

ALL JOY IN ALL TRIALS

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“My Brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith works patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.”
James 1:2-4.

JAMES calls the converted among the 12 tribes, his Brethren. Christianity has a great uniting power—it both discovers and creates relationships among the sons of men. It reminds us of the ties of Nature and binds us with the bonds of Grace. Everyone that is born of the Spirit of God is Brother to every other that is born of the same Spirit. Well may we be called Brethren, for we are redeemed by one blood! We are partakers of the same life; we feed upon the same heavenly food; we are united to the same living Head—we seek the same ends; we love the same Father—we are heirs of the same promises and we shall dwell forever together in the same Heaven! Therefore, let brotherly love continue; let us love one another fervently with a pure heart and manifest that love, not in words only, but in deed and in truth.

Whatever brotherhood may be a sham, let the Brotherhood of Believers be the most real thing beneath the stars. Beginning with this word, “Brethren,” James shows a true brotherly sympathy with Believers in their trials—and this is a main part of Christian fellowship. “Bear you one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.” If we are not tempted, ourselves, at this moment, others are—let us remember them in our prayers, for in due time our turn will come—and we shall be put into the crucible. As we would desire to receive sympathy and help in our hour of need, let us render it freely to those who are now enduring trial. Let us remember those that are in bonds, as bound with them, and those that suffer affliction as being, ourselves, in the body.

Remembering the trials of his Brethren, James tries to cheer them and, therefore, he says, “My Brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various temptations.” It is a part of our high calling to rise ourselves into confidence. And it is also our duty to see that none of our Brethren despond, much less despair. The whole tendency of our holy faith is to elevate and to encourage. Grace breeds no sorrow except the healthy sorrow which comes with saving repentance and leads to the joy of pardon—it comes not to make men miserable, but to wipe all tears from their eyes! Our dream is not of devils descending a dreary staircase to Hell, but of angels ascending and descending upon a ladder, the top of which leads to the shining Throne of God!

The message of the Gospel is one of joy and gladness and were it universally understood and received, this world would be no longer a wilderness, but it would rejoice and blossom as the rose! Let Grace reign in all

hearts and this earth will become a temple filled with perpetual song—even the trials of life will become causes of the highest joy—so beautifully described by James as, “all joy,” as if every possible delight were crowded into it. Blessed be God, it is our work not to upbraid, but to cheer all the Brotherhood—we walk in a light which glorifies everything upon which it falls and turns losses into gains! We are able, in sober earnest, to speak with the afflicted and bid them be patient under the chastening hand of God. Yes, to count it *all joy* when they fall into various temptations because those trials will work out for them such signal, such lasting good, they may be well content to sow in tears since they are sure to reap in joy!

Without further preface we will come, at once, to the text and observe that in speaking about affliction—for that is the subject of the text—the Apostle notes, first, the essential point which is assailed by temptation, namely, your faith. Your faith is the target that all the arrows are shot at. The furnace is kindled for the trial of your faith. Notice, secondly, the invaluable blessing which is thus gained, namely, the *proving* of your faith, discovering whether it is the right faith or not. This proof of our faith is a blessing of which I cannot speak too highly. Then, thirdly, we may not overlook the priceless virtue which is produced by this process of testing, namely, patience—for the proving of your faith produces patience—and this is the soul’s surest enrichment.

Lastly, in connection with that patience, we shall note the spiritual completeness which is thus promoted—“That you may be perfect and entire, lacking nothing.” Perhaps you have noticed the little variations I have made in the text, but I am now following the Revised Version which gives an admirable rendering. I will read it. “Count it all joy, my Brethren, when you fall into manifold temptations; knowing that the proof of your faith works patience. And let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and entire, lacking in nothing.”

I. First, let us think a little UPON THE ESSENTIAL POINT WHICH IS ASSAILED by temptation or trial. It is your faith which is tried. It is supposed that you have faith. You are not the people of God, you are not truly Brethren unless you are Believers. It is this faith of yours which is peculiarly obnoxious to Satan and to the world which lies in the Wicked One. If you had no faith, they would not be enemies of yours. But faith is the mark of the chosen of God and, therefore, His foes become the foes of all the faithful, spitting their venom specially upon their faith. God, Himself, has put enmity between the serpent and the woman—between the serpent’s seed and the woman’s Seed—and that enmity must show itself.

The serpent bites at the heel of the true seed and, therefore, mocking, persecutions, temptations and trials are sure to beset the pathway to faith. The hand of faith is against all evil and all evil is against faith! Faith is that blessed Grace which is most pleasing to God and, therefore, it is the most displeasing to the devil. By faith God is greatly glorified and, therefore, by faith Satan is greatly annoyed. He rages at faith because he sees, there, his own defeat and the victory of Grace. Because the trial of your faith brings honor to the Lord, therefore the Lord, Himself, is sure to try it that out of its trial praise may come to His Grace by which faith is sustained! Our chief end is to glorify God—and if our trials enable us

more fully to answer the end of our being—it is well that they should happen to us.

So early in our discourse we see reason to count it all joy when we fall into manifold temptations. It is by our faith that we are saved, justified and brought near to God and, therefore, it is no marvel that it is attacked! It is by believing in Christ that we are delivered from the reigning power of sin and receive power to become the sons of God. Faith is as vital to salvation as the heart is vital to the body—therefore the javelins of the enemy are mainly aimed at this essential Grace. Faith is the standard bearer and the objective of the enemy is to strike him down that the battle may be gained. If the foundations are removed, what can the righteous do? If the cable can be snapped, where will the vessel drift?

All the powers of darkness which are opposed to right and truth are sure to fight against our faith and manifold temptations will march in their legions against our confidence in God. It is by our faith that we live—we began to live by it and continue to live by it, for—“the just shall live by faith.” Once let faith go and our life is gone! Therefore it is that the powers which war against us make their main assault upon this royal castle, this key of the whole position. Faith is your jewel, your joy, your glory! And the thieves who haunt the pilgrim way are all in league to tear it from you. Hold fast, therefore, to this, your choice treasure!

It is by faith, too, that Christians perform exploits. If men of old worked daring and heroic deeds, it was by faith. Faith is the fighting principle and the conquering principle—therefore it is Satan’s policy to slay it even as Pharaoh sought to kill the male children when Israel dwelt in Egypt. Rob a Christian of his faith and he will be like Samson when his locks were cut away—the Philistines will be upon him and the Lord will have departed from him. Marvel not if the full force of the current shall beat upon your faith, for it is the foundation of your spiritual house! Oh that your faith may abide steadfast and unmovable in all present trials, so that it may be found true in the hour of death and in the day of judgment! Woe unto that man whose faith fails him in this land of peace, for what will he do in the swelling of Jordan?

Now, think of how faith is tried. According to the text we are said to fall into “manifold temptations” or into “various temptations”—that is to say, we may expect very many and very different troubles. In any case, these trials will be most real. The 12 tribes to whom this Epistle was written were an especially tried people, for in the first place they were, as Jews, greatly persecuted by all other nations. And when they became Christians, they were cruelly persecuted by their own people. A Gentile convert was somewhat less in peril than a Jewish Christian, for the latter was crushed between the upper and nether millstones of Paganism *and* Judaism.

The Israelite Christian was usually so persecuted by his own kin that he had to flee from them. And where could he go, for all other people abhorred the Jews? We are not in such a plight, but God’s people, even to this day, will find that trial is no sham word. The rod in God’s house is no toy to play with! The furnace, believe me, is no mere place of extra warmth to which you may soon accustom yourself—it is often heated seven times

hotter, like the furnace of Nebuchadnezzar—and God’s children are made to know that the fire burns and devours. Our temptations are no inventions of nervousness nor hobgoblins of dreamy fear.

You have heard of the patience of Job—his was real patience, for his afflictions were real. Could each tried Believer among us tell his own story, I do not doubt we would convince all who heard us that the troubles and temptations which we have endured are no fictions of romance, but must be ranked among the stern realities of actual life. Yes, and note, too, that the trials of Christians are such as would, in themselves, lead us into sin, for I take it that our translators would not have placed the word, “temptation,” in the text—and the Revisionists would not have retained it—if they had not felt that there was a coloring of *temptation* in its meaning and that, “trial,” was hardly the word.

The natural tendency of trouble is not to sanctify, but to induce *sin*. A man is very apt to become an unbeliever under affliction—that is a sin. He is apt to murmur against God under it—that is a sin. He is apt to put forth his hand to some evil way of escaping from his difficulty—and that would be sin. Hence we are taught to pray, “Lead us not into temptation,” because trial has, in itself, a measure of temptation—and if it were not neutralized by abundant Grace it would lead us towards sin. I suppose that every test must have, in it, a measure of temptation. The Lord cannot be tempted of evil, neither tempts He any man, but this is to be understood of His end and design. He entices no man to *do* evil, but yet He tries the sincerity and faithfulness of men by placing them where sin comes in their way—and does its best or its worst to ensnare them—His design being that the uprightness of His servants may thus be proved, both to themselves and others.

We are not taken out of this world of temptation, but we are kept in it for our good. Because our nature is depraved, it makes occasions for sin, both out of our joys and our trials. But by Grace we overcome the tendency of nature and so derive benefit from tribulation. Do I not speak to many here, who, at times, feel strong impulses towards evil, especially in the darksome hour when the spirit of evil walks abroad? Have you not been made to tremble for yourselves in season of fierce trial, for your feet were almost gone, your steps had well-near slipped? Is there any virtue that has not been weather-beaten? Is there any love that has not, at times, been so tried that it threatened to curdle into hate? Is there any good thing this side of Heaven which has marched all the way in silver slippers? Did ever a flower of Grace blossom in this wretched clime without being tried with frost or blight?

Our way is up the river—we have to stem the current and struggle against a flood which would readily bear us to destruction! Thus, not only trials, but black temptations assail the Christian’s faith. As to what shape they take, we may say this much—the trial or temptation of each man is distinct from that of every other. When God tested Abraham, he was bid to take his son, his only son, and offer him upon a mountain for a sacrifice. Nobody here was ever tried in that way! Nobody ever will be. We may have the trial of losing our child, but certainly not the trial of having a com-

mand to offer him as a sacrifice. That was a trial peculiar to Abraham—necessary and useful to him—though never proposed to us.

In the case of the young man in the Gospels, our Lord Jesus tried him with, “If you would be perfect, go and sell all that you have, and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in Heaven.” Some have dreamed that it must, therefore, be the duty of everybody to part with their possessions—but this is silly! It would not be the duty of any man to offer up his only son and it is not the duty of every man to part with all his goods. These were tests to particular persons and others equally special and searching have been applied in other cases. We are not to try ourselves, nor to desire other men’s trials! It will be well if we endure those which the Lord appoints for us, for they will be wisely chosen. That which would most severely test me would, perhaps, be no trial to you. And that which tries you, might be no temptation to me.

This is one reason why we often judge one another so severely, because feeling ourselves to be strong in that particular point, we argue that the fallen one must have been strong in that point, too, and, therefore, must have willfully and earnestly have determined to do wrong. This may be a cruel supposition. We hastily conclude that the temptation must have been as feeble in his case as it would have been in our own, which is a great mistake, for a temptation which to you or to me would be no temptation at all, may be to another individual, of a peculiar constitution and under singular circumstances, a most fierce and terrible blast from the Adversary, before which he falls mournfully, but not with malice aforethought. Various temptations, says the Apostle, and he knew what he said.

And, dear Friends, sometimes these various temptations derive great force from their seemingly surrounding us and cutting off escape. James says—“You fall into various temptations”—like men who fall into a pit and do not know how to get out. Or like soldiers who fall into an ambush; or travelers in the good old times when two or three footpaths surrounded them and made them feel that they had fallen into bad hands. The tempted see not which way to turn! They appear to be hemmed in. They are as a bird that is taken in the fowler’s snare. This it is that makes calamity of our manifold temptations—that they hedge up our way—and unless faith finds the clue, we wander in a thorny maze.

At times temptation comes suddenly upon us and so we fall into it. When we were at rest and were quiet, suddenly the evil came, like a lion leaping from the thicket. When Job’s children were eating and drinking in their elder brother’s house, suddenly a wind came from the wilderness and the Patriarch was bereaved. The cattle were plowing, the sheep were grazing, the camels were at their service—and in a moment—by fire from Heaven and by robber bands, the whole of these possessions vanished! One messenger had not told his story before another followed at his heels! Job had no breathing time—the blows fell thick and fast!

The trial of our faith is most severe when various temptations happen to us when we look not for them. Is it not strange, then, in the light of these things, that James should say, “Count it all joy when you fall into various temptations”? Those were the days of tumults, imprisonment,

crucifixion, sword and fire. Then the amphitheatre devoured Christians by the thousands! The general cry was, "The Christians to the lions!" Do you wonder, if sometimes the bravest were made to say, "Is our faith really true? This faith which is abhorred of all mankind, can it be Divine? Has it come from God? Why, then, does He not interpose and deliver His people? Shall we apostatize? Shall we deny Christ and live, or shall we go on with our confession through innumerable torments—even to a bloody death? Will fidelity answer, after all? Is there a crown of glory? Is there an eternity of bliss? Is there, in very deed, a resurrection of the dead?"

These questions came into men's minds, then, and were fairly faced—the faith of martyrs was not taken up at second hand, or borrowed from their parents—they believed for themselves in downright earnest! Men and women, in those days, believed in such a way that they never flinched nor started aside from fear of death! Indeed, they pressed forward to confess their faith in Jesus in such crowds that, at last, the heathen cried, "There must be something in it! It must be a religion of God, or how could these men and women and children so gladly bear their troubles?" This was the faith of God's elect, the work of the Holy Spirit!

You see, then, the main point of attack is our faith—and happy is the man whose shield can catch and quench all the fiery darts of the enemy!

II. That we may make the text more clear, we shall next, notice, THE INVALUABLE BLESSING WHICH IS GAINED BY THE TRIAL OF OUR FAITH. The blessing gained is this, that our faith is tried and proved. Two Sabbaths ago I addressed you upon the man whose bad foundations led to the overthrow of his house [Sermon #1702—*On Laying Foundations*] and I know that many said after the sermon—"God grant that we may not be like he was—may we have a firm foundation for our soul to rest on." Then you went home and you sat down and said, "Have I this sure foundation?" You began to question, argue, reason and so on, and your design was a good one.

But I do not reckon that much came of it. Our own looking within seldom yields solid comfort. Actual trial is far more satisfactory, but you must *not try yourself*. The effectual proof is by trials of God's sending. The way of trying whether you are a good soldier is to go down to the battle! The way to try whether a ship is well built is not merely to order the surveyor to examine her, but to send her to sea! A storm will be the best test of her staunchness. They have built a new lighthouse upon the Edystone—how do we know it will stand? We judge by certain laws and principles and feel tolerably safe about the structure, but, after all, we shall know best if, in later years, when a thousand tempests have beaten upon the lighthouse in vain!

We need trials as a test as much as we need Divine Truth as our food. Admire the ancient types placed in the Ark of the Covenant of old—two things were laid close together—the pot of manna and the rod. See how heavenly food and heavenly rule go together! See how our sustenance and our chastening are equally provided for! A Christian cannot live without the manna nor without the rod! The two must go together. I mean this, that it is as great a mercy to have your salvation proven to you under trial as it is to have it sustained in you by the consolations of the Spirit of God.

Sanctified tribulations work the proof of our faith and this is more precious than that of gold which perishes, though it is tried by fire.

Now, when we are able to bear it without starting aside, the trial proves our sincerity. Coming out of a trouble, the Christian says to himself, "Yes, I held fast to my integrity, by God's Grace, and did not let it go. Blessed be God, I was not afraid of threats! I was not crushed by losses! I was kept true to God under pressure. Now, I am sure that my religion is not a mere profession, but a real consecration to God. It has endured the fire, being kept by the power of God." Next, it proves the truthfulness of our doctrinal belief. Oh, yes, you may say, "I have heard Mr. Spurgeon expound the doctrines and I have believed them." This is poor work! But if you have been sick and found a comfort in those doctrines, then you are assured of their truth! If you have been on the borders of the grave and the Gospel has given you joy and gladness, then you *know* it is true.

Experimental knowledge is the best and surest. If you have seen others pass through death, itself, triumphantly, you have said, "This is proof to me. My faith is no guess work—I have seen for myself." Is not this assurance cheaply purchased at any price? May we not count it all joy when the Lord puts us in the way of getting it? It seems to me that doubt is worse than trial! I had sooner suffer *any* affliction than be left to question the Gospel or my own interest in it. Certainly it is a jewel worth purchasing even with our heart's blood! Next, your own faith in God is proved when you can cling to Him under temptation. Not only your sincerity, but the Divinity of your faith is proved, for a faith that is never tried, how can you depend upon it?

But, if in the darkest hour, you have still said, "I cast my burden upon the Lord, and He will sustain me," and you find He *does* sustain you, then is your faith that of God's elect! If in temptation you cry to God in prayer that you may keep your garment unspotted and He helps you to do so, then, also, are you sure that yours is the faith which the Spirit begets in the soul! After a great fight of affliction, when I come forth a conqueror, I know that I believe in God, and I know that this faith makes me a partaker of Covenant blessings! And from this I may fairly argue that my faith is of the right kind. I find it especially sweet to learn the great strength of the Lord in my own weakness. We find out, under trial, where we are most weak. And just then, in answer to prayer, strength is given answerable to the need.

The Lord suits the help to the hindrance and puts the plaster on the wound. In the very hour when it is needed, the needed Grace is given! Does this not tend to breed assurance of faith? It is a splendid thing to be able to prove, even to Satan, the purity of your motives. That was the great gain of Job. There was no question about his outward conduct, but the question was about his motive. "Ah," says the devil, "he serves God for what he gets out of Him. Have You not set a hedge about him and all that he has? His is cupboard love—he cares nothing for God, Himself—he only cares for the reward of his virtue." Well, Job is tried, and everything is taken away—and when he cries—"Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him!" When he blesses the *taking* as well as the *giving* God, then the devil, himself, could not have the prudence to accuse him again! As to Job's

own conscience, it would be quite settled and confirmed as to his pure love to God.

My Brothers and Sisters, I reckon that the endurance of every imaginable suffering and trial would be a small price to pay for a settled assurance which would, forever, prevent the possibility of doubt! Never mind the waves if they wash you upon this Rock! Therefore, when you are tempted, "Count it all joy" that you are tried, because you will thus receive a proof of your love, a proof of your faith, a proof of your being the true-born children of God! James says, "Count it." A man requires to be trained to be a good accountant. It is an art which needs to be learned. What muddles some of us would make if we had to settle accounts and manage disbursements and receipts without the aid of a clerk! How we should get entangled with balances and deficits! We could much easier spend money than count it. But when a man once knows the science of bookkeeping and gets into the way of it, he readily arrives at the true position of affairs. He has learned to count and no error escapes his eyes.

James gives us a ready reckoner and teaches us, in our troubles, how to count. He sets before us a different kind of measure from that which carnal reason would use—the shekel of the sanctuary was very different from the shekel in common commerce—and so is the counting of faith far other than that of human judgment! He bids us take our pen and sit down quickly and write at his correct dictation. You are going to write down, "Manifold temptations." That would be so much on the wrong side, but instead, he bids you set down the proving of your faith—and this one asset transforms the transaction into a substantial gain!

Trials are like a fire—they burn up nothing in us but the dross—and they make the gold all the purer. Put down the testing process as a clear gain and, instead of being sorry about it, count it all joy when you fall into various temptations, for this bestows upon you a proof of your faith! So far there is sufficient ground for counting all trials joy. Now, let us go a little further.

III. Let us think of THE PRICELESS VIRTUE WHICH IS PRODUCED BY TRIAL, namely, patience—for the proof of your faith "works patience." Patience! We all have a large stock of it—until we need it—and then we have none! The man who truly possesses patience is the man that has been tried. What kind of patience does he get by the Grace of God? First, he obtains a patience that accepts the trials as from God without a murmur. Calm resignation does not come all at once—often long years of physical pain, or mental depression, or disappointment in business, or multiplied bereavements are needed to bring the soul into full submission to the will of the Lord.

After much crying the child is weaned. After much chastening, the son is made obedient to his Father's will. By degrees we learn to end our quarrel with God and to desire that there may not be two wills between God and ourselves, but that God's will may be our will. Oh, Brothers and Sisters, if your troubles work you to that, you are a gainer, I am sure, and you may count them all joy!

The next kind of patience is when experience enables a man to bear ill treatment, slander and injury without resentment. He feels it keenly, but

he bears it meekly. Like his Master, he opens not his mouth to reply and refuses to return railing for railing. Contrariwise, he gives blessing in return for cursing, like the sandalwood tree which perfumes the axe which cuts it. Blessed is that holy charity which hopes all things, endures all things and is not easily provoked. Ah, Friend, if the Grace of God, by trial, shall work in you the quiet patience which never grows angry and never ceases to love, you may have lost a trifle of comfort, but you have gained a solid weight of character!

The patience which God works in us by tribulation also takes another form, namely, that of acting without undue haste. Before wisdom has balanced our zeal, we are eager to serve God all in a hurry, with a rush and a spurt, as if everything must be done within the hour or nothing would ever be accomplished. We set about holy service with somewhat more of preparedness of heart after we have been drilled in the school of trial. We go steadily and resolutely about work for Jesus, knowing what poor creatures we are and what a glorious Master we serve! The Lord our God is in no hurry because He is strong and wise. In proportion as we grow like the Lord Jesus, we shall cast aside disturbance of mind and fury of spirit.

His was a grand lifework, but He never seemed to be confused, excited, worried, or hurried, as certain of His people are. He did not strive nor cry, nor cause His voice to be heard in the streets. He knew His hour was not yet come and there were so many days in which He could work and, therefore, He went steadily on till He had finished the work which His Father had given Him to do. That kind of patience is a jewel more to be desired than the gem which glitters on the imperial brow! Sometimes we blunder into a deal of mischief, making more haste than speed—and we are sure to do so when we forget to pray and fail to commit our matters into the Divine hands. We may run with such vehemence that we may stumble, or lose our breath—there may be in our random efforts as much undoing as doing, for need of possessing our souls in patience.

That is a grand kind of patience, too, when we can wait without unbelief. Two little words are good for every Christian to learn and to practice—“pray,” and, “stay.” Waiting on the Lord implies both praying and staying. What if the world is not converted this year! What if the Lord Jesus does not come tomorrow! What if our tribulations are lengthened out! What if the conflict is continued! He that has been tried and, by Grace, has obtained the true profit of his trials, both quietly waits and joyfully hopes for the salvation of God. Patience, Brothers and Sisters! Is this high virtue scarce with you? The Holy Spirit shall bestow it upon you through *suffering*.

This patience also takes the shape of believing without wavering, in the very teeth of strange Providences and singular statements, and perhaps inward misgivings. The established Christian says, “I believe my God and, therefore, if the vision tarries I will wait for it. My time is not yet come. I am to have my worst things first and my best things afterwards and so I sit down at Jesus’ feet and wait for His leisure.” Brothers and Sisters, if, in a word, we learn endurance, we have taken a high degree! You look at the weather-beaten sailor, the man who is at home on the sea—he has a bronzed face and mahogany-colored flesh. He looks as tough as heart of

oak and as hardy as if he were made of iron. How different from us poor landmen!

How did the man become so accustomed to hardship, so able to breast the storm, so that he does not care whether the wind blows south-west or north-west? He can go out to sea in any kind of weather. He has his sea legs on—how did he come to this strength? By doing business in great waters! He could not have become a hardy seaman by tarrying on shore. Now, trial works in the saints that spiritual hardihood which cannot be learned in ease! You may go to school forever, but you cannot learn endurance there! You may color your cheeks with paint, but you cannot give them that ingrained brown which comes of stormy seas and howling winds. Strong faith and brave patience come of *trouble* and a few men in the Church who have thus been prepared are worth anything in times of tempest.

To reach that condition of firm endurance and sacred hardihood is worth all the expense of all the heaped-up troubles that ever come upon us from above or from beneath! When trial works patience, we are incalculably enriched. The Lord give us more of this choice Grace! As Peter's fish had the money in its mouth, so have sanctified trials spiritual riches for those who endure them graciously.

IV. Lastly, all this works something better, still, and this is our fourth head—THE SPIRITUAL COMPLETENESS PROMOTED. "That you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing." Brethren, the most valuable thing a man can get in this world is that which has most to do with his truest self. A man gets a good house. Well, that is something. But suppose he is in bad health—what is the good of his fine mansion? A man is well clothed and well fed. That is something, but suppose he shivers with fever and has no appetite through indigestion? That spoils it all. If a man is in robust health, this is a far more valuable gift.

Health is far more to be prized than wealth, or honor, or learning—we all agree to that. But suppose that a man's innermost self is diseased while his body is healthy, so that he is disgraced by vice or fevered with passion? He is in a poor plight, notwithstanding that he has such a robust frame, is he not? The very best thing is that which will make the man, himself, a *better man*! Make him right, true, pure and holy! When the man, himself, is better, he has made an unquestionable gain. So, if our afflictions tend, by trying our faith, to breed patience and that patience tends to make us into perfect men in Christ Jesus, then we may be glad of trials! Afflictions, by God's Grace, make us all-around men, developing every spiritual faculty and, therefore, they are our friends, our helpers—and should be welcomed with "all joy." Afflictions find out our weak points and this makes us attend to them. Being tried, we discover our failures and then, going to God about those failures, we are helped to be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

Moreover, our trials, when blessed of God to make us patient, ripen us. I do not know how to explain what I mean by "ripening," but there is a sort of mellowness about Believers who have endured a great deal of affliction that you never see in other people. It cannot be mistaken or imitated. A certain measure of sunlight is needed to bring out the real flavor of

fruits—and when a fruit has felt its measure of burning sun, it develops a lusciousness which we all delight in. So is it in men and women—a certain amount of trouble appears to be necessary to create a certain sugar of graciousness in them, so that they may contain the rich, ripe juice of a gracious character. You must have known such men and such women, and have said to yourselves, “I wish I could be like they are—so calm, so quiet, so self-contained, so happy—and when not happy, yet so content not to be happy, so mature in judgment, so spiritual in conversation, so truly ripe.” This only comes to those in whom the proof of their faith works experience and then experience brings forth the fruits of the Spirit.

Dear Brothers and Sisters, there is a certain all-roundness of spiritual manhood which never comes to us except by manifold temptations. Let me attempt to show you what I mean. Sanctified trials produce a chastened spirit. Some of us, by nature, are rough and untender. But after a while friends notice that the roughness is departing—and they are quite glad to be more gently handled. Ah, that sick chamber did the polishing! Under God’s Grace, that depression of spirit, that loss, that cross, that bereavement—these softened the natural ruggedness and made the man meek and lowly like his Lord. Sanctified trouble has a great tendency to breed sympathy and sympathy is, to the Church, as oil to machinery.

A man that has never suffered feels very awkward when he tries to sympathize with a tried child of God. He kindly does his best, but he does not know how to go to work at it. But those repeated blows from the rod make us feel for others who are smarting and, by degrees, we are recognized as being the Lord’s anointed comforters, made meet by temptation to succor those who are tempted. Have you never noticed how tried men, too, when their trouble is thoroughly sanctified, become cautious and humble? They cannot speak quite so fast as they used to—they do not talk of being absolutely perfect, though they are the very men who are Scripturally perfect. They say little about their doings, but much about the tender mercy of the Lord. They recollect the whipping they had behind the door from their Father’s hands and they speak gently to other erring ones. Affliction is the stone which our Lord Jesus throws at the brow of our giant pride—and patience is the sword which cuts off its head!

Those, too, are the kind of people who are most grateful. I have known what it is to praise God for the power to move one leg in bed. It may not seem much to you, but it was a great blessing to me. They that are heavily afflicted come to bless God for *everything*. I am sure that woman who took a piece of bread and a cup of water for her breakfast, and said, “What? All this, and Christ, too!” must have been a tried woman, or she would not have exhibited so much gratitude. And that old Puritan minister was surely a tried man, for when His family had only a herring and a few potatoes for dinner, He said, “Lord, we bless You that You have ransacked sea and land to find food for us this day.” If he had not been a tried man, he might have turned up his nose at the meal, as many do at much more sumptuous fare. Troubled men get to be *grateful* men, and that is no small thing.

As a rule, where God’s Grace works, these come to be hopeful men. Where others think the storm will destroy the vessel, they can remember

storms equally fierce which did not destroy it, and so they are so calm that their courage keeps others from despair. These men, too, become unworldly men. They have had too much trouble to think that they can ever build their nest in this black forest. There are too many thorns in their nest for them to reckon that this can be their home. These birds of paradise take to their wings and are ready to fly away to the land of unfading flowers!

And these much-tempted ones are frequently the most spiritual men and, out of this spirituality comes usefulness. Mr. Great-Heart, who led the band of pilgrims up to the Celestial City, was a man of many trials, or he would not have been fit to lead so many to their heavenly rest. And you, dear Brother, if ever you are to be a leader and a helper, as you would wish to be, in the Church of God, it must be by such means as this that you must be prepared for it. Do you not wish to have every virtue developed? Do you not wish to become a perfect man in Christ Jesus?

If so, welcome with all joy various temptations and afflictions! Fly to God with them! Bless Him for having sent them! Ask Him to help you to bear them with patience and then let that patience have its perfect work—and so, by the Spirit of God, you shall become “perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.” May the Comforter bless this word to your hearts, for Jesus Christ’s sake. Amen.

Adapted from *The C. H. Spurgeon Collection*, Ages Software, 1.800.297.4307

LOVING ADVICE FOR ANXIOUS SEEKERS NO. 735

**DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, FEBRUARY 17, 1867,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.**

*“If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men liberally, and upbraids not; and it shall be given him.”
James 1:5.*

IF YOU are acquainted with the context, you will at once perceive that this verse has a special reference to persons in trouble. Much-tempted and severely-tried saints are frequently at their wits end, and though they may be persuaded that in the end, good will come out of all their afflictions, yet for the present they may be so distracted as not to know what to do. How fitly spoken and how seasonable is this word of the Apostle, “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God.” And such wisdom shall the Lord afford His afflicted sons that the trying of their faith shall produce patience, and they themselves shall count it all joy that they have fallen in many trials.

However, the promise is not to be limited to any one particular application, for the word, “If any of you,” is so wide, so extensive that whatever may be our necessity, whatever the dilemma which perplexes us, this text consoles us with the counsel, “If any man lacks wisdom, let him ask of God.” This text might be peculiarly comforting to some of you who are working for God. You cannot work long for your heavenly Lord without perceiving that you need a greater wisdom than your own! Why, even in directing an enquirer to the Cross of Christ, simple work as that may seem to be, we shall often discover our own inability and folly.

In rebuking the backslider, in comforting the desponding, in restoring the fallen, in guiding the ignorant we shall need to be taught of God, or else we shall meet with more failures than successes. To every honest Christian worker this text speaks with all the soft melody of an angel's whisper. “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God.” Your lips shall overflow with knowledge, and your tongue shall drop with words of wisdom if you will but wait on God and hear Him before you speak to your fellow men! You shall be made wise to win souls if you will learn to sit at the Master's feet that He may teach you the art which He followed when on earth, and follows still.

