being induced to modify, conceal, or alter those holy principles in which they were trained from their mother's knee. It is a great calamity when professedly converted men become unfixed, unstable, and carried about with every wind of doctrine. It shows great faultiness of mind and unsoundness of heart when we can trifle with those grave and solemn truths which have been sanctified by a mother's tears, and by a father's earnest life. "I am thy servant," said David, "and the son of thy handmaid": he felt it to be a high honor, and at the same time a sacred bond which bound him to God, that he was the son of one who could be called God's handmaid. Take care you who have had Christian training, that you do not trifle with it. "My son, keep thy father's commandment and forsake not the law of thy mother: bind them continually upon thine heart and tie them about thy neck."

Protection to character is also found in the fact that solid doctrines have been learned. This is a fine stone wall. Many among us have been taught the gospel of the grace of God and have learned it well, so that they are able to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints. Happy are they who have a religion that is grounded upon a clear knowledge of eternal verities. A religion which is all excitement and has little instruction in it may serve for transient use, but for permanent life-purposes there must be a knowledge of those great doctrines which are fundamental to the gospel system. I tremble when I hear of a man's giving up, one by one, the vital principles of the gospel and boasting of his liberality. I hear him say, "These are my views, but others have a right to their views also." That is a very proper expression in reference to mere "views," but we may not thus speak of truth itself as revealed by God; that is one and unalterable, and all are bound to receive it. It is not your view of truth, for that is a dim thing; but the very truth itself which will save you

if your faith embraces it. I will readily yield my way of stating a doctrine, but not the doctrine itself. One man may put it in this way, and one in another; but the truth itself must never be given up. The spirit of the Broad School robs us of everything like certainty. I should like to ask some great men of that order whether they believe that anything is taught in the Scriptures which it would be worth while for a person to die for, and whether the martyrs were not great fools for laying down their lives for mere opinions which might be right or might be wrong. This broad-churchism is a breaking down of stone walls, and it will let in the devil and all his crew, and do infinite harm to the church of God if it be not stopped. A loose state of belief does great damage to any man's mind.

We are not bigots, but we should be none the worse if we so lived that men called us so. I met a man the other day who was accused of bigotry, and I said, "Give me your hand, old fellow. I like to meet with bigots now and then for the fine old creatures are getting scarce, and the stuff they are made of is so good that if there were more of it, we might see a few men among us again and fewer mollusks." Lately we have seen few men with backbone; the most have been of the jelly-fish order. I have lived in times in which I should have said, "Be liberal, and shake off all narrowness"; but now I am obliged to alter my tone and cry "Be steadfast in the truth." The faith once delivered to the saints is now all the more attractive to me because it is called narrow, for I am weary of that breadth which comes of broken hedges. There are fixed points of truth and definite certainties of creed, and woe to you if you allow these stone walls to crumble down. I fear me that the slothful are a numerous band, and that ages to come may have to deplore the laxity which has been applauded by this negligent generation.

Another fence which is too often neglected is that of godly habits which had been formed; the sluggard allows this wall to be broken down. I will mention some valuable guards of life and character. One is the habit of secret prayer. Private prayer should be regularly offered, at least in the morning and in the evening. We cannot do without set seasons for drawing near to God. To look into the face of man without having first seen the face of God is very dangerous: to go out into the world without locking up the heart and giving God the key is to leave it open to all sorts of spiritual vagrants. At night, again, to go to your rest as the swine roll into their sty without thanking God for the mercies of the day is shameful. The evening sacrifice should be devoutly offered as surely as we have enjoyed the evening fireside: we should thus put ourselves under the wings of the Preserver of men. It may be said, "We can pray at all times." I know we can; but I fear that those who do not pray at stated hours seldom pray at all. Those who pray in season are the most likely persons to pray at all seasons. Spiritual life does not care for a cast-iron regulation, but since life casts itself into some mold or other, I would have you careful of its external habit as well as its internal power. Never allow great gaps in the wall of your habitual private prayer.

I go a step farther, I believe that there is a great guardian power about family prayer, and I feel greatly distressed because I know that very many Christian families neglect it. Romanism at one time could do nothing in England because it could offer nothing but the shadow of what Christian men already had in substance. "Do you hear that bell tinkling in the morning! What is that for! To go to church to pray." "Indeed," said the Puritan, "I have no need to go there to pray. I have had my children together and we have read a passage of Scripture, and prayed, and sang the praises of God, and we have a church in our house." Ah! there goes that bell again in the evening. What is that for? Why, it is the vesper bell. The good man answered that he had no need to trudge a mile or two for that, for his holy vespers had been said and sung around his own table, of which the big Bible was the chief ornament. They told him that there could be no service without a priest, but he

replied that every godly man should be a priest in his own house. Thus have the saints defied the overtures of priestcraft, and kept the faith from generation to generation. Household devotion and the pulpit are, under God, the stone walls of Protestantism, and my prayer is that these may not be broken down.

Another fence to protect piety is found in weeknight services. I notice that when people forsake weeknight meetings, firm power of their religion evaporates. I do not speak of those lawfully detained to watch the sick, and attend to farm-work and other business, or as domestic servants and the like; there are exceptions to all rules: but I mean those who could attend if they had a mind to do so. When people say, "It is quite enough for me to be wearied with the sermons of the Sunday; I do not want to go out to prayer-meetings and lectures and so forth"—then it is clear that they have no appetite for the Word, and surely this is a bad sign. If you have a bit of wall built to protect the Sunday, and then six times the distance left without a fence, I believe that Satan's cattle will get in and do no end of mischief.

Take care also of the stone wall of Bible reading and of speaking often one to another concerning the things of God. Associate with the godly and commune with God, and you will thus by the blessing of God's Spirit keep up a good fence against temptations, which otherwise will get into the fields of your soul and devour all goodly fruits.

Many have found much protection for the field of daily life in the stone wall of a public profession of faith. I am speaking to you who are real believers, and I know that you have often found it a great safeguard to be known and recognized as a follower of Jesus. I have never regretted—and I never shall regret—the day on which I walked to the little river Lark in Cambridgeshire, and was there buried with Christ in baptism. In this I tread contrary to the opinions of all my friends whom I respected and esteemed; but as I had read the Greek Testament for myself I felt bound to be immersed upon the profession of my faith, and I was so. By that act I said to the world, "I am dead to you and buried to you in Christ, and I hope henceforth to live in newness of life." That day, by God's grace, I imitated the tactics of the general who meant to fight the enemy till he conquered, and therefore he burned his boats that there might be no way of retreat. I believe that a solemn confession of Christ before men is as a thorn hedge to keep one within bounds, and to keep off those who hope to draw you aside. Of course it is nothing but a hedge and it is of no use to fence in a field of weeds, but when wheat is growing a hedge is of great consequence. You who imagine that you can be the Lord's and yet lie open like a common field are under a great error; you ought to be distinguished from the world, and obey the voice which saith, "Come ye out from among them, be ye separate." The promise of salvation is to the man who with his heart believeth, and with his mouth confesseth. Say right boldly, "Let others do as they will; as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." By this act you come out into the king's highway and put yourself under the protection of the Lord of pilgrims, and he will take care of you. Oftentimes when otherwise you might have hesitated, you will say, "The vows of the Lord are upon me: how can I draw back?" I pray you then, set up the stone wall and keep it up, and if it has at any corner been tumbled over set it up again, and let it be seen by your conduct and conversation that you are a follower of Jesus and are not ashamed to have it known.

Keep to your religious principles like men, and do not turn aside for the sake of gain or respectability. Do not let wealth break down your wall, for I have known some make a great gap to let their carriage go through, and to let in wealthy worldlings for the sake of their society. Those who forsake their principles to please men will in the end be lightly esteemed, but he who is faithful

shall have the honor which cometh from God. Look well to this hedge of steadfast adherence to the faith and you shall find a great blessing in it.

There is yet another stone wall which I will mention, namely, firmness of character. Our holy faith teaches a man to be decided in the cause of Christ, and to be resolute in getting rid of evil habits. "If thine eye offend thee"—wear a shade? No; "pluck it out." "If thine arm offend thee"—hang it in a sling? No; "cut it off and cast it from thee." True religion is very thorough in what it recommends. It says to us, "touch not the unclean thing." But many persons are so idle in the ways of God that they have no mind of their own: evil companions tempt them and they cannot say "No." They need a stone wall made up of noes. Here are the stones, "no, no, no." Dare to be singular. Resolve to keep close to Christ. Make a stern determination to permit nothing in your life, however gainful or pleasurable, if it would dishonor the name of Jesus. Be dogmatically true, obstinately holy, immovably honest, desperately kind, fixedly upright. If God's grace sets up this hedge around you, even Satan will feel that he cannot get in and will complain to God, "hast thou not set a hedge about him?" I have kept you long enough looking over the wall; let me invite you in, and for a few minutes let us—

II. Consider the consequences of a broken-down fence. To make short work of it, first, the boundary has gone. Those lines of separation which were kept up by the good principles which were instilled in him by religious habits, by a bold profession, and by a firm resolve, have vanished, and now the question is, "Is he a Christian, or is he not?" The fence is so far gone that he does not know which is his Lord's property and which remains an open common: in fact, he does not know whether he himself is included in the Royal domain or left to be mere waste of the world's manor. This is for want of keeping up the fences. If that man had lived near to God, if he had walked in his integrity, if the Spirit of God had richly rested on him in all holy living and waiting upon God, he would have known where the boundary was and he would have seen whether his land lay in the parish of All-saints, or in the region called No-man's-land, or in the district where Satan is the lord of the manor. I heard of a dear old saint the other day who when she was near to death, was attacked by Satan, and waving her finger at the enemy in her gentle way she routed him by saying, "Chosen! chosen! chosen!" She knew that she was chosen, and she remembered the text, "The LORD that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee." When the wall stands in its integrity all round the field, we can resist the devil by bidding him leave the Lord's property alone. "Begone! Look somewhere else. I belong to Christ, not to you." To do this you must mend the hedges well so that there shall be a clear boundary line, and you can say "Trespassers, beware!" Do not yield an inch to the enemy, but make the wall all the higher the more he seeks to enter. O that this adversary may never find a gap to enter by.

Next, when the wall has fallen, the protection is gone. When a man's heart has its wall broken, all his thoughts will go astray and wander upon the mountains of vanity. Like sheep, thoughts need careful folding or they will be off in no time. "I hate vain thoughts," said David, but slothful men are sure to have plenty of them, for there is no keeping your thoughts out of vanity unless you stop every gap and shut every gate. Holy thoughts, comfortable meditations, devout longings, and gracious communings will be off and gone if we sluggishly allow the stone wall to get out of repair.

Nor is this all, for as good things go out so bad things come in. When the wall is gone every passer-by sees as it were an invitation to enter. You have set before him an open door, and in he comes. Are there fruits? He plucks them of course. He walks about as if it were a public place, and he pries everywhere. Is there any secret corner of your heart which you would keep for Jesus? Satan

or the world will walk in; and do you wonder? Every passing goat, or roaming ox, or stray ass visits the growing crops and spoils more than he eats, and who can blame the creature when the gaps are so wide? All manner of evil lusts and desires and imaginations prey upon an unfenced soul. It is of no use for you to say, "Lead us not into temptation." God will hear your prayer and he will not lead you there, but you are leading yourself into it, you are tempting the devil to tempt you. If you leave yourself open to evil influences the Spirit of God will be grieved, and he may leave you to reap the result of your folly. What think you, friend! Had you not better attend to your fences at once?

And then there is another evil, for the land itself will go away. "No," say you, "how can that be?" If a stone wall is broken down round a farm in England a man does not thereby lose his land, but in many parts of Palestine the land is all ups and downs on the sides of the hills, and every bit of ground is terraced and kept up by walls. When the walls fall the soil slips over, terrace upon terrace, and the vines and trees go down with it; then the rain comes and washes the soil away and nothing is left but barren crags which would starve a lark. In the same manner a man may so neglect himself and so neglect the things of God, and become so careless and indifferent about doctrine and about holy living, that his power to do good ceases, and his mind, his heart, and his energy seem to be gone. The prophet said, "Ephraim is a silly dove, without heart": there are flocks of such silly doves. The man who trifles with religion sports with his own soul and will soon degenerate into so much of a trifler that he will be averse to solemn thought, and incapable of real usefulness. I charge you dear friends to be sternly true to yourselves and to your God. Stand to your principles in this evil and wicked day. Now, when everything seems to be turned into marsh and mire and mud, and religious thought appears to be silently sliding and slipping along, descending like a stream of slime into the Dead Sea of Unbelief—get solid walls built around your life, around your faith, and around your character. Stand fast, and having done all, still stand. May God the Holy Ghost cause you to be rooted and grounded, built up and established, fixed and confirmed, never "casting away your confidence which hath great recompense of reward."

III. Lastly, I want if I can to wake up the sluggard. I would like to throw a handful of gravel up to his window. It is time to get up, for the sun has drunk up all the dew. He craves "a little more sleep." My dear fellow, if you take a little more sleep you will never wake at all till you lift up your eyes in another world. Wake at once. Leap from your bed before you are smothered in it. Wake up! Do you not see where you are? You have let things alone till your heart is covered with sins like weeds. You have neglected God and Christ till you have grown worldly, sinful, careless, indifferent, ungodly. I mean some of you who were once named with the sacred name. You have become like worldlings and are almost as far from being what you ought to be as others who make no profession at all. Look at yourselves, and see what has come of your neglected walls. Then look at some of your fellow-Christians and mark how diligent they are. Look at many among them who are poor and illiterate, and yet they are doing far more than you for the Lord Jesus. In spite of your talents and opportunities, you are an unprofitable servant, letting all things run to waste. Is it not time that you bestirred yourself? Look again at others who like yourself went to sleep, meaning to wake in a little while. What has become of them? Alas! for those who have fallen into gross sin and dishonored their character and who have been put away from the church of God; yet they only went a little further than you have done. Your state of heart is much the same as theirs, and if you should be tempted as they have been you will probably make shipwreck as they have done. Oh!

see to it, you that slumber, for an idle professor is ready for anything. A slothful professor's heart is tinder for the devil's tinder-box: does your heart thus invite the sparks of temptation?

Remember lastly the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. Shall he come and find you sleeping? Remember the judgment. What will you say to excuse yourself for opportunities lost, time wasted, and talents wrapped up in a napkin when the Lord shall come?

As for you my unconverted friend, if you go dreaming through this world without any sort of trouble and never look to the state of your heart at all, you will be a lost man beyond all question. The slothful can have no hope, for "if the righteous scarcely are saved" who strive to serve their Lord, where will those appear who sleep-on in defiance of the calls of God? Salvation is wholly and alone of grace as you well know; but grace never works in men's minds towards slumbering and indifference; it tends towards energy, activity, fervor, importunity, self-sacrifice. God grant us the indwelling of his Holy Spirit that all things may be set in order, sins cut up by the roots within the heart, and the whole man protected by sanctifying grace from the wasters which lurk around, hoping to enter where the wall is low. O Lord, remember us in mercy, fence us about by thy power, and keep us from the sloth which would expose us to evil, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

The Sluggard's Farm

A sermon (No. 2027) intended for reading on Lord's Day, June 3rd 1888, delivered by C. H. Spurgeon at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington.

"I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding; And, lo, it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall thereof was broken down. Then I saw, and considered it well: I looked upon it, and received instruction."—Proverbs 24:30-32.

No doubt Solomon was sometimes glad to lay aside the robes of state, escape from the forms of court, and go through the country unknown. On one occasion when he was doing so he looked over the broken wall of a little estate which belonged to a farmer of his country. This estate consisted of a piece of ploughed land and a vineyard. One glance showed him that it was owned by a sluggard who neglected it, for the weeds had grown right plentifully and covered all the face of the ground. From this Solomon gathered instruction. Men generally learn wisdom if they have wisdom. The artist's eye sees the beauty of the landscape because he has beauty in his mind. "To him that hath shall be given," and he shall have abundance, for he shall reap a harvest even from a field that is covered with thorns and nettles. There is a great difference between one man and another in the use of the mind's eye. I have a book entitled "The Harvest of a Quiet Eye," and a good book it is: the harvest of a quiet eye can be gathered from a sluggard's land as well as from a well-managed farm. When we were boys we were taught a little poem called "Eyes and no Eyes," and there was much of truth in it, for some people have eyes and see not, which is much the same as having no eyes; while others have quick eyes for spying out instruction. Some look only at the surface, while others see not only the outside shell but the living kernel of truth which is hidden in all outward things.

We may find instruction everywhere. To a spiritual mind nettles have their use and weeds have their doctrine. Are not all thorns and thistles meant to be teachers to sinful men? Are they not brought forth of the earth on purpose that they may show us what sin has done, and the kind of produce that will come when we sow the seed of rebellion against God? "I went by the field of the slothful and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding," says Solomon; "I saw and considered it well: I looked upon it and received instruction." Whatever you see, take care to consider it well, and you will not see it in vain. You shall find books and sermons everywhere, in the land and in the sea, in the earth and in the skies, and you shall learn from every living beast and bird and fish and insect, and from every useful or useless plant that springs out of the ground. We may also gather rare lessons from things that we do not like. I am sure that Solomon did not in the least degree admire the thorns and the nettles that covered the face of the vineyard, but he nevertheless found instruction in them. Many are stung by nettles, but few are taught by them. Some men are hurt by briars, but here is one who was improved by them. Wisdom hath a way of gathering grapes of thorns and figs of nettles, and she distills good from herbs which in themselves are noisome and evil. Do not fret therefore over thorns, but get good out of them. Do not begin stinging yourself with nettles; grip them firmly and then use them for your soul's health. Trials and troubles, worries and turmoils, little frets and little disappointments, may all help you if you will. Like Solomon, see

and consider them well—look upon them and receive instruction. As for us, we will now first consider Solomon’s description of a sluggard: he is “a man void of understanding”; secondly we shall notice his description of the sluggard’s land: “it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof.” When we have attended to these two matters we will close by endeavoring to gather the instruction which this piece of waste ground may yield us.

First think of Solomon’s description of a slothful man. Solomon was a man whom none of us would contradict, for he knew as much as all of us put together; and besides that, he was under divine inspiration when he wrote this Book of Proverbs. Solomon says a sluggard is “a man void of understanding.” The slothful does not think so; he puts his hands in his pockets, and you would think from his important air that he had all the Bank of England at his disposal. You can see that he is a very wise man in his own esteem, for he gives himself airs which are meant to impress you with a sense of his superior abilities. How he has come by his wisdom it would be hard to say. He has never taken the trouble to think, and yet I dare not say that he jumps at his conclusions because he never does such a thing as jump, he lies down and rolls into a conclusion. Yet he knows everything and has settled all points: meditation is too hard work for him and learning he never could endure; but to be clever by nature is his delight. He does not want to know more than he knows for he knows enough already, and yet he knows nothing. The proverb is not complimentary to him, but I am certain that Solomon was right when he called him “a man void of understanding.” Solomon was rather rude according to the dainty manners of the present times, because this gentleman had a field and a vineyard, and as Poor Richard saith, “When I have a horse and a cow every man biddeth me good morrow.” How can a man be void of understanding who has a field and a vineyard? Is it not generally understood that you must measure a man’s understanding by the amount of his ready cash? At all events you shall soon be flattered for your attainments if you have attained unto wealth. Such is the way of the world, but such is not the way of Scripture. Whether he has a field and a vineyard or not, says Solomon, if he is a sluggard he is a fool, or if you would like to see his name written out a little larger, he is a man empty of understanding. Not only does he not understand anything, but he has no understanding to understand with. He is empty-headed if he is a sluggard. He may be called a gentleman, he may be a landed proprietor, he may have a vineyard and a field; but he is none the better for what he has: nay, he is so much the worse because he is a man void of understanding and is therefore unable to make use of his property.

I am glad to be told by Solomon so plainly that a slothful man is void of understanding, for it is useful information. I have met with persons who thought they perfectly understood the doctrines of grace, who could accurately set forth the election of the saints, the predestination of God, the firmness of the divine decree, the necessity of the Spirit’s work, and all the glorious doctrines of grace which build up the fabric of our faith; but these gentlemen have inferred from these doctrines that they have to do nothing, and thus they have become sluggards. Do-nothingism is their creed. They will not even urge other people to labor for the Lord because, say they, “God will do his own work. Salvation is all of grace!” The notion of these sluggards is that a man is to wait and do nothing; he is to sit still and let the grass grow up to his ankles in the hope of heavenly help. To arouse himself would be an interference with the eternal purpose, which he regards as altogether unwarrantable. I have known him look sour, shake his aged head, and say hard things against earnest people who were trying to win souls. I have known him run down young people, and like a great steam ram sink them to the bottom by calling them unsound and ignorant. How shall we survive the censures of this dogmatic person? How shall we escape from this very knowing and very captious

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sluggard? Solomon hastens to the rescue and extinguishes this gentleman by informing us that he is void of understanding. Why, he is the standard of orthodoxy, and he judges everybody! Yet Solomon applies another standard to him, and says he is void of understanding. He may know the doctrine but he does not understand it, or else he would know that the doctrines of grace lead us to seek the grace of the doctrines, and that when we see God at work we learn that he worketh in us, not to make us go to sleep but to will and to do of his good pleasure. God's predestination of a people is his ordaining them unto good works that they may show forth his praise. So if you or I shall from any doctrines, however true, draw the inference that we are warranted in being idle and indifferent about the things of God, we are void of understanding, we are acting like fools, we are misusing the gospel; we are taking what was meant for meat and turning it into poison. The sluggard, whether he is sluggish about his business or about his soul, is a man void of understanding. As a rule we may measure a man's understanding by his useful activities; this is what the wise man very plainly tells us. Certain persons call themselves "cultured," and yet they cultivate nothing. Modern thought, as far as I have seen anything of its actual working, is a bottle of smoke out of which comes nothing solid; yet we know men who can distinguish and divide, debate and discuss, refine and refute, and all the while the hemlock is growing in the furrow and the plough is rusting. Friend, if your knowledge, if your culture, if your education does not lead you practically to serve God in your day and generation you have not learned what Solomon calls wisdom, and you are not like the Blessed One who was incarnate wisdom, of whom we read that "he went about doing good." A lazy man is not like our Savior, who said "My Father worketh hitherto and I work." True wisdom is practical: boastful culture vapours and theorizes. Wisdom ploughs its field, wisdom hoes its vineyard, wisdom looks to its crops, wisdom tries to make the best of everything; and he who does not do so, whatever may be his knowledge of this, of that, or of the other, is a man void of understanding.

Why is he void of understanding? Is it not because he has opportunities which he does not use? His day has come, his day is going, and he lets the hours glide by to no purpose. Let me not press too hardly upon anyone, but let me ask you all to press as hardly as you can upon yourselves while you enquire each one of himself— am I employing the minutes as they fly? This man had a vineyard but he did not cultivate it; he had a field but he did not till it. Do you, brethren, use all your opportunities? I know we each one have some power to serve God; do we use it? If we are his children, he has not put one of us where we are of necessity useless. Somewhere we may shine by the light which he has given us, though that light be only a farthing candle. Are we thus shining? Do we sow beside all waters? Do we in the morning sow our seed and in the evening still stretch out our hand? for if not, we are rebuked by the sweeping censure of Solomon who saith that the slothful is a "man void of understanding." Having opportunities, he did not use them, and next, being bound to the performance of certain duties, he did not fulfill them. When God appointed that every Israelite should have a piece of land under that admirable system which made every Israelite a landowner, he meant that each man should possess his plot, not to let it lie waste, but to cultivate it. When God put Adam in the garden of Eden it was not that he should walk through the glades and watch the spontaneous luxuriance of the unfallen earth, but that he might dress it and keep it, and he had the same end in view when he allotted each Jew his piece of land; he meant that the holy soil should reach the utmost point of fertility through the labor of those who owned it. Thus the possession of a field and a vineyard involved responsibilities upon the sluggard which he never fulfilled, and therefore he was void of understanding. What is your position, dear friend? A father?

A master? A servant? A minister? A teacher? Well, you have your farms and your vineyards in those particular spheres; but if you do not use those positions aright you will be void of understanding because you neglect the end of your existence. You miss the high calling which your Maker has set before you. The slothful farmer was unwise in these two respects, and in another also; for he had capacities which he did not employ. He could have tilled the field and cultivated the vineyard if he had chosen to do so. He was not a sickly man who was forced to keep his bed, but he was a lazybones who was there of choice.

You are not asked to do in the service of God that which is utterly beyond you, for it is expected of us according to what we have and not according to what we have not. The man of two talents is not required to bring in the interest of five, but he is expected to bring in the interest of two. Solomon's slothful man was too idle to attempt tasks which were quite within his power. Many have a number of dormant faculties of which they are scarcely aware, and many more have abilities which they are using for themselves and not for him who created them. Dear friends, if God has given us any power to do good, pray, let us do it, for this is a wicked, weary world. We should not even cover a glow-worm's light in such a darkness as this. We should not keep back a syllable of divine truth in a world that is full of falsehood and error. However feeble our voices, let us lift them up for the cause of truth and righteousness. Do not let us be void of understanding because we have opportunities that we do not use, obligations that we do not fulfill, and capacities which we do not exercise. As for a sluggard in soul matters, he is indeed void of understanding, for he trifles with matters which demand his most earnest heed. Man, hast thou never cultivated thy heart? Has the ploughshare never broken up the clods of thy soul? Has the seed of the Word never been sown in thee? Or has it taken no root? Hast thou never watered the young plants of desire? Hast thou never sought to pull up the weeds of sin that grow in thy heart? Art thou still a piece of the bare common or wild hearth? Poor soul! Thou canst trim thy body and spend many a minute at the glass; dost thou not care for thy soul? How long thou takest to decorate thy poor flesh which is but worm's meat, or would be in a minute if God took away thy breath! And yet all the while thy soul is uncombed, unwashed, unclad, a poor neglected thing! Oh it should not be so. You take care of the worse part and leave the better to perish through neglect. This is the height of folly! He that is a sluggard as to the vineyard of his heart is a man void of understanding. If I must be idle, let it be seen in my field and my garden, but not in my soul.

Or are you a Christian? Are you really saved and are you negligent in the Lord's work? Then indeed, whatever you may be I cannot help saying you have too little understanding; for surely when a man is saved himself, and understands the danger of other men's souls, he must be in earnest in trying to pluck the firebrands from the flame. A Christian sluggard! Is there such a being? A Christian man on half time? A Christian man working not all for his Lord; how shall I speak of him? Time does not tarry, death does not tarry, hell does not tarry; Satan is not lazy, all the powers of darkness are busy: how is it that you and I can be sluggish if the master has put us into his vineyard? Surely we must be void of understanding if after being saved by the infinite love of God we do not spend and be spent in his service. The eternal fitness of things demands that a saved man should be an earnest man.

The Christian who is slothful in his Master's service has no idea what he is losing, for the very cream of religion lies in holy consecration to God. Some people have just enough religion to make it questionable whether they have any or no. They have enough godliness to make them uneasy in their ungodliness. They have washed enough of their face to show the dirt upon the rest of it. "I

am glad," said a servant, "that my mistress takes the sacrament, for otherwise I should not know she had any religion at all." You smile, and well you may. It is ridiculous that some people should have no goods in their shop and yet advertise their business in all the papers, should make a show of religion and yet have none of the Spirit of God. I wish some professors would do Christ the justice to say, "No, I am not one of his disciples; do not think so badly of him as to imagine that I can be one of them." We ought to be reflections of Christ; but I fear many are reflections upon Christ. When we see a lot of lazy servants we are apt to think that their master must be a very idle person himself, or he would never put up with them. He who employs sluggards and is satisfied with their snail-like pace cannot be a very active man himself. O, let not the world think that Christ is indifferent to human woe, that Christ has lost his zeal, that Christ has lost his energy: yet I fear they will say it or think it if they see those who profess to be laborers in the vineyard of Christ nothing better than mere sluggards. The slothful then, is a man void of understanding; he loses the honor and pleasure which he would find in serving his Master; he is a dishonor to the cause which he professes to venerate, and he is storing up thorns for his dying pillow. Let that stand as settled—the slothful, whether he be a minister, deacon, or private Christian, is a man void of understanding.

Now, secondly, let us look at the sluggard's land: "I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding; And lo, it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof." Note first that land will produce something. Soil which is good enough to be made into a field and a vineyard must and will yield some fruit or other; and so you and I, in our hearts and in the sphere God gives us to occupy, will be sure to produce something. We cannot live in this world as entire blanks; we shall either do good or do evil as sure as we are alive. If you are idle in Christ's work you are active in the devil's work. The sluggard by sleeping was doing more for the cultivation of thorns and nettles than he could have done by any other means. As a garden will either yield flowers or weeds, fruits or thistles, so something either good or evil will come out of our household, our class, or our congregation. If we do not produce a harvest of good by laboring for Christ, we shall grow tares to be bound up in bundles for the last dread burning. Note again that if it be not farmed for God, the soul will yield its natural produce; and what is the natural produce of land if left to itself? What but thorns and nettles or some other useless weeds? What is the natural produce of your heart and mine? What but sin and misery? What is the natural produce of your children if you leave them untrained for God? What but unholiness and vice? What is the natural produce of this great city if we leave its streets and lanes and alleys without the gospel? What but crime and infamy? Some harvest there will be, and the sheaves will be the natural produce of the soil, which is sin, death, and corruption. If we are slothful, the natural produce of our heart and of our sphere will be most inconvenient and unpleasant to ourselves. Nobody can sleep on thorns or make a pillow of nettles. No rest can come out of an idleness which lets ill alone, and does not by God's Spirit strive to uproot evil. While you are sleeping Satan will be sowing. If you withhold the seed of good Satan will be lavish with the seed of evil, and from that evil will come anguish and regret for time, and it may be for eternity. O man, the garden put into thy charge, if thou waste thy time in slumber, will reward thee with all that is noisome and painful. "Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee."

In many instances there will be a great deal of this evil produce, for a field and a vineyard will yield more thistles and nettles than a piece of ground that has never been reclaimed. If the land is good enough for a garden, it will present its owner with a fine crop of weeds if he only stays his hand. A choice bit of land fit for a vineyard of red wine will render such a profusion of nettles to

the slothful, that he shall rub his eyes with surprise. The man who might do most for God, if he were renewed, will bring forth most for Satan if he be let alone. The very region which would have glorified God most if the grace of God were there to convert its inhabitants, will be that out of which the vilest enemies of the gospel will arise. Rest assured of that; the best will become the worse if we neglect it. Neglect is all that is needed to produce evil. If you want to know the way of salvation I must take some pains to tell you; but if you want to know the way to be lost my reply is easy, for it is only a matter of negligence;—"How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?" If you desire to bring forth a harvest unto God I may need long to instruct you in ploughing, sowing, and watering; but if you wish your mind to be covered with Satan's hemlock you have only to leave the furrows of your nature to themselves. The slothful asks for "a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep," and the thorns and thistles multiply beyond all numbering and prepare for him many a sting.

While we look upon the lazy man's vineyard let us also peep into the ungodly sluggard's heart. He does not care about repentance and faith. To think about his soul, to be in earnest about eternity, is too much for him. He wants to take things easy and have a little more folding of the arms to sleep. What is growing in his mind and character? In some of these spiritual sluggards you can see drunkenness, uncleanness, covetousness, anger, and pride, and all sorts of thistles and nettles; or where these ranker weeds do not appear by reason of the restraint of pious connections, you find other sorts of sin. The heart cannot possess it. My dear friend, if you are not decided for God you cannot be a neutral. In this war every man is for God or for his enemy. You cannot remain like a sheet of blank paper. The legible handwriting of Satan is upon you—can you not see the blots? Unless Christ has written across the page his own sweet name, the autograph of Satan is visible. You may say, "I do not go into open sin; I am moral," and so forth. Ah, if you would but look and consider and search into your heart, you would see that enmity to God and to his ways and hatred of purity are there. You do not love God's law, nor love his Son, nor love his gospel, you are alienated in your heart and there is in you all manner of evil desires and vain thoughts, and these will flourish and increase so long as you are a spiritual sluggard and leave your heart uncultivated. O, may the Spirit of God arouse you; may you be stirred to anxious, earnest thought, and then you will see that these rank growths must be uprooted, and that your heart must be turned up by the plough of conviction, and sown with the good seed of the gospel till a harvest rewards the great Husbandman.

Friend, if you believe in Christ I want to peep over the hedge into your heart also, if you are a sluggish Christian; for I fear that nettles and thistles are threatening you also. Did I not hear you sing the other day—"Tis a point I long to know"? That point will often be raised, for doubt is a seed which is sure to grow in lazy men's minds. I do not remember reading in Mr. Wesley's diary a question about his own salvation. He was so busy in the harvest of the Master that it did not occur to him to distrust his God. Some Christians have little faith in consequence of their having never sown the grain of mustard seed which they have received. If you do not sow your faith by using it, how can it grow? When a man lives by faith in Christ Jesus and his faith exercises itself actively in the service of his Lord, it takes root, grows upward, and becomes strong, till it chokes his doubts. Some have sadly morbid forebodings; they are discontented, fretful, selfish, murmuring, and all because they are idle. These are the weeds that grow in sluggards' gardens. I have known the slothful become so peevish that nothing could please them; the most earnest Christian could not do right for them; the most loving Christians could not be affectionate enough; the most active church could

not be energetic enough; they detected all sorts of wrong where God himself saw much of the fruit of his Spirit. This censoriousness, this contention, this perpetual complaining is one of the nettles that are quite sure to grow in men's gardens when they fold their arms in sinful ease. If your heart does not yield fruit to God it will certainly bring forth that which is mischievous in itself, painful to you, and injurious to your fellow-men. Often the thorns choke the good seed; but it is a very blessed thing when the good seed comes up so thick and fast that it chokes the thorns. God enables certain Christians to become so fruitful in Christ that their graces and works stand thick together, and when Satan throws in the tares they cannot grow because there is not room for them. The Holy Spirit by his power makes evil to become weak in the heart, so that it no longer keeps the upper land. If you are slothful, friend, look over the field of your heart and weep at the sight. May I next ask you look into your own house and home? It is a dreadful thing when a man does not cultivate the field of his own family. I recollect in my early days a man who used to walk out with me into the villages when I was preaching. I was glad of his company till I found out certain facts and then I shook him off, and I believe he hooked on to somebody else, for he must needs be gadding abroad every evening of the week. He had many children and these grew up to be wicked young men and women, and the reason was that the father, while he would be at this meeting and that, never tried to bring his own children to the Savior. What is the use of zeal abroad if there is neglect at home? How sad to say, "My own vineyard have I not kept." Have you never heard of one who said he did not teach his children the ways of God because he thought they were so young that it was very wrong to prejudice them, and he had rather leave them to choose their own religion when they grew older? One of his boys broke his arm, and while the surgeon was setting it the boy was swearing all the time. "Ah," said the good doctor, "I told you what would happen. You were afraid to prejudice your boy in the right way, but the devil had no such qualms; he has prejudiced him the other way, and pretty strongly too." It is our duty to prejudice our field in favor of corn, or it will soon be covered with thistles. Cultivate a child's heart for good or it will go wrong of itself, for it is already depraved by nature. O that we were wise enough to think of this and leave no little one to become a prey to the destroyer. As it is with homes, so it is with schools. A gentleman who joined this church some time ago had been an atheist for years, and in conversing with him I found that he had been educated at one of our great public schools, and to that fact he traced his infidelity. He said that the boys were stowed away on Sunday in a lofty gallery at the far end of a church where they could scarcely hear a word that the clergyman said, but simply sat imprisoned in a place where it was dreadfully hot in summer and cold in winter. On Sundays there were prayers, and prayers, and prayers, but nothing that ever touched his heart, until he was so sick of prayers that he vowed if he once got out of the school he would have done with religion. This is a sad result, but a frequent one. You Sunday-school teachers can make your classes so tiresome to the children that they will hate Sunday. You can fritter away the time in school without bringing the lads and lasses to Christ, and so you may do more hurt than good. I have known Christian fathers who by their severity and want of tenderness have sown their family field with the thorns and thistles of hatred to religion instead of scattering the good seed of love to it. O that we may so love as our Father who is in heaven. May fathers and mothers set such an example of cheerful piety that sons and daughters shall say, "Let us tread in our father's footsteps, for he was a happy and a holy man. Let us follow our mother's ways for she was sweetness itself." If piety does not rule in your house, when we pass by your home we shall see disorder, disobedience, pride of dress, folly, and the beginnings of vice. Let not your home be a sluggard's field, or you will have to rue it in years to come. Let every

deacon, every class-leader, and also every minister enquire diligently into the state of the field he has to cultivate. You see brothers and sisters, if you and I are set over any department of our Lord's work and we are not diligent in it, we shall be like barren trees planted in an orchard which are a loss altogether, because they occupy the places of other trees which might have brought forth fruit unto their owners. We shall cumber the ground and do damage to our Lord unless we render him actual service. Will you think of this? If you could be put down as a mere cipher in the accounts of Christ that would be very sad; but brother, it cannot be so, you will cause a deficit unless you create a gain. Oh that through the grace of God we may be profitable to our Lord and Master. Who among us can look upon his life-work without some sorrow? If anything has been done aright we ascribe it all to the grace of God; but how much there is to weep over! How much that we would wish to amend! Let us not spend time in idle regrets but pray for the Spirit of God, that in the future we may not be void of understanding, but may know what we ought to do, and where the strength must come from with which to do it, and then give ourselves up to the doing of it.

I beg you once more to look at the great field of the world. Do you see how it is overgrown with thorns and nettles? If an angel could take a survey of the whole race, what tears he would shed if angels could weep! What a tangled mass of weeds is the whole earth! Yonder the field is scarlet with the poppy of popery, and over the hedge it is yellow with the wild mustard of Mahometanism. Vast regions are smothered with the thistles of infidelity and idolatry. The world is full of cruelty, oppression, drunkenness, rebellion, uncleanness, misery. What the moon sees! What God's sun sees! What scenes of horror! How far is all this to be attributed to a neglectful church? Nearly nineteen hundred years are gone and the sluggard's vineyard is but little improved! England has been touched with the spade, but I cannot say that it has been thoroughly weeded or ploughed yet. Across the ocean another field equally favored knows well the ploughman, and yet the weeds are rank. Here and there a little good work has been done, but the vast mass of the world still lies a moorland never broken up, a waste, a howling wilderness. What has the church been doing all these years? She ceased after a few centuries to be a missionary church, and from that hour she almost ceased to be a living church. Whenever a church does not labor for the reclaiming of the desert, it becomes itself a waste. You shall not find on the roll of history that any Christian community has flourished after it has become negligent of the outside world for a length of time. I believe that if we are put into the Master's vineyard and will not take away the weeds, neither shall the vine flourish, nor shall the corn yield its increase. However, instead of asking what the church has been doing for this nineteen hundred years, let us ask ourselves what are we going to do now. Are the missions of the churches of Great Britain always to be such poor, feeble things as they are? Are the best of our Christian young men always going to stay at home? We go on ploughing the home field a hundred times over while millions of acres abroad are left to the thorn and nettle. Shall it always be so? God send us more spiritual life and wake us up from our sluggishness, or else when the holy watcher gives in his report he will say, "I went by the field of the sluggish church and it was all grown over with thorns and nettles, and the stone wall was broken down so that one could scarcely tell which was the church and which was the world; yet still she slept, and slept, and slept, and nothing could waken her."

I conclude by remarking that there must be some lesson in all this.

I cannot teach it as I would, but I want to learn it myself. I will speak it as though I were talking to myself. The first lesson is that unaided nature always will produce thorns and nettles and nothing else. My soul, if it were not for grace this is all thou wouldst have produced. Beloved, are you

producing anything else? Then it is not nature, but the grace of God that makes you produce it. Those lips that now most charmingly sing the praises of God would have been delighted with an idle ballad if the grace of God had not sanctified them. Your heart that now cleaves to Christ would have continued to cling to your idols—you know what they were—if it had not been for grace divine. And why should grace have visited you or me—why? Echo answers, Why? What answer can we give? “‘Tis even so Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight.” Let the recollection of what grace has done move us to manifest the result of that grace in our lives. Come brothers and sisters, inasmuch as we were aforetime rich enough in the soil of our nature to produce so much of nettle and thistle—and God only knows how much we did produce—let us now pray that our lives may yield as much of good corn for the great Husbandman. Will you serve Christ less than you served your lusts? Will you make less sacrifice for Christ than you did for your sins? Some of you were whole-hearted enough when in the service of the evil one; will you be half-hearted in the service of God? Shall the Holy Spirit produce less fruit in you than that which you yielded under the spirit of evil? God grant that we may not be left to prove what nature will produce if left to itself.

We see here next the little value of natural good intentions; for this man who left his field and vineyard to be overgrown always meant to work hard one of these fine days. To do him justice we must admit that he did not mean to sleep much longer, for he said—“Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep.” Only a little doze and then he would tuck up his sleeves and show his muscle. Probably the worst people in the world are those who have the best intentions, but never carry them out. In that way Satan lulls many to sleep. They hear an earnest sermon but they do not arise and go to their Father; they only get as far as saying, “Yes, yes, the far country is not a fit place for me. I will not stay here long; I mean to go home by-and-by.” They said that forty years ago, but nothing came of it. When they were quite youths they had serious impressions, they were almost persuaded to be Christians, and yet they are not Christians even now. They have been slumbering forty years! Surely that is a liberal share of sleep! They never intended to dream so long, and now they do not mean to lie in bed much longer. They will not turn to Christ at once, but they are resolved to do so one day. When are you going to do it, friend? “Before I die.” Going to put it off to the last hour or two, are you? And so when unconscious and drugged to relieve your pain, you will begin to think of your soul? Is this wise? Surely you are void of understanding. Perhaps you will die in an hour. Did you not hear the other day of the alderman who died in his carriage? Little must he have dreamed of that. How would it have fared with you had you also been smitten while riding at your ease? Have you not heard of persons who fall dead at their work? What is to hinder your dying with a spade in your hand? I am often startled when I am told in the week that one whom I saw on Sunday is dead—gone from the shop to the judgment-seat. It is not a very long time ago since one went out at the doorway of the Tabernacle and fell dead on the threshold. We have had deaths in the house of God, unexpected deaths; and sometimes people are hurried away unprepared who never meant to have died unconverted, who always had from their youth up some kind of desire to be ready, only still they wanted a little more sleep. Oh my hearers, take heed of little delays and short puttings off. You have wasted time enough already, come to the point at once before the clock strikes again. May God the Holy Spirit bring you to decision.

“Surely you do not object to my having a little more sleep?” says the sluggard. “You have waked me so soon. I only ask another little nap.” “My dear man, it is far into the morning.” He answers, “It is rather late, I know; but it will not be much later if I take just another doze.” You

wake him again and tell him it is noon. He says, "It is the hottest part of the day: I daresay if I had been up I should have gone to the sofa and taken a little rest from the hot sun." You knock at his door when it is almost evening, and then he cries, "It is of no use to get up now, for the day is almost over." You remind him of his overgrown field and weedy vineyard and he answers, "Yes, I must get up, I know." He shakes himself and says, "I do not think it will matter much if I wait till the clock strikes. I will rest another minute or two." He is glued to his bed, dead while he liveth, buried in his laziness. If he could sleep forever he would, but he cannot for the judgment-day will rouse him. It is written, "And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torment." God grant that you spiritual sluggards may wake before that; but you will not unless you bestir yourselves betimes, for "now is the accepted time"; and it may be now or never. To-morrow is only to be found in the calendar of fools; to-day is the time of the wise man, the chosen season of our gracious God. Oh that the Holy Spirit may lead you to seize the present hour, that you may at once give yourselves to the Lord by faith in Christ Jesus, and then from his vineyard— "Quick uproot the noisome weeds that without profit suck the soil's fertility from wholesome plants."

God's Glory in Hiding Sin

A sermon (No. 2838) intended for reading on Lord's Day, July 5th 1903, delivered by C. H. Spurgeon at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington, on Lord's Day evening, July 15th, 1877.

“It is the glory of God to conceal a thing: but the honour of kings is to search out a matter.”—Proverbs 25:2.

The translation of our text, if it had been more literal, would have run thus, “It is the glory of God to cover a matter, but the honor of kings is to search out a matter.” For the sake of variety in language our translators sometimes gave two different interpretations to the same word; and though that makes the verbiage more smooth, it is generally a great mistake and apt to mislead us. The word “conceal” is just the same word that we get in the passage, “Blessed is he whose sin is covered.” So the text runs thus—I will give it to you again that I may further impress it upon you—“It is the glory of God to cover a matter, but the honor of kings is to search out a matter.”

First of all I will give you the common interpretation which is given to these words, and the topic which is suggested to most minds thereby, namely that it is God's glory to conceal much of the great truth which concerns himself and his dealings with the sons of men. “Clouds and darkness are round about him.” It is his glory that he is not seen, his glory that he is concealed; while as for kings, it is their honor “to search out a matter.” This is the general interpretation which almost every expositor gives of this passage, but I am not able wholly to agree with it. However, I will speak upon it for little while.

It is certain that such an explanation as this would have to be taken in a limited sense, for it cannot absolutely and without qualification be the glory of God to conceal a thing; for if so, he might have concealed everything from us. It is evidently for his glory that some things should be revealed, or else why has he revealed them? He might have dwelt for ever in that wondrous solitude in which we suppose he did dwell before he commenced the work of creation. We know not what he was doing in that eternity—of which it is difficult if not impossible for us to conceive—when there was no creation, when not a single star had begun to shine, nor an angel had fled through space on rapid wing. If it were God's glory to be absolutely concealed, it seems to me that he would have remained alone in the thick darkness that surrounded him, for he would not have wanted to have a single creature to know his love, to realize his power, or to contemplate his wisdom. It is at once obvious that if this is the true and correct interpretation, “It is the glory of God to conceal a thing,” it must be taken in a very limited sense. If it had been his glory to conceal everything, he would have continued to conceal it; but as far as I can see his manifested glory is his glory. The glory of God is not so much to conceal as to reveal himself to those whom he prepares to receive the revelation.

There are many things which it would not be for God's glory to conceal. You could not say of everything, “It is the glory of God to conceal this.” Take, for instance his righteous law, would it have been for his glory to have left our race utterly ignorant of it? I cannot conceive of such a thing. And then his matchless redemption he has revealed to us in many wonderful ways. Would he have taken all the pains that he has done to reveal himself in Christ Jesus if it had been for his glory to

conceal himself in that respect? Would he bid us go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature if it could be for his glory to conceal that? No, it is high treason against the majesty of heaven for any man to obscure the blessed revelation of God in Christ Jesus. I am afraid that all of us preachers of the Word do that in some measure by reason of our infirmity; but God forbid that we should ever wilfully keep back a single ray of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ!

There are many great and glorious truths which do not need that God should conceal them. If we do not perceive them probably it is because it is not necessary that they should be concealed, for their own inherent glory is their concealment. If I were to take for instance the mysterious doctrine of the eternal filiation of the Lord Jesus Christ, or the procession of the Holy Ghost from the Father and the Son—these wondrous truths need not be concealed from us, because they are in themselves such deep mysteries that however clearly there may be revealed to us it is not possible for us to understand them. Even the grand doctrine of the Trinity, which is so plainly set forth in the Scriptures—the Trinity in the Unity of the Godhead—need not be concealed; as indeed it has not been, yet we cannot comprehend it. God need not seek out any method of concealment, for if he were to unveil his face among us the glory would be too bright to be beheld. Go and stand, O mortal man, and gaze upon the sun at mid-day! Canst thou do it? Would not thine eyes be thereby blinded? Yet the sun is only one of the myriads of servants in the courts of God; then what must the face of the King himself be? It needs not that he should veil it; his own glory is surely veil enough unto itself. Our minds are finite, contracted, limited. There were certain men who called themselves “Encyclopaedists”, because they fancied that they knew everything; yet they knew nothing perfectly, and many of them broke down together in their attempt to learn even all that might be known by men. But as for God himself, who can possibly comprehend him? The archangel who standeth nearest to his august presence must veil his face with his wings, for even he is not able to gaze upon the glory of that excessive light. It does not seem to me to be so great a truth that it is the glory of God to conceal as that his very glory doth conceal itself, not by being concealed, but by being so exceedingly unveiled. The glory itself blindeth, for the finite mind of man is not able to gaze thereon.

Yet the truth which our English Version seeks to convey to us may be accepted without hesitation if we regard it thus: if God has concealed anything, it is God’s glory to conceal it, and it is right that it should be hidden. If God has not told us any truth, it is for his glory not to tell it to us. Perhaps we have as much reason to bless the Lord for what is not in the Bible as for what is there; and what he has not revealed may be as much for our benefit, and certainly is as much for his glory, as what he has revealed. For instance, if he does not tell us all about himself and the mystery of his person, do we want to know it? Can we not believe in him and love him all the better because we do not understand him? Surely a God whom we could understand would be no God. We delight in being out of our depth—in finding waters to swim in where understanding with its little plumline finds no bottom, but where love with a restful spirit finds perfect peace. Doubtless there is a glory in the Lord not revealing himself so far as the past or present is concerned.

As to the future, it is no doubt for the glory of God that he has not revealed to us all concerning the history of this world. It may be all in the Book of Daniel and the Book of Revelation. Some friends think it is, and it may be; but this I venture to say, there is no man who understands it, and I do not think any men will understand it until the Word shall explain itself; and then possibly, when history becomes the commentary upon the prophecy, we shall wonder that we did not see it. Yet we cannot do so at present. It is to the glory of God and to thine own profiting that thou dost

not know what will happen to thee on the morrow. Thou knowest not what afflictions may await thee, nor when thou shalt die; it is well for thee that thou dost not know. If it had been for God's glory that thou shouldst read thy history from its first page to its last and be able to foretell every event in thine own life story, or in the history of the nations of the earth, God would have revealed it to thee; but be thou content not to know what God doth not tell thee, and say in thy spirit, "Let it be so; for in some things it is the glory of God to conceal a thing."

Still, I think that this is not the teaching of the text. I conceive that it has quite another meaning which I will try to give you. You know that in a proverb like this with a "but" in the middle there is what we call a antithesis, or an expression of opposites. The text does not run thus, "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing: but the honor of kings is to publish a thing." That is not what is said here; it is quite a different sentence which is not an antithesis at all. Then again, the antithesis is not complete, "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing: but the honor of kings is to search out a matter," for it is not so much the business of kings to search out matters that refer to wisdom, as it is the business of wise men to do so. If there are doctrines that are not known to us because God conceals them, it is the business of wise men to search them out, and not so much the business of kings to do so. Neither can we read the passage thus, "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing, but the honor of kings to make things plain," because the third verse of the chapter does not agree with this rendering. Solomon did not think that it was to the honor of kings to make things plain. He was a believer in diplomacy, for he says "The heaven for height and the earth for depth, and the heart of kings is unsearchable." He could not therefore have intended to convey that meaning.

Now let me give you what I think is the true meaning of the passage. What is the business of kings? Why are they set up above their fellow-men? What is their honor? Why, it is the honor of kings to search out matters that concern the administration of justice, to bring prisoners before their bar, laying bare their crimes and convicting them of they are guilty. It is the glory of God to cover a matter, that matter being sin; but it is the honor of kings to search that matter out and bring the guilty one to justice. You know that we think less and less of our police if they are not able to discover criminals. It has sometimes happened that justice misses its mark. Perhaps there is an attempt made to get a certain important witness out of the way, or to suborn another, or to suppress some testimony that might be brought against the accused persons. It is never to the honor of kings when that is done. When for instance a murder has been committed and the criminal cannot be traced, it is not to the credit of the governing powers that it should be so; and though it must be so sometimes— for no human government can be perfect in its detective forces— yet it is not to the honor of "the powers that be." It is to the honor of kings that they search matters out till they bring home the guilt to the proper individual. Nor is it to the honor of kings if they give their verdict and sentence at first sight according to prejudice. It is their honor to search out a matter—to hear both sides of the case. The magistrate who sits in the king's name is bound to enquire thoroughly into the matter brought before him, and at last to adjudicate as justice demands. This is sometimes very difficult, but it is to the honor of kings and their representatives when they attempt it. Now to God such a thing as this is impossible. Nothing is concealed from him; the whole universe is but one great prison for those who offend against him and he can find them at any time that he pleases, and he can execute his just sentence upon them without a moment's delay. He needs no witnesses, he need not summon this person or that who has seen a certain deed done, for the transgression has been committed in his own sight. His glory is that he covers the matter; and as it is the glory of God to cover the matter, it is also the honor of kings to search the matter out; that matter in each

case being the breach of law. I am persuaded that this is the meaning of the text. Even if it were not, it is a grand truth of Scripture well worthy of our meditation.

So we shall dwell upon it thus. First, it is the glory of God to cover sin. Secondly, this is a great encouragement to penitent sinners; and thirdly, it ought to be a great stimulus to saints.

I. First, it is the glory of God to cover sin.

This is the expression which is commonly used in Scripture to describe the putting away of sin and forgiving it. God covers the very thing which the magistrate searches out—the guilt, the breach of his law, the aggravations, the multiplied repetitions of sin, the base motives, the many excuses and deceits with which sin is sought to be extenuated—all this God covers. Hear this and be astonished, O ye sinners: God can cover all your sins no matter how black they are, or how many, or how deep their dye, he can cover them all!

“This in his grand prerogative,
And none can in this honor share.”

But he can do it, glory be to his blessed name!

He can cover the sin which is known and confessed. He never covers the sin which is unconfessed. When a man will not acknowledge himself to be guilty, he stands convicted of his rebellious refusal to take his proper position before the Lord. But if thou dost stand, O sinner, and confess thy guilt; if thou sayest O rebel, “There is no doubt about the matter; I own that I am guilty,” it is the glory of God that he can cover that sin which no other can cover, and which thine own conscience will not permit thee to conceal! He can cover the transgression of that man whose mouth is stopped by the consciousness of his guilt. O glorious act of divine grace, that sin and transgression can be covered—covered though it be confessed and acknowledged, and covered because it is confessed and acknowledged!

The glory of this truth lies in the fact that God can do this justly through the work of Jesus. To cover up sin, why, standing as it does alone and without any qualification, it might seem to be a dreadful thing for God to do; but he can do it righteously. Without the slightest violation of his law, without endangering the stability of his kingdom, he can forgive and cover up all manner of sin and blasphemy so that it shall never be seen again. Do you ask me how this can be done? The answer lies in the great substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus Christ. God steps down from his eternal throne when man must be punished for his sin, and he says “I will bear the punishment; lay it all on me.” And that he might bear it, Jesus took upon himself the form of a man and dwelt among men; and at last upon the accursed tree he bore the guilt of man. It was a wondrous recompense which he made to his own law by being himself punished in the stead of the offender. Now, beneath the whole heavens, there can be none who can justly object to the covering of sin by the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ. That singular, that remarkable, that unique transaction of the Just suffering for the unjust that he might bring us to God, has enabled God to cover our sin and to do it justly.

Further, he can do this without exacting any sort of compensation from the offender. Marvellous is this truth— too marvellous for some to believe. The Romish Church teaches us that we must do penance if our sin is to be forgiven. There must be so many lashes for the bare back, or so long abstention from food, beside purgatorial pains to be inflicted after death, and I know not what beside. Ay, but this is the glory of God—that he can cover all this sin now upon the spot, without any price being paid by the sinner, or any suffering being endured by him. He has but to come and

confess his sin and accept the divine covering; namely, the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ, and the whole of it shall be covered once for all.

It is the glory of God that he can do all this without any injury to the person who is forgiven. It sometimes happens that if a man has offended you and you forgive him again and again, he may thereby become hardened in his sin; but the Lord's sweet way of covering sin is one which always melts and changes the heart. Sin is never so heartily hated as when it is covered by the blood of Christ. No man does ever thoroughly loathe sin till he has seen it put away in Christ; but when he has seen Jesus put it way by his own griefs and death, then he really hates the sin that made the Redeemer mourn and nailed him to the tree. It is the glory of God that he can cover sin in such a fashion as this, so as not to injure the offender whom he forgives.

And he can do it without causing any injury to the rest of mankind. There is no man who is any the worse because his fellow-man is saved. The example of saved souls is never injurious. There are some I know who can twist the truth till they find in it an excuse for sin; but the truth that God is able to forgive the grossest sin—nay more—that he has forgiven it in the case of many, and has pressed them to his bosom as his own dear children, has done no injury but much helpful service to the morals of mankind. Go where you will and read the story of the prodigal son—on board ship among rough sailors, or away there in the barracks amongst wild soldiery, or go into the worst slums of London and read to fallen women that wondrous story of God's pardoning love, and see if it will do them any injury. You know that it will not. On the contrary it conveys to them a message of hope which helps to lift them up from that black despair which is one of the strongest chains by which the devil can hold lost souls in captivity. I am not at all afraid of the effect of preaching that it is the glory of God to blot out sin, for he put his Son between himself and the sinner, as we sometimes sing —

“Christ and then the sinner see,
Look through Jesus's wounds on me.

The greatest blessing of Him, dear friends, that when God covers sin he does it so effectually that it never appears any more. He declares that he casts it into the depths of the sea. He says that as far as the east is from the west so far does he remove it from us. He even goes the length of saying “The iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none.” So far as anything can be annihilated, that is what will happen to the Lord's people. You know that the work of the Messiah was “to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness;” and that is the work of which he said, “It is finished.” Then it is finished, there is an end of it; that is the glorious way in which the Lord covers sin, and it is his peculiar glory that he is continually doing this. Kings may search out matters, and they ought to do so or government will not be safe; but it is to the honor of God to forgive sin.

II. Now secondly to make a practical use of this doctrine, this should be very great encouragement to those who are seeking mercy at God's hands.

Beloved friend, do you wish to have your sin forgiven? Then do not attempt to cover it yourself, for it is the glory of God to cover that matter, so do not try to rob him of his glory. If you could have covered your sin there would have been no need for a Redeemer. Do not attempt to excuse or extenuate your guilt, but make a clean breast of it. You are sinner, therefore say that you are a sinner. In all your approaches to God seeking mercy at his hands, come in your true colors. Do not even plead your own repentance or your tears or your feelings. Plead as David did, “For thy name's

sake, O LORD, pardon mine iniquity: for it is great.” Call your sin great as it really is. Never try to make it out to be little. You know that if you were wounded on a battlefield and a surgeon came where you were, you would not say to him “Oh, I have very little the matter with me!” Oh no! I warrant you that you would cry as loudly as you could, “Doctor, do bind up my gaping wounds lest I die!” You know that in such a case you would make the most of it, and you would act wisely in doing so; and it is never wise for a sinner to make himself out to be a little sinner. It is the glory of God to cover sin so do not you attempt to do it. I say again, lay it all bare before him, and ask him to cover it with the atoning sacrifice of his dear Son.

Now, poor sinner, I pray the Holy Spirit to enable thee to give God glory at this moment by believing that he can cover sin. When the conscience is thoroughly awakened it seems impossible that sin should ever be covered. The convicted sinner says, “My sin, my sin, I always see it; can it ever be hidden from the sight of God?” Canst thou not believe that God in Christ can cover thy sin? Glorify God, O son, glorify God, O daughter, by believing that he can do so! Do not limit his mercy by thinking that he cannot pardon thee, for he has forgiven so many that assuredly there is proof enough that he can pass by iniquity, transgression, and sin, and remember not the guilt of those who trust his Son. If thou believest that, give glory to God now by believing that he is willing to pass by thy sin. Every man is willing to do that which honors himself, and it is inconceivable that God should be reluctant to do that which glorifies himself. So as it is for his glory to cover it, he must be willing to cover it; therefore may the Holy Spirit help thee now to believe that he can and will cover thy sin! There is Christ on the cross; look to him with the eye of faith and take him to be thine own Savior. Christ on the cross is nothing to you until you trust in him, but it glorifies Christ when a poor guilty sinner cries to him, “Purge me with hyssop.” You know what the use of the hyssop was. They took a bunch of it and dipped it in the blood of the sacrifice, and those who were sprinkled with it were made ceremonially clean. David prayed “Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow;” and that is the prayer for you to present. You believe that if God were to wash another man in the blood of Jesus he would become whiter than snow, but canst thou not believe it for thyself? May the blessed Spirit take away thine unbelief, dear heart! Canst thou not believe that he can wash thee and make thee whiter than snow? He will do it in a moment if thou dost but trust him, rely upon him, and receive his dear Son to be thy salvation. This is the true covering of sin. Oh, how the Hebrews loved that word “covering.” Noah’s ark was pitched within and without with pitch: that was its covering. So everything under the Mosaic law had its covering; and God has a way of covering sin, and covering the sinner too, within and without, till all his sin is gone, and he that believeth on the Lord Jesus Christ may know at once that his transgression is forgiven, his sin is covered.

“But,” someone asks, “am I to do nothing?” Nothing but “believe in him that justifieth the ungodly.” If you do that you will begin to do something more directly afterwards, for you will love God for having pardoned you and you will say, “I am not my own now for I am bought with a price; and therefore I will live to his glory.” But in order to get thy sin forgiven thou hast nothing to do except to—

“Cast thy deadly doing down,
Down at Jesus’ feet;
Stand in him, in him alone,
Gloriously complete;”

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“for he that believeth on him is not condemned.” “He that believeth in him is justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.” Oh what an encouragement this ought to be to all sinners who are seeking the Savior!

III. Now lastly, this grand doctrine ought to be a great stimulus to the people of God.

First it should excite you to glorify God in having covered your sin. Do not go and talk to everybody about what you used to be before conversion as I have known some do. They will almost glory in what they were. I have more than a little hesitation about what is sometimes said by converted burglars, and men of that sort. I am glad they are converted but I wish there would not talk so much about that which is covered. Let it be covered.

Still, never be backward to glorify God for having covered your sin. Speak of it with delicacy and modesty; but if the grace of God has saved you tell all men of it and do not let people imagine that God has done only a small thing for you. When he saved you it was the grandest thing he could do for you. Do you not think so? Well then, tell the story of it.

“Tell it unto sincere, tell,
I am—I am—out of hell.”

And what is more I never shall go there, but shall see God’s face with acceptance in heaven. Tell this to sinners while you live; and when you get to heaven make the streets of glory to ring with the tidings of the almighty grace that covered all your sin.

The next thing for you Christian people to do, now that you know that God can cover sin, is to aim at the covering of the sins of your friends and neighbors by leading them to the Savior. To see sin should always be a tearful sight to you. As soon as ever you see it breathe the prayer, “Lord, cover it.” Do you live where you can hardly lie in your bed at night without hearing mounds of ribaldry and blasphemy? Then the moment you hear them say, “Lord, cover that sin.” Do you see, in the streets, foul transgression that makes you blush? Never see it without saying “Lord, cover that sin.” If we were in a right state of heart this would be our habit; every sin that we noticed in ourselves or in others—in our children or our servants or our neighbors or that we read of in the newspapers, would make us pray “Lord, cover that sin.” So always be telling others about the covering of sin by Christ’s precious blood. Show them what a perfect covering it is. You know that the Lord spoke through Isaiah of “a covering which is narrower than that a man can wrap himself in it.” But the atoning sacrifice of Christ is a covering which will cover all sin, and cover the sinner from head to foot; therefore tell others about it with all your might.

And once more, you who have proved the power of this covering, imitate the Lord in forgetting the sins of those who repent. If ever they offend you, let that atonement which satisfied God for sin also satisfy you, and say, “Though this man has offended me, I ask no atonement at his hands, because Christ’s atonement is to my soul the satisfaction for every sin against me as well as against God.” Never harbor any resentment for a single moment, beloved. Even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. Do you think that Christ’s blood and righteousness are not sufficient to cover those unkind words of your brother, or that ungenerous action of your sin, or that slanderous speech of your neighbor? Go and put all offenses against yourself where God has put all offenses against himself. It is a dreadful thing to hear a man talking about God having forgiven him ten thousand talents and then to see him take his brother by the throat, saying “Pay me what thou owest.” Our Lord Jesus Christ said “If ye forgive not men their trespasses neither will your Father forgive your trespass.” This spirit of forgiveness would keep us always in a state of love, and this is exactly what

the Lord Jesus aims at. "It is the glory of God to cover a matter." Then do you cover matters too. I know some people who always like to be poking into any filth there is. They keep a long stick and stir it up, and they seem to be quite pleased with the sweet perfume. Let it alone, brother, let it alone. "Oh but you do not know how they have offended me!" No, and I do not want to know; but I am quite sure that they have not offended you as much as you have offended God, and yet he has forgiven you. Then do you forgive them. The less said in such matters, the sooner are they mended. Solomon wisely says "Where no wood is there the fire goeth out." Blessed are they who always act as firemen, throwing cold water upon every spark of dissension or ill-will that they see. It is the glory of God to cover it up, so do you also cover it up with the spirit of love and the mantle of gentleness; and, above all, with the reflection that the precious blood of Christ that made peace between you and God, has also made peace between you and all mankind. And now for love of Christ, if they smite you on the one cheek you should turn the other also; if they will have your cloak, for love of Jesus let them have your coat also sooner than live in the spirit of perpetual contention and strife. May God enable you to act thus, for Christ's sake! Amen.

Good News

A sermon (No. 2866) delivered on Thursday Evening, January 6th, 1876,
by C.H. Spurgeon at The Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington.

“As cold waters to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country.”—Proverbs
25:25.

This is a text for summertime rather than for a winter's evening. It is only on one of our hottest summer days that we could fully appreciate the illustration here employed; we need to be parched with thirst to be able to feel the value of cold waters to quench our thirst. At the same time I think that we can without any very great stretch of imagination, put ourselves into the position of some to whom cold waters have been almost like life from the dead. Look at Hagar in the wilderness with her child, whom she has cast under one of the shrubs, that she may not see him die. The water in the bottle is spent, and she longs for a cooling draught that might save the young lad's life. Then the Lord opened her eyes so that she saw a well of water in the desert, and as she filled her bottle from it she understood what cold waters are to a thirsty soul. Think also of the whole nation of Israel in the wilderness crying out in agony because there was no water for them to drink. Then they began to murmur against the Lord, and against Moses; but how joyful they were when the smitten rock poured forth its cooling stream, and they rushed to it, and drank to the full. If you want another personal example of the blessing of cold water to a thirsty soul, think of Samson. Heaps upon heaps, with the jawbone of an ass he has slain a thousand men; but the dust of the conflict, and the heat, and the exhaustion had caused such an intense thirst to come upon him that he is ready to die. Then he lifts up his voice to the Lord, and the same God who had made the jawbone to be so mighty a weapon against the Philistines opens for him a spring of water in that very jawbone, and he drinks, and is refreshed, and magnifies the name of the Lord. So you see, there are occasions when cold waters are inexpressibly precious to thirsty souls; and Solomon, who seems to have known something of their value, says that good news from a far country is equally pleasant, and refreshing, and reviving.

This proverb is true in its most literal interpretation. When we are in a far country separate from those we love, there is no greater pleasure than that of receiving letters from them with tidings of their welfare. Even the little details about household affairs—the minor events which we should scarcely have noticed if we had been there—become exceedingly interesting to us; and the longer we have been away from home the more dear everything becomes to us when we hear of it in the far country where, for a while, our lot has been cast. I suppose that merchants who have costly ventures in distant parts, also long for good news from the far country which is still their home wherever they may be. Solomon had sent his ships to various foreign countries, and when the news came from Joppa that the vessels were in sight which had come back from India, or from the Pillars of Hercules, bringing all manner of precious things, the merchant prince was highly pleased and felt that “as cold waters to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country.” And this which is a literal fact may become an illustration of spiritual truth; and I am going to use it in that way as God the Holy Spirit may guide me.

First, good news from God for sinners is like cold waters to a thirsty soul. Secondly, good news from heaven for saints is like cold waters to a thirsty soul. And thirdly, good news in heaven from earth—the good news which reaches that far country every now and then, is to angels and glorified saints as cold waters to a thirsty soul.

I. First then, (and may God bless this first head very richly!) good news from God for sinners is like cold water to the thirsty.

Sin has led the sinner into a far country. That part of the description of the prodigal son, who gathered all-together and went into a far country, aptly describes the condition of the whole human race. Man before the Fall was near to God, he communed with him. But when Adam and Eve “heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day,” after they had disobeyed him, they “hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden.” Practically, by his sin, Adam set out on a long journey away from his happy home; and soon he was so far off that when God came where he had formerly communed with him, he had to cry to him, “Adam, where art thou?” In like manner we are alienated from God by wicked works, far off from him in character, for he is light and we are darkness; he is truth and we are falsehood; he is love and we are just the opposite. We are also far off from God in our aims and objects, for we aim not at the good of others, nor at his glory, but we seek earthly things. We are by nature far off from God in the whole bent and current of our life, which no longer runs in a parallel line with the life of God as first imparted to man, but runs rather according to the fashion of the life of Satan, so that we yield ourselves up to the evil influence of that foul spirit who worketh in the children of disobedience.

When a sinner is awakened by the Holy Spirit, he becomes conscious of this distance and he feels in a measure like the lost spirits in hell who realize that there is a great gulf fixed between them and God. At first the convicted sinner fancies that gulf can never be passed; and the longer he looks into its awful depths, the longer his eyes try to gaze across it to the other side, the more he discovers that he is far off from his God, and that there is a vast, yawning chasm between him and his Maker. If any of you dear friends are conscious of being thus at a distance from God, I have come as a messenger from him bringing to you his words of mercy and grace, which should be to you as good news from a far country.

And the first piece of good news that I have to give you is that God has not forgotten you. You are a lost sheep, and you have almost forgotten your Shepherd—perhaps you have altogether forgotten him—but your Shepherd has been counting over the number of his sheep and he finds that there is one missing, for there are only ninety and nine where there should be a hundred, and he is deeply concerned about the one that has gone astray.

God has not only remembered that there is such a person as you, but he remembers you with pity. It is wonderful to notice how he speaks. Sometimes he cries, “How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim?” Like as a father pitieth his children, so is it with our God, he pities those who wander away from him. “As I live, saith the LORD God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live.” God takes no delight in your sin, and no delight in the shame and sorrow which your sin will bring upon you unless you turn from it, but he will take delight in you if you return to him. He still cries to you, “Return ye now every one from his evil way;” and he still remembers you in pity and compassion. Notwithstanding your forgetfulness of him, and your wilful rebellion against him, he doth remember you still; for God is love, and there

is love in his heart even towards sinners who are dead in trespasses and sins. That surely is good news to you, and if God thus thinks of you in pity, should not you think of God with deep, heartfelt penitence and contrition?

But there is even better news from God for you than this, namely, that he has prepared the way by which you may come back to him. Do you ask, "How can that be, for there is a wall of partition between us? How can I ever get to God? Surely the justice of God, on account of my sin, raises an impassable barrier between us. That justice stands like the cherubim with a flaming sword which turned every way to keep the way of the tree of life, lest haply I should attempt to return to my God." That is quite true, yet listen to this, poor, guilty sinner. God must be just, that is certain; and being just, he must punish thy sin. But hast thou not heard that he has given his only-begotten Son that he might stand in the sinner's stead, and bear the punishment that was due on account of the sinner's guilt? That cherub's flaming sword has been quenched in Jesus's precious blood. That middle wall of partition Christ has broken down, even as the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom. Oh what a mighty rent was that! Not a little slit part of the way down, but from the top to the bottom. So has Jesus Christ demolished the barrier which stood between a justly angry God and a guilty but repenting sinner, and now there is a way of approach for the very worst of men and women, right up to the throne of the Most High. By the blood of Jesus, once shed for many for the remission of sins, the guiltiest foot of man may come. Ay, by that blood-besprinkled way, the most condemned sinner may come without fear of being repulsed. The chasm has been filled, the gulf bridged over, and if thou truly believest in Jesus Christ, thou mayest in his name and for his sake come back to thy Heavenly Father. That wise resolve within thy heart which says, "I will arise and go to my Father," should be at once carried into effect, for thy Father hath prepared the way by which thou mayest come back to him, and to encourage thee he has sprinkled it with the blood of his dear Son—the surest sign and token of his love to sinners that even God himself could give. Here then is good news from a far country. Your Father thinks of you, poor prodigal, and he has paved the way for you to come back to his own house and heart.

Is there any more good news for you? Ay, that there is, far more than I can tell you. This is another piece of it, God has sent you his Word, and sent you his servants, to invite you to come back to him. It is very gracious for God to prepare the way; but it is even more gracious for him to invite you to make use of that way. There are sometimes cases of necessity when a man thrusts himself upon the notice of another, and seeks his aid in some great emergency. It is a dark and stormy night, and the wanderer who has lost his way knocks at the first door he sees and asks for shelter. But that is not your case. You also are a wanderer, and you need shelter, but mercy's door stands wide open, and God has sent his messengers to invite you to come in. If the door had been closed, it would have been a wise action on your part to knock and ask for admission, or even to cause the kingdom of heaven to suffer violence and to take the blessing by force. But that is not necessary. Think then of the goodness of God who invites, entreats, exhorts, and persuades sinners to come unto him. Nay, more, there is a text—a blessed text I think—which says, "Compel them to come in." The great King bids his servants to seize them by the mighty force of love, and to draw them in with tears and entreaties again and again repeated until they yield. "Compel them to come in" says he, "that my house may be filled." This is good news indeed. Such gracious invitations as these make up still more good news: "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: for

I have redeemed thee.” “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.” “Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” “All manner of sin and of blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men.” “The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.” “This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.” Is not this good news for poor sinners? O my Master, bless thou thine own words of grace and mercy to all who hear or read them, and make them to be like cold waters to a thirsty soul!

There is still more good news beyond all this, and I will tell you some of it. It is good news that many have already returned to their Father and have been welcomed. Some of these are your own friends and relatives—your brother, your sister, your father, your mother. This good news does not relate to anything which is merely a matter of experiment. The experiment has been made so often—the blessed experiment of proving whether God will receive repenting sinners or no—that it is a matter of certainty now. Why, you even know one who used to be your companion in every kind of folly and sin, and he has sought and found the Savior. Did he not tell you so the other day? And there was one who seemed to be even worse than you—at least he went further in open sin than you have ever done; yet he sought the Lord and he was not rejected. Now when I see so many come to Christ and find that he never casts out one of them, what ought I to infer from that? Why, that he will not cast me out if I come to him. If from my Master’s door I saw a stream of sinners coming back with sad countenances, and all shaking their heads and saying, “We have been denied admittance, we were too guilty to go in;” or, “We were not fit;” or, “We were not sensitive enough;” or something of that kind, then methinks I should not dare to go; but if the footprints of sinners all run towards Christ, and never is there a single footprint of a penitent sinner turned back by him—if I see him drawing men unto himself, according to his word: “I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me;”—and if I never see him repelling or repulsing one sinner however black or crimson he may be, I may well say, “Come, my poor guilty soul, why shouldst not thou have acceptance too?” At any rate—

“I’ll to the gracious King approach,
Whose scepter pardon gives;
Perhaps he may command my touch,
And then the suppliant lives.

I can but perish if I go,
I am resolved to try;
For if I stay away, I know
I must for ever die.

And if I die with mercy sought,
When I the King have tried
This were to die (delightful thought!)
As sinner never died;”—

for no sinner ever did seek Jesus Christ by faith in vain. That surely is good news from a far country.

And once again we have to bring this good news—that the Lord has not only made a way for his poor wandering children to come back to him, but he has provided all the means needed to

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bring them back. You recollect that when Joseph sent for his father Jacob to come to him in Egypt, Jacob could not believe that Joseph was still alive; the news, that he was, under Pharaoh, ruler over all Egypt, seemed too good to be true; but when he saw the waggons which Joseph had sent, then his spirit revived. "Waggons" is the word in our translation, but I expect that Joseph also sent some of the best chariots that Egypt could produce to carry poor old Jacob and all his family down into Egypt; and I do not wonder that the spirit of the patriarch revived when he saw those waggons or chariots. There is many a poor sinner who says, "Yes, I know that there is a way of salvation; but then my feet are lame, so how can I run along that way! I know that there is saving truth in the Bible, and blessed be God for that; but how shall I ever learn that truth? I know that Christ is himself the Truth, but how can that Truth be mine? I know that there is eternal life, and that Christ is the Life as well as the Truth and the Way, but I am spiritually dead, can I ever have that life?" Yes you can, for our Lord Jesus Christ is not merely the Way, but he is also the power by which we run in that way. He is not only the Truth, but he gives us the illuminating Spirit to lead us into the Truth; and he is not only the Life, but he puts that Life into us and sustains and perfects it. You have nothing to do sinner but to give yourself up to the leading, guiding, directing, assisting, quickening of the blessed Spirit of God. It is true that you must believe, but he will give you the grace of faith. It is true that you must repent, but it is also true that he works repentance in us. There must and there will be a change of life in all true converts, but it is the Holy Spirit who converts you and turns you completely round. There must be sanctification in genuine believers, but it is the Holy Spirit who sanctifies you. There is nothing asked of you in the gospel but what the gospel itself gives you. Those things which in one part of Scripture are put as precepts, are in other parts of Scripture among the promises. What the Lord bids the sinner do he enables the sinner to do, just as when Jesus said to the man that was paralyzed, "Take up thy bed, and walk," with the command he gave the power to obey it; and when he said to another man, "Stretch out thy hand, withered though it be," the miraculous power that gave the nerves and muscles force again went with the mandate from the lips of Jesus. In like manner, trust thou the Lord to give thee the power to lay hold on the gospel. The very eye with which to look at the brazen serpent is his gift; and that gift he is prepared to bestow upon all who come to him for it. Is not this good news from a far country?

And this too is good news—that thou mayest come to Christ at once. If at this moment thou art enabled to trust the Lord Jesus, he is thine. The way home looks very far, but the good news I have to bring you is that you can be there in a moment. That is to say, far off as thou art from God, if thou believest in Jesus, thou art brought to God that very instant. As soon as the Holy Spirit enables thee to trust in Jesus, thou art brought near to God at once. What said our Savior to the dying thief? "This day shalt thou be with me in paradise." You perhaps will not have an immediate entrance into the paradise above but may live a little longer here; but as soon as thou dost believe in Jesus, thou shalt be reconciled to God by the death of his Son; thou shalt have instantaneous forgiveness, and at the same time it shall be as permanent as it is instantaneous, and as complete as it is immediate. This is the good news which comes to you by the gospel.

And what thou hast to do with it is this, believe the Father's word, and trust thyself wholly to what Christ has done for sinners. May the Divine Spirit take thee off from all other ways of salvation, and bring thee to trust to this alone, and make thee abhor and loathe, even to detestation, anything like confidence in thy prayers, or thy tears, thy doings, thy sufferings, thy preparings, thy repentings, or anything else; for it is none but Jesus who can bring a sinner near to God. All that you spin you will have to unravel; all that you build will have to come down; all that you can bring to God, you

will have to take back again. You must come to him empty-handed, with nothing of your own, and simply rest where God himself doth rest—in the blessed person and the finished work of the Lord Jesus who is all in all.

Now if thou art spiritually thirsty, this good news will be to thee as a draught of cold water; but if thou art not thirsty thou wilt not partake of it. It is little use to praise cold water to a man who is already drunk with the world's intoxicating draughts, or to those who have no thirst and who will despise it. If there is anyone here who does not feel that he is a sinner, or who thinks that he has no great guilt, and who has no true sorrow of heart on account of his sin—I might as well walk into St. Paul's Cathedral and talk to the statues there, or into Westminster Abbey and preach to the dust beneath my feet as preach to you. Cold waters are for the thirsty, and the good news of mercy and salvation is for the guilty. Oh that the Holy Spirit would make you feel your deep need, and give you intense spiritual thirst; for then Jesus Christ and the good news from the far country would be precious to you!

II. Now I turn to the second part of our subject, which is good news from heaven for saints. That also is as cold waters to a thirsty soul.

Does someone ask, "Is there any news from heaven?" Yes there is; and that shall be my first remark in this part of my theme—that news does still come from heaven. There is an invisible telegraph between us and the glory-land; we are not cut off from communication with those who are there. Jacob dreamed of a ladder reaching to heaven, but it was not merely a dream. Never was there anything more real than that vision of the night, for there is a blessed means of communication between this far-off land and the goodly land beyond the river. Our prayers and sighs and tears, our praises and thanksgivings, get there all right; they are not lost en route. They reach the great heart of God, and messages come down to us from him in response to them. How do they come? Well, they come by the Holy Spirit sealing home to the soul the promises of the Word. Do you know experimentally what I mean by that? "Ah!" says someone, "do I not!" Every now and then some blessed portion of Scripture seems as if it were set on fire, and as you read it it blazes out before your eyes just as sometimes we see the lamps that are being got ready for an illumination. There is some grand device, and before it is lit up it is little more than an array of pipes; but how different it looks after they have lit it all! So, there is many a text of Scripture which is like that design; you can see something of what it means, but you should see it when it is lit up. How very different it is then! You sometimes get a promise from the Word whispered into your ear, and it is just as new to you as if it had never been written down eighteen hundred or three or four thousand years ago. It is as fresh to you as if the eternal pen had written it to-day, and written it for you alone. Some of us, I hope many of us, know how the Spirit of God takes of the things of Christ and reveals them unto us—leads us into the very heart and soul of the precious blessings of the covenant of grace. This is as good news from a far country, and is as cold waters to a thirsty soul.

And often too the Lord Jesus Christ sends us news concerning the fellowship which he intends us to enjoy with him. Still do godly men walk with God as Enoch did. Do not imagine that God has gone away, and that no longer may we speak to him as a man speaketh with his friend. No, for "truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." Still does Jesus lay bare his heart to his beloved. Still may we say with the spouse, and have the prayer answered, "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth: for thy love is better than wine." There are still sweet intercourses and blessed love passages between Christ and his chosen, of which the world knows

not; but “the secret of the LORD is with them that fear him; and he will show them his covenant.” Yes, there is good news from a far country for the saints of God.

And dear friends, it should be our earnest aim to keep unbroken our intercourse with heaven, for it is the most refreshing thing beneath the sun. This world is like an arid desert where there is no water except as we maintain our intercourse with Christ. So long as I can say that the Lord is mine, all things here below are of small account; but if I once get a doubt about that matter, and if I cease to walk with God, then what is there here below that can content my immortal spirit? Without Christ this world is to us as thorns without the roses, and as bitters without the sweets of life. But thou, O Lord, makest earth to be a heaven to thy saints even when they lie in dungeons when thy presence cheers them. But were they translated to the palaces of kings and thereby lost thy blessed company, those palaces would be worse than prison-houses to them. It is most important that you who are obliged to mingle with the world should maintain your intercourse with Christ, for that is the only way to keep yourself clear from its corruptions. And you who have much to do in the church must keep up your intercourse with Christ, for that is the only way of preserving your service from becoming mechanical, and of preventing you from doing good works as a mere matter of routine. You too, who have much to suffer, or even much to enjoy, must keep up this holy intercourse, or else your soul will soon be like a thirsty land where there is no water.

It may be that I am addressing some who have not had much news lately from the far country of heaven. You are going there one day, and—

“There your best friends, your kindred, dwell;
There God your Savior reigns;”—

but you have had no news from there lately. If it is so with you, I hope you feel as some of us did a little while ago when we were in the South of France. “No letters?” we asked, as the time came for our usual post. When the next day came and there were still no letters, we enquired, “What is the matter?” and they said, “There is deep snow on the railway, the trains cannot travel, so the mails cannot be brought on.” Another day passed, and as the snow was not gone we had no letters. When the letters did come they were very sweet, and all the sweeter because we had had to wait for them. And there were more of them than usual, for those that had been delayed came tumbling in two or three at a time. I hope it may be so with you and your good news from heaven. If there have been any snow-drifts between your soul and Christ—and that does happen sometimes in this cold world—if there is between you and the Savior a chilly air, and a frozen mass of unbelief so that the trains cannot travel to and fro;—oh, cry mightily to the Lord to melt these snows and clear them away; and I warrant you, if you do so, when you get communication restored and fellowship renewed, it will be exceedingly sweet. I hope you will often feel that you cannot have too much of it, and seek to have more and more. Say as the spouse did in the Song, “It was but a little that I passed from them, but I found him whom my soul loveth: I held him, and would not let him go.” Let this dark season of interrupted fellowship into which you have passed only make you the more desperately in earnest to get out of it, so that when that fellowship is restored you may be able to say, “I held him, and would not let him go.” Get such a firm grip of him again, such a grip as you had when first you knew him—when the love of your espousals was upon you—when you were newly married to the blessed Bridegroom, and say again, “I held him, and would not let him go.” God grant to you that there may be no more lukewarmness, no more of being neither cold nor hot; and may the cold atmosphere through which you have passed in his absence make your heart grow

all the warmer towards him now that you have him again. May you cling to him now with an intensity of affection that you have never reached before!

What is this good news of which I have been speaking? Well, dear friends, I think that this good news may be summed up thus. God is working in providence and making all things work together for your good if you belong to him. Your heart is heavy just now, and your harp is hanging on the willows. Yet God is permitting that to happen for your good. The bitter drugs you have to take are nauseous to you, but they are to work together with other things for your good; wherefore, be of good cheer.

The next piece of good news is that Jesus is pleading for you. Remember how he said to Peter, "Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat; but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not." Jesus has thy name upon his breastplate— yea, "graven on the palms of his hands." You are not forgotten of him; is not that good news? When somebody comes to you in a foreign land, you like to hear him say, "When I was at your home they were all talking about you, and they all sent loving messages to you. I saw your portrait in a locket, and I could tell that you were not forgotten." You are glad to hear that; and Jesus has your names graven on the palms of his hands, and he is pleading for you before the mercy-seat, you are not forgotten up there.

Another piece of good news is that he is coming here again— coming here for you—coming to be admired by you and the rest of his redeemed family when he comes to take his people up to their eternal home. The message which he has sent is, "Behold, I come quickly." What is your answer to that? I think I hear you say, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus." It will not be very long before you will be with him, or else he will be with you. In a short time you will have ended your pilgrimage here; the days of your banishment from home will be over. Wait a little longer; only a few more tears, and then—

"Safe in the arms of Jesus,
Safe on his gentle breast."

Is not that good news?

There is another piece of news which you have often heard before, that is, that a great many of the saints have got home already. There is good news from the Fair Havens. Many have entered there— thousands, millions—who have had as stormy a sea to traverse as you yourself have had; but their Pilot has brought them to their desired haven. Many whom we loved on earth have gone home to be "for ever with the Lord." They are all right; all is well with them. The sheep are getting home to the fold; the children are going home to their Father's house above.

I have another piece of good news, and that is, beloved brother or sister, that there is a house there for you. Our Lord Jesus Christ has made it ready for you. There is a crown there which nobody's head but yours can ever wear. There is a seat in which none but yourself can sit. There is a harp that will be silent till your fingers strike its strings. There is a robe made for you which no one else can wear. And let me also tell you that they are wanting you up there. "Oh!" say you, "they are so happy, and so perfect that they surely do not want me." But they do. What does Paul say in the Epistle to the Hebrews? "They without us should not be made perfect." Nor can they; there cannot be a perfect body till all the members are there. It cannot be a perfect heaven till all the saints are there. Jesus Christ has not all the jewels of his crown yet, and he will have a perfect crown. So they are looking for you, and waiting and watching for you, and all is ready for your reception. You shall go home soon; therefore, live in hope; and having this hope within you, purify

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yourselves, come out from the world more and more. “Our conversation is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.” There is good news for you; is it not like cold waters to a thirsty soul?

III. Now lastly and very briefly. Sometimes in heaven they get good news from earth

Our text may be applied to the angels and to the spirits of just men made perfect: “As cold waters to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country.” We do not know how they receive news about us; and it is no use speculating concerning the matter; but there is one thing that we are sure of, that is, in heaven they know when a sinner repents, for our Lord Jesus Christ has told us that “there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.” That is, to them, good news from a far country. The angels all know about Jesus having died, and every time they see a repenting sinner washed in the blood of the atonement they must rejoice for Jesus’ sake, because he sees of the travail of his soul, and is satisfied.

I believe too brethren, that they get good news from a far country when you who are running the Christian race run well; for how does Paul put it in the 12th of Hebrews? Does he not tell us that we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses? And who are these witnesses? Why, those he had been speaking of—those brave men and women who had performed such valorous deeds by the power of faith, whose names he had inscribed on the triumphal arch of the 11th chapter of his Epistle. These are they who gaze upon us from their lofty seats, and they see us as we run the race, and note how we do it; and they clap their hands as the spectators were wont to do in the old Roman foot races, and rejoice over the grace that is manifested in us, and it is as cold water to their souls when they see what God does for his struggling, suffering people.

And moreover there is another piece of good news that reaches the far country; that is, when the Church of God is being built up and the gospel is spreading in the earth. When the world was created, did not the morning stars sing together and shout for joy? And do you not think that, as this new spiritual world is being fashioned by the pierced hands, the spirits above are looking down and watching the wondrous process? I am sure they do. “When the LORD shall build up Zion, he shall appear in his glory;” and appear, not only to those who are watching here below, who are workers together with him, but also to those who have gone above, who rejoice together with him in his gracious work below.

And I believe it is also good news from a far country when the saints one by one finish their course. They get tidings up there when another saint is crossing the Jordan of death. “Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints,” and it must be precious also in the sight of the angels and the redeemed from among men. John Bunyan pictures the shining ones as coming down to the river’s brink, and I can easily conceive that it is so. I can well imagine their glad welcome to the spirit as, disencumbered of this poor body, it comes forth from the stream of death, and taking it up to the pearly gates of the celestial city. Then there is good news from a far country. I sometimes like to send a message home by some whose hands I grasp as they are in the last article of death. Rowland Hill, when he was very old, said to one aged Christian who was dying, “I hope they have not forgotten to send for old Rowley;” and then he added, “Take my love up to the three glorious Johns, the apostle John, and John Bunyan, and John Newton.” I have sometimes felt inclined to do the same. Surely a spirit there will not forget anything that was good here below and pass in utter unconsciousness into the next world. It will have enough to do to think of Christ and to behold his glory; but, mayhap, the mind will be so expanded as to be able to think of other things beside. This

however I do not know; but this I am sure of—that as one by one they for whom the Savior died come home, there must be joy. As they rejoice over repenting sinners, so do they rejoice over perfected saints who are without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, and who come up cleansed and delivered from anything like sin through the precious blood of the Lamb. Then is there good news for them from the far country.

I cannot help feeling that I am addressing some who know nothing about the good news of which I have been speaking. For their benefit, let me tell you a story I have heard concerning one of our English pilots. A vessel was off the coast of Kent, gently sailing, as the seamen thought, towards their desired haven. A pilot who was watching them, observing the extreme danger in which they were, went at his utmost speed to warn them of their peril. He was hardly aboard before he shouted to the captain, “The Goodwins! The Goodwins!” They were almost on to those fatal sands, and they did not know it. At once the course of the vessel was changed and all sail possible was set, and they were saved as by the skin of their teeth. So I come to you thoughtless, careless ones, and I cry to you, “Hell lieth right ahead of you, eternal destruction from the presence of the Lord, and the glory of his power. Put your helm hard aport, up with such sail as you have: and may God send the breath of his Eternal Spirit to blow you from these breakers which already seem booming with the certainty of your eternal doom!” O God, almighty and ever-merciful, save them by thy grace! Save them by the precious blood of Jesus, for his dear name’s sake! Amen and Amen.

To-morrow

A sermon (No. 94) delivered on Sabbath morning, August 25, 1856,
by C. H. Spurgeon at Maberley Chapel, Kingsland,
on behalf of the Metropolitan Benefit Societies' Asylum, Ball's Pond Road, Islington.

“Boast not thyself of to-morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.”—Proverbs 27:1.

God's most holy Word was principally written to inform us of the way to heaven, and to guide us in our path through this world to the realms of eternal life and light. But as if to teach us that God is not careless concerning our doings in the present scene, and that our benevolent Father is not inattentive to our happiness even in this state, he has furnished us with some excellent and wise maxims which we may put in practice, not only in spiritual matters, but in temporal affairs also. I have always looked upon the book of Proverbs with pleasure, as being a book not only teaching us the highest spiritual wisdom, but as also more especially speaking on the “now”—the time that is present with us— giving us maxims that will make us wise for this world, and that will instruct us in conducting our affairs whilst we are here amongst our fellow-men. We need some temporal wisdom as well as spiritual illumination; it need not always be that the children of the kingdom should be more foolish than the children of darkness. It is well that we should be wise to order our common affairs aright, as well as to set out house in order for the grave; and hence we find in Scripture maxims and teachings for them both. Since God has been pleased thus to instruct us in the avocations of life, I shall not then be out of place if I use my text in some degree in a merely temporal manner, and endeavour to give advice to my friends concerning the business of this life. Afterwards, I shall dwell upon it more spiritually. There is first, the abuse of to-morrow forbidden in the text; in the second place I shall mention the right use of to-morrow.

I. First then, there is the abuse of to-morrow mentioned in the text; and we shall look upon it first in a worldly point of view, and yet I trust, in a way of wisdom. “Boast not thyself of to-morrow.” Oh! my brethren, whoso'er ye be, whether ye be Christians or no, this passage hath a depth of wisdom in it for you. “Boast not thyself of to-morrow,” and this for many very wise reasons.

First of all because it is extremely foolish to boast at all. Boasting never makes a man any the greater in the esteem of others, nor does it improve the real estate either of his body or soul. Let a man brag as he will, he is none the greater for his bragging; nay, he is the less for men invariably think the worse of him. Let him boast as much as he pleases of anything that he possesses, he shall not increase its value by his glorying. He cannot multiply his wealth by boasting of it; he cannot increase his pleasures by glorying in them. True, to be content with those pleasures and feel a complacency in them may render them very sweet; but not so with such a treasure as this, for it is a treasure which he has not yet, and therefore how foolish is he to glory in it! There is an old, old proverb, which I dare not quote here; it is something to do with chickens. Perhaps you can recollect it; it bears very well upon this text for to-morrow is a thing that we have not yet obtained, and therefore, not only if we had it would it be foolish to boast of it, but because we have it not and may never have it, it becomes the very extremity of foolishness to glory in it. Glory, O man, in the harvest that may come to thee next year when thy seed is sown; but glory not in to-morrow, for

thou canst sow no seeds of morrows. Morrows come from God; thou hast no right to glory in them. Glory if thou wilt, O fowler, that the birds have once flown to thy net, for they may come again; but glory not too soon, for they may find another decoy that shall be better to their taste than thine, or they may rove far off from thy snare. Though many a day has come to thee, think not that another will certainly arrive. Days are not like links of a chain; one does not ensure the other. We have one, but we may never see its fellow; each may be the last of its kind. Each springs of a separate birth. There are no twin days. To-day hath no brother, it stands alone, and to-morrow must come alone, and the next and the next also must be born into this world without a brother. We must never look upon two days at once, nor expect that a whole herd of days shall be brought forth at one time.

We need not boast of to-morrow, for it is one of the frailest things in all creation, and therefore the least to be boasted of. Boast of the bubbles on the breaker, boast of the foam upon the sea, boast of the clouds that skim the sky, boast of what thou wilt O man, but boast not of to-morrow, for it is too unsubstantial. To-morrow, it is a fleeting thing. Thou hast not seen it; why dost thou boast of it? To-morrow, it is the cup which the idiot dreams lieth at the foot of the rainbow. It is not there, nor hath he found it. To-morrow—it is the floating island of Loch Lomond; many have talked of it but none have seen it. To-morrow—it is the wrecker's beacon, enticing men to the rock of destruction. Boast not thyself of to-morrow; it is the frailest and most brittle thing thou canst imagine. Not glass were half so easily broken as thy to-morrow's joys and thy to-morrow's hopes; a puff of wind shall crush them while yet they seem not to be full blown. He said, good easy man, full surely my greatness is a ripening, but there came a frost—a killing frost which nipped his shoot and then he fell. Boast not of to-morrow; thou hast it not. Boast not of to-morrow; thou mayest never have it. Boast not of to-morrow; if thou hadst it, it would deceive thee. Boast not of to-morrow, for to-morrow thou mayest where morrows will be dreadful things to tremble at.