But the class of persons who just now win my heart's warmest sympathies are those who are seeking the Savior, and, as the text says, “If any of

you.” I thought I should be quite right in giving seekers a share in it. They are seeking Christ, but they are in the dark. Their soul desires Him, but it has little light, little guidance, and their cry is, “O that I knew where I might find Him! That I might come even to His seat!” I thought that this text might be as the balm of Gilead to some of these unwise ones who have found out, all of a sudden, their own sin and folly. I thought it would say to them, “If you, poor Sinner, if you lack wisdom, seek of God who gives to all men liberally, and upbraids not.”

Let us put ourselves, then, at once in order for this work of comforting seekers, and may God the Holy Spirit, make it effectual.

I. First, I shall call your attention to THE GREAT NEED OF MANY SEEKERS, NAMELY, WISDOM. This need occurs from many reasons. Sometimes it is their *pride* which makes them fools. Like Naaman, they would do some great thing if the Prophet had bid them, but they will not wash and be clean. The natural heart rebels against the simplicity of the way of salvation. “What? Am I to do *nothing* but simply accept the righteousness already finished? Am I to leave off *doing* and merely *look* unto Him who was nailed to the tree and find all my salvation in Him? “Well, then,” says the proud Heart, “I cannot understand it.” It cannot understand it because it does not love it.

Now, Soul, if this is your difficulty, and I believe, in nine cases out of ten, a proud heart is at the root of *all* difficulty about the sinner’s coming to Christ—if this is it which turns you aside and makes you foolish—then go to God about it and seek wisdom from Him. He will show you the folly of this pride of yours, and teach you that simply to trust in Jesus is at once the safest and most suitable way of salvation. He will make you see that if the way of salvation had been by *doing*, the method would not have suited you, for what could you do? If it had been by *feeling*, it would not have suited you either, for what can your hard heart feel?

How can you make yourself tender of heart? But, seeing that it is by *faith*, it is therefore by Divine Grace. O that you may be made wise enough to stoop and kiss the silver scepter which is outstretched to you! Wise enough to come and buy this wine and milk, without money and without price, and accept with your whole heart, with intense joy, this perfect righteousness, this finished salvation which Christ has worked out and brought in for every seeking soul!

Many persons, also, are made foolish so that they lack wisdom through their despair. Probably nothing makes a man seem so much like a maniac as the loss of hope. When the mariner feels that the vessel is sinking, that the proud waves must soon overwhelm her, then he reels to and fro and staggers like a drunken man, because he is at his wits’ end. Ah, poor Heart, when you see the blackness of sin I do not wonder that you are driven to despair! And when your sins come howling behind you like so

many ravenous wolves, all seeking to devour you, I do not marvel if you should be ready even to lay violent hands upon yourself!

It is no strange thing for men to be sorely tempted when they are under a sense of sin. And now you know not what to do. If you could be calm and quiet we could tell you plainly the way of peace, and you might understand that there is no reason for despair since Jesus died and rose again, and is “able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by Him.” But you cannot give us a calm hearing for you are distracted, and you think that this comfort applies to everybody but you. You lack wisdom because you are in such a worry and turmoil. As John Bunyan used to say, you are much troubled up and down in your thoughts. I pray you, then, ask wisdom of God, and even out of the depths if you cry unto Him, He will be pleased to instruct you and bring you out into a safe way.

No doubt many other persons lack wisdom because they are not instructed in Gospel *doctrine*. It is wonderful how Satan will plague many timid hearts with the doctrine of Election. That doctrine, rightly understood, is full of *comfort*. But, distorted and misrepresented, it often appears to be a bolt to shut sinners out from mercy—the fact being that it shuts none out, but shuts tens of thousands *in*! Why, the very doctrine of the Atonement is not understood by many while they are under a sense of sin! If they could see that Christ took their sins and carried their sorrows. If they could perceive the meaning of that word, “substitution,” light might break in! The window of the understanding is blocked up with ignorance. If we could but clean away the cobwebs and filth, then might the light of the knowledge of Christ come streaming in and they might rejoice in His salvation!

Well, dear Friends, if you are bemired and puzzled with difficult doctrine, the text comes to you and says, “If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God.” Ignorance, also, of Christian *experience* is another cause for the lack of wisdom. I have seen many enquirers who have told me what they have felt, and to them it was so amazing that they half expected to see individual hairs of my head stand upright while they told me their feelings! And when I said, “Oh, yes, yes, I have felt just that. That is the common way of most souls that come to Christ,” they have looked surprised beyond measure! The very road which is most safe you think to be most dangerous. And that which leads to Christ, you fancy leads to Hell!

Little do you know the value of that stripping work which you so much dread. “Surely,” you say, “I am being stripped that I may be cast away,” whereas the Lord only strips those whom He intends afterwards to clothe with the robe of His salvation. Those cuts of the lancet are sharp and you think the surgeon means to kill, but he intends to cure. When God is making you feel the burden of your guilt, you suppose that now He has forgotten to be gracious—whereas it is *now* that He *is* gracious to you in very deed, and is using the best means of making you understand and

value His Grace. The way of life is a new road to you, poor seeking Soul, and therefore you lack wisdom in it and make many mistakes about it.

The text lovingly advises, “Ask of God.” “Ask of God.” Very likely, in addition to all this, which may well enough make you lack wisdom, there are certain singularities in the action of Providence towards you which fill you with dismay. Ever since you have begun to think about the Lord Jesus, things have gone cross with you in the outward world. You have not only trouble within, but, strange as you think it is, you have now trouble outside! It partly arises from friends who say you are mad—would God they were bitten with the same madness—partly from circumstances over which you can have no control. It is not at all unusual for God to make a complete shipwreck of that vessel in which His people sail, although He fulfils His promise that not a hair of their heads shall perish.

I should not wonder if He would cause two seas to meet around your ship, so that there should not be more than a few boards and broken pieces of the ship left to you. But oh, if you have faith in Christ, He will certainly bring you safe to shore! It is not at all an uncommon thing for the Lord to add to the inward scourging of conscience the outward lashings of affliction. These double scourging are meant for proud, stubborn hearts—that they may be humbly brought to Jesus’ feet, for of us it may be said, in truth, as Solomon says of the child—“Foolishness is bound in his heart. But the rod of correction shall drive it far from him.”

God is thus, dear Hearer, bringing folly out of you by the smarts of His rod. It is written, “The blueness of a wound cleanses away evil,” and therefore the Lord is making your wounds to be black and blue, and I should not wonder if He will even let them putrefy till you have to say with Isaiah, “From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it, but wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores.” Then it is that eternal mercy will take advantage of your dire extremity and your deep distress shall bring you to Christ who never would have been brought by any other means!

To close this somewhat painful picture. Many lack wisdom because, in addition to all their fears and their ignorance, they are fiercely attacked by Satan. John Bunyan tells us of Apollyon, that he said, “No king will willingly lose his subjects.” Of course he will not! And Apollyon, as he sees his subjects, one after another, desert him to enlist under the banner of King Jesus, howls at his losses and he leaves no stone unturned to keep souls back from mercy. Just at that critical moment when the soul is beginning to turn to God, he says to himself, “It is now or never! If I do not nip these buds, they will become flowers and fruits. But if I can bring in a withering frost, I shall kill the young plant.”

The great enemy takes dead aim at anxious souls. He it is who digs that Slough of Despond right in front of the wicket gate and keeps the big dog to howl before the door so that poor trembling Mercy may go into a faint-

ing fit, and find herself too weak to knock at the door. “Now,” he says to all his servants, “shoot your arrows at that awakened soul! It is about to escape from me! Empty your quivers, you soldiers of the Pit! Launch your hot temptations, you Fiends of Hell! Sting that soul with infidel insinuations and hideous blasphemies, for if I once lose it I have lost it forever! Therefore, hold it, you princes of the Pit, hold it fast, if you can.”

Now, in such a plight as that—with your foolish heart, and the wicked world, and the Evil One, and your sins in dreadful alliance to destroy you—what could such a poor timid one as you do if it were not for this precious word, “If any of you”—that must mean *you*—“If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men liberally, and upbraids not”?

II. We shall now mention the second point in the text. THE PROPER PLACE OF A SEEKER’S RESORT—“Let him ask of God.” My dear Friends, bear me witness that it is my constant effort to teach you the *spirituality* of true religion and the necessity of our own hearts having personal dealings with the living God. Now, though this you have heard thousands of times, I was about to say from me, yet, once again, I must remind you of it: the text says, “Let him ask of God.”

Now, you perceive that the man is directed at once to God without any intermediate object, or ceremony, or person. You are not told here to seek direction from good books. They may become very useful as auxiliary helps, but the best of human books, if followed slavishly, will mislead. For instance, I am sure that hundreds of persons have been kept in unnecessary bondage through that wonderful and admirable book, “Doddridge’s Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul.” It has been the means of the conversion of hundreds. It has been profitable to thousands more. But there is a point in which it fails, so that, if you slavishly follow it, you may read the book through and I undertake to say, you will not find comfort by following its exhortations.

It fails, as all human guides must, if we trust in them and forget the Great Shepherd of Israel. When a man is really under concern of soul he is in a condition of considerable danger. Then it is that an artful false teacher may get hold of him and trick him into heresy and unscriptural doctrine. Hence the text does not say, “If any man lack wisdom, let him ask his priest.” That is about the *worst* thing he can do! For he who sets himself up for a priest is either a deceiver or deceived. “Let him ask of *God*”—that is the advice of the Scripture. We are all so ready to go to books, to go to men, to go to ceremonies, to anything except to God.

Man will worship God with his eyes, and his arms, and his knees, and his mouth—with anything but his *heart*—and we are all of us anxious, more or less, until we are renewed by Divine Grace, to get off the heart-worship of God. Juan de Valdey says that, “Just as an ignorant man takes a crucifix and says, ‘This crucifix will help me to think of Christ,’ so he

bows before it and never does think of Christ at all, but stops short at the crucifix. So," he says, "the learned man takes his book and says, 'This book will teach me the mysteries of the kingdom,' but instead of giving his thoughts to the mysteries of *godliness*, he reads his book mechanically and stops at the book, instead of meditating and diving into the Truths of God."

It is the action of the *mind* that God accepts, not the motion of the body. It is the thought communing with *Him*. It is the soul coming into contact with the soul of God. It is spirit-worship which the Lord accepts. Consequently, the text does not say, "Let him ask books," nor, "ask priests," but, "let him ask of God." Above all, do not let the seeker ask of *himself* and follow his own imagination and feelings. All human guides are bad, but you, yourself, will be your own worst guide. "Let him ask of God." When a man can fairly and honestly say, "I have bowed the knee unto the Lord God of Israel, and asked Him, for Jesus' sake, to guide me and to direct me by His Spirit, and then I turned to the Book of God, asking God to be my Guide into the Book," I cannot believe but what such a man will soon obtain saving wisdom!

I beg to caution all of you against stopping short of really asking of God. I conjure you by the living God, do not be satisfied with asking of *me*. I am no priest, except as all Believers are priests. Thank God I wear no title of ecclesiastical dominion. Be not content with asking my Brethren, the deacons and elders. God has made many of them wise in helping souls out of difficulties but do not be satisfied with the advice of *any* man, however godly and holy, but go directly to the Lord God of Heaven and earth, and say unto Him, "Lord, teach me! Show me Your way, O God! Teach me in Your Truth!" You are not bid to go to any second-hand source of wisdom, but to God the only Wise, who alone can direct you. "Let him ask of God."

Such advice as this must be good. You cannot suspect us of any interested motive in exhorting you to *this*! It is your *good* which we seek and not our own glory. It must be best to go to the headquarters—you will surely be led aright if so you seek direction. Some say, Lo, here! Others say, Lo, there! But if you go to God, and then with His guidance study His Word, you shall not fail of wisdom. How can you? Moreover, remember that there is one blessed Person of the Divine Unity who makes it His special office to teach us! Therefore, if you go to God for wisdom, you only go for that which it is His Nature and His office to give.

The Holy Spirit is given to this end: "He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatever I have said unto you." When you go to God, you may say to Him these words, "O Father, You have been pleased to reveal to us the Holy Spirit who is to enlighten our darkness and to remove our ignorance. Oh, let that Spirit of Yours dwell in me! I am willing to be taught by Your Spirit, through Your Word, or

through Your ministers, but I come first to You because I know that Your Word and Your ministers, apart from Yourself, cannot teach me anything. O Lord, teach me.”

I do not mean by any word of mine to make you think little of Scripture—God forbid!—nor little of those who may speak to you with the Holy Spirit sent down from Heaven. But I did mean to make you look even at this Book and at God’s ministers as being subservient to the Holy Spirit Himself. Go to Him! Ask Him! For there in the Book is the letter which kills. He, He alone can make you to know the living essence and the quickening power of that Word. Without the Holy Spirit, my dear Hearer, you must still be as blind with the light as you would have been without it! You will be as foolish after having been taught the Gospel in the theory of it, as you were before you knew it! Let the Holy Spirit, however, teach you, and you shall know all things that are necessary for this life and godliness.

Thus, then, we have brought two points before you—the great need of the seeker is “wisdom.” And the right place to get that need removed.

III. Thirdly, THE RIGHT MODE IN WHICH TO GO TO GOD. “Let him ask.” Oh, that simple word, “Let him ask”—“let him ask!” No *form* of asking is prescribed. No words laid down! No *method* dictated, no hour set apart, no rubric printed! But there it stands in gracious simplicity, “let him ask.” He who will not have mercy when it is to be had for the asking deserves to die without it! While I am thinking of this word, before I plunge into its fullest meaning, I may well say, if God will give wisdom to the seeker only because he asks for it, what shall I say of the folly which will not even ask to be made wise? May God forgive you such folly for the past, and deliver you from it for the future!

The text says, “Let him ask,” which is a method implying that *ignorance* is confessed. No man will ask wisdom till he knows that he is ignorant. Come, dear Hearer, *confess your ignorance* into the ear of God, who is as present here as you are! Say unto Him, “Lord, I have discovered, now, that I am not so wise as I thought I was. I am foolish and vain. Lord, teach me.” Make a full confession, and this shall be a good beginning for prayer.

Asking has also in it the fact that God is believed in. We cannot ask of a person of whose existence we have any doubt! We will not ask of a person of whose hearing us we have serious suspicions. Who would stand in the desert of Sahara and cry aloud where there is no living ear to hear? Now, my dear Hearer, you believe that there is a God. Ask, then! Do you not believe that He is here, that He will hear your cry, that He will be pleased in answer to your cry to give you what you ask for? Now, if you can believe that there is a God—that He is here and that He will hear you—then confess your ignorance, and ask Him now to give you the promised wisdom for Jesus’ sake!

There is in this method of approaching God by asking, also a clear sight that salvation is by Divine Grace. It does not say, "Let him *buy* of God. Let him *demand* of God. Let him *earn* from God." Oh, no—"let him ASK of God." It is the beggar's word. The beggar asks for alms. You are to ask as the beggar asks of you in the street, and God will give to you far more liberally than you give to the poor! You must confess that you have no merit of your own. If you will not acknowledge that, neither will God hear your prayers. But come now with the acknowledgment of ignorance, with the confession of sin, and believing that God is the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him, and He will even *now* give you the wisdom which saves the soul.

Observe here, what an acknowledgement of dependence there is. The man sees that he cannot find wisdom anywhere else—that it must come from God. He turns his eyes to the only Fountain and leaves the broken cisterns. Do this, dear Hearer. I feel as if the text did not need any explanation from me but only needs carrying out by you! Let him ask of God. I think I can hear 50,000 objections from different parts of the building. One is saying, "But I don't understand, 'ask of God.'" Another is saying, "I cannot comprehend, 'ask of God.'" If you have made some difficulties for yourself, if you are such a fool as to be tying knots and wanting to get them untied before you will believe in Jesus, then I have nothing to say to you, unless it were, beware lest you tie a knot that shall destroy your soul!

But if you are troubled with an honest objection, I say to you now, in God's name, "Ask of God." You need not wait till you get home! You need not stay till you have left that seat—but *now*, silently, in your soul, as Hannah did when she went up to the tabernacle, breathe the prayer—"O God, teach me! Lead me to the foot of the Cross! Help me to see Jesus! Save my soul this day! End the doubtful strife! Answer these questions! Bring me, as an humble seeker, to lie before the footstool of your Sovereign Mercy and to receive pardon through the mediatorial Sacrifice." "Let him ask"—that is all—"let him ask."

IV. Fourthly, the text has in it ABUNDANT ENCOURAGEMENT for such a seeker. There are four encouragements here. "Let him ask of God, who gives to all men." What a wide statement—who "gives to all men"! I will take it in its broadest extent. In natural things, God does give to all men life, health, food, raiment. Who "makes His sun to rise on the evil and on the good." Who causes the rain to descend upon the fields of the just and of the unjust. Every creature is favored with Divine benevolence and there is not a creature, from the tiniest ephemera which creeps upon the green leaf of the forest to the swift-winged angel who adoringly flies upon his Master's will, which is not made to partake of the gifts of the Great Father of Lights.

Now, if God has gifts for *all* men, how much more will He have gifts for that man who earnestly turns his tearful eyes to Heaven and cries, “My Father, give *me* wisdom, that I may be reconciled to You through the death of Your Son”? Why, the grass, as Herbert says, never asked for the dew, and yet every blade has its own drop! And shall you daily cry for the dew of Divine Grace and there be no drop of Heaven’s Grace for you? Impossible! Fancy your own child saying, “My Father, my Father, I want to be obedient, I want to be holy.” And suppose that you have power to make your child so—could you find it in your heart to refuse? No! It would be a greater joy to you to give than it could be to the child to accept.

But it has been said the text ought not to be understood in that broad a sense. Very probably it ought not to be so. I conceive that there is implied the limitation that God gives to all who seek. Though the limitation is not stated, yet I think it is *intended*, because of *spiritual* mercies God does *not* give to *all* men liberally. There are some men who live and die without the liberal favors of Divine Grace because they wickedly refuse them. But He gives to all true seekers liberally. We may take that view of it, and we may find you hundreds of witnesses to prove the truth of it, and can find them in this very place this morning!

Here is one witness—I myself personally sought the Lord and He heard me and delivered me from all my fears. My dear Brothers, and my Sisters, too, I know you could spring up like a great army, if it were a fitting thing to ask you to do, and you could say, “This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him.” “The God of Jacob has not despised nor abhorred the cries of His people.” Now, Soul, if God has heard so many who sought His face, why should He not hear *you*? Is it not a comfort to think that hundreds, thousands, and tens of thousands have gone to God and there never has been a case in which He has refused *one*? Will He begin with *you*? Shall you be the first rejected seeker? Oh, then what a strange destiny yours will be, to have to say in another world, “I am the first who sought Divine Grace, and found it not! I wept at the foot of the Cross and I found no mercy! I said, ‘Lord, remember me,’ but He would not remember me.”

You will never be able to say that! Hell will never make its boast over such a case! Heaven will never have its honor tarnished by one such solitary instance! Seek the Lord and His strength! Seek His face evermore! Your hearts shall live that seek Him!

The next comfort is, He gives to all men liberally. God does not give as *we* do—a mere trifle to the beggar—He bestows His wealth by the handfuls. Solomon asked for wisdom—God gave him wealth and power. In nearly every instance of prayer in the Old Testament, God gives ten times as much as is asked for. Jacob asked that he might have bread to eat, and raiment to put on—God made him to be two bands. The Lord will “do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think.”

This is the Divine habit! He not only redeems His promises, but when He might pay them in silver He prefers to pay them in gold. He is exceedingly bountiful. Dear Hearers, we have found Him so when we have tried Him, and do you think He will begin to be stingy with *you*? If He should liberally forgive your sins, He will be none the poorer. If He should withhold forgiveness, He will be none the richer. Why should He limit His favor? You want to wash away your sins—there is a river of Grace to wash in. You want Grace to refresh your souls—He has floods to pour upon the dry ground. We read of the unsearchable riches of Christ.

Ho, you leviathan sinners, here is an ocean of mercy for you to swim in! Ho, you elephantine sinners, here is an ark large enough to hold you and float you above the waters of the deluge! Ho, you gigantic sinners, whose sins of pride reach up to Heaven, and whose feet of lust are plunged in the mire of Hell—the sacred hiding place is large enough to hide even you! The Lord is great in mercy! Oh, who would not ask of so liberal a God, whose thoughts are as high above our thoughts as the heavens are above the earth?

It is added as a third comfort, “and upbraids not.” That is a sweet word! If you help a friend who is in debt, and wants to borrow money, you say, “Remember, I do not like it, you ought not to be in such a state.” Your brother wants some aid. You have helped him many times, and will again, but still you upbraid him and tell him he is very imprudent. You tell him he ought not to get into these messes—he ought to manage his business better. If you do not tell him so with your mouth, you look at him, and he thinks to himself, “It’s very kind of him to give me the help, but really, it is very humiliating to me to have to ask of him because I get so severe a lesson.”

I suppose we do right to upbraid. I have no doubt we do so with good motives. But God never does upbraid seeking souls! He gives liberally and does not dim the luster of His Grace by harsh rebukes. He does not say, “Ah, you Sinner, how came you to commit such sin? I will forgive you, but.” The Father does not talk thus to the returning prodigal. One would have supposed that when the prodigal came back the father would have said, “Well, dear Boy, you are forgiven, but never let me see you do that again. How wrong of you to take that portion of my goods, and spend it in that way! I shall never be so well off as before—you have wasted half my living! And now think where you have been—what a dishonor you have cast upon your father’s name and character through wasting your living with harlots. I forgive but I cannot forget.”

My Brothers and Sisters, it was not so! The prodigal remembered his sins but his father forgot them all, and exclaimed with joy, “This, my son, was dead, and is alive again! He was lost, and is found.” O Soul, if you did but know the heart of the Savior you would not tarry in sin! If you could

but know the overflowing love of the Divine Father, you would not linger in unbelief”—

**“His heart is made of tenderness,
His heart melts with love.”**

Fool as you are, be not such a fool as to be unwilling to ask for wisdom, but now, breathe the prayer, “Teach me, O God, to trust Your dear Son this day.”

Then comes the last encouragement. “It shall be given him.” Looking through my text last night, I asked the question—Is that last sentence needed? “Let him ask of God, which gives to all men liberally, and upbraids not.” Now, if the Lord gives to all men, He will certainly give to the seeker. Is that last promise needed? And I came to this conclusion—it would not have been there if it was not required. There are some sinners who cannot be content to draw obvious inferences—they must have it in black and white. Such is the fearfulness of their nature—they must have the promise in so many express words. Here they have it—“it shall be given him.”

You are not left to *suppose* that it shall be, or to infer that it *may* be. But it is written, “it shall be given him.” But to whom shall it be given? If any of you lack wisdom. “Well,” says one, “I am quite out of all catalogs. I am one by myself.” Well, but you are surely contained in this, “*any* of you.” “Ah,” says one, “but I have a *private* fault, a sin, an offense which I would not dare to mention, which I believe has damned me forever.” Yet the text says, “If *any* of you.” If I saw a door open and it said, “If any of you are hungry, let him come in here,” I should not stop outside because I feared that I was not quite the person intended! I should say, “It is their responsibility, who mean to keep me out, to be more specific in their invitation. They have put it, ‘any of you.’ I am certainly one of the sons of men, and I will step into the feast.”

Ah Soul, if God had meant to shut *you* out, He would have been more plain about it! But here is not a shutting-out word at all. It says, “If any of you lack wisdom”—well, that is *you*, surely—that lack of wisdom helps to *include* you within the boundary. It does not *limit* the character—it widens it to you because you feel how foolish you are. The promise is, “it shall be given him.” “Suppose I do not get it,” you say. You must not suppose God to be a liar. How can you suppose such a blasphemy? “Let him ask of God, and it shall be given him.” “But,” says one, “suppose my sins should prove to be too great?”

I cannot, *will not* suppose anything which can come in conflict with the positive Word of God! “Let him ask of God, and it shall be given him.” Do you think God does not mean what He says? O Sinner, will you add to all your other sins this sin of thinking that God would lie? O Man, He invites you to ask of Him wisdom, and He says He will give it to you! Doubt not the Lord! Distrust not the veracity of Jehovah! But come at once humbly,

tremblingly, to the foot of the Savior's Cross. View Him lifted on high as the great atoning Sacrifice! Look to His streaming wounds! Behold His brow still covered with the crimson drops which flow from the wounds caused by His crown of thorns!

Look to Him and live! There's life in a look at the Crucified One! Look to Him and the promise is that you shall be saved! I commend the text to the careful, thoughtful, believing acceptance of every sinner here. Ask that the sun may not go down until you, each and all, have received the promise which the text presents to you. May the Holy Spirit now give His own blessing, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

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A WARNING TO WAVERERS

NO. 2537

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, OCTOBER 3, 1897.
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“But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavers is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord.”
James 1:6, 7.

THE Apostle James was always very practical. He never really differed from Paul, but, whereas Paul dwelt more upon the doctrinal side of the Truth of God, James, who has given us but one Epistle, dwelt more upon the practical. I should not have wondered, if Paul had taken up the same subjects as James did, if he had written in the same style. At any rate, we are very grateful to James that he is so downright, so straightforward, so plain and practical. He never minces matters. He hits the nail on the head every time. Whenever he talks about faith, he seems to be saying all the while, “Believe.” If he discourses on prayer, you can hear him crying, “Pray!” And if he speaks concerning holy living, you can hear the thunder at the back of his words commanding us to forsake sin and to follow after righteousness!

In the passage before us, the Apostle is dealing with the matter of prayer, but not with that, alone, for, while the verse previous to my text is about a man praying and, therefore, James says, “Let him ask in faith, nothing wavering,” yet the verse *following* our text is *not* about prayer, but about a man's general life—“A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways.” Therefore I shall try to show you, first, that the text speaks of *the great necessity in prayer*, namely, decided faith. And then I shall use the text as pointing forward to that which follows it, and speak to you concerning *the great necessity in life*, namely, decision of character for the Lord.

I. To begin, then, the Apostle James first speaks of THE GREAT NECESSITY IN PRAYER. If we would pray successfully, we must have a decided faith.

There should be, first of all, a very decided conviction in our own minds *as to the desirableness of the thing that we are asking for*. “Why,” says one, “that is self-evident! Would a man pray if he did not thoroughly desire what he asked of God?” My reply is that I am afraid a great many people ask for what they do not really desire—and they would be taken aback if God were, at once, to give them what they have asked for! There is a man who says that he has been praying for a new heart, but then he does not intend to give up frequenting the bars, nor will he leave off associating with his bad companions. Well, if God could give such a man as

that a new heart, all of a sudden, and he could still retain his love for his old evil habits, he would be likely to kneel down and pray to have it taken away again, for he would be very uncomfortable with such a burden as a new heart and a right spirit! That is not what he truly wants.

Some men pray to be made holy, but they wish to keep some little pet sin in the backyard. They do not really want what they are asking for—they are not yet convinced of the desirableness of the thing that they profess to be seeking. Men and women pray that they may be saved, but if we explained to them what it is to be saved, they would pray, “Lord, do not save us—at least, not just yet! We must have a little more of the world. We have some unholy engagements that we must keep—we do not want to be made religious people just at present.” In all probability, the more they understood of what salvation really is, the less they would think of praying to be saved.

A man kneels down, and says, “Lead us not into temptation,” and he gets up and goes straight away to a place where temptations swim all around him. What is he but a self-deceived man asking for a thing which he practically proves that he does not wish for? He prays, “Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us.” Within five minutes of so praying, he says, “I will never forgive that fellow! I hate him for what he did and the longer I live, the worse I shall hate him.” Will a man thus mock God? Will he so trifle with his Maker? Alas, how many do! If you must insult someone by your mockeries, go and insult your equal—your king if you dare! But to go and insult your God—can you commit such a terrible sin as this? Yet many do it. If they complain that their prayers are not answered, they have no right to complain, for such people must not expect to receive anything of the Lord. They are wavering even as to the sincerity of their prayer! Their own wish is not intense enough or intelligent enough to be really their settled desire. They waver even on the threshold of the House of Mercy—how can they expect to succeed in their business with the great Lord of the house?

Further, wavering may be seen in some persons *as to the fact of God's hearing prayer at all*. Possibly they are not even sure that there is a God, or, if that Truth of God is believed, yet God's *existence* is to them a matter of great obscurity. They know little about Him and do not care to know any more. “Yes,” they say, with a kind of languid assent which they have not the moral courage to refuse, “no doubt there is a God”—and they are a little proud to think that they are not atheists as some people are—“Yes, there is a God, but does He really hear prayer as a man hears the requests of his fellow men? And does God actually attend to the prayer so as to be affected by it and to grant the desire of His creature?” If, my dear Friend, you have been led to question this Truth of God, you must not expect to receive anything of the Lord, for, “he that comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.” If either of these is a moot point with you, you might as well stand upon a hill and whistle to the wind, as go up into your chamber and bow your knee in prayer! You are a waverer about matters in which a man must not waver if he expects to be successful in pleading with God! Your fulcrum is not fixed, so you cannot have any effectual

leverage in prayer. This must be a settled and fully-believed fact, that God *is*, and that He hears and answers prayer. You may not be able to make out how that is consistent with His fixed purposes and it is a blessing that you need not try to make it out. The way to Heaven is not by explaining riddles, but by believing Revelations. The way to Heaven is not through the cleverness that can spell out an enigma, but through the simplicity that believes in God who cannot lie. It is true that God's eternal purpose is fixed, do not doubt that—but it is equally true that the Lord listens to the voice of a man and that whatever we ask in prayer, believing, we shall receive.

Furthermore, there are some who very greatly spoil their prayers because they waver *as to God's granting the specific thing which they are seeking at His hands*. You know, dear Friends, that there is a way of praying in which you ask for nothing *and get it*. I have heard that kind of praying even in public Prayer Meetings. It was a very good prayer, indeed, containing many admirable phrases—a prayer that was very well put together—I seem to have heard it ever since I was a boy. But there is no real prayer in it and that is the fatal flaw in it. It would be a capital prayer if it were a prayer at all—it has all the makings of a prayer—and yet it is no prayer! It is just as though you might see in a shop window all the garments of a man, but no man wearing the garments! Now, such a prayer as that never succeeds with God because He does not play at hearing prayer though far too many play at praying. It is earnest work with God and it must be downright business work with us.

Suppose you go into a bank and stand at the counter, and say, "I want some money." The clerk says, "How much do you want, Sir? Please put the amount down on this check." "Oh, I do not want to be specific! You can give me a few hundred pounds, but I do not know to a sixpence exactly what I want, I am not sure that I could put it down in black and white." You will get no money at all that way! But if you write down in black and white exactly how much you want—spell it in letters and put it down, also, in figures—the clerk will give you the money if you have so much in your account at that bank. So, if you have an account with the great God—as, blessed be His name, some of us have—go and ask for what you want!

The Apostle James says in the chapter we read, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God." If a man asks of God *riches*, that is not what He has promised to give! If he asks of God good health, that may be granted to him but, still, the promise is concerning *wisdom*, and that is what the man needs! Therefore, let him with all his heart pray, "Lord, give me wisdom." I think our prayers would succeed much better if we were not so wavering about what it is that we really require, and if we were not dubious as to whether God could give us that very thing.