Boast not thyself of to-morrow, not only because it is extremely foolish, but because it is exceedingly hurtful. Boasting of to-morrow is hurtful to us every way. It is hurtful to us now. I never knew a man who was always hoping to do great things in the future that ever did much in the present. I never knew a man who intended to make a fortune by-and-by who ever saved sixpence a week now. I never knew a man who had a very great and grand hopes on the death of some old grandmother, or the coming-in of some property from chancery, or the falling to him of something because his name was Jenyns, I never saw him very prosperous in the mean time. I have heard of a man going to be rich to-morrow and boasting of it; but I never knew him do much. Such men spend so much time in building castles in the air that they have no stones left wherewith to build so much as a cottage on the ground. They were wasting all their energies on to-morrow, consequently they had no time to reap the fields of the present, for they were waiting for the heavy harvests of the future. The heavily laden boats of to-day come in with abundance of fish from the depths of time; but they said of them, "They are nothing; there will be heavier draughts to-morrow; there will be greater abundance then. Go away little ships; an argosy shall come home to-morrow—a very fleet of wealth;" and so they let to-day's wealth go by because they expected the greater wealth of to-morrow; therefore they were hurt even for the present.

And worse than that. Some men were led into extraordinary extravagance from their hopes of the future. They spend what they are going to have, or rather what they never will have. Many have been ruined by the idle dream of speculation; and what is that but boasting of to-morrow? They have said, "True, I cannot pay for this which I now purchase; but I shall to-morrow, for to-morrow I shall roll in wealth, to-morrow perhaps I shall be the richest of men. A lucky turn of business (as

they term it) will lift me off this shoal." So they keep still, and not only do they refuse to toil, to push themselves off the sand, but worse than that, they are throwing themselves away and wasting what they have in the hope of better times coming in the future. Many a man has been made halt, and lame, and blind, and dumb, in the present, because he hoped to be greater than a man in the future. I always laugh at those who say to me, "Sir, rest a while; you will work all the longer for it. Stay while, lest you waste your strength, for you may work to-morrow." I bid them remember that such is not the teaching of Scripture, for that says "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might;" and I would count myself worse than a fool if I should throw away my to-days in the expectation of to-morrows, and rest upon the couch of idleness to-day because I thought the chariot of to-morrow would make up for all my sloth. No beloved, if we love our God we shall find enough to do if we have all our to-morrows, and use all our to-days too. If we serve our God as we ought to serve him, considering what he has done for us, we shall find that we shall have more than our handsfull, let our life be spared as long as Methuselah's— enough for every moment, enough for every hour, long as life may be. But hoping to do things in the future takes away our strength in the present, unnerves our resolution, and unstrings our diligence. Let us take care that we are not hurt in the present by boasting of to-morrow.

And remember that if you boast of to-morrow it will not only hurt you to-day, but hurt you to-morrow also. Do you know why? because as sure as you are alive you will be disappointed with to-morrow if you boast of it before it comes. To-morrows would be very good things if you did not give them such a very good character. I believe one of the very worst things a minister can possess is to have anybody to recommend him; for the people say, "Here comes a man, how he will preach, how eloquent he will be!" The poor creature cannot come up to their expectations and so they are disappointed. So with to-morrow; you give him such flattering encomiums; "Oh! he is everything; he is perfection." To-days—they are nothing; they are the very sweepings of the floors; but to-morrows—they are the solid gold. Today's—they are exhausted mines and we get little from them; but to-morrows—they are the very mines of wealth. We have only to get them and we are rich, immensely rich. The to-morrows are everything; and then the to-morrows come laden with mercy and big with blessings of God; but notwithstanding we are disappointed, because to-morrow is not what we expected it to be, even when to-morrow is marvellously abundant. But sometimes to-morrow comes with storms and clouds and darkness when we expected it to be full of light and sunshine, and oh how terrible is our feeling then, from the very reason that we expected something different. It is not at all a bad beatitude, "Blessed is the man that expecteth nothing, for he shall never be disappointed."

If we know how to practise that and expect nothing, we shall not be disappointed it is certain; and the less we expect, and the less we boast of our expectations, the more happy will the future be; because we shall have far less likelihood of being disappointed. Let us recollect then that if we would kill the future, if we would ruin the to-morrows, if we would blast their hopes, if we would take away their honey, we must press them in the hand of boasting, and then we shall have done it. "Boast not thyself of to-morrow;" for thou spoilest the to-morrow by boasting of it.

And then remember what disastrous circumstances have occurred to men in this life after to-morrow had gone, from boasting of to-morrows. Ay, there is many a man that set all his hope upon one single thing; and the to-morrow came which he did not expect— perhaps a black and dark to-morrow, and it crushed his hopes to ashes; and how sad he felt afterwards! He was in his nest; he said, "Peace, peace, peace;" and sudden destruction came upon his happiness and his joy.

He had boasted of his to-morrow by over security, and see him there, what a very wreck of a man he is because he had set his hope on that; now his joy is blasted. Oh! my friends, never boast too much of the to-morrows, because if you do your disappointment will be tremendous when you shall find your joys have failed you and your hopes have passed away. See there that rich man; he has piled heaps on heaps of gold; but now for a desperate venture he is about to have more than he ever possessed before, and he reckons on that to-morrow. Nothingness is his; and what is his disappointment? because he boasted of imagined wealth. See that man! his ambition is to raise his house and perpetuate his name; see that heir of his— his joy, his life, his fulness of happiness. A handful of ashes and a coffin are left to the weeping father. Oh! if he had not boasted too much of the certainty of that son's life, he had not wept so bitterly after the to-morrow had swept over him with all its blast and mildew of his expectations. See yonder another; he is famous, he is great; to-morrow comes a slander and his fame is gone and his name disgraced. Oh! had he not set his love on that, he had not cared whether men cried, "crucify," or "hallelujah;" he had disregarded both alike. But believing that fame was a stable thing, whereas its foot is on the sand, he reckoned on to-morrows; and mark how sad he walks the earth because to-morrow has brought him nothing but grief. "Boast not thyself of to-morrow."

And I would have you remember just one fact, and that I think to be a very important one; that very often when men boast of to-morrow and are over confident that they shall live, they not only entail great sorrow upon themselves, but upon others also. I have when preaching frequently begged of my friends to be quite sure to make their wills, and see to their family affairs. Many are the solemn instances which should urge you to do so. One night a minister happened to say in the course of his sermon that he held it to be a Christian duty for every man to have his house set in order, so that if he were taken away, he would know that as far as possible everything would be right. And there was one member of his church there who said to himself, "What my minister has said is true. I should not like to see my babes and my wife left with nothing, as they must be if I were to die." So he went home. That night he made his will and cleared up his accounts. That night he died! It must have been a joyful thing for the widow in the midst of her sadness to find herself amply provided for, and everything in order for her comfort. Good Whitfield said he could not lie down in bed of a night if he did not know that even his gloves were in their place; for he said he should not like to die with anything in his house out of order. And I would have every Christian very careful to be so living one day that if he were never to see another, he might feel that he had done the utmost that he could, not only to provide for himself, but also for those who inherit his name and are dear to him. Perhaps you call this only worldly teaching; very good; you will find it very much like heavenly teaching one of these dark days if you do not practise it. "Boast not thyself of to-morrow."

II. But now I come to dwell upon this in a spiritual manner for a moment or two. "Boast not thyself of to-morrow." Oh! my beloved friends, never boast of to-morrow with regard to your soul's salvation.

They do so, in the first place, who think that it will be easier for them to repent to-morrow than it is to-day. Felix said there would be a more convenient season, and then he would again send for Paul that he might hear him seriously. And many a sinner thinks that just now it is not easy to turn and to repent, but that by-and-bye it will be. Now, is not that a very string of falsehoods? In the first place is it ever easy for a sinner to turn to God? Must not that be done, at any time, by divine power? And again, if that be not easy for him now, how will it be easier in after life? Will not his

sins bind fresh fetters to his soul so that it will be even more impossible for him to escape from his iron bondage? If he be dead now, will he not be corrupt before he reaches to-morrow? And when to-morrow comes, to which he looks forward as being easier for a resurrection, will not his soul be yet more corrupt, and therefore, if we may so speak, even further from the possibility of being raised? Oh! sirs, ye say it is easy for you to repent to-morrow; why then not to-day? Ye would find the difficulty of it if you should try it; yea, you would find your own helplessness in that matter. Possibly you dream that on a future day repentance will be more agreeable to your feelings. But how can you suppose that a few hours will make it more pleasant? If it be vinegar to your taste now, it shall be so then; and if ye love your sins now, ye will love them better then; for the force of habit will have confirmed you in your course. Every moment of your lives is driving in another rivet to your eternal state. So far as we can see, it becomes less and less likely (speaking after the manner of men) that the sinner should burst his chains each sin that he commits; for habit has bound him yet faster to his guilt, and his iniquity has got another hold upon him. Let us take care then that we do not boast of to-morrow by a pretence that it will be so much easier to repent to-morrow; whereas it is one of Satan's lies, for it will only be the more difficult.

He boasts of to-morrow, again, who supposes that he shall have plenty of time to repent and to return to God. Oh! there are many who say, "When I come to die, I shall be on my death-bed, and then I shall say, 'Lord, have mercy upon me a sinner.'" I remember an aged minister telling me a story of a man whom he often warned, but who always said to him, "Sir, when I am dying I shall say 'Lord, have mercy on me;' and I shall go to heaven as well as anybody else." Returning home from market one night rather "foul" with liquor, he guided his horse with a leap right over the parapet of a bridge into the river; the last words he was heard to utter were a most fearful imprecation; and in the bed of the river he was found dead, killed by the fall. So it may be with you. You think you will have space for repentance, and it may be that sudden doom will devour you: or perhaps even while you are sitting there in the pew your last moment is running out. There is your hour-glass. See! it is running. I marked another grain just then, and then another fell; it fell so noiselessly, yet methought I heard it fall. Yes! there it is! The clock's tick is the fall of that grain of dust down from your hour-glass. Life is getting shorter every moment with all of you; but with some the sand is almost out; there is not a handful left. A few more grains. See, now they are less, two or three. Oh! in a moment it may be said, "There is not one left." Sinner! never think that thou hast time to spare! thou never hadst; man never had. God says, "Haste thee," when he bids men flee from Sodom. Lot had to haste, and depend upon it, when the Spirit speaks in a man's heart he doth always bid him haste. Under natural convictions men are very prone to tarry; but the Spirit of God, when he speaks in the heart of man, always says, "to-day." I never knew a truly anxious soul yet who was willing to put off till to-morrow. When God the Holy Ghost has dealings with a man they are always immediate dealings. The sinner is impatient to get deliverance; he must have pardon now; he must have present mercy or else he fears that mercy will come too late to him. Let me beseech you then (and may God the Holy Spirit grant that my entreaty may become successful in your case), let me beseech every one of you to take this into consideration—that there is never time to spare, and that your thought that there is time to spare is an insinuation of Satan; for when the Spirit pleads with man he pleads with him with demands of immediate attention. "To-day, if you will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation."

"Boast not thyself of to-morrow," O sinner, as I doubt not thou art doing in another fashion. "Boast not thyself of to-morrow," in the shape of resolves to do better. I think I have given up

resolutions now; I have enough of the debris and the rubbish of my resolutions to build a cathedral with, if they could but be turned into stone. Oh! the broken resolutions, the broken vows all of us have had! Oh! we have raised castles of resolutions, structures of enormous size that outvied Babylon itself in all its majesty. Says one, "I know I shall be better to-morrow; I shall renounce this vice and the other; I shall forsake this lust; I shall give up that darling sin; true, I shall not do so now—a little more sleep and a little more slumber; but I know I shall do it to-morrow." Fool! thou knowest not that thou shalt see to-morrow. Oh! greater fool! thou oughtest to know that what thou art not willing to do to-day thou wilt not be willing to do to-morrow. I believe there are many souls that have been lost by good intentions which were never carried out. Resolutions strangled at their birth brought on men the guilt of spiritual infanticide; and they have been lost with resolutions sticking in their mouths. Many a man has gone down to hell with good resolution on his lip, with a pious resolve on his tongue. Oh! if he had lived another day, he said he would have been so much better; if he had lived another week, oh, then he thought he would begin to pray. Poor soul! if he had been spared another week he would only have sunk the deeper into sin! But he did not think so, and he went to hell with a choice morsel rolling under his tongue—that he should do better directly, and that he meant to amend by-and-bye. There are many of you present I dare say, who are making good resolutions. You are apprentices: well, you are not going to carry them out till you get to be journeymen. You have been breaking the Sabbath: but you intend to leave it off when you are in another situation. You have been accustomed to swear: you say, "I shall not swear any more when I get out of this company, they try my temper so." You have committed this or that petty theft: to-morrow you will renounce it because to-morrow you will have enough, and you can afford to do it. But of all the lying things—and there are many things that are deceptive—resolutions for to-morrow are the worst of all. I would not trust one of them; there is nothing stable in them; you might sooner sail to America across the Atlantic on a sere leaf than float to heaven on a resolution.

It is the frailest thing in the world, tossed about by every circumstance, and wrecked with all its precious freight—wrecked to the dismay of the man who ventured his soul in it—wrecked, and wrecked for aye. Take care my dear hearers, that none of you are reckoning on to-morrows. I remember the strong but solemn words of Jonathan Edwards, where he says, "Sinner, remember, thou art at this moment standing over the mouth of hell upon a single plank, and that plank is rotten; thou art hanging over the jaws of perdition by a solitary rope, and lo! the strands of that rope are creaking—breaking now, and yet thou talkest of to-morrows!" If thou wert sick, man, wouldst thou send for thy physician to-morrow? If thine house were on fire, wouldst thou call "fire" to-morrow? If thou wert robbed in the street on thy road home, wouldst thou cry "stop thief" to-morrow? No, surely; but thou art wiser than that in natural concerns. But man is foolish, oh! too foolish in the things that concern his soul; unless divine and infinite love shall teach him to number his days that he may apply his heart unto true wisdom, he will still go on boasting of to-morrows, until his soul has been destroyed by them.

Just one hint to the child of God. Ah! my beloved brother or sister, do not, I beseech thee, boast of to-morrow thyself. David did it once: he said, "My mountain standeth firm, I shall never be moved." Do not boast of your to-morrows. You have feathered your nest pretty well; ay, but you may have a thorn in it before the sun has gone down, and you will be glad enough to fly aloft. You are very happy and joyful, but do not say you will always have as much faith as you have now—do not be sure you will always be as blessed. The next cloud that sweeps the skies may drive many of your joys away. Do not say you have been kept hitherto, and you are quite sure you will be preserved

from sin to-morrow. Take care of to-morrows. Many Christians go tumbling on without a bit of thought; and then, on a sudden, they tumble down and make a mighty mess of their profession. If they would only look sharp after the to-morrows—if they would only watch their paths instead of star-gazing and boasting about them, their feet would be a great deal surer. True, God's child need not think of to-morrow as regards his soul's eternal security, for that is in the hand of Christ and safe for ever; but as far as his profession, and comfort, and happiness are concerned, it will well become him to take care of his feet every day. Do not get boasting; if you get boasting of to-morrow you know the Lord's rule is always to send a canker where we put our pride. And so if you boast of to-morrow you will have a moth in it before long. As sure as ever we glory in our wealth it becomes cankered, or it takes to itself wings and flies away; and as certainly as we boast of to-morrow, the worm will gnaw its root, as it did Jonah's gourd, and the to-morrow under which we rested shall, with dropping leaves, only stand a monument to our disappointment. Let us take care Christian brethren, that we do not waste the present time with hopes of to-morrow—that we do not get proud and so off our guard by boasting of what we most assuredly shall be then, as we imagine.

III. And now in the last place, if to-morrows are not to be boasted of, are they good for nothing? No, blessed be God! There are great many things we may do with to-morrows. We may not boast of them, but I will tell you what we may do with them if we are the children of God. We may always look forward to them with patience and confidence, that they will work together for our good. We may say of the to-morrows, "I do not boast of them, but I am not frightened at them; I would not glory in them, but I will not tremble about them."

"What may be my future lot,
Well I know concerns me not;
This doth set my heart at rest,
What my God appoints is best."

We may be very easy and very comfortable about to-morrow; we may remember that all our times are in his hands, that all events are at his command; and though we know not all the windings of the path of providence, yet He knows them all. They are all settled in his book, and our times are all ordered by his wisdom; whether they be

"Times of trial and of grief;
Times of triumph and relief;
Times the tempter's power to prove,
Times to taste a Saviour's love:
All must come, and last, and end,
As shall please my heavenly Friend."

And therefore we may look upon the to-morrows as we see them in the rough bullion of time, about to be minted into every day's expenditure, and we may say of them all, "They shall all be gold; they shall all be stamped with the King's impress, and therefore let them come; they will not make me worse—they will work together for my good."

Yea, more, a Christian may rightly look forwards to his to-morrows not simply with resignation, but also with joy. To-morrow to a Christian is a happy thing, it is one stage nearer glory. To-morrow! It is one step nearer heaven to a believer; it is just one knot more that he has sailed across the

dangerous sea of life, and he is so much the nearer to his eternal port—his blissful heaven. To-morrow, it is a fresh lamp of fulfilled promise that God has placed in his firmament, that the Christian may hail it as a guiding star, in the future, or at least as a light to cheer his path. To-morrow, the Christian may rejoice at it; he may say of to-day, “O day, thou mayest be black, but I shall bid thee good-bye, for lo, I see the morrow coming, and I shall mount upon its wings and shall flee away and leave thee and thy sorrows far behind me.”

And moreover, the Christian may await to-morrow with even more than simple hope and joy; he may look forward to it with ecstasy in some measure, for he does not know but that to-morrow his Lord may come. To-morrow Christ may be upon this earth, “for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of Man cometh.” To-morrow all the glories of millennial splendour may be revealed; to-morrow the thrones of judgment may be set, and the King may summon the people to judgment. To-morrow we may be in heaven; to-morrow we may be on the breast of Christ; to-morrow, ay, before then, this head may wear a crown, this hand may wave the palm, this lip may sing the song, this foot may tread the streets of gold, this heart may be full of bliss, immortal, everlasting, eternal. Be of good cheer, oh, fellow-Christian; to-morrow can have nothing black in it to thee, for it must work for thy good, but it may have in it a precious, precious jewel. It is an earthen pitcher and it may have in it some dark black waters, but their bitterness is taken away by the cross. But mayhap, also, it may have in it the precious jewel of eternity; for wrapt up within to-morrow may be all the glories of immortality. Anoint thine head with fresh oil of gladness at the prospect of each coming day. Boast not of to-morrow, but often comfort thyself with it. Thou hast a right to do so; it cannot be a bad tomorrow to thee; it may be the best day of thy life, for it may be thy last.

And yet, another hint. To-morrow ought to be observed by Christians in the way of providence. Though we may not boast of to-morrow, yet we may seek to provide for the morrow. On one occasion I pleaded for a benefit society, and not knowing a more appropriate text, I selected this, “Take no thought for the morrow, for to-morrow shall take thought for the things of itself.” Some of my hearers, when I announced my text, feared the principle of it was altogether hostile to anything like an insurance, or providing for the future, but I just showed them that it was not as I looked upon it. It is a positive command that we are to take no anxious thought concerning to-morrow. No, how can I do that? How can I put myself into such a position that I can carry out this command of taking no thought for the morrow! If I were a man struggling in life and had it in my power to insure for something which would take care of wife and family in after days, if I did not do it, you might preach to me all eternity about not taking thought for the morrow; but I could not help doing it when I saw those I loved around me unprovided for. Let it be in God’s word, I could not practise it; I should still be at some time or other taking thought for the morrow. But let me go to one of the many of the excellent institutions which exist, and let me see that all is provided for, I come home and say, “Now, I know how to practise Christ’s command of taking no thought for the morrow; I pay the policy-money once a year, and I take no further thought about it, for I have no occasion to do so now, and have obeyed the very spirit and letter of Christ’s command.” Our Lord meant that we were to get rid of cares; now it is apparent that those distressing cares are removed, and we are able to live above anxiety by that single process.

Now, if that is so, if there is anything that enables us to carry out Christ’s commands, is it not in the very bowels of the commandments to do that? If God has pleased to put into the hearts of wise men to devise something that should in some way ameliorate the misfortunes of their kind, and relieve them from the distresses and casualties of God’s providence, how can it but be our duty

to avail ourselves of that wisdom which, doubtless, God gave to men, that we might thereby in these times be enabled to carry out in the fullest extent the meaning of that passage, "Take no thought for the morrow." Why, if a man says "I shall take no thought for the morrow, I will just spend all I get, and not think of doing anything or taking any thought for the morrow," how is he going to pay his rent? Why, the text could not be carried out, if it meant what some people think. It cannot mean that we should carelessly live by the day or else a man would spend all his money on Monday, and have nothing left for the rest of the week; but that would be simple folly. It means that we should have no anxious, distressing thought about it. I am preaching about benefit societies; I would not attempt to recommend many of them, and I do not believe in the principles of half of them; I believe a great deal of mischief is done by their gatherings in alehouses and pothouses; but wherever there is a Christian society I must endeavour to promote its welfare, for I look on the principle as the best means of carrying out the command of Christ, "Take no thought for the morrow, for the morrow shall take thought for itself." Allow me to recommend this Asylum to your liberality as a refuge in adversity for those who were careful in prosperity. It is a quiet retreat for decayed members of Benefit Societies, and I am sorry to inform you that many of its rooms are vacant, not from want of candidates, but from a lack of funds. It is a pity that so much public property should lie unemployed. Help the committee then to use the houses.

And now in concluding, let me remind the Christian that there is one thing he has not do, and that is, he has not to provide salvation, nor grace, nor sustenance, nor promises for the morrow. No beloved; but we often talk as if we had. We say, "How shall I persevere through such and such a trial?" "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." You must not boast of to-day's grace as though it were enough for to-morrow. But you need not be afraid. With to-morrow's difficulties there will be to-morrow's help; with to-morrow's foes, to-morrow's friends; with to-morrow's dangers, to-morrow's preservations. Let us look forward then to to-morrow as a thing we have not to provide for in spiritual matters, for the atonement is finished, the covenant ratified, and therefore every promise shall be fulfilled, and be "yea and amen" to us, not only in one to-morrow, but in fifty thousand to-morrows, if so many could run over our heads.

And now just let us utter the words of the text again very solemnly and earnestly. O young men in all your glory! O maidens in all your beauty! "Boast not yourselves of to-morrow." The worm may be at your cheeks very soon. O strong men whose bones are full of marrow! O ye mighty men whose nerves seem of brass and your sinews of steel! "Boast not of to-morrow." "How, fir tree," for cedars have fallen ere now; and though you think yourselves great, God can pull you down. Above all, ye grey heads, "Boast not yourselves of to-morrow," with one foot hanging over the unfathomable gulf of eternity and the other just tottering on the edge of time! I beseech you do not boast yourselves of to-morrow. In truth I do believe that grey heads are not less foolish on this point than very childhood. I remember reading a story of a man who wanted to buy his neighbour's farm next to him, and he went to him and asked him whether he would sell it. He said, "No, I will not;" so he went home and said, "Never mind, Farmer So-and-so is an old man; when he is dead I shall buy it." The man was seventy, and his neighbour sixty-eight; he thought the other would be sure to die before him. It is often so with men. They are making schemes that will only walk over their graves, when they will not feel them. The winds shall soon howl across the green sward that covers their tomb, but they shall not hear its wailing. Take care of the "to-days." Look not through the glass of futurity but look at the things of to-day. "Boast not thyself of to-morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth."

The Best Friend

A Sermon (No. 2627) intended for reading on Lord's Day, June 18th, 1899,
delivered by C. H. Spurgeon at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington.
on Thursday evening, February 23rd, 1882.

“Thine own friend, and thy father's friend, forsake not.”—Proverbs 27:10.

True friends are very scarce. We have a great many acquaintances and sometimes we call them friends, and so misuse the noble word “friendship.” Peradventure in some after-day of adversity when these so-called friends have looked out for their own interests and left us to do the best we can for ourselves, that word friendship may come back to us with sad and sorrowful associations. The friend in need is the friend indeed, and such friends I say again, are scarce. When thou hast found such a man, and proved the sincerity of his friendship; when he has been faithful to thy father and to thee, grapple him to thyself with hooks of steel and never let him go. It may be that because he is a faithful friend he will sometimes vex thee and anger thee. See how Solomon puts it in this very chapter: “Open rebuke is better than secret love. Faithful are the wounds of a friend.” It takes a great deal of friendship to be able to tell a man of his faults. It is no friendship that flatters; it is small friendship that holds its tongue when it ought to speak; but it is true friendship that can speak at the right time and if need be even speak so sharply as to cause a wound. If thou art like many other foolish ones, thou wilt be angry with the man who is so much thy friend that he will tell thee the truth. If thou art unworthy of thy friend, thou wilt begin to grow weary of him when he is performing on thy behalf the most heroic act of pure charity by warning thee of thy danger, and reminding thee of thine imperfection. Solomon, in prospect of such a case, knowing that this is one of the greatest trials of friendship among such poor imperfect beings as we are, tells us not to forsake for this reason—nor indeed for any other reason—the man who has been to us and to our family a true friend: “Thine own friend, and thy father's friend, forsake not.”

I do not think that I should waste your time if I were to give you a lecture upon friendship—its duties, its dangers, its rights, and its privileges; but it is not my intention to do so. There is one Friend to whom these words of Solomon are specially applicable, there is a Friend who is the chief and highest of all friends; and when I speak of him I feel that I am not spiritualizing the text in the least. He is a true and real Friend, and these words are truly and really applicable to him; and if ever the text is emphatic it is so when it is applied to him, for there was never such another friend to us and to our fathers; there is no friend to whom we ought to be so intensely attached as to him: “Thine own friend, and thy father's friend, forsake not.”

I want under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to speak upon this subject thus; First here is a descriptive title which may be fitly applied to Christ by very many of us; he is our own Friend and also our father's Friend. Secondly here is suggestive advice concerning this Friend: “Forsake him not.” And ere I have done I shall say a little upon a consequent resolution. I hope that we shall turn the text into a solemn resolve and say, “My own Friend, and my father's Friend, I will not forsake.”

I. First then here is a descriptive title for our blessed Lord and Master.

First, he is a Friend, the Friend of man. I know that Young calls him the “great Philanthropist.” I do not care to see that title used just so; it is not good enough for him, though truly the great Lover

of man is Christ. Better still is the title which was given to him when he was upon earth, “the friend of sinners.”

Friend of sinners, is his name.

Their Friend—thinking of them with love when no other eye pitied them and no other heart seemed to care for them. Their Friend, entering with tenderest sympathy into the case of the lost, for “the Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost.” Their Friend—giving them good and sound advice and wholesome counsel, for whosoever listens to the words of Christ shall find in his teaching and in his guidance the highest wisdom. Their Friend, giving far more than sympathy and mere words however—giving a lifetime of holy service for the sake of those whose cause he had espoused, and going further even than this, doing for them the utmost that a friend can do, for what is there more than that a man should lay down his life for his friend? Friend of man, and therefore born of man, Friend of sinners, and therefore living among them and ministering to them. Friend of sinners, and therefore taking their sin upon himself and bearing it “in his own body on the tree,” so fulfilling Gabriel’s prophecy that he would come “to finish the transgression and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness.”

Christ has done for us all that needed to be done. He has done much more than we ever could have asked him to do or expected him to do. He has done more for us than we can understand even now that he has done it, and more than you and I are likely ever to understand even when our intellect shall have been developed and enlarged to the utmost degree before the eternal throne, for even there I do not think we shall ever fully know how much we owe to the friendship of our best Friend. However self-denying and tender other friends may be, our Lord must ever stand at the head of the list, and we will not put a second there as worthy of any comparison with him.

Next, it is a very blessed thing to have the Lord Jesus Christ as having been our father’s friend. There are some of us to whom this has been literally true for many generations. I suppose that there is some pride in being the fourteenth earl, or the tenth duke, or having a certain rank among men; but sometimes quietly to myself I glory in my pedigree, because I can trace the line of spiritual grace back as far as I can go to men who loved the Lord, and who, many of them, have preached his Word. Many of you I know in this church and in other churches have a glorious heraldry in the line of the Lord’s nobles. It is true that some of you have had the great mercy of being taken like trees out of the desert and planted in the courts of our God, for which you may well be glad; but others of you are slips from vines that in their turn were slips from other vines, loved and cared for by the great Husbandman. You cannot tell how long this blessed succession has continued; your fathers and your fathers’ fathers as far back as you can trace them were friends of Christ. Happy Ephraim, whose father Joseph had God with him! Happy Joseph, whose father Jacob saw God at Bethel! Happy Jacob, whose father Isaac walked in the fields and meditated in communion with Jehovah! Happy Isaac, whose father Abraham had spoken with God and was called “the friend of God.” God has a habit of loving families; David said “The mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children’s children; to such as keep his covenant and to those that remember his commandments to do them.” Grace does not run in the blood, but often the stream of divine mercy has run side by side with it, and instead of the fathers have been the children whom the Lord has made to be princes in the earth.

Some of you perhaps have fathers and mothers still living whose example you may fitly follow; I charge you never forsake your father’s God, or what is tenderer still, the God of your mother.

Others of you have parents in heaven; well, they are still yours; that sacred relationship is not broken. You remember your mother's last grasp of your hand when she bade you follow her to heaven; you recollect your father's appeals to you in his long sickness when he pleaded with you to take heed to your ways and not neglect the things of God but seek him in the days of your youth. Well, did you ever hear your father say anything against his God? Did your mother ever in her confiding moments whisper in your ear, "Mary, do not trust in God for he has betrayed your mother's confidence"? No, I know they did not talk like that, for he was their best friend; and he who was such a Friend to the dear old man whom you can never forget, he who cheered the heart of that gracious matron whose sweet face rises before you now—oh, I beseech you, forsake him not! "Thine own friend, and thy father's friend, forsake not."

Still, the sweetest part of the text lies in these words, "Thine own friend." I do not think that I can preach on those words; I can take them in my mouth and they are like honey for sweetness, but they must be personally enjoyed to be fully appreciated. There are some precious lines we sometimes sing,—

The health is of my countenance,
Yes, mine own God is he;—

which exactly describes the blessedness of "thine own friend."

Now if it be true that Christ is thine own Friend then thou hast spoken with him, thou hast held sweet converse with him, thou hast placed thy confidence in him, thou hast told him thy lost estate and sinfulness, and thou hast reposed in him as thine own Savior. Thou hast put thy cause into his hands, and thou hast left it there. If he be indeed thine own Friend, then he has helped thee. Thou wast a stranger and he has taken thee in; thou wast naked and he has clothed thee; thou wast spiritually sick and in prison and he came to thee and healed thee. Yea, and he wore thy chains and bade thee go free; and he took thy sicknesses and bade thee take his health, and so he made thee whole. Ay, and he restored thee even from the grave, and went into that grave himself, that by his death thou mightest live. Thou knowest that it is so, and day by day thou dost keep up communion with him; thou couldst not live without him, for he is such a Friend to thee, and thou dost rest on him with all thy weight as thou comest up from the wilderness with him, leaning on thy Beloved, "thine own friend."

Nor is the friendship all on one side, though thy side is a very little one. Thou wouldst make it greater if it were in thy power, for thou hast confessed his name, thou hast united thyself with his people, thou lovest to join with them in prayer and praise. Thou art not ashamed to be called by Christ's name as a Christian, or to speak well of that name, and thou desirest to consecrate to him all that thou hast. Better than all this, while thou dost call him Friend he also calls thee friend, as he said to his disciples, "Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you." Dare I say the words, yet dare I doubt the truth of the words—Jesus is my Friend? There is one we read of in the Bible who was David's captain of the host, and there was another who was David's counselor, but there was one man whom we always call "David's friend, Jonathan;" and I envy him such a title. Yet Jesus gives this name to all those who come and put their trust in him, and so find him to be their Friend.

Now inasmuch as the Lord Jesus is "thine own friend and thy father's friend," the injunction of the text comes to thee with peculiar force: "Forsake him not." Canst thou forsake him? Look at his face all red with bloody sweat for thee; nor his face alone, for he is covered all over with that

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gory robe wherein he wrought out thy redemption. He that works for bread must sweat, but he that worked for thine eternal life did sweat great drops of blood falling down to the ground. Canst thou forsake him? He stands at Pilate's bar, he is mocked by Herod's men of war, he is scourged by Pilate, and all for thee; and canst thou forsake him? He goes up to the cross of Calvary and the cruel iron is driven through his hands and feet, and there he makes expiation for thy guilt; he is thy Friend even to the ignominy of a felon's death, and canst thou forsake him? He lays his pierced hand on thee and he says, "Wilt thou also go away?" or as he worded it to the twelve, "Ye also will not go away, will you?" So it might be read: "Many of my supposed friends have gone, and so have proved themselves to be not friends but traitors; but ye also will not go away, will you?" And he seems to make an appeal to them with those tearful tender eyes of his—"as the eyes of doves by the rivers of waters, washed with milk, and fitly set,"—"Ye also will not go away, will you?"

And when you turn your eye another way and think not merely of the shame your Friend endured for you, but recollect what is an equal proof of his love, that he is not ashamed of you now that he is in his glory; that amidst the throng of angels and cherubim and seraphim that frequent his courts above, he does not disdain to know that he is the brother of these poor earth-worms down below, for even there he wears the body which proves him to be our next of kin—ay, and wears the scars which proved that for us he endured the death-penalty itself, and even now he is not ashamed to call us brethren;—as you think of all this can you forsake him? Because you are somewhat better off than you once were, will you leave the little gathering of poor folk with whom you used to worship so happily, and will you go to some more fashionable place where there is music, but little of the music of the name of Jesus—where there is gorgeous architecture it may be, and masquerading, and mummery, and I know not what, but little of the sweet savor of his presence and the dropping of that dew which he always brings with him wherever he comes? Oh, it is a pity, it is a sorrowful pity, it is a meanness that would disgrace a mere worldling, when a man who once confessed Christ and followed him must needs turn his back upon his Lord because his own coat is made of better material than it used to be, and his balance at the bank is heavier! I had almost said—Then let the Judas go, be his own place what it may—it were almost a dishonor to Christ to wish the traitor back. Oh, will ye go away either from the Crucified or from the Glorified, for if ye will forsake this Friend, "Behold, he cometh!" Every hour brings him nearer; the chariots of his glory have glowing axles, and you may almost hear them as they speed toward us; and then what will you do when you have forsaken your own Friend and your father's Friend and you hear him say, "I never knew you; I never knew you"? God grant that it may never be the lot of any of us here present to hear those awful words!

II. Now I pass on to our second head as the Holy Spirit may help me; it is suggested advice: "Thine own friend, and thy father's friend, forsake not."

There is to me in the text a suggestion which the text itself does not suggest; that is to say, it suggests something by not suggesting it. The text does not suggest to me that my own Friend and my father's Friend will ever forsake me. It seems to hint that I may forsake him, but it does not suggest that he will ever forsake me and he never will do so. If the Lord had ever meant to forsake me he has had so many good reasons for doing it that he would have done it long ago. The apostle says of those who are journeying to the better country, that "if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned," and certainly our blessed Lord and Master, if he had desired to leave us to perish, had many an opportunity to return to heaven before he died; and since then he has had many occasions when he might have said "I

really must withdraw my friendship from you,” if he had ever wished to do so. But his love is constant to its line: “Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end.” His is a friendship which never changes. You shall never fall back on him and find that he has withdrawn the arm with which he formerly upheld you. You shall find in life and in death that “there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother.” Let us be cheered by the assurance that he will never forsake us.

Now let us go on to what the text does suggest in so many words: it suggests to us the question, in what sense can we forsake Christ? Well, there is more than one sense in which a man may forsake Christ. Two passages rise to my mind at this moment: “Then all the disciples forsook him and fled.” That was one sort of forsaking; they were all afraid and ran away from their Lord in the hour of his betrayal into the hands of sinners; but it is quite another kind of forsaking when we read: “From that time many of his disciples went back and walked no more with him.” The first forsaking was the result of a sudden fear, much to be deplored and very blameworthy, but still only temporary in its effects; the other was the deliberate act of those who in cool blood refused to accept Jesus Christ’s doctrine or to follow him any farther, and so turned back and walked no more with him. This last forsaking is incurable. The former one was cured almost as soon as the sudden fear that caused it was removed, for we find John and even Peter following the Master to the judgment hall, and the whole of the disciples soon gathered around him after his resurrection. I would say to you dear friend, “Thine own friend, and thy father’s friend forsake not” in any sense at all. Forsake him not even in thy moments of alarm. Pray God then that thou mayest play the man and not forsake him and flee. And then in the other sense, let no quarrel ever arise between you and Christ’s most precious truth, so as to lead you deliberately to leave him, for this is the worst of all kinds of forsaking. If we never forsake him in any sense at all, then it is quite certain that we shall never forsake him in the worst sense. I remember a little merriment I had with a good Wesleyan brother, the clerk of the works, when the Tabernacle was being built. He wanted me to go up a ladder right into those lantern lights, and I said “No, thank you, I would rather not.” “But” he replied, “I thought you had no fear of falling.” “Yes” I answered, “that is quite true, I have no fear of finally falling away; but the belief that the Lord will preserve me does not exercise any evil influence over me, for it keeps me from running unnecessary risks by climbing up ladders; but you good brethren who are so afraid of falling do not seem to show it practically in your conduct, for you go up and down the ladders as nimbly as possible.” I have sometimes met with persons who think that if we believe that we shall never fall so as to perish, we are apt to become presumptuous; but we do not, dear brethren. There are other truths that come in to balance this one, so that what they think might come of it is by God’s good grace prevented; and I am not quite sure that those who think that they may finally fall and perish are sufficiently impressed with that belief so as to be always careful. The fact is that your carefulness of walk does not depend merely upon your view of this doctrine or that; but it depends upon your state of heart and a great many other things besides, so that you have no reason to judge what you might do if you believed such-and-such a truth, because if you did believe it perhaps you would at the same time be a better man, and the possibility that appears to linger around the doctrine would vanish so far as you are concerned. Let this be the language of all of us who love the Lord as we look up confidently and reverently to him,—

We have no fear that thou shouldst lose
One whom eternal love could choose;

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But we would ne'er this grace abuse,
Let us not fall, Let us not fall.

I know that if we are truly the Lord's he will not suffer us to forsake him; but I must have a wholesome fear lest I should forsake him, for who am I that I should be sure that I have not deceived myself? And I may have done so; and after all, may forsake him after the loudest professions and even after the greatest apparent sincerity in avowing that I never will turn away from him.

So I ask again—in what sense can we forsake our Lord? Well, there are many senses, but perhaps you will see better what I mean if I describe a general process of forsaking a friend. I hope that you have never had to undergo it; I do not know that I ever had; but still I can imagine that it is something like this. The old gentleman was your father's friend, he also had been your own friend and has done you many a good turn; but at last he has said something which has provoked you to anger, or he has done something which you have misunderstood or misinterpreted; and now you feel very cool towards him when you meet. You pass the time of day and perhaps say very much the same things which you used to say, but they are said in a very different fashion. Now that is how we begin to forsake our God; we may keep up the appearance of friendship with Christ, but it is a very cool affair. We go to a place of worship but there is no enjoyment, no enthusiasm, no earnestness. Then the next thing is that you do not call to see your friend as frequently as you used to do. It has not come to an open rupture between you, so you do look in at certain set times when you are expected, but there are none of those little flying visits and that popping in upon him unawares, just to get a look at his face as you used to do. And on his part he does not come to see you much. And that is how our forsaking of Christ generally continues. We do not go to talk with him as we once did, and when we do go to his house we find that he is not at home. "Can two walk together except they be agreed?" Then by-and-by perhaps there is a sharp word spoken, and your friend feels that you do not want him. You have said something that cuts him to the quick and grieves him. It was not anything so very bad if it had been spoken to a stranger; but to be said to him who was your father's friend, to him whom you always expected to come in and whom you loved to see—to say it to him was very hard and he naturally took umbrage at it. That is how it comes to pass between Christ and professors. There is something done which might not be of so much account in the case of nonprofessors or the openly ungodly; but it is very bad in one who professed to have Christ for his Friend. And do you know what happens by-and-by when your friend is being discarded? At last he does not call at all and you do not go to see him. Perhaps the breach is still further widened and little presents are sent back or treated with contempt. There is that oil painting which your father would have, though he could scarcely afford it, because he loved his friend so much, and which he hung up in so conspicuous a place in his house; well, the other day the string broke and you did not buy a fresh piece of cord to hang it up again; in fact, you put the picture away in the lumber-room and you really do not care what becomes of it. The little tokens of past affection are all put away for there is an open rupture now; and when somebody spoke to you about him lately you said, "Oh, pray don't mention him to me! He is no friend of mine now. I used to be on intimate terms with him once, but I have altered my opinion about him altogether." So do some professors act towards the Lord Jesus Christ. Those little tokens of love which they thought they had from him they send back. They do not remain in fellowship with his Church. They do all that they possibly can to disown him. In the meanwhile the blessed Lord of love is obliged

to disown them too; and his Church disowns them; and by-and-by the rupture has become complete. May that never be the portion of any of you!

“No,” says one, “it never will be.” My dear friend, if you are so confident as that you are the person about whom I am most afraid. I recollect one who used to pray among us but we had to put him out of the church for evil living; and there was one of our members who said that night, “If that man is not a child of God I am not one myself.” I said “My dear brother, do not talk like that. I would not pit my soul against the soul of any man, for I do know a little of myself, but I do not know other men as well as I know myself.” I am very much afraid that neither of the two men I have mentioned was a child of God; by their speech they seemed to be Christians, but their acts were not like those of God’s people. It does not do for us to talk as that man did but to pray to the Lord, “Hold thou me up and I shall be safe.” That is the proper prayer for us; or else it may happen even to us as happened to them, and we may forsake our own Friend and our father’s Friend.

Now what reasons can we possibly have for forsaking Christ? We ought to do nothing for which we cannot give good reasons. I have known persons very properly forsake their former friends because they have themselves become new creatures in Christ Jesus, and they have rightly and wisely given up the acquaintances with whom they used to sin. They cannot go now to the house where everything is contrary to their feelings. But it is not so with Christ. Some so called friends drag a man down, lower him, injure him, impose upon him, and at last he is obliged to let them go; but we cannot say that of Christ. His friendship has drawn us up, helped us, sanctified us, elevated us; we owe everything to that friendship. We cannot have a reason therefore for forsaking this Friend. I have known some to outgrow an acquaintance or friend. They really have not been able to continue to have common views and sympathies, for while their friend has remained in the mire they have risen into quite different men by reason of education and other influences; but we can never outgrow Christ. That is not possible; and the more we grow in a right sense, the more we shall become like him. A man who has been the friend of our father and of ourselves is the very man to have still as a friend, because he probably understands all about the family difficulties and the family troubles, and he also understands us. Why, he nursed us when we were children and therefore he knows most about us. I remember that when lying sore sick, I had a letter from a kind old gentleman who said that he had that day celebrated his eightieth birthday, and the choicest friend he had at his dinner table was the old family doctor. He said, “He has attended to me so long that he thoroughly knows my constitution, he is nearly as old as myself; but the first time I was ill I had him, and he has attended me now for forty years. Once” he said, “when I had a severe attack of gout, I was tempted to try some very famous man who very nearly killed me; and until I got back to my old friend I never was really well again.” So he wrote to advise me to get some really good physician, and let him know my constitution, and to stick to him and never go off to any of the patent medicines or the quacks of the day. Oh, but there is a great deal of truth in that in a spiritual sense! With the utmost reverence we may say that the Lord Jesus Christ has been our family Physician. Did he not attend my father in all his sicknesses, and my grandfather too? And he knows the ins and outs of my constitution;—he knows my ways good and bad, and all my sorrows; and therefore I do not go to anyone else for relief; and I advise you also to keep to Jesus Christ, do not forsake him. If you ever are tempted to go aside even for a little while, I pray that you may have grace enough to come back quickly, and to commit yourself again to him, and never go astray again. There is the blessing of having one who is wise, one who is tried, one whose sympathy has been tested, one who has become, as it were, one of your family, one who has taken

your whole household to his heart and made it part and parcel of himself. Such a Friend to your own soul and to your father's soul forsake not.

Do not forsake him, dear friends, because I almost tremble to say it—you will want him some day. Even if you would never need him in the future, you ought not to forsake him. I do not quite like that verse of the hymn at the end of our hymn-book—

Ashamed of Jesus! yes, I may,
When I've no guilt to wash away;
No tear to wipe, no good to crave,
No fears to quell, no soul to save.

No, I may not; when all my guilt is gone I shall not be ashamed of Jesus. When I am in heaven and need no more the pardon of sin, I certainly shall not be ashamed of him who brought me there; no, but I shall glory in him more than ever. Your friendship to Christ, and mine, ought not to depend upon what we are going to get out of him. We must love him now for what he is, for all that he has already done, and for his own blessed person and personal beauties which every day should hold fast our love and bind us in chains of affection to him.

But suppose you do think of forsaking Christ, where are you going to get another friend to take his place? You must have a friend of some sort; who is going to sit in Christ's chair? Whose portrait is to be hung up in the old familiar place when the old Friend is discarded? To whom are you going to tell your griefs, and from whom will you expect to receive help in time of need? Who will be with you in sickness? Who will be with you in the hour of death? Ah! there is no other who can ever fill the vacuum which the absence of Christ would make. Therefore, never forsake him.

III. Now I must close with the consequent resolve about which I can say very little, as my time has gone.

Let this be your resolve by his grace, instead of forsaking him you will cling to him more closely than ever; you will own him when it brings you dishonor to do so; you will trust him when he wounds you, for "faithful are the wounds of a friend;" you will serve him when it is costly to do it, when it involves self-denial; resolved that by the help of his ever-blessed Spirit without whom you can do nothing, you will never in any sort of company conceal the fact that you are a Christian. Never under any possible circumstances wish to be otherwise than a servant of such a Master, a friend of such a Lord. Come now dear young friends who are getting cool towards Christ, and elder friends to whom religion is becoming monotonous, come to your Lord once more and ask him to bind you with cords, even with cords to the horns of the altar. You have had time to count the cost of all Egypt's treasure; forego it and forswear it once for all. But the riches of Christ you can never count; so come and take him again to be your All-in-all.

Those about to be baptized will feel I trust—as we shall when we look on—and say each man and woman for himself or herself—

'Tis done! The great transaction's done:
I am my Lord's, and he is mine.

Nail your colors to the mast. Bear in your body the marks of the Lord Jesus. Ay, let everyone of us who has been baptized into Christ feel that our whole body bears the water-mark, for we have been "buried with him by baptism into death." It was not for the putting off of the filthiness of the flesh, but as a declaration that we were dead to the world and quickened into newness of life in

Christ Jesus our Savior. So let it be with you too, dear friends, as you follow your Lord through the water; cling to him, cleave to him: "Thine own friend and thy father's friend, forsake not." May God add his blessing for our Lord Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

The Honored Servant

A Sermon (No. 2643) Intended for Reading on Lord's Day, October 8th 1899,
delivered by C. H. Spurgeon at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington
on Thursday Evening, June 22nd, 1882.

“Whoso keepeth the fig tree shall eat the fruit thereof: so he that waiteth on his master shall be honored.”—Proverbs 27:18.

In Solomon's day every man sat under his own vine and fig tree, and there was peace throughout the whole country. Then, God's law about dividing out the land among the people so that every man had his own plot was rightly observed, and each one had a fig tree of his own to which he gave his personal attention; and in due time, having waited upon the fig tree and kept it, he ate the fruit thereof. Solomon says in another place, “In all labor there is profit;” and it is well when men feel that it is so, for then they will be inclined to labor. A man would not long keep a fruitless fig tree. If he was quite sure that no fruit would be the result of his toil he would leave the tree to itself, or else he would say “Cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?”

There were some men in Solomon's day who for divers reasons became servants to others—as there still are and always must be—and they looked for some return from their service; and the wise man here tells them that just as “whoso keepeth the fig tree shall eat the fruit thereof, so he that waiteth on his master shall be honored.” It is a commonplace truth that those who are faithful servants ought to be honored; I wish in these times this matter was more often thought of, and that men did honor those who are faithful to them. There are some people who permit others to minister to their comfort, but it never occurs to them to provide for the comfort of their servants. They will allow a man to spend most of his life in increasing their business, and yet when he is getting old, he is discharged and left to perish by starvation so far as they are concerned. I notice this kind of thing frequently with very much regret, and I am not always able to make exceptions on behalf of Christian masters. Far from it sometimes; they seem only to recollect their business and to forget that they are Christians, and they act as cruelly as did that Amalekite in David's day, who left his servant to die because he was sick. I pray that the time may come when there shall be so good an understanding between all men that Solomon's words shall be true: “he that waiteth on his master shall be honored.” I am sorry that they are not always true in that sense now, but I am going to leave that literal meaning of the words and apply the text to those who wait upon the Lord Jesus, having made him to be their Master; for most certainly as surely as he who keeps the fig tree shall eat the fruit thereof, even much more certainly shall those who wait upon our great Master in heaven find a sweet return from their service, for they shall be honored by him. Very simple will my talk be, and you beloved, who are his servants, do not want anything else I am sure.

I. The first observation is that our Lord Jesus Christ is our Master.

He said to his disciples after he had washed their feet, “Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am.” Is it so with you, dear friends? Let conscience answer the question. Is Jesus Christ really Master and Lord to each one of us? It is a wonderful way in which he does master us if we are indeed his servants. I can never forget how in my own case it came to pass that I, who had been bought with his precious blood and therefore belonged to him, had yet lived forgetful of

his claims. He passed by and looked on me, and that very look made me go out to weep bitterly. But he did more; he laid his hand on me—it was a pierced hand—and from that day I had a twist in my understanding and my judgment; those who knew me saw that something extraordinary had happened to me which had altogether changed me. From that time I thought very little of men, and very much of One whom until then I had despised; many of my former pursuits ceased to have the slightest charm for me and I had for my one pursuit the desire to do everything to his honor and glory. From that twist I have never been able to escape and I have never wanted to do so; from that mystic influence which he cast over me I have never come forth; and what is more I trust I never shall. I know that I am describing many of you as well as myself. Oh! did he not master you from head to foot! If you are really converted it was not the conversion of the feelings only, or the intellect only; it was the subjugation of everything within you to that sweet power of his. You were quite broken down; you had no strength to stand up against him any longer; and the joy of it was that you had not any wish to do so. When he was about to fix the chains of his love upon you, you held out your hands saying, “Here Lord, bind my wrists;” you put forth your feet crying, “Place the fetters here also.” You asked him to cast a chain around your heart; you made a covenant with him and agreed to be bound all over, for that part of you which was unbound you reckoned to be enslaved, and only that which he did bind you considered to be free. When he had so mastered us we longed to lie forever at his feet and weep ourselves away; or, we wished to sit forever at his feet and listen to his wondrous words and learn his blessed teaching; yet we also wanted to run about the world on his errands; it mattered not to us where he might send us, we would not make any choice of our sphere of service if he would but employ us; that would be all we would ask. We wanted then to have a dozen lives and to spend them all for him. Ay, we remember singing—

Oh, for a thousand tongues to sing My great
Redeemer’s praise!

We said—and we meant it—

Had I ten thousand hearts, dear Lord, I’d give
them all to Thee;

and we did give ourselves up wholly to our Lord. We could not help doing so. We were carried right away as when a mountain torrent comes, removes the earth from the young tree that is growing by the river side, and gradually undermines it until the tree falls into the stream and the current sweeps it on and on and never lets it rest again, but bears it right down to the sea. So was it with us that blessed day when first we knew that we could call Christ “Master and Lord.”

Brethren, our Lord Jesus Christ has so completely mastered us that now, to-day, he is our sole Master. It is not always a thing to ennoble a man when he is able to call another person his master; but we feel that the more fully we are mastered by Christ the better will it be for us; and the more absolutely we can become his servants, the more noble and honored shall we be. In many passages of Scripture where our translation uses the term “servant”, the true word is “slave”; and I think the time has come when we had better speak of it as it ought to be, that we may learn the full force of the expression. We do not mean that there is any cruel slavery of Christ’s people to himself; but we do mean that just as much as the slave completely belonged to his master to do his master’s bidding, to live or die at his master’s will, so have we given ourselves up unto Christ; he has become our sole Master. There are others who struggle for the mastery over us, but no man can serve two

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masters. He may serve two rival powers—one struggling against the other for a while—but they cannot both be masters; only one can be supreme within the spirit. In this way Christ has become so completely the believer's Master that sin shall not have dominion over him, and he shall not be any longer under the domination of Satan. Christ is the Master of all his people, whatever happens to them. We may wander like sheep but Christ is still our Shepherd, and he will bring the straying sheep back—for they are still his property even when they are wandering away from him.

What say you, brothers and sisters? Do you own any other master beside Christ? If you do, in that divided sovereignty you shall find ten thousand miseries. Oh! if your right eye is contrary to Christ, pluck it out and cast it from you; if your very life should stand up in rivalry with Christ, it would be much better for you that you should die than that you should lead such a life as that. Our Lord Jesus is the sole Master of us this day.

And what a choice Master he is also! If we had had the opportunity in our old state of choosing our master, we were so blind and foolish that we would not have chosen him; but if we had known then what we know now we should have chosen him; and if we knew infinitely more about him we should never discover a reason why he should not be our Master; but we should continually find stronger arguments why we should be his servants forever. There was never such a Master as our Lord Jesus Christ, who took our nature that he might be able to master such servants as we are, who even died to win us, and whose only mastership after all is that of love. He rules us sovereignly; yet in his hand is the silver scepter, not the rod of iron. Our Master is at the same time our Husband, whom we must obey. Oh! it is blessed to obey him to whom our hearts are fully surrendered, and in whom all loveliness is centred. When a husband truly loves his wife it becomes easy for the wife to be obedient unto her husband; and as Christ loves us infinitely, we must love him and serve him in return. Look by faith into his blessed face; it is Jehovah's joy to look upon him, and it shall be ours forever. Was there ever such another countenance? Was ever such loveliness imagined as really exists in him? Look at all his character, from Bethlehem even until now; peep in upon him in his loneliness, or see him in the midst of the crowd, and will you not say of him, "He is the standard-bearer among ten thousand; yea, he is altogether lovely"? Pick out all the charms that ever could be found in the most amiable character, gather up all the virtues that ever glittered in the most spiritual man or woman, and bring them all here. Ah! but they are not worthy to be compared with the glory and beauty and excellency of the Well-beloved. All their goodness came from him, therefore, let them all lie at his feet for there is none to be compared with him.

Next, our spirit exultingly says, "As he is our choice Master so he is our chosen Master. Since he has chosen us, we have learned to choose him." The love was at first all on his side; but now, through the effectual working of his grace, it is on our side too. We can each one say, "I love my Master; I love his house; I love his children; I love his service; I have chosen him to be mine for ever. If he should dismiss me from his service I would come back to him again. If he gave me what men call liberty, I would beg of him to withdraw such accursed liberty and let me be, forever, and only, and completely, and entirely his; for as he has chosen me by his grace, so has his grace led me to choose him." I know that many of you can say the same; and I daresay while I have been speaking you have been thinking of George Herbert's lines,—

How sweetly doth 'my Master' sound!
 'My Master!'
 As ambergris leaves a rich scent Unto the taster:

So do these words give a sweet content
An oriental fragranciness, 'My Master.'

We delight to use this title concerning our Lord for he is, further, our gracious Master. That word "Master" seems to lose the idea of masterfulness when it is applied to him. He is most graciously and wondrously our Lord; but yet we call him no more "Baali," that is, "my Lord," but we call him "Ishi," that is, "my Man," "my Husband." There is truly a service to which we are called; yet his message to his disciples was, "Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you." We never can forget that, with all his love, he is our Lord; it is our joy to remember that; yet what loving service we have received at his hands! He has been so much our servant that we have sometimes had to ask ourselves, "Which is the servant?" He is Servus servorum—the Servant of servant—as he proved when he washed his disciples' feet. He has done more than that for us; for he stooped so low as to be despised of men and rejected of the people in order that he might save us. Then surely it shall be our joy and bliss and glory henceforth to call him Master and Lord.

He is also our life-long Master. No; that is a mistake, for there was, alas! a time when we lived, yet we lived not unto him. Some of us were but boys when erst we began to serve him. I always feel glad to think that I wore a boy's jacket when I was baptized into his name; I had not assumed the garb of a man, but my whole soul was his and I was buried with him. I wish it had been earlier still. O dear young people, there is no such joy as that of knowing Christ in your early youth! We hear sometimes of life-long teetotallers, but I could wish that I had been a life-long abstainer from selfrighteousness, a life-long drinker of the river of the water of life; but as all of us failed to serve the Lord at the beginning of our life, let us try with all our hearts to serve him right to the end. Oh, to have him for our life-long Master—with no little intervals of running away, no furloughs, no holidays! Brethren, we have our recreations in Christ's service, but we never have any holidays; that is to say, he re-creates us, but he permits us to continue in his work without cessation or intermission. It would be no recreation for us to have a furlough from the great work of the Lord; we only wish that we could live and labor and spend ourselves, and find our rest as some birds do, on the wing, flying, mounting, singing, and so resting, and making this to be our continual joy. So you see, we are in for our Master's service for life; we have entered his employ and we are bound to him; and "neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" and Master forever, blessed be his name!

II. Now I hasten in the second place to remind you that our business is to serve our Master.

That business is expressed in the Hebrew of our text by the word "keep." I will read you the text as it should be rendered, and as the translators will make it read if they use their senses in their revision of the Old Testament; that is, if they give the same meaning to a word in all places. The previous translators thought that the Bible would sound tautological if they gave the same translation of a word everywhere; so to charm the ears they changed the words; but then, alas! they sometimes changed the sense. Here the original ought to be rendered thus: "Whoso keepeth the fig tree shall eat the fruit thereof: so he that keepeth his master shall be honored." Is not that a wonderful word? In the interpretation I am giving to the passage, it means that as certainly as the husbandman keeps and tends a fig tree, so you and I are to keep and tend Christ. Is it really true that he hath committed

himself to our keeping? Yes. On earth among the sons of men there is One who keepeth Israel; but Israel in another sense is made to be a keeper, and is to keep the Lord Jesus Christ.

How are we to do that? Well, erst, we must keep him by always remaining his servants. We must keep him as our Master. I like the idea of that man who once said to his master, "Sir, you talk about discharging me; but you see sir, if you don't know when you have a good servant I know very well when I have a good master, and I don't mean to be discharged. If you put me out of the front door I shall come in at the back, for I have been your servant ever since I was a boy. I was born in your father's house and I mean to die in this house." The gentleman saw that it was quite hopeless to try to get rid of the old man as he would not go, so he decided they should not be parted; and I think some of us have come to the same pass with our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ. Truly he knows that in us he has, even at our best, only unprofitable servants; but then he accepted us. He knew all that we were and all that we should be; he had a clear foresight of our whole future, and he has engaged us for life. Some of our friends think he only engaged them for a quarter or half a year, or for a limited period; but I know that he took me on for life, and for eternity too; and my soul rejoices in the fact that he will keep to the bargain. Like the old man, I am determined that if he puts me out at the front door I will come in at the back, for I know that I have a good Master and I will not go away from him. Do not you say the same, beloved? Then still hold on to him and tell him that you will not let him go. Should he chasten you with the rod of men and lay many stripes on you, yet be like some dogs that seem to love their masters all the better the more they beat them. So dear friends, love your Lord all the better when he treats you roughly; kiss the hand that smites you and let this be your settled resolution, that from him you will not go.

What else are we to do in order to keep our Master? I think next we are to keep him by defending him. We must defend our Lord's name and honor and cause at all costs and all hazards. We must not let him sleep like King Saul, with his spear stuck in the ground by his bolster and his body-guard also asleep; but if the enemy should ever come to attack our Master, our watchword must be "Up, guards, and at them!" Give them a warm reception from whatever quarter they may come. You and I, beloved, are put in charge of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, and every child of God is bound to be upon the defensive just as if the keeping of the gospel depended entirely upon him. I believe that I am as much bound to preach against error and to war for the truth of Christ as if there were not another minister living, and I think that every other minister stands in the same responsible position; and it is the same with every Christian. Keep your Master and all that he has in safety; let no traitor come near him; guard his ordinances, his doctrines, his precepts; adore his matchless person, and extol his blessed work, and so keep him against all comers.

Then dear friends keep him by guarding all his interests. It is the duty of a servant to reckon that what belongs to his master is, in a certain sense, his, and therefore to be sacredly defended. I have heard of servants in the olden times saying, "That is our park," "this is our country house," or "this is our town house," "these are our horses;" and one of them was heard by his master to say, "There come our children, bless their little hearts!" Well, they were no children of his were they? Yes they were, for they were his master's children; and he had become so identified with his master's interests that he regarded his master's children as belonging to him. So ought we to think of everything that appertains to Christ; and if the Lord has anywhere a little child who needs to be cared for, each of us who are his servants should be prepared to nurse it and watch over it for him, and say to him with good Dr. Doddridge—

Hast thou a lamb in all thy flock
 I would disdain to feed?
 Hast thou a foe, before whose face
 I fear thy cause to plead?

Thus dear friends, keep your Master; watch over your Master's possessions; guard your Master's truth; defend your Master's honor; care for your Master's children; as far as your power goes try to keep everything that belongs to him, labor for the good of his cause; struggle for the advancement of his interests and for the overthrow of his adversaries, just as every loyal soldier seeks to preserve his sovereign's dominions intact and to keep his king's arms from suffering any dishonor. Thus let us keep our Master and all that belongs to him.

Now let us come back to our own Authorized Version: "He that waiteth on his master shall be honored." This also is a very good translation, if not equal to the other; and I think it conveys an important meaning for us. You and I are like servants who wait upon their Master, and that waiting consists in part in waiting for his orders, trying to ascertain what they are; and when we know them, waiting until he bids us carry them out. It is not intended that you and I should be inventors of rites and ceremonies and novelties of worship, and all manner of strange doctrines; our position is simply that of servants. Our Master has a certain way of setting out his table and inviting his guests to it; and I have no business to go to him and say, "See how the king of Syria arranges his table; is not that a better plan than yours?" No, that would be utter disloyalty; I have to set the table according to my Master's plan and custom. There are some old country squires who have acquired odd ways of their own, and the servants whom they employ must drop into them whatever their own notions may be. Now, the ways of the Lord are right and it is your duty and mine to ask what they are, and to conform our practice to them.

The same rule is to be observed in matters of church government and discipline, in the ordinances of the Lord's house, in the truth to be preached, and in the way we go about our Master's business. It is not for us to make our own laws or to invent our own methods; but just to wait upon our Master and learn his will concerning everything. If we do not do that we shall get into a world of trouble; but if we wait upon him for our orders and then obey the orders we receive from our Master, we shall be honored.

Next we must wait upon him for strength to obey his orders, for if we do not we shall either fail in our attempts, or else we shall fail altogether to make the attempt. We must also wait upon our Master, seeking his smile. I am afraid we do a great deal to get the smiles of our brethren, and if they think we have done well we congratulate ourselves. But oh! to preach for the Master, to pray for the Master, to teach that class for the Master—not for your pastor; not for the elders or deacons, not for your fellow-members, that they may say, "What a zeal for the Lord this person has!" Let it all be done for the Master. "He that waiteth on his master shall be honored." Do you not think that sometimes you and I wait upon ourselves, and that while we are very busy and fancying we are working for the Lord, we may be doing it entirely for self? Because we find some sort of pleasure in it we keep on doing it just for that pleasure, or because we feel that some kind of credit must come to ourselves as the result of it. If we are serving self, not our Master, we shall have a reward but it will be a poor commonplace reward, like that of the Pharisees, of whom the Master said, "Verily I say unto you, they have their reward." That is the end of it; they have had their reward, and they cannot expect to be paid twice for what they have done.

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We are, dear friends, further to wait upon the Lord by expecting him to fulfil his promises; and his promises will only be fulfilled in his own time. We are not to run before the Lord, nor to seek to hasten the Lord, as though we thought he was slow in accomplishing his purposes. If we ever do cry, "Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the LORD," we shall probably receive for an answer, "Awake, awake; put on thy strength, O Zion." It is we who are asleep, the Lord never is; and we are to wait upon him and plead the promises that he has given us.

This waiting also includes acquiescence in his will; not only doing it, but suffering it, being ready for anything that he may appoint; perhaps lying on a sick bed for months. Why, if we never rose again and had to lie bedridden until we died, we ought to be perfectly willing so to wait on our Master. You remember the story of poor old Betty, who said that the Lord told her to do this and that, and she tried to do it, and at last he said to her, "Betty, go upstairs and lie in your bed and cough." She said, "I am doing it, and I take satisfaction even in coughing if that be according to my Lord's will." If you have no will of your own in such matters you will have very little sorrow. Our troubles mostly grow from the root of self-will; but when self-will is conquered and we hold ourselves entirely at God's disposal then there is a sweetness even in wormwood and gall, and our heaviest cross becomes our joy and delight, and we say with holy Rutherford, "I find the cross of Christ no more a burden to me than wings are to a bird, or sails are to a ship." That saintly man said that sometimes he felt so deeply in love with his cross that he almost feared lest his sufferings and grief should become so lovely to him as to be a rival to the Lord Jesus Christ. There is no such danger I am afraid with the most of us, for we are as bullocks unaccustomed to the yoke, and we kick against the pricks. But if you can wait upon your Master and say, "Do with me as thou wilt, Lord," all will be well. Try to be like the shepherd on Salisbury Plain, whose story should never be forgotten. When he was asked, "Is it good weather?" he answered, "Yes, it is all good weather that God sends." "But does this weather please you?" "If it pleases God, it pleases me," was his reply. That is the point to get to; may God bring us there by his grace!

III. When we get there we shall come to our last point, our service will bring us honor: "he that waiteth on his master shall be honored."

O brethren, the thought of waiting upon Christ and being his servant is an unspeakable honor; therefore I will not try to speak about it, but ask you just to sit still and think about it. You are his servants, the servants of the eternal Son of God. Perhaps somebody is going to be made an earl or a duchess. I do not think that would be any honor to you, for you have a higher honor than that already, for you are a servant of the Lord. There will be a coronet for somebody to wear; but really I do not see that it could add any lustre to you, for you are a prince of the blood-royal of the skies. As for our pedigree, there is none like it; we do not trace it to the Normans but to Calvary; we are of that seed that was to crush the serpent's head. Our coat of arms is much more ancient than any that the Heralds' College can ever issue; we need no other honor and can have no higher glory than to be servants of Christ. Are you only a little nurse-girl? Well, if you belong to Christ you are one of those whom he counts right honorable. Are you a chimneysweep, my brother? Never mind that; if the Lord has washed you in his precious blood you are as noble as any peer of the realm, and nobler than most of them. Do you have to go to the workhouse for weekly help? Never mind about your poverty, you are not so poor now as your Lord was, for he had not where to lay his head. Do not talk about being mean and obscure; why, you are descended from the King of kings! "This honor have all his saints," "Unto you that believe he is an honor," —that is the meaning of the

Greek; and I take it that it is honor enough for us to have such a Savior to believe in, and such a Master to serve.

You shall have honor dear friends, among poor fellow-Christians. If you really honor your Master's name alone it will not be long before they will honor and esteem you. I notice that the moment a man begins to seek honor for himself he loses the esteem of his fellows. Do you ever hear any minister who preaches very grandly? If so you think to yourself, "What a splendid preacher he is!" But you will find that as a rule God's people do not care much about him. Notice any worker in the church who wants to be very prominent and push himself forward; everybody desires to kick him; but there is another brother who serves Christ in the rear rank, and who blushes when he is pushed to the front, he is the man to whom his brethren and sisters look up, and though they may say little to him they delight to honor him in their hearts. Perhaps the most honorable thing in Christ's house is the door-mat; when all the brethren wipe their dirty boots upon it they are so much the cleaner. I know some people who do not like to be in the position of the doormat; if a person brushes against them they cry, "What a shame!" It is a great honor to do anything for your Master's children which will be for their good. In the kingdom of God the way to go up is to go down, and the way to grow great is to grow little. Look at little Paul—that man short of stature and with many infirmities. Why, he is the biggest of all the apostles! And what is "great Paul"? Oh! he is only sounding brass and the less we hear of him the better. Get to be like little Paul, brother, and your sound shall go out to the very ends of the earth; whereas if you are ever a big Paul you will only give out a brazen note which will be heard for a very little way. If the Lord Jesus Christ has made us to be his servants, let us count it our highest honor to be a servant of the least of his servants that so we may bless them and glorify him.

But our highest honor is yet to come in that day when Christ shall call his chosen ones to his own right hand to reign with him, when he shall appoint unto them a kingdom even as his Father appointed it to him, when he who was faithful in a few things shall be made ruler over many things in the kingdom of the Master for ever and for ever. I think I see the King come into his court; it is crowded with cherubim and seraphim and all the shining ones that form his royal retinue. There they stand in all their gorgeous glory, and the Master from the throne looks over all their ranks as he accepts their loyal and reverent homage. But he is looking for one poor man who on earth loved him and who kept the faith under much derision and scorn; at last he spies him out and says, "Make way my angelic servants, cherubim and seraphim, stand in line and let him come. This man was with me in my humiliation as you could not be; for me he bore the cross and was despised; make way and let him come and sit with me, for they who have been with me in my humiliation shall be with me in my glory."

Oh, that you and I, dear friends, may have that honor at the last! And what will we do when we get it? Why, we will cast our crowns at our Savior's feet and say unto him, "Not unto us, not unto us, but unto thy name be all the praise and glory for ever," and in that very deed we shall find the highest honor of all, and we shall then perhaps recollect this Thursday evening and this text, "He that waiteth on his master shall be honored." The Lord bless you all, for Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

The Way to Honor

A Sermon (No. 1118) delivered by C. H. Spurgeon
at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington.

“Whoso keepeth the fig tree shall eat the fruit thereof: so he that waiteth on his master shall be honored.”—Proverbs 27:18.

If a man in Palestine carefully watched his fig tree and kept it in proper condition, he was sure to be abundantly rewarded in due season, for it would yield him a large quantity of fruit of which he would enjoy the luscious taste. So according to Solomon, good servants obtained honor as the fruit of diligent service. In those early days when there were far better relations between servants and masters than unhappily there are nowadays, if a servant carefully waited upon his master he was sure to be honored for his faithfulness. The Bible is full of such cases. Eleazar, the servant and steward of Abraham, met with much honor at his master's hands. Deborah was a faithful nurse, and what sorrow there was for her at Allon-bachuth, or the oak of weeping. Elisha poured water upon the hands of his master Elijah, and became himself a prophet endowed with a double portion of his master's spirit. In the New Testament we read of the centurion who so honored his servant that in his sickness he sent to the Lord Jesus, earnestly entreating him to come and heal him. There were exceptions of course. There were faithful servants who met with ungenerous treatment; but what rule is there without an exception? The rule was that he who was faithful to his master received honor. I could wish it to be more general for there to be intimate friendly relationships between men and their servants; I would fain see a restoration of family loyalty between heads of households and their dependents. In these times, servants and persons in the employ of others are looked upon as hands to be worked, rather than as souls to be cared for. It may be that servants have degenerated, but it may also be the truth that masters have degenerated too. I believe that every Abraham will be likely to find an Eleazar, and every Rebekah a Deborah. Good masters make good servants. Good servants make good masters. Happy is the family where, without forgetting the proper distinctions of position, all are knit together in firm friendship. Alas! the bonds of society have been too much loosened. Oppression on the one hand and discontent on the other have rent the commonwealth. Yet there still survive among us instances of personal attachment where servants have served the same masters from their youth up, have continued with them in sickness and in misfortune, have remained faithful to the family when the master has been scarcely able to remunerate them for their services, and have continued faithful even unto death. I am sure when we have read such stories or seen such servants ourselves, we have felt that they deserved to be had in honor, and there is a general respect still which is manifested by mankind to the servant that waiteth upon his master. However, I am not going to speak about the duties of masters and servants this evening. At other times we have not hesitated to speak our mind upon that matter, and we shall not fail to do so as occasion requires.

But now we shall speak of a higher Master who was never unfaithful to a servant yet, and never will be; and we shall speak of a superior service which brings to those who are engaged in it the highest possible degree of honor. Blessed are they who are servants of the King of kings. Happy

is he who takes even the lowest place and fulfils the meanest office for the Lord Jesus, if any service can be mean that is rendered to our all-glorious Immanuel.

We will begin by considering the relation of the Lord Jesus Christ to us, and ours to him; then we shall consider the conduct which is consistent with that relation; and then the reward which is promised to such conduct.

I. And, first, the relation which subsists between ourselves and our Lord. He is our Master—our Master.

I speak now of course only to you who are converted, to you who are true believers and are saved by faith in Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus is to you your Master, in the sense of contrast to all other governing powers. You are men, and naturally moved by that which moves other men, but still, the master motive power with every one of you who is a Christian is the supremacy of Christ. There are some among your fellow servants to whom you render respect, just as in a large firm there are foremen set over different parts of the work, to whom a measure of deference is fitly rendered. Still, as the overseer is not the chief authority, so your earthly superiors are not masters over you in the highest sense. The highest of your fellow workmen in your Lord's service is far, far, far below the Master; ministers and fathers in Christ are not the ultimate authorities to whom you bow, and whatever esteem you may pay even to such glorious names as those of Peter, and James, and John, you still regard them but as your fellow servants. "One is your Master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren." In this sense we are not servants of men, yea, we know no man after the flesh. We are in subjection to the Father of Spirits, but neither to Pope in Rome, nor bishop at home; we are the Lord's free men and cheerfully obey those whom he sets over us in his church: but we yield to none who claim lordship over us and would divert us from obeying the Lord Jesus only.

The Christian man has of course to attend to the concerns of this life, and while he is attending to them he must throw a measure of his heart into them or he cannot do them properly; still, the master of our heart is not our business but our Savior. A Christian man is thoughtful, and he studies, and reads, and investigates; still, for all that, philosophy does not rule him, nor the news of the day, nor the science of the times. Christ is our Master—master of our thoughts and meditations, the great leader and teacher of our understandings. We are his disciples and disciples of none else besides. We are affected by the love of family, the love of friendship, the love of country; but there is a love that is higher than all these, a master love, and this is love to Jesus our Well-beloved, the Bridegroom of our souls. That text is frequently misread—"No man can serve two masters." The stress is not to be laid upon the word "two." For the matter of that, a man might serve three or half-a-dozen, or twenty; but the stress is to be laid upon the word "masters"—"No man can serve two masters." Only one thing can be the master-passion, only one power can completely master us so as to be supremely dominant and exercise imperial lordship over us. No man can have two imperial master-faculties, master-motives, and master-ambitions. One is our Master, and that one is Christ. Brethren, as I have said before we are compelled while we are in this body to yield to this impulse and to that, we are urged forward by this motive and by that, we pursue this end and that, and subordinately none of these things may be sinful, but the master-impulse must be the love of Christ, the master-aim must be Christ's glory, and the master-power that doth possess us, as the Spirit took possession of the prophets of old and carried them right away, must be loyalty to Jesus Christ our Lord. He is our Master and we stand before him as servants who desire to obey his bidding.

What then is the reason why the Lord Jesus Christ has become to us a Master? If we were contending with the ungodly who challenge us for calling Christ "Master," we could give them a ready enough answer by telling them that he is the Master-man of all men. We would ask them to turn over the pages of history and find a man it was worth while to serve in comparison with the man Christ Jesus. We would appeal to his character and ask, was there ever a character which could compel homage as his character does? Why, he is a right royal man in all respects: there is nothing about him of meanness or weakness. To know him is to become enthusiastic in his cause. We would then point to his kingdom and the nature and character of it, and ask whether there was a kingdom for which men ought to fight, for which men ought to strive and be willing to die compared with his kingdom. We would point to the benefits which he confers upon mankind, the blessings which the faith of Jesus Christ has scattered amongst the nations, and ask if there ever was a cause so worthy of zeal as the cause of Christ, which is the cause of humanity, the cause of truth, the cause of right, the cause of God. His are the principles which alone can redeem men from their degradation and misery. We count it easy enough to answer the ungodly in this matter. Whoever their leader may be, he is not fit to loosen the shoe latchet of our Master's sandal; whoever he may be, and however they may lift him up, he is fit to lie in the dust beneath the feet of our Immanuel. He is so excellent, and in his nature so pre-eminent, that we defy anyone to count us foolish for choosing him to be our Master.

But behind all this, deep down in our souls we have other reasons for calling him our Master, namely, that we belong to him by the purchase of his blood, by the rescue of his grace, and again, by the surrender, the willing surrender which we have made to him. Christ is our Master because he bought us. When we were sold under sin, when by the justice of God we were condemned to die, when we were utter slaves, he purchased us and redeemed us from all iniquity with a cost which sometimes has seemed to us, for his sake, to be too great. What were ten thousand times ten thousand sinful worms compared with the Son of God? Yet that glorious Son of God laid down his life for us. He loved his church and gave himself for it—a matchless price indeed to pay!—and now we are not our own but are bought with a price. We feel that we should be unjust to Jesus, base to our best Benefactor, if we were to ignore the solemn obligations under which his redemption has placed us. We had been on the road to hell if it had not been for his blood; shall we not walk in the way of his commands? After what he has done for us nothing is too great for us to do for him. Our body, our soul, our spirit, we cheerfully render up to his dominion, neither count we ought of our nature to be our own. As he has redeemed us entirely, so in the entirety of our manhood we belong altogether to him; and if there be a part of our nature which has not been subdued to him we desire him to conquer it by force of arms, for its rebellion against him is sorrow to ourselves. Jesus is our rightful Lord, his wounds attest it, and if any other lord hath dominion over any other portion of our nature, that lordship is usurped and ought to be cast down.

I said moreover that Christ has won us by his power as well as by his blood. There are two redemptions, redemption by price and redemption by power; redemption by price was typified in the paschal lamb and the Passover, redemption by power in the passage of the Red Sea when the children of Israel went through it dry shod and the Egyptians were drowned. Remember how Jacob spake to his son Joseph and said, "I have given to thee one portion above thy brethren, which I took out of the hand of the Amorite with my sword and with my bow." Now the Lord Jesus Christ claims us in the same way as Jacob claimed that particular portion, for we are his spoil taken in battle. Almighty grace bowed us down when we were stiff-necked; almighty grace delivered us from our

habits of sin when we were fast bound by them; almighty grace broke the iron bars of our despair and led us into liberty; let all the glory be ascribed unto the Almighty Redeemer. With a high hand and an outstretched arm he brought us forth from the Egypt of our lusts and taught our willing feet the way to the heavenly Canaan. And now we grace his chariot wheels as servants, not in manacles of iron but in silken fetters of love.

“As willing captives of our Lord
We sing the triumphs of his word,”

and confess him to be our Master and none beside.

Remember that I also said we are his servants and he our Master because we have willingly surrendered ourselves to him. Recall to your memories that blessed time when you gave yourselves up to Jesus under the sweet constraint of his love. Was it not a good day in which you said—

“Now, Lord, I would be Thine alone
Come, take possession of Thine own,
For Thou hast set me free;
Released from Satan’s hard command,
See all my members waiting stand,
To be employ’d by Thee.”

And now at this day, remembering the love of your espousals when you went after your Lord into the wilderness, would you have it otherwise? You were married to him; do you now wish to sue for a divorce against your glorious Bridegroom? Nay, but you can sing with Doddridge,

“High heaven, that heard the solemn vow,
That vow renew’d shall daily hear:
Till in life’s latest hour I bow,
And bless in death a bond so dear.”

Now beloved, as I have shown that Christ had a right to be our Master from the very dignity of his character, and that we yield him service because of his love to us; it only remains for me to add that our position of servants to Christ is an irreversible one. The servant of old when he might go out from bondage sometimes said, “I love my master, and I love his children, and I love his house—I desire to be his bondsman for ever,” and after the same manner would I speak this day. And then, you remember, they took an awl and they bored the man’s ear and fastened it to the doorpost that he might be a servant as long as he lived. Even after that fashion would I say, “Mine ears hast thou opened, and I was not rebellious.” Who among us would not wish to bear in our body the marks of the Lord Jesus, to receive the brand which would betoken the irretrievable confiscation of all sinful liberty? Do we not wish to be forever bound to Christ and crucified with him? This was the teaching of our baptism. When we were baptized we were buried in the water. The teaching was that we were henceforth to be dead and buried to the world and alive alone for Jesus. It was the crossing of the Rubicon—the drawing of the sword and the flinging away of the scabbard. If the world should call us we now reply, “We are dead to thee, O world!” One of the early saints, I think it was Augustine, had indulged in great sins in his younger days. After his conversion he met with a woman who had been the sharer of his wicked follies; she approached him winningly and said to him, “Augustine,” but he ran away from her with all speed. She called after him and said,

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“Augustine, it is I,” mentioning her name; but he then turned round and said, “But it is not I; the old Augustine is dead and I am a new creature in Christ Jesus.” That—to Madam Bubble and to Madam Wanton, to the world, the flesh, and the devil—should be the answer of every true servant of Christ: “I live, yet not I but Christ liveth in me. Thou art the same, O fair false world— thou art the same, but not I. I have passed from death unto life, from darkness into light. Thy siren charms can fascinate me no more. A nobler music is in my ear and I am drawn forward by a more sovereign spell towards other than yours. My bark shall cut her way through all seas and waves till it reaches the fair haven and I see my Savior face to face.” ‘Tis irretrievable, then, this step which we have taken, the absolute surrender of our whole nature to the sway of the Prince of peace. We are the Lord’s. We are his for ever and for ever. We cannot draw back, and blessed be his name, his grace will not suffer us to do so. The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.”

“Leave thee! no, my dearest Savior,
Thee whose blood my pardon bought;
Slight Thy mercy, scorn thy favor!
Perish such an impious thought:
Leave Thee—never!
Where for peace could I resort?”

II. The second point of our reflection is to be this: seeing that we are servants to Jesus, there is a conduct which is consistent therewith.

What conduct is consistent in a servant? Is it not, first, that he should own himself to be his master’s? Such a servant as is mentioned in the text does not call himself his own or his time his own. No person who is a servant can say during his work hours— “This time is my time, I can do what I like with it.” No, he is a false servant if, having sold his time for a reward, he takes it to himself. Servants of Jesus have no time at their own disposal. We have no wealth of our own, we are only stewards; we have no talents, they are our Lord’s. When we have traded with our stock and have multiplied it diligently, we shall say to our Lord, “Thy pound hath gained ten pounds.” We dare not call the talent ours. If we are true servants we are always about our Master’s business. If we eat or drink, or rest or sleep, we desire to do all to the glory of God. We are never off duty. A policeman may be, but we never are. A soldier may have a furlough, but a Christian never, he must wear both night and day the whole armor of God. We are always to bear the shield, and the sword is always to be in our hands. Even in our recreation we are to remember that our Master may come at any hour and therefore we are still to be looking for his coming.

As servants it is our duty to learn our Master’s will. I am grieved to observe that some of my fellow servants do not want to know their Lord’s will. There would not be so many divisions in the church if we all came to Holy Scripture and searched the law and the testimony to know the Lord’s will. The Lord’s will is fully set forth there, and no other book is of the slightest authority among saints. The Lord’s will is not in the prayer-book, it is in the Bible. The Lord’s will is not in the canons; the Lord’s will is not in the creed of the Baptist church, or the Wesleyan church, or the Congregational church, or the Episcopalian church; his will is in the Scriptures: and if we searched them more and more and were determined, irrespective of anything that may have been done by the church, or the world, or by government, or by anybody else, that we would follow our Lord’s will, we should come to closer union. We are divided because we do not study the Lord’s will as

we should. Brethren, we ought to be prepared to give up any doctrine however venerable, any institution however comely, if we do not see it to be the divine will. Obedience is the path of the servant, obedience is his safety and happiness. What have I as a servant to do with anybody but my Master? I am set to do a certain thing, and if passers-by make a remark that I am not doing it according to the usual rules of the trade, what is that to me? Rules and customs are of small consequence. My Master's will must be everything to me if I am a true servant. Somebody will sneeringly remark, "You are acting very singularly." Well, the Master must be accountable for the singularity of conduct which he prescribes. If we are true servants we obey even in the jots and tittles at all hazards. But we must search the word, for unread Bibles are evidences against rebels, and are unbecoming in believers.

When his master's will is known every true servant is bound immediately to do it. A servant is not to say, "Sir, I will attend to that to-morrow." If the command be ascertained it will be as surely disobedience to postpone obedience as to reject the duty altogether. If delay be a part of the command the delay is justifiable, but if not the servant must not tarry. "But surely you forget that the consequences of obedience may be costly and involve great sacrifices?" Servants have nothing to do with consequences; those belong to their masters. "But perhaps if I were to follow out the Master's command I might place myself in a position where I should not be as useful as I now am." You have nothing whatever to do with that except as it may prove a test of your faith: it is a lame obedience which only follows the Master where carnal judgment approves. A servant of God is not to use his judgment as to the rightness of his Master's command; he is to do as he is bidden, for his Lord is infallible. What if the heavens fell through our doing right? God does not want us to sin in order to prop them up. His throne is not rotten so as to need buttresses of iniquity. Consequences of true principles ought never to be considered. There is nothing more vicious in the world than policy; it may be admired in the House of Commons, but it should be detested in the church of God. Far from our minds be every question of policy. If an act be right, let it be done: if Christ bids it let it be done, and let there be no hesitation in the matter.

It is ours also, if we are servants, to obey the Master willingly and for love of his person. The text says, "He that waiteth upon his master shall be honored." Suppose I as a minister know something to be God's will, yet nevertheless attend to it with the view of serving you and doing you good as God's church; I shall possibly receive honor from you whom I serve, but that is not the honor which a Christian minister ought to seek. The church is not his master; his Master is in heaven and if he desires real honor he must earn it by waiting upon his Master for his Master's sake. Suppose any of you are children and are doing right in order to please your parents—I will not censure the motive; you will get honor from your parents; but the right honor is gained by seeking to please God. You must labor as believers to wait upon your Master; to come to the house of God for instance, not because it is the custom, but because you would honor the Lord in prayer and praise; you must give to the poor, not because others have given so much but because Jesus loves his people to be mindful of poor saints; you must do good, not that others may say "See what a zealous man he is!" but for your Master's sake. I am afraid we sometimes serve ourselves even in our holiest things, and in carrying out our judgment of the Lord's will we are often the victims of prejudice or whim, and are not so much determined to do the Lord's will as to have our own, or to carry out what we call our "principles" in order to show that we are not to be cowed by opposition. Ah, brethren, there must be no motive with us but our Master's honor. "He that waiteth on his

master shall be honored.” Wait on your Master. Take care that you have an eye always to him. Do your duty because he bids you. Then you shall win the honor of which the text speaks.

Then observe that this waiting upon the Master is to be performed personally by the servant. It is not, “The servant who employs another to wait upon his master shall be honored,” I do not so read the text, but “He that waiteth upon his master” himself, doing personal service to a personal master—he shall have honor. Jesus Christ did not redeem us by proxy. He himself—his own self—bare our sins in his own body on the tree. Let us not attempt to serve God by merely contributing to the foreign mission, or City Mission, or helping to support the minister, or something of that sort. We should do that, but we should not put it in the place of the other. Let us constantly give our personal service, speaking for Christ with these lips, pleading for his kingdom with this heart, running on his errands with these feet, and serving him with these hands.

“He that waiteth on his master shall be honored,” even though the waiting be almost passive. Sometimes our master may not require us to do anything more than stand still. But you know John the footman behind his master’s chair, if his master bids him stand there he is as true a servant as the other attendant who is sent upon an errand of the utmost importance. The Lord for wise reasons may make us wait awhile. Having done all, we may yet have to stand still and see the salvation of God and find it to be the hardest work of all. In suffering especially is that the case; for it is painful to be laid aside from the Master’s service; yet the position may be very honorable. There is a time for soldiers to lie in the trenches as well as to fight in the battle. David made a law that those who tarried with the baggage were to share the spoil with those who went down to the fight. This is the rule of the church militant to this day. Some cannot march to the battle, yet are they to share in the spoil; they are waiting on their Master and they shall be honored.

On the whole, summing all up in a word, it is ours to abide near to Christ. Servants wait best when they can see their master’s eye and hear his wish. We are to wait upon our Master humbly, reverently, feeling it an honor to do anything for him. We are to be self-surrendered, given up henceforth to the Lord, free men, and yet most truly serfs of this Great Emperor. We are never so truly free as when we own our sacred serfdom. We are henceforth the body servants of the Lord Jesus Christ. Often Paul calls himself the servant the Lord, and even the slave of Christ, and he glories in the branding iron’s marks upon his flesh. “I bear,” says he, “in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus; henceforth let no man trouble me.” We count it liberty to bear the bonds of Christ. We reckon this to be supremest freedom for we sing with the psalmist, “I am thy servant; I am thy servant. Thou hast loosed my bonds.” “Bind the sacrifice with cords, even with cords to the horns of the altar.” Such is the conduct which our servitude to our Lord requires.

III. The third point is the reward which surely comes to the faithful servants. “He that waiteth on his master shall be honored.”

You will observe that he finds his honor in waiting on his master. Now the Christian may have other honors besides the one of waiting on his Master. He may have poor, wretched, miserable, laded honors. I am always sorry when I see a Christian making himself some great one in the world’s esteem. I knew one, and I esteemed him much. He was an earnest Christian man, but his great ambition was to be the chief magistrate in a certain city which I shall not name. He lived to reach that post, and his heart exulted greatly; but I noticed that the very night he attained the honor the hand of the Lord went forth against one whom he greatly loved, and in a short time he himself sickened and went home to his Father and his God. No joy came with the honor for he had looked at it too long and with too keen an eye. Not I alone, but those who knew him judged so too, and

we almost thanked God that he did not suffer the child of God, whose crown was in heaven, to be satisfied with being a magistrate here. I have seen men grow very eager after gold; they have had a good business but have clutched at more, and got it, and then sought after more still; and when I have seen chastening come and sorrow in the household I have not marvelled at it, for I have understood that Christ meant his servant to take honor from him, and if he would look after other honor he would find it but a bitter-sweet. There is a law, I believe, that no subject of Our Majesty may take princely rank from any foreign potentate, and it is a law in the kingdom of Christ. What honor can this world confer upon a servant of Christ? I count that to be a scullion in Christ's kitchen would be a greater honor than to be the Czar of all the Russias, or to exercise imperial sway over all the kingdoms of the earth at once. Honour! Ye confer honor upon the servant of Christ—ye worldlings! As well might emmets upon their anthills hope to confer dignity upon an angel! Already infinitely superior, it is but degradation to a saint to be honored by the sons of men. The servant of Christ finds his honor in the service itself. The cultivator of the fig tree looks for figs from the fig tree; the servant of the Master looks for honor from the Master and he covets no honor besides.

Every faithful servant of Christ is honored in his Master's honor. If you serve Christ aright you will have to bear his reproach. You must take your share of the cross for you have already your share of the crown. Thanks be to God who always causes us to triumph in every place. Paul and the other apostles, when they were suffering for Christ, were always triumphing in Christ at the same time. If there be any honor in the cause of truth and righteousness and the salvation of men Christ has it all, but he reflects some of it upon those of his servants who espouse his righteous cause and propagate his truth. "He that waiteth on his master is honored" by being permitted to wait upon such a Master. The honor of the Master falls upon the servant, who is honourably distinguished by wearing the livery of the great Prince.

He is honored too, with his Master's approval. Did you ever feel that Christ approved of you? You did some little act of love which nobody knew of but your Lord; he smiled on you, you knew he did, and you felt superabundantly rewarded. You served him and you were reviled for it, but you took it very joyfully, for you felt that he knew all about it, and as long as your Master was satisfied it did not signify what man could do unto you. For the true Christian, his Lord's approval is honor enough.

Sometimes the Lord honors faithful servants by giving them more to do. If they have been faithful in that which is least, he tries them in that which is great. If they have looked after a few little children, and fed the lambs, he says, "Come hither and feed my sheep." If they have trimmed a vine or a fig tree in a corner, he calls them out and sets them among the chief vines of the vineyard and says to them, "See after these clusters." Many a man would have been called to wider fields of labor if he had not been discontented or slothful in his narrow sphere. The Lord watches how we do little things, and if great care be taken in them he will give us greater things to do. Elisha poured water upon the hands Elijah, and then the Lord says "Elijah's mantle shall fall upon his faithful servant and he shall do even greater miracles."

God also honors the faithful in the eyes of their fellow servants. When I take down from my library-shelf the biography of a holy man, I honor him in my soul. I do not mind whether he was a bishop or a Primitive Methodist preacher, a blacksmith or a peer, I do him honor in my heart. If he served his Master he will be sure to be elevated into a position of honor in the memory of succeeding ages. There are some men whose doctrines you and I could not endorse, who yet were faithful to the light they had, and therefore we number them amongst the honored dead, and we are

glad to recollect how bold they were against the foe, how meek they were with the little ones, how faithful they were in believing their God, and how courageous in rebuking sin. If you would have honor from your fellow servants you will never get it by seeking honor from them; you must go to your Master and honor him by waiting upon him, and then there will come to you honor in the eyes of your fellow men.

But beloved the chief honor of a faithful servant comes from the blessed Trinity. "If any man will serve me, him will my Father honor." Does it not appear too good to be true that a poor man should be honored of God the Father, the Creator, the great I AM! I will not speak about it but leave you to think it over.

And then Jesus Christ will honour us; for he says that when the master comes and finds the servant waiting for him, he will gird himself and serve him. Can you understand that? There was a certain saturnalia amongst the Romans which was observed once a year, in which the masters changed places with the servants entirely, and the servants sat at the table and commanded their masters as they liked, while the masters served them. It has been thought by some that our Savior has drawn the figure from that singular celebration. I hardly think that it can be so for he would scarcely have cared to use such an illustration. To think of the great Master serving us is strange indeed; yet he has done it. He did so when he took a towel and washed his disciples' feet, and he will do it again, he will gird himself and serve us.

The Holy Spirit will honor us too, for the Holy Spirit often puts great honor upon a faithful man in a way that I cannot explain to you except by a figure. Moses had been a faithful servant and the skin of his face shone when he came down from the mount. Stephen was a faithful servant, and when he stood up to confront his adversaries he was full of the Holy Ghost and a glory gleamed from his face. When the Spirit of God is richly in a man, and that man is faithful to his Master, some gleamings of a supernal splendor will come from him, not visible to human eyes but potent over human hearts. Believers will feel its power, for as one of our poets says, when a good man is in company 'tis even as though an angel shook his wings. You feel the influence of the man and almost without a word from him, he has honor in the eyes of them that sit at meat with him, for the Holy Ghost is upon him.

Now dear brethren and sisters, I close by saying we ought faithfully to serve, for we have before us the greatest conceivable reward, a reward which grace enables us to gain. That precious blood which cleanses us cleanses our service also, it makes us white as snow and it makes our service white too. We and our work are both accepted in the Beloved. A Christian's works are good works: let no one say they are not, for they are the work of the Spirit of God, and who shall say they are not good? It is an encouragement to go forward when we know that "he that keepeth the fig tree shall eat the fruit thereof;" and that "the servant who waiteth on his master shall be honored."

There is a black side to this, upon which, suffer ye one word. He who doth not serve Jesus Christ will not be honored. In the day when the Lord cometh many that sleep in the dust shall awake, some to glory, but some to shame and everlasting contempt. Oh, the contempt that will be poured upon ungodly men at the last judgment! When God holds up the mirror and they see themselves, they will despise their own image; and when God holds up their characters to men and angels, revealing to all created beings their secret deeds, their evil motives, their base designs, their filthy imaginations, there will go up against such men dying without faith in Christ a universal hiss of general execration; to think that they would not believe God but made God a liar; would not accept the sacrifice of Christ but trod the blood of the covenant under foot as an unholy thing.

Redeemed men will cry, “Shame!” Unfallen angels will cry “Shame!” Holy spirits from a thousand worlds will cry “Shame!” And it will be everlasting contempt. Nothing stings a man like contempt. The poorest among us does not like to be despised, however poor he may be. You do not like to be pointed at and be made the object of derision, yet sinner, this will be your portion. If you die without believing in Jesus you will wake up to shame and to everlasting contempt. “Shame shall be the portion of fools”—such shame! Oh, be ashamed to-day that you may not be ashamed then! Penitent, shame will lead you to fly to Christ and put your trust in him, and then your transgressions shall be blotted out for ever. May the Spirit lead each one of you to repentance for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

Portion of Scripture read before sermon—Psalm 25.