You, dear Friends, are in a fix—you do not know which way to move. Happily, you have forgotten your troubles the little while you have been in the House of Prayer, but tomorrow morning the first thing you will say to yourself will be, "What am I going to do today?" Do you believe that God can give you wisdom and that He will do so if you ask Him? Then go at once to Him and say, "Lord, this is what I need." Specify your needs.

State your exact condition. Lay the whole case before God with as much orderliness as if you were telling your story to an intelligent friend who was willing to hear it and prepared to help you. And then say, "Lord, this is specifically what I think I need, and I ask this of You believing that You can give it to me."

If it is wisdom that you need, it will be essential, when you ask for that wisdom, that you decidedly believe that this Book, through which God teaches us wisdom, is really Inspired, so that what it teaches is distinctly and unquestionably true—and is received by you as the utterance of Infallibility. Ask of God in the full belief that it is so, or else I do not see how you can pray to be guided. Moreover, the Author of the Bible is prepared to teach you concerning the things which are written in this Book and it is essential, when you ask for wisdom, that you should believe that the Holy Spirit is able to enlighten you and is willing to instruct you concerning those things which now perplex you. Go, then, to God in prayer, believing in His Word and believing in His Holy Spirit.

God also teaches men sometimes by Providence. He guides their way as otherwise it could not have been directed. Believe in the Providence of God, in the overruling hand of God everywhere in everything and, believing that, go upon your knees and say to Him, "Lord, give me direction. Give me wisdom by Your Word, by Your Spirit, or by some other means in Your gracious Providence, and I will bless Your name for it." But, mark you, when you go to God asking for wisdom, you will not get any help from Him unless you are prepared to follow the guidance of that wisdom when He gives it to you. Many people, when they ask advice, have long before made up their minds what they mean to do. It is not infrequently my lot, as pastor, to be consulted by some persons about marriage. I am very careful as to what I say upon that matter because I am pretty sure that, long before they ask my opinion, they have decided whom they mean to marry. In the case of marriage with ungodly persons, they only come just to salve their consciences, meaning, all the while, to do what they know is wrong.

Now, dear Friends, do not go to God in that fashion—having made up your mind already what you mean to do! "Lord," says one, "help me to do right in this business." And he means to do right if it will not be too expensive. "Lord," he says, "keep me upright in this transaction." And he means upon the whole, preferably, to be upright—if, if, if—if there is anything to be made by it. He would sooner get the money honestly than the other way but, still, he means to make money somehow! Well, that kind of praying is impudence, and worse than that—it is an attempt to flatter the Oracle to take the responsibility of iniquity off your shoulders—and that will never do when God Jehovah, the All-Glorious One, is the Oracle to which you appeal! No, there must be in our cries to God a firm belief in the power of prayer, a firm conviction of the truth of Revelation and a strong resolve that whatever the Lord bids us do, we will do it, for only to the man who keeps His Commandments and delights himself in the Lord, will God give the desires of his heart. If you will not listen to God's Word, neither will God listen to your word when you come to Him in prayer.

II. Now I want to gather up all my strength and to ask the special attention of all of you who are undecided, while I speak about THE GREAT NECESSITY IN LIFE, that is, decision for God and for His Truth.

What is indecision? Well, first, *it is a thing which permeates the lives of many men.* I could describe some of them and they would probably think that I was very personal. I wish that they would believe that I mean to be exactly so! They wish above all things to be Christians, especially on Sundays, but they have some associates whose company is particularly pleasurable—and when they are with them, they studiously avoid anything that looks like religion! I have seen them among Christian people and they are very cautious, for they would not like to be thought worldly. And I have seen them among worldly people and they are very cautious there, too, for they would not wish to be thought to be Christians! They highly approve of a religious book, but then, as some men like a little rotten cheese for the taste of it, so they like just a flavoring of bad literature because they must know what is in the world—and that rottenness has to them rather a pleasant flavor.

As for prayer, of course that is admirable—they are glad that their wives pray, they would be delighted to hear that their children pray and they, themselves, do pray—but not very often. They do it when they are obliged to, just as some ships put into harbor when there is rough weather about. They are upright in business, nobody can find much fault with them in that respect. They only rob God, *that is all*—and God being of no particular consequence to them, they act just as they like towards Him. Imagine, dear Friends, that you can see a pair of scales and you have a good illustration of what these waverers are like. Look, that scale slowly gets to a balance and, by-and-by, the wrong side goes down, and the right side proves to be short weight! That is how it is with these people—they would and they would not—they are, “to good and evil equal bent.”

And, according to the mood in which you catch the man, he is either a devil or a saint! He can speak very prettily when, after a service, he is questioned about his conversion. He says that he is very much obliged to the friend for being so careful about his soul and he hopes that there is some good thing in himself toward the Lord God of Israel. If one from the opposite camp were to accost him in his shop and say, “You go to a place of worship, don’t you?” he is such a coward that, though he might not actually tell a lie about it, he would sail wonderfully near the wind and you might think, from what he said, that he was much more often at the theater than at a House of Prayer!

This is the kind of man who is undecided and, in describing him, I take leave to tell him that his *condition is one of immorality.* Nothing can be more immoral than for a man to know the right, yet not to follow it and so far to admit the importance of that right as well-near to yield to it, and yet to do such despite to God and to his own conscience, as not to yield to it at all, but to be drawn aside by altogether opposite influences! If a man were to say, “Well, I am undecided upon the question of honesty,” I would be very decided about locking up the spoons! If there should be a woman who said, “I am very undecided about the question of

purity of morals," I would know that she was no better than she ought to be. There are some things about which a man must not be undecided—you must not be undecided about being chaste, about speaking the truth—and you cannot be undecided about serving God without being guilty, in that very indecision, of manifest treason against the majesty of Heaven! I pray every undecided man to give himself his true character and that will not be a good one. It will be written out in large letters, "You are in an immoral state as long as you are halting between two opinions." Christ reckons that the man who is not with Him is against Him! He who does not serve Christ is opposing Him. There are no "betweenites"—none can dwell on the fence. You are either in Immanuel's land, or else you are in the dominions of Satan—you can be sure of that! If not right, you are wrong! If not a friend of Christ, you are His enemy!

This condition of things is also *very dangerous*. There are some persons here for whom I always pray whenever I enter the pulpit and see them here. There are some not here, as I see by their not being in their places, for whom I think no Sunday has passed over my head for years without my breathing a prayer for them. And still they are not saved. I have seen some very strange persons who had never come in before and they have been converted the first time they have attended this place. But these other people have been here, some of them for 20 years, and they are not a bit nearer than they were at first because they have always seemed so near. They still appear very promising, but it never comes to anything. Everybody who knows them says that within a very short time they will come forward and confess Christ, but a *very long time has already passed* and they have not done so yet because they do not know Him in their heart and, therefore, they cannot confess Him with their mouth. You know that when a man is an out-and-out black sinner, you can aim at him and hit the mark the first shot—but these people who are a sort of whitey-black, or a kind of blackey-white—you do not know which they are! It might have been white originally, but certainly it has been smoked nearly black. Or it may have been originally black, but it has been certainly bleached to look like white. These undecided people somehow baffle us. We cannot get at them and meanwhile they get confirmed in that wretched condition—and there is no doing anything with them. It is a very, very dangerous position for a man to occupy.

O my Friend, if this is where you are, I pray you not to sit down at ease in such a state as that! As well might a man go to the edge of Shakespeare Cliff at Dover, and lie down to sleep there, and feel himself perfectly safe, when in a moment he may be dashed to pieces at the foot of the rock! O Sirs, will you stay where you are? You are on a volcano! It will burst before long to your destruction. Therefore, escape for your life!

Our text also tells us what this indecision is like—"He that wavers is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed." Like a wave of the sea! Well, a wave of the sea is very *unrestful*. You see it come rolling up from a distance. On, on it sweeps and never stops! Out on the broad Atlantic, what a life a wave seems to have—never still—never for a second in one place. Now up like a mountain, then down again like a great abyss! Such is the life of the undecided man—he does not know where he

is—and you do not know where to find him. He is never quiet, never still, never at rest. A man who gives himself up to the devil gets a kind of dead peace within him. His conscience being seared as with a hot iron, he is still. This is quite different from the state of the Christian who gives himself up wholly to his Lord and who, therefore, enters into a delightful heavenly peace which continually deepens and increases. The man who is always shilly-shallying, playing at see-saw all his life, knows nothing of real rest. He does not make even the best that can be made out of the devil—he gets nothing worth having from either one side or the other—so he is a wretched creature, indeed!

The Church will not acknowledge him and the world is suspicious of him. I am always glad when the world turns out a person of this character. When I was pastor at Waterbeach, a certain young man joined the Church. We thought he was an excellent young man, but there used to be in the village, once a year, a great temptation in the form of a feast, and when the feast came round, this young fellow was there in very evil company. He was in the long room of a public house in the evening, and when I heard what happened I really felt an intense gratitude to the landlady of that place. When she came in and saw him there, she said, “Hal-loa, Jack So-and-So, are you here? Why, you are one of Spurgeon’s lot, yet you are *here*? You ought to be ashamed of yourself! This is not fit company for you. Put him out the window, boys.” And they did put him out the window on the Friday night—and we put him out the door on the Sunday—for we removed his name from our Church-book! Where was he to go? The world would not have him and the Church would not have him. If he had been all for the world, the world would have made something of him—and if he had been all for Christ, Christ would have made something of him. But as he tried to be a little of each and so nothing to either, his life became a wretched one! As he walked the streets, people pointed at him with scorn. The Christians turned away, thinking him a hypocrite, as I fear he was, and the worldlings called him so, and made his name a by-word and a proverb. Oh, you who are neither for God nor the devil, nobody will respect you long! They cannot!

You fancy, just now, because you have money in your pocket, that you are a very respectable person. But you are a disreputable person and the world itself says that you are! And you will find it out, yourself, before long—and you will be unrestful, like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed.

The undecided man is also like a wave of the sea, *unstable*. Yonder great wave seems to form a pyramid—look how it towers aloft! It is a wonderful sight, but while you are admiring it, it is gone. It was only made of water and it has disappeared into its own element. So are there some people who appear to be excellent and admirable, but they are undecided and their goodness is as the morning cloud and as the early dew—it soon passes away.

They are also *uncertain*. That wave that is rolling away yonder, where will it end? Will it sweep across the Atlantic till it reaches the shore of America? Look, there comes a north wind and it turns towards the icebergs! But another wind blows and now the wave is rolling towards the

coast of England. It is in a perpetual whirl, just as the winds happen to drive it—and we have many people of that uncertain kind—“driven with the wind and tossed.”

These undecided persons, too, are like the waves of the sea because they have *no inward vital principle*. A wave of the sea is dependent upon the wind that comes to bear it on. There may be a great force in the waves, but even that is not mighty enough to stand against the rough gale—they are “driven with the wind and tossed.” And look at some of you! There has only to be a bit of a breeze and see how you are driven by it. You sang with us just now, “Happy day! Happy day!” Yet, perhaps, tomorrow evening you will be at a social party where there will be jesting at religion and some questionable witticisms—and you will laugh at them as loudly as others will. And if somebody does charge you with being on the other side, you will stutter, stammer, blush and, at last, you will say something that all the while you do not like to say. Yes, you are “driven with the wind.” There are some fellows six feet high if they did but stand upright, yet anybody can twist them whichever way he likes.

For my part, “I had as well not be, as live to be in awe of such a thing as I myself.” What does it matter to me what a mere man’s opinion of me may be? Nothing whatever! If a thing is right, I believe it, say it and try to live it. And if others also think that it is right, so much the better for them, but if they think it is wrong, it is none the worse for me when I have once learned to stand on my own legs. But there is a certain class of people who always stand on other people’s feet. They ask “Mrs. Grundy” what is the proper thing to do. If they move in West-End circles, they would sooner die than be out of the cruel bondage that is called, “fashion.” If they live at the East-End, there is a rough sort of fashion there, and they cannot stand against it. They are “like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed.” I should have an unutterable contempt for all such people if I did not feel an earnest desire that they might yet possess a living, powerful principle, and begin to stand alone in the power and energy of the Divine Life which God gives to all of those who believe in His Son, Jesus Christ.

The worst of these wavering, undecided people is that, like waves of the sea, though they are creatures of circumstances, yet they have a *great force for evil*. Those waves of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed, sink many a gallant ship and devour many a brave mariner—and these unstable people have an influence by which they carry many away. They half wish that they were not themselves carried away, yet they are. There is something good about them, but there is also something so bad that they sweep others on with them to destruction! Perhaps they are bearing their own children away by their indecision, so that they, too, will grow up undecided—and generation after generation may be cursed by their wicked hesitation. God grant that they may not continue in this evil condition a single moment longer!

In closing, what shall I say to you who are undecided? I pray you think whether you have not been undecided long enough. Remember that the question you have to decide is by no means a difficult one. Whether you shall serve God or Satan, whether you shall live with Christ

in Heaven or lie among the lost in Hell forever—these are not questions about which there ought to be any choice! Decide, then, foolish waverer! If you are a Believer in the Scriptures, a Believer in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Savior of men, decide to follow the teaching of those Scriptures and to accept that Savior—and decide at once! May God help you to decide very speedily! All this while you are robbing yourself of happiness, robbing God of glory, robbing His people of your help, you are even robbing this poor wicked world of what little you might do for its benefit, robbing your family of a holy example, robbing your entire life by letting its best days go for nothing. It is time, then, you were decided! O Lord, bring these waverers to decision, for Your dear Son's sake! Amen.

**EXPOSITION BY C.H. SPURGEON:
JAMES 1.**

Verse 1. *James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting.* According to the teaching of some in the present day, the Apostle should have said, "To the two tribes and the ten that are lost," but he does not say so, nor does Scripture say so. "To the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greetings."

2. *My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into diverse temptations.* Or, "trials." This is a strange thing to say, is it not? Should we not count it great joy when we *escape* from trial? Perhaps so, but we are expressly told to count, or reckon, it all joy when we fall into divers trials. Have you never known what it is, in times of peace and quietness, to feel as if you missed the grandeur of the Presence of God? I have looked back to times of trial with a kind of longing, not to have them return, but to feel the strength of God as I have felt it, then—to feel the power of faith, as I have felt it, then—to hang upon God's powerful arm as I hung upon it, then, and to see God at work as I saw Him then. I think the mariner at home must sometimes feel a kind of longing to once more enjoy a storm on the ocean and to see how the good ship rides on the billows' crest. Life gets flat, sometimes, while all goes smoothly, and we need even the variety of a trial to bring us to close dealing with our God. It is so much for our good to be tried, it is so much for the glory of God that we should be tried, that we will read the verse again and note what the Apostle says—"My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into divers trials." Be like the soldier who is not afraid of the shot and shell, and the turmoil and strife of the battle!

3. *Knowing this, that the trying of your faith works patience.* That is a gem of the first water, well worth finding even if you have to dig in the mines of trial for it.

4. *But let patience have her perfect work, that you may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.* This is true Christian perfection, when every gracious quality is present, and present in perfection! If you have a child, it is a great joy to you to find the child perfect as a child—with no sense deficient, no limb missing and every part rightly formed. Oh, that we may all be such Christians—"perfect and entire, wanting nothing!"

5. *If any of you lack wisdom.* That is the point in which we are all deficient and if we are to be wanting in nothing, we must not be lacking in wisdom. How, then, are we to obtain it?

5. *Let him ask of God, that gives to all men liberally, and upbraids not; and it shall be given him.* Young beginner, you who have but lately put on Christ, you certainly do lack wisdom—you cannot have attained that gift in all its fullness as yet—then go to God for it! He can give it to you and he *will* give it to you if you ask Him for it.

6, 7. *But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavers is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord.* It ensures failure in prayer when there is not a decided faith in the one who prays—and it ensures failure of the whole life if there is not a decided determination to serve the Lord.

8-11. *A double minded-man is unstable in all his ways. Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted: but the rich, in that he is made low: because as the flower of the grass, he shall pass away. For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withers the grass, and the flower thereof falls, and the grace—Or, “beauty.”*

11. *Of the fashion of it perishes: so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways.* No matter how luxurious may be his mode of living, no matter how admirable may be his taste, he shall certainly fade—and all that he has will fade, too. And if this is all that can be said of him, that he is a rich man—he is a very poor creature, indeed.

12. *Blessed is the man that endures temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to them that love Him.* For that is the purpose of our trials—that we should be made to love Him more and love him better. This is that Divine Grace which shall win “the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to them that love Him.”

13. *Let no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempts He any man.* That is to say, if God permits or sends temptation to any man, it is not an inducement to sin. In that sense, God tempts no man. Those temptations which are said to come from God are *trials or tests*. In *that* sense, God *does* tempt all His people, even as it is written, “God did tempt (or, prove) Abraham.” He tries and tests them, that they may see and that He may see, whether their faith and their profession is genuine or not, even as the Angel of the Lord said to Abraham, after the trial of his faith, “Now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son from Me.”

14. *But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.* This is the essence of an evil temptation—a man’s own lust.

15. *Then when lust has conceived, it brings forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, brings forth death.* There you see the egg, the larva and the full-grown fly of sin! “Sin, when it is finished, brings forth death.”

16. *Do not err, my beloved brethren.* Do not err about anything, but, especially do not err about this matter of temptation, where you may so easily make a blunder. “Do not err, my beloved brethren.”

17. *Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of Lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.* Ascribe all evil to yourself, to the world, or to Satan—but ascribe all good unto God. “Every good gift and every perfect gift”—every grain of goodness, every trace of excellence that there is in the world comes from Him—but no evil ever comes from Him.

18. *Of His own will He begat us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of His creatures.* It is a very delightful idea that we are presented to God as “a kind of first fruits of His creatures.” There is a whole harvest behind us, as Paul also reminds us in Romans 8:19-21—“For the earnest expectation of the creature waits for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of Him who has subjected the same in hope, because the creature, itself, also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.”

19, 20. *Therefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger: for the anger of man works not the righteousness of God.* Therefore, when we are tempted, let us not be in a hurry to pronounce a verdict on the temptation. If we are slandered and evilly spoken of, let us not be quick to reply, or to grow angry. Let us be slow—very slow—to anger. It will be our wisdom, for no good comes of human anger. “The anger of man works not the righteousness of God.”

21. *Therefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness and receive with meekness the engrafted Word, which is able to save your souls.* Receive it as a graft. As the tree is prepared by the knife to receive the new shoot that is to be put into it, and so does receive it as to make it its own, and to use it for its own fruit-bearing purposes, even in that way “receive with meekness the engrafted Word, which is able to save your souls.”

22-24. *But be you doers of the Word, and not hearers, only, deceiving your own selves. For if any is a hearer of the Word and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a mirror: for he beholds himself, and goes his way, and straightway forgets what manner of man he was.* The best thing to do when you look into a mirror, and spy a spot on your face, is to wash it off. The true use of hearing the Word, or reading it, is to amend one’s self at once in those points in which the Word discovers us to be faulty. To look in the mirror and not to wash off the spots is but a piece of vanity. And to hear a sermon, or read a chapter, and not to put into practice what we are taught is a sad waste of time.

25. *But whoso looks into the perfect Law of liberty and continues therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.* There are many who complain of their short memories when they are hearing sermons. Well, then, let them be quick about *doing* what the sermon bids them, and then they will not be forgetful hearers. You have heard how one good woman described the effect of the sermon she has heard. She was one who washed wool and when her minister went round to ask her what she had learned on the previous Sabbath, she did not even remember the text. “Oh, Janet,” he said, “I am afraid you are a forgetful hearer! I cannot see what good the sermon has

done for you.” So she took him to the back of her house where she had a pump—and she worked at the handle while she held underneath the spout a sieve full of wool that was dirty and foul. The water ran through the wool and through the sieve, and all ran away. “There,” she said, “this sieve is like my memory. But, Sir, though the water does not stop in the sieve, it washes the wool—and what you preach, though it does not stay in my memory, it has washed my heart and cleansed my life and conversation.” Never mind about keeping the water in the sieve so long as it washes the wool! No man can be said to be a forgetful hearer who is a doer of the work that he is bid to perform!

26. *If any man among you seems to be religious.* You know what that means and there are some who do seem to be wonderfully religious. Butter would not melt in their mouths, as we say, they are so solemn. “If any man among you seems to be religious.”

26. *And bridles not his tongue*—That little noisy troublesome member. “And bridles not his tongue.”

26. *But deceives his own heart, this man’s religion is vain.* If religion does not salt your tongue and keep it sweet, it has done nothing for you. If the doctor wants to know the state of your health, he says, “Let me see your tongue.” And there is no better test of the health of the mind than to see what is on the tongue! When it gets furred up with unkind words. When it turns black with blasphemy. When it is spotted with lasciviousness, there is something very bad inside the heart, you may be quite sure of that!

27. *Pure religion.*—It might be rendered, “Pure ritualism.”

27. *And undefiled before God and the Father is this.* What is pure ritualism according to the Inspired Apostle. To wear a white surplice and to change it for a black gown? I do not see that in the Scriptures. To have little boys in white to sing for you? I do not see that. What I do see is this—

27. *To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction and to keep himself unspotted from the world.* I should like to have such a surpliced choir as this—a company of Christian men and women robed in unspotted holiness! We shall have such a choir as that around the eternal Throne of God, so they who wish to be there had better begin to practice the music here! The Lord help you to do so, for Christ’s sake! Amen.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—797, 658, 788.

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**PRAY THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL USE THIS SERMON TO BRING MANY
TO A SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST.**

A DISCOURSE UPON TRUE BLESSEDNESS HERE AND HEREAFTER NO. 1874

A SERMON INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, DECEMBER 13, 1885.
DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,
ON LORD'S-DAY EVENING, AUGUST 2, 1885.

*“Blessed is the man that endures temptation: for when he is tried,
he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord has
promised to them that love Him.”
James 1:12.*

THE text is a Beatitude. It begins with BLESSED. We should all like to be blessed. What a more than golden word that “blessed,” is! It begins the Psalms of David—there is sweetest poetry in it. It begins the sermon of the Son of David. It is the end of all holy teaching. “Happiness” is the earthly word. “Blessedness” is the heavenly one. Happiness may prove to be a superficial appearance, but blessedness is deep as the abyss. Happiness ripples like a flowing brook, but blessedness is a springing well. Happiness may be wholly human, but blessedness has the Divine element in it. Happiness is transient; blessedness is eternal! Happiness may lie in our own conception of things; blessedness is God’s verdict, God’s truthful statement of a man’s condition! Happiness may prove but tinsel—blessedness is solid gold. Oh, to be blessed! Blessed of the Lord which made Heaven and earth!

Where are these blessed men? There are such still upon the earth, for the text says, “Blessed is the man.” It speaks not of a phantom, but of a man. It treats not of an ideal man, but of one who is tried and made to endure temptation. I hear in this verse the echo of the music of many a Psalm which was chanted by the saints hundreds of years ago! James took pen in hand concerning blessed men and of the same persons, David, long before, had sung of men well known to him. There are such persons as blessed men, or the eminently practical James would not have written concerning them. It is true the curse has fallen on the world and man is born to endure toil and suffering in tilling a thorn-bearing earth and earning his bread with the sweat of his face, but for all that, there are blessed men—men so blessed that the wilderness and the solitary place are glad for them—and by their presence the desert is made to rejoice and blossom as the rose!

Where are these blessed men? Can we be of their number? Is there any way by which *we* can enter their ranks and become members of their glo-

rious peerage? Blessed men! From this day on we will not rest until we are initiated into this sacred fellowship!

Great mistakes are made as to the persons who are happy and blessed. Some suppose that the *wealthy* must be blessed—but if their lives were written, it could be proven, without a doubt, that some of those who have had the largest possessions have had the very least of blessedness, especially when those possessions have brought with them the curses of the oppressed and the wailings of the down-trodden. It must be an awful thing to have tons of cankered gold and silver pressing upon the soul—and burying the true life beneath the accursed load! Yes, and when wealth comes justly, it often brings such care, such burdensomeness with it, that it is well described in the Scriptures as a load of thick clay! In addition, there may be such a lack of power to enjoy it that the man may be rather cursed than blessed by his possessions. Well may we pity the man who has pictures but no sight, music but no ear, meat but no appetite, estates but no health with which to enjoy them.

Are there not thousands of such? Certainly they are not blessed by their fortunes. Moreover, riches are uncertain things. Like the hoarfrost of the morning, they are gone when the sun is up. Do but clap your hands and the birds that cover the fields fly away—and so do riches—they “take to themselves wings and fly away.” How should such fleeting things bring blessedness to the fields on which they light for so short an hour? No, look not in gold mines for blessedness, for it gleams not among the nuggets. Blessedness cannot be gotten for all the treasures of the miser, or the wealth of nations.

But, surely, it is to be found in positions of eminence and power! These are greatly coveted and men will sell their souls to win them. But I suppose from what I have read of history that if I were to select the most unhappy set of men beneath the vault of Heaven, one would only have to select statesmen, emperors and kings! Surely on the day of his installation, the great man may well say, “Farewell peace!” I should certainly not search among the lofty glaciers of yonder Alps to find the flowers of happiness. All is chill and cold and tempestuous in the high places of the earth. And if one had the choice of such a place, he might accept it out of a self-denying wish to do good, but otherwise he were unwise to have it as a gift. Not the high but the *holy* are blessed—not those who sit with the great, but those who *serve* with the good are marked out by the Lord as blessed.

Nobler natures feel no greed for gold and pine for no distinction of rank. They count those blessed who know and are stored with wisdom. Surely to pry into the secrets of Nature and read the pages of philosophy must be pleasure of a lofty kind. Therefore ambitious youth burns the midnight oil—and the oil from the marrow of life as well—hoping that in search and study the mystery of blessedness will be discovered. But is it so? Does he that increases knowledge increase joy? Does he not, rather add to his sorrow? If knowledge were bliss, the devil would be in Heaven! Should we possess the gift of prophecy and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, yet these would profit us *nothing* in the trade of happiness. Telescopes, microscopes, air pumps and calculating machines are not the in-

struments of that alchemy which brings happiness out of all conditions! In another school than that of Plato we must learn in whatever state we are to be content. Blessedness is not the bookworm of the library, but a spirit which descends from above!

But some think that, surely, blessedness may be had by a combination of dignity and wisdom and riches. Put these together and a man might surely be blessed! And yet it does not seem so. I should think that no mortal that ever lived had finer opportunities than Solomon. He began with a blessed heritage from a father who was a man after God's own heart. He gathered riches like the sand of the sea and he had a capacious mind like the sea itself! None of that age could be thought of as his rival and, perhaps, none *since* have altogether equaled this many-sided man. He denied himself no luxury. He abstained from no pleasure. He tried everything that could be tried, both serious and comic.

There was nothing from which he stayed his hand. He cast everything into the crucible and he brought out of it, not gold, but ashes! "Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, all is vanity." This is the conclusion of Solomon's life as well as of Solomon's discourse. No, you cannot find blessedness on a throne nor in making many books, nor in seeking out many inventions, nor in enjoying all luxuries. These things all cry, "It is not in me!" Blessedness is a thing which is not discoverable beneath the moon, apart from Him who sits above this world and looks down—and by His Spirit influences human minds after the best things. Apart from Him you may have health and wealth and talent and eminence and power and dignity—and yet be written down among the most wretched of mankind!

If you want blessedness, hear Him speak who knows. That is, hear the Holy Spirit speak by the mouth of His servant James—"Blessed is the man that endures temptation." The subject for tonight shall be *the blessed man in his worldly state* and, secondly, *the blessed man in the world to come*.

I. We are going to find him first, in this present world, and consider him in this present life. Let us behold THE BLESSED IN THIS LIFE. "Blessed is the man that endures temptation."

It does seem very startling, at first sight, that the blessed man should be described in this way. Notice, it does not say, "Blessed is the man that is tempted," nor, "Blessed is the man that is beset by temptation." No. "*Blessed is the man that endures temptation.*" That is to say, the man who bears up under it, survives it, is not led aside by it, but endures it as gold endures the fire.

But observe, first, that it does not say, "Blessed is the man who is *never* tempted." I am sure that word has often been ready upon our lips when we have been in the sharp fire of the enemy. We have said, "Blessed is that man who is never tried, never afflicted, never tempted. Oh when shall we get to the place where there shall be none of these trials and temptations?" But James says not, "Blessed is the man who is *not tempted*," but, "Blessed is the man that endures temptation."

Look, Sirs, suppose we are professing Christians tonight and, as such, think that we have genuine faith in Christ—that we have a bright hope of Heaven—that we have a pure and fervent love to God—that we have, in

ourselves, received the gifts and Graces of the Holy Spirit and that we are certainly the children of God? These are flattering beliefs and tend greatly to our present comfort.

But suppose none of these have been tried? It would be a very presumptuous and unwise thing for us to pronounce ourselves blessed, for when such trial shall come—and come it will to us all in life or in death—suppose all our happy signs and cheering tokens should fail us? We cannot say that we are blessed till our Graces have been tried and proven—and when they have been tried and proven and we have endured the test in God's great proof-house, *then* are we blessed, but not till then! Here is a man who has received a file of what looks to be bank notes and he thinks he is very rich. Have you tried to pass one of them? Have you taken one of them to a bank? No, poor fool! He does not wish to have his fine fortune tried, but he gets angry when you suggest a doubt. And yet his wealth is mere fiction! Those flimsy papers are bank notes of the Bank of Elegance and if he were to attempt to pass them, he might rather be suspected to be a thief, than be judged to be a rich man! Much faith in this world is no better than that—and he is not blessed, but blinded—that possesses it!

He is blessed who has tried his faith, who has gone to God with a promise and received an answer to his prayer. He is blessed who has had his faith tried—who, having been put into the furnace, has by that faith in God been made to walk safely amid the flaming coals and to come out unharmed. Untried faith is questionable faith. Is it faith at all? Was there ever in this world a Believer altogether without trouble, or a grain of faith which had undergone no trial?

Blessed, then, is the man that *endures trial*. I would not like to have everything about me untried. You would hardly like to sleep in a bed concerning which you were not sure that it might not be damp and cause your death. One would not like to buy a house that he had never seen, or a yoke of oxen that he had never tried, or even a cheese which he had not tasted. One feels like David when he put on Saul's armor. Though it was royal armor, he did not like it any the better for that, for he had never seen the go of it, nor tried how far he could move and fight in it. It fitted him a great deal too much and he could hardly find himself within its ample scope. At last he made up his mind to have none of it—he must have it off and, therefore, he cried "I cannot go with these, for I have not proven them!" He had well tried that bit of hide which made his sling, though—he knew what he could do with *that* and a smooth stone—and, therefore, he felt at ease with tried weapons. But as for Saul's armor—well, he had not tried it. If your religion has never been tested, you can hardly be described as "blessed." "Blessed is the man that endures temptation."

It may seem a fine thing to have a religion that you lay aside on Monday morning after having carefully brushed it. It may seem correct and proper to put your Sunday religion into a box with a sprig of lavender or something to keep away the moth. But it is an awful farce. Your godliness will come out again on Saturday evening with your clean linen and you will be very gracious on Sunday morning when you have put on your suit and your sanctity, your hat and your heavenly-mindedness. As for the week—well, you do not need to wear your religion out too soon and, there-

fore, you do not use it on Monday! You have other manners for Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday. This is a wretched comedy! O Sirs, the sooner you burn such religion, the better! You need to have a religion which is tested every day in the week and which stands you in good stead because it can endure the test! You are blessed if you have a religion which God gives, which God tries, which God sustains, which God accepts! As an uncultivated garden is no garden, so untried godliness is no godliness! A faith that will not bear strain and test is no faith! A love that cannot endure a temptation is no love to God at all! See, then, he is *not* blessed who is screened from temptation, but he *is* blessed whose faith, hope, love and every Grace will bear the trial.