Cheer for Despondency

A sermon (No. 3183) published on Thursday, February 3, 1910,
delivered by C. H. Spurgeon at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington.

“Thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.”—Proverbs 27:1.

What a great mercy it is that we do not know “what a day may bring forth”! We are often thankful for knowledge, but in this case we may be particularly grateful for ignorance. It is the glory of God, we are told, to conceal a thing, and it most certainly is for the happiness of mankind that he should conceal their future. Supposing that bright lines were written for us in the book of destiny, and that we could read those bright lines now, and see some of them, we should probably loiter away our time until we arrived at them and should have no heart for the present. If on the other hand we knew that there were dark days of trouble in store for us, and had a presentiment and full conviction as to when they would come, probably the thought of them would overshadow the present, so that the joys which we now drink would be left untasted by reason of our nervous fears as to the distant future. To know the good might lead us to presumption, to know the evil might tempt us to despair. Happy for us is it that our eyes cannot penetrate the thick veil which God hangs between us and tomorrow, that we cannot see beyond the spot where we now are, and that, in a certain sense, we are utterly ignorant as to the details of the future. We may indeed be thankful for our ignorance.

Although however we do not know what a day may bring forth, though we cannot see into what I may call “the immediate future,” yet we have reason to be thankful that we do know something about what is to come, and that we do know what is in the far-reaching future. We differ from the brutes in this respect. When two or three nights in the week I pass on my way home a flock of sheep, or a little herd of bullocks, all going down to the butcher’s, travelling in the cold bright moonlight towards the slaughter-house, I feel thankful that they do not know where they are going, for what would be their misery if they knew anything about death? The lamb’s thoughts are in the fold, and all unconscious of the shambles; it licks the hand that smites it, not knowing of its coming speedy death. It is the happiness of the brute not to know the future.

But in our case we know that we must die; and if it were not for the hope of the resurrection and of the here-after, this knowledge would distinguish us from the brutes only by giving us greater misery. There must be an intention on God’s part for us to live in a future state or else he would, out of mere benevolence, have left us ignorant of the fact of death. If he had not meant our souls to begin to prepare for another and a better existence, he would have kept us ignorant, even of the fact that this one will pass away; but having given us an intellect and a mind which doth from observation and inward consciousness know that death will come, we believe that he would have us prepare for that which will follow and look out for that which is beyond. We do know the future in its great rough outlines. We know that if the Lord cometh not first, we shall die; we know that our soul shall live for ever in happiness or in woe; and that, according to whether we are found in Christ or without Christ, our eternal portion shall be one of never-ending agony or of ceaseless bliss. We may be thankful that we do know this so that we may be prepared for it; but still—to

return to that with which we started—we may be thankful also that we do not really know the great future in its details, that it is shut from our eye lest it should have an evil influence upon our life.

Now, Solomon in the Book of Proverbs applied the truth that we know not about to-morrow to the boaster, to the man who said, “To-morrow I will go into such a city and buy, and sell, and get gain, and then go to another city and get more gain, and then when I have amassed so much wealth I will say, ‘Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease; eat, drink, and be merry.’” Solomon seems to come in and put his hand upon the man’s shoulders and to say, virtually, “Thou fool, thou knowest nothing about all this; thou dost not know what shall be on the morrow; thy goods may never come to thee, or thou mayest not be here to trade with these goods at all; so thou buildest a castle in the air; thou thinkest thy fancies are true; thou art as one that dreams of a feast and wakes to find himself hungry! How canst thou be so foolish?” Solomon dwells upon the text very solemnly, and says, “Boast not thyself of tomorrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.”

I do not intend however to use the text with this object to-night. It struck me that as Solomon uses it here with one design it might be very properly used for another; that as he intends to shame our growing pride and certainty of prosperity, so it might be used especially to cheer those who have a tendency to gloom, and to shed a ray of light into the thick darkness of their fear.

I. It will first comfort those who are fearing and trembling concerning some evil which is yet to come.

My friend, thou art afraid to-night; thou canst not enjoy anything thou hast because of this terrible and fearful shadow which has come across thy path of an evil which thou sayest is coming to-morrow, or in one or two months’ time, or even in six months. Now, at least, thou art not quite certain that it will come, for thou knowest not what may be on the morrow. Thou art as alarmed and as afraid as if thou wert quite certain that it would appear. But it is not so, “Thou knowest not what a day may bring forth,” and since it is uncertain whether it shall be or not, hadst thou not better leave thy sorrow till it is certain; and meanwhile, leave the uncertain matter in the hand of God whose divine purposes will be wise and good in the end, and will be even seen to be so? At the very least, slender as the comfort may be, yet still there is comfort in the fact that thou knowest not what may be on the morrow.

Let us just expand this thought a little to those of you who are fearing about to-morrow. We very often fear what never will occur. I think that the major part of our troubles are not those which God sends us, but those which we invent for ourselves. As the poet speaks of some who

“Feel a thousand deaths in fearing
one,”—

so there are many who feel a thousand troubles in fearing one trouble, which trouble, perhaps, never will have any existence except in the workshop of their own misty brain. It is an ill task for a child to whip himself; it might be good for him to feel the whip from his father’s hand, but it is of little service when the child applies it himself. And yet very often the strokes which we dread never do come from God’s hand at all, but are the pure inventions of our own imagination and our own unbelief working together. There are more who have to howl under the lash of unbelief than there are who have to weep under the gentle rod of God’s providential dispensation. Now, why shouldst thou go about to fill thy pillow with thorns grown in thine own garden? Why so busy, good sir, about gathering nettles with which to strew thine own bed? There are clouds enough without thy

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thinking that every little atom of mist will surely bring a tempest. There are difficulties enough on the road to heaven without thy taking up stones to throw into thine own path to make thing own road more rough than there was any need shalt it should be. Thou knowest not what may be on the morrow. Thy fears are absurd. Perhaps thy neighbor knows they are absurd, but certainly thou oughtest to know it is so. Dost thou not know that the trouble thou art dreading, God can utterly avert? Perhaps to-morrow morning there will come a letter which will entirely change the face of the matter. A friend may interpose when least thou couldst expect one, or difficulties which were like mountains may be cast into the depths of the sea. "Thou knowest not what a day may bring forth," and the trouble which thou so much darest may never occur at all.

Moreover, dost thou not know that even if the if the trouble should come, God has a way of overruling it? So that even thou, poor trembler, shalt stand by and see the salvation of God and wonder at two things—thine own unbelief and God's faithfulness. Thou sayest that the sea is before thee, that the mountains are on either hand, and that the foe is behind thee, but thou knowest not what shall be on the morrow. Thy God shall lead thee through the depths of the sea, and put such a song into thy mouth as thou never couldst have known if there had been no sea, and no Pharaoh, and no mountains to shut thee in. These trials of thine shall be the winepress out of which shall come the wine of consolation to thee. This furnace shall rob thee of nothing but thy dross, which thou wilt be glad to be rid of, but thy pure gold shall not be diminished by so much as a drachm, but shall only be the purer after it all. The trouble, then, may not come to thee at all, or if it come it may be overruled.

And there is one thing more; supposing the trial does come, thy God has promised that as thy days so shall thy strength be. Hath he not said it many times in his Word, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee"? He never did promise thee freedom from trouble. He speaks of rivers and of thy going through them; he speaks of fires and of thy passing through them; but he has added, "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee; when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee." What matters it to thee then whether there be fire or not, if thou be not burned? What matters it to thee whether there are floods or not if thou be not drowned? As long as thou escapest with spiritual life and health and comest up out of all thy trials the better for them, thou mayest rejoice in tribulations. Thank God when thy temptations abound, and be glad when he putteth thee into the furnace because of the blessing which thou art sure to receive from it. So then, since thou knowest not what may be on the morrow, take thou heart thou fearing one, and put thy fears away. Do as thou hast been bidden, delight thyself in the LORD and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart. Cast thy burden upon the LORD and he will sustain thee. He will never suffer the righteous to be moved. Did not David say, speaking by the Holy Ghost, "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivereth him out of them all"? I charge thee therefore to be of good comfort since thou knowest not what may be on the morrow. This is the message to fearful saints.

II. But now we will use the text to another class of Christians whose painful position really deserves more pity than that of those who only invent their fears, or who are troubled about the future. I mean those who are at the present moment disconsolate through immediate distress and present affliction.

We little know my brethren, when we gather here, how many cases of distress may be assembled in this house at any one time. Verily the poor have not ceased out of the land. The poor we have

always with us, and some of the poor, too, who need to have other mouths to speak for them since from their very independence of spirit and their Christian character they are slow to speak for themselves. There may be a trouble in my neighbour's hearts which is almost bursting it, while I am sitting peacefully still enjoying the Word. We should remember those who are in bonds as bound with them; and sympathize with those who are troubled as being ourselves also in the body.

It will not be a waste of time then if I say to you who are troubled about worldly matters, than there is comfort for you in this passage. "Thou knowest not what a day may bring forth." Thou sayest, "It is all over with me; I will give up in despair." No friend, do not do so for one day longer, for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth; and if to-morrow bring thee not deliverance, hope on at least for one day more, for "thou knowest not what a day may bring forth." And I would keep on with the same tale till the last day of life. At least for one day more there is no room for despair. You cannot conclude that God has forsaken you, or that providence has utterly turned against you. At least you know not what may be on the morrow, so wait till you have seen that day out. Give not up yourself a hopeless victim to despair till you have seen what to-morrow may bring you.

What unexpected turns there have been in the lives of those who have trusted in God! You who are trusting in yourselves may help yourselves as best you can, but you who are trusting in God have ample reasons to expect that God will come to your assistance. It is yours to watch and yours to work as if everything depended upon you, but it is yours also to remember that everything does not depend upon you. Sometimes God has come in to help his servants so exactly at what we call "the nick of time" that they have hardly been able to believe their own senses. "Strange!" they say, "it is like a miracle," and so indeed it is; for the difference between the old dispensation and the new is that God used to work his wonders by suspending the laws of nature, whereas now he does greater things than this, inasmuch as he achieves his purposes quite as marvellously, and lets the laws of nature remain as they are. He does not make the ravens bring his people bread and meat, but he lets them have their bread and their meat when they need them.

God does not nowadays make the manna drop down from heaven; no doubt some people would like him to do so, but still he brings the manna for all that: there is the bread, and there is the raiment, and therewith should the Christian be content. He supplies his people's needs by ordinary means, and herein is he to be wondered at and to be adored. Look up then. Wipe away that tear. Do not talk for a moment of murmuring against God. Do not go home with that sorry tale to your wife and children, and tell them that God is not faithful to you. Wait till to-morrow at any rate, for "thou knowest not what a day may bring forth."

And to you who are disconsolate about spiritual things I might quote the same text. You say, "Ah! I have been hearing the Word very long, and all that I have got from it is a sense of sin, or hardly that. Oh! how I wish that God would bless the word to my soul! I am longing to be saved! What would I not give to be a Christian, a true and sincere Christian, one in whom the Spirit of God has wrought a new heart and a right spirit? Oh!" you say, "I have sought it by listening to the word, and I have sought it in earnest prayer; but months have passed, and I have made no advance; I have no more hope now than I had long ago; I seem as far off the attainment of eternal life as I was when first I heard the Word; nay, if possible I am still further off; the Word has been a savor of death unto death to me, and not a savor of life unto life." Well, my dear friend, do not give up listening to the Word; do not give up treading the courts of the Lord's house; for if thou hast hitherto

got no blessing, yet, being in the way, the Lord may meet with thee, for thou knowest not what may be on the morrow.

How many years these poor creatures waited around the pool when they expected that an angel would, at a certain season, come and trouble the water! There they waited, and though they were disappointed scores of times by others stepping in before them, yet seeing it was the only hope they had they waited still. Now, it is in the use of the means that you are likely to get a blessing. "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." Do not therefore be persuaded to cease hearing, for thou knowest not what may be on the morrow. The very next sermon thou shalt hear may be the means of thine enlightenment. The very next address at the prayer-meeting may give thee encouragement. The very next time the gospel trumpet sounds thou mayest obtain thy liberty, and what a blessing will that liberty be. When thou dost find it thou wilt say it was well worth waiting for.

Let me add another exhortation, do not give up praying. It is a common device of Satan to say to the seeking soul, "The Lord will never hear you; you are one of the reprobate; he has never written your name in the Book of Life." Soul, pray as long as you have breath. Let it be your firm resolve to remain at the throne of grace; say to yourself,—

"If I perish, I will pray,
And perish only there."

It is not said that the gate of mercy will open at the first knock. If it were, there would be no room for the virtue of importunity. But the Lord who delights in our importunity encourages us with the promise that one day the gate will be opened. "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." And who knows how soon this may be? Why, before you close your eyes to-night you may be able to look to Christ crucified and find joy and peace in believing. Instead of the weeping prayer at the bedside there may be a happy prayer of another kind; not with tears of sorrow but with tears of holy joy, to think that the Lord has enlightened your darkness, that you have looked unto Christ, and now your face is not ashamed. Why should it not be so to-night? Why should it not be so on the morrow? God grant, poor disconsolate one, that it may be very speedily!

At any rate, wilt thou let me repeat the advice I have already given? Since thou canst not know that God will not hear thee; since it never was revealed to any man, and never will be, that God will not regard his cry; if thou canst get no further than the king of Nineveh did, yet go on and who can tell what may be, for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth. I will tell thee one thing, and thou mayest take it as being God's own truth; if thou goest to Christ empty-handed, guilty, yet willing to take all thy salvation from him as a free gift, and if thou castest thyself upon him, I will tell thee what the day will bring forth. It will bring forth eternal life to thee —salvation, joy, and peace. It will bring forth adoption, for thou shalt be received into the divine family. It will bring forth to thee the foretaste of the heaven which God has prepared for his people. Thou shalt know a blessed day here that shall be a foretaste of a never-ending day hereafter, a day that shall be as one of the days of heaven upon earth.

I wish that the Lord would bless these words of mine to disconsolate ones. I think there may be some who may be sustained for a while and kept up by what I have said; but it will be better still if they shall now be filled with a desperate resolve to cast themselves at the foot of the cross; then little do they know what the day will bring forth! They cannot imagine the joy they shall have,

nor the peace they shall receive. The pardon which Christ shall give them is far more rich than they have thought it could be, and the success with which their prayers shall be crowned is far more marvellous than even their best hopes have conceived. “Thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.”

III. Now thirdly, turning this time not to those who are fearing the future, nor yet to those who are disconsolate about present affliction, I thought of addressing a few words to those who are toil worn in the Master’s service

I can scarcely sympathize as I could wish to do with those who have worked for Christ unsuccessfully. To say, “Master, I have toiled all the night and have taken nothing,” has never been my lot, and therefore I can only speak from what I suppose to be the feeling of unsuccessful men. For these many years I have been preaching the gospel in this great London and I know not that at any time God has blessed us more than he is blessing us now, neither can I even say that at any time he has blessed us less, for it seems as if he has always been giving us more than we can receive, and blessing the Word exceedingly abundantly above what we asked or ever thought. There is room for nothing in my case but gratitude and encouragement, for humble dependence upon God for the future, and adoring joy for the past and the present.

But what hard work it must be for a minister or a Sunday-school teacher to go on preaching and laboring positively without success, or with so little that it is only like a cluster hole and there upon the topmost bough! I can imagine such brethren and sisters feeling that they can speak no more in the name of the Lord; and as they weep over their failure, saying with Isaiah, “Who hath believed our report, and to whom is the arm of the LORD revealed?” I should not wonder but that my text may whisper in their ears a comfortable thought, “Thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.”

Do not cease from thy labor dear brother! Thou art fainting to-day, but tomorrow thou mayest arise with new strength; or feeling as if thou wert but weakness itself in the morning, though thou mayest hardly know how it came about, in the evening thou mayest be happy and cheerful. The divine presence may overshadow their heart and drive thy fears away, consoling thee in thy distress, and making thee feel as if it were well to be God’s servant even if one had no present reward.

And what if coming at the back of this, thou shouldst find thyself, next time thou goest to thy work discharging it with unusual zest and with new power? What if the pulpit, instead of being as it has been, a prison to thee, should suddenly come to be a palace? What if, instead of there being a mere bush in the wilderness, God should dwell in the bush and make it all ablaze, like that unconsumed burning bush which Moses saw? What if the stammering tongue should suddenly be unloosed, and the cold heart be all aglow with divine enthusiasm? What if the poor tongue of clay should suddenly become a tongue of fire? What a change it would be! Ah! but “thou knowst not what a day may bring forth.”

And what if whilst thou art thyself thus quickened, there should fall a like spirit upon the people, upon the children in the class, upon the hearers in the house of prayer? What if, instead of the dull leaden eyes which looked as if death itself were gazing from them —what if instead of stony and motionless hearers there should suddenly be a holy sensitiveness given to the people—what wouldst thou say to that? Yet why should there not be? Sometimes such grace comes all at once. The rock has been long smitten yet it would not break; but on a sudden there has come a blow of the hammer, and that perhaps not so hard as many that have fallen before, but it has hit the rock in the right place and lo! the mass of stone flies to shivers! “Oh!” you say, “I could keep on at my work if I thought

that this would happen.” Keep on at your work then brother, for you do not know what will come next. Pray for great things and you may then expect them. Now you may not make sure of such blessing, of course, if you have not prayed for it; but having sought it, why should it not come?

I believe all Sunday-school teachers find that sometimes such sudden meltings come over their classes, and ministers often realize that on a sudden they scarcely know how there is a change in the very aspect of their hearers, so that it is quite a different thing to preach. I am very conscious of the difference there is between the various congregations I address. Almost every day, and sometimes twice a day, I am preaching. Occasionally it is dreadful misery because, say what we will, we know we have not a sympathizing audience. We feel as though we were dragging a plough over the rough ground; but when we feel that the Spirit of God is there then we realize that we are sowing this good seed, that it is falling on good ground, and we expect the joyful sheaves which are to be our reward. And yet brethren, we are as much the servants of God when we are doing the one thing as when we are doing the other, and are as much in his service when we are unsuccessful as when we are successful. We are not responsible to God for the souls that are saved, but we are responsible for the gospel that we preach, and for the way in which we preach it. And “who can tell” whether those of us who have been least successful may not suddenly exchange our heavy toil for the most delightful service, for we know not what a day may bring forth?

And how dost thou know my brother what may yet happen? Thou wert saying this morning, “It is a dark age for the church.” Well so it is. You were saying, “I believe it is quite a crisis.” So it is. Every year in fact seems to be a crisis. “Ah!” you say, “but there are peculiar dangers now.” No doubt there are, and I think the oldest man here recollects that there were peculiar dangers when he was a boy; there always have been and always will be peculiar dangers. But if there is danger from this revival of Ritualism—and no doubt there is—yet who among us can tell what a day may bring forth? Are we certain that God will not yet turn back the tide of Romanizing error? Are we sure that he has not a man somewhere, or even fifty men, who shall be the instruments of accomplishing this? Has it not often occurred that the very men who have been the hottest advocates of a certain system have afterwards been the greatest enemies of that system? The Christian Church could never have expected to get an apostle from among the Pharisees, and least of all could they have supposed that they would find in Saul of Tarsus, the blood-thirsty persecutor, the great apostle of the Gentiles, not one whit behind the very chiefest of the twelve. You and I do not know what God has in store. There may be somewhere at this very moment a man, unknown to you, who is reading the Word, and as he reads it he may, like the monk Luther, get such light through the reading that he who once helped to build up will be the instrument in God’s hand to destroy. I am getting more and more hopeful about these matters. I entertain, the most sanguine expectation that the God who has put his enemies to rout in years gone by will do it Now once again; and instead of sitting down in anything like heaviness of spirit or oppression of heart, I would speak hopefully and have you, my brethren, tell hopefully, for we do not know what a day may bring forth.

Suddenly the whole current of the public mind may be turned. There may come a great tide of conversions which shall be the strength and the joy of the Christian Church. On a sudden, slumbering churches may awake, racious revivals may come! Upon the land the holy fire may once again descend from heaven. The Christian Church may start up to find that the God who answered by fire is still in her midst. The mourning Christian may put off his ashes and sackcloth, and put on his beautiful array, and a shout of joy may go up, “Hallelujah! Hallelujah!” where you and I expected to hear nothing but “Crucify him! Crucify him!”

Let us then, if we are working for the Master, instead of growing tired with service hear him say to us, "Be not weary in well doing, for in due season ye shall reap if ye faint not." Let us, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as we know that our labor is not in vain in the Lord. You know not how soon you shall see this success, for you know not what a day may bring forth. I hope every city missionary who hears me, every Biblewoman, every minister, every tract-distributor, every Sunday-school teacher, will try and look this very sweet thought in the face. Expect that God is going to do great things and he will do them, for he does very much according to his people's expectations. According to your faith shall it be done unto you.

IV. I will now say a few words, in the fourth place, to those who are dispirited in prayer, to some who have been engaged in special supplication for some object but who up till now have received no answer, and are ready to give up praying. Let me encourage such to persevere by repeating to them the words of Solomon, "Thou knowest not what a day may bring forth."

There is a story I have often heard told by our Methodist friends of a woman who had long prayed for her husband. She resolved that she would pray for him every day a certain number of times, I think it was for ten years; and that after that she would pray no longer, supposing that if her prayer were not heard by that time, it would be an intimation that God did not intend to grant the blessing. I do not think she was right in setting any limit to God at all, or that she had any right so to act. However, on this occasion God winked at his servant's infirmity, and so the story goes—and I do not doubt its correctness, on the day on which she was to cease from prayer her husband suddenly turned thoughtful and asked her the question which she had so longed to hear from him, "What must I do to be saved?" I am sure that those who have watched over their success in prayer will have met with cases quite as startling as that— things which your neighbor would not believe if you were to tell him, but which you treasure up amongst those inward experiences which are true to you, however improbable they may seem to other people. You know, dear friends, that you have obtained answers to prayer, very singular ones, and have obtained them very promptly and very punctually. You have had your prayers met just as an honest merchant meets his bills at the appointed time. On the expected day God has met with you and given you what you wanted, and what you sought for, just at the very time you needed it.

But now I will suppose that you are tried thus. That dear child of yours, instead of hopefully rewarding your prayers, seems to be going from bad to worse. Perhaps dear brother it is your son, and I know there are many such cases; the devil has told you that it is no use to pray for him, for God will never hear you. Or else good sister, it is your brother, and your prayer for him has been incessant; indeed, it has been a constant burden on your mind. Now in such cases I charge you, I earnestly entreat you never to listen to the malicious insinuation of Satan that "you may as well leave off praying, for you will not be heard," for at the very least, and I am now putting it on the very lowest ground possible, "Thou knowest not what a day may bring forth." You cannot tell but that too-hard heart may yet be softened, and the rebellious will be subdued. You would be surprised to go home and find your son converted, would you not? Well, but such things have occurred. You would be surprised if your wife came in some Sunday evening and said, "I have been hearing So-and-so, and God has met with me." Yet why should it not be so? Is anything too hard for the Lord? Is his arm shortened that it cannot save? Is his ear heavy that it cannot hear? Even if you should die without seeing your children converted or your dear ones brought in, you do not know, even then, what a day may bring forth. They may be converted after you are dead; and it will tend

possibly to swell the joy of Heaven when you shall see them, after years of wandering, brought to follow their father, their father whom in life they despised, but whom after he was gone they came to imitate. Persevere in prayer Christian. "Men ought always to pray and not to faint." Praying breath is never spent in vain. Still besiege the throne. The city may hold out for a while, but prayer should capture it. Beleaguer the throne of grace; it is to be taken. Never raise the siege until you get the blessing: the blessing shall certainly be yours.

V. And now I cannot talk longer on this matter so I will close with just another thought to those of us who are cheerful and happy.

I hope there are many of us who are neither afraid and fretting about the future, nor depressed about the present, neither worn out with toil in the Master's service, nor dispirited in prayer. There are some of us to whom the Lord is so gracious that our cup runneth over. Now, we may just put another drop on the top of the full cup. Dear friend, "thou knowest not what a day may bring forth." It may perhaps bring forth to you and to me our last day. What a blessed day that would be, our last day! Our dying day! No, do not call it so, but the day of our translation, the day of our great change, the day of our being taken up, that of our being carried away in the fiery chariot to be for ever with the Lord!

Thou knowest not but what this may be thy case to-morrow. Oh what joy! I am doubting and fearing to-day, but I may see his face tomorrow, and see it so as never to lose sight of it again. From my poor tenement of poverty I am going to the mansions of eternal blessedness. From the sick-bed where I have tossed in pain I shall mount to everlasting joy. The streets of gold may be trodden to-morrow, and the palm branch of victory may be waved to-morrow, the streets trodden by these weary feet, and the palm branch waved by these toil-worn hands to-morrow! Yes, to-morrow the chants of angels may be in your ears, and the swell of celestial music may made glad your soul. To-morrow you may see the beautiful vision, and may behold the King in his beauty in the land that is very far off. I do like to live in the constant anticipation of being "with Christ, which is far better." Do not put it off Christian, as though it were far away. If we had to wait a hundred years they would soon pass like a watch in the night; but we shall not live so long as that. We may be with our Lord to-morrow. We may sup here on earth and breakfast in heaven. We may breakfast on earth, and hear Christ say "Come and dine," or we may go from our communion table here to the great supper of the Lamb above, to be with him for ever.

This is the best of it. When somebody said to a Christian minister, "I suppose you are on the wrong side of fifty?" "No," he said, "thank God, I am on the right side of fifty, for I am sixty, and am therefore nearer heaven." Old age should never be looked upon with dismay by us; it should be our joy. If our hearts were right in this matter, instead of being at all afraid at the thought of parting from this life we should say,—

"Ah me, ah me that I
In Kedar's tents here stay!
No place like this on high!
Thither, Lord! guide my way.
O happy place!
When shall I be,
My God, with thee,
And see thy face?"

I have not time to say much to others here who are not concerned in these sweet themes, but I will at least say this. Let the careless and thoughtless here remember that they do not know what a day may bring forth. Tomorrow it may not be that grand party to which you are intending to go; to-morrow it may not be that sweet sin of which your evil nature is thinking. To-morrow may see you on a sick-bed, to-morrow may see you on your dying bed. To-morrow, worst of all, may see you in hell! O sinner, what a state to live in, to be in daily jeopardy of eternal ruin, to have the wrath of God, who is always angry with the wicked, abiding on you; and not to know but that to-morrow you may be where you can find no escape, no hope, no comfort! To-morrow in eternity! To-morrow banished from his presence for ever! To-morrow to have that awful sentence thrilling in your soul, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels."

Spiritual Appetite

A Sermon (No. 1227) delivered on Lord's Day Morning by C. H. Spurgeon, April 4th, 1875, at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington.

“The full soul loatheth an honeycomb; but to the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet.”—Proverbs 27:7.

It is a great blessing when food and appetite meet together. Some have appetite and no meat, they need our pity; others have meat but no appetite, they may not perhaps win our pity but they certainly require it. We have heard of a gentleman who was accustomed to take an early morning walk and frequently met a poor man hastening to his labor. One morning he said to him, “I have to walk thus early of a morning to get a stomach for my meat.” “Ah,” said the other, “and I have to trudge to work thus early to get meat for my stomach.” Neither of them was quite satisfied with his position: the happy conjunction of the appetite and the food could alone secure content. Are we thankful enough when we have both?

It has often happened that men have been so luxuriously fed that appetite has departed from them altogether. The Israelites when they were in the wilderness became at last so squeamish that though they were fed with the bread of heaven, and for once men did eat angels' food, yet they said, “Our soul loatheth this light bread;” and thousands in the world are in great danger of falling into the same condition, for the rarest luxuries are unenjoyed by them. They pick and choose as if nothing were good enough for them, and like the old Roman gluttons they require sea and land, earth and air to be ransacked for their gratification, and then crave pungent sauces and strange flavourings ere they can eat. The fact is, the old proverb is true, that the best sauce for meat is hunger, and while the confectioner and the cook may labor with a thousand arts to produce a dainty dish, nature teaches us the way to enjoy our meat; namely, not to eat it till we want it, and then to partake of only so much as our bodies require. That hunger gives a relish even to objectionable diet is certain. Our forefathers found it possible to live upon food which we could not touch. Even so late as the reign of Queen Elizabeth, the mass of the poor seldom tasted wheaten bread but fed on rye or barley cakes, and often had to be content with bread made of beans, peas, tares, oats, or lentils, and even these had to be frequently mixed with acorns. They had a saying that “hunger setteth his foot in the horse's manger,” meaning that food which was only fit for horses was devoured by men in the time of famine. Those delicate people who are for ever complaining of this and that and regretting the “good old times,” would change their tune if they had a trial of such fare, and could earnestly pray to be projected again into the times in which we live.

The rules which apply to the bodily appetite equally hold true of the mind. We easily lose our taste for anything of which we have our fill. Many men of the world have gone the round of amusement, and now nothing can please them; they have worn out all their playthings and are tired of every game. Poor things, more wearied of their follies than the slave by his servitude! For them laughter and mirth have become ghastly mockeries, men singers and women singers are no delight, and instruments of music are discordant, gardens and palaces are dreary, and treasures of art a vexation of spirit. By the road of folly they have reached the very point to which Solomon came with all his wisdom, and like him they cry “Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.”

In a higher order of things the same process can be observed. In the pursuit of knowledge men may come to loathe honeycombs through sheer repletion. Many a literary man has reached such a condition of fastidiousness that the books which he can enjoy are as few as the fingers of his hand. With a toss of the head he passes by volumes with which ordinary readers are charmed. His delicate poetical taste is shocked by the hymns which delight his countrymen, and his ear is tortured by the tunes to which they are sung. For my part, I would sooner retain the power of enjoying a simple hymn sung to a tune which delights the multitude, than find myself proclaimed king of critics, and I would sooner be able to sit down and read a child's story book with interest, than rise into the sublime condition of those literary gentlemen who glance over every book with a sharp critical eye, and see nothing meriting their attention; in fact, never will see anything worth reading unless the book is written by themselves or one of their party. "The full soul loatheth a honeycomb; but to the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet."

I should not have said so much upon this principle of our nature if it had not happened to enter into religion. It is upon religious fastidiousness that I have to speak this morning. Men in the things of God have not always an appetite for the sweetest and most precious truth. The gospel of Jesus revealed from heaven is full of marrow and fatness, but the condition of men's minds is such that they cannot perceive its excellence, but regard it as a tasteless thing at best, while some even treat it as though it were wormwood and gall to them. They feed upon the husks of the world with greedy relish, but turn from the provisions of mercy with disdain. They are full of the meat from the flesh pots of Egypt, and for the bread of heaven they have no desire; nor will they till the Holy Spirit quickens them into spiritual life and makes them feel the keen pangs of spiritual hunger.

The three points of my discourse will be as follows:—first, that Jesus Christ is in himself sweeter than the honeycomb; secondly, there are those that loathe even him; and then thirdly, blessed be his name, there are others who appreciate him.—"To the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet."

I. Let us begin then with the assured truth that Jesus Christ is himself sweeter than the honeycomb. Whether you believe it or not the fact remains, the incarnate Word is sweeter than honey or the honeycomb: whether it be your privilege to revel in the delightful knowledge of his love or not, that love will still be equally precious. That Jesus Christ is sweeter than the honeycomb is clear if we consider who he is and what he gives and does. If you think of it you will see that it must be so. Our Lord is the incarnation of divine love. The love of God is sweet, and Jesus is that love made manifest. "God so loved the world,"—I pause to ask how much? Where shall we see at a glance the fullness of that love? Turn your eyes to Jesus, he alone answers the question. "God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son." There bleeding upon Calvary we see the heart of the Father revealed in the pierced heart of his only-begotten Son. Jesus is the focus of the love of God. The boundless goodness of the ever-loving God finds its best expression in the person of the Redeemer:—surely then he must be sweet beyond compare. When God takes his love and culls the choicest flower from it, and hands it down to earth for men to gaze upon it as the token of his favor, we may be sure that its fragrance surpasses conception. God is love, and when that love is concentrated in one individual that it may be afterwards diffused through multitudes, there must be an infinite sweetness in that blessed person. Judge ye what I say;—must it not be so?

Moreover, Jesus Christ is in himself the embodiment of boundless mercy to sinners, as well as love to creatures. God loved men, for he had made them, but he could not bless them for he must judge them for their offenses. Lo, Jesus Christ has vindicated the divine honor, satisfied the law, and now the mercy of God can descend freely to men, even to the rebellious and the undeserving.

He who would find mercy, let him look where Jesus died upon the tree and he shall find it blooming freely from the crimsoned ground. He who would behold mercy in all its plenitude, let him go where Jesus stands with open hands welcoming the vilest of the vile to the feast of love, cleansing their every stain, and robing them in garments of salvation. He must be sweet from whom such sweetness flows that he makes the foulest and most offensive of mankind acceptable to God. If his merits turn our hell to heaven, our gall of bitterness into joy and peace, it is not possible that even the honeycomb dripping with virgin honey should fitly set him forth. Ye bees that wander over fairest flowers, your choicest gatherings can never rival the quintessences of delight which must dwell in one in whom the mercy of God is concentrated.

Ye poverty-stricken sons of men, Christ must be sweet for he meets all your wants. Sweet is liberty to the captive, and when the Son makes you free you are free indeed; sweet is pardon to the condemned, and Jesus proclaims full forgiveness and salvation; sweet is health to the sick, and Jesus is the great physician of souls; sweet is light to those who are in darkness and to eyes that are dim, and Jesus is both sun to our darkness and eyes to our blindness: all that men can want, all that the most famished souls can pine after, is to be found in the person and work of the Lord Jesus, and therefore sweet he must be.

He is sweet because whenever he comes into a man's heart, he breathes into it the sweetness of abounding peace. Oh the rest our souls have known when we have leaned upon his bosom! "The peace of God which passeth all understanding" has kept our heart and mind by Jesus Christ. Our soul has drank nectar from his wounds. Nor has it been bare peace alone, the glassy pools of rest have bubbled up into fountains of joy. In Jesus we have rejoiced and do rejoice and will rejoice all the day. No happiness can be more divine than the bliss of knowing him and feeding upon him and being one with him. All the true peace and joy that are known on earth—I might have said that are known in heaven among the ransomed throng—all come through Jesus Christ our Lord whose name is the sum of delights. Those spices must be sweet indeed from which the sacred oil of joy distill; that honey must be infinitely sweet of which one single drop fills a whole life with rejoicing.

It is clear that sweet our Lord must be, because his very name is redolent of celestial hope to believers. No sooner do we taste of Jesus than, like Jonathan in the wood, our eyes are enlightened and we see the invisible; the veil is taken away and we behold a way of access to our Father God and to the joys of his right hand. Once understand that Jesus has borne our sins and carried our sorrows, and we see that the felicities of eternity are prepared for us. His name is the open sesame of the gates of Paradise; learn but to pronounce the name of Jesus from your heart as all your confidence, and you have learned a magic word which will scatter troops of opposing foes, and will open the two-leaved gates, and cut the bars of iron in sunder if they stand betwixt your soul and heaven. Since Jesus is all this and vastly more than any human tongue can tell, it is clear upon the very face of it that he must be sweet.

But we are not left to the supposition and inference that it must be so; we know it is so. Our Lord is as the honeycomb, for he is sweet to God himself. The taste of the High and Holy One, who shall venture to judge? What the Lord himself calls sweet must be sweet indeed. Now the very smell of Christ's sacrifice, nay, I will go further, the very smell of that which was the type of Christ in the days of Noah, was so pleasing to God that it is written, "The LORD smelled a sweet savour, and the LORD said in his heart, I will no more destroy the earth with a flood." If the very smell of that which was but the emblem of the bleeding Lamb was grateful to Jehovah, how sweet to the divine Father must the Lord Jesus himself be in his actual sacrifice. Why, the very sight of the

blood—and mark you, not the blood of Christ, but only the blood of a lamb slain in type of Christ—the very sight of that blood sprinkled on the lintel turned away the destroying angel from Israel of old, for the LORD said, “When I see the blood I will pass over you.” Now if a mere glimpse of the type of Jesus’ atoning blood be so satisfactory to the heart of God, what must the sight of Jesus be? for he has been obedient to death, even the death of the cross. If I had time I might mention the many ways in which our Lord is set forth in Scripture as being sweet to the Father; all the senses are represented as being gratified; the Lord hears his voice crying from the ground and answers it with blessing; he tastes his sacrifice as wine which makes glad the heart of God, and he feels his touch as the Daysman laying his hand both upon judge and offender. In every possible way Jesus is most sweet and pleasant to the divine mind. Hear how the Lord declares from the highest heaven, “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.” The Lord is well pleased for his righteousness’ sake. Now, if the heart of Deity itself is satisfied and filled to the full with content, there must be an infinite sweetness in the person of the Lord Jesus. That honeycomb must be sweet with which the Triune God is satisfied.

Moreover our Lord Jesus is sweet to the angels in heaven. Did they not watch him when he was here below with careful eyes? When first they missed him from the courts above they flew with eager haste to discover where he was, and when they found that he was come to this poor planet, they made the night bright with their radiance, and sweet with their chorales. While he tarried here they watched his footsteps, they ministered to him in the wilderness and in the garden, and at other times they waited in their legions eager to deliver him if he would but have beckoned them to use their celestial weapons. When they saw him at last, ready to ascend, I can well believe that the poet’s words are no fiction but describe a fact—

“They brought his chariot from on high
To bear him to his throne;
Clapp’d their triumphant wings and cried,
‘The glorious work is done.’”

He was “seen of angels,” and was very dear and precious to them. Surely he who attracts all those bright intelligences, and causes them to gaze upon him unceasingly, and pay him divine honors, must be sweet indeed.

Sweet is Christ, beloved, for it is his presence that makes heaven what it is. You are in a garden and smelling a dainty perfume, you say to yourself “Whence cometh this?” You traverse the walks and borders to discover the source of the pleasant odour and at last you come upon a rose: even thus if you were to walk amongst those fruitful trees which skirt the river of the water of life you would perceive a peerless perfume of superlative delight, but you would not have to ask yourself, “Whence comes this fragrance?” There is but one rose even in the Paradise of God which is capable of scattering such perfume of joy, and that is the “Rose of Sharon,” that famous “plant of renown” which has diffused fragrance over both earth and heaven. Well may he be sweet to us since when he was broken like the alabaster box of precious ointment, he filled all the chambers of the house of God both above and below with an unrivalled sweetness.

If you want proof from nearer home let me remind you how sweet the Well-beloved is to his own people. What was it that first attracted us to God? Was it not the sweetness of Christ? What was it that banished all the bitterness of our fears? Was it not the sweetness of his pardoning love? What is it that holds us so that we cannot go, which enchains us, seals us, nails us to the cross, so

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that we can never leave it? Is it not that he is so sweet that we shall never find any to compare with him, and therefore must abide with him because there is nowhere else to go? Brethren and sisters, I appeal to you who know Jesus, are ye not satisfied? I mean not only satisfied with him, but satisfied altogether? Does he not fill and over-fill your souls? When you enjoy his presence, what other joy could you imagine? When he embraces you, have you any heart left for other delights? Do you not say, "He is all my salvation, and all my desire." My cup runneth over, my Lord Jesus, when I have communion with thee.

"Jesus, to whom I fly,
Doth all my wishes fill;
What though the creature streams are dry,
I have a fountain still."

All the saints will tell you that Christ is most sweet and altogether lovely, and some of them will confess that sometimes his sweetness overcomes them, carries them right away, and bears them out of themselves. The eagle wings of Jesus' love uplift us to the gates of heaven, and this will happen to us even when there is nothing on earth to make us happy, and all without and within is dark. When the poor body is full of pain and every nerve is unstrung by disease, even then Jesus comes and lays his fingers amid the strings of our poor nature until, charmed by his touch, they pour forth a music which might teach the harps of heaven his praise. In his presence our heart is glad beyond all gladness; we are beatified if not glorified. Would God it might be always so. My dear Lord and Master is very sweet, but my lips fail me and I blush at my poor attempts to speak his praises.

One thing that proves how sweet he is is this—he removes all bitterness from the heart which truly receives him. The quassia cup of sickness is no longer bitter when a drop of his love falls into it. In his society, sick beds grow into thrones wherein the invalid does not so much pine as reign; the lonely chamber becomes a royal reception room, the hard bed becomes a couch of down, and the curtains are transformed into banners of love. So too, his love digs out of the garden of life the roots of the rue of care and the wormwood of anxiety. A man may be vexed with a thousand anxieties, but in communion with Christ he will find rest unto his soul. The delectable hydromel of fellowship with Jesus effectually drowns the taste of the world's bitterness. Saints in persecution have found the love of Christ cleanse their mouths from every taste of hatred's gall; they have been able to bear imprisonment and think it liberty, to regard chains as ornaments, to find the rack a bed of roses, and the blazing stake a chariot of fire to bear them to their reward. If a child of God were called in the pursuit of duty to swim through a sea of hell's most bitter pains, yet with the honied sweetness of Christ's love in his mouth would not so much as taste the sea of gall. As to death, we have learned to swallow it up in victory; surely its bitterness is past. Where else find you such delicious dainties? Where else such all-subduing sweetness? Jesus is bliss itself.

Thus have I shown sufficiently that facts have proved that Jesus is sweet as the honeycomb, but I detain you just a moment to notice that he is incomparably so. Honey, I might almost say, is not only sweet, but sweetness itself. Whether I am right or not in speaking thus of honey, I shall be right enough in saying it of Jesus Christ: he is not only sweet, but sweetness itself. We need not say of him that he is good, for he is essential goodness. He is not only loving, but love. Whatever good thing you may seek in the world you shall find it thinly spread here and there upon good men, as God deals out these precious things by measure; but the fullness of all good you shall find in

Jesus Christ. He is not the sweet odour, but the ointment which gives it forth; he is not the rill, but the fountain from which it springs; he is not the beam of light, but the sun from which it proceeds. Honey is the conglomeration and compounding of a thousand sweets. The bees visit all sorts of flowers, knowing by a cunning wisdom denied to us where all dulcitudes are hidden: they take not only the nectar of the ruddy rose but also of the snow-white lily, and gathering ambrosia from all the beauties of the garden they thus concoct a luscious sweetness altogether unsurpassable. Even thus my Lord is all excellences compounded and commingled in divine harmony, a rare confection of all perfections to make one perfection, the meeting of all sweetnesses to make one perfect sweet. They said of Henry the Eighth that if all the lineaments of a tyrant had been lost, they might have been painted afresh from his life; and surely we may say of Christ that if all the sweetness and light of manhood had been forgotten, if all the love of mothers, the constancy of martyrs, the honesty of confessors, and the self-sacrifice of heroes, had departed, you would find it all treasured up in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Each bee as he performs his many journeys selects what he thinks best, and brings it to the common store, and I doubt not they have each a dainty tooth, so that each one chooses the best he finds. Oh ye preachers of the gospel, ye may each seek out the richest thoughts and words ye can to set out about my Lord. Oh, ye who are the mighty orators of the church, ye may utter the choicest language of poetry or prose, and so you may bring all sweets together, but you shall never match the altogether peerless sweetness which dwells in the person and work of Jesus the well-beloved.

Honey is a healthy sweet, though many sweets are not so. Children have been made sick and even poisoned by berries whose sickly sweetness has decoyed them to their hurt, but as for our Lord, the more you feed on him the more you may. Christ is health to the soul, yea, strength and life. Eat, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved. Hast thou found honey? eat not too much, but hast thou found Jesus? eat to the full, and eat on still if so thou canst, for never shalt thou have too much of him.

II. Secondly—there are those who loathe the sweetness of our Lord. This shows itself variously. Some loathe him so as to trample on him, and this I find to be the translation given in the margin, “The full soul tramples on a honeycomb.” God have mercy upon these boastful ones who persecute his saints, revile his name, and despise his gospel. If there be any such here, may sovereign mercy change their hearts, or a fearful judgment awaits them.

Others show that they loathe Christ because they are always murmuring at him; if they do not find fault with the gospel itself, they rail at its ministers. Nobody can please them. John comes neither eating nor drinking and they say he hath a devil; the Master comes eating and drinking and they say—behold a man gluttonous and a wine bibber. One man preaches very solemnly and they call him heavy, another mingles humor with his discourse and they accuse him of frivolity; one minister uses a lofty rhetoric, he is too flowery; another speaks in simpler style, he is vulgar. This generation like the generations which have gone before, cannot be satisfied, but it is Jesus they are discontented with. O ye carping critics of the gospel, you find fault with the dish but it is a mere excuse, you do not like the meat. If you hungered after the meat you would not molest the platter on which it is served; but because you love it not you complain of the dish and the carver.

Often this loathing is shown by an utter indifference to the gospel. The great mass of our fellow-citizens will not attend a place of worship at all, or if they do attend it is but seldom; and when they come they leave their hearts behind them, so that the word goes in at one ear and out at

the other. The suffering Savior is nothing to them; heaven and hell are nothing to them; whether they shall be lost or saved is nothing to them. Thus they show their loathing.

Perhaps some here present loathe our Lord at bottom, and yet think not so. They attend to his word, but what is the attention? They care for Jesus, but they care so little that it leads to no practical result. Some of you after ten years of hearing the gospel are still unconverted, and after twenty years of the enjoyment of gospel privileges you still have never tasted the honey of the word. If you thought it sweet you would have tasted of it before now: you loathe it, or else you would not let it stand right under your nose untasted for years. You must be surfeited or you would not allow this honeycomb to lie untouched so long. You have meant to eat of it, you say. Yes, but I never knew a hungry man sit without eating for six hours at a table, meaning to eat all the while. No, he lays to as soon as grace has been said, and in your case the grace has been said a great many times, and yet you sit with the sweets of mercy before you and refuse to eat thereof. I cannot account for it on any other theory but that there is a secret loathing in your soul.

This loathing is manifest by many signs. There is the Bible, a book of infinite sweetness, God's letter of love to the sons of men. Is it not dreadfully dry reading! A three-volume novel suits a great many far better. That is loathing the honeycomb. There is the gospel ministry. Sermons are dull affairs, are they not? Now, I will admit that some sermons are dreary and empty as a desert, but when Christ be honestly and earnestly preached, how is it you are so weary? Others are fed, why do you complain? The meat is right enough, but you have no appetite for it for the reason given in the text. When a man loathes Christ he finds prayer to be bondage, and if he carries it on at all, it is a very dull exercise yielding no enjoyment. As to meditation, that is a thing neglected altogether by the godless many. The Sabbath with some persons is a very weary day, they are glad when it is over. I heard one say the other day he thought the Sabbath ought to be spent in recreation; upon which a friend replied that he wished he might find true re-creation, for he needed to be created anew in Christ Jesus, and then he would judge the Sabbath to be the best day of the week. Alas, these dull Sabbaths and these dreary preachers, and this dull praying and singing, and all this weariness, are sure signs that you are full souls and therefore loathe the honeycomb.

This loathing comes of a soul's being full, and souls may be full in a great many ways. Some are full because they have never yet discovered their natural depravity and nothingness, have never known that they are condemned by the law of God. These full souls who are what they always were, good people as they have always been from their birth, do not want a Savior, and therefore they despise him. Why should those that are whole value a physician? Is he not intended for the sick? Alas for you full ones, for your time of hunger will come when there will be no more feasts of love, and then as Dives could not obtain a drop of water you also will be denied a crumb of consolation.

Some people are full with enjoying the world. They have wealth and they are perfectly content with it; or they have no wealth but still they are pleased with the grovelling pursuits of their class. Their thoughts never rise; they are like the cock on the dunghill that scratched up a diamond and said, "I would sooner have found a grain of barley." They are satisfied if they have enough to eat and drink and wear, but they think not of divine things. They are full of the world and therefore loathe the honeycomb.

Some are full of confidence in outward religiousness. They were christened when they were babes and they were confirmed, and if that does not save people what will? A bishop's hands laid on you! Think of that!! Since that they have taken the sacrament, and they have always been told

that if you go regularly to your place of worship, and especially if you pay twenty shillings in the pound you will do very well—at least if you do not what will become of your neighbors? These full souls do not appreciate free grace and dying love, and salvation by the blood of Christ seems to them to be but idle babble.