In these times, we need not wish for more temptations, for they are all around us. Men who live in London need not go across the street to meet the devil. The very atmosphere of a great city is close and hot with the reek of sin. As flies in summer, so will temptations torment you, go where you may. Men of business, you need not ask for temptations—they are thick in every trade and they multiply like gnats. They swarm in the factory, the counting-house, the exchange and the shop. The Christian man in public needs not sigh for temptations—they will not be ashamed to solicit him in the open streets. This age tests the backbone of every Christian. A man had necessarily be a man at such an hour as this! We must not be dwarfs nor spiritual consumptives! We have come into the very thick of the fight and woe to that man who cannot endure temptation—but blessed is the man who can bear it even to the end!

Dear Sister in Christ, you think yourself very patient. Have you any pain? Have you endured the loss of children or husband? If not, be not too sure of your patience. But blessed are they whose patience has endured the open grave, the constant gnawing at the heart, the bitterness of poverty and the agony of an everyday struggle for bread. The men who bear affliction in a gracious manner, these are the blessed people, for they have a patience that has been tested, a faith that has passed the ordeal, a love that has been more than a conqueror in trial! These, according to our text, are the blessed people! The Holy Spirit pronounces them such.

And they are blessed among other things for this reason—because *they have endured temptation through their love to God*. Read the text again, “Blessed is the man that endures temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised—to them that endure temptation”? No, “to them that love Him.” So that those who endure temptation rightly, endure it because they *love God*. They say to themselves, “How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?” They cannot fall into sin because it would grieve Him who loves them so well and whom they love with all their hearts! To abstain from sin for any reason is, so far, good. But you may abstain from sin from a motive which will lend no virtue to your abstinence! Some abstain from sin from fear of men, or from hope of gain—as the thief is honest when he sees a policeman and the beggar becomes pious when a meal is to be had at church. One sin will often kill another sin, as the miser shuns profligacy because he is too mean to spend his money riotously.

But to abstain from sin because you love God—yes, that is the thing! To cease from evil ways because the Lord Jesus Christ has loved you and given Himself for you and you have been led to put your sole trust in the merit of His precious blood—this is a genuine work of Grace! You love Him because He first loved you and then you say, “Now will I, with holy earnestness, keep myself clean from every sin and fly from everything that is not upright, true, honest, kind, good and pure. I will purge myself, by the help of God’s Divine Spirit, from all filthiness of the flesh and of the spirit.” When you endure temptation out of love to God, then you are blessed!

“Well,” says one, “I do not yet see the peculiar blessedness of that.” You would, dear Friend, if you had ever possessed it! I do not need, for a moment, to explain to the child of God what a blessed condition he is in who has endured temptation out of love to God—for there is, first, a main element of blessedness in the fact that it is *a blessed thing to love God*. I cannot see how a man can be unhappy who really loves God. If you love God, you cannot be cast into Hell because there can be no Hell in the heart that loves God! Love to God is, in itself, such a delightful emotion that before long the indulgence of it perfumes the whole mind with happiness. To love You, my God! To love You, my God! Surely if You give me no more than this I will bless You forever and ever! It is Heaven enough for such a poor creature as I am to be permitted to love the Lord my God with all my heart, soul and strength!

Then there arises out of the endurance of temptation *a sense of God’s acceptance*. The text says, “Blessed is the man that endures temptation, for when he is *approved*”—that is the new version—and a very correct one, too. Not so much when he is tried, but when he has *been* tried—when he has been put into the refining pot and has come out certified to be real unalloyed gold. When he is proven and, therefore, approved—then he shall receive the crown of life.

After the tried man has stood against temptation, God says of him “Now I know that you fear Me,” as he said concerning Abraham after He had tried him. “Now I know that you fear God.” This approval of God breeds a holy delight in the soul. The soul becomes conscious of the approbation of God and, I venture to say, that any man who has felt that approbation in his heart knows the beginning of Heaven! Blessed is that man who consciously enjoys his Maker’s approval, who can stand up before the infinitely Holy One and say, “Although I have sinned, my Lord Jesus has washed me in His blood and the Holy Spirit has helped me to resist the temptations which once overcame me. And I know that the gracious Father approves me.” This is, indeed, blessedness! I know of nothing to exceed it. Blessed is the man that steadfastly endures temptation, for the Lord Himself is well pleased with Him!

There comes over the back of this a number of things to help to make such a man blessed, for *he has great thankfulness in his soul*. “O God,” he says, “I thank You that I have been kept while passing through those temptations.” He is as glad as one who has been taken out of a burning house! I have known what it is to escape from a strong temptation without falling into it and I think that I have felt as grateful to God as a man

would be who had seen a shark after him—and had been almost between its jaws and had just slipped away as he heard the monster close his mouth with a snap! I remember standing under a building which was in course of building and seeing a mass of stone fall from a great height just in front of me. What a thud it made! How narrow was my escape! How I started! But what joy filled my heart! So it is when one is delivered from temptation—from temptation which began to overpower the heart. As David said, “My feet had almost gone—my steps had well near slipped.”

You remember Bunyan’s description of the feelings of Christian when he had passed through the Valley of the Shadow of Death and was able to look back by the morning light? He was struck with awe to think that he had ever passed through such a war as that, with an abyss on one side and a quagmire on the other. The road was haunted with sprites and hobgoblins and beset with traps and snares beyond all count—and yet he had actually come through that way in safety! When he saw what he had escaped, what could he do but fall down on his knees and bless God with all his heart that he had been protected through so great a peril? It helps to make a man blessed when his mind is filled with holy gratitude to God who has preserved him—

**“Kept alive with death so near,
I to God the Glory give,”**

says the man. And he is blessed by the thankfulness which he so gladly expresses!

Besides, another feeling comes over him—that of *deep humility*. “Oh,” he says, “what a wonder of Grace I am! However is it that I have escaped such peril? With such a base nature as mine, how have I been kept from destruction? I shall perish and fall tomorrow unless the Lord, Himself, is still my Helper.” Putting his trust in God, that sense of his own nothingness, accompanied with a sense of his perfect security in God, makes him feel exceedingly happy! A little rabbit, hunted and pursued, rushes through a narrow crevice under the rock and enters the place where he has his burrow. How quiet he is when he is once there! He hears many noises, but he knows that he is quite safe—not because he is so big or so strong, but because he is so little and so weak that he has been able to hide himself away under a rock where nobody can get at him. Such a feeling is blessedness to the child of God—to be *nothing*, but for Christ to be everything to him—to be weak to the last degree, but for God’s strength to be his everlasting security! Therefore, such a man who has been hunted by temptation and driven into the cleft of the Rock, Christ Jesus, enjoys a very singular and remarkable blessedness!

And, once more, he enjoys *a fearlessness of heart*. It must be an awful thing to go about the world and feel, “I fell under that temptation the other day and I would not have it known for all the world. I fell into that vile deed on such and such an occasion and if it were known, where should I be?” Poor wretch! I have heard of a toad under a harrow and I have often admired that situation without wishing to be in it—but that would be Heaven to the position of men who are conscious that they have not been true to conscience or true to God and yet have kept up a flaming profession! What poor creatures are those jackdaws who strut about in feathers which are not their own! A guilty conscience is the back door to

Hell! But he that knows that, before God, he has stood though tempted and that though often assailed he has never been vanquished, can walk through the world and care for no man! The forked tongue of slander has no power with him! He has an antidote against the venom of malice. The noise and strife of this world can little distress him, for innocence walls him up against the onslaught of the enemy! He stands like a rock in the midst of the raging billows, for God has given him steadfastness of soul—and is not that blessedness?

If it is not, I cannot tell what is! Young men beginning the Christian life, pray that you may be helped to endure temptation, for in that endurance lies blessedness like a pearl within a rough oyster shell! All of you that take the name of Christ upon you, ask for Grace to stand fast in your integrity, for as the beauty of the palm is its uprightness, so is integrity the Glory of the man! Ask for power to stand against every wind and wave because you have heard Christ's Words and, by His Grace, have practiced them and are, therefore, like houses that are built upon rocks! Ask for Grace that your piety may be such as will stand every assault of the world, the flesh and the devil, for, "blessed is the man that endures temptation."

So ready are we to sin, that to prevail over one temptation is a great joy! To have overcome many temptations is a multitudinous blessedness! To have overcome them all will be an infinite Heaven! The poet Spenser seems to anticipate that we shall all be overcome if the battle lasts long enough, just as a famous politician was known to say that every man has his price. At any rate, it will be a great rapture to fight out the last conflict and conquer in it. Oh to be victorious in our last Armageddon! It will be a joy worth worlds to disprove the Spenserian stanza which I have alluded to, which may well make the most bold tremble—

***"But all in vain; no fort can be so strong,
No fleshly breast can armed be so sound,
But will at last be won with battery long,
Or unawares at disadvantage found.
Nothing is sure that grows on earthly ground,
And who most trusts in arm of fleshly might
And boasts in beauty's chain not to be bound
Does soon fall in disadventurous fight
And yields his wretched neck to victors most despite."***

With this dark prophecy ringing in our ears, we can truly call him blessed who endures right on, and never starts aside, let the test be what it may!

Thus I have set before you what the blessed man is on earth.

II. Just a few words on WHAT THE BLESSED MAN IS TO BE, BY-AND-BY. "When he is approved, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to them that love Him"

He shall receive a crown. Of course the allusion is to the Grecian games. See how the man runs! Every muscle is strained. There is not a part of his body but what is violently exercised. He tries to pass his fellows. He flies to the goal; he reaches it and then he receives a crown. A crown of laurel, or of ivy, or, perhaps, of parsley, is put upon his head. It has no value in itself. The Greeks were so little honest that a man could not have kept his crown in his house if it had been worth a penny. Strong rooms and iron safes had not, then, been dreamed of and, therefore, they

gave the athletic Greek a crown of fading leaves—and yet many men threw away health and even life to gain that paltry wreath! Though it was intrinsically worthless, it had about it a meaning which made each leaf inexpressibly precious to him who labored for it and obtained it. Now, if we live through faith in Christ, by God's Grace, a life that shall be full of purity and holiness, God will give us a crown, not of laurel, nor of parsley, nor even of gold and rarest gems, but a, "crown of life that He has promised to them that love Him." Very wonderful, is it not, that God should reward our poor endeavors? Yet so He will!

Let us dwell, just for a minute, upon the figure of *a crown*. What did that crown mean? It meant something done—a race finished, a battle fought, a prize poem written with care and accepted by the Greek world. It recorded and rewarded something *done*. Oh it will be glorious, at last, for Christ to say, "Well done!" That crown which is promised us is not for talk, nor thought, nor vow, but it records something *done*.

It was something appreciated—appreciated by him that gave the crown. It will be no small Heaven for God, Himself, to appreciate our poor lives! We think little of them if we are gracious, but God thinks much of them because He is gracious. It is ours to humble ourselves for our imperfections, but it is God's, despite the imperfections, to see what we desire to be and what in heart we really are. It is our blessedness both now and forever to be accepted in Christ Jesus. A crown signifies something done and that something appreciated.

A crown meant reward. Now, in the Gospel system there is room for a reward, though it is not of debt, but of *Grace*. The child of God, like Moses, has "respect unto the recompense of the reward." He does not run to win a crown by his own merit, but he runs knowing that there will be a crown given to him according to the love and goodness of the God of Grace. It is not difficult for a child of God to hate legality and yet to expect a reward at the last. He knows how the great Lord who saves us by His Grace does also reward us according to His Grace! God grant us, then, Brothers and Sisters, to be living so as to receive the gracious reward of a holy life.

There is a crown for me. Does it make you laugh? I think I seldom think of it without beginning to laugh. Shall you and I wear crowns? Shall it be that our poor limping will yet win the race—that our staggering struggles will yet overcome and that we shall be *crowned*? O you dear Christian people that live in poverty and obscurity, I have a reverence for your heads which are already anointed with Grace, for your heads that are yet to be crowned with Glory! You run—often run better than the greatest and most observed of your fellow Christians—and you shall not miss your reward! There is a crown laid up, not only for Paul, "but for all them that love our Lord's appearing." Therefore, laugh to yourselves, not with unbelief as Sarah did, but with a holy joy, as Abraham did! Shall I have a crown? Shall this aching brow be decked with a crown? Shall this forehead be decked with a tiara? O my God, will You set a coronet upon *my* head? Then will I gird up my loins and quicken my pace, since the crown is so sure to those who run with patience!

Now go an inch farther in the text—“*A crown of life.*” What must that be? What is a crown of life? A crown is a dead thing. There, put it away, put it away! Somebody may steal it if they think it worth the snatching, but, after all, it is a poor lifeless circlet! A crown is made of a somewhat rare earth which men call gold, a substance yellow and cold which is hammered and sold to break hearts and buy immunity for vice. Poor stuff! In crowns there are also jewels. Pebbles, or perhaps, consolidated gases which flash and blaze in a cold joyless light of their own. A crown is a dead hard weight. But if we serve the Lord aright, we are to have “*a crown of life.*” What is life? Well, I thought to myself, this morning, as I was preaching and the multitude were listening so eagerly, “This is life.” It was no dead work to preach! Sometimes one preaches and you are like a yacht out at sea without a capful of wind—and there you lie dead, becalmed, motionless. Many a sermon resembles a dead ship on a dead sea! But when the breeze is up and you fly before it merrily, then you say, “This is life.” This kind of thing comes to us in our spiritual work, as well as in our everyday course.

Life does not mean existence. Why, they say that when God promises eternal life to Christians, it means that they shall eternally exist. They always must eternally exist because God has made their souls immortal—but there is no blessing in eternal existence! On the contrary, it may curdle into a curse. The blessing is in eternally *living*—and what is living? It is not mere existing! In fact, existence, though it is essential to life, does not enter into the meaning of life, nor so much as come near it! To live means to be in health, to be in vigor, to be in force, to be in joy, to be in right and fit condition, to have one’s whole self in order and to enjoy all that surrounds you with all that is within you. God will give to all His people, by-and-by, such a crown of life! There shall be no sickness—the inhabitant shall no more say, “I am sick.” There shall be no weakness—even our body shall be raised with power. There shall be no dullness—we shall be forever fresh and young—led to living fountains of water!

There shall be no emptiness, no sense of depletion, nor of need—we shall be forever filled with all the fullness of God. There shall be no pain, no misery—but a plenitude of enjoyment at His right hand where there are pleasures forevermore. We shall possess and enjoy all that manhood can desire. All that you can ask or think shall be yours and much more than that—inconceivable enjoyment, bliss, rapture and ecstasy—all shall be bestowed upon you by the unstinted hand of boundless love. Life shall crown all! All your life shall be crowned and all the crown shall be life! “*A crown of life.*”

Does it not mean, however, as well—is it not a sort of Hebraism for a living crown? The crown they gave in the Olympic games soon faded. That bit of parsley, or olive, or laurel was soon turned into faded leaves. But you shall have a *living* crown, that is to say, it shall never be taken from you, nor you from it. When yon sun grows pale with weariness; when his bright eye grows dim with age; when yonder moon shall redden into blood as her brightness is over shaded—then shall your crown be as resplendent as ever! When time, itself, shall cease to be and visible things shall die and death, itself, shall be swallowed up, yet you shall not cease to be

blessed, for you shall receive a living crown—a crown of everlasting life which cannot know an end!

What is more, it shall be a living crown. The best thing in this world grows stale. If a man could have all the wealth and all the art treasures of this world, he would soon grow tired of it. Did you ever go to see any exhibition without, at last, feeling, “Well, I have had enough of this. I would not care to come here every day”? But the crown of life will be just as fresh after myriads and myriads of ages as on the first day of your celestial coronation! There was a dear Sister of ours, whom the most of us will never forget, Mrs. Bartlett. Blessed among women was that mother in Israel! She has been 10 years in Heaven, today! Did you remember that? I should like to hear her story of her first 10 years in Paradise. What a chapter to read if she could write it and send it down to us! I will guarantee you that she has not known a weary moment! She has not known an instant in which her Lord has ceased to be, to her, a fullness of delight! I believe that she is *beginning* Heaven now—it is still the New Jerusalem to her! She is just at the commencement of her bliss!

Brothers and Sisters, we shall soon be with her! Our own beginnings of Glory are drawing near. Project yourselves through a million years till all that is prophesied shall be fulfilled and there you are, sitting among the angels. Listen! It is a new song they are singing and you are evidently delighted with the new melody. Did you hear those harps? They strike out novel music. You have heard it long, but it is quite new to you. Look! Look at the brightness of the seraphs! They shine as burningly as if their glow had only but kindled yesterday! “But as for myself,” says a bright spirit, clothed upon with his resurrection body, “it is a million years since I was down on earth and sinned—and washed my robes in the blood of the Lamb—and I have needed no other washing! Come, Brother, let us sing together, ‘Worthy is the Lamb that was slain,’ for we have washed our robes and made them white in His precious blood and, therefore, are we before the Throne of God!” They are always at their *beginnings* in Glory, for Christ is always their Alpha. They have always reached the fullness of their Glory, for He is their Omega! O happy saints, that wear an ever living crown!

But listen once more. Did you ever try to indulge a speculation as to what the crown of life shall be? I mean this—you have a bulb in your hand of an unknown plant. I have had several, lately, from Central Africa. The missionary said, “Put it in your hothouse” and I did. It did not look to me worth half a farthing—it was an uncomely root. But it has developed large green leaves! It is growing rapidly and “it does not yet appear what it shall be.” I am speculating upon the color of the flowers and the form of the fruit. I guess, by the delicate velvetiness of its leaves, that it is going to turn out something very remarkable, but I cannot prophesy what it will be. Man, by nature, is that uncomely bulb. When he dies, you know what a poor dried-up bulb he seems to those who lay him in his coffin. Yet even here, when God gives spiritual life, what a beautiful thing the Christian is! There is an amazing comeliness about the heavenly life even here below—yet we do not know what it is going to be. We know what spiritual life is, but we cannot guess what the flower of that life will be. Whatever it is to

be, God will give that Glory to those who, by His Grace, endure temptation because they love Him.

You gentlemen who believe in evolution, as I do *not*, tell us what a man will come to when God has sanctified him fully, by His Grace, and he has passed through ages of blessedness. What will he be when his life develops into the crown of life? We make poor guesswork of it. But I will tell you what I mean to do. I pray you follow me therein. *I mean to go and see what this crown of life is like.* We do not know what we shall be, but we have heard a soft whisper say, “When He shall appear, we shall be like He, for we shall see Him as He is.” Come, let us go to Jesus! First, let us hasten away to His Cross and unitedly look up, and say, “We trust You, Jesus.” Then, from His Cross let us come down and take His yoke upon us and learn of Him, and say, “Jesus, we will follow You.” Then, let us go with Him into the thick throng of temptation, where Satan shall try us with wealth and honor, or with necessities even unto hunger, as he tried our Lord. And there let us stand and say, “We will wrestle with temptation, O Lord Jesus, even as You did. O Lord, when we have done this, we will die with You! And if You come not soon, we will lie asleep in You! And when You say, ‘Awake,’ we will answer, ‘Here we are. We will live with You forever and forever!’”

And our joy shall be that crown of life which the Lord has promised of His own free, rich, Sovereign Grace to them that love Him! May every person in this congregation wear that crown! May you soldiers in your red coats over yonder win this crown and wear it forever! May you all be more than conquerors, for Jesus Christ’s sake. Amen!

**PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalm 73.
HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—674, 857.**

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“A KIND OF FIRST FRUITS”

NO. 3275

A SERMON
PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 9, 1911.

**DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,
ON LORD’S-DAY EVENING, JANUARY 5, 1868.**

*“Of His own will He brought us forth by the Word of Truth, that
we might be a kind of first fruits of His creatures.”
James 1:18.*

MARTIN LUTHER, the great defender of the faith, who passionately loved the Doctrine of Justification by Faith, once grew so thoroughly out of temper with the opponents who quoted the Apostle James against him, that he almost threatened to tear his Epistle out of the canon, because he supposed that James fell afoul of Paul upon the matter of justification by faith alone. It is, however, very clear to us that James, like the other Apostles, never doubted that every good thing that can be found among mankind is a gift of pure Grace, the gift of God. Hear how he puts it in the verse preceding our text, “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above”—nothing from human nature, nothing from mere free agency. Good and perfect gifts are flowers too rich and rare to spring up of themselves upon the dunghill of human nature. “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of Lights.” James knew how to—

***“Give all the Glory to Him
To whom all the Glory belongs.”***

There was no gainsaying upon this matter with the Apostle—he put the crown upon the right head and ascribed the honor to Him alone who is worthy to receive it.

Waiting upon God this evening in the same spirit, and desiring to honor and magnify Him, I ask you to consider the words of the text. They speak only to the saint—and a division must therefore be made in the congregation at once, for I fear we are not all saved—not all the children of the Divine God, not all resting upon the Rock of Ages. Let conscience speak, let each man judge himself, and let us now stand a divided company—as I fear we shall one day stand, some on the right hand and some on the left of the Judge.

It is to the children of God, the Believers, the saved ones, that such a pedigree belongs and such a destiny opens up. *Their privilege of birth* claims our first notice. And then *the practical consequences flowing from that privilege* must engage our attention.

I. THE PRIVILEGE MENTIONED IS THAT WE HAVE BEEN REGENERATED, THAT WE ARE NEW CREATURES THROUGH THE WORD OF GOD.

“Of his own will He brought us forth.” *Regeneration and all consequent blessings come to us entirely through the absolute but gracious will of God.* He is not bound to give. He may, if He wills, withhold. We have no claim upon God, except the claim of justice—and what would that involve but that He should punish us for our sin? We are felons against the Majesty of Heaven. We have forfeited all the rights we ever had under the Divine Government. The right to punishment is the only right we can now claim upon the footing of justice. Henceforth we are simply in the hands of God awaiting His sentence. He may, if He wills, save the entire human race. If it pleases Him, He may save none. If so He wills, He may make this man a monument of mercy and leave his neighbor to reap the due reward of his works. This is what God has a right to do and He claims His sovereign prerogative! Are not His own words heard through Scripture like peals of thunder, “I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion; so then it is not of him that wills, nor of him that runs, but of God that shows mercy”? There are some who, in their blindness, grow wrathful at this Doctrine, as if it were ungracious to mention a fact which it is impossible to disguise—they will almost froth at the mouth when the subject is broached. Well, let them do so—it still stands firm as a rock and fast as the eternal hills! Jehovah gives no account of His matters. He does as He wills among the armies of Heaven and among the inhabitants of this lower earth. So—

***“Mortals, be dumb! What creature dares
Dispute His awful will?
Ask no account of His affairs,
But tremble and be still!”***

Brothers and Sisters, you and I, to whom this sovereignty has looked forth through the lattice of Grace, can gladly appreciate it. We bless that wonderful, discriminating love which fixed upon us while others were let to go their downward course and perish. The only motive God had to stir up His mercy, was His own will. To us, therefore, it is precious. Before we ever prayed, before we ever sought His face, His own will, acting spontaneously, brought to us the bounty of His loving kindness. Now most men who are generous need to have their generosity excited. They will need to be waited upon. Appeals must be laid before them. They must sometimes be pressed—an example must lead them on. But “of His own will” God did to us all that has been done, without any incentive or prompting, moved only by Himself because He delights in mercy—because His name and His Nature are Love—because evermore, like the sun, it is natural to Him to distribute the beams of His eternal Grace! “Of His own will He brought us forth.” Come, my Brothers and Sisters, let us magnify the

Lord who loved us when we were dead in trespasses and sins! Let us extol the freeness of that mercy, the goings-forth of which were of old, from everlasting, while we remember that we deserved it not—that we set ourselves against it, that when we did know it, we despised it! That when it was presented to us, we defied it, resisted it, stood out against it many a long year! Oh, when we think of this, I say, let us bow humbly before the Throne of the Infinite Majesty and bless Him whose mercy endures forever and whose loving kindness, like Himself, owes nothing to any incentive beyond itself, but is causeless, not communicated, existing full and free in the mind of God Himself! Because He willed and according to the dictate of His own good pleasure, did He have compassion upon us!

The benefit we have thus received is described in the next words, “Of His own will *He brought us forth.*” That is to say, we have, by Divine power, been born-again! Our first birth was to us our sensitive creation. Our second birth, our regeneration, is our second creation. We were made once and God made us. These bodies are the wonderful fabrics of His skill and these souls are the emanations of His power. Father of Spirits, You are, O God, and we are Your offspring, and Yours alone! But our being made *again* is as great a work of God and quite as solely a work of God, quite as entirely the handiwork of God, as our first creation! Of His own will He gave us a new life and made us new creatures. Beloved, are we conscious tonight that we are new creatures? Some, perhaps, have doubts about it sometimes, but a man cannot be a new creature and not be conscious of some sort of change. And there will be times, with the most doubtful of the saints, when they are certain and assured that they are no longer what they were, but have passed from death unto life! Search your own hearts, dear Friends. Let the prayer that was offered just now to the great Searcher of Hearts, and Trier of the reins of the children of men, come from your lips and your hearts, “Search us, O God, and try us!” Verily, verily, I say unto you, if you have not something more than what Nature gave you, you will perish! If you are not something higher than the best morality, the most exact discipline and the most consistent moral behavior can make you, you will never enter into the Kingdom of Heaven!

“You must be born-again.” This declaration stands like a sentry at the gate of Heaven, thrusting the bayonet in the way to show that, however amiable, moral, upright and excellent those may be who seek to enter there, they must be born-again. “You must be born-again.” You dignitaries of the Church, you senators of the nation, you who wear imperial crowns and you who don your coronets, you must be born-again! You who have been brought up and dandled upon the knees of piety. You who have not openly offended against the Law. You who have been in your houses a joy and in the world a delight, you must be born-again! It matters not who you are—if you are born of woman, how can that be

clean which comes of the unclean? You must be passed out of the flesh into the spirit—and this must be the work of God, Himself, or it is worth nothing! It must be a *supernatural* change, above and beyond all the struggling and the striving of the creature. It must be the display of the eternal power of the Holy Spirit, or where God, is you cannot go. Happy should you be, my Brothers and Sisters, who trust that you have a share in this unutterably precious privilege! “Of His own will He brought us forth.” You are twice born. You are God’s children with an emphasis which belongs not to other men. You, though you were dead, are now alive! Though you were carnal, you have been spiritualized! Though you were far off, you have been brought near—and this all due to the Sovereign will of God alone! Bless Him, bless Him, and humble your hearts before Him!

The instrumentality through which this singular change has been worked in us is clearly stated, “Of His own will He brought us forth by the Word of Truth.” Men are not usually saved without the immediate agency of the Gospel. Some have said that the Spirit of God always works through the Truth of God and that the Truth is sure to work conviction. The Truth, however, is preached—and faithfully preached—to tens of thousands to whom it conveys not a blessing at all, but is the savor of death unto death! Others have said that the Spirit of God regenerates men apart from the Word of God but this is not told us in Scripture and is not, therefore, to be received. But always the Word and the Spirit are put together. Scripture does not talk of the Word of God as a dead letter. It says, “The Word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword.” On the other hand, Scripture does not speak of the Holy Spirit as though the Word would work apart from Him, but the two are put together, and “what God has joined together, let no man put asunder.” My dear Brothers and Sisters, you who have been begotten again unto a lively hope, was it not through the hearing of the Word, or the reading of it, or the remembrance of some hallowed text which you had almost forgotten? You know it was! Good McCheyne used to say, “Depend on it, it is God’s Word that saves souls, and not our comment upon God’s Word.” And so I believe it is. It is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believes!

And what is this Word? What is it that usually brings men to be begotten unto a new life? The Word, the special quickening Word, is the preaching of the Doctrine of the Cross. Beloved, no man was ever begotten again by preaching to him the Law. The Law may smite him, and lay him low in his death and ruin, and break and bruise him, but the telling him of what he ought to be, and should be, and of what he has done amiss, and of the punishment that he will receive will never quicken him! It is telling him that “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them”—this it is which brings

the heart to God, to peace, to life, to safety! Leave out the Doctrine of the Cross and you have left out everything! Those men who take away the Atonement from the Gospel, murder the Gospel—they are like vampires that suck the blood out of the living man’s veins, and lay him dead! That word, “blood,” is one of the most solemn and most important in the whole of Scripture! “The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanses us from all sin,” is one of the most weighty of all the Truths of Revelation—and he that speaks that Doctrine stammeringly, or who holds it without confidence, had better go to his bed—but never to his pulpit, for he cannot win souls! Let him repent of his iniquity, but never pretend to be a minister of Christ! Oh, then, if you have been quickened by the Word, proclaim the Word! If the Gospel has brought you to salvation, proclaim that Gospel! Whisper into every sinner’s ear the fact that Christ died for sinners. Make it known wherever your influence can reach that whoever believes in the Lord Jesus Christ has everlasting life! Tell how Jesus stood as the Substitute for guilty men. How, when Vengeance poured out her vials, she emptied them upon Christ instead of us! How, when the sword awoke against iniquity, it smote the Shepherd instead of the sheep! And how the Beloved Redeemer—

**“Bore, that we might never bear,
His Father’s righteous ire.”**

Now, looking back, I recall the minds of Believers to holy gratitude and humble hope as they look back to what God has done, and bless His name that “of His own will He brought us forth by the Word of Truth.”

II. And now we shall ask your earnest attention to THE PRACTICAL DUTY WHICH SPRINGS OUT OF THIS PRIVILEGE.

It is a universal rule that to whom much is given, of him much will be required—a rule as much under the Gospel as under the Law—it is a part of the government of the great House of God. Now, we were begotten by the Word with an end and with a purpose, namely, “that we might be a kind of first fruits of His creatures.”

I suppose it is meant *that we should have a dignity above all the rest of His creatures*. God intends to put us first. He puts His saints beyond all others as His peculiar treasure. I ventured to say, last Sabbath evening, that I believed the poorest and the meanest of the Lord’s people were, in the estimation of God, infinitely more important than the greatest potentates living upon the face of the earth when they are unconverted. God looks upon the rest of mankind as though they were but the common pebbles of the brook, but these are the gems, the jewels, the regalia of His crown! In these He takes delight—they are His peculiar treasure. See, then, dear Brothers and Sisters, your privilege. You have been begotten on purpose that you may be the choice ones of the earth—precious beyond conception, dear to the heart of God and lying very near to His bosom!

But the duty that comes out of this is the point to which I wish to call your attention. This morning I told you that the first fruits were gathered out of the harvest and presented to God. I think I shall have time to read a few verses from the 26th Chapter of the Book of Deuteronomy which will throw a great deal of light upon the fact of the first fruits and may help us in practically aiming to be such.