Some are full of self-conceit—they know everything—they are great readers and profound philosophers. Their thoughts have dived to the bottom of infinity; they are so nice in their criticisms that they

“Can a hair divide
Betwixt the west and north-west side!”

It is not possible to satisfy them. The knowledge of Christ crucified is foolishness and a stumbling-block to them.

Others are full of the pride of rank. Yes, they are very glad to hear that the poor people hear the gospel, and they have no doubt that the plain preaching of the gospel is very useful to the lower orders, but respectable people who live in the West End and ride in carriages do not require such preaching; they are too respectable to need saving, and so their full souls loathe the honeycomb.

But we need not stop any longer talking about them, for we shall do them no good as long as they are full. If the angel Gabriel were to preach Christ to them it would be as a sounding brass and as a tinkling cymbal. Serve up the meat as well as you may, but never will it be appreciated till the guest has an appetite. The Lord send them an appetite by the work of his Holy Spirit!

III. And so I close with the third point, which is this —there are some who do appreciate the sweetness of Christ. I would to God I could find such out this morning. Hungry souls we are, brethren. If you are hungry after pardon, mercy, and grace, I remember when I was in your condition. What would you give to have Christ? “I would give my eyes,” says one. Give him your eyes then by looking to him and you shall have him. “What would I give,” saith one, “to be delivered from my besetting sin! I hunger after holiness.” Soul, you may have deliverance from besetting sins and have it for nothing. Jesus Christ has come into the world to save his people from their sins, and looking to him he will deliver you from that disease which now makes you love sin, and he will give you a taste for holiness and a principle of holiness by the Holy Ghost, and you shall henceforth become a saint unto God. He turns lions into lambs and ravens into doves; nothing is impossible with him. You have but to trust your soul with him and you shall have pardon, peace, holiness, heaven, God, everything.

Those who hunger are those then who know the sweetness of Christ, but they must do more than that: being hungry they must feed, for though the text does not say so, it is very clear that merely being hungry does not make meat sweet, it is only sweet when you eat it. If meat were placed where we could not reach it and we were hungry, we should be inclined to think it bitter, after the model of the fox and the grapes in the fable. If there were a Savior but we could not reach him, it would make our life still more miserable. Poor soul, if you want Christ receive him, it is all you have to do. The bread is before you, eat it. The fitness which is needed for eating is an appetite—you have it: lay to then, by holy faith; receive Christ into yourself and he will be sweet indeed to you.

The text says that the hungry man’s appetite makes even bitter things sweet. Is there anything bitter in Christ? Yes, there was much in him that was bitter to himself, and that is the very sweetest part to us. Those pangs and griefs of his, and woes unutterable, and bloody death, how bitter! The

wormwood and the gall were his, but to our believing soul these bitter things are honeycombs. Christ is best loved when we view him as crucified for us.

There are other bitters with Christ. We must repent of sin, and to carnal minds it is a bitter thing to hate sin and leave it; but to those who hunger after Christ repentance is one of the daintiest of graces. Christ requires of his people self-denial and self-sacrifice, and unrenewed nature nauseates these things, but souls eager after Jesus are glad to deny themselves, glad to give of their substance, glad even to suffer hardships for his dear sake; even bitter things for him are sweet.

There are doctrines also which are very distasteful to carnal minds; they cannot away with them, they are angry when they are preached even as those who left our Lord when he said "Except ye eat my flesh and drink my blood, there is no life in you." Those who hunger after Christ prize the doctrines of grace; only let them know what Jesus teaches and every syllable is at once acceptable to their minds.

It may be there are ordinances which you shrink from; you have felt baptism especially to be a cross, but when your soul fully knows the sweetness of Christ and your mind perceives that it is his ordinance, you feel at once that the bitter thing is sweet to you for his dear sake. Possibly you may have to suffer some measure of persecution and be despised and nick-named for Jesus' sake. Thank God they cannot imprison you and put you to death, but even if they could, if you have an appetite for Christ you will eat the bitter herbs as well as the Paschal Lamb and think that they do well together. Christ and his cross—you will give your love to both and shoulder the cross right bravely, and find it a sweet thing to be despised for the love of Jesus Christ your Lord.

Have but an appetite for Christ and the little prayer meeting, though there be but few poor people at it, will be sweet to you. That poor broken-down preaching which is the best that the minister is able to give, will become sweet to you because there is a savor of Christ in it. If you can only get a leaf torn out of the Bible, or half a leaf, it will be precious to you. Even to hear a child sing a hymn about Christ will be pleasant. You remember Dr. Guthrie, when dying, asking his friend to sing him "a bairn's hymn." He wanted a child's hymn then; a little simple ditty about Christ was what the grand old man desired in his departing moments; and when your soul hungers after Jesus Christ you will love simple things if they speak of him. You will not be so dainty as some of you are. You must have a comfortable cushion to sit upon; when you are hungry you are glad to stand in the aisles. Full souls must needs have a very superior preacher; they say of the most successful evangelist, there is nothing in him, he only tells a lot of anecdotes: but when you are hungry you will rejoice that the man preaches Christ and the faults will vanish. I remember my father telling me when I was a boy and did not like my breakfast, that he thought it would do me good to be sent to the Union-house for a month and see if did not get an appetite. Many Christians need to be sent under the law a little while and Moses would cure them of squeamishness, so that when they came back to Jesus and his love they would have a zest for the gospel.

The lesson from all this is—pray for a good appetite for Christ, and when you have it keep it. Do not spoil it with the unsatisfying dainties of the world, or by sucking down modern notions and sceptical philosophies—those gingerbreads and unhealthy sweetmeats so much cried up now-a-days. Do not waste a good appetite upon anything less sweet than the true honeycomb. When you have got that appetite for Christ, indulge it. Do not be afraid at any time of having too much of Christ. Some of our brethren seem alarmed lest they should grow perfect against their wills. Dear brother, go into that river as far as you please, there is no likelihood of your being drowned. You will never have too much grace, or peace, or faith, or consecration. Go in for the whole thing; indulge your

appetite to the very full. We cannot say it to our children with honey before them, but we may say it to God's children with Christ before them—"Eat, yea, eat abundantly."

Pray the Lord to give other people appetites. It is a grand thing to hear of ten and twenty thousand rushing to hear the gospel; I hope it is because they are hungering for it. When the Lord gives the people the appetite I am certain he will find them the meat, for it is always true in God's family that whenever he sends a mouth he always sends meat for it, and if any one of you has a mouth for Christ this morning, come to him and be filled to the full.

While you pray to God to give others an appetite, try and create it. How can you create it? Many an appetite has been created in the streets amongst poor starving wretches by their passing the place where provision is prepared—the very smell of it has made their mouths water. Tell sinners how happy you are; tell sinners what Christ has done for you; tell them how he has pardoned you, how he has renewed your nature; tell them about your glorious hope, tell them how saints can live and die triumphant in Christ and you will set their mouth a-watering. That is half the battle; when once they have an appetite they are sure to have the meat. May the Lord the Holy Spirit send that appetite to sinners throughout the whole of London, and to Jesus Christ who satisfies all comers shall be glory for ever. Amen.

Portion of Scripture read before sermon—1 Peter 1.
Hymns from "Our Own Hymn Book"—907, 436, 559.

The Wandering Bird

A Sermon (No. 3453) published on Thursday, April 8th, 1915,
delivered by C.H. Spurgeon at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington.

“As a bird that wandereth from her nest, so is a man that wandereth from his place.”—Proverbs 27:8.

Solomon spoke from observation. He had seen certain persons of a vagrant kind, and he perceived that they seldom or never prospered. Moreover, he spoke from inspiration as well as from observation, hence the sagacity of the philosopher is in this case supported by the austerity of the preacher. We may therefore take this proverb, first, as the dictate of human wisdom gathered by long experience; and then, next, as the testimony of divine wisdom, commended to us by infallible revelation. The principle it inculcates is alike applicable to the common affairs of life and to the higher pursuits which belong to our spiritual interests.

I. This is the dictate of wisdom.

In the common affairs of life we believe Solomon to be correct in his statement that “as a bird that wandereth from her nest, so is a man that wandereth from his place.” The unrest of that man’s mind, and the instability of his conduct who is constantly making a change of his position and purpose, augurs no success for any of his adventures. Unless he maketh the change very wisely and hath abundant reason for it, he will make a change for the worse as the bird doth that leaveth her nest. Some make a change of their country and fly from their native shores. This is not an ill thing for men to do, for thereby nations have been formed and deserts have been peopled. When a man finds it impossible to provide bread for an increasing family in this country, one of the wisest things that he can do is to cross the sea and seek profitable employment in another land. But there are some spirits of such a moving caste that they seem never to be satisfied at home. They feel persuaded that if they were under other skies they would succeed, whereas as a matter of general fact a man who cannot prosper in England will not prosper anywhere, and many of those who have gone abroad would be but too glad to get home again. Without taking great counsel from God and weighing the matter long, it is ill for a man to leave the Christian privileges of this country, let alone other considerations; it is ill I say, to turn aside from the place where sanctuaries are so numerous and where the gospel is so clearly proclaimed, to go abroad where there may be some pecuniary advantages, but where there must be much spiritual loss. Let the man take anxious thought before he goes or else, mayhap, when he finds himself in Australia he will long to be in New Zealand, and when he does not prosper there he will pant for the United States, and not getting on there, he will perhaps be wanting to come back to Old England, and so he will spend the best of his days in vacillating as to where he shall spend them.

The like is also true with respect to a change of occupation. Some persons are one thing to-day but you do not know what they will be to-morrow. Evidently they were not cut out for this, and therefore they think they must have been ordained for that, and as they have not thrived in one line of business they feel certain that they must have made a little mistake, and that if they could get into another line they would prosper. Well, when a man is in error about his calling, if it really be not his calling, let him leave it; but let him first be sure that it is not his calling, for otherwise he

will sin against the express words of inspiration. The apostle Paul says “Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called”—that is to say, the occupation or profession in life you were engaged in when you were converted need not be rashly abandoned. Therein you may enjoy communion with God. But if you go running before the cloud, and with presumptuous self-will get out of the path that Providence has assigned you, you will be sure to smart for it. It is ours to follow, never to lead. Where we clearly see our way, thither let us go; and unless we have that way clearly manifested to us let us abide still in our nest.

This also applies to those who want to be always changing their situation and their acquaintance—masters never satisfied with their servants, and servants always discontented with their employers. We know many who say, “There are so many temptations in the place where I am; I will try another.” Well, I do not know, dear friends, that you are right. The temptations that trouble me, I would rather endure them than encounter any fresh ones. I may know something about my weakness in the present trial but I cannot know how I might stagger under another. I should recommend you to be rather wary of changing your trials. To exchange one trial for another is all the relief you will get in this world. All is vanity under the sun. The whole creation groaneth together. Amidst sorrow and sighing thus universal, our lot is cast. From the sick man’s bitter experience, as Dr. Watts describes it, we cannot escape—

“We toss from aide to side in pain,
But ‘tis a poor relief we gain
I’d shift the place,
but not the pain.”

You may your change your position o’er and o’er again, but you will always be exposed to the temptation. Until you get beyond yonder azure sky, you will never be out of gun-shot of the devil. Evil spirits molest every rank in life. The poor man is sore beset with grievous hardships and the rich man is encompassed with seductive snares. He who toils with his hand may have some cause to complain, but he who toils with his brain will become the victim of a sorer complaint. Should you fly to the utmost verge of the green earth, temptation would still pursue you. Everywhere, while you are in the body, you must keep guard, for temptations and trials are the common portion of all that on this earth do dwell. Be not in a hurry therefore to fly from one scene of temptation to another. If God ordains that your lot should be altered, be it so. It is yours to accept his allotment either with resignation or with gratitude. But be not hasty or heedless in running from one place to another, lest in yielding to the impulse of a moment you forfeit the comfort of a life-time.

It may be that these remarks are peculiarly applicable to some people here present. I cannot tell. When talking about such homely things our words have sometimes proved to be like an oracle for the guidance of those that have come up to God’s house to enquire in his temple. At any rate dear friends, when the mind is unhinged or the feelings chafed, it is not easy to exercise a wise discretion. Wait upon God for guidance as to any change in life you may determine, and if the two things be equal—to remain where you are, or to remove elsewhere—choose to abide still, for speaking according to man’s judgment, the chances are in its favor. Reason seems to say that, as it is unwise for the bird to wander from her nest, so it is not desirable for you to wander from your place.

Still keeping to the common use of these words let us now turn them to another account. This is most certainly true in changing one’s religious service in the cause of God. We have a niche

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perhaps in which God has placed us, and we have had some little honor in filling it; but by-and-bye another sphere of labor opens up before us, and like children easily charmed with novelty, we think we could be more useful in doing something else and leaving our old work. Let us be very careful in this matter, for “as a bird that wandereth from her nest so is a man that wandereth from his place.” I admired one thing greatly in our deceased friend, Mr. Worcester, who for so long a time kept the gate outside. When I once asked him whether he could not be serviceable to the church as an elder, he said that if he were elected to it he should decline the office, because, he said, “I can do my work as a gate-keeper but I do not know what I could do as an elder.” So he resolved to stick to the work in which he was acknowledged to do good service. I would have each Christian man do the same.

Some brethren we know have such an itching to get into the pulpit that they are impatient of any other office than the preacher’s. But there are many in the pulpit now-a-days who had better have kept out of it. They were excellent people at prayer meetings; they were very serviceable indeed to give a little address now and then at a cottage-meeting; they would have been useful deacons, exemplary visitors of the sick, and perhaps good city missionaries. But they thought within themselves that the pulpit ought to be blessed by their distinguished abilities, and so they crept up the pulpit stairs as little to their own comfort as to the church’s edification; and now had they but the wisdom and the humility to come down again never more to mount them, it would be well. If you be really called to the ministry, then in God’s name do not stand back from it; and if a new sphere of labor opens to you, accept it, resting on your God who can make his strength perfect in your weakness; but be not for ever panting after the highest seats in the synagogue; do not always want the uppermost place at the feast, lest when the King cometh in thou shouldest have with shame to take a lower room. Wait till the King says, “Friend, come up higher”; never go up higher till you have the King’s friendly admonition that the higher place is yours by a call other than your own choice, remembering that “as a bird that wandereth from her nest so is a man that wandereth from his place”—from his place, from his proper place in the Church of God, his proper position in the ranks of the Lord’s hosts.

Again, I will use it as a proverb very often applicable to ministers. There may be some here to whom this may come as a powerful rebuke. It is a crying evil just now, especially in our own denomination, that ministers are changing their places. The good old ministers used to occupy one charge for fifty years, and the people used to love them and to hold fast to them. They did not think of moving, they never spoke of resigning any more than fathers speak of resigning their fatherhood because their boys and girls are sometimes disobedient. They weathered the storm. They knew that all parts of the sea are rough, so they did not want to get out of one bay into another as soon as a little storm came on. I do not know but that some preachers are better moving, and probably they would be better if they were moved off altogether. I think when a man remains in service at one place for only about two years he has need to question whether he was called into the ministry at all. God does not generally plant trees in his vineyard that need shifting every two years. God’s trees are full of sap, the cedars of Lebanon which he hath planted. They can stand on the bare mountain’s brow and see the ages of mortals swept away into the tomb. And so a God-sent minister may stand many years in one place, and see man-made ministers swept away like generations of lichens and mosses because they have no divine life in them. I love to see a Christian minister, I must say, standing fast in his place. We are not to get into a great pet because there was a little disagreement at a church-meeting, or turn round offended because some deacon will not be quite as pliable as we could wish, or because the neighborhood does not seem to increase, or because

there are not quite so many conversions as we want. No sirs, if God shall move us let us move; but if he doth not move us, let not the devil do it. Do you know what happens when the bird wanders from her nest? Why, there are her own eggs in the nest, and there is no bird which can sit so well on the eggs as the bird that laid them. And so a Christian minister should recollect that there are some young converts who are his own spiritual children. They are of his own bringing in through divine grace, and ordinarily speaking there is no man who can by any means nurture the young converts like the man who was the means of their conversion. It is well for infants to be brought up by their own mother, and it is a good thing for young converts to be fed under their own spiritual parents. I should not like to trust mine to anybody else for any great length of time. There is always a fear, when the parent bird is away, that the eggs will grow cold and addled, so that when she comes back she will find that she has lost all her trouble. And so when the minister leaves his people and goes away to some other place, there are many of those who did seem to run well who will turn back. This is a sad result; a tale of wasted labor. Besides, the bird knows that, however uncomfortable its nest may be, there is no other nest in the world so comfortable as the one which it has made itself. And the Christian minister must know that there is no other church so comfortable for him as the church which he was the means of forming. "I dwell among my own people," said the Shunamite. That is my happiness and my joy, to dwell among my own people, and if any man should say to me "Is there anything in life that thou desires? Wouldest thou be spoken for to the king, or to the captain of the hosts?" I would answer, No, there is nothing I desire under heaven but to dwell among my own people; if I may but seek their good and see the Church of God prosper here it shall be all that I ask of my God this side of heaven. Brethren, let us who are in the ministry then, as far as possible, cling to our churches and to our fields of labor, remembering that "as a bird that wandereth from her nest so is a man that wandereth from his place."

This is equally true of our hearers. Oh! there are some hearers who are sad, sad vagrants. We can have no objection to our hearers going to listen to other ministers if ever they can be edified thereby, for the bird that sits best on the nest must come off sometimes, especially if there is any food to be had elsewhere. Hear anybody that can profit you. I am sure nothing will make me more glad than to know that you are anywhere, as long as your souls are fed. If a Church of England minister preaches the gospel in your neighborhood better than the Baptist minister does to not go and hear the Baptist; and if you find either Baptist or Independent treating you to free will instead of free-grace, do not listen to them but seek out the Presbyterian, and hear him if you find him more sound in the faith; for after all your souls must be fed. That is a matter of necessity. Where you can have all the points of the truth, prefer it, prefer it infinitely; but if you cannot have them all give your chief care to those which possess the greater importance. Seek first, in this case, those things which make most for your souls' prosperity. But what I do not like is this—certain people will join a church, and then after about six months will join another church, and then another, and then another. They ought to have no moss on them, and I suppose they have none, for they have been rolling stones certainly. And then if the minister should die how many there are who are off directly, for now that the church is in a little difficulty they will all get out of it. Brave sailors these! They want to get into the boat when the ship is in a little bit of gale, and they leave the Church of God just when their help is most wanted. Oh! they will come and join the church when the church prospers; yes, any quantity of them; but I wonder, if the pastor went away, whether we should find them all remaining faithful. Too many in our London churches are a sort of flying camp, always flying from one place to another—a set of gypsy-Christians who have no settled abode and no

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“local habitation,” and are about as respectable as the Gypsies with whom I have compared them. Now never let this be said of any of you who love your Lord and who consequently love his Church, but when you are united with his people, say: —

“Here would I make my settled rest,
While others go and come;
No more a stranger, or a guest,
But like a child at home.”

You shall find that your wandering shall do you but little good after all, while in permanent adhesion to the church and a diligent casting in of your whole efforts into the cause of God, shall through the Holy Spirit give your soul prosperity.

But now I shall take my text in another way and try to use the general principle in another sense.

II. Some men wander from their place in spiritual things.

Where is the “place” for a sinner? The place for to sinner is always at the foot of the cross, looking unto Jesus. Alas! then, the tendency in us all is to be looking for evidences, signs, marks, experiences, graces, and I know not what. Having begun in the Spirit we are so foolish and so bewitched that we try to get perfect in the flesh. We know that at the first our only comfort came from simply depending upon the finished work of Jesus, and yet we are so mad that we try to get comfort from that poor flesh of ours, which has already been our encumbrance, and will be our plague till it dies. Now the moment that a Christian wanders away from his place—that is, from the simplicity of his faith in Jesus—the moment he departs from that standing upon the solid rock of what Christ did and what Christ is, and what Christ has promised, that moment he is like a bird that wanders from her nest. The bird away from her nest has no comfort; the instincts of nature make her feel during her incubation that the nest is her proper place. And when the Christian gets away from the cross, the newborn instincts within him make him feel that he is out of his proper position. The cross is the true rest of a Christian. We are like Noah’s dove, there is no rest for the sole of our feet except in the ark; we may search the world around and fly over the great waste of waters, but there never shall be found rest for us anywhere but at the cross. I confess I sometimes get into that sorry state of feeling, rather as a Christian professor or a minister than as a sinner saved by grace; but I find that I have to come back again to that same place and to sing the old ditty over again:—

“Nothing in my hands I bring;
Simply to thy cross I cling;
Naked, come to thee for dress;
Helpless, look to thee for grace.”

There is no living comfortably, there is no living with the peace and joy of the Holy Spirit in the heart, if we at once wander from the simplicity of our confidence in Christ.

Further: there are many believers who also wander out of their place. What now is a believer’s place? A believer’s place is on the bosom of his Lord, or at the right hand of his Master, or sitting at his feet with Mary. Now some of us have had times in which we did come very near to the Lord Jesus Christ. Ah! some of you never woke in the morning without thinking of him, and all day long a sense of his presence was in your heart. How you grudged the world the hours you had to give to business; and when you locked up your heart at night you always gave Jesus Christ the key. Oh!

how sweet ordinances were to you then because you could see Christ through them, as through windows of agates and gates of carbuncles! So delightful were prayer-meetings and similar gatherings because you saw Jesus there and talked with him! But what about your present state? Perhaps my dear friend you have wandered from your place; you are not living near to Christ as you used to do. Hence ordinances have but very little comfort in them; they are dull and tedious; and services which were once as marrow and fatness to you have now become as dry bones. Your closet, too, is much neglected; your Bible is not studied as it was. You have lost your first love, and I appeal to you, have you not also lost your first comfort? Are you not like a bird that has wandered from her nest? Believe me there is no solid joy, no seraphic rapture, no hallowed peace this side of heaven, except by living close under the shadow of the cross and nestling in the wounds of Jesus. Oh! that we should be so foolish! The bird doth not forget her nest but we do forget our Lord. We have need to say with the Psalmist, "Return unto thy rest, O my soul, for the LORD hath dealt bountifully with thee!" We have need to cry to-night: —

"Return, oh! heavenly Dove, return,
Sweet messenger of rest;
I hate the sins that made thee mourn,
And drove thee from my breast."

We have wandered from our place, you see, for our place is at Jesu's feet with Mary, or on Jesu's bosom with John, or at Jesu's lips with the spouse in the Canticles saying, "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth"; but roaming hither and thither we are like a bird that has wandered from her nest.

And does not this wandering imply a lack of watchfulness? Do I not observe the Christian who was so jealous of himself once that he did not haste to put one foot before the other for fear he should take a step awry? he would not even talk without saying, "O Lord, open thou my lips!" But now he thinks that he is sure to stand and he forgets to guard himself with jealousy. He thinks perhaps that his experience has made him so wise that he will not fall into his former errors, and so he getteth a carnal confidence and forgetteth to stand upon his watch-tower day and night, and watch against his foes. Do you know what sometimes happens to the bird if it leaves its nest? Why, while the bird is away the cuckoo comes and drops its egg in, and so the poor bird when it comes back has to hatch its enemy. And oftentimes when we are not watchful and permit the enemy to take an advantage over us, Satan comes in and drops some foul temptation into our nest, which our hearts help to hatch, and which will give us trouble all our lives. As sure as ever we wander in the matter of watchfulness, it will be for our hurt. We may sleep, but Satan does not. Never was he detected napping yet. There is slothfulness among believers but there is no slothfulness on the part of their adversary. He ever watcheth, going "about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." Though you should leave off watchfulness he never will. Oh! Christian, do not leave your nest, for you do not know what may come of it; what good things may be destroyed or what bad things may be deposited! while your heart is away.

Some Christians, too, wander in a yet more melancholy manner as to its outward effect, for we see them wander from holiness. Unhappy church that hath in it many such inconsistent professors! But alas! they are too common in the world. They "did for a time run well; what then did hinder them that they should not obey the truth?" The root of the matter was scarcely in them, for they brought forth fruit only for a season, and by-and-bye they withered away. Ah! well, if there be a

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Christian here—a real Christian—who has backslidden and gone into the world, he never will be happy in his sin. A reprobate, after making a profession, may perhaps go back and be comfortable, but a Christian never can. Tell me that you are happy in your sin and I tell you at once that you are dead in sin, for he who puts on guilt must cast off shame. You are in your own element; like a fish in the water you will find it suits your constitution. As a bird could not be happy down in the depths of the sea, it must drown unless it soon be delivered; so the saint of God is wretched in the depths of iniquity; he must speedily perish unless he is brought out. If he falleth into sin through infirmity, or be dragged into it through the force of sudden temptation, he yearneth to be delivered and groaneth and crieth unto God till once more the bones that were broken are made to rejoice. If you wander from holiness you wander from your place. I have known some people who, in order to avoid trouble, have committed a trespass. A Christian man for instance has kept his shop open on a Sunday to prevent bankruptcy, and a mass of troubles rolled in upon him ten times heavier than those he had sought to avert. We have heard of some who have done violence to their conscience just once. In sheer despondency they shut their eyes and swallowed the bitter pill. It did not take five minutes to do it. Their friends said it was wise. Ill advisers told them it was necessary. They thus attempted to extricate themselves from some trying position. But the consequence was that to their dying day the worm of conscience still did gnaw their soul. They have made the rod wherewith God hath scourged them. Mind what you are at then, lest in wandering from holiness you prove yourself like a bird that wandereth from her nest. Oh! how blessed it will be if you and I shall be kept by mighty grace simply relying upon Christ, constantly communing with his person, watchful against the inroads of temptation and persevering in holiness even to the end! Without this there can be no comfort to us.

III. The persecutions¹ we undergo are designed to make every one of us who is a true Christian cling close to his nest.

Consider dear friends the joy which you and I have had when we have been clinging close to Christ. Where else can such sweetness be found as we have found in the love of Jesus? Will a man leave the cool flowing waters from Lebanon to go and drink of the muddy river of another place? Shall a man turn away from the bubbling fountain to seek out for himself a broken cistern? Oh! Let it not be! We who have fed on angels' food cannot be content with the husks that swine eat. Let us say with Rutherford, "Ever since I have eaten the wheaten bread of heaven, my mouth has been out of taste for the brown bread of Earth, which is full of grit and gravel-stones. I can no longer find sweetness in this world's joys for I have tasted of joys celestial that are beyond all that earth can give." Let the joy we have had in Christ constrain us still to cling to him.

Think again of the sorrow we have felt whenever we have wandered. You and I have had backsliding times; let us confess it mournfully. But what wretched times they have always been! What have we ever gained by going away from our Lord but broken bones and sorrow of heart? As we have been burned, let us dread the fire; and as we have had to smart for our wanderings when the watchmen have plucked off our veil and smitten us, let us henceforth cling close to our Beloved. What reason has he even given us to be discontented and go away? Has he been unfaithful to us? "Have I been a wilderness unto you?" he asks. In what respect has he aggrieved us? Has he ever smitten us in his wrath, or treated us harshly for our follies? Never has a friend behaved better to his friend than Christ has behaved to us; and as we can never find a better Savior, let us cling to

¹ Wisdoms. Heb. Compare note Chapter 1:20

him all our days. Or can you think that the outlook is dreary? When we think of the joy that is yet to come we have a yet stronger motive to cling to the Savior. We may have to walk with him to-day when the snow blows in our face, but oh! what will it be to walk with him in the sunshine? It may be hard work to keep pace with him, faint may be our heart, and flesh and blood are frail, walking as we now do with him through the mire and dirt, but what will it be to walk in silver slippers upon the golden pavement of the celestial city? It is not so easy to stand with him in the pillory when the multitudes are hooting him; but oh! how joyous it will be with him when the angels are rending the heavens with acclamations, and all the saints are casting their crowns at his feet! To be with him in his trouble is not very sweet to our natural feelings, I know; but what will it be to be with him in his triumph? To be partners in his cross—from that we may shrink, but to sit with him upon his throne—for that we must eagerly long. Well, as we cannot be crown-bearers without being cross-bearers, let us espouse his cross as we would enjoy his crown. Yet be it known that his cross droppeth with myrrh, and that they who carry it will find it so sweetly perfumed that they shall love the very cross itself because Christ has touched it. From this nest let us never wander, because of the “rest” which “remaineth for the people of God.”

Wander from this nest—methinks—we cannot, if the love of Christ inflames us; if our love to Christ sustains us. What, wander from him who died for us that we might never die? who lives for us, that we might ever live! What base ingratitude is ours that we do not cling closer to him! Can we give him up? Christians, he gave you the light that cheered your darkness, and can you turn away from the brightness of his face? With pitying eye he saw you when you were lying in your blood an outcast, all forlorn, and he said unto you, “Live,” and can you ever forsake him? He passed by thee, he looked upon thee, he spread his skirt over thee, he covered thy nakedness, he swore unto thee, he entered into a covenant with thee and canst thou now prove treacherous? He redeemed thee, he opened his veins that he might pour forth the purple drops of his precious blood as the price for your inestimable ransom, and can you turn away from him? “Despised and rejected of men” as he was, will you hide your face from him? And while he is still pleading for you, will you cease to plead for him? Now that his chariots are making haste to bring him in the glory of his second advent, will you turn away from him when his kingdom is so near? Shall the wife leave a husband who cherishes her with utmost tenderness? Shall the child neglect its parents under whose roof his every want is supplied? Shall the limbs of one’s body abhor the head? Such strange vagaries were not half so unnatural as for a Christian to turn vagrant and forsake his Savior. Ah! me, unnatural and brutish as it must seem, you and I would do this and more also, did not grace prevent. The love which has made us one with Christ must keep us one with him, or else we shall never hold on our way. Be it then your constant prayer, “Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe.” Let this be your heart’s cry, “Abide with us,” for except he abide with us and make our hearts his nest, we shall never abide with him, but shall be as a bird that wandereth from her nest.

Mayhap, I speak to some poor bird which has wandered from its nest. You are a stranger and you have strayed in hither! You recollect a nest in some happy family circle where prayer was wont to be made. You remember the nest in which you were wont to nestle—a little village church where you worshipped God with kindred dear. But you have wandered from your nest. You have lost your friends; you have gone into the world; you are a sinner. Conscious you are that you scarcely dare to face the home of your childhood. You have come away from your old haunts, for you are ashamed to continue in them. You have wandered from your nest. And do you mean to wander on? Is yours to be forever the flight of a bird that hath no roost? “Foxes have holes, and the birds of the

air have nests"; will you never have a place to lay your head? Are you condemned like the unclean spirit to wander through dry places, seeking rest and finding none? Are you a pilgrim who shall never have a city that hath foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God? Are you like the phantom ship of which the mariners talk, which flits across the sea for aye, but never reaches a port? Nay friend, you are not so to account yourself, though the devil hath told you that there is no hope; though he hath driven you to desperation and persuaded you that you are given up of God and man. It is not so; it is not so. The eternal Father, bending from high heaven looks down upon you, and by these lips talks to you. Little as you were thinking that you would be found out, he saith to you "Return, return, return" 'Tis he who makes you say "I will arise and go unto my Father." He meets you, prodigal; he falls about your neck; he gives you the kiss of reconciliation. He cries today to the messengers of mercy, "Take off his rags, and bring forth the best robe and put it on him; put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet, and let us eat, drink, and be merry, for he that was dead is alive, and he that was lost is found." The bird has come back and has found her nest, and as the mother-bird is happy when that little fledgling which she thought had fallen on the ground, or had been swallowed by the hawk, comes back, and she covers it with her feathers and bids it nestle under her warm bosom, so is the Eternal Father happy, and as she rejoices, nay infinitely more, so does the Eternal Father rejoice when the wanderer comes back to him and finds comfort in his love.

Believe thou in the Lord Jesus Christ. Trust thou in the Father's grace as manifest in the Savior's wounds, and so thou shalt find an eternal nest from which thou shalt never wander till thou shalt build thy nest in heaven. Amen.

Two Coverings and Two Consequences

A Sermon (No. 3500) by C. H. Spurgeon,
 April 4th, 1875, at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington.
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“He that covereth his sins shall not prosper.”—Proverbs 28:13.

“Thou Hast covered all their sins.”—Psalm 85:2.

In these two texts we have man’s covering, which is worthless and culpable, and God’s covering, which is profitable and worthy of all acceptance. No sooner had man disobeyed his Maker’s will in the garden of Eden than he discovered to his surprise and dismay that he was naked, and he set about at once to make himself a covering. It was a poor attempt which our first parents made, and it proved a miserable failure. “They sewed fig-leaves together.” After that God came in, revealed to them yet more fully their nakedness, made them confess their sin, brought their transgression home to them, and then it is written, “the LORD God made them coats of skin.” Probably the coats were made of the skins of animals which had been offered in sacrifice, and if so, they were a fit type of him who has provided us with a sin-offering and a robe of perfect righteousness. Every man since the days of Adam has gone through much of the same experience, more or less relying on his own ingenuity to hide his own confusion of face. He has discovered that sin has made him naked, and he has set to work to clothe himself. As I shall have to show you presently, he has never succeeded. But God has been pleased to deal with his own people, according to the riches of his grace; he has covered their shame and put away their sins that they should not be remembered any more.

Let me now direct your attention first to man’s covering and its failure; and then to God’s covering and its perfection. May the Holy Spirit be pleased to give you discernment that you may see your destitute state in the presence of God, and understand the merciful relief that God himself has provided in the bounty of his grace!

I. Man’s covering. There are many ways in which men try to cover their sin. Some do so by denying that they have sinned, or, admitting the fact, they deny the guilt; or else candidly acknowledging both the sin and the guilt, they excuse and exonerate themselves on the plea of certain circumstances which rendered it, according to their showing, almost inevitable that they should act as they have done. By pretext and presence, apology and self-vindication, they acquit themselves of all criminality and put a fine gloss upon every foul delinquency. Excuse-making is the commonest trade under heaven. The slenderest materials are put to the greatest account. A man who has no valid argument in arrest of judgment, no feasible reason why he should not be condemned, will go about and bring a thousand excuses and ten thousand circumstances of extenuation, the whole of them weak and attenuated as a spider’s web. Someone here may be saying within himself, “It may be I have broken the law of God, but it was too severe. To keep so perfect a law was impossible. I have violated it, but then I am a man endowed with passions that involve propensities, and inflamed with desires that need gratification. How could I do otherwise than I have done? Placed in peculiar circumstances I am borne along with the current. Subject to special

temptations, I yield to the fascination; this is natural.” So you think; so you essay to exculpate yourself. But in truth you are now committing a fresh sin; for you are abasing God, you are inculpating the Almighty. You are impugning the law to vindicate yourself for breaking it. There is no small degree of criminality about such an unrighteous defence. The law is holy, just, and good. You are throwing the onus of your sins upon God. You are trying to mane out that, after all, you are not to blame, but the fault lies with him who gave the commandment. Do you think that this will be tolerated? Shall the prisoner at the bar bring accusations against the Judge who tries him? Or shall he challenge the equity of the statute while he is arraigned for violating it? And as for the circumstances that you plead, what valid excuse can they furnish? Has it come to this—that it was not you, but your necessities that did the wrong and are answerable for the consequence? Not you, indeed! you are a harmless innocent victim of circumstances! I suppose instead of being censured you ought almost to be pitied. What is this again but throwing the blame upon the arrangements of Providence, and saying to God, “It is the harshness of thy discipline, not the perverseness of my actions that involves me in sin.” What, I say, is this but a high impertinence, ay, veritable treason against the Majesty of that thrice holy God before whom even perfect angels veil their faces while they cry, “Holy, holy, holy, LORD God of Hosts”? I pray thee resort not to such a covering as this, because while it is utterly useless it adds sin to sin and exposes thee to fresh shame.

In many cases persons violating the law of God have hoped to cover their transgression by secrecy. They have done the deed in darkness. They hope that no ear of man heard their footfall or listened to their speech. Possibly they themselves held their tongue and flattered themselves that no observer witnessed their movements or could divulge their action. So was it with Achan. I dare say he took the wedge of gold and the Babylonish garment mid the confusion of the battle, and hid it when his comrades seemed too much engaged to notice so trivial an affair. While they were rushing over the fallen walls of Jericho amidst the debris and the dust, he might be unmolested; and then in the dead of night while they slept he turned the sod of his tent, dug into the earth, and buried there his coveted treasure. All looks right, to his heart’s content. He has smoothed it down and spread his carpet over the grave of his lust. Little did he reckon of the Omniscient eye. Little did he count on the unerring lot that would come home to the tribe of Judah, to the family of the Zarhites, to the house of Zabdir, and at last to the son of Carmi, so that Achan himself would have to stand out confessed as a traitor—a robber of his God. Men little know the ways in which the Almighty can find them out, and bring the evidence that convicts out of the devices that were intended to cover their sin.

Do you not know that Providence is a wonderful detective? There are hounds upon the track of every thief and murderer and liar—in foot, upon every sinner of every kind. Each sin leaves a trail. The dogs of judgment will be sure to scent it out and find their prey. There is no disentangling yourselves from the meshes of guilt; no possibility of evading the penalty of transgression. Very wonderful have been the ways in which persons who have committed crimes have been brought to judgment. A trifle becomes a tell-tale. The method of deceit gives a clue to the manner of discovery. Wretched the men who bury their secrets in their own bosom. Their conscience plays traitor to them. They have often been forged to betray themselves. We have read of men talking in their sleep to their fellows, and babbling out in their dreams the crime they had committed years before. God would have the secret disclosed. No eye had seen, neither could other tongue have told, but the man turned king’s evidence against himself; he has thus brought himself to judgment.

It has often happened in some form or other that conscience has thus been witness against men. Do I address anyone who is just now practicing a secret sin? You would not have me point you out for all the world, nor shall I do so. Believe me however, the sin is known. Dexterous though you have been in the attempt to conceal it, it has been seen. As surely as you live it has been seen. "By whom?" say you. Ah! by One who never forgets what he sees and will be sure to tell of it. He may commission a little bird of the air to whisper it. Certainly he will one day proclaim it by the sound of trumpet to listening worlds. You are watched, sir; you are known. You have been narrowly observed, young girl; those things you have hidden away will be brought to light for God is the great discoverer of sin. His eye has marked you; his providence will track you. It is vain to think that ye can conceal your transgressions. Before high heaven disguise is futile. Yea, the darkness hideth not; the night shineth as the day. I have known persons who have harboured a sin in their breast till it has preyed upon their constitution. They have been like the Spartan boy who had stolen a fox and was ashamed to have it known, so he kept it within his garment till it ate through his flesh and he fell dead. He suffered the fox to gnaw his heart ere he would betray himself. There are those who have got a sin, if not a lie in their right hand, yea, a lie in their heart, and it is eating into their very life. They dare not confess it. If they would confess it to their God and make restitution to those whom they have offended, they would soon come to peace; but they vainly hope that they can cover the sin and hide it from the eyes of God and man. He that covereth his sin in this fashion shall not prosper.

Again, full many a time sinners have tried to cover their sin with falsehood. Indeed, this is the usual habit—to lie—to cloak their guilt by denying it. Was not this the way with Gehazi? When the prophet said, "Whence comest thou, Gehazi?" he said, "Thy servant went no whither." Then the prophet told him that the leprosy of Naaman should cleave to him all the days of his life. The sin of Ananias and Sapphira, in lying in order to hide their sin, how quickly was it discovered and how terrible was the retribution! I wonder that men and women can lie as they do after reading that story. "Hast thou sold the land for so much?" said Peter. And Ananias said, "Yea, for so much." At that instant he fell down and gave up the ghost. Three hours after, when his wife Sapphire said the same, the feet of the young men who had buried her husband were at the door ready to carry out her corpse and bury her by his side. Oh! sirs, ye must weave a tangled web indeed when once ye begin to deceive; and when you have woven it you will have to add lie to lie, and lie to lie, and yet all to no purpose for you will be surely found out. There is something about a lie that always deludes the man who utters it. Liars have need of good memories. They are sure to leave a little corner uncovered through which the truth escapes. Their story does not hang together. Discrepancies excite suspicions and evasions furnish a clue to discoveries, till the naked truth is unveiled. Then the deeper the plot the fouler is the shame. But to lie unto the God of truth, of what avail can that be? What advantageth it you to plead "not guilty" when he has witnessed your crime? That infallible Eye which never mistakes is never closed. He knows everything; from him no secret is hid. Why therefore dost thou imagine that thou canst deceive thy Maker?

There are some who try to cover their sin by prevarication. With cunning subtlety they strive to evade personal responsibility. Memorable is the instance of David. I will not dwell upon his flagrant crime; but I must remind you of his sorry subterfuge, when he tried to hide the baseness of his lust by conspiring to cause the death of Uriah. There have been those who have schemed deep and long to throw the blame on others, even to the injury of their reputation, to escape the odium of their own malpractices. Who knows but in this congregation there may be someone who

affects a high social position, supported by a deep mercantile immorality? Merchants there have been that have swollen before the public as men of wealth, while they were falsifying their accounts, abstracting money, yet making the books tally, rolling in luxury, and living in jeopardy. Have they prospered? Were they to be envied? The detection that long haunted them at length overtook them; could they look it in the face? We have heard of their blank despair, their insane suicide; at any rate a miserable exposure has been their melancholy climax. "Be sure your sin will find you out." You may run the length of your tether. It is short. The hounds of justice, swift of scent and strong of limb, are on your trail. Rest assured, you will be discovered. Could you escape the due reward in this life yet certainly your guilt is known in heaven, and you shall be judged and condemned in that great day which shall decide your eternal destiny. Seek not then to cover up sin with such transparent cobwebs as these.

Some people flatter themselves that their sin has already been hidden away by the lapse of time. "It was so very long ago," says one, "I had almost forgotten it; I was a lad at the time." "Aye," says another, "I am gray-headed now. It must have been twenty or thirty years ago. Surely you do not think that the sin of my far-off days will be brought out against me? The thing is gone by. Time must have obliterated it." Not so, my friend. It may be the lapse of time will only make the discovery the more clear. A boy once went into his father's orchard, and there in his rough play he broke a little tree which his father valued. But rapidly putting it together again he managed to conceal the fact, for the disunited parts of the tree took kindly to each other and the tree stood as before. It so happened that more than forty years afterwards he went into that garden after a storm had blown across it in the night, and he found that the tree had been riven in two, and it had snapped precisely in the place where he had broken it when it was but a sapling. So there may come a crash to your character precisely in that place where you sinned when yet a lad. Ah! how often the transgressions of our youth remain within our bosoms! There lie the eggs of our young sin, and they hatch when men come into riper years. Don't be so sure that the lapse of time will consign your faults and follies to oblivion. You sowed your wild oats, sir; you have got to reap them. The time that has intervened has only operated to make that evil seed spring up, and you are so much the nearer to the harvest. Time does not change the hue of sin in the sight of God. If a man could live a thousand years the sins of his first year would be as fresh in the memory of the Almighty as those of the last. Eternity itself will never wash out a sin. Flow on, ye ages; but the scarlet spot is on the sand. Flow on still in mighty streams, but the damning spot is there still. Neither time nor eternity can cleanse it. Only one thing can remove sin. The lapse of time cannot. Let not any of you be so foolish as to hope it will.

When the trumpet of the resurrection sounds there will be a resurrection of characters as well as of men. The man who has been foully slandered will rejoice in the light that reflects his purity. But the man whose latent vices have been skilfully veneered will be brought to the light too. His acts and motives will be alike exposed. As he himself looks and sees the resurrection of his crimes, with what horror will he face that day of judgment! "Ah! ah!" says he, "Where am I? I had forgotten these. These are the sins of my childhood, the sins of my youth, the sins of my manhood, and the sins of my old age. I thought they were dead and buried, but they start from their tombs. My memory has been quickened. How my brain reels as I think of them all! But there they are, and like so many wolves around me they seem all thirsting for my destruction." Beware, oh! men. Ye have buried your sins, but they will rise up from their graves and accuse you before God. Time cannot cover them.

Or do any of you imagine that your tears can blot out transgressions? That is a gross mistake. Could your tears for ever flow; could you be transformed into a Niobe, and do nothing else but weep for aye, the whole flood could not wash out a single sin. Some have supposed that there may be efficacy in baptismal water, or in sacramental emblems, or in priestly incantations, or in confession to a priest—one who asks them to disclose their secret wickedness to him and betrays a morbid avidity to make his breast the sewer into which all kinds of uncleanness should be emptied. Be not deceived. There is nothing in these ordinances of man, or these tricks of Romish priestcraft (I had almost said of witchcraft, the two are so much alike) to excuse the folly of those who are beguiled by them. You need not catch at straws when the rope is thrown out to you. There is pardon to be had; remission is to be found; forgiveness can be procured. Turn your back on yonder shavelings; lend not your ear to them, neither be ye the victims of their snares. In the street each day it makes one's soul sad to see them. Like the Pharisees of old they wear their long garments to deceive. You cannot mistake them. Their silly conceit publishes their naked shame. Confide not in them for a moment. Christ can forgive you. God can blot out your sin. But they cannot ease your conscience by their penances or remove your transgressions by their celebrations.

Thus I have gone through a rough, not very accurate list of the ways by which men hope to cover their sin, but they "shall not prosper." None of these shall succeed.

A more joyous task devolves on me now while I draw your attention to my second text, "Thou hast covered all their sin."

II. God's covering. This fact is affirmed concerning the people of God. All who have trusted in the atoning sacrifice which was presented by the Lord Jesus Christ upon Calvary may accept this welcome assurance, "God has covered all their sin." How this hath come to pass I will tell you. Before ever God covers a man's sins he unveils them. Did you ever see your sins unveiled? Did it ever seem as if the Lord put his hand upon you and said, "Look, look at them"? Have you been led to see your sins as you never saw them before? Have you felt their aggravations fit to drive you to despair? As you have looked at them, has the finger of detection seemed to point out your blackness? Have you discovered in them a depth of guilt, and iniquity, and hell—desert which never struck your mind before? I recollect a time when that was a spectacle always before the eyes of my conscience. My sin was ever before me. If God thus makes you see your sin in the light of his countenance, depend upon it he has his purposes of mercy toward you. When you see and confess it he will blot it out. So soon as God in infinite loving-kindness makes the sinner know in truth that he is a sinner, and strips him of the rags of his self-righteousness, he grants him pardon and clothes his nakedness. While he stands shivering before the gaze of the Almighty condemned, the guilt is purged from his conscience. I do not know of a more terrible position in one's experience than to stand with an angry God gazing upon you, and to know that wherever God's eye falls upon you it sees nothing but sin; sees nothing in you but what he must hate and must abhor. Yet this is the experience through which God puts those to whom he grants forgiveness. He makes them know that he sees how sinful they are, and he makes them feel how vile and leprous they are. His justice withers their pride; his judgment appals their heart. They are humbled in the very dust and made to cry out—each man trembling for his own soul—"God be merciful to me, a sinner"!

Not till this gracious work of conviction is fully wrought does the Lord appear with the glorious proclamation that whosoever believeth in the Lord Jesus shall have his sins covered. That proclamation I have now openly to publish and personally to deliver to you. With your outward ears you may have heard it hundreds of times. It is old, yet ever new. Whosoever among you,

knowing himself to be guilty, will come and put his trust in Jesus Christ, shall have his sins covered. "Can God do that?" Yes, he can. He alone can cover sin: Against him the sin was committed. It is the offended person who must pardon the offender. No one else can. He is the King. He has the right to pardon. He is the Sovereign Lord, and he can blot out sin. Beside that, he can cover it lawfully, for the Lord Jesus Christ (though ye know the story, let me tell it again—the song of redemption always rings out a charming melody), Jesus Christ, the Father's dear Son, in order that the justice of God might be vindicated, bare his breast to its dreadful hurt, and suffered in our room and place and stead what we ought to have suffered as the penalty of our sin. Now the sacrifice of God covers sin—covers it right over; and he more than covers it, he makes it cease to be. Moreover, the Lord Jesus kept the law of God, and his obedience stands instead of our obedience; and God accepts him and his righteousness on our behalf, imputing his merits to our souls.

Oh! the virtue of that atoning blood! Oh! the blessedness of that perfect righteousness of the Son of God by which he covers our sins!