In Deuteronomy 26:1-4, we read as follows—“And it shall be, when you are come in unto the land which the Lord your God gives you for an inheritance, and possesses it, and dwell therein, that you shall take of the first of all the fruit of the earth which you shall bring of your land that the Lord your God gives you and shall put it in a basket, and shall go unto the place which the Lord your God shall choose to place His name there. And you shall go unto the priest that shall be in those days, and say unto him, I profess this day unto the Lord your God, that I am come unto the country which the Lord swore unto our fathers to give us. And the priest shall take the basket out of your hands and set it down before the altar of the Lord your God.” Then there is an account of what the offerer shall say, which we will read, by and by, and then the account closes in the 11th verse, “And you shall rejoice in every good thing which the Lord your God has given unto you, and unto your house, you, and the Levite, and the stranger that is among you.”

Now, according to James, God has been pleased to save us, *that we may bring ourselves as an offering unto God*, just as the Israelites brought a basket full of the first ripe ears of corn to offer them unto the Lord in sacrifice.

Observe, that *this was ordered of God*. This giving of the first fruits was according to God’s own ordinance. My Brothers and Sisters, I might if I liked, tonight, talk to you about the duty of giving a portion of your substance to God’s cause, but I trust that you have learned that and that many of you practice it—as many of you as do not, neglect your own profit. The rich should give that they may be rich and the poor that they may become rich—for those who give shall usually find that God returns it into their bosoms abundantly. But I am not going to speak of that just now. When it was the birthday of Socrates, each one of his disciples brought him a present, but there was one so poor that he brought nothing, but he said to Socrates, “Oh, teacher, I give you myself as my offering.” So you saints of God, I shall say nothing to you about your substance—it belongs to God. You are only stewards. I will say nothing about your time—that belongs to God, and not to you unless you redeem it, you that care for it. But rather I speak about yourselves—this is an ordinance of God, that every soul redeemed by blood should acknowledge that he is not his own, but that he is bought with a price. If you reject the giving up of yourselves to God, then you reject the purchase of the blood—but if you acknowledge that you are redeemed, you must also

admit that you are not your own, but that you belong to Christ. Professors and members of this Church, may I solemnly put it to you, whether you are carrying out day by day the consecration of yourselves to Christ? Could you honestly say, “For to me to live is Christ”? Remember, if you cannot say that, there is something wrong within—you are acting dishonestly to Him whose servant you profess to be!

A genuine Christian, I take it, makes the main and chief objective of his life the extension of his Master’s Kingdom and the manifestation of the Redeemer’s Glory. He can scarcely be thought to be a Christian, except in name, who lives from week to week with no more spirituality than that which enables him to go sometimes to the House of Prayer, but who, neither by his powers, nor his gifts, nor his time, nor by any other means, ever does service to the Lord, his God! I must be faithful with you, his servants you are to whom you obey! If you spend the whole of your energies, the whole of your strength in serving yourselves, then you are your own servants and not God’s. If Christ is in you, you will seek to honor Christ! Away with your profession, away with your name to live if there is no care for Christ’s honor! I believe that there are some professors who would as soon see the Church decline as prosper, who would just as soon hear of no conversions as of many, who never did go about to bring a soul to Christ, who never sought by any means to increase the number of the faithful! Woe unto such when He shall come, whose fan is in His hand and who shall thoroughly purge His floor. Woe unto you, I say, in that day when He shall sit as a refiner and shall purify the sons of Levi, for that which is not living Christianity will rot and be cast into the sea in that day! That which is not solid, sterling service to Christ will be held to be wood, hay and stubble which the fire shall burn! I tremble while I thus speak, for those of us who do the most may yet be doing it unto ourselves—and even the preaching of the Cross may be to us a selfish service! Oh, it is to be feared that we may sometimes preach Christ rather for the display of our own ability than the display of Christ’s beauty! And if so, we have brought no sacrifice to Him—we have rather prostituted the service of Christ to our own pride and so have dishonored Him and brought sorrow upon ourselves! Come, then, you who claim that you are blood-bought! Come, I pray you, tonight, and confess your shortcomings and ask for Grace that, henceforth, if you live, you may live unto Christ! And bring yourselves, now, I pray you, as is your reasonable service, your spirits, souls and bodies, and present them to your God, for they are His unless you have deceived yourselves!

But, in the next place, *the offering was a willing one on the part of the offerer*. Nobody ever went up to God’s House, in the olden time, flogged there or dragged there! If the Israelite did not choose to bring the first fruits, it was his own decision, and his own alone. He incurred the penalty. He lost the blessing. But if he did bring it, God loved a cheerful giv-

er—it was to be brought by him freely. So, Beloved, if I were speaking to you tonight about the giving of your substance, I would say, “Not by constraint, but willingly.” If I were speaking to you concerning the offering of your time to serve God, I would say, “Not grudgingly, but being glad to be servants of the Most High.” But I am speaking of yourselves, and I pray you bring yourselves cheerfully. ‘Tis mine to exhort you, but, oh, where the heart is right, our exhortation will be thankfully received—but still the heart will be willing beforehand. Happy is he who preaches to a people whose pure minds have the good thing in them and who, therefore, only need to have them “stirred up by way of remembrance.” Yet to any that have hitherto held back, I say, “I beseech you, Brothers and Sisters, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.” Do you notice the word the Apostle uses, “I beseech you”? Beseech! It is the beggar’s word. “I beseech you,” and I do. If I may have any love to you at all, or any care for your spiritual prosperity, I would express in this earnest beseeching of you that you would present yourselves to God!

Ah, we shall soon be gone, and on the dying bed may it never be your regret nor mine that we wasted opportunities of serving our Lord! I have stood by bedsides, and of good men, too, where there has been much of darkness and of gloom because they had to confess that they had not lived as they should have lived. O may your deathbed pillow never be stuffed with thorns because you have been unfaithful! My Hearer, are you doing all you can for Christ? Is there any service that you might undertake which you have hitherto slighted? My young Brother, with all the strength of your youth, or you, yonder, with all the wisdom of your experience—are you sure that you have laid out every talent? Is there any rusty talent wrapped in a napkin? Is there not yet something that you might do for your Master? May God grant us what I cannot bestow—the Grace to be wholly sanctified! I am afraid that few of us are so and yet we might be—might be without giving up our business, might be without leaving our daily calling—for there is such a thing, as you full well know, as eating and drinking to the Glory of God! You can buy and sell, you can sweep a street crossing, you can do anything if the heart is but right, so as to glorify God in it! The household servant, the nursery girl, the laborer in the docks, the carpenter, the bricklayer, the tradesman, the merchant, the senator, the clerk—each of these is necessary to the commonwealth—and if they are diligent and fear God in all they do, they may be as acceptable as the minister of Christ whose whole time is devoted to what are thought to be more sacred works! Only do, I beseech you, do bring yourselves cheerfully, willingly, without pressing or persuasion! Bring yourselves unto Christ in every way that your loving heart can devise and make yourselves a living sacrifice!

You noticed, perhaps, when I was reading the Chapter in Deuteronomy, that the man brought ears of corn in a basket, and he brought them freely. *But he did not, himself, offer them to God.* Did you note those words, “And the priest shall take the basket out of your hand”? Not the man’s hand that brought them could offer them but the priest’s hands should offer them—“The priest shall take the basket out of your hand, and set it down before the altar of the Lord your God.” Our offering of ourselves to God, then, is Divinely ordered and should be willingly performed, but it *must be mediatorially presented.* We cannot offer ourselves to God directly—we must come through Jesus Christ. Nothing that you and I can do or can be, in itself, is acceptable to the Most High! Christ must wash the sins of our best charities in His precious blood—and He must perfume our most industrious works with His own merit—or else they are not such as the pure and holy God can receive! I do like to think that I can bring myself by holy self-consecration to the Lord Jesus Christ, and can say to Him, “Here I am, a poor unworthy one, defiled with sin. I want to serve God. I do desire to give Him all my powers, my goods, my hours—but Lord, everything I have is so defiled, and I myself am so polluted! Put out that dear hand of Yours that was once outstretched to bleed for sin. Take me into Your hands and then take me up to Your Father’s Throne and say, “Father, I have brought You a poor sinner’s heart. He freely offers to give it, for I have fairly won it, and I present it to you. It is all Yours, it is all Mine. Father, help that poor heart, as long as it beats, to live for You. Help it with Your Grace to move hands, and tongue, and feet, and every power that is within it for your Glory and for Yours alone.” Come then, Brothers and Sisters, on this, the first Sabbath of the year [1868]—bring your hearts, bring yourselves to the High Priest, our blessed Lord Jesus—and let us pray Him to take us as we are and offer us before the Eternal Throne, that we may be “accepted in the Beloved.”

After that, it appears that *the worshipper made a confession of what he owed to God.* I have no time to read the rest of that 26th Chapter, but it suffices to say that the pious Jew, standing there with his ears of corn, confessed that his father was a Syrian, that he went down into Egypt, that there God multiplied him. That Israel was brought out of the wilderness and made, through Divine Love, to possess the promised land. “Now, therefore,” he says, in effect, “of Your own do I give unto You.” Now, if you and I give ourselves to God anew tonight, let us remember all the ways whereby the Lord has led us. Why, some of us were but boys and girls when we first loved Christ! When we were singing just now that hymn—

**“O happy day, that fixed my choice
On You, my Savior and my God”—**

I could not help thinking what a blessing and a privilege it has been to have had one's choice fixed on Jesus so many years ago! Why, it is some 18 years ago since Jesus won my heart and I am not yet old! That is much the biggest half of my life and I bless Him for it. Would I have had it postponed? Would to God I had known my Lord before I was fifteen, and loved Him while still younger—while still a child! But what has been our experience since then? Very checkered, many ups and downs, a world of ingratitude and forgetfulness on our part, but a Heaven of faithfulness and loving kindness on His part! We can sing of His love tonight, His immutability, His long-suffering, His forgiving Grace—and every note in that song seems to say to us, “Then bring yourselves and offer yourselves afresh.” By every sin forgiven, by every Grace received, by every prayer answered, by every trial from which you have been delivered, by every conflict in which you have obtained the victory, by every act of mercy vouchsafed to you, I beseech you, bring yourselves as living sacrifices unto God! Oh, if you have never got to the dignity of being sacrificed for Christ, strive after it! An ordinary Christianity is not worth the picking up, but the true Christianity that wraps a man up and envelopes him as the bush was enveloped in the fire and was not consumed—that will make you happy—that will make the eyes to flash and the soul to beat high with a more than earth-born joy! I tell you solemnly, I believe that half the professors do not know what true religion means. They have never got to it. They have got to the skimmed milk, the scum and the froth, but they have not got down into the depths! The more you give up self, the more you dare and do for Christ, the more fully Jesus sits on the throne of your heart and the more Divinely blessed will this life become to you! But the farther you keep from Christ and the more content you are with a half-hearted religion, the more will you find it to be a weariness, a mere burden to be borne, a custom to be endured—not a banquet to be enjoyed, nor a thing Divine to be loved and to be grasped with all your mind and heart!

After the worshipper had presented his ears of corn, he went his way. And we are told in Deuteronomy that he was *to have gladness of heart and a blessing upon all*. The consecration of the first fruits was a blessing on the whole, for it was a rule with God that if the first fruits were holy, the lump should be also holy. Now, if you, then, would have a blessing from God, begin, my fellow Christians, with a thorough consecration. “Oh,” you say, “my boys did not turn out as I wished!” How did you turn out yourself? “Ah,” you say, “there are my girls growing up, and I do not believe they will ever be converted!” How near do you live to God yourself? “There are my servants—I was in hopes that I should see some of them joined to the Christian Church and walking in the faith.” How about your own example? As sure as there are laws and rules of Nature, you will find that by living near to God, yourself, you will become a

channel of blessing to others. “God be merciful unto us, and bless us, and cause His face to shine upon us; that Your way may be known upon earth, Your saving health among all nations.” The blessing comes to His people, first, and then afterwards it comes to all nations. Did you forget that promise, “I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon,” and so on. And then, “They that dwell under His shadow shall return”? When you get consecrated yourselves, those who are overshadowed by your influence shall be blessed by the Divine Grace which comes to you! True revivals must begin at home. If you want to kill weeds, take the hoe into your own garden . If you want to make sweet flowers grow, dig up your own beds. So, then, if you want to have the oil of Grace communicated to the whole household, strive, as the father, the mother, the elder brother, or the sister, or the servant, or whoever you may be, to get the Divine Grace abundantly into your own soul, that afterwards it may come to the rest! O Brothers and Sisters, bring yourselves, like the basket of ears of corn, to the Lord, now, and there shall be a blessing in your going out and in your coming in! And if the blessing comes not in the shape that you would prefer, yet for all that, all things shall work together for your good. If your house is not so with God as you could desire, yet shall you feel that He has made with you an Everlasting Covenant, ordered in all things and sure!

All this while I have been speaking to the children of God—but to others of you I cannot thus speak. It would be sheer hypocrisy for me to say to you, “Come and bring yourselves to God.” Ah, no! You can make no offering to Him. Your heart is not right with Him and, therefore, you could not be accepted. But I will tell you what you can do by His Grace. Though you have nothing to bring Him, you have something to ask from Him. If your heart is not such that you can bring it, and say, “Take it, Lord, take and seal it,” yet there is the heart of Christ ready for you to take, and the love of Christ ready for you to receive! You cannot be a giver, so be a receiver! You say, “How can I receive?” I notice the poor hungry creatures on these wintry days, when they stand round the soup kitchens, bringing their pitchers with them—they do not bring their pitchers full! They bring an empty pitcher, each one of them, and they get it filled. Now, all that Christ wants of you is your empty pitcher—that poor, empty, needy heart of yours! If you would receive from Him, here is His command, “Believe and you shall live.” To believe is to trust, to confide, to lean upon, to depend. Depend upon Christ, trust in Christ and He will save you, for no one ever yet did lean on Christ and find Him fail! Oh, may you be led to a simple confidence in the dying, but now risen Savior—and then, after that—give God your whole heart and live to Him who died for you!

The Lord command His blessing for Jesus’ sake! Amen!

**EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:
PSALM 43.**

Verses 1, 2. *Judge me, O God, and plead my cause against an ungodly nation: O deliver me from the deceitful and unjust man. For You are the God of my strength.* In the previous Psalm, David had called the Lord the God of his life. Now he calls Him the God of his strength. We generally sing ourselves up. We may begin in a very low key, as David did, but if we can praise God in the dark, we shall soon praise God in the light!

2-4. *Why do You cast me off? Why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy? O send out Your Light and Your Truth: let them lead me; let them bring me unto Your holy hill, and to Your tabernacles. Then will I go unto the altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy. “My exceeding joy”—exceeding all the other joys I have—exceeding all the joys of the happiest men I have ever known!*

4. *Yes, upon the harp will I praise You, O God, my God.* It was not enough for David to say, “O God.” He cries, “O God, my God.” You cannot praise another man’s God. Possession is not only nine points of the law, but it is all the points of the Gospel!

5. *Why are you cast down, O my Soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God: for I shall yet praise Him, who is the health of my countenance and my God.* May the Lord comfort His mourning people by such words as these!

—Adapted from *The C. H. Spurgeon Collection*, Ages Software, 1.800.297.4307

**PRAY THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL USE THIS SERMON
TO BRING MANY TO A SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST.**

BEFORE SERMON, AT SERMON AND AFTER SERMON

NO. 1847

A SERMON DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JUNE 28, 1885,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

*“Therefore lay aside all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness,
and receive with meekness the engrafted Word,
which is able to save your souls. But be you doers of the Word,
and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.”*
James 1:21, 22.

BRETHREN, it is a good thing to be under the sound of the Word of God. Even if the very lowest motive should induce persons to come to hear the Gospel, it is, nevertheless, a good thing that they should come. We have heard of some who have even come to *steal*—and yet the Word of God has stolen into their hearts. In many cases, in olden times, spies were sent to hear the Protestant divines who preached the Gospel—and these took notes of all that was said, with a view to accuse them of false doctrine that they might be punished—yet in several cases, the spies, themselves, were converted! Such is the power of the Gospel of Christ, that it woos and wins, even, its greatest enemies. He that comes near to its fire, even with the intent to quench it, may find himself overcome by its heat.

Master Hugh Latimer, in his quaint manner, when exhorting people to go to church, tells of a woman who could not sleep for many nights, notwithstanding that drugs had been given to her. She said that if they would take her to her parish church she could sleep, there, for she had often enjoyed a quiet slumber under the sermon. And he goes the length of saying that if people even come to the sermon to sleep, it is better than not to come at all for, he adds, in his fine old Saxon, “they may be caught napping.” It is even so. A sick man does well to live where there are physicians, for one day he may be healed. If men are in the heat of a battle, they may be wounded—if they come where Gospel arrows are shot, they may fall under them. Plants that grow in the open are likely to be watered when the shower falls. We dare not say to any man who wills to enter the House of Prayer, “You must not come because your motive is gross and low.” No, you are welcome, anyway! Who knows but that, being in the way, God may meet with you. Being where His Truth is preached, you may hear it—and “faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.”

Yet it will strike you at once that though it is well to come to the hearing of the Word of God in any case, yet it is better to come in a better way. We should endeavor to gather the most we can from the means of Grace and not pluck at them at random. A farmer may feel that there will be

sure to be some crop upon his land if he does but seed it, but, if he is a wise man, he is not satisfied with a bare crop—he fertilizes his land heavily and tills it well so that it may bring forth a large return to him—for in these times, the largest harvest is no more than he needs. So, my Brothers, let us so use the holy ordinance of preaching that we may extract the largest possible amount of gold from the ore. Let us so come into the solemn assembly that we may hope to meet with God, there, for this is the chief end of our gathering together. And let us so behave ourselves before the coming, in the coming and after the coming, to the sanctuary, that we may gain the greatest possible profit by our coming together. To hear the Word of the Lord is often made, of the Spirit of God, to be life to dead souls and the most eminent means of further quickening to those who are already alive unto God. Let us not lose a grain of the blessing through our own fault. The Word of the Lord is precious in these days—let us not trifle with it.

This morning I shall handle my text with the earnest design of teaching you how to hear. Oh, that the Spirit of God may graciously help me! First, let us note what to do *before the sermon*—“Lay aside all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness.” Secondly, let us learn how to behave *during the sermon*—“Receive with meekness the engrafted Word, which is able to save your souls.” And thirdly, here is the instruction for *after the sermon*—“Be you doers of the Word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.”

I. Let us consider the fit and proper preparation for listening to the Gospel, or what is to be done BEFORE HEARING. It will strike every man who thinks about it, that there should be some preparation of the heart in coming to the worship of God and to the hearing of the Gospel. Consider who He is, in whose name we gather, and surely we cannot rush together without thought! Consider whom we profess to worship and we shall not hurry into His Presence as men run to a fire. Moses, the man of God, was warned to take off his shoes when God only revealed Himself in a bush—how should we prepare ourselves when we come to Him who reveals Himself in Christ Jesus, His dear Son? There should be no stumbling into the place of worship half-asleep; no roaming there as if it were no more than going to the theater. We cannot expect to profit much if we bring with us a swarm of idle thoughts and a heart crammed with vanity. If we are full of folly, we may shut out the Truth of God from our minds. We should make ready to receive what God is so ready to bestow. If he was condemned, who came to the wedding feast not having on a wedding garment, what shall we say of those who habitually come into the festivals of our Lord and never think of being meet to be partakers of His royal dainties? What shall we say of those who defile the temple of God by never seeking to have their souls washed from the filthiness of their sin? Certainly there should be a *serious* preparation when a sinful creature draws near to the most holy God!

Brothers and Sisters, when I think of our engagements throughout the week, who of us can feel fit to come into the holy place of the tabernacles of the Most High? I mean not into these tabernacles made with hands, but into the inner *spiritual* temple of communion with God. How shall we come unto God until we are washed? After traveling so miry a road as that

which runs through this foul world, can we come unto God without shaking the dust from off our feet? Can we be busy with earthly cares all the six days of the week and be ready for the holy Sabbath without a thought? I think not! Even in the heathen temples before the solemn mysteries began, the herald cried, "Far hence, you profane! Far hence, you profane!" And should not some herald cry to our wandering thoughts, "Far hence, vain thoughts, for God is here!"

When the hour is come for drawing near unto the glorious Lord before whom angels veil their faces as they cry, "Holy, holy, holy," it becomes us to be devout and humble, holy and earnest. Yes, Brothers and Sisters, if we were always occupied with Divine worship; if we never knew thought or care except for His Glory; if we were altogether dissociated from the entanglements and defilements of the world, I should not be so earnest to speak of preparation before hearing the Word of God! But, alas, it is not so! We are men of unclean lips and we dwell among a people of unclean lips! We have not yet come into the holy country where everyone that salutes us is either saint or angel. We have not yet cut off all the Canaanites—we still have need to watch against them daily. Because of the sin which dwells in us and around us, we have need to wash ourselves in the laver at the tabernacle door before we may come near unto the Most High.

There is a common consent among mankind that there should be some preparation for worship. I see the visible signs of it here, today. Before the Sabbath dawned, you began to prepare clean linen and brighter garments than those of common days. It is but an outward and common matter, but still, within the shell there lies a kernel. Man puts off his ordinary week-day garments and puts on his best apparel for the Sabbath because, by instinct, he feels that he should pay some reverence to his God. I fear this change of clothing full often degenerates into a wish to look good before your fellows, but the underlying meaning should be this—"I am going up, this day, to the worship of my God. I will not go, therefore, either in uncleanness of body or of apparel, but will put on the best raiment, that I may show respect to my God and to the assemblies of His house."

My counsel to you is cleanse your hearts rather than your garments! Go before God in newness of spirit rather than in newness of clothing. If of old the Prophet said, "Rend your heart, and not your garments," so may I say, today, Put on the garments of righteousness and holiness by the Grace of Christ Jesus our Lord, rather than external garments which do but adorn the flesh. Yet, I say, even in that change of raiment there is an admission that there should be God and to worship His holy name. God grant that we may not be forgetful of some kind of special preparation when we go up to hear the Word.

In making this preparation, our text tells us that there are *some things to be laid aside*. What does it say? "Therefore lay aside all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness." Some things must be removed before the Word of God can be received. And what are these things? The text mentions *all filthiness*. Now sin of every kind is filthiness. It does not strike the most of men so—they call it pleasure! I have even known them to think it an ornament. But in the judgment of the Spirit of God, who speaks here by His servant, James, every sin is filthiness. In the sight of every renewed

man, all sin is filthiness and nothing better. Ever since the day when the Spirit of God took the scales from his eyes, the godly man sees sin to be a *foul* thing—abominable in the sight of a holy God. Sin in the thoughts is filthiness of the thoughts! Sin in words is filthiness of speech! Sin in action is filthiness in life! Everywhere, the transgression of the Law is a foul and polluting thing, which neither God nor good men can bear.

Now, Brothers and Sisters, in coming before God, by the help of His Spirit, every sin must be confessed, forsaken, and hated. By faith in the precious blood of Jesus, it must be washed out, for we cannot come before God with acceptance while iniquity is indulged. We must remain apart from God till we are apart from filthiness. Filth, you know, is a *debasing* thing, meet only for beggars and thieves—and such is *sin*. Filth is *offensive* to all clean persons. We cannot bear close contact with a person who neglects the washing of his body or of his clothes, so as to become a living dunghill. However poor a man is, he might be clean. And when he is not, he becomes a common nuisance to those who speak with him, or sit near him. If bodily filthiness is horrible to us, what must the filthiness of sin be to the pure and holy God?! I cannot attempt to express the abomination of sin to God! He hates it with all His soul. If we are to be acceptable before God, there must be no keeping of favorite sins, no sparing of darling lusts, no providing for secret iniquities—our service will be filthiness before God if our hearts go after our sins. He says, “Be you clean, that bear the vessels of the Lord.” He would not have the vessels of His sanctuary touched with filthy fingers.

Have we well considered this? Lay aside, then, all filthiness unless you wish to arouse the wrath of God. If we are offensive to God, all we do becomes offensive to Him. Remember how it is written that, “the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering: but unto Cain and to his offering, He had not respect.” The Lord’s acceptance is, first, to the *person* and, then, to the sacrifice—to Abel, first, and to his offering afterwards. If God has no delight in a man’s person, then has He no delight in his services. Think not, you unclean, that your hymns and praises, however sweetly they are sung, can be music in His ears! Think not that your forms of prayer can ever ascend like sweet perfume before Him—they are a stench to Him—and an abomination, so long as you, yourselves, are not washed from your filthiness! The filthiness of sin is to be put aside if we would hear the Word aright.

Moreover, sin is not only offensive, but it is *dangerous*. We have learned at last, I hope, though some are still ignorant of the fact, that filthiness means disease. Men begin to see that unless we are clean we cannot be healthy. He who harbors filth is making a hot-bed for the germs of disease and thus he is the enemy of his family and of his neighborhood. The filthy man is a public poisoner, a suicide and a murderer! Sin is the greatest conceivable danger to a man’s own soul—it makes a man to be dead while he lives—yes, corrupt before he is dead. Sin is a mortal disease and he that bears it about him is not far from Hell—while he continues to love it, he can never enter Heaven. Will you come before God and tread His courts with this leprosy upon your foreheads? Will you bring your infectious diseases into His Temple? They must be laid aside. Oh, for Grace to do this!

There are at least three sins that are intended, here, and one is *covetousness*. Hence the desire of unholy gain is called filthy lucre because it leads men to do dirty deeds which otherwise they would not think of. If the lust of wealth enters into the heart, it rots it to the core! The Apostle cries, "Your gold and your silver are cankered!" Truly, the man becomes full of cancer and cankered, too. Now, when a man's heart is full of filth, when the desire to get gain and to get it anyway he can is strong on a man, he is in a very unfit condition to profit by hearing the Gospel. You cannot get the Gospel into him—a golden bolt fastens the door. He is somewhat in the condition of the sea captain I have heard of who went out after whales and when he landed and heard the Gospel preached, he said to the man of God, "Sir, it was of no use your preaching to me, for all the while I was thinking about where I should find a whale. There is no room for anything else in my mind but whales. I must have whales and, for the time, I can think of nothing else but whales." So it must be with the man who is hot for gain—his farm and his merchandise are in his heart—crowding out everything else. He who has a stall in Vanity Fair is in an unfit state to buy the Truth of God since his merchandise is vanity. A covetous man is an idolater and cannot receive the gift of God till he has mastered his bosom sin. He is too foul to draw near to the Lord! God help him to escape from the idolatry of riches.

Then, with peculiar correctness, *lustfulness* may be spoken of as filthiness. I need not enlarge. Does not Nature, itself, teach us that the indulgence of our animal passions, whatever form that indulgence may take, whether of drunkenness or lewdness, is a condition that makes a man unfit for the reception of the pure Word of God? How should spotless purity come and dwell with that man whose life is brutish indulgence? How should the thrice Holy Spirit come and dwell in that heart which is a den of unclean desires? Did the men of Sodom profit by the teaching of Lot? Shall a man come from the chamber of lust to the house of the Lord? No, Brothers and Sisters. We must lay apart all filthiness if we are to worship God in spirit and in truth.

But in the connection of my text, the filthiness meant is especially *anger*. Read it and you will see. "The wrath of man works not the righteousness of God; therefore lay aside all filthiness." Some persons, when they are angry, will say things that never ought to be repeated, or even said for the first time. It was so, no doubt, in James's day even more than in our own—then angry men let fly horrible epithets and abominable insinuations which were, indeed, a superfluity of naughtiness. Now, the child of God is to subdue his anger, wrath and malice. How can you accept the Word of Peace while you are at enmity with your brother? How can you hope to find forgiveness under the hearing of the Word of God when you forgive not those who have trespassed against you? We would have you pray before you come into this house on the Sabbath morning or evening—and see to it that you come in the spirit of gentleness and meekness! Only thus will you receive the engrafted Word. The wrath of man is so filthy a thing that it cannot work the righteousness of God! Nor is it likely that the righteousness of God will be worked in the heart that is hot like an oven with passion and malice. A revengeful, bitter and malicious

spirit is little likely to imbibe the sweet forgiving spirit of the Gospel. God help us, then, to lay aside all filthiness and especially all enmity.

But it is added, "*and superfluity of naughtiness.*" What does that mean? Any kind of naughtiness in a child of God is superfluous—iniquity ought *not* to be within him! "Superfluity of naughtiness," or the outpouring of evil, is unnecessary. It is an excrescence upon a child of God. The phrase here used differs not in meaning from the first epithet of the text—it gives another view of the same thing. You have seen a rose bush which, perhaps, was bearing very few roses, and you half wondered why. It was a good bush and planted in good soil, but its flowers were scanty. You looked around it and, by-and-by, you perceived that suckers were growing up from its roots. Now, these suckers come from the old, original briar on which the rose had been grafted—and this rose had a superfluity of strength which it used in these suckers. These superfluities, or overflows, took away from the rose, the life which it required, so that it could not produce the full amount of flowers which you expected from it. These superfluities of naughtiness that were coming up here and there were to the injury of the bush.

Children of God, you cannot serve the Lord if you are giving your strength to any form of wrong! Your naughtinesses are springing from the briar stock of your old nature and the best thing to do is to cut off those suckers and stop them as much as possible, so that all the strength may return into the rose—and the lovely flowers of Grace may abound. Oh, that God's people, when they come up here on the Sabbath, may first have undergone that Divine pruning which shall take away the superfluity of naughtiness, for there cannot be grafting without a measure of pruning! The gardener takes off from a certain part of the tree, a shoot of the old stock, and then he inserts the graft. There must be a removal of superfluities in order that we may receive with meekness the engrafted Word which is able to save our souls. This is what is to be put away.

The garments spotted with the flesh and infected with disease are to be taken off and *laid aside*. We are to wear them no more if we desire to profit by the Word which we hear. We are not to *lay up* these to put them on again, but lay them *aside* among the offal of Tophet's fire—with the strong desire never to touch them again. To the fires we condemn these filthy things! What have we to do with filthiness, now that we have been begotten by the will of God to be the first fruits of His creatures? You who are the children of a holy God, what have you to do with naughtiness, or any such superfluity? God help you to shake off sin as Paul shook off the viper into the fire!

Why is this? Why is a man, as he comes to hear the Gospel, to see to this? I take it because all these evil things preoccupy the mind. Whether it is covetousness, or lewdness, or anger, in addition to the pollution which these bring, they also possess the thoughts, so that they are not likely to be blessed while hearing the Word of God. These are the rocks which prevent the seed from entering the mind. These the birds which devour that which is sown. These are the weeds which choke the upspringing shoots. Therefore, lay these aside. If you bring your measures to this place filled to the brim with chaff, how can you expect to have them filled with wheat?

If we come here with this filthiness about us, how can we expect that the pure and incorruptible Word of God shall be sweet to us?

Moreover, sin prejudices against the Gospel. A man says, "I did not enjoy the sermon." How can you? What have you been enjoying during the week? What flavor did last night leave in your mouth? "I cannot stand that man," says one. And if you could, it would be an evidence that the man was not faithful! Can Ahab love Elijah? I remember seeing one get up and go out in hot indignation at what I had said, which happened to come personally home to him, though the man was a stranger to me. What I had said was the pure Truth of God and I could not be sorry that an ill-living man was indignant at it, since this was the only homage that such as he could pay to purity! Had he but known it, there was therein a manifestation to himself of what his nature was and in what condition he was. Do you think Christ's servants desire to please those who will not please God? "Oh," said one to a Puritan Divine, "my lord heard you, this morning, and he is mightily offended at your remarks upon profane language, for my lord is given to drop an oath, now and then, in his ordinary speech." What said the Puritan Divine? He answered, "Sir, if your lord offends my Lord, then your lord *ought* to be offended and I cannot say less than I have said."

If any men are offended with the Gospel, it is because they offend God. It is almost invariably the case that when persons grow skeptical, who once professed to be religious, and begin picking at this and that, there is a secret evil in their lives which they thus try to cover from their own consciences. The devil tempts them to rail at the ministry because the Gospel presses hard upon their guilty consciences and makes them feel uneasy in their sins. If you are to hear God's Word with pleasure and profit to yourselves, you must, "lay aside all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness," for these things will prejudice you against the Word of God and render you incapable of that lively appreciation of it which is so necessary to profiting thereby. God bless these words of mine and may many of you who have come carelessly here at different times, henceforth seek to come with preparedness into the assembly of God's people.

II. Secondly, I will talk a little about DURING HEARING. How shall we act while listening to the Word? "Receive with meekness the engrafted Word, which is able to save your souls." The first thing, then, is *receive*. That word, "receive," is a very instructive Gospel word—it is the door through which God's Grace enters us. We are not saved by working, but by *receiving*—not by what *we* give to God, but by what *God* gives to us—and we receive from Him. In the hearing of the Word, there should be a receiving of it, not into the ears only, but into the understanding, into the heart, into the conscience, together with a laying-up of this good treasure in the memory and the affections. You must *receive* the Word of God, or it cannot bless you. For, Sirs, the Word of God is a feast, but what comes of it if a man only *looks* at the banquet? Shall he not go away as empty as he came if he does not *receive* it? The preaching of the Word of God is as a shower from Heaven, but what happens to the soil if the raindrops fall but none are absorbed into the soil? Of what use is the shower if none is drunk in by the thirsty furrows? A medicine may have great healing

power, but if it is not *received*, it does not purge the inward parts of the body. There must be a receiving of any good thing before the goodness of it can be ours.

I love, when I read the Bible, or hear the Word, to throw the doors of my soul wide open—yes, and to open all the windows of my heart. My soul cries, “Come in, most blessed Spirit; come in, Divine Life. You shall not say there is no room for You in the inn! Come, take possession of every chamber of this house of mine and be Master of it from now on and forever.” I pray you, my Brothers and Sisters, do not block up your souls against the incoming tide of the Gospel! On the contrary, break down the dams and let the river flow into you till you are filled with it! Receive the Word of God! Many men are not profited by the Word because it does not penetrate them, but is like water flowing down a slab of marble. The Truth of God must soak into the heart if it is to bless the heart! May the blessed Spirit give us a sweet receptiveness of the Truth, for, otherwise, it is of no use to hear it.

Then it is added, “receive *with meekness*.” Many do not receive the Gospel because they are not of a meek and teachable spirit. They come up to God’s house, but the only seat they will occupy is the Judgment Seat. One would imagine them to be the god of God by their bold talk! Judge not the Word of God, I charge you! You may judge *me* as you like—small matter shall that be to me, for we are not anxious as to men’s judgment—our judgment is with the living God. If the preacher truly declares the Word of God, woe unto the man who sits in judgment upon it—this same Word shall judge him at the Last Great Day! We stand at the bar to be tried by God’s Word, searched and sifted—but woe unto us if, rejecting every presence of meekness, we ascend the tribunal and summon God, Himself, before us! The spirit of critics ill becomes sinners when they seek the Lord’s mercy.

His message must be received with teachableness of mind. When you know it is God’s Word, it may upbraid you, but you must receive it with meekness. It may startle you with its denunciations, but receive it with meekness. It may be there is something about the Truth which, at the first blush, does not commend itself to your understanding. It is, perhaps, too high, too terrible, too deep—receive it with meekness. This is not the spirit of the present age, but it is the spirit which the living God requires of us. It is by receiving with *meekness* that we receive the Truth of God in the power of it and so it is able to save our souls. Unless you are converted and become as little children, you cannot enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. The door of Heaven is open to those who sit at Jesus’ feet and learn of Him. You are not His servant unless He is your Master. You cannot be said to be His disciple if you question His teaching, for in the questioning of Christ’s teaching lies the rejection of His Person. To doubt Jesus is treason against the authority He claims over every human heart. Receive with meekness if you would be blessed with Divine Grace.

What is this which is to be received? “Receive with meekness *the engrafted Word*.” We are not bid to receive with meekness *men’s* words, for they are many, and there is little in them. But receive with meekness God’s Word, for it is one, and there is power in each Word which proceeds

out of His mouth. One Word of God created the heavens and the earth! By the Word of God, the heavens still stand! One Word of His shall, before long, shake not only earth but also Heaven! Therefore, hear with meekness that Word; that Word which testifies of sin and of its sure punishment; that Word which testifies of Grace most large and free—and of an Atonement provided by the Only-Begotten Son of the Father—by which sin is put away in consistency with justice and holiness. Receive with meekness the Word of the Lord in its entirety and unity. Reject no part of it, but receive the whole.

Any little particle of God's Word, so far as we know it, is precious, and should be highly esteemed by us. The odds and ends, and corners and fragments of the Divine Word are to be received by you and by me—and there is a *lack* of meekness in us if we begin to pick and choose, and cut and carve the Divine Word. Who are we that we should say, "This or that is not essential"? Who are you, O man, that you should decide what is essential or otherwise? He who gave the Word did not write trifles! It is essential that you receive the Word of the Lord as supreme and perfect! And it is essential that you are *lost* if you do willfully reject any portion of that which the Most High deigns to reveal to men. Receive with meekness the one, only, and indivisible Word of the Lord.

It is called "the *engrafted* Word." The Revised Version has "the implanted Word," which is, perhaps, more literal than the Authorized translation. And it puts in the margin, "the inborn Word," which gives another idea and yet conveys the same sense. I will keep to our old and well-beloved version and read it, "engrafted Word." When a graft is to be made, the first thing is to make a cut or gash. Nobody ever received the Word of God into his heart, to be engrafted there, without being cut and wounded by the Truth of God. It needs two wounds to make a graft—you wound the tree and you wound that better tree which is to be grafted in. Is it not a blessed grafting when a wounded Savior comes into living contact with a wounded heart? When a bleeding heart is engrafted with a bleeding Savior? Engrafting implies that the heart is wounded and opened—and then the living Word is laid in and received with meekness into the bleeding, wounded soul of the man. There is the gash and there is the space opened by it. Here comes the graft—the gardener must establish a union between the tree and the graft. This new life, this new branch, is inserted into the old stem, and they are to be livingly joined together.

At first they are bound together by the gardener and clay is placed about the points of junction. But soon they begin to grow into one another and only *then* is the grafting effectual. This new cutting grows into the old and it begins to suck up the life of the old and change it so that it makes new fruit. That branch, though it is in the grafted tree, is altogether of another sort. Now, we need the Word of God to be brought to us in a similar fashion—our heart must be cut and opened—and then the Word must be laid into the gash till the two adhere. Then the heart begins to hold to the Word, to believe in it, to hope in it, to love it, to grow to it, to grow into it and to bear fruit accordingly! "Christ lives in me," said the Apostle. Is not that a wonderful thought? The daily Incarnation of Christ in the Believer, or, in other words, the new Eternal Life living in us and producing fruit af-

ter its own kind, while we live in it—and the fruit is our own. Christ is come in all the newness of His life and is living in me! Oh, blessed grafting! “Receive with meekness the engrafted Word.”

Once more, you are to receive it by faith, for you are to regard the word as being *able*. Believe in the *power* of God’s Word—receive it as being fully able to save your souls from beginning to end! Two ways it does this—by putting away your sin as you accept the blood and righteousness of Christ—and by changing your nature as you accept the Lord Jesus to be your Master and your Lord, your life and your all. There is such potency in the Word of God, that if it is received into the heart, it will effectually save the soul! It will not merely give you a *hope* of being saved, but *really* save you—save you *now*, save you through life, save you to all eternity! Oh, with what ears ought men to listen to a Word which can save their souls! With what open mouths ought they to drink in this Living Water! How wisely might we wish to be like sponges, to suck it all up, or like Gideon’s fleece, to be saturated with the dew of Heaven! How we ought to wish to be like the plowed ground which is broken up and pulverized, so that every drop that falls may soak into it! Oh, that the new life that is come to us would put out the old life of the flesh, so that our life should no longer be after the old fashion, but in all newness of power! Let us rejoice to have the Word engrafted in us.

This is how to behave *at* the sermon. Oh, what need have we of the Holy Spirit to help us to hear the Truth as well as to prepare us before we hear it!

III. Lastly, and very briefly, let us think of AFTER THE SERMON. “Be you doers of the Word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.”

First, the command is *positive*—“Be you doers of the Word.” Oh, dear Sirs, I come to this pulpit oftentimes and speak with you, but as I come here, my heart is more and more burdened with this desire—that mine may not be an unprofitable ministry to you! I shall be useless to you unless you are doers of the Word as well as hearers. Sirs, you have heard about repentance and the putting away of filthiness—repent, then, and let your filthiness be put away! May God the Holy Spirit lead you to do so—not only to *hear* about it—but *do* it. You have heard us preach continually concerning faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and you know all about believing—but have you believed? Sirs, have you believed? If not, to what use is it for us to cry, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved”? We are to admonish you concerning all those blessed duties which spring out of that living faith which works by love—but it is nothing to hear about these virtues unless you possess them! *Doing* far surpasses *hearing*!

I believe that with a very little knowledge and great doing of what we know, we may attain to a far higher degree of Grace than with great knowledge and little doing of what we know. The man who knows how to keep shop makes no profit by his knowledge if he does not keep a shop. The doctor who knows how to cure the sick is not, therefore, a healer if he never has a patient. The man who knows how to teach children, but never teaches them, is not an instructor of youth. If a schoolmaster teaches the little he does know, he may be a better teacher than a great philosopher who keeps all his wisdom to himself. We value clouds by their rain, and

men by their actual doings! The world is always looking to the church, not so much to hear her teachings as to see her doings. Few ask, "What is the doctrine taught at such a meeting house?" The ungodly world cries, "Forget the doctrine! What *good* is done there?"

If the people who attend there are mean, false and hypocritical, the world condemns the tree which yields such fruit! The bulk of men do not read the Bible, but they read *you*—and if they do not come to hear the minister preach the Gospel, yet they say, "These people who hear him are no better than other people, and why should we trouble to go and listen to him?" The minister gets the blame which should rightly belong to those who are hearers but not doers of the Word of God! Oh, may the Eternal Spirit work in us all to will and to do of His own good pleasure! There is nothing done by these Sundays. There is nothing done by these pulpits! There is nothing done by these pews! There is nothing done by these vast gatherings unless our hearers are *doers* of the Word of God! Practice is the harvest—the rest is but the plowing and the sowing.

Observe that the command is put *negatively*. The text says, "not hearers only." Those who are hearers only are wasters of the Word. What poor creatures hearers are, for they have long ears and no hands! You have heard of him who, one day, was discoursing eloquently of philosophy to a crowd, who greatly applauded him. He thought he had made many disciples, but suddenly the market bell rang and not a single person remained! Gain was to be made and, in their opinion, no philosophy could be compared to personal profit! They were hearers till the market bell rang and then, as they had been hearers only, they quit the hearing, also! I fear it is so with our preaching—if the devil rings the bell for sin, for pleasure, for worldly amusement, or evil gain—our admirers leave us right speedily! The voice of the world drowns the voice of the Word! Those who are only hearers, are hearers but for a time. Some of those now before me are hearers only. We cannot mark your houses by putting a cross upon your doors and writing on them, "Lord, have mercy upon us," but if I did so, London would seem to be smitten with the plague!

Oh that you would cease from this mocking of God and ruining of yourselves! Remember, if any man will be lost, he will most surely be lost who heard the Gospel and refused it! Write that word in great capital letters—if any soul will be lost emphatically, it is he who has been, for years, a hearer only, a hearer where thousands have believed unto eternal life! Over the cell of such a man write, "He knew his duty, but he did it not"—and that cell will be found to be built in the very center of Gehenna—it is the innermost prison of Hell. Willful rejection of Christ ensures woeful rejection from Christ! Take heed, you that deny Him entrance now, lest—

"How they deserve the deepest Hell

That slight the joys above!

What chains of vengeance must they feel

Who break the bonds of love!"

The text closes with this solemn word—"deceiving yourselves." Whereupon says Bishop Brownrig, "To deceive is bad, to deceive yourselves is worse, to deceive yourselves about your souls is worst of all." Alas, there are many in that sad condition! A syllogism may be bad and yet it may look like logic—and such are the hopes which men fashion out of a bare

hearing of the Word of God! It is very easy, when you get well accustomed to the Gospel, *au fait* at it, as they say, to be able to twist it so as to make it seem to favor you, though it condemns you. He who wills to be deceived can feign an acquittal out of a sentence of death! Many think it is all right with them, when it is all wrong with them. They *always* hear the Gospel—how can *they* be castaways? They sit under a thoroughly evangelical Divine—how can they be reprobates? They know what is what—they will not consent to hear false doctrine—they have a discriminating faculty and will not abide unorthodox teaching.

I am very glad they will not, but they seem to make a god of this discernment. Alas, it is a mere idol! Hundreds believe that because their minister is unquestionably sound in the faith, therefore they are also sound. As they have the good sense to hear *him*, surely they are first-rate people and the Lord will overlook their faults! Oh, Sirs, be not such fools! Do not deceive yourselves in that way, for there is no truth in this comforting conclusion! The better that which you hear, the more guilty are you if you do not *practice* it! And the plainer and more straight the Gospel which is taught you, the more inexcusable are you if you do not receive it! When the Gospel comes to you with a heavy knock at the door of your heart, the more terrible your crime if you bolt and bar your door against it, or say, “When I have a more convenient season I will send for you.”

God grant to each one of us that when we go home we may attend to the doing of the sermon! You know the old story—I am half ashamed to repeat it, but it is so pat to the point. When Donald came out of church sooner than usual, Sandy said to him, “What? Donald, is the sermon all done?” “No,” said Donald, “it is all said, but it is not begun to be done yet.” Let my sermon be done in your chambers by prayer and in your lives by holiness! Let it be done all through the week by our, each one, seeking to put away all filthiness! Let us cling to the holy Christ, desiring to live His life and breathe His Spirit. God grant it may be so with you all, for Jesus Christ’s sake. Amen.

**PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—James 1.
HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—101, 652, 645.**

Adapted from *The C. H. Spurgeon Collection*, Ages Software, 1.800.297.4307

TWO SORTS OF HEARERS

NO. 1467B

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

“But be you doers of the Word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if any is a hearer of the Word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholds himself, and goes his way, and straightway forgets what manner of man he was. But whoever looks into the perfect Law of liberty, and continues therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.”
James 1:22-25.

JAMES has no speculations. “By their fruits you shall know them,” seems to have taken possession of his mind and he is always demanding practical holiness. He is not satisfied with the *buds* of hearing—he wants the *fruits* of obedience! We need more of his practical spirit in this age, for there are certain ministers who are not content with sowing the old seed, the same seed which, from the hand of Apostles, confessors, fathers, reformers and martyrs produced a harvest unto God. They spend their time in speculating as to whether the seed of tares grown under certain circumstances may not bring forth wheat—whether, at any rate, good wheat would not be the better for the admixture of just a little sprinkling of tare seed!

We need somebody to take these various theories, put them into a cauldron, boil them down and see what is the essential practical product of them. Some of you may have seen in the newspapers a short time ago an article which fastened itself upon my mind—an article with regard to the moral state of Germany. The writer, himself a German, says that the skepticism of the professed preachers of the Word of God, the continual doubts which have been suggested by scientific men and more especially by professedly religious men as to Revelation, have now produced upon the German nation the most frightful consequences.

The picture which he gives makes us fear that our German friends are treading upon a volcano which may explode beneath their feet. The authority of the government has been so severely exercised that men are beginning to weary of it and, meanwhile, the authority of God has been put so much out of the question that the basis of society is undermined. I need not, however, ground my remarks upon that article, for the French Revolution at the end of the last century remains in history as an endur-

ing warning as to the dread effects of philosophy when it has cast suspicion upon all religion and created a nation of infidels. I pray God that the same may not happen here, but the party of “modern thought” seem resolved upon repeating the experiment! So greatly is the just severity of God ignored and so trifling an evil is sin made out to be that if men were to be *doers* of what they hear and carry out what has been taught from certain professedly Christian pulpits, anarchy would be the result! Free-thinking always leads that way. God keep us from it!

While preachers too often toy with preaching, how much there is among hearers of the same fashion? Hearing is often merely a critical exercise and the question after a sermon is not, “How was that Truth of God fitted to your case?” but, “How did you like *him*?” as if that had anything to do with it! When you hear music, do you ask, “How did you like the trumpet?” No, it is the *music*—not the *instrument*—that your mind thinks about! Yet many persons always consider the minister rather than his message. Many contrast one preacher with another when they should contrast themselves with the Divine Law. Thus hearing the Gospel is degraded into a pastime and judged to be little better than a theatrical entertainment.

Such things must not be! Preachers must preach as for eternity and look for *fruit*—and hearers must carry out what they hear, or otherwise the sacred ordinance of preaching will cease to be the channel of blessing and will rather be an insult to God and a mockery to the souls of men! I shall, not, at great length, but I hope with much earnestness, speak of two classes of hearers—the *unblessed class*, and the second, *the class who according to the text, are blessed in their deed*.

I. First, THE UNBLESSSED CLASS. They are hearers, but they are described as *hearers who are not doers*. They hear—some of them pretty regularly, others of them only now and then just to while away an hour—and they hear with considerable attention because they appreciate good speaking. They are interested in doctrine, perhaps, having a little knowledge of the Christian system, and they like to discuss a point or two. Moreover, they are anxious to be able to say that they heard Such-and-Such preach, of whom his fame has gone abroad. But as to *doing* what they hear, that has not entered their minds.

They have heard a sermon on repentance, but they have not repented. They have heard the Gospel cry, “Believe!” but they have not believed. They know that he who believes purges himself from his old sins, yet they have had no purging, but abide as they were. Now, if I address such, let me say to them—it is clear that you are and must be unblessed. Hearing of a feast will not fill you! Hearing of a brook will not quench your thirst! The information that there is gold in the Bank of England will not enrich

you—you need cash in your own pocket. The knowledge that there is a shelter from the storm will not save the ship from the storm. The information that there is a cure for a disease will not make the sick man whole. No, gifts must be grasped, blessings must be appropriated and made use of if they are to be of any value to us. O Sirs, you know what you should do but you have not done it! You have been half-inclined to attend to eternal things, but you have let them go and so you are still among those un-blessed hearers who hear in vain!

Next, these hearers are described as *deceiving themselves*. “Deceiving yourselves,” says James. What did they deceive themselves about? Why, probably they thought they were considerably better for being *hearers*—much to be commended and sure to get a blessing! They would not have been happy if they had not heard the Word of God on Sunday and they look with disgust upon their neighbors who make nothing of the Sabbath. They, themselves, are very superior people because they are regular Church-goers or Chapel-goers. They have a sitting, a hymnbook and a Bible—is not that a good deal? If they stayed away from a place of worship for a month they would be very uneasy. But though they do not believe that going to a place of worship will save them, yet it quiets their conscience and they feel themselves more at ease.

I should like to feed you for a month on your theory. I would rattle the plates in your ears and see whether you would be fed. I would not accommodate you with a bed at night. Why should I? I would preach you a discourse upon the benefit of *sleep*. Nor need I even give you a room to occupy—I would read you an eloquent dissertation upon domestic architecture and show you what a house should be! You would very soon quit my door and call me inhospitable if I gave you music instead of meat! And yet you deceive yourselves with the notion that merely *hearing* about Jesus and His great salvation has made you better men!

Or, perhaps, the deceit runs in another line—you foster the idea that the stern Truths of God which you hear do not apply to you. Sinners? Yes, certainly—the preacher addresses sinners and *they* may get good out of it—but *you* are not a sinner, at least not in any special sense so as to need looking after. Repentance? Most people ought to repent, but you do not see any reason why *you* should repent! Looking to Christ for salvation? “Excellent doctrine,” you say, “excellent doctrine!” But, somehow, *you* do not look to Him for salvation. Here is the Scriptural verdict upon this opinion of yours—“Deceiving yourselves.” The *Gospel* does not deceive you! It tells you, “You must be born again, you must believe in Jesus Christ or be lost.” The *preacher* does not deceive you! He never said half a word to support the notion that coming to this place would be of any service to you unless you would yield your hearts to Christ! No, he has

learned to speak plain English about such matters. You deceive yourselves if, being hearers and not doers, you derive comfort from that which you hear!

And then, again, according to our text, *these people are superficial hearers*. They are said to be as a man who sees his natural face in a glass. Now, even a casual hearer will often find the preaching of the Gospel to be like looking in a glass and seeing himself. When a glass was first exhibited to some fresh discovered Negro tribe, the chieftain, as he sees himself, is perfectly astonished. He looks and looks again and cannot make it out. So is it in the preaching of the Word of God—the man says, “Why, those are *my* words! That is my way of feeling.” I have often known hearers exclaim, “Why, that is the very expression I used as I was coming along.” They feel like she of old who said, “Come, see a Man which told me all things that I ever did.”

Such a person reads his Bible and he says, “Come, see a Book which tells me all things that I ever did. Is not this God’s Book?” The fact is that the Word of God is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the *heart*. As you have seen hanging up in the butcher’s shop the carcasses of animals cut right down the center, so the Word of God is “quick and powerful, piercing to the dividing of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow.” It opens up a man to himself and makes him see himself. He is quite astonished and cannot make it out! I have no doubt many of you here who are unconverted have felt this under a searching sermon.

When you have been reading the Scriptures you have been perfectly astonished at the way in which you have been revealed to yourselves—but it has been superficial work. If a man looks at himself in a glass and then puts down the mirror and goes his way, he has made but very poor use of it, for it was intended to lead him to remove spots and improve his personal appearance by washing. Looking in the glass and noticing a black mark on your forehead is mere child’s play if you do not wash the spot away! To see yourself as God would have you see yourself in the glass of Scripture is something, but you must afterwards go to Christ for washing or your looking is very superficial work. God grant that if you are made to feel the revealing power of the Word of God you may at once come to the practical point and, “wash and be clean.”

The text accuses these persons of being *hasty hearers*—“he beholds himself and goes his way.” They hear a sermon and they are off! They never give the Word time to operate—they are back to business, back to talk and idle chit-chat the moment the service ends. Enquirers’ Meetings are often eminently useful because they give people a little opportunity to think over what they have heard—while much of hearing is not followed up with thought and so it is ineffectual. We get much more out of medita-

tion than out of hearing. Like the cattle, we must chew the cud if we would get nutriment from spiritual food, but few do this.

It is a great mercy for us, considering the quantity of nonsense there is in the world, that we have two ears so that we can let idle words go in one ear and out the other! But it is a great pity that we should use those two ears in such a way in reference to the Word of God. Let it have a home, dear Friend! Do not let the Gospel come in one ear and out the other! How are you to prevent it? Why let it come in both ears! Let it have two roads right down to the soul and shut your ears when the Truth has thoroughly entered in and compel it to abide in the chamber of your soul. How much of blessing would come to men if they carried the Word of God home with them! How much a blessing they would receive if they took the text to pieces, weighed it, considered it and prayed for a personal application of it. Then they would become spiritually wise by the teaching of the Holy Spirit. But, alas, they are hasty hearers—they look in the glass and go their way.

One other thing is said about them, namely, that they are *very forgetful hearers*—they forget what manner of men they are. They have heard the discourse and that is the end of it. You know the story of Donald's coming home a little sooner from church than usual and his wife enquiring, "What? Donald! Is the sermon all done?" He replied, "No, no, it is all *said*, but it has not begun to be done yet."

But while it has not begun to be done, it often happens that the sermon has *ended* with many hearers. They have listened to it, but it has ran through them like water through a sieve and they will remember no more of it till the Judgment Day. There is no sin in having a bad memory, but there is great sin in refusing at once to obey the Gospel. If you cannot remember the text, or even remember the subject tomorrow morning, I shall not blame you. But the remembrance of the spirit of the whole thing, the drinking in and absorption into yourself of the Truth of God—that is the main matter and the carrying of the Truth into practice is the essence of the business.

That traveling dealer did well who, while listening to Mr. William Dawson, when he was speaking about dishonesty, stood up in the midst of the congregation and broke a certain yard measure with which he had been in the habit of cheating his customers. That woman did well who said that she forgot what the preacher talked about, but she remembered to burn her bushel when she got home, for that, too, had been short in measure! Never mind about remembering the sermon if you remember at once to practice it! You may forget the words in which the Truth of God was couched if you will but let it purify your life!

It reminds me of the gracious woman who used to earn her living by washing wool. When her minister called upon her and asked her about his sermon and she confessed that she had forgotten the text, he said, “What good could it have done you?” She took him into her back place where she was carrying on her trade. She put the wool into a sieve and then pumped on it. “There, Sir,” she said, “your sermon is like that water. It runs through my mind, Sir, just as the water runs through the sieve. But, then the water washes the wool, Sir, and so the good Word of God washes my soul.” David, in the 103rd Psalm speaks of those who remember the Lord’s commandments *to do* them—and that is the best of memory! Mind that you have it.

Thus I have described certain hearers and I fear we have many such in all congregations—admiring hearers, affectionate hearers, attached hearers—but all the while *unblessed* hearers because they are not *doers* of the work. We have wondered how it was that they never confessed themselves to be followers of Christ, but we suspect that they have never made such a confession because it would not be true. And yet they are very good, very kind—helpful to a good cause and their lives are very upright and commendable—but we grieve that they are not decided Christians. One thing they lack—they have no faith in Christ. It does surprise me how some of you can be so favorable to everything that has to do with Divine things and yet have no personal share in the good treasure.

What would you say of a cook who prepared dinners for other people and yet died of starvation? Foolish cook, you say. Foolish hearer, say I! Are you going to be like Solomon’s friends, the Tyrians, who helped to build the temple and yet went on worshipping their idols? Sirs, are you going to look on at the Table of Mercy, admire it and yet refuse its provisions? Does it give you a thrill of pleasure to see so many taken from the highways and the hedges and brought in and will you stand outside and never partake yourself? I always pity the poor little boys on a cold winter night who stand outside a steaming cook shop window and look in and see others feasting, but have none themselves. I cannot understand you! All things are ready and you are bid and persuaded to come—and yet you are content to perish with hunger! I pray you think of yourselves and I ask the Spirit of God to make you doers of the Word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

II. But, now, a few minutes for those who are BLESSED HEARERS—those who get the blessing. Who are they? They are described in the 25th verse—“But whoever looks into the perfect Law of liberty, and continues therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.” Now, notice that this hearer who is blessed is, first of all, *an earnest, eager, humble hearer*. Note the expression. He

does not look *upon* the Law of liberty and go his way, but he looks *into* it. It is the same word which is used in the passage, “which things the angels desire to look into,” and the Greek seems to imply a sort of stooping down to look intently into a thing.

Thus is it with the hearer who obtains the blessing—he hears of the Gospel and he says, “I will look into this. There is a something here worth attention.” He stoops and becomes a little child that he may learn! He searches as men do who are looking after diamonds or gold. “I will look into it,” he says. “My mother used to tell me that there was something charming in it and my father died triumphantly through the influence of it—I will investigate it. It shall not be for lack of examination that I let it slip.” Such an individual hears intently and earnestly, laying his soul open to the influences of the Truth of God, desiring to feel its holy power and to practice its Divine commands. That is the right kind of hearer—an earnest listener whose senses are all awakened to receive and retain all that can be learned.

It is implied, too, that he is a *thoughtful, studious, searching hearer*—he looks into the perfect Law. I call you back to the figure. As a man will put an insect under a glass and inspect it again and again through the microscope—looking at the wings; at each joint of the back and at every part of the creature under his eye—so a hearer who desires a blessing looks closely into the Word of God. He is sacredly curious! He enquires. He pries. He asks all those who should know. He likes to get with old Christians to hear of their experiences. He loves to compare spiritual things with spiritual—to dissect a text and see how it stands in relation to another—and to its own parts, for he is in earnest when he hears the Word.

Alas, dear Friends, as I have said before, many hearers are too superficial! They listen to what is said and that is the end of it—they never search for the marrow of the bones. The hearer who obtains a blessing, first gives his whole heart up to attention and afterwards keeps his heart saturated with the Truth by an earnest, diligent, searching study of it! And so, by the Spirit’s teaching, he discovers what is the mind of God to his soul. Then this hearer goes further. Looking so steadily *he discovers that the Gospel is a Law of liberty*—and, indeed, it is so! Blessed is the condition of those who are free from the Law of Moses and have come under Law to Christ who emancipates the soul from every form of bondage!

There is no joy like the joy of pardon! There is no release like release from the slavery of sin! There is no freedom like the liberty of holiness, the liberty to draw near to God! He who hears the Gospel aright soon discovers that there is that in it which will remove every fetter from his soul! He looks and looks, and at last loves that perfect Law of liberty which sets his heart at large to run in the way of God’s commands! Would God that all of

you understood it and had a share in its benefits. This is the man who is blessed while he hears!

But it is added that *he continues therein*. If you hear the Gospel and it does not bless you, hear it again. If you have read the Word of God and it has not saved you, read it again. It is able to save your soul! Have you been searching through one gracious, earnest Book and did it not seem to fit your case? Try another. Oh, if men would search for salvation as they search after hidden treasure it would not be long before they found it! I remember, when I was seeking Christ, how I read through Doddridge's, "Rise and Progress of Religion" with an avidity such as I showed when as a boy I read some merry tale, for I devoured each page greedily.

When I had done with Doddridge, I read Baxter's, "Call to the Unconverted," which did me good, but yielded me no comfort. I read each page and drank in every word, though the book was exceedingly bitter to me. I needed Christ and if I could find Him and Eternal Life through Him, it did not matter to me how often my eyes grew weary with lack of sleep while reading! Oh, if *you* come to that—that you *must* have Jesus—you shall have Him! If your soul is brought to feel that you will search Heaven and earth through, if necessary, but you will find the Savior, that Savior will soon appear to you! The hearer who gains salvation, "looks into the perfect Law of liberty," *and continues therein*.

Lastly, it is added that this man is not a forgetful hearer, but *a doer of the work* and he shall be blessed in his deed. Is he bid to pray? He prays as best he can. Is he bid to repent? He asks God to enable him to repent. Is he bid to believe? He says, "Lord, I believe: help my unbelief." He turns everything that he hears into practice. I wish that we had thousands of hearers of that sort. I remember reading of a certain person who heard of giving a 10th of our substance to God. "Well," said he, "that is right and I will do it." And he kept his promise. He heard that Daniel drew near to God three times a day in prayer. He said, "That is right; I will do it." And he practiced a threefold approach to the Throne of Grace each day. He made it a rule every time he heard of something that was excellent, to practice it at once. Thus he formed holy habits and a noble character—and became a blessed hearer of the Word.