There are two features of covering I should like to recall to your recollection. The one was the mercy-seat or propitiatory over the golden ark, wherein were the tables of stone. Those tables of stone seemed, as it were, to reflect the sins of Israel. As in a mirror they reflected the transgression of God's people. God was above, as it were, looking down between the cherubic wings. Was he to look down upon the law defied and defiled by Israel? Ah! no; there was put over the top of the ark, as a lid which covered it all, a golden lid called the mercy-seat, and when the Lord looked down he looked upon that lid which covered sin. Beloved, such is Jesus Christ the covering for all our sins. God sees no sin in those who are hidden beneath Jesus Christ.

There was another covering at the Red Sea. On that joyous day when the Egyptians went down into the midst of the sea pursuing the Israelites, at the motion of Moses' rod the waters that stood upright like a wall leapt back into their natural bed and swallowed up the Egyptians. Great was the victory when Miriam sang, "The depths have covered them. There is not one of them left." It is even so that Jesus Christ's atonement has covered up our sins. They are sunk in his sepulchre; they are buried in his tomb. His blood, like the Red Sea, has drowned them. "The depths have covered them. There is not one of them left." Against the believer there is not a sin in God's Book recorded. He that believeth in him is perfectly absolved. "Thou hast covered all their sin." I shall not have time to dwell upon the sweetness of this fact, but I invite you that believe to consider its preciousness; and I hope you who have not believed will feel your mouth watering after it; to know that every sin one has ever committed, known and unknown, is gone—covered by Christ. To be assured that when Jesus died he did not die for some of our sins, but for all the sins of his people; not for their sins up till now, but for all the sins they ever will commit! Well does Kent put it:—

"Here's pardon for transgressions past,
It matters not how black they're cast
And O, my soul, with wonder view
For sins to come here's pardon too."

The atonement was made before the sin was committed. The righteousness was presented even before we had lived. "Thou hast covered all their sin." It seems to me as if the Lamb of God, slain from before the foundation of the world, had in the purpose of God, from the foundation of the world, covered all his people's sins. Therefore, we are accepted the Beloved, and dear to the Father's heart. Oh! what a joy it is to get a hold of something like this truth, especially when the truth gets

a hold of you—when you can feel by the inwrought power and witness of the Holy Ghost that your sins are covered—that you dare stand up before a rein-trying, heart-searching God, and give thanks that every transgression you ever committed is hid from the view of those piercing eyes through Jesus Christ your Lord.

Some people think we ought not to talk thus, that it is presumptuous. But really there is more presumption in doubting than there is in believing. For a child to believe his father's word is never presumption. I like to credit my Father's word. "He that believeth in him is not condemned." Condemned I am not, for I know I do believe in him. "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."

Beloved, the covering is as broad as the sin. The covering completely covers and for ever covers; for as God sees to-day no sin in those who are washed in Jesus' blood, so will he never see any. You are accepted with an acceptance that nothing can change. Whom once he loves he never leaves, but loves them to the end. The reason of his love to them does not lie in their merits nor their charms; the cause of love is in himself. The ground of his acceptance of them is in the person and work of Christ. Whatever they may be, whatever their condition of heart may be, they are accepted because Christ lived and died. It is not a precarious or a conditional, but an eternal acceptance.

Would you enjoy the blessedness of this complete covering? Cowering down beneath the tempest of Jehovah's wrath which you feel in your conscience, would you obtain this full remission? Behold the gates of the City of Refuge which stand wide open. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is proclaimed! to the thirsty, needy, labouring, weary soul. Not merely open are the gates, but the invitation to enter is given. "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." You are bidden to lay hold upon eternal life. The way of doing so is simple. No works of yours, no merits, no tears, no preparations are required, but trust—trust—that is all. Believe in Jesus. Rely upon him; depend upon him; depend upon him. I have heard of Homer's Iliad being enclosed in a nutshell, so small was it written; but here is the Plain Man's Guide to Heaven in a nutshell. Here is the essence of the whole gospel in one short sentence. "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Trust him; trust him. That is the meaning of that word believe. Depend upon him, and as surely as thou doest it, nor death, nor hell, nor sin shall ever separate thee from the love of him whom thou hast embraced, from the protection of him in whose power thou hast taken shelter. The Lord lead you to cower beneath his covering wings, and grant you to be found in Christ, accepted in the Beloved. So shall your present peace be the foretaste of your eternal felicity. Amen.

The Right Kind of Fear

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on Thursday evening, September 2nd, 1876.

“Happy is the man that feareth alway.”—Proverbs 28:14.

But did not John say that “fear hath torment?” Then how can he be happy who hath fear, and especially he who hath it always. Did not John also say that “perfect love casteth out fear?” How is it then that he is happy in whom love is not made perfect, if so be that the fear which John mentions must be left in it? Dear friends, the explanation is that the word “fear” is used in different senses, and both Solomon and John are right; neither is there any conflict between their two statements. There is a fear which perfect love casts out because it hath torment. That is the slavish fear which trembles before God as a criminal trembles before the judge,—the fear which mistrusts, suspects, and has no confidence in God,—the fear which, therefore, keeps us away from God, causes us to dread the thought of drawing near to him, and makes us say like the fool to whom the psalmist refers, “No God.” Many of you know what this kind of fear is, for you once suffered from it; though I trust you are now delivered from it by faith in Christ Jesus and by the love which the Spirit of God has wrought in your hearts. There is also another sort of fear which springs out of this slavish fear, and which is to be equally shunned, namely, a fear which leads to the apprehension that something evil is about to happen. There are many persons who have so little faith in God, that they fear that the trials which will sooner or later overtake them, will also overthrow them. They are afraid of a certain form of suffering that threatens them; they fear that they will not have patience enough to bear up under it, they feel sure that their spirit will sink in their sickness. Above all, they are dreadfully afraid to die. They have not yet believed that God will be with them when they pass through the valley of deathshade; and because they cannot trust him they are all their lifetime subject to bondage. They cannot say that all things work together for good to them, but they often say as poor old Jacob mistakenly said, “All these things are against me.” And so they go on, fearing this and fearing that and fearing the other, and their life is spent, to a great extent, in sorrow and sighing. May the Lord graciously deliver any of you who are in that condition!

That is a kind of fear from which the true believer is free. He knows that whatever happens, God will overrule it for the good of his chosen. “He shall not be afraid of evil tidings: his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord.” Resignation to the divine will has made him feel that whatever the Lord wills is right; he does not seek to have his own will, but he is glad to make God’s will his will, and so he is perfectly satisfied with all that comes. God save you, my brethren and sisters in Christ, from all fear of a slavish sort! Above all, no Christian ought to have any fear which would bring dishonor upon the truthfulness, the goodness, the immutability, or the power of God. To doubt his promise,—to suppose that he will not make it good,—this is indeed a fear which hath torment. To doubt God’s faithfulness,—to suppose that he can ever forget his children, that his mercy can be withdrawn from them, or that he will be favorable to them no more,—this also is wrong. To doubt the perseverance of the saints when God’s Word has so plainly declared that he will keep their foes, and will perfect the work which he hath begun in them,—indeed, to doubt anything that has the

inspired Scriptures to support it, and to tremble in any way when your trembling arises out of a suspicion that God may change or cease to be faithful to his promises, and faithful to his Son, all that kind of fearing is to be cast far from us.

But, dear friends, there is another fear that ought to be cultivated,—the reverential fear which the holy angels, feel when they worship God, and behold his glory;—that gracious fear which makes them veil their faces with their wings as they adore the Majesty on high. There is also the loving fear which every true, right-hearted child has towards its father,—a fear of grieving so tender a parent,—a proper feeling of dread which makes it watch its every footstep, lest, in the slightest degree, it should deviate from the path of absolute obedience. May God graciously grant to us much of this kind of fear!

Then there is a holy fear of ourselves, which makes us shun the very thought of self-reliance,—which weans us, equally from self-righteousness and self-confidence,—and which makes us feel that we shall surely fall unless the Lord shall continually hold us up, and that we shall certainly die, unless he shall sustain our spiritual life. This fear of our own selves - the fear of sinning against God —is a fear which we ought always to cherish, and concerning which the text saith, “Happy is the man that feareth always.”

I have taken this topic for a special reason. You know that we have recently had a great deal of preaching of “Believe! Believe! Believe!” and I have very heartily joined in the evangelistic services which have been held. We have also had a great deal of singing about full-assurance, and we have had a little chattering about perfection, or something wonderfully like it, as far as I can make it out and as I put all these things together, I cannot help being afraid that there will be a great growth of the mushrooms of presumption. With warm days and damp days and with everything tending to make vegetation luxurious, we may expect to see an abundant crop of poisonous fungi growing up,—noxious agarics, toadstools, and I know not what besides. They will come up in a night but they may not be destroyed in a night; and they will be a great nuisance, and possibly worse than that. So I want to speak in such a way that we may all be led to do some sincere heartsearching, and to commend to you the cherishing of an anxious fear, lest peradventure all that glitters should not prove to be gold, and lest much of that which looks like wheat should, at the last, turn out to be tares.

I. My first observation shall be that There is, after all, very grave cause for fear.

. Otherwise Solomon would not have been inspired to write, “Happy is the man that feareth always.”

There is cause for fear, dear brethren and sisters who love the Lord, because corruption still remaineth in us. In the best man or woman here there is still the old flesh that lusts against the spirit, that flesh which is in constant enmity to the spirit and never will be reconciled to it. If that flesh keeps quiet for a time, it is there all the while, just as a lion is still a lion even when he is lying hidden in his den. He only needs some dark hour to come, and he will rush forth from his den; so is it with the flesh which still lurks within us. When a man imagines that all his corruptions are gone, that is no proof that he is clean rid of them, but only that he does not really know his true condition; for if God were but to lift the veil that covers his eyes and to let him see the great deeps of sin that are in his nature, he would soon discover that he has grave cause for fear, and he would be driven to cry out to God, “Oh, keep me, I beseech thee, or else I shall commit spiritual suicide! I must and shall become like the vilest of apostates unless thy sovereign grace shall hold me on my way.”

There is also cause for fear, my brethren, if you look around at the world in which we live. This vile world has not changed its character; it is no more a friend to grace than it was in the days of the early Christians. It was a difficult thing to be a Christian in the days of Diocletian and the other persecuting Roman emperors, but I sometimes think that it is an even more difficult thing to be a Christian now. To be a soldier under Hannibal and to fight bravely when crossing the Alps must have been a difficult task, but it was far more trying for the soldiers when they reached sunny Italy, and their holiday amusements destroyed the discipline of the army. The Christian camp at the present time seems to be pitched in a sunny plain where all the surrounding influences bend to relax the sinews of the warriors, and to take away from them their strength. It is hard to keep to the narrow way when the broad road runs so near to it that sometimes they seem to be one. The time was when the broad road was so distinct from the narrow one that we could easily discern who was travelling to heaven and who was going to hell; but now the devil has engineered the broad road so very close up to the side of the narrow way that there are many people who manage to walk on both of them; they never were so pleased as when they can first take a little turn on the narrow road, and then afterwards take another turn on the broad one. Let us never imitate Mr. Facing-both-ways; but let us walk only in the narrow way that leadeth unto life, whatever it may cost us to do so. You must be in a very singular position if you never have any temptations; indeed, I should not be surprised to learn, if you live where you have no temptations, that you are undergoing a worse trial than temptation itself would be. In such a place as that you are very likely to get indignant. The very pleasantness of the situation may put you off your guard and you will not live so near to God as you would have done if your surroundings had seemed to be more opposed to your growth in grace. There is cause for fear then, when all around us there is an enemy behind every bush, a temptation lurking in every joy, and a devil hiding himself under every table,—when, as old Francis Quarles used to say—

“The close pursuer’s busy hands do plant
 Snares in thy substance; snares attend thy want;
 Snares in thy credit, snares in thy disgrace;
 Snares in high estate, snares in thy base
 Snares tuck thy bed; and snares surround thy board;
 Snares watch thy thoughts; and snares attach thy word;
 Snares in thy quiet, snares in thy commotion;
 Snares in thy diet; snares in thy devotion
 Snares lurk in thy resolves, snares in thy doubt
 Snares lie within thy heart, and snares without,
 Snares are above thy head, and snares beneath
 Snares in thy sickness, snares are in thy death.”

Besides that, dear friends—in addition to having a store of dry tinder within our heart and showers of sparks falling near us— besides having a great heap of gunpowder within our nature, and being constantly exposed to the fires that burn all around us, we must remember that there is such a thing as self-deception in the world. This is a great and a common danger. Do you not yourselves know some who have been self-deceived? I have had a wide experience in watching over the souls of others, and many persons have come under my notice who have thought themselves Christians, and I have often wondered how they could think so. I have seen that in their lives which has let me

to feel sure—as sure as one man can feel concerning another—that the grace of God could not be in them; yet they have not had any doubt or suspicion concerning their Christianity. Now brethren and sisters, do not you know some people like that? Well then, is it not possible that the judgment which you have formed concerning them is the very same that others have formed concerning you? And perhaps that judgment is true. There have been great preachers who have been very eloquent men, and God has even condescended to use them in his service; yet afterwards it has been discovered that they were living in gross sin all the while that they were preaching holiness to others. If that has been the case with only one preacher, might it not also be the case with me? Have you never heard of church members who have come regularly to the communion table, and been very prominent in the work of the church, and apparently leading the way in all good things; yet after all they were rotten at the core? They had made a mistake altogether—unless they had wilfully deceived others instead of themselves,—in professing to be Christ’s people at all. Well then, if some have acted like that, may not you do the same? I do not wish to say anything unpleasant merely for the sake of making you feel uncomfortable; but I want you to remember that my text says, “Happy is the man that feareth alway.” Sometimes to examine the foundation on which we are building for eternity, to look into the profession which we have made, to see whether it will stand the wear and tear of daily life, and to judge whether it will be likely to endure the best of our dying day, and the still sterner test of the day of judgment—is a wise occupation for every one of us. The man who dares not have his ship examined is the man who knows that some of the timbers are rotten; and if you do not like being examined you are the very men who ought to put yourself through that process without a moment’s delay, obeying the injunctions of the apostle, “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?”

There is also great cause for fear because some Christians have been “saved; yet so as by fire.” Oh, with what difficulty have some of God’s ships entered the eternal harbour! They have lost their masts, the deck has been swept clear of everything, they have been well-nigh abandoned as derelict; and if it had not been that the eternal grace of God had ensured the safety of the vessels, they must have drifted away to destruction and gone to the bottom of the sea. And what bugging there has been to get some souls into heaven! Do you not know some of that sort? I saw one not long ago. I had highly esteemed him at one time; but from what I learned afterwards I saw how little cause there was in him for my esteem. He had professed to be a child of God, but he was weeping and wailing and asking whether there was any hope for him. As a contrast to such a sad case, I may say that I have stood by the bedsides of many others and have learned from them lessons that I can never forget; for they have told me something of the joys of heaven by the very glances of their eyes, and the wondrous words which have fallen from their lips, often more full of poetry than poetry itself. They have seemed to be inspired, and to be favored with visions of the hereafter as they have looked through the veil which had become so blind to them. But I have also seen some, such as the one I mentioned just now, who have not lived near to God, who have neglected prayer, who have done but little service for Christ; and when they have come to die they have been “saved; yet so as by fire.” They have had to come in their last moments without any comfort or hope, without any joy in the Lord, and cry “What must we do to be saved?”—just as though they had never known the way of salvation, although they have been professors for years. Instead of having an abundant entrance into heaven they have just been saved, and no more. Now you and I do not want to have

such an experience as that; and therefore, let us always fear lest we should get into such a state of heart that this should be our case. Let us fear lest we lose communion with God, let us fear lest we misuse any grace which the Holy Spirit has given to us, let us fear lest we become fruitless and unprofitable, let us fear lest we lose the light of Jehovah's countenance; if we do so fear we shall understand what Solomon meant when he wrote, "Blessed is the man that feareth always."

II. Now, secondly, I want to prove to you that the man who does so fear is a happy man. I will show you that by a few contrasts.

The word "happy" in our text may not exactly mean that the man enjoys happiness just now, but that he is really happy, he has the root of true happiness in him, and he will have the fruit in due time. Now, here are two men. One of them says, "I am a child of God; I have had a very deep experience; I know all the doctrines of grace, blessed be God; and I feel that I am thoroughly confirmed in Christian habits. I may be tempted to sin, but I shall be able to resist the temptation. Take a good look at that man so that you will know him when you see him again. With a formal prayer he leaves his bedroom in the morning and he goes forth to his business, perfectly satisfied with himself whatever may happen. Here is another man. He says, "I believe I am a child of God for I have trusted in Jesus Christ as my Savior, and I know that I am safe in his hands; but I dare not trust myself. I feel that unless he shall uphold me all through this day, I may by my words or my actions bring dishonor upon his holy name; and I tremble lest I should do so." See him kneeling down there by his bedside, and hear how earnestly he pleads with God. His prayer is something like this, "O Lord, I am as helpless as a little child; hold thou me up or I shall surely fall! I am like a lamb going out among wolves; O Lord, preserve me! "Now, which of the two do you regard as the really happy man? The happiness of the two men may, to a superficial observer, appear to be about equal, but which happiness would you prefer to have? I say—and I think most of you will agree with me—God save me from the so-called happiness which is careless and prayerless, and give me that holy fear which drives me often to my knees and makes me cry to God to keep me. Well now, night has come on, and the two men have reached their homes. Neither of them has fallen into any gross sin during the day; they have both been preserved from that evil. One of them retires to his bed after a few sentences of formal prayer, with no life or earnestness in it, and no expression of his gratitude to God, and he soon falls asleep in perfect contentment with himself. The other man looks carefully over all that has happened during the day, for he is afraid lest he may have sinned against God even unconsciously, and he takes notice of things which the other man does not think anything of, and he says, "Lord, I fear that I erred there, and that I failed there; forgive thy child and help me to do better in the future." Then he says, "I thank thee, Lord, that thou hast kept me by thy grace from being surprised by sudden temptation, and thou hast enabled me to honor thy name at least in some degree. I give all the glory for this to thee; and now my Lord,—

“Sprinkled afresh with pardoning blood,
I lay me down to rest,
In the embraces of my God,
Or on my Savior's breast.”

Now, which is the happy man of these two? I know which I should like to be—the man who is so fearful and so full of trembling that he wonders that he has not fallen, and who is sometimes almost afraid that he has; and who therefore walks humbly before his God. Is he not infinitely to be preferred

to the other man who thinks it is a matter of course that he shall always stand, and who has no qualms of conscience about what he calls little faults. You may rest assured that the seeds of untold misery are already sown in that other man's heart.

Think of these two men under another aspect. Imagine that they are sailors out at sea. One of them is well aware that a certain course is very dangerous. Some captains have been able to take it and have made "a short cut" by doing so, and he decides that he will take that course. He can see that his vessel is bound to go near some very ugly-looking rocks, and among a number of sharp ledges where many others have been wrecked; but he is a bold dare-devil sort of fellow; he believes that all will be right and he has no fear. But here is the other captain, and he says, "My motto is to keep as far away from danger as I possibly can. I know that in fair weather that passage may be safe; but then I cannot reckon on fair weather. I may be caught in a fog and not know where I am; or a terrible storm may come on and drive me where I do not wish to go. I shall therefore take the longer course, which is also the safer course." Now in which of these two vessels would you like to sail, and which of the two captains do you esteem to be that happy man? Of course you say the second one. We admire courage, but we do not admire foolhardiness; and the Christian man who seeks to steer clear of temptation, who endeavors to be precise and exact in his mode of living so as not to go near to sin, but to avoid it, and keep away from it must be judged to be in the best sense of the word a happier man than the one who courts temptation and heedlessly rushes into a position of peril.

Look at the difference between what these two men regard as happiness. The one who was not afraid said "Why should I fear? Am I not getting to be an old-established Christian now? Have I not resisted temptation for such a long while that I need not fear it now? I feel that I may do what young people must not do; it would be too dangerous for them, but it will never hurt me." So he talked, but look at him now. He has become so fond of the drunkard's cup that he was seen reeling through the streets, or else he has been so enchanted by the lusts of the flesh that he has committed himself fatally. Or it may be that he was strongly tempted to make money very quickly—and quick money-making and honesty never go together except by a very extraordinary concatenation of circumstances—and this man thought it would end all right, and that he should make a great haul; so he asked the devil to help him throw the net in just that once, and now he has got into the clutches of the law, and he names the name of a man who once made a profession of religion—is bracketed with that of other rogues and vagabonds! But now look at the timid man—the man who said "I know that I shall never be intoxicated if I never take anything that is intoxicating; I know that I shall not be a thief if I never take anybody's money but my own; I know that if I never indulge even in indelicate expressions, if I never think of or look at anything that is impure, I shall not be likely to go in that evil way which I utterly abhor;"—that is the man who is both safe and happy, "the man that feareth alway." Some people call him a milksop, and say that he has not spirit enough to do as others do; but just look at him. He can go in and out of the house of God as an honorable Christian man, while the other one of whom I have told you, is a moral wreck, and his name is a by-word and a reproach. I can bear my testimony that I have seen high professors so act as to become a stench in our nostrils; and on the other hand, I have seen poor timid girls who were half afraid they were hypocrites, and poor trembling men who used to come to me for comfort and counsel lest they should be deceiving themselves. I have seen many of the latter class enter the port of glory like ships in full sail coming into the harbor, while those other vessels with their painted

hulls, that seemed to tempt a lot from the enemy, have gone to the bottom and they have been lost to us, and lost to themselves.

Now I will suppose that both these men whom I have been describing have fallen into a certain sin; see what a difference there is between them now. The man who has not any fear says, "Well, yes, there is no doubt that I did wrong; but then"—and he begins telling all about the circumstances under which he says that he was "overtaken." He tries to make out that he was an innocent victim who was deceived by somebody else. Now listen to "the man that feareth alway." "Ah!" says he, "I have sinned," and he hangs his head in shame; and then adds "I have no excuse to make; and you cannot say anything to me that will be half so heavy and so hard as what I say to myself. God will forgive me, I have no doubt, for I have truly repented; but I can never forgive myself." The first man has a dry eye and a proud defiant spirit; and it is very likely that having committed that one great sin he will go on and commit another, and yet, another, and get harder and harder in his heart continually, yet all the while talk about being one of God's elect who will be saved at last. Well now, that man is not a happy man. I pray that none of us may ever experience the wretchedness of having a seared conscience, and get into a state of indifference in which we can trifle with sin and yet pretend to be the servants of God. But oh, if we do fall into sin, may the Lord make us very tender about it! Let this be our prayer—

"Quick as the apple of an eye,
O Lord, my conscience make!
Awake my soul, when sin is nigh,
And keep it still awake."

Dear brothers and sisters, may you by God's grace be preserved from sin; but if sin should come upon you unawares, may your bones be broken by it, and may you feel that your very heart is wounded because you have wounded your God! To repent of sin is one of the hallmarks of a Christian; but to have a hardened, untrembling heart, is one of the sure marks of the reprobate who are far off from God.

I might thus continue to show you, by a hundred contrasts, that the man who feareth alway is the really happy man. Suppose that we are fishing and that we have cast our line into the water. There is one fish that is altogether afraid of our bait, and of all our arrangements, and he swims as far as ever he can up or down the stream away from us. But here are some fish that are quite charmed with our worm. They say that they do not mean to swallow the hook, but we do not believe them. They say that they mean to get the worm off without letting the hook catch hold of them. They have very clever ways of sucking worms off hooks, and they are going to show what they can do; and soon they are caught. But happy is the fish that fears the bait as well as the hook, and so keeps right away from both of them. When some of us were boys we used to set traps for the sparrows and other birds in winter time, and we would watch to see them go in to eat our crumbs inside the trap. Sometimes there would come a bird that had seen our arrangement before, and had been almost caught in it, and knew all about it. Well, as soon as ever he looked at it he made up his mind that he would give our trap a very wide berth, so he flew away as far as he could. But there were some other birds that would come and look at the trap, and even perch on it, and presently some of them would get into it. Of course they did not mean to be caught; they thought they knew the way to go just far enough into the trap to get those grains of wheat, and then to fly out; but once in, they could not fly out. And sinners are just as foolish as those sparrows. Of course they do not mean to be

caught; they will fly out of the trap all right when they have eaten the wheat! Yes, but I say, happy is the bird that feareth always, and that keeps far off the trap; and unhappy is the bird that thinks it can go just so far into the trap, but fully intends to go no further. Oh, how many young men and young women have been ruined because they have gone just so far into sin, meaning to stop there! But they could not stop there; they began to slide and it carried them along where they never meant to go. The only safe plan is to keep off the ice altogether. If you do not take the first wrong step, dear friend, you will not take the second; and if divine grace makes you fear and tremble before you begin to go down the hill, you are not likely to be found amongst those who have fallen to the bottom. Happy is the man, in this sense, that feareth alway.

III. But I must pass on to notice, in the third place, that the man who has this fear in his heart will do well to have it there continually: Happy is the man that feareth alway.

Have this fear concerning your holy things. For instance, when you come up to God's house to worship, be afraid as you are coming along, lest you should be only a lip-server, and so get no blessing. If you are afraid of that happening it will not happen. And when you are sitting in your pew, say to yourself, "Now, it is possible for me to become a mere formalist in worship, and I may be listening to the Word of God with my ears, yet not receiving it into my heart. I am sorely afraid lest it should be so." Brethren and sisters, it will not be so if you are afraid that it will be. And when the service is over, say to yourself, "I am afraid that I did not worship God in spirit and in truth as I should have done; I fear that I did not praise him or pray to him with my whole heart as I ought to have done. O Lord, pardon the iniquity of my holy things! "I do not think any man ever preached as he ought to preach if he is satisfied with his own efforts. I sometimes feel thankful to God for the feeling of dissatisfaction that possesses me every time I preach. I often feel as I am going home that I should like to go back again and try to do it so much better;—I do not mean better in an oratorical way, but pressing the truth home to men's hearts more earnestly and more simply. I think that, in this sense, it is right that we should fear always. Ah, my dear young brother in the College, you are afraid that you will become cold-hearted, but you never will as long as you cherish such a fear as that. If you are afraid that you will by-and-by preach in a perfunctory official manner, you will not fall into that bad habit if you live in dread of doing so. If you are afraid that you will not set a good example to your people, I believe that you will set them a good example. But if you ever feel, "Oh, I can preach and practice too; I am all right;" it may happen that God will rebuke your pride and let you see, and perhaps let your enemies see, what a poor fool you are after all. Blessed is the man who, in his holy things, feareth alway—the man who is afraid when he is on his knees alone, lest he should not pray aright—the man who is afraid lest either in public or in private he should act the hypocrite before his God.

And happy is the man who has this holy fear in his own house—the man who says, "I am afraid lest I should not act as a Christian father ought to act towards his children, or as a Christian husband should act towards his wife." Other members of the household may say, "I fear lest I should not be such a wife, or such a child, or such a servant, or such a master as I ought to be." These are the people who usually are what they should be—those who are afraid that they are not. Those who are the most anxious lest they should fail are generally those who do not fail.

And I would like you also to be anxious in your business, for fear lest you should in any way take advantage of anybody—lest in the measure, or in the weight, or in the price, or in the invoice, there should be any mistake which would unjustly benefit you. The man who is afraid of anything like that will be an honest tradesman, you may rest assured of that. As for the servant or the workman

who is afraid that he will not give a fair day's work for a fair day's wage, and the employer who is afraid that he will not give his servant or workman as much as he ought to give him—I can only say that I wish we had many more of that sort of men than we already have, though I know a good many of that sort. If we are afraid of wronging one another, and not loving our neighbor as ourselves, that is a healthy kind of fear; and the more we have of it the more happy shall we be.

And if perchance there should not seem to be in yourself any special cause for this fear just now—though “let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall,”—then begin to be afraid for the church of which you are a member. This is a fear which is always resting heavily upon me—the fear lest we should love our earnestness in prayer—lest we should not care as much as we ought for the souls of men—lest the members of our church should grow worldly—lest we should become cold and indifferent towards our dear Lord and Master. Never lose this wholesome kind of fear concerning this church and your fellow-members, or concerning any other church with which you are connected.

Then, have a solemn fear about your own children; lest possibly you should not have trained them up as you should have done, or should not have prayed for them as you should to have done, or lest your own example should not have been such as they could safely follow. Be afraid for your children as Job was for his. When they met together to feast he “offered burnt offerings according to the number of them all: for Job said, It may be that my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts.” The man who is thus afraid that things may be wrong is the man who is most likely to keep everything right. Many a man who becomes a bankrupt is so, largely, because he does not examine his books. He says that he does not like looking into his books; they are very unpleasant literature to him, and he never sees to the details of his affairs himself. He leaves this to John, and that to Thomas, and the other to one clerk, and something else to another; and then one day he wakes up to find that everything has gone to smash. Do not let it be so in your household, or in your temporal affairs, or in your spiritual concerns; but look into everything yourself and watch everything carefully; for in this way, by fearing alway, you will be both safe and happy in the hands of God.

IV. Now lastly, there are some who have indeed very grave cause to fear.

There are some of my hearers at this service—I am glad that they are here—who I am afraid have cause to fear in a far deeper sense than that in which I have used my text. Some of you are not saved; you know you are not. You have never had your sins forgiven, you have never sought and found mercy through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ, God's only-begotten Son. And some of you are very ill; you were only just able to get here to-night. What! so ill as that, yet with no Savior to help you? Sick, well-nigh unto death, yet without a Savior? Likely to die soon, for you are consumptive, yet you have no Savior? Let me appeal to you my dear friend: is this wise? Can you afford to run such a terrible risk? Why, the healthy may die at any moment but as for you, death is already at your door; so surely you cannot afford to trifle with eternal things. And some of you are getting old, yet you are not saved. Sixty years of age and not saved? Seventy, eighty, and not saved? What are you at? A man told me the other day that he would not come to hear me again, for, said he, “The last time I came you called me an old fool. Why was that? I asked. “Why,” he replied, “you said that an old sinner was an old fool.” So I said to him, “Are you an old sinner then? Because if you are, you are an old fool;” and he could not deny it, for we are all fools till we are saved by Jesus Christ. A man must be a fool to run the risk of losing his immortal soul. I have heard that a man once went up to the top of the spire of Salisbury cathedral and stood on his head there. What do you think he was? “A fool,” you say. Yes, so he was; yet he only risked his neck;

but you are risking your soul's eternal welfare, risking the loss of heaven, and running a terrible risk of going to hell for ever. O friend, is this wise? You know it is not, and that I am only speaking the truth when I tell you that you are a fool, and one of the worst of fools.

O sirs, if you are not believers in the Lord Jesus Christ you are standing over the mouth of hell upon a single plank, and that plank is rotten. You are hanging over the jaws of perdition by a single hair, and that hair is snapping. I looked down my well this afternoon as a man was going down it to do some necessary work, and I said to him, "Oh, do be careful! Pray be very careful!" I felt such dread upon me lest possibly the man should fall while he was going down that great depth, into which I looked till it made me giddy; and I cannot bear to think of some of you who are in far greater danger, for you are hanging over the mouth of hell with only a rotten rope to hold to. Some of you may be in hell within a week; I cannot guarantee that any one of you will live ten minutes longer. All the physicians in the world would not be able to guarantee to any one individual that he should live even for five minutes. You are always liable to death and in danger of the wrath to come. Therefore escape for your lives, I entreat you; and meanwhile I would put you in fear about this matter, that, through this fear, you may be driven to the only place of safety, even to Jesus Christ who was lifted up upon the cross and now is exalted on high a Prince and a Savior. There is life in him; there is life for you at this moment if you will only trust in him. There is pardon for you now if you will only believe in him.

Two Ancient Proverbs

A Sermon (No. 3080) Published on Thursday, February 20th, 1908.
Delivered by C.H. Spurgeon at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington
on Lord's Day evening, March 29th, 1874.

“The fear of man bringeth a snare; but whoso puteth his trust in the LORD shall
be safe.”
—Proverbs 29:25.

We have two ancient proverbs here; each of them is true as a separate proverb, and they are equally true when linked together. The independent proposition, that the fear of man bringeth a snare, is a truth which experience has taught to many. The other proposition, that he that trusteth in the Lord shall be safe, has been found most blessedly true by all those who have tested it. Then put the two propositions together—that the fear of man bringeth a snare but trust in the Lord is the safe and certain way to avoid that snare—and this also is true.

I. We shall first of all consider for a little while the first of the two ancient proverbs: “The fear of man bringeth a snare.” That is one of the great evils that we have to avoid.

What a common evil the fear of man is—the fear of losing human approbation, the fear of incurring human wrath. There are thousands of men who have no fear of God who have great fear of man. They break the laws of God without any fear of the consequences that must ensue, yet they are afraid to break the laws of man because they dread the punishment that might possibly follow. They are not afraid of hell, yet they are afraid of an earthly prison. They dread not the arm of the Almighty, yet they are afraid of an arm of flesh.

The fear of man has been thought by some persons to be a very good and salutary thing. Instead of bringing a snare, they think that it is the means of preventing much sin among mankind. Now I do not doubt that some are hindered by the fear of man from committing great crimes and open acts of wrong, but the utmost that the fear of man can do is to confer a very doubtful benefit. Try it in your own house among your own children. If your children are kept from wrong-doing only by the fear of you—if they only do that which they are bidden to do because they are afraid to do otherwise—you will have a very poor form of obedience; and you will have at the same time an abundant crop of deceit springing up; for when your child has done wrong his fear of punishment will drive him to a falsehood, and perhaps lead him from one falsehood to another, and falsehoods may become so common with him that at last it shall be as natural to him to tell a lie as to speak the truth; and I think every parent must know that all the faults a child can commit, if put into the scale together, are not equal in criminality and in injury to his spiritual constitution to a lie. The power to tell a lie is one of the most hideous powers to which man can attain, and some children are kept in such a state of terror that they naturally learn to do it. It is supposed too that servants cannot be managed without being kept in a state of fear. Yet you all know what an eye-server is. If there is no right principle in servants, they are worth nothing. Those who will only work because the eye of the master or mistress is upon them are of very little value. You only teach them habits of deceit if they live in constant fear of you. This experiment has been tried on a large scale. Laws have been made with the severe penalties for their violation, yet men seemed as if they transgressed

all the more. In prison, the sternest forms of discipline have been tried, yet the prisoner has come out determined to sin again; certainly there has been no beneficial change produced in him by fear.

I will not deny that the fear of man has its uses, but I must assert again that it is always a very doubtful good which fear brings to the human mind and heart. Love, my brethren, is the grand cure for the evil of human hearts, especially the love that cometh from above; that pure and heavenly flame which is kindled only by the Holy Ghost burns up sin. But “fear hath torment;” it doth little else save plague and vex the soul.

Having said this much about any possible good that may come of fear, I now remark that according to the text, “the fear of man bringeth a snare.” It has led many men into very great sins.

Look at Pilate. I mention him first because there was a peculiar atrocity about his sin. The pure and holy Jesus is brought before him, and after examining him, he declares “I find no fault in this man.” He sends him to Herod, and the result is that he says to Christ’s accusers, “I have found no fault in this man touching these things whereof ye accuse him: no, nor yet Herod: for I sent you to him.” Pilate’s wife warns him that she has suffered much in a dream because of Christ, and she says, “Have thou nothing to do with that just man.” Pilate’s own interviews with Christ impressed his mind, and therefore he wanted to set the Savior free if he could; but though he was a Roman governor, and placed in a high position of power, he was a poor slave to the people. He was vacillating; he knew what was the right course, and he wanted to take it, but he feared the consequences. The Jews might appeal to Caesar, and say that he had spared the life of one who pretended to be a king, and then he might lose his post. So this poor, timid, contemptible creature takes water, and washes his hands, and says that he is innocent of the blood of this just person, and the next minute gives up the innocent victim to be nailed on a cross. It was the fear of man that caused Pilate’s name to become infamous in the history of the world and of the Church of God, and it will be infamous to all eternity. The fear of man led him to slay the Savior; take care that it does not lead you to do something of the same kind.

Long before Pilate’s day, there had been a king of Israel who lost his crown through the fear of man. God had chosen Saul to be head over his people, but when he was commanded by God to smite the Amalekites and to destroy all that they had, he spared Agag and the best of the sheep and oxen and all that was good, because he “feared the people and obeyed their voice.” He was head and shoulders taller than his subjects, a man who at other times acted as a despot and had his own way; yet at this particular time he feared the people, and so did that which God had commanded him not to do, and therefore his kingdom was rent from him and given to one who was better than he.

“Yes,” you say, “those two were bad men who fell into sin through fear of man.” Yes, but I am sorry to say that I must also mention good men who did the same. Look at Aaron, the priest of the Lord, and companion of his brother Moses; Aaron who had spoken with God, and was his representative to the people. Yet when Moses was gone up into the mount, and the people came to Aaron and said, “Up, make us gods which shall go before us; for as for this Moses the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him;” Aaron bade them break off their golden earrings and bring them to him; and he, the priest of God, desecrated his sacred hands by making for the people a molten calf before which they might bow in worship. Ah, Aaron! hadst thou had the courage of thy brother, thou wouldst not have fallen into that shameful sin.

Turning to the New Testament again, to give an example from it, remember bold Peter and the words which he spoke so enthusiastically to his Lord, “I am ready to go with thee, both into prison,

and to death. Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee.” Yet see him a little later, warming himself in the high priest’s palace, and first one of the maid-servants, and then others that stood by said to him, “Surely thou art one of them;” and “he began to curse and to swear,” to prove that he was no disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ. Ah, Peter, where is thy courage now? Truly, “the fear of man bringeth a snare,” even to the best of men. God save us from it, and make us so brave that we shall never fear any man so as to do a wrong action!

Again, the fear of man brings a snare in this respect, it keeps many persons from conversion. Perhaps there are some such persons now present; let me see if I can pick them out. You scarcely dare to go to the place where the gospel is preached in a way in which God blesses it, because if you were to go there and it were known, it would be a subject of jest in your family, and would provoke remarks that you would not like. There are many who dare not go to the house where God pours out the blessing; they are such cowards that they dare not come to listen to those who preach Christ’s gospel with power; and others who do come and hear it are afraid to receive the truth to which they have listened again and again. The thought in such a person’s mind is, “What would father and mother say if I were converted? Oh, what a time I should have of it! What would my fellow-workmen say? I should have to run the gauntlet of the whole lot if they once knew that I had become a Christian.” Another says, “I don’t know how I should endure the persecution I should receive; my life would become intolerable if I were to become a child of God.” So they never come to Jesus because the fear of man, which bringeth a snare, keeps them still as the hopeless slaves of sin. But, young man, do you mean to be damned just to please somebody else? Do you mean to fling away your immortal soul in order to escape the laughter of fools? Remember that they may laugh you into hell, but they cannot laugh you out again. Let not the fear of man be the ruin of your soul. If for the sake of pleasing men you choose to forfeit some small trifle, it does not much matter; but when it comes to the forfeiting of Christ, the forfeiting of your soul, and the forfeiting of heaven, I appeal to your own conscience to say if it is worth while to be eternally ruined for the sake of pleasing men whoever they may be. Is it not better that even father, and mother, and brother, and sister, and every friend you have in the world should be against you, and that God should be yours, than that you should have all these as your friends and yet remain at enmity against the Most High?

I have no doubt that this same fear of man keeps a large number of persons who are converted from making a public avowal of their faith, and so it bringeth a snare to them. Nicodemus “at the first came to Jesus by night,” and Joseph of Arimathaea was “a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews.” I hope you will not try to shelter behind those two good men, for remember that as soon as Christ was put to death, when his cause was at the very worst, they came out boldly and proved their love of him; and we do not read that they ever crept back like snails into their shells. Having owned Christ as their Lord and Master, I have no doubt that they continued to follow him whatever the consequences may have been. So far as you are concerned, just now is the time to own Christ; now especially, because scepticism and superstition, the two monstrous evils which threaten to devour true religion, are so rampant; and it needs some moral courage to declare yourself upon the side of the simple gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now is the hour for a Christian to play the man for Christ his Lord and Master; yet there are many who are keeping in the background because “the fear of man bringeth a snare” upon them. Where are you, dear friend? I cannot come round to all those pews; otherwise I should stop here and there before some of you whom I know, and before others whom I suspect—and whom I joyfully suspect—of loving my Master. I think you do by the way you look when his name is extolled in your hearing; yet you have not said so in

the way he wishes. I charge you by the love which you bear to him, keep not back. Think that you see him now before your eyes, and that you hear him say to you as he hangs upon the cross, "I bore all this for thee, and yet art thou ashamed of me? If thou lovest me, own me in the midst of this wicked and perverse generation. Take up your cross and follow me, whatever suffering or reproach it may involve."

The fear of man has brought a snare to some of the greatest believers who have ever lived; and any child of God, whenever he fears the face of man, loses some of the dignity which appertains to that relationship. What a grand man Abraham was! Whenever I read his life I look up to him with astonishment and wish I had such faith as would make me resemble him in that respect. He marches across the page of history with such quiet stately dignity that kings and princes are dwarfed beside his great figure. How nobly did he say to the king of Sodom, "I will not take from a thread even to a shoelatchet, lest thou shouldest say I have made Abram rich;" but oh, how small did he look when he said to Abimelech concerning his wife, "She is my sister." She was his sister in a sense; there was some truth in what he said, but she was more than his sister so he was uttering a falsehood, for which he was rightly rebuked by the heathen prince.

You have in David another instance of how the fear of man can bring the mighty down. How brave he is as he goes out to slay Goliath, and how grandly he behaves when twice he spares the life of his sleeping enemy! Yet see him there at Gath when the servants of Achish frightened him so that he "feigned himself mad in their hands, and scrabbled on the doors of the gate, and let his spittle fall down upon his beard." The fear of man had brought down Israel's future monarch to drivel like a madman.

Equally sad is the case of Elijah, that grandest of men, as I may truly call him. You see him in his grandeur as he cries "Take the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape;" and as he brings them down to the brook Kishon and slays them there, and then as he goes to the top of Carmel and prays till the rain descends upon the parched land. Yet after the excitement is over he is afraid of a woman, Jezebel, and the great Elias shrinks down into a frightened man who runs away and cries, "It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life, for I am not better than my fathers." So you see that "the fear of man bringeth a snare" even to the best of men; it drags them down from their high places and hurls them into the dust. Therefore may God preserve us from it!

The fear of man keeps some believers in very dubious positions. I have known some believers remain where they knew they were not doing right, and where every day they were dragging a heavy chain behind them because they had not the moral courage to come straight out for God. If any of you young people who love the Lord want to go the easiest way to heaven—you know that all ways there are rough, but if you want to go the easiest way, take that which looks the hardest; namely, be an out-and-out thorough-going Christian. "But that will cost me much," says one. It will at first, but it will be the more easy for you afterwards; whereas if you begin by giving way to the world a little—trimming a little—you will have to give way and trim more and more. A Christian should be like a steamer that goes straight away to the port it is intended to reach; but many professors are like sailing vessels; the motive power that controls them is outside of them, so they have to tack a good deal; and though they may ultimately get to their destination, there is a good deal of queer sailing to the right and to the left and their voyage takes a very long while. I hope you, dear friends, will go straight to your mark. "Trust in God and do the right;" and this will after all be the very smoothest path that you can follow.

Further, the fear of man hampers the usefulness of a great many. There are brethren who ought to be preaching, but who are not because they are afraid of men; and some who ought to go and visit the poor, but they say that they cannot; the reason is that they are afraid of men. Why, I have known some who were afraid even to give away a tract; they were as much alarmed as though they had to put their hand into a tiger's mouth. I have known some who were afraid to speak to their own children about their souls. Is it not strange that they can speak to other people's children about their souls better than they can to their own? It should not be so; in fact, there is nobody living that any one of us, if he is a Christian, has any right to be afraid of. We shall never do good to people if we are afraid of them. What would have become of the Church of God if the apostles had been such timid, gentle Christians as some whom I know? They would not have gone out to preach in the streets, and as there were no chapels and churches then, they would not have preached at all. As soon as Caesar promulgated an edict that they were not to meet on the first day of the week, they would have said, "Perhaps we had better not meet." When they heard that the crowds shouted in the amphitheatre, "Christians to the lions!" they would have said, "We must not expose ourselves to such a risk, and we must think of our wives and families;" and so they would have been cowards, and soon there would have been no Christianity left in the world. Just imagine what would have happened if the Reformers had acted thus. Suppose Martin Luther had said, "I shall do as that old monk advised me when I consulted him. He said, 'Martin, go back to thy cell and live thou there near to thy God, and leave the Church and the world alone.'" If Luther had followed that advice, where would the blessed Reformation have been, and what preaching of the gospel would there have been at this present moment?

I must not continue much longer upon this part of my subject, but I must say that to a minister of Christ the fear of man is one of the worst of snares. Jonah tried to escape from going to Nineveh because he was afraid of man. The Galatians could not bear the full light of the gospel, and therefore certain teachers among them tried to shut off some of its beams; and if a minister of Christ once begins to be afraid of his hearers, his tendency will be to withhold some doctrine through fear of a wealthy subscriber, or to keep back some rebuke for fear that it should bear too hardly upon an influential person in his congregation. There is one sin which I believe I have never committed; I think that I have never been afraid of any of you, and I hope by the grace of God that I never shall be. If I dare not speak the truth upon all points and dare not rebuke sin, what is the good of me to you? Yet I have heard sermons which seemed to me to have been made to the order of the congregation. But honest hearers want honest preaching; and if they find that the preachers message comes home to them, they thank God that it is so. They say "Is it not right that it should be so? If we err, should not the Word of God which is quick and powerful, search us, and try us, and find out our errors?" And the preacher, if he really preaches the truth as it is in Jesus, must often deal out rebuke as well as encouragement. May God deliver all his ministers from the fear of man everywhere, and the whole Church of Christ too! At one time the fear of man took this form—the geologists had discovered that Moses was mistaken, and that God did not know how he had made the world! Many seemed to think that something dreadful had happened, and they wondered how those objectors were to be answered. Soon after that, somebody discovered that God was mistaken about having made Adam and Eve, for they gradually developed from oysters or some smaller creatures still! Then again there was a great outcry, "Who is to answer these eminent philosophers?" O, Church of God, is every drivelling fool to have any answer at all? Stand fast by the inspired Word, and be not ensnared by the fear of man. We have seen scores of systems of philosophy come

and go, and we shall probably see as many more before we die. Our business is just to stand fast to the truth of revelation, and let philosophies die as the frogs of Egypt died in the days of Moses; for die they will, and when fresh hordes come they also will die, but the eternal truth of the ever-blessed God will never die—it will live on in its own glorious immortality.

II. Now in the second place I want to show you that the great cure for this evil is trust in God: “The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the Lord shall be safe.”

I should have thought that Solomon would have said, “The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso feareth the Lord shall be safe.” That would have read very well, and it would have been quite true; but it would not have expressed the special truth that Solomon then had in his mind. It is not fear but faith that is the cure for cowardice. Trust in the Lord and you can then cry, “Whom shall I fear?” for you will feel that you have the strength of the Almighty at your back. Trusting in God, we feel that we are one with God, and so we are made strong. That strength breeds courage and enables us boldly to ask, “If God be for us, who can be against us?” That courage leads us to count the cost of doing right, and after counting it, we feel that in God’s strength we can endure that, and a thousand times as much if necessary; and therefore we say “Come what may we will serve the Lord;” and with the Holy Spirit resting upon us we march boldly on to victory in his might. So that trust in God, by giving us God’s strength, and consequently courage and decision, lifts us up above the fear of man.

But the point of the text may be found in another direction, namely, that trusting in God we become safe not merely from fear, but from the consequences of defying fear. “Whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe.” By trusting in the Lord and doing that which is right, he may be a great sufferer but he shall be safe. He will not be so great a sufferer as he would be if he followed the opposite course. Suppose that his enemies carry their opposition to extremes, they can only kill the body and after that they have no more that they can do. But suppose he were to forfeit his faith, then his body and soul would be cast into hell, which would be an infinitely greater and eternal loss. Never imagine that you can be a loser by trusting in God. Whatever risk there is in doing so, the risk of not trusting in him is far greater; and every sensible man will prefer the smaller risk. Besides, how often it happens that if a man trusts in God and acts according to his conscience, he is not a loser at all. Many have been gainers thereby, though that ought not to be an inducement. Many have said, “If we do what we feel is right, we shall lose everything;” and yet when they have dared to run that risk they have lost nothing at all, for God has helped them in the emergency. But if they should lose by doing the right thing, let this assurance comfort them, “Whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe.” It is much better to be safe than to be wealthy, and infinitely better to be safe for time and for eternity than to have all the comforts of life about you, but to put your soul in jeopardy.