Now, dear Friends, our text does not say that such a man is blessed *for* the deed, but it says that such a man is blessed *in* the deed. He who does what God bids him shall not be blessed *for* it, but he shall be blessed *in* it. The happy result will come to us in the act of obedience. May God grant you Grace, whenever the Gospel is preached, to stir yourself up with the energy which God's Spirit infuses into you and say, "I will do it. I will not dream about it, or talk about it, or question about it, or say I will do it and put it off, but now, at once, the act commanded shall be done." I finish

with this practical suggestion. The remaining portion of life is short with some of you who hear me this day. Gray hairs are upon you here and there and, according to the course of nature, you must soon stand before your Judge.

Would it not be well that you thought about another world and considered how you shall face your Lord at the Last Great Day? The Gospel says, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ," which, in other words, means, "Trust Him." Repent. Confess your sin, forsake it and look to Christ for cleansing. That is the way of salvation—"He that believes and is baptized shall be saved." You know all about the way of life. I am telling you a tale which you have heard a thousand times, but the question is, *when is it going to be done?* "Soon, Sir," you say.

But were you not here when this Tabernacle was opened? "Yes," you say, "I think I was." You said, "soon," then, and you say, "soon" now! You will say, "soon," I expect, until that word, "soon," will be met with the heavy sentence—"Too late! Too late! You cannot enter now." Take heed that this is not your case before this day has ended! Some men die very suddenly. A sister came to me this morning and said, "My father is dead. He was well in the morning He came home from the shop, seemed a little ill and died all of a sudden." Seeing that life is so precarious, would it not be best that you should *immediately* seek the Lord while He may be found and call upon Him while He is near?

I would suggest that you do not begin gossiping and talking on the way home, today, but that you get alone quietly for a little while. Do you reply that you have no place where you can be alone—this is not true—you can find some place or other. I remember a sailor who used to find his prayer closet at the masthead—nobody came up there to disturb him. I knew a carpenter who used to get down in a sawpit to pray. There are many such places. The streets of London, when crowded, are about as lonely as anywhere and Cheapside may be as good as the mountain side if your heart desires real solitude.

Some of you, I fear, never think at all. As far as thinking goes, if your brains were taken out, many of you would get on almost as well without them. The brains of some people are only useful as a sort of salt to keep them from rotting by death. Little thinking is done by the great mass of the people except the thought, "What shall we eat and what shall we drink?" Do, I pray you, *think* a little! Pause and consider what God, the Lord, sets before you. Be a *doer* of the work. Do what God bids you. As He bids you repent, repent. As He bids you believe, believe! As He bids you be baptized, be baptized. As He bids you pray, pray. As He bids you accept His Grace, God helping you, do it. Oh, that it might be done at once and to the Lord shall be praise world without end! Amen.

**PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—James 1.
HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—483, 538, 992.**

If those who profit by these sermons will promote their circulation, they may be doing as much good as if they preached themselves. The preacher, in returning to his pulpit, would feel greatly cheered if he found that the circulation of the sermons largely increased. A judicious word may gain a subscriber to whom the reading may be useful. Would not some of our readers find the distribution of the discourses an easy and efficient mode of Christian service?

Adapted from *The C.H. Spurgeon Collection*, Ages Software, 1.800.297.4307.

[Brother Spurgeon wrote the above postscript in 1879. I ask you to consider printing and distributing this sermon and others of the more than 1,600 (as of February 13, 2004) for HIS Glory. There is a link on our site which enables you to print several sermons in *booklet format*. You will need special software and a special stapler to do this, but it is not very expensive and can be found at many office supply stores. Or you may contact us and we will tell you where we got our software and stapler. The link is “Booklet Format” at <http://www.spurgeongems.org/booklet.htm> and of course, the site, Spurgeon Gems, is at <http://www.spurgeongems.org> . May His Holy Spirit comfort you.—eod]

THE LOOKING GLASS

NO. 1848

A SERMON DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JULY 5, 1885,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“For if anyone is a hearer of the Word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: for he beholds himself, and goes his way, and straightway forgets what manner of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect Law of liberty, and continues in it, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.”
James 1:23-25.

LAST Lord's Day I tried to show the right way of hearing the Word of God. We spoke of how to behave before the sermon, at the sermon and after the sermon. May God grant that the word which I then spoke may continue in your minds and bring forth good fruit! At this time I shall draw a distinction between the true and blessed hearer of the Word and the person who misses the blessing because he hears to forget. You will forgive my coming back to this subject when I confess that I groan in my own heart with unutterable longings to be a channel of blessing to all who hear or read my discourses. To what purpose do I stand here so often and pour out my soul before you, if you are not the better for it? I am an unhappy sower if all the handfuls of seed which I scatter must fall upon unbroken soil, to be devoured of birds and never take root. Blessed be God, it is not altogether so! We, by His Grace, have reaped many harvests in this place. But still, our hearts ache for larger results!

There remain among us, still, those who are impervious to the Truth of God, in whom the Divine Word has taken no lodging—will these never be saved? They still continue to listen and to listen with kindly respect, but they are not yet *doers* of the Word. Our lament is that of Paul, “They have not all obeyed the Gospel.” They have heard it and, in a measure, appreciated it, but they have not *obeyed* it. It has not come to them with *power*, compelling them to yield to its commands. It will be a sad thing if, when I give in my account, it shall be with grief and not with joy—for this will be as unprofitable for you as it will be grievous for me. I know that I shall meet my hearers at the Judgment Day and I know, also, that an account will be demanded of me—much more searching than any through which my conscience can put me even when it is most awake! How will you stand in that account? It will be read in the seven-fold light of that Great Day for which all other days were made! And what will the record be?

I earnestly desire to present you all as a chaste virgin unto Christ, but I fear it will not be so. Concerning some of you, I fear that I shall have run in vain and labored in vain. I am bowed with grief at such a prospect! O my Hearers, do not kill me by destroying your own souls! Oh, that you may now turn to our Lord Jesus and, in Him, find acceptance with the Lord in that day! The Lord grant it for His infinite mercy's sake!

Two things are very obvious in the text—the first is the hearer of the Word who does not profit by it and is represented as *looking into a glass*. And then, secondly, we see the man who *does* profit by the Word, for he is represented as *looking into the perfect Law*. May the Holy Spirit help us to see these clearly!

I. First, then, here is LOOKING INTO A GLASS. Looking into a glass is a trivial business. In all areas men, not to say, women, have been fond of seeing themselves. In the earlier days they had no reflecting glasses as we now have, but they used mirrors made of brass and different metals, highly polished. These mirrors yielded a sufficiently clear image of the beholder. Albeit, the children of Israel came out of Egypt in a great hurry, yet we find that the women carried their looking glasses with them into the wilderness. (See Exodus 38:8). It was according to their womanly nature—whatever else they forgot, they must have the indispensable looking glass for the purpose of their toilet. It is to their praise, however, that in the desert their devotion overcame their vanity, for when the bronze laver was to be made in which the priests should wash, it was made of the looking glasses of the serving-women who were accustomed to meet at the door of the tabernacle.

Still, the use of the mirror must be ranked among the trifles of life—I see that you are half-smiling at the playfulness which glitters around a glass. Is not this a hint at the light in which many regard the hearing of the Gospel? They crowd to hear a preacher if he has some sort of name—not that they desire to get a blessing, but merely that they may say that they have heard him—or that they may gratify their curiosity by seeing what he is like. Truly the burden of our lives is a pastime to some of you! Sirs, this reminds me of the fable of the frogs. When the boys stoned them, the poor creatures said, “It may be sport to you, but it is death to us!” You may hear me, this day, with the most idle curiosity and judge my message with the coldest criticism, but if you do not *receive* the blessings of the Gospel, it strikes a chill at my heart! Your unspiritual hearing is sport to you, but it is death to me! A deadly shadow like a Hell-mist hovers over my Spirit while I suppose it possible that I am, with all my earnestness, ministering to your condemnation!

Can it be that I am laboriously doing nothing? Worse than that, are my instructions, persuasions and entreaties to be so treated as to increase your responsibility and bury you under a heavier load of sin? As God's servant, I tremble at so dreadful a prospect! We live if you live unto God—but if you do not turn to God, we wish that we had never been born! It were better for us to plow the thankless sea than to utter Truth which will be a savor of death to you. O Sirs, to hear the Gospel will one day appear to be the most solemn of exercises! Indeed, it is not the trivial matter that

many make of it! It is infinitely more than gazing into a mirror. How long will it be before you know this?

Upon my first head of looking into a glass, let me say that *to every hearer, the true Word of God is as a mirror*. Certain preachers dream that it is their business to paint pretty pictures, but it is not so. We are not to design and sketch, but simply to give the reflection of the Truth of God. We are to hold up the mirror to nature, in a moral and spiritual sense, and let men see themselves. We have not even to make the mirror, but only to hold it up! The thoughts of God—not our own thoughts—are to be set before our hearers' minds—these allow a man to discover himself. The Word of the Lord is a revealer of secrets—it shows a man his life, his thoughts, his heart, his inmost self.

A large proportion of hearers only look upon the surface of the Gospel—and to their minds, the surface, alone, is operative. Yet, even that surface is sufficiently effectual to reflect the natural face which looks upon it and this may be of lasting service if rightly followed up. Brethren, the chief blessing cannot come to us by surface work—he that would be enriched by the Gospel must dig for it—and must dig deep. He must sink shafts into its fathomless mines, that he may bring up “the much fine gold.” Let not our thoughts glide over the surface of the Word like swift birds that touch the crests of the waves, but let us plunge into the depths of Scripture like pearl-fishers who seek for hidden treasures.

The Scripture gives a truthful reflection of man's nature—it lets the man see himself, not as others see him, for others make mistakes, nor as he would see himself, for he is very apt to be partial to his own soul—but the Scripture makes him see himself as God sees him. Look at the Scriptural portrait of a sinner. That is you, O man! Look at the depraved heart, the rebellious will, the darkened understanding—that heart, will and understanding are yours, O my Brother! What a sight it is which meets the sinner's eyes when he is hearing the faithful Word! “I thought,” he says, as he looks into the Word, “that I was much more comely than this. I had never dreamed of these freckles and spots! I was not aware that I suffered from such a twist of features, such an exaggeration of one and such a deficiency in another.”

The Bible does not flatter human nature, neither does the true preacher attempt so base a work—but in plain and downright honesty of truth the witness is given, “They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that does good, no, not one.” When conscience is awakened and the man sees himself as the Revelation of God declares him to be, he can hardly think that this can be the same self with which he was upon such excellent terms! If God blesses the sight, he is led to abhor himself and to seek for cleansing and renewal! But if not, the man has at least seen himself and has had the opportunity of knowing his true state.

The reflection of self in the Word is very like life. You have, perhaps, seen a dog so astonished at his image in the glass that he has barked fiercely at himself. A parrot will mistake its reflection for a rival. Well may the creature wonder, since every one of its movements is so accurately

copied—it thinks itself to be mocked. Under a true preacher, men are often so thoroughly unearthened and laid bare that even the details of their lives are reported. Not only is the portrait drawn to the life, but it is an actually *living* portrait which is given in the mirror of the Word. There is little need to point the finger and say, “You are the man,” for the hearer perceives on his own that he is spoken of. As the image in the glass moves and alters its countenance, and changes its appearance, so does the Word of the Lord set forth man in his many phases, moods and conditions.

The Scripture of Truth knows all about him and it tells him what it knows. Many a time the hearer has said, “Somebody has told the preacher.” Yes, somebody *has* told him—that which you do in your bed-chamber the Lord has revealed unto His servant. The Holy Spirit “aides our hands wittingly,” so that we lay them upon the right heads. I have sometimes said to you that people frequently *wish* that the preacher knew their experience in order that he could preach to it. But it is not necessary to tell God’s sent servant anything about it, for he will speak to you with all the more power because he does *not* know! You may go in to hear the sermon—and be wearing a disguise—but even a blind Prophet will find you out and say, “Come in, you wife of Jeroboam, why do you feign yourself to be another woman? I have heavy tidings from the Lord for you.” The Chaldean soothsayers said to King Nebuchadnezzar, “Tell your servants the dream and we will show the interpretation”—but Daniel knew the *dream* and the interpretation, also, and that marked him out as being sent of God! When the preacher’s description of the man’s heart is true to life and yet no human mouth has whispered it into his ears, then the man cries, “This is the finger of God!” A great part of the self-evidencing power of the Gospel lies in the way in which it discovers to our minds that which, before, lay within our bosoms, hidden, even, from ourselves!

The glass of the Word is not like our ordinary looking glass, which merely shows us our external features, but, according to the Greek of our text, the man sees in it “the face of his birth,” that is, the face of his nature. He that reads and hears the Word may see not only his actions, there, but his motives, his desires, his inward condition. As the butcher cuts down the carcass and reveals all the innards, which never could have been seen but for his knife, so is the Word of God “quick and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” The secrets of the man are opened up to himself and he is astonished to see his inward depravity, his carnal tendencies and his corrupt inclinations. As a man sees his outward self in the looking glass, so may he see his inward self in the Word of God. But if this is all, to what purpose is it?

Secondly, *many a hearer does see himself in the mirror of the Word*. We are told so twice in the text—“He is like a man beholding his natural face in a glass, for he *beholds* himself.” He really does see himself, for he cannot help doing so. He is not such a careless hearer as to be utterly blind to the Revelation of God—he beholds—he beholds himself. He beholds the face of his birth. He is thoughtful during the discourse. He spies out the

application of the Truth of God to himself and marks his own spots and blemishes.

Oftentimes he sees himself so plainly that he grows astonished at what he sees. He cries, like the woman of Samaria—"Come, see a Man that told me all things that ever I did." Barbarous people, when they first of all see looking glasses, are quite taken aback. "How can these things be?" is their first question. Now, have not you, dear Hearers, who are unconverted, been often staggered at the home-thrusts of the Word? You have seen yourselves so unmistakably that you have been unable to escape from the truth, but have been filled with wonder at it. But what is the use of this if it goes no farther?

Such observers have been known to praise the excellence of the mirror and speak well of its faithfulness. You may hear them say, "The man is a true servant of God and preaches in all honesty and courage." So far so good. But, alas, there are many preachers who will win no such praise! As I have seen glasses which have elongated my face or broadened it—so that it was by no means my true image—so have I known ministers whose description of human nature is flattering and false. But after all, if the face is not to be washed, to what purpose is it that the mirror faithfully shows the smuts and stains which are upon it? O my Hearers, I desire to be always faithful to you, but how will my faithfulness benefit you if you are not faithful to yourselves?! Why should I show you your blots if you do not seek the Lord Jesus to have them removed?

Many of our hearers go somewhat further, for they are driven to make solemn resolutions after looking at themselves. Yes, they will break off their sins by righteousness; they will repent; they will believe on the Lord Jesus—and yet their firm resolves are blown away like smoke and come to nothing! The sight of their natural face leads to a natural resolve but the strength of nature suffices not to carry the resolution into practice. O Sirs, you must be born again! And, for lack of that new birth, your goodness is as a morning cloud and as the early dew! Both of these soon vanish and so do your fine feelings and resolutions! What a multitude of dead resolutions fall in this House of Prayer! The blossoms upon our fruit trees give great promise of a heavy crop of fruit, but, alas, the most of them do not knit, but drop from the tree and powder the ground as with snow! So the flowers of promise are upon our Hearers, but they come not to real soul-fruit. O Spirit of God, make it otherwise with my congregation! Save them from their own inconstancy! Let them not resolve and re-resolve and yet die in their sins!

But what follows? Observe, "He beholds himself, and goes his way." *Many hearers go away from what they have seen in the Word.* There are two, "ands," in the text, following quickly one after the other, but they have a force which I cannot very well convey to you. They show that the man looks at himself hurriedly and, as it were, in passing, and so goes his way, straightway forgetting what manner of man he was, because his glance was hasty, casual and soon over. He heard the Word and that was the end of it—no echoes lingered in his soul. The sermon was over when it was over. Many a man, having seen himself in the glass of the Word, has

no time for any further thought about himself. Tomorrow morning he will be over head and ears in business—the shutters will be down from his shop windows, but they will be put up to the windows of his soul. His office *needs* him and, therefore, his prayer closet cannot have him! His ledger falls like an avalanche over his Bible. The man has no time to seek the true riches—passing trifles monopolize his mind! Sirs, you call earthly things, “business,” but the salvation or the damnation of your souls is such a biding matter that any stray hour will suffice for it. Is it not so? Do you not propose to put off the Lord till your last gasp? The Lord deliver you from this madness! Oh, that you would no more allow your earthly business to crush your souls!

Others have no particular business to engross them, but, having seen themselves in the glass of the Word with some degree of interest, they go their way to their amusements. Their principal difficulty is how to kill time and spin the weary hours away. What will become of some of you who are going down to Perdition with all your time to spare? You will not be able to say that you went your way to your farm, or to your merchandise, for you have neither farm nor merchandise and do not know what to do with your time. And yet, for all that, you cannot spare an hour to think upon your souls and upon your God. Oh, that it were not so! May infinite mercy make men wiser than to go their way while their souls are going down to Hell!

Alas, there are some who go their way to sin. It is not mere pleasure, or business, but it is an overt act of transgression to which they go! It is an awful thing, to my mind, that men go from hearing the Word of God to speaking the word of the devil—they go from God’s House to the house of sin! They go straight away from the holy to the profane, from the pure to the foul. They go from the Mercy Seat to the seat of the scorner. I do not wonder that no good comes of such hearing as this! When a man sees his face in the glass and then goes his way to defile that face more and more, of what use is the glass to him? If you return to sin, to procrastinate, to live in willful neglect of God and eternity, you would derive no benefit from such hearing, though all the Apostles should, in turn, preach to you, or even their Master, Himself!

This going is always followed by forgetting all they have seen. This forgetfulness is, indeed, very mischievous. How different is this from that word of David, “I will never forget Your precepts”! The wicked forget God, but the favored of the Lord “remember His commandments to do them.” Forget the words of man, but be zealous to remember the Word of the Lord, for forgetfulness leads to inaction. Those who forget, forget to do! They follow not the Lord’s command in the Book of Numbers—“Remember to do all My commandments.” In Purchas’ Pilgrim, we read of certain Spaniards of the olden time who were often pinched with hunger and yet immense shoals of fish passed along their shores. They saw the fish, but were too idle to take them! Are there not many Hearers of that kind? The Truth of God shines by them unappropriated, unused, unpracticed—and all because they take no earnest heed to make it their own by personal obedience to it. They say, “I go, Sir,” but they forget to go. They see the

pearl of great price, but forget to buy it. They are mere players with the Lord's message and never come to honest dealing with it.

Forgetfulness of the Word leads to self-satisfaction. Looking in the glass, the man felt a little startled that he was such an ugly fellow, but he went his way, mingled with the crowd and forgot what manner of man he was and, therefore, he felt quite easy again. The sweep thinks he is as clean as his neighbors, for he has forgotten the soot upon his face. By the force of sheer ignorance a man can climb to a desperately false assurance of his own excellence. He can cry, "Peace, peace," when there is no peace, till, at last, a blast of trumpets will not alarm him! What can be more fatal than this? One may as well not know, as only learn and straightway forget!

This forgetfulness leads to a growing carelessness. A man who has once looked in the glass and afterwards has not washed, is very apt to go and look in the glass, again, and continue in his filthiness. He who thinks his conscience has cried, "wolf," in mere sport, will think the same till he takes no heed when it cries in earnest. When men get to playing with the Word of God, they are near to destruction. Beware of hearing the Gospel as a pastime—it is the next stage to eternal ruin! When that which God designs to be to our salvation becomes a pastime to us, then, in all likelihood, that it will save us is gone. He who sports with Heaven and Hell will soon lose all hope of the one—and be hurried down to the other.

Yes, but let me remark that this forgetfulness of the Word leads to increased sin, for we do not hear the Word of God without some result coming of it. As I am responsible for preaching, so are you for hearing. O unconverted Hearers, you to whom the Gospel has come as a *revealer* of yourselves, but not as a *renewer* of your hearts, you have grown harder in sin and you have sinned against more Light and against more knowledge—and thus your sin grows blacker!

Thus have I sketched the hearer of the Word who is not a doer of it. I do not wish, personally, to apply this to anyone here, but I beg that every person who does not know the Lord will make a personal application of it to his own conscience and I pray God, the Holy Spirit, Himself, would now come and press these Truths upon each conscience. O, my dear Friends, will you not invite His sacred operations? You have seen your faces in the mirror of the Word—do you not desire to have them cleansed and beautified? You know your impurity—do you not wish to be cleansed by the blood of Jesus from all sin? Will you go your ways as if there were no Law to accuse you, no Gospel to invite you, no Christ to forgive you? Will you live and die as if there were no Heaven, no Hell, no eternity, no God? May the Lord deliver you from being triflers with the Word and forgetters of it, lest, at the end, your religion should turn out to be vain and you should find yourselves accursed by that which might have been a blessing to you!

II. May I have your further attention while I speak upon the true and blessed hearer? He does not look into the glass, but he is represented as **LOOKING INTO THE LAW**—"Who looks into the perfect Law of liberty, and continues in it, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed."

The picture I have in my mind's eye at this moment is that of the cherubim upon the Mercy Seat—these are models for us. Their standing is upon the golden Mercy Seat and our standing is the Propitiation of our Lord—there is the resting place of our feet and, like the cherubs, we are joined there and, therefore, continue therein. They stand with their eyes looking downward upon the Mercy Seat, as if they desired to look into the perfect Law of God which was treasured within the ark. Even so do we look through the Atonement of our Lord Jesus, which is, to us, as pure gold like unto transparent glass, and we behold the Law, as a perfect Law of liberty, in the Person of our Mediator. Like the cherubim, we are in happy company and, like they, we look towards each other by mutual love. Our common standing is the Atonement; our common study is the Law in the Person of Christ and our common posture is that of angels with outstretched wings prepared to fly at the Master's bidding. Oh, that we might, in this sense, be as the cherubim and like they, abide in the secret place of the Most High, where the light is the Light of God and the Glory is the Divine Presence! We are not to look casually at the Word as though it were a mere looking glass, but we are to gaze earnestly upon it as our law under the New Covenant. As the Apostles stooped down and looked into the sepulcher, so are we to search diligently into the blessed Law of the Lord and delight in it after the inner man.

Note well *that the Law of God is worth looking into*. I understand by the, "Law," here, not merely the Law of the Ten Commandments, but the Law as it is condensed, fulfilled and exhibited in Christ Jesus. The Gospel Law, the Law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, that Gospel which we are called upon to obey, is worthy of deep meditation! I mean that holy Law which the Lord has promised to put into our inward parts and write upon our hearts—the Law of faith and not of self-righteousness—even the command of Grace which bids us believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and obey His commands. A law is always worth considering, for we may break the law unwittingly, and involve ourselves in penalties which we might have avoided. An unknown law is a pitfall into which a man may fall without knowing it. It is the duty of all loyal subjects to learn the law, that they may obey it.

Better still, it is a perfect Law. All human laws are imperfect, but the Law of the Lord is perfect. The Law in the hand of Christ is perfect in itself, having no excess and no deficiency. And it is a Law which makes those perfect who obey it. It is a Law which is set forth in the Person of the perfect Christ and worked in us by the perfect Spirit. It is a Law which touches our whole nature and works it unto perfect beauty. Who would not wish to look into a Law which, like its Author, is love and purity itself?

It is called the "perfect Law of liberty." Now, the Law under the Old Covenant genders to bondage, but the Law in the hand of Christ is liberty. We never walk in liberty till we walk in the Lord's commands! He that wears the yoke of Christ is the Lord's free man. Oh, Brothers and Sisters, I do trust our eyes will be turned to the "perfect Law of liberty," for freedom is a jewel and none have it but those who are conformed to the mind and will of our God!

The true hearer looks into this perfect Law of liberty with all his soul, heart and understanding till he knows it and feels the force of it in his own character. He is the prince of hearers, who delights to know what God's will is and finds his joy in acting out the same. He sees the Law in its height of purity, breadth of comprehensiveness and depth of spirituality. And the more he sees, the more he admires. He cannot have too much of it, but meditates on it both day and night and, therefore, he cries, "Oh, how I love Your Law! It is my meditation all the day." His most frequent prayer is that he may be conformed unto that perfect Law in all respects. And in proportion as his prayer is heard, he enters into perfect rest. I pause and ask you whether you belong to the blessed company who look into the crystal glass of the Law. If you can answer that you are such, then please follow me for a minute or two.

As I stand here, I look into the mirror of the Word and see myself. But this is not enough for me—I will look till I see *more*. I continue looking into the mystic glass until, to my great surprise, I see another form appearing. Evidently some mysterious Person is reflected in this mirror. How beautiful and majestic is the Stranger's visage! I look till the image of my countenance melts into the reflection of His countenance and He, alone, is seen. I only appear *in* Him. Is He not lovely? Indeed, He is the Chief among ten thousand! Now I see the meaning of that word, "We all, with open face beholding as in a glass the Glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."—

***"This is the thankful glass,
That mends the looker's eyes;
This is the well
That washes what it shows."***

Surely this is the mirror that Mercy, in "The Pilgrim's Progress," longed for! Does not Master Bunyan say of it, "Now the glass was one of a thousand. It would present a man one way, with his own features exactly, but turning it another way, it would show one the very face and similitude of the Prince of Pilgrims, Himself. Yes, I have talked with them that can tell and they have said that they have seen the very crown of thorns upon His head by looking in that glass. They have therein also seen the holes in His hands, in His feet and His side"?

A man looks into the Law of liberty and he sees all perfection in Christ—he looks and looks till, by a strange miracle of Grace, his own image dissolves into the image of Jesus! Surely this is a thing worth looking into and infinitely superior to any looking into a glass merely to see yourselves! We are compelled to say, "Come, see a Word which tells me all things that I ever did: did not this come from God? "No, more! We said this at first, but now we see Jesus and we cry, "Come, see *a Man* that told me all things that I ever did: is not this the Christ?"

He that looks into the perfect Law of liberty will not only see Christ, but he will begin to see the Eternal Spirit of God bearing witness with that Law of liberty and operating by that witness upon his own soul. "Oh," says he, "this is a blessed Law, indeed, now, for I have it written upon the prepared tablets of my heart!" What a sight is that which lets us see the

Holy Spirit working in us to will and to do of His own good pleasure—and making us conformable to the Law of His own declaring!

Yes, and he that looks into that perfect Law will, by-and-by, see God the Father—for the pure in heart shall see God. Those who love and live the Law of God become like unto God—they are “imitators of God as dear children.” They that are familiar with God’s will, love it and study it, gradually receive the likeness of God their Father till they are called the children of God! Thus the sacred Trinity are seen and known by those who do the will of the Father in Heaven. Is not this a joy, to have our fellowship with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ? Oh, to prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God!

Dear Friends, I cannot speak to you as I should like to this morning—my theme masters me. I cannot make you see all that I see, myself, but you must look into it for yourselves in the Light of God. Look, and look again, till what you see in the Word is also to be seen in yourself. Transformation of character will follow upon meditation upon the Truth of God, by the blessing of the Holy Spirit.

Note carefully that our text says, “*He continues*”—“who looks into the perfect Law of liberty and continues.” Our translators insert the word, “therein,” but it is not in the Greek text. “And continues”—that is, he continues to meditate in the Law and he continues to own his allegiance to it. The Law of the Lord is always Law to him. He also continues to practice it—he does not begin and then turn aside, but he continues to make advances in holy living and gracious conformity to the Lord’s statutes—and he continues by a final perseverance to follow on. This is the hearer that shall win the blessing—not you who make a profession one day and then disgrace it the next! Not you who are all hot for Christ today and lukewarm tomorrow. The man who obtains the blessing of the Lord is, by God’s Grace, made to continue in it! I have heard of a famous King of Poland who did brave deeds in his day and confessed that he owed his excellent character to a secret habit which he had formed. He was the son of a noble father and he carried with him a miniature portrait of his father and often looked upon it. Whenever he went to battle, he would look upon the picture of his father and nerve himself to valor, When he sat in the council chamber, he would secretly look upon the image of his father and behave himself right royally, for, he said, “I will do nothing that can dishonor my father’s name.”

Now, this is the grand thing for a Christian to do, to carry with him the will of God in his heart, and then in every action to consult that will. We ought to ask—What shall I do, as a child of God? What course shall I follow as a man of God, bought with the precious blood of Jesus Christ? It is thought, by some, that you cannot always continue in the will of God—they dream that you are to hear a sermon and then be very pious—or go to a Prayer Meeting and then be very devout. But they think that this piety and devotion cannot remain with us all day. Brothers and Sisters, we must *continue* in the Law of the Lord or we have no true religion! Living godliness is for the shop, for the kitchen, for the parlor and for the street—it is a continuous struggle for holiness. Looking at the perfect will

of God is for every day and all day! We are to believe for holiness; looking to the Lord to become like the Lord. I would gladly have my Savior's image painted on my eyeballs so that I could not see except I saw everything through Him! It is well to have Christ's portrait hung up in every chamber of your soul—I do not say of your *house*—that might lead to idolatry, but in every chamber of your mind and heart!

I once saw a room so covered with mirrors, that when I looked, I saw myself some 15 times, certainly, to my taste, 14 times too often. But oh, I would have my whole being to be such, that whenever Jesus comes into it, He may see Himself everywhere—above, below, to the right, to the left and on all sides! Oh, to have Him shining even into the innermost closet of our nature so as to have no dark part! Oh, to become new editions of the life of Christ! We would not only look into the mirror, but we would be our mirrors reflecting the beauties of the holy Lord Jesus! But remember, this must not be occasional, but continual, for the true heart continues looking into the perfect Law of liberty.

To conclude—you notice how it says, "*this man shall be blessed in his deed.*" Mark—"this man," "this man." These demonstrative pronouns act like fingers. A man has gone up to the Temple to pray. What a fine gentleman he is! He wears a striking phylactery between his eyes and he boasts a broad blue hem on his garment. He is a very superior person! You can see that at a glance. He stands in a prominent place in the Temple and he most pompously cries, "God, I thank You that I am not as other men are." Curious that the Bible does not make much account of him. But yonder is a poor weeping creature who does not dare to come into a prominent position, nor even to lift up his eyes towards Heaven. Every now and then he beats upon his breast as if very much depressed. At last he cries, "God be merciful to me, a sinner!"

Look! The Savior points out the publican and says, "*this man—this man* went down to his house justified rather than the other." He lays His hand on him as one near to Him and says, "*this man.*" In my text there is a person who has seen himself in the glass and he has gone his way, but we need not mind about him—he is of no account. But here is a man who has been looking into the Law and has continued to look into it—and the Holy Spirit has selected him from all others and marked him as, "*this man.*" *This man* is blessed! Perhaps he does not wear the best broadcloth. Perhaps he is arrayed in a fustian jacket, but he is selected and distinguished as, "*this man!*" Perhaps he has received no elaborate education—you will not see him at the Athenaeum, or hear him discussing Evolution with the learned, yet he is "*this man.*" "*This man,*" says the text, "is blessed." Where is this man? Where is this woman? Judge whether you are the persons thus called and chosen—whether you are abiding in love to that Law which has won your heart.