A Christian man need never be afraid of anybody. If you are doing right you have no cause to fear the greatest man who is serving the devil. Look at Bernard Palissy, the Huguenot potter who produced such wonderful works of art. One day the king of France said to him, “Bernard I am afraid I shall be compelled to give you up to the inquisitors to be burned if you will not change your religion.” Bernard’s reply was, “I pity your majesty.” Only think of that, the potter pitied the king! So his majesty asked, “Why do you pity me, Bernard?” “Because,” he answered, “you have said what your majesty and fifty thousand princes cannot make me say, ‘I fear I shall be compelled!’” Why, sirs, Palissy was the king and the king was not worthy to be the potter. A truly royal dignity dwelt in that potter’s soul. Are any of you young men going to allow anybody to make you say, “I

fear I shall be compelled to cease worshipping with the Dissenters;" "I fear I shall be compelled to abstain from attending that little country Baptist chapel;" or, "I am afraid it might not be considered proper for me to make an open profession of religion in the town where I live?" If you talk like that I can only say, "May the Lord have mercy on your little miserable soul, and give you enough manhood and common honesty to confess what Christ has done for you!" If you really have been bought with the precious blood of Jesus Christ, and have had your sins forgiven, and have been made an heir of heaven, and are on your way to a glorious immortality, surely you cannot act the part of a sneak like that! What are you who are to dwell among the angels, you for whom there is a mansion in the skies, and a robe of righteousness and a crown of glory, are you going to play the coward like that? Why, if you act thus, you ought to be drummed out of the regiment of the Church militant, so how can you expect to be in the Church triumphant with such a miserable spirit as that? May the Lord help you to put your trust in him, that you may be saved from all fear of man!

Now to close. The last sentence of the text is true as an independent proposition. "Whoso putteth his trust in the Lord shall be safe." I have not time to speak about this sentence, but I give it to you to put under your tongue as a sweet morsel as you go your way to your homes. It is not, "He that trusteth in himself;" not, "He that trusteth in a priest;" not, "He that performs good works, and trusts in them," but, "whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe." The man who is trusting in the blood and righteousness of Jesus may not always be happy, but he is safe; he may not always be singing, but he is safe; he may not always have the joy of full assurance, but he is safe. He may sometimes be distressed, but he is always safe; he may sometimes question his interest in Christ, but he is always safe.

I was astonished the other day to meet with an expression used by Cardinal Bellarmine, who was one of the greatest Jesuit controversialists. He closes a long argument about being saved by works with the following very remarkable sentences, which I will quote as accurately as I can:—"Nevertheless, although the way of acceptance with God is by our own works there is a danger that men may so trust in their own works as to grow proud, which would quite spoil their works; and therefore, upon the whole, it is safest for them to rely upon the blood and merits of Jesus Christ alone." Well done, Cardinal Bellarmine! "Upon the whole," I mean to do that as long as I live; and oh that everyone who has ever been deluded by the doctrines of the Church of Rome would listen to the Cardinal's confession that, upon the whole, it is safest to rest upon what Christ has done! Upon the whole, it is better to trust in the Savior than to trust in ourselves! Upon the whole, it is better to be washed in his blood than to think that we can make ourselves clean! The cardinal did not say all the truth, but I thank him for what he did say, though the truth is better put by Solomon in my text, "Whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe." He shall be safe if he is sick, if he is rich, if he is poor. He shall be safe when he dies, safe when he rises again, safe at the day of judgment, and safe throughout eternity. Oh then, come all of you and trust in the Lord, for "whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe" for ever! Amen.

A Homily for Humble Folks

A Sermon (No. 2140) delivered on Lord's Day, April 27th, 1890
by C.H. Spurgeon at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington.

“Surely I am more brutish than any man, and have not the understanding of a man.”—Proverbs 30:2.

Sometimes it is necessary for a speaker to refer to himself, and he may feel it needful to do so in a way peculiar to the occasion. When Elihu addressed himself to Job and the three wise men, he commended himself to them saying, “I am full of matter, the spirit within me constraineth me”; but when Agur instructed his two disciples Ithiel and Ucal, he spoke in the lowliest terms of himself and declared that he was “more brutish than any man.” Wisdom is justified of her children. Neither of these men was to blame for his opening words to his hearers. Elihu was a young man talking to elderly men of great note for learning: he saw that they had blundered terribly; he felt convinced that he had the right view of the matter under discussion, but he thought it discreet to introduce himself by modestly stating the reasons why he thought he should be patiently heard. Agur was probably a man of years and honor, and possibly his two young friends looked up to him more than was meet, and therefore his principal endeavor was to wean them from undue confidence in himself. He passed the gravest censure upon himself that his hearers might not suffer their faith to stand in the wisdom of men. I can suppose that both Elihu and Agur were equally humble—the one so modest that he felt that he needed to commend himself to gain a hearing; and the other so lowly that he feared the hearing he should win would place his personal influence in too high a place.

But did Agur really mean all he said? I cannot doubt it. Forcible expressions are not always to be understood in their strictest sense, yet I have no doubt Agur meant to describe himself as he felt himself to be apart from the grace of God. Or better and more likely, he felt thus brutish and foolish after he had been enlightened by the Spirit of God. One mark of a man's true wisdom is his knowledge of his ignorance. Have you never noticed how the clean heart always mourns its uncleanness, and the wise man always laments his folly? It needs holiness to detect our own unholiness, and it needs wisdom to discover our own folly. When a man talks of his own cleanness, his very lips are foul with pride; and when a man boasts of his wisdom, he proclaims his folly with trumpet sound. Because God had taught Agur much, he felt that he knew but little.

Especially I think the truth of our text relates to one particular line of things. This man was a naturalist. We have nothing of his save this chapter, but his allusions to natural history all through it are exceedingly abundant. He was an instructed scientist, but he felt that he could not by searching find out God nor fashion an idea of him from his own thoughts. When he heard of the great discoveries of those who judged themselves to be superior persons, he disowned such wisdom as theirs. Other men with their great understanding might be fishing up pearls of truth from the sea; as for himself, he knew nothing but that which he found in God's Word. He had none of that boasted understanding which climbed the heavens, bound the winds, and swathed the sea, and so found out the sacred name; he was content with revelation and felt that “every word of God is pure.” Not in any earthly school learned he the knowledge of the Holy: all that he knew he had been taught by God's Book. He had in thought climbed to heaven and come down again: he had listened to the

speech of winds and waves and mountains; but he protested that in all this he had not discovered God's name nor his Son's name by his own understanding. All his light had come through the Lord's own Word; and he shrewdly gave this caution to those who thought themselves supremely wise above what is written: "Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar." Philosophy had failed him and revelation was his sole confidence. As for himself, he did not claim that degree of perception and profundity which enabled him to think out God; but he went to God himself and learned from him at first hand through his revealed wisdom. This I take to be his meaning; but I shall not use the text in that way this morning.

Here was a man, who, whatever he really was, held himself in his own opinion and judgment to be an inferior person; and yet nevertheless was a firm believer in his God. He was not only a firm believer, but he was an earnest student of the sacred oracles. All the more because of his ignorance he pressed on to learn more and more of God. Nor was this all, he was a willing worker; for he spoke prophetically in the name of the Lord. Nor do we even end here; for from this short writing it is clear that he was a joyful truster in God. Brutish as he judged himself to be, he rose into supreme content at every thought of God. Those four points I am going to handle at this time, as the Lord may help me by his Holy Spirit.

I. The first is this—a sense of inferiority must not keep us back from faith in God. I will suppose that some one here is saying, "Surely I am more brutish than any man, and have not the understanding of a man": our text brings before us a wise man who said this of himself and yet had firm faith in God. If we have to say what Agur said, let us also trust as Agur did. If only wise men might put their trust in God, what would become of nine out of ten of us?

I hope there is nobody here so foolish as to say, "I could trust in God if I were a man of mark." Ah sirs! to be a man of mark is no help in the matter of faith. I hope no one is so silly as to say, "If I were possessed of great riches I could then come to Jesus." "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!" Nor may you say, "If I had great gifts I could trust in the Lord Christ." Talents involve responsibility, but they do not help towards salvation. Gifts may even drag a man down: only grace can lift him up. The gifted man may be so full of pride that he may never submit himself to the free grace gospel of our Lord Jesus.

I shall deal with more sensible objections than these. There are some who seem as if they could not trust Christ and believe in God because they cannot go with other men in their heights; and there are others, strange to say, who have the same difficulty because they cannot follow others into their depths.

I will have a word first with those who say, "We cannot hope to be saved because we cannot reach the heights of other men." You have marked the holy conduct of certain godly men, and setting your own imperfections side by side with their excellences you have not only been humbled, but greatly discouraged. You have concluded that you could be saved if you were like these gracious men; but that, since you fall so far short of their noble character, you must be lost. You have seen them in sickness, and marked their patience and joy, and their acquiescence in the divine will, and you have been greatly humbled, which was well; but you have also fallen into unbelief, which was not well. Since you cannot play the man under fire as these champions do, you fear that you may not hope for eternal life.

Moreover, you have listened to their prayers; you have been edified, you have been aroused, and you have also been driven to tremble. Seeing Jacob in his wrestlings at Jabbok you have cried, "Would God I could wrestle like that man; but as I cannot, woe is me!" You have noticed Daniel

go to his chamber and cry unto his God three times a day, and then you have remembered your own forgetfulness and wandering thoughts in the matter of prayer, and you have concluded that you could have no hope of speeding at his throne of grace.

Other aspects of the piety of believers have also discouraged you. To see how they walk with God, how their speech is perfumed with love to Jesus, how their manner of life is above that of the world— all this has made you fear that you could never enter into their heritage. These gracious men seem so far above you that you cry, “Surely I am more brutish than any man.”

You have noticed also their usefulness—how many souls they have brought to Christ; how God has helped them to guide the bewildered and to instruct the ignorant; and then you have felt that it was natural that such men should have confidence towards God; but as for yourself, what is the use of you? You have felt good for nothing in the presence of persons privileged to do so much for God and men.

You have been even more cast down when you have heard them talk of their high joys. The other day you met with one who wore heaven on his face and you said to yourself, “I wish I knew such joy as beams in this man’s countenance.” You heard your minister describe the deep peace and holy calm which come with full assurance of faith; and every word he spoke about his own joy in the Lord was like a dagger at your heart; for you felt that you could not speak of such a blissful experience. You were never on the top of Tabor never did you behold the transfigured Lord. You are afraid to trust God because you cannot compare with other men in their heights.

Carefully notice two or three little points which I will mention. First, remember that you see these good people at their best. You have not seen their seamy side. Perhaps they have not told you of how at times their feet were almost gone, their steps had well-nigh slipped. You see their days, and not their nights. I think it is a very sweet trait in your character that you do so. In this you differ from the wicked world. The ungodly always notice the bad points in the saints; they eat up the sins of God’s people as they eat bread: it is nourishment to them. As for you, poor troubled one! you observe only the virtues of believers, and you overlook their shortcomings. Surely God has wrought a change in you. In this there is some ground of hope: the Lord who has taken away your envy, malice, and all uncharitableness, will remove the rest of your sins if you bring them before him in repentant faith.

Recollect also that you now see men who have faith in God, and you see in them the result of that faith. Do not imagine that their graces existed before their faith. If you have not the result of faith before you have faith itself, do not be astonished; they had not these excellences before they believed in Jesus. Some of the brightest of them were once the blackest of sinners. “Such were some of you,” said Paul: “but ye are washed.” Can it be a wise thing to say, “I have not those fruits of the Spirit and therefore I will not cultivate the tree of faith from which they grow”? Nay, rather say, “The Lord who made these men what they are, can make me what they are. He that could beautify them with righteousness can also hang my neck with the jewels of holiness.”

Do you not think it would be very great folly on your part if you should refrain from believing in the Lord Jesus on the ground that you had greater need to seek him than other men? Because you lack these things which you see in the saints, and know that you can only have them of the Lord by faith, is that a reason why you should not go to God in faith? This is a grand argument for going at once. Should a man plead his poverty as a reason why he should not ask an alms? Is nakedness a reason for refusing to be dressed? Is hunger a motive for rejecting food? or sickness a motive for shutting out the physician? I argue in the opposite way. Your urgent need is the strongest

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reason why you should claim of the Lord by faith these promises which he has made to needy souls. If you are more brutish than any man go to the Lord that he may instruct you!

The greater your need, the greater opportunity you have of glorifying God by believing in him for an all-sufficient supply. If you lack all these lovely and needful things which you so much admire in others, it is a sad and grievous want; but if you can believe that the Lord of mercy can and will give you all, you will do great honor to his name. Is it not written, "If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God"? If you were a little sinner and had little needs, God could only be a little merciful and give you a little supply; but the more brutish you are and the less of true understanding you have, the greater opportunity have you of glorifying the Lord Jesus Christ by believing in him for the great things which you evidently need. If you are the greatest fool that ever lived, you will give to Christ all the more honor when you believe that he can make you wise unto salvation. God grant that the heights to which other men reach may never keep you back from faith in God, but may the rather urge you on to believe great things of God!

But further, I said—and perhaps I surprised you—that the depths of other men have often kept tremblers from a simple faith in God. I know many who say, "I cannot feel as others feel—my heart is hard and insensible, and when I listen to what believers tell me of their sharp distresses I fear that I cannot be saved; for into these deep places I have never gone." These depths are of many kinds; but the mention of one or two may suffice. Some believers have been brought to the Lord through fearful conviction of sin, conviction most overwhelming: they seem to have found their way to heaven round by the brink of hell. "Ah!" say you, "I was never thus shaken over the pit." Another, after he has been converted, experience awful conflicts: from day to day he struggles with inbred corruptions, and therefore he goes sighing and crying to heaven. There is among the best of men an amount of sorrow which I need not here dwell upon. Ploughing, harrowing, scarifying, fall to the lot of the best of soils. Saints go through fire and through water in their spiritual march to the land of bliss. Perhaps some of you escape these agonies and know but little of the grinding process. Will you therefore fear to believe because you think you are more unfeeling than other men? Will you refuse the cup of life because God has not infused all his bitters into it?

Hearken to me, ye that are so readily cast down: some of these depths you never need wish to know, for they would not be to your advantage but to your loss. The dark side of much that is called Christian experience is not the work of the Holy Spirit at all. In many it is occasioned by a natural crabbedness of disposition: some are so hard that God must use iron wedges with them before their hearts will be reached. There are men with such a proud spirit that they need to be brought down to feed swine before they will arise and go to their Father. Others are obstinate, and wear a brow of brass; and these must be made faint with labor before they will yield. In many instances, the mental distress which attends the work of the Spirit is produced by sickness of body: it is not repentance but indigestion or some other evil agency depressing the spirits. A sluggish liver will produce most of those fearsome forebodings which we are so ready to regard as spiritual emotions. There is such a blending of the physical with the mental that it is hard to name our feelings. All the experience of a Christian man is not Christian experience. The troubled man experiences a good deal, not because he is a Christian, but because he is a man, a sickly man, a man inclined to melancholy. Why will you envy such a person? Do you want to feel his despondency? Do you really desire disease? Do you think you could trust God better if you had a morbid mind and a disordered body? What nonsense! I do not admire your taste; I think you are very foolish.

In multitudes of instances the strange depressions which befall some excellent people are the result of external trouble, of grinding poverty, of frequent bereavements, or of excessive labor. These things may greatly intensify the bitterness of spiritual distress. Do you want affliction? Do you really think that poverty or bankruptcy would help you to believe in God? Give some men a holiday by the sea and their dark thoughts vanish. Were they ever desirable? In desiring what would only grieve you, you remind me of a child that would always cry until its mother said, "What! Do you cry for nothing? You shall have something to cry for before long." If you covet grief, and even dare to threaten the Lord that you will not believe him unless he vexes you, it may be that he will deal with you according to your desires, and then you will cry in earnest on the other side of your mouth.

Frequently the great darkness through which many true people of God pass is occasioned by Satan. He delights to torment the child of God with blasphemous suggestions or with foul imaginations. Do any of you say, because you are a stranger to this, "We cannot believe"? Why, dear soul, you must be out of your mind to talk so. Bless God with all your heart that you are a stranger to this horrible temptation. Never be so insane as to wish for this dreadful trial. These temptations may come quite soon enough. Desire them? Never, while reason remains to you!

Do you not think too, that many are more deeply convinced of sin and more seriously tried and more fiercely tempted than others, because the Lord has a special design to answer in them? Even when the terrible searching work within is all real, you need not wish for it, for it may not be needful in your case, since God has not the same intention towards you that he has towards the much tempted one. Much more is wanted by way of foundation for a lofty tower than for a humble cottage; and so the grand public life of such a man may need more digging out by inward sorrow than your more private life can possibly require. Our Lord may also be shaping the tried soul for special work. If a man is to be a son of consolation to others, he must be much exercised himself. Barnabas must have tasted the wormwood and the gall, or he cannot mix the cup of consolation for others.

Remember that all Christians are not, and cannot be, of the same calibre. We are all soldiers brethren, but we are not all champions. God calls upon everyone that believes in Christ to fight his battles, but many of us are happy to belong to the rank and file. We cannot all be captains. Only here and there shall we find a David, who with his sling and his stone shall go forth, a solitary champion against gigantic Philistines. For David it was needful that he should fight lions and boars in his youth, or he would not have faced the giant. If God sends us less of inward and outward trials than others, he knows best. We need enough sorrow to drive us from self and carnal confidence, and when that is effected it would be folly to sigh for more. Our wisdom is to leave our experience with the Lord, who will appoint us sun or shade as best will suit our growth. Let us envy no man his standing upon Tabor or Pisgah, and on the other hand let us never desire to make excursions with the Lord's Jonahs, and go with them to the bottoms of the mountains. Seek not to copy another man's ups or downs, but wait on God, and put thy trust in him, even though thou shouldst seem to thyself to be more foolish than any other living man.

II. Secondly and very briefly: a sense of inferiority must not keep us from learning. Suppose you have to say "I am more brutish than any man," you have so much the more need of being taught the things of God. If you have not the understanding of a man there is so much more cause that you should go to school to the Holy Spirit, till the eyes of your understanding shall be enlightened, and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

Vital truth is simple. A great many things are hard to understand, but that which is essential to salvation is not difficult. To know thyself a sinner and Christ a Savior, is this a deep mystery? To quit thine own self and thine own trusts simply to rely upon the person and work of the Son of God, is this exceedingly difficult to understand? The safest truth is the simplest. Commonly an invention in machinery grows more simple as it nears perfection; and because God's way of salvation is perfect, therefore it is simplicity itself. You can know the gospel, for it is not a tough metaphysical problem, but a revelation which he that runs may read.

If thou art staggered by the sublimity of heavenly learning, consider that these things are revealed to babes. Our Lord said, "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes." Therefore, if you are more than ever conscious of your spiritual babyhood, be none the less assured that the Lord can and will reveal his truths to you.

Remember also that the Holy Ghost is a great Teacher. The best earthly teacher may be able to do very little with such slow scholars as we are; therefore let us go to our heavenly Teacher, that he may give us of his Spirit wherewith we may learn the truth. He can teach young men wisdom, and give to babes knowledge and discretion. When the Lord teaches it is wonderful how quickly we learn. We have frequently met with young children deep-taught in the things of God because the Holy Ghost has been their Teacher.

Let me comfort you by the remark that a sense of ignorance is a very good beginning for a learner. The door-step of the Palace of Wisdom is a humble sense of ignorance. When thou art empty of all fancied wisdom, there is room for God to fill thee with heavenly instruction. If thou art more brutish than any man, I should hope thou art more surely on the way to be made wise from the very foundation, by the teaching of the Spirit of God.

Hang your hope upon that promise: "All thy children shall be taught of the LORD." You are one of those children, though you are a little one, and therefore you are included in the number of those who shall be taught of the Lord. The Lord will not give up one of the children of Zion as incorrigible. Dunces, whom no other master would tolerate, the gentle Spirit will tenderly instruct. Therefore I say unto you let not a sense of inferiority keep you from following on to know the Lord.

III. I have been very brief upon that second point, and I must be much the same on the third: a sense of inferiority must not keep us back from serving God. What if like Agur we take the very lowest place; yet, like him let us speak on God's behalf. Who knoweth he may prophesy by us also? Agur's simple word is called "the prophecy." If God shall speak by thee my friend, thy thinking so little of thyself will give a charm to thy speech. If God shall use such as thou art he will have all the glory of it, will he not? When the Lord uses a very clever man, there is always the fear that people will ascribe the success to the human instrument. But when the Lord uses the man who owns himself to be a poor foolish creature, then the honor is not divided, but all men see that this is the finger of God. The Lord loves to use tools which are not rusted with self-conceit. An axe which boasteth itself shall not be used upon the thick trees.

God can use inferior persons for grand purposes. He has often done so. Go into his armoury and see how he has worked by flies and lice, by worms and caterpillars, by frogs and serpents. His greatest victories were won by a hammer and a tent-pin, by an ox-goad, by the jawbone of an ass, by a sling and a stone, and such like. His greatest prophets at the first tried to excuse themselves on the ground of unfitness. In the armoury of the Lord you will find few swords with golden scabbards, but you will find many unlikely weapons. God uses what no one else would look upon.

The Lord can get much glory out of you my poor desponding friend; wherefore, bestir yourself. Though you think yourself quite unworthy, go on in consecration of heart to yield yourself wholly to God and he will not pass you by.

Bethink you yet again, the Lord does not expect of you more than you can do: it is accepted if it be according to what a man hath, and not according to what he hath not. In building a house there must be the common bricks for the wall as well as the carved stone for the corner. Are you so ambitious that nothing but the chief place will suit you? Fie upon you! Let no man despise anything that may come in to complete the building of the house that God inhabits.

Suppose you feel that you are more brutish than any man, shall I give you a little advice? If you can do but little, make the best of yourself by intensity. In the natural world that creature is most to be feared which is the most energetic, rather than that which is greatest. You shall find your life more in danger from the slender viper than from the huge ox. That which is the fullest of fire and energy will achieve the most. A small musket-ball in full career will do more execution than a great cannon-ball which lies still. Make the best of yourself also by perseverance. If you are a little axe and can give only a small chip at a time, keep on striking, and even the oak will yield to your blows. If you are only a drop, remember that constant dripping wears away stones. Keep on at holy service, and do so all the more because you do so little at any one time. Many littles will make much. Pence given every day will make pounds.

Make up by spiritual force what you lack in natural ability. If you lack talent, get all the more grace and you will be no loser. If you love God more, even though you know less of science, you will live a successful, because a holy, life. If you have a greater love for the souls of your hearers than the man who has ten talents, you may be ten times more a soul-winner than he. It is spiritual power, not mental power, which avails in conversion.

Agur, a little further on in his one chapter, cheers up the humbler sort of people by his talk about little things. In his twenty-fourth verse he says:—"There be four things which are little upon the earth, but they are exceeding wise: the ants are a people not strong, yet they prepare their meat in the summer." You that cannot do very much, take care never to lose an opportunity. Make hay while the sun shines: seize the seasons and turn them to account. If you were a great man and could at one speech sway the minds of thousands, even then you ought not to be idle; but if you can only deal with one at a time, do not let that one escape you. Copy the bees and the ants and use the summer hours right diligently.

Next, read verse twenty-six. You are feeble; but remember, "The conies are but a feeble folk, yet make they their houses in the rocks." Keep to the rock, keep to eternal verities, keep to the things which cannot be moved. Never run away from the gospel. There is not much in you, but there is a great deal in Christ: always keep to him. You cannot say much, but let all you do say savor of Christ. Never quit the gospel or you leave the rock of your shelter. Keep to the rocks and you will do much good, and run no risk.

Next, if you are very little you should like the locusts associate with others, and go forth in an orderly way to work. Make yourself useful by dropping into rank, and in holy companionship doing your part in connection with the rest. One locust is a thing to be laughed at but when they go forth in bands they make nations tremble. One believer may accomplish little; but in the ranks of the Sunday-school the many can do wonders.

Suppose you are as little thought of as a spider, yet copy the spider in the two things which Agur mentions. Take hold with your hands. Always be taking hold upon the promise of the great

King by the hand of faith. Let your faith come out of your own heart as the spider spins her web out of her own bowels. Be always hanging on to one promise or another, and constantly add to your holding. Have also a holy courage like the spider who is in king's palaces. She is not satisfied with being hidden away in a barn or a cottage; she pays a visit to Solomon and makes her abode in his painted halls. If you can go anywhere for Christ, go and spin your web of gospel from your inmost soul. Make up your mind that whatever company you are in, you will begin to spin about Christ, and spin a web in which to catch a soul for your Lord. In this way, though you fear you are more foolish than any man, God will make as much use of you as if you were the wisest of men. I pray thee, O feeble one, render to thy Lord such service as thou canst.

IV. Lastly: a sense of inferiority must not hinder our faith in the Lord. Suppose you have to say this morning, very groaningly, "I am more brutish than any man, I have not the understanding of a man." What then? Are you going to fret and worry about it? Will you therefore refuse to believe in your God? I do not see, if it be true to the fullest extent, that there is any reasonable cause for being cast down in reference to the Lord your God. Would you expect to be saved because you were not brutish? Would you look for heaven because you had a fine understanding and could place a third of the letters of the alphabet at the end of your name? If everybody said "What a highly-cultured man this is!" do you think heaven's gate would open any the more readily to you? You are on the wrong tack, my friend, if you think so. Capacities and attainments put plumes into the hat but they do not protect the head from error.

Answer me this. Are not the little things in creation full of joy? Do not the dewdrops sparkle on the hedges? When the summer comes walk down your garden and see the thousands of gnats. What are they doing? They are dancing up and down in the sunbeams. The very midges are full of delight. Will you be shamed by a gnat or a midge? No! take you to dancing too; but let it be like that of David when he danced before the ark of God. Rejoice in the Lord always. God gives small creatures great delight. Why should not you be as happy, after your measure, as the angels are? Little stars twinkle for very brightness. If you need humbler examples, look at the little birds and hear how they sing. Great birds seldom have the gift of song. You may listen long before you will hear an ostrich or an emu singing. In our own farmyards neither the turkey nor the peacock charm us with their melody. Little birds awake the sun with their harmonies and make the morning sacred with their psalmody. Tell me, you that feel as if you were less than the least, is there any reason why you should not rejoice in the Lord?

Who had most joy out of the Lord Jesus when he was here? Or rather, who expressed their delight most exultingly? It was not great Peter, nor active James, nor holy John, but it was the children in the temple.

"Children of Jerusalem
Sang the praise of Jesus' name."

They shouted "Hosanna!" "Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings he hath perfected praise," if nothing else. The little ones can praise for they are happy in the sweet simplicity of their faith and in the warmth of their hearts. My dear friend, do the same. Delight thyself also in the Lord. Be glad in the Lord, and express your gladness.

"Ah, sir! I am foolish and ignorant." Yes, but did you notice in the seventy-third Psalm, which we read just now, that I called your attention to the singular language used by Asaph? He says, "So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before thee. Nevertheless I am continually with thee:

thou hast holden me by my hand.” God takes care of the foolish and guards the feeble, wherefore, let them rest in his love, and be glad in his care.

Remember that if by reason of our inferiority you and I have to take a back seat, the back seats are still in the house. Our littleness does not alter God’s promise. It is the same promise to the small as to the great; to the weak as to the strong. Our deficiency does not alter our God. He is as full of grace and truth as ever. He does not increase because we are enlarged, neither is he diminished because we have declined. My God, as a babe in grace, is the same God as those rejoice in who have attained to fullness of stature in Christ Jesus. What a blessed God we have! Only to think of him is hope; to know him is fruition. “Yea, mine own God is he,” said David; and he could never have uttered a grander word. “This God is our God for ever and ever,” is a sentence which might as fairly have been spoken in heaven as upon this lower earth. It has a glory tone about it. Come ye little ones, ye backward ones, ye foolish ones, dwell upon the name of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, with your hearts’ delight. The triune God is yours, your Father, your Redeemer, your Comforter: a triple blessing is thus secured to you; let your triple nature of body, soul, and spirit rejoice therein.

This makes no difference to the covenant of grace. Babes in their long-clothes, if they are heirs, have quite as sure a right to their inheritance as have those who are of full age. One is as legally protected as one-and-twenty. The children cannot yet take full possession by reason of their tender years; but the law defies a rogue to rob even an infant heir of his lawful patrimony. Enjoy you, therefore, O you little ones, the infinite wealth of the covenant, and doubt not your right and title in Christ Jesus!

However little you may be this makes no difference to God’s love to you. Ask yourselves, do you love that full-grown son of yours of twenty-five so much that you have the less love left for your chubby little boy at home of two or three? Bless his little heart! when he climbs your knee to-day and asks whether you have a kiss for him, will you answer “No Johnny, I cannot love you, for you are so little that I give all my love to your older brother, because he knows so much more than you do and can be so useful to me”? Oh no; you love the last one perhaps better than any of them: certainly not less. They say that if there be a child in the family who is a little weak, the mother always loves it most. It is so with our God; he is most tender and most gracious to the weakest and least known. Our Shepherd carrieth the lambs in his bosom and doth gently lead those that are with young: wherefore be not cast down because of your conscious inferiority, but admire the condescending grace of God.

If you feel that you are more brutish than anybody else, yet believe in God up to the hilt; believe in him and trust him with all your heart, and then feel all the more gratitude that he should have loved such a worthless one as you are. Feel all the more content with that free, rich, sovereign grace which has chosen you and ordained you to eternal life. Glorify God-by your very weakness. Glory in your infirmity, because the power of Christ doth rest upon you. Be all the more trustful in God since you have nothing in yourself to rely upon. Say, “The great ones may run alone, but I am a babe, and I must be carried in my Father’s arms; therefore I will have the greater faith to match my greater need.”

Our deep sense of folly and weakness should also keep us humble before the Lord. Where is room for boasting? What have we to glory in? We owe all to mercy, and to mercy shall be all the praise!

Lastly, be more tender to others who like yourself are feeble. It is wonderful how gracious little ones care for other little ones, sympathize with them, pray for them, and comfort them. I believe that the saying is strictly true, that “the poor help the poor”; and I know it is so among the spiritually poor. High and mighty ones cannot help downcast saints: only those who have been afflicted can console the afflicted. In the East, among the Bedouins, in a shepherd’s family, the little children, as soon as they can walk, learn to keep the lambs. You see, the little boy who can only go slowly can lead the little lambs admirably, for he and they go well together. The big father would have taken long strides and so have tired the little lambs; but his little son can only go at a slow pace, and that pace suits the lambs. The weak lambs are pleased with their little shepherd who is a lamb like themselves: he is fond of the lambs, and the lambs feel at home with him. So dear friends, if the Lord permits you to be among the little ones, look after the little ones; and whereas some would have to bend their backs too much to look after the lowly, you are on their level and will naturally care for their state. Thus will you find your sphere of usefulness, and in it you will earn to yourselves a good degree. Though like Agur you feel more brutish than any man, you will so live that nobody would have thought so if you had not told them; and few will believe it when you do tell them. To God alone be glory. Amen.

Portions of Scripture read before sermon— Psalm 73.; Proverbs 30:1-9.
Hymns from “Our Own Hymn Book”— 122 (Song I.), 398, 616.

The Gospel Cordial

A Sermon (No. 3236) published on Thursday, February 9th, 1911
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on Lord's Day Evening, September 20th, 1863.

“Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto those that be of heavy hearts. Let him drink, and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more.”—Proverbs 31:6, 7.

These somewhat singular sentences were spoken by the mother of Lemuel to her son, who was probably Solomon. She had already said to him, “It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine; nor for princes strong drink: lest they drink and forget the law, and pervert the judgment of any of the afflicted.” But such a king as Solomon was must have had an abundant store of wine of all kinds, so his mother urged him to give it to the sick and the sad and the poor who needed it more than he did. The Jews were in the habit of giving a cup of strong drink, usually with some potent drug in it, to stupefy those who were about to be executed. Perhaps that is the meaning of the words, “Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish.” We know too how persons who have been very weak and ill, on the very borders of the grave, have often been medicinally relieved by wine given to them which they could not possibly purchase for themselves. I believe this is the literal meaning of the text, and that if any man should be wicked enough to draw from it the inference that he would be able to forget his misery and poverty by drinking, he would soon find himself woefully mistaken; for if he had one misery before he would have ten miseries afterwards; and if he was previously poor he would be in still greater poverty afterwards. Those who fly to the bottle for consolation might as soon fly to hell to find a heaven; and instead of helping them to forget their poverty, drunkenness would only sink them still more deeply in the mire.

I am going to use my text spiritually for I believe it has a far deeper meaning than that which glistens upon its surface. There are many persons who are doubting and despairing, spiritually “ready to perish,” and there is in the Word of God a rich store of comforting truths which are far more cheering to the spirit than wine can ever be to the body; and we are to give this gospel cordial to those who are heavy of heart, that they may drink and forget their misery and remember their doubts and despair no more.

In attempting to obey the precept of the text, I am going to speak upon three topics; first, that there is a most comforting cordial in the gospel; secondly, that it is our duty and privilege to give this cordial to all who need it; and thirdly, that when it is given to such people it is their duty and privilege to drink it, and forget their spiritual poverty and misery.

I. So first, there is most comforting cordial in the Gospel. Dr. Watts truly sings—

“Salvation! oh, the joyful sound!
‘Tis pleasure to our ears;
A sovereign balm for every wound,
A cordial for our fears.”

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I will take first, the case of a true believer in Jesus who is sorely tried with cares and losses and crosses. I will suppose that you have come in here to-night dreading what may happen to you to-morrow. Perhaps your trouble my brother, is that your business is failing and that want is staring you in the face. Possibly you, my sister, are sorrowing over that dear child who lies in her little coffin in the quiet room upstairs at home. Or it may be that you, my friend, have a sick wife, and day by day you see fresh signs and tokens of the great loss that is surely awaiting you. I cannot mention all the causes of sad heart in the believing members of this great assembly, but my Master has sent me here with his own blessed cordial, which is more than sufficient to comfort every sorrowing saint here.

Remember beloved, that all that happens to you comes in the course of divine providence. Your loving heavenly Father has foreseen, foreknown, and I venture to say, foreordained it all. The medicine you have to drink is very bitter, but the unerring Physician measured all the ingredients drop by drop, and then mixed them in the very way in which they could best work for your highest good. Nothing in this world happens by chance. That great God - who sitteth upon the circle of the heavens, to whom all things that he hath made are but as the small dust of the balance, who maketh the clouds his chariot, and rideth upon the wings of the wind - that same God careth for you with such special care that he has even numbered the very hairs of your head and put your tears in his bottle. You may therefore rest assured that even those experiences which are causing you so much sorrow are all in accordance with his eternal counsel and decree. Doth not this divine cordial make you forget your poverty and remember your misery no more?

Remember too that everything that happens to believers is working for their present and lasting 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." If you could have chosen your own circumstances and condition in life, you could not have made so wise a choice as God has made for you. The gardener knows where his plants will flourish best. Some of them might wish to grow in the sunshine although like the fern family they are better in the shade. Some of them would prefer to be on yonder mossy bank, but the gardener puts them in sandy soil because he knows that it is better suited to the requirements of their nature. You may depend upon it that there never was any earthly father who was so attentive to the needs of his child as your heavenly Father is to yours. When you decide as to the occupation you think is best for your son to follow, you may select the very career that will prove to be his ruin; but when God plans your future he takes more care in arranging for you than you do in arranging for your boy. Seeing as he sees the end from the beginning, which you cannot see either for yourself or for your child, he chooses for you with infinite and unerring wisdom. Do not wish to have it otherwise dear brother or sister in Christ; be not only content with such things as you have, but say with David "The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup: thou maintainest my lot. The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage." So I say, drink this divine cordial and forget your poverty, and remember your misery no more.

Moreover beloved friend, dost thou not know that the Lord Jesus Christ is with thee in all thy poverty and misery? Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego never realized the presence of the Son of God so blessedly until they were cast alive into Nebuchadnezzar's burning fiery furnace; but his presence with them there was so manifest that even the heathen king exclaimed, "I see four men loose walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God." There is many a child who has no special petting and fondling so long as it keeps

well; but as soon as it is ill it seems as though all the mother's love was concentrated upon that particular member of the family; and it is to you who specially need such a cheering message that the Lord says, "As one whom his mother comforteth so will I comfort you; and ye shall be comforted." It was to his ancient people that he gave the gracious promise, and it was concerning them that it was said "In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them; in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old." It is thus that he still tenderly and lovingly deals with his tried and afflicted people, and this thought ought to be like a cordial to make them forget their poverty and misery.

I might keep on all night trying thus to comfort tried saints, but I must content myself by giving them just one more sip of this divine cordial, and that shall be this - remember how soon all these trials will be over. Be of good courage, weary pilgrim; the heavenly mansion where thou art to rest for ever is almost in sight; and thou mayest well sing—

"My Father's house on high,
Home of my soul! how near,
At times, to faith's foreseeing eye,
Thy golden gates appear!"

How fast the years fly by, and our trials and troubles are flying just as fast. Beloved, Paul truly wrote concerning "our light affliction which is but for a moment;" for after all, our afflictions are only like a troubled dream, a little starting in the sleep of life, and then we wake to sleep no more for ever. This world is, to the believer, like a country inn by the wayside, where there are many constantly coming and going, and there are such disturbing noises that no one can rest. Well, never mind, thou art only tarrying there for one short night, and then thou shalt be up and away to thine eternal home, to go no more out for ever. Will not this divine cordial make thee forget thy poverty and remember thy misery no more?

Now I will take the case of a true believer in Jesus who is suffering from soul-desertion. You, my friend, are inclined to say with Heman the Ezrahite, "O LORD God of my salvation, I have cried day and night before thee!.... Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps.... LORD, why castest thou off my soul? why hidest thou thy face from me?" You are even inclined to think that you now can understand that cry of Christ upon the cross, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" The Lord seems to turn a deaf ear to your supplications, prayer itself is a heavy burden to you, you have no comforting visions of the Saviour's face, past seasons of holy enjoyment are only remembered by you with regret that you no longer have such happy experiences; even when you turn to the Word of God itself, your eye seems to fix only upon the threatenings, and never to notice the many "exceeding great and precious promises"; and your soul is "ready to perish" in despair. Well, my poor brother, if there ever was a time when you needed the spiced wine of God's covenant faithfulness, and the luscious, nutritious nectar of Jesus Christ's everlasting love, it is now. I wonder what Arminians do when they are seized with this kind of spiritual ague, and shake in terror from head to foot; I know that when I have these attacks - and I do have them very badly sometimes - I turn to those texts that say most about God's free and sovereign grace, and I try to get the marrow and fatness out of them to feed my starving soul. Those who spiritually "do business in great waters" find that nothing will serve their turn but God's eternal decrees, God's unchanging purposes, God's never-failing faithfulness, God's distinguishing, discriminating grace; at least that is my own experience, and I urge you my despairing brother or sister, to take a deep

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draught of the same divine cordial that you may forget your spiritual poverty, and remember your misery no more. You are not likely to turn the high doctrines of the gospel to evil account, so come and feed upon them till your soul is satiated with these dainties of your Lord's banqueting house. Accept his own gracious invitation, "Eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved."

Among the other comforting things that I should say to those suffering from soul-desertion would be this - Remember brother, if you ever were a child of God you are a child of God now. You pass through many changes, but you have a Saviour who is ever the same; "Jesus Christ the same, yesterday, and today, and forever." You have your ups and downs, you change with every phase of the moon; but with the great "Father of lights" there is "no variableness, neither shadow of turning." We rightly sing—

"Unchangeable his will
 Whatever be my frame;
 His loving heart is still
 Eternally the same:
 My soul through many changes goes,
 His love no variation knows."

He never began a work of grace in anyone and then left it unfinished. He never adopted a child into his family and then cast him out to perish. The Lord Jesus Christ never first married any soul and then divorced her, for he hateth putting away. He will never part with any member of his mystical body; if he could do such an outrageous thing he would himself be incomplete. So, my despairing brother, I say to you that if you have ever had the light and the love of God in your soul, not only are you still a saved man, but the time will yet come when you will know that it is so. Like Jonah you will yet come up out of the depths, and with him you will ascribe all the glory of your salvation unto the Lord.

I want also to try to comfort some true believers in Jesus who are afraid they are not really the Lord's. I am glad that John Bunyan mentioned some of their names in his immortal allegory, for we still have among us swarms of people who answer to his description of Mr. Fearing, Mr. Feeble-mind, Mr. Despondency and his daughter Miss Much-afraid, Mr. Ready-to-halt, a Mr. Little-faith, though we have only here and there a Mr. Great-heart, or a Mr. Stand-fast, or a Mr. Valiant-for-Truth. Well dear friends, if you are here to-night let me remind you that although you are the little ones in God's family, you are not little in God's sight. He loves you just as much as he loves the greatest saint who ever lived. When the Lord gave the commandment to Moses concerning the ransom for every soul numbered among the children of Israel, it was expressly stated "The rich shall not give more, and the poor shall not give less than half a shekel when they give an offering unto the LORD, to make an atonement for your souls." It is the same in the atonement wrought by the Lord Jesus Christ, it cost him just as much and no more, to ransom the least of his people or the greatest, and he loves them equally. He may use some of them as his instruments more than he uses others, but he has the same regard for all of them. If he ever makes any difference in his treatment of them, it is the weak ones who have the preference; he carries the lambs in his bosom, but he allows the strong sheep to follow in his track.

So be of good comfort, you feeble folk who belong to Christ, and remember also that little saints are just as safe as big saints. If we are with Christ in the vessel of his Church we are just as safe as all the rest of those on board; and we may rest assured that we shall never perish, for if we

could Christ would perish too, and that can never be. The greatest saint who ever served his Lord with apostolic zeal or even Christlike self-sacrifice, has to rely for his salvation upon the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ, and the feeblest saint has to do just the same, and the one is no more saved and safe than is the other. So Mr. Fearing and Miss Much-afraid, drink that diving cordial and be no longer either doubtful or sad.

I think my text has also a special message to the sinner who is heavy of heart and desponding in spirit. To such an one I would present the gospel cordial thus. My friend, remember that "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." That word "sinners" includes you; and if you ask me "What must I do to be saved?" I answer as Paul did when that question was put to him, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." So, as you are commanded to believe on Christ, to rely upon him, to trust to him to save you, it cannot be presumptuous on your part to do so. Jesus Christ is "mighty to save;" he is able to save unto the uttermost all that come unto God by him. If there is a sinner here who is so bad that I could not describe his case to you, he is not too bad for Christ to save; then why dost thou despair, O thou who art "ready to perish," seeing that God has given up his well-beloved Son to die for just such sinners as thou art? Thy sins are great, I know, and they cry aloud for punishment; but the moment that thou dost repent of them, and trust in the blood of Jesus to cleanse thee from them, thou shalt be made perfectly whole. Thy sins shall be so completely put away that God says that if they are searched for, they shall not be found; yea, they shall not be. They shall be as absolutely annihilated as if thou hath never committed them. What more comforting cordial than that canst thou possibly have set before thee? Then drink of it, and forget thy poverty, and remember thy misery no more.

II. I can only speak very briefly upon the second point, which is that it is our duty and privilege to give this cordial to all who need it.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, I want you all to obey the injunction of the text by giving this gospel cordial to those who are heavy of heart and "ready to perish." Some of you can do this by talking to them of your own experience. When you meet with doubting and desponding souls, tell them how the Lord delivered you from old Giant Despair's grim dungeon in Doubting Castle; remind them of that key called Promise which can unlock the doors of the prison where they lie bound in fetters of iron. We are told that Origen, so long as his strength permitted, used to go to the prisons where the Christians were confined during the Decian persecution, and afterwards went with them to the stake, comforting them from the Scriptures which he had found to be such a support to his own soul; imitate him so far as you can even though Christians are not now persecuted unto death.

Many of you can give away this gospel cordial by visiting the sick and the poor. In so vast a church as this, it is impossible for the pastor or elders to visit all the members, much less can they visit all who compose our great congregation; so I would urge you to do the visiting yourselves as far as you are able. Especially would I invite you who are the most deeply experienced in the things of God to find out the sin and the sorrowing in your own neighbourhoods, and to comfort them with the comfort wherewith you yourselves have been comforted of God.

Then, many more of you than are at present doing it, can give away this gospel cordial by preaching wherever and whenever you have the opportunity. In such a city as London, where every street corner can furnish a pulpit, and every street can supply a congregation, there is no excuse for the man with only one talent if he does not use it for Christ. The good news you have to tell, my

brother, is so sweet that it should be told over and over and over again till every gale shall spread the tidings to—

“All people that on earth do dwell.”

I pray the Lord also to raise up many brothers and sisters from our midst to go to “the regions beyond” as missionaries of the cross, and to move you who cannot yourselves preach, to give of your substance either for the training of our brethren in the College or for the support of those who are called of God to preach and teach the Word in distant lands where Jesus is not known. “In that way, you too will be helping to give the gospel cordial to those who are heavy of heart and ready to perish.”

III. Now lastly and but briefly, when this Gospel cordial is given to such people it is their duty and privilege to drink it and forget their spiritual poverty, and remember their misery no more.

We can bring a horse to the water but we cannot make him drink it; and we can carry this gospel cordial to the sinner, but only the Holy Spirit can sweetly constrain him to take a full, deep draught of it. I have been trying to give this cordial again to-night to those who need it, as indeed I have been doing ever since the Lord first opened my mouth to speak for him; but what about your part of the business, my dear hearers? It is my duty and privilege to preach the gospel, but it is just as much your duty and privilege to believe it when it is preached. “Faith cometh by hearing;” but, alas! there are many who hear the Word who are like those of whom the apostle wrote, that “the Word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.” To have the healing medicine in thy hand and yet not to drink it is to commit spiritual suicide; I beseech thee, sinner, not to add that crowning crime to all thine other iniquities; but I pray thee this very hour to accept the proffered boon. The water of life is set before thee; drink and live. The bread of life is placed within thy reach, why should thine immortal soul be starved and perish?

Dost thou fear that thou art too black a sinner to be saved? Remember Agur’s words concerning one of the “four things which are little upon the earth,” but which “are exceeding wise.” He said, “The spider taketh hold with her hands, and is in kings’ palaces.” It may be, that Agur had seen a big black spider in Solomon’s palace, and that as he mused upon it, he said to himself, “That ugly creature is very wise, for there was a great storm coming on, and her usual home would have been unsafe; so looking about for a place of shelter she espied an open window in the king’s palace, and in she went. She had no right there, no one had invited her, but there she was.” Now, poor sinner, that spider was not as full of venom as thou art full of sin; there is a greater storm coming on than that spider dreaded, and the door of God’s mercy is as surely open as was that window in Solomon’s palace; and thou art invited to enter as that spider never was invited. O sinner, be at least as wise as a spider, and come in to God’s royal palace of salvation; for once thou art inside, thou shalt never be cast out!

Art thou still afraid to come to Jesus? Then let me remind thee of that poor woman who came and touched the hem of his garment, and was instantly cured of her long-standing malady. You remember that she was ceremonially unclean, she had no business to be in a crowd; yet she was so eager to be healed that she worked her way through the throng until she was near enough to Jesus to touch the border of his seamless robe, for she said, “If I may touch but his clothes, I shall be whole.” She did so, and Christ at once honored her faith and gave her the gracious assurance that she might “go in peace,” and keep the cure that she had, as it were, obtained by stealth. O sinner, wilt thou not be as wise as that poor woman was? Thou needest not attempt to steal the blessing

for thou art invited to come and take it openly. Jesus still says, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Rest is what you need - rest of mind, rest of heart, rest of conscience; that rest can only come to you by faith, "for we which have believed do enter into rest." O ye poverty-stricken and miserable sinners, believe in Jesus; take his yoke upon you and learn of him, for so shall you find rest unto your souls; and then shall you also realize that "there remaineth" another rest, a fuller and yet more blessed one, even that eternal "keeping of Sabbath" which is the blissful portion of all "the people of God." There is the divine cordial which we are commanded to place within your reach; drink it and forget your poverty and remember your misery no more. God bless you, for Jesus' sake! Amen.

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