"This man shall be blessed in his deed." "Oh," says one, "I do not see the blessedness of true religion!" No, my Friend, you are not likely to see it, because you do not *do* it. This man is blessed "*in his deed.*" "In keeping His commandments there is great reward." Much of the blessedness of godliness lies in the *practice* of godliness. Not in consideration of doctrine,

but the blessing lies in *obedience* to precept. “This man shall be blessed in his deed.” In the very act of serving his Lord and Master, he shall be blessed—not *for* it but *in* it. The doing of the obedient deed is the evidence that God has blessed the doer from before the foundation of the world! His practical godliness is the *evidence* of his election; his actual holiness is the evidence of his redemption; his keeping close to the will of God is the evidence of his adoption. Holiness is the witness that its possessor shall be blessed in the day when Christ shall glorify His people!

You who do not get a blessing by hearing the Gospel may now see why it is so. You glance into a looking glass and that is all. Much good may it do you! After having seen your pretty selves, you go your ways into the world to live as you lived before and, therefore, you get no blessing. If you had gone to the Divine Law, that heavenly mirror of the will and mind of the Most High, it had been better for you. If, instead of making the Word a mirror to look at, you had made it a *window to look through*—and you had seen God in Christ and perfect holiness in Him—and had put your trust in Jesus, He would have given you a higher and better life, so that you would have become like Jesus! Then you would have been blessed in your deed!

Behold I set before you, this morning, as they did of old upon Ebal and Gerizim, blessing and curse—the curse for those who peek into the looking glass, but do no more—the blessing for those who attentively look into the perfect Law of liberty and continue to do so until they are transformed into the image of the Lord! Which shall it be? May God the Eternal Spirit decide that question by leading you, now, solemnly, seriously, earnestly, to close in with Christ and His perfect Law of liberty. And to Him be glory forever and ever! Amen and amen.

**PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Matthew 7:13-29.
HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—132, 641, 459.**

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CHARITY AND PURITY

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*“Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this,
To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction,
and to keep ourselves unspotted from the world.”*
James 1:27.

THERE is a great deal said, a great deal written, a great deal of zeal on the one side and of anger on the other, expended upon the *externals* of religion. Some think that they should be very fine, not to say gaudy, very impressive, not to say imposing. They like what they call, “bright” services, though we might call them by another name. But the great question with many people is, “What are to be the externals of religion?” What dress is religion to wear? Shall it be robed in the plainness of Quakerdom, or shall it be adorned with all the brilliance of Romanism? Which shall it be?

Well, dear Friends, after all, we may spend much time over that question and find no satisfactory answer to it. But the Biblical Ritualism, the *pure* external worship, the true embodiment of the inward principles of religion is to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction and to keep ourselves unspotted from the world. Charity and purity are the two great garments of Christianity. Charity was once cried up by the Romanists to an extreme point—almsgiving seeming to be, to many—the beginning and the end of piety. It was an almsgiving which had a great deal that was excellent about it and which I cannot regard, as some do, altogether with abhorrence—an almsgiving which covered this land with houses of entertainment for the poor, so that they journeyed from one halting-place to another—and were freely lodged and housed. And we had, at least, no poor law, or workhouse, with all (I was about to say) the horrors which accompany the present system.

But, unfortunately, charity was thought to be *everything*, and purity was too much neglected, so that even those houses which were originally built to be the abode of those who should help the poor and needy, and instruct the ignorant, became, to a sad degree, the haunts of luxury and vice! The monastery, which should have been a place of pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father, as it entertained the fatherless and the widows, was not famed for being unspotted by the world's sins, but, on the contrary, it was famous or infamous for its foulness! I have no doubt that this was a great deal exaggerated, but, at any rate, the accusation did seem to lie, to a very sad extent, against it, that those who were

supposed to be dedicated to God were not such consecrated men as they professed to be. Purity went down and charity went up.

Well, in these days, I sometimes fear lest we should by no means insist too much on purity, but should certainly insist too little upon charity! The visitation of the fatherless and widows in their affliction is not left optional. It is not to be the privilege of a few worldly men who give all their substance to orphanages. *Every Christian* is bound to wear his part of the external dress of religion, that is, charity! This charity is to be manifested especially to those who need it most, whose need cannot be a matter of imposture, but must be real. These are the fatherless and widows during the time of their destitution and affliction—when the orphans are not able to earn the bread that perishes—and the mother has her children weeping around her and pining in poverty. Not only may this charity be shown, but it must be manifested if we would have pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father. The increase of charity, of careful and discreet consideration for the poor and needy, would bring a great blessing with it, and is what is greatly needed, even in these times, when, perhaps, we fancy that we are doing almost enough in this direction, although we certainly are not.

Yet charity without purity will be of no use. In vain should we give all our substance to the poor and give our bodies to be burned if we do not walk in the way of holiness, “without which no man shall see the Lord.” If we do not come out from the world and keep ourselves from its polluting influence, we have not yet learned what pure and undefiled religion really is! We may be very orthodox in creed, or we may be very far advanced in our knowledge of religious matters. We may think ourselves to be Hebrews of the Hebrews, Pharisees of the Pharisees, and as touching the righteousness which is of the Law, blameless. But we are, in the sight of God, only as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal, unless, by Divine Grace, we have learned to keep ourselves unspotted from the world!

Without forgetting what I have said to you about charity, we will examine those words in our text which especially speak of purity and, in doing so, I notice, first, that *they indicate separation*. Look below their surface and they certainly indicate that. Secondly, *they impress upon us spotlessness*—“to keep ourselves unspotted from the world.” And, thirdly, *they insist upon careful self-watching*.

I. First, then, beloved Friends, if you look below the surface of the words here, you will see that **THEY INDICATE SEPARATION**.

“To keep ourselves unspotted from the world,” implies that we are not a part of the world. We are in it, but evidently not of it. We are one thing and the world is another thing—and we are so much apart from the world that even a spot from the pools of the world would defile us. We are to be quite outside the world even while we are in it. Those of you who were here on Monday night must have been greatly amused and also instructed by what was said by a young seller of religious tracts. He was a little fellow—you remember him! He was going along with his pack on his back and a big man accosted him in this way, “Well, my little fellow, do you belong to the Militia?” “No, Sir, I do not, but I belong to the King’s Own.”

“You little fool,” said the man, “why, there is not any king in this country, so you cannot belong to the King’s Own.” The lad replied, “I don’t know that I am a fool any more for that, for, do you know, I belong to another country?” “What do you mean by saying that you belong to another country? You are not a foreigner.” “Well, I won’t say that I am a foreigner, but I can say that I am a stranger in this land, and I belong, as I have already told you, to another country. And that I am not a fool is quite certain, for in the country to which I belong there *is* a King, and I am in His army. And if you would like to know how to enlist in it, I have a book in my pack which you can buy, and in which you can read all about my King and His army.”

It was well put and it also expressed nothing more than the real truth. Here, in the midst of this world, you and I, if we are truly born again from above, are strangers and pilgrims. We have come into this land as gypsies might have come—pitching our tent here and there—but having no abiding city anywhere. We are in this world as Abraham was in Canaan. We are not related to any of the Canaanites among whom we dwell. We are of another country, to wit, a heavenly one—and we are looking for “a city which has foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God.” There are some professing Christians who also try to be worldly, but a worldly Christian is an anomaly and a contradiction!

No, beloved Friends, if we are truly the Lord’s, *we are severed from the world*. I will mention two or three of the many ways in which we are thus separated.

The first is by Divine Election. The Lord Jesus Christ had a people given to Him—a people whom He received of His Father, as He said—“Yours they were, and You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your Word.” “I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which You have given Me.” These are they whom God chose in Christ Jesus from before the foundation of the world, having predestinated them, according to the good pleasure of His will, that they should be holy and without blame before Him in love—“for whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the First-Born among many brethren.” Now this eternal choice of God has severed Believers from the rest of mankind and they stand apart as much as Israel stood apart in Egypt, even in the midst of the plagues. Thus God’s chosen ones constitute a people that shall dwell alone—they shall not be numbered among the nations. He has made them to be His portion, “for the Lord’s portion is His people. Jacob is the lot of His inheritance.”

This Truth of God, some of you may say, leads us into the great mysteries of the Kingdom of God. Well, in due time, our separation from the world is the result of Divine *calling* as well as Divine election, for the Apostle writes, “moreover, whom He did predestinate, them He also called.” There is a people in this world who have been called out from the world and they make up the ecclesia, the called-out assembly, the people to whom a Voice has come which others have not spiritually heard. They are the people who have been drawn by Christ and have run after Christ—the people who were dead and who have been quickened—the people who

were slumbering and who have been awakened. They are the people who were afar off and who have been brought near, the people who have been brought out of darkness into Christ's marvelous light, the people whom He has separated unto Himself—and who shall show forth His praise. Do you know anything about this calling, my dear Hearers? Were you ever led, by conviction of sin, repentance and faith, to fly to Jesus? Have you come to Him? If so, in that wondrous calling out, you have one evidence that you are distinct from the world that lies in the Wicked One.

Another clear distinguishing mark is redemption. The blood of the paschal lamb was on the lintel and the two side posts of the house of every family of Israel. It was not on the houses of the Egyptians and to their dwellings the Destroying Angel came with swift, sure, unerring blow, killing the first-born in every house throughout the land. It was the blood-mark that distinguished Israel from all the rest of the people! And today, only those who are sheltered by the sprinkled blood of Jesus, the Lamb of God, are safe! Christ has redeemed His people from among men. He loved His Church and gave Himself for her—and He has redeemed that Church and brought her out of the Egyptian bondage of sin with a high hand and an outstretched arm, redeeming her by power as well as by price—and she shall be His forever. Has He not espoused her unto Himself and will He not have her of whom His soul was eternally enamored and to whom, in the Covenant of old, He was joined by bonds of everlasting wedlock? Yes, verily, He will have her to be His own bride, world without end! This is another mark of our separation from the world—the blood-red mark of redemption, effectual redemption by the Lord Jesus Christ.

Then, Beloved, in due time, separation from the world comes out, externally, more fully in *sanctification*. There is a people in this world who have another nature from that of the men of this world. Would to God there were more of them! But there has come, by Divine Grace, a work of Christ in their heart which has changed their entire nature, aspirations, loves, hates—their whole selves—and made the whole world to become new to them because they are totally new to it. When this great change is worked in the heart of a man, it crucifies him to the world and the world to him. And he becomes a member of a community as much above the common race of humanity as a man is above a horse or a dog! He becomes possessed of a higher nature which was born in him by regeneration and which lifts him up into familiarity with God, so that he becomes a partaker of the Divine Nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. So says this Book on which we rest and I beseech you to believe that it speaks the Truth of God.

Sanctification is the great open separator of Christians from the world! And they are so separate and so distinct that they will never be mixed together, not even in that day when their bones shall lie mingled in the same cemetery—when grave by grave the righteous shall sleep side by side with the wicked! There shall be a distinction in that day of resurrection when the dead in Christ shall rise first—"The rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished." There shall be a distinction in that day when the King's words, "Come, you blessed," or, "De-

part, you cursed,” shall make an everlasting division between them—and all the universe shall know that the Lord does put a difference between Israel and Egypt!

Now, Beloved, you can judge for yourselves, tonight—I pray you to do it—whether you are separate from the world. If you are not, you will be judged with the world. If this day there falls to your lot, special Grace, as well as special joy—if you have a new life and a heavenly experience all your own, then, inasmuch as you are not of the world, hear again the words of my text and keep yourselves “unspotted from the world.”

Now, I want you to notice, before I leave this point, that, inasmuch as there is an evident separation between the people of God and the world, *we make it a part of worship to manifest that separation*. Observe what the text says—“Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this...To keep ourselves unspotted from the world.” Religion does not consist simply in meeting together for prayer, in singing hymns and hearing sermons. There is much of this that is profitable and glorifies God, but there is something more needed to complete real worship of God.

When you and I live daily with the fear of God before our eyes, in the presence of men of the world who care not whether there is a God or not, then are we truly manifesting “pure and undefiled religion.” When we judge all our conduct by thinking how it will appear in the sight of God. When, assailed by temptation, we say to ourselves, “How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?” When we keep ourselves apart from every evil thing that might fascinate and entice us, saying, “So did not I, because of the fear of God,” this is true worship! It is quite as real worship as the hymns we sing and the prayers we offer.

Abstinence from evil and seeking that which is right will manifest our separation from the world, especially if the Glory of God is our one great objective in life. I like that word of my dear friend, Mr. George Muller, when he says, “Never begin a day without feeling joy in the Lord.” I think that is a very blessed rule—to live constantly walking in such a way that you and God are on close terms of happy fellowship so that all that you do you do heartily as unto the Lord! Your common service as a domestic servant, or your public service as a preacher, you do in the Presence, not of the great Taskmaster, but of your great Father and Friend, of whom you have become an adopted child and to whom you are separated to be a priest serving Him every day! If everything is done, from the taking down of the shop shutters on the Monday morning to the putting of them up on Saturday night, as well as what is done on Sunday—if all is done for God’s Glory, this will make a great gulf between you and the man of the world who lives for baser ends.

Thus I have tried very plainly to show that the words in our text indicate separation.

II. Now, in the second place, THEY IMPRESS UPON US SPOTLESSNESS—“To keep ourselves unspotted from the world.”

We learn from this, first, that *the Christian never expects to get any good from the world*. He is to keep himself from the world, specially from the spots of the world. Dr. Watts wisely asks—

***“Is this vile world a friend to Grace,
To help me on to God?”***

No, it never is. It never was. It will never be. There is enmity, today, between the Seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent—and so there will be to the end of the chapter. You will never get anything out of the serpent, even though you stand and listen to his philosophical questions and his new explanations of God’s Word. You will get nothing more out of him now than mother Eve did when she got from him a curse to all her posterity. You can get no good out of the world, nor out of the Prince of this world.

It is implied in our text, also, that *we cannot go and wallow in the world’s filth*. If there is any man here who is a professor of religion and who can go, tonight, and indulge himself in vice, or who can find himself at home with the world, well, he belongs to the world. Where you find your pleasure, there your heart is! Do not pretend to belong to the Church and to the world as well. I like the honesty of the man who finds that his life is not consistent with the life of Christ and, therefore, gives up his profession—that is plain sailing. But do not pretend that you can wallow in the mire of open sin or secret sin and yet belong to Christ, for that cannot be! Keep yourselves unspotted from the world’s puddles.

In particular, *we must keep ourselves unspotted from the lepers of the world*. There is a certain number of leprous men in the world. You can tell them by their conversation and, sometimes you cannot help going very near where they are. But if you hear them cry, “Unclean!” just give them a very wide berth. I wish that Christians were more careful about this leprosy in the matter of books. As soon as ever you see that there is leprosy there, do not go and play with it, and examine it, and look at it. You will catch it if you are not careful! Keep clear of it! Keep yourselves unspotted from the lepers of the world. “Well, that is easy enough,” you say. Perhaps it is not as easy as you think.

But, further, *we are to keep ourselves from all spots of the world when we have to mingle with it*. Notice, there are spots which come from your circumstances. Are you wealthy? Well, use your wealth for God, but mind that it does not spot you. There is a great deal of rust about riches. Mind that it does not eat into your soul as does a canker. Are you poor? Does your poverty compel you to live in a very low neighborhood with people of groveling tastes? Well, the poverty will not necessarily hurt you any more than the wealth will, but keep yourselves unspotted from it. You will need a deal of Divine Grace to live in some parts of London and not be spotted, even, by the people who have apartments in the house where you live.

And not only will your *circumstances be likely to spot you*, but the favors and honors of the world will spot you. So you have received a degree, or you have had a rise in business and the people all speak well of you, do they? And there is that thoroughly worldly lady who has a secret admiration for you. Well, well, well, be careful! Joseph had the favor of Potiphar and of Pharaoh in Egypt, but he kept himself unspotted. Mind that the world’s favor does not spot you. “Ah,” says one, “I don’t get much of that! I get all frowns.” Very well—persecution, slander and frowning need not

spot you, but they may, you know. There are many who cannot bear the cold atmosphere and biting frosts of persecution. Mind that you are not spotted in that way.

Then we may be spotted, dear Friends, in trade. I suppose that a man has good need to be wide awake in order to stay honest. A man can soon do a wrong thing in business by simple negligence and, unless he keeps both his eyes open, his very servants may be doing, in his name, that which will be injurious to the honor of their master. Dear Friends, trade away all you can—go and prosper in it—but mind that you do not get spotted! Then there are politics. You know what party politics are. We are all trying to get in another set of maggots to eat the cheese! That is about all it amounts to—first turn out one lot and then turn in another. It comes to little more than that! Even in the pursuit of really good matters of policy, do you know any Christian who goes into politics who is the better for it? If I find such a man, I will have him stuffed if I can, for I have never seen such a specimen yet! I will not say, do not attend to politics, but I do say, do not let them spot you.

Then there are the societies of life. A man goes in with his neighbors and he sits at their feast. The Savior sat at a feast with a Pharisee, but mind that it does not spot you—it did not spot Him, but it may spot you, so beware! And as to your ordinary conversation with men of the world, are you not conscious, when you go home at night, that you need washing? After shaking hands with a good many men of the world and talking with them, do you not feel that you are apt to get spotted? And the literature, the common literature of the world. I do not mean that which we should censure, and condemn, and burn—but the common literature that is all around you—mind that it does not spot you, Brothers and Sisters.

If we would be spotless, *we must beware of the vanities and pleasures of the world, the thoughts and the tendencies of the world.* It is supposed to be something wonderful to see “the tendency of the age,” “the current of the age,” “the set of thought.” It is all pollution and nothing else! Instead of wishing to be abreast of it, I only desire to be abreast of it in stemming it and, by opposing it, to drive it back. That is the only position for a Christian! If you go with the current of the age, you are swimming the wrong way, for all that is of the world comes of evil even to this day. There is no change in the Scripture and there is no change in the world. If you love the world, the love of the Father is not in you. The current of human opinion always was, is and will be, till Christ shall come, an evil current that will bear you the wrong way if you yield to it.

I might thus enlarge, but I will not, and will only say that *we must keep ourselves unspotted from the sins of the world.* What are they? Well, one of them is atheism. Keep yourselves unspotted from that horrible crime, hatred of Deity! Doubt of every kind is in the air—this is the day of doubt. Keep yourselves unspotted from the world’s unbelief. This is the age of compromises—to many people, the Truth of God is not a matter of great importance, nowadays, and principle is of no account. They snip and cut and mar the Scriptures as Jehudi cut the Prophet’s roll—they have no care as to what God has said. Avoid compromises and be unspotted of the

world! This is the age of trifling! There is more money spent on recreation, today, than ever was since the world began, unless it was that day in which God swept all away by the Flood! Keep yourselves unspotted by the world! It is the age of hollowness and gigantic shams and bubbles. Be real! Be true! Keep yourselves unspotted from the world. This subject is endless. God give us Grace to carry it out!

III. I must finish by noticing, in the third place, that the words in our text INSIST UPON CAREFUL SELF-WATCHING.

Do you understand that it is your very person, your soul, your heart, your very self that is to be kept unspotted? What a man is, the man, before long, does. But keep yourselves clean, unspotted, my Brothers and Sisters. Do you say, "O Lord, how can I do this"? It is plain from the text that I am not to sit down, and say, "The Lord will do it, the Lord will do it and the Lord must do it, for I cannot." The language of the text is such that it calls the Christian, himself, to watchfulness and care. What must he do, then?

Brethren, first, *let us go and wash*. We were washed once, many years ago. Jesus washed us and made us clean. But now, today, we have been going through the world and our feet have become muddied. Let us come to Him, again, tonight, before we go to rest. Dear Master, wash our feet, again, from any spots of the world which we have acquired by going along these dusty pathways! The fairest lily in the gardens near London gets spotted by the soot of this great city—you cannot help seeing its defilement! But the shower comes and the dew falls, and the lily washes its fair face, and its loveliness is restored. Let us go to our Lord, again, to be washed in His precious blood. It is never supposed in the Scriptures that we shall be without sin to confess, but it is written, "If we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship, one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin." We still need cleansing, even when we are walking in the Light of God! Let us get away to Christ, then, and say, "Lord, I would be, myself, unspotted. I come to You for washing."

That done, *avoid careless walking if you wish not to be spotted*. In going home, after a shower, if you have to cross a road, it is very difficult to keep from being spotted. And if you run carelessly, you will plunge into a puddle and there will be splashes of mud all over you, before you know it! Now, do not run into the puddle—walk circumspectly. There is a clean way and it is called the way of holiness—the unclean shall not pass over it. The Lord help us to watch every action and, more than that, every thought and every word! I would like to be able to take my words out of my mouth and look at them before I speak them—and to have all the actions of my life done as under the watchful eye of God, to see whether they will look right in the Day of Judgment. If you cannot sleep over a thing, do not do it. As the good man said to his boy, "My boy, pay as you go." "Suppose I cannot pay, Father." "Then, don't go." So would I say to you, examine your life as you go. If you dare not examine an action, or look at it, then do not do it! When you do not know whether it is right, then it is always best to feel sure that it is wrong. Even though it might be right to

another, it will be wrong to you if you have not faith that it is right, for, “whatever is not of faith is sin.” If *any* question arises about moral conduct, that question makes it evil to you.

Next, I would say that, as you would avoid careless walking, also *avoid careless walkers*. Very frequently, when I am riding alone, and I am not getting into any mud, an omnibus comes by and splashes me all over. It is no fault of mine, but then it is somebody *near me* that does it. As you walk along the street, you are very careful, but if your neighbor puts his foot in a puddle, the splash may come over you. So mind what company you keep! And when you find people getting rather “fast,” or rather “loose,” leave them—get away from them! You do not need to be muddied, so keep yourself unspotted from the world.

Above all, *cry to God to preserve you from evil*. If you go out every day, covered and protected by Divine Grace, then, and then only, can you be kept unspotted from the world. I would like to see a Christian not kept in a glass case away from trial and temptation, but yet covered with an invisible shield, so that, wherever he went, he would be guarded and protected from the evil influences that are in the world in almost every place.

Thus I have spoken to God’s people, but I have said very little to sinners. Although I have not addressed them especially, tonight, if you, the people of God, will go and live godly lives, you will preach to sinners better than I shall. I have to say to you who fear God, keep yourselves unspotted from the world, but what am I to say to those who are not only *in* the world, but also *of* the world? Do you not know that “the earth, also, and the works that are therein shall be burned up”? What will become of you, then? And you who belong to the world and have your portion in this life—and your joy in this world—in that great day when the elements shall melt with fervent heat, where will you be? Then you may call to the rocks to hide you, but you will call in vain! If your portion is in this life, what will you do in the life to come?

Some of you are living within the boundaries of this mortal existence and that is your all. Poor Soul! Poor Soul! Poor soul! Poor Soul! The Lord in His mercy bring you to know the life eternal! And when you once get that, your great desire will be to be delivered from the power of sin and to keep yourself unspotted from the world! The Lord bless you, for Christ’s sake! Amen!

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON. JAMES 1.

Verse 1. *James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting.* “Where are the lost ten tribes?” asks somebody. They never were lost. That is a mere piece of nonsense! There were, and there still are, 12 tribes of Israel, as much one as the other. Ask any Jew if it is not so. James writes to all his compatriots by nature and to all the fellow citizens of the saints by Grace, and greets them. What a strange greeting it is!

2. *My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into divers temptations. Or “trials.” Do not be sorry about it, be thankful for it. The gold should be glad to be put into the crucible—the Christian should rejoice to be tested and tried. Not only count it joy, but count it, “all joy when you fall into divers temptations.”*

3, 4. *Knowing this, that the trying of your faith works patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that you may be perfect and entire, needing nothing.* You need to grow—you will not grow without trials. You need to learn—you will not learn without affliction. It is God’s school for you. Be thankful, therefore, when these afflictions come. They are the rumbling wagons of your Father, in which He sends you choice treasure. They are black ships that come from afar, loaded with precious things. But mind that you get this patience and, that when you have it, you have still more of it—“Let patience have her perfect work.”

5. *If any of you lack wisdom.* Ah, James, you need not say, “If any of you lack wisdom,” for we all lack it! We are all poor, foolish creatures—“If any of you lack wisdom.”

5. *Let him ask of God, that gives to all men liberally, and upbraids not; and it shall be given him.* The Lord might very well upbraid us for our folly and say, “Poor child, I will give you wisdom; yet you are very foolish.” But He does not say that. He “gives to all men liberally, and upbraids not.” Let him who lacks wisdom ask of God, “and it shall be given him.” Can the Lord give wisdom? Surely we must study, learn, and gain experience before we can know and then, afterwards, knowledge, rightly used, grows into *wisdom*. Can God give us wisdom ready made? Ah, yes, He can! He gives wisdom if we ask for it.

6. *But let him ask in faith.* A man who has no wisdom can have faith. Let him use his faith to get wisdom—“Let him ask in faith.”

6, 7. *Nothing wavering. For he that wavers is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord.* He may receive something of the Lord, but he may not think that he shall. It may come as a spontaneous gift of Sovereign Grace, but we have no right to expect an answer to prayer when we pray in a wavering style.

8. *A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways.* He sees double. He runs after two objects and, therefore, he staggers across the street—he “is unstable in all his ways.”

9. *Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted.* Being lifted up by the Grace of God to sit among the princes of Israel!

10. *But the rich, in that he is made low.* Hard work, this! Still, the child of God should rejoice in it, for now that he is stripped of earthly things, he finds his all in God.

10-12. *Because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away. For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withers the grass, and the flower thereof falls, and the beauty of the fashion of it perishes: so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways. Blessed is the man that endures temptation. Or, “endures trial.” Blessed is the man who is tried and tested, and who lives through it—who conquers, notwithstanding all the battle*

and struggle through which he passes. We would say, "Blessed is the man who is not tried," but it is not so. He who, bearing the heavy load, receives gracious strength to sustain him under it, gets a greater blessing than the man who escapes the burden.

12, 13. *For when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to them that love Him. Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God. That would be nonsense and falsehood! When a man is seduced to evil, when evil casts its attractive spell over him, let him not blame God!*

13, 14. *For God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempts He any man: but every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed. God tries men. God does not, in the sense in which the word is here used, tempt men. Satan tempts—God tries. But the same trial may be both a temptation and a trial—and it may be a trial from God's side, and a temptation from Satan's side, just as Job suffered from Satan and it was a temptation. But he also suffered from God through Satan, and so it was a trial to him.*

15. *Then when lust has conceived, it brings forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, brings forth death. That is the pedigree of sin—it is born of lust, and it brings forth dust. Any sin, whatever it is, if we cling to it and love it, will bring forth death—rest assured of that! The only hope we can have of eternal life is by being parted from sin. That must be taken away from us; for there shall never enter into Heaven anything that defiles. We have, from day to day, to fight against sin till it is utterly put away from us.*

16, 17. *Do not err, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of Lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. God never turns from us, nor, in any way whatever, changes. He is the same God, ready always to bless us, ready to save us tonight as much as any other Thursday night! Ah, dear Friends, what variableness we have! The other day we were frostbitten and crying out with the cold. And now, tonight, perhaps, we feel dull, stupid and heavy because it is so hot! Yet, what a mercy it is that God has no variableness, neither shadow of a turning, and we may come to Him, tonight, and say, "Lord, visit us as You are known to do! Revive us and refresh us. Put us into a lively, brisk, happy frame of mind tonight and send us on our way rejoicing."*

18. *Of His own will He begat us with the Word of Truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of His creatures. We are His creatures, but we are better than His other creatures, for he has made us twice over! We are his twice-born creatures and we are the first ripe fruit of His creation, dedicated to His praise, gathered to His Glory—"a kind of first fruits of His creatures." Oh, that God would help us to honor Him and to live truly consecrated to Him!*

19. *Therefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear. It is a great thing to have an open ear. Some are very slow to hear, especially to hear the Word of God and the voice of God speaking that Word. Oh, to have our ears unstopped that we may hear every syllable of the Truth of*

God gladly, cheerfully, retentively! God grant us that swiftness of hearing tonight!

19. *Slow to speak, slow to wrath.* For, sometimes, when men are very quick to speak, they are also very quick in other respects as well—and volubility may be accompanied by a tendency to heat or passion. “Slow to speak, slow to wrath.”

20. *For the wrath of man works not the righteousness of God.* Satan does not cast out Satan! Anger does not overcome evil. We may think we do well to be angry, but that will very seldom be the case.

21. *Therefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted Word of God which is able to save your souls.* Perhaps you have seen a man grafting a tree. What a gash he makes in the tree before he puts in the graft! How he wounds it to make the sap flow into the new wood! If the Lord has made any of your hearts bleed, tonight, by the sharp cutting of His Spirit, we are not sorry, if it shall the better prepare you for receiving the grafts of His own Nature, and His own Word.

22. *But be you doers of the Word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.* It is a pity when a man deceives himself—he must be an arch-deceiver!

23-25. *For if any is a hearer of the Word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: for he beholds himself, and goes his way, and straightway forgets what manner of man he was. But whoso looks into the perfect Law of liberty, and continues therein.* Perseverance to the end is needed—“Continues therein.”

25. *He being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.* The blessedness of true religion lies very much in the practical effect of it. Hearing is pleasant, but *doing* is the effectual proof of Grace.

26. *If any man among you seems to be religious, and bridles not his tongue, but deceives his own heart, this man’s religion is vain.* James settles that matter off very peremptorily. An unbridled tongue indicates a godless heart.

27. *Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep ourselves unspotted from the world.* This is not the *secret* part of religion. Of that we read elsewhere. But this is the very dress that true religion puts on—charitably caring for the most destitute of our fellow creatures, and holy walking, that we are not as the men of the world are—“Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep ourselves unspotted from the world.”

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A SERMON
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“Even so faith, if it has not works, is dead, being alone.”
James 2:17.

WHATEVER the statement of James may be, it could never have been his intention to contradict the Gospel! It could never be possible that the Holy Spirit would say one thing, in one place, and another in another. Statements of Paul and of James must be reconciled, and if they were not, I would sooner be prepared to throw overboard the statement of James than that of Paul. Luther did so, I think, most unjustifiably. If you ask me, then, how I dare to say I would sooner do so, my reply is, I said I would sooner throw overboard James than Paul for this reason, because, at any rate, we must keep to the Master, Himself, the Lord Jesus Christ. We ought never to raise any questions about differences of Inspiration, since they are all equally Inspired, but if such questions could be raised and were allowable, it were wisdom to stick fastest to those who cling closest to Christ. Now the last words of the Lord Jesus, before He was taken up, were these, “Go you into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature,” and what was this Gospel? “He that believes and is baptized shall be saved.” To that, then, we must always cling, and Jesus Christ has given a promise of salvation to the baptized Believer, for He has said, “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, and whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life.”

Here it is clear He promises everlasting life to all who believe in Him, to all who trust in Him. Now from the Master's words we will not stir, but close to His own declaration we will stand. Be assured that the Gospel of your salvation as a Believer, with a simple confidence in Jesus Christ, whom God raised from the dead, will save your soul—a simple and undiluted reliance upon the life, death, resurrection, merit and Person of Jesus Christ, will ensure to you everlasting life. Let nothing move you from this confidence—it has great recompense of reward! Heaven and earth may pass away, but from this grand fundamental Truth of God not one jot or tittle shall ever be moved! “He that believes in Him is not condemned, but he that believes not is condemned already, because he has not believed on the Son of God.”

The fact is, James and Paul are perfectly reconcilable—they are just viewing a Truth of God from different standpoints. Whatever James may

mean, I am quite confident about what Paul means, and confident about the truth of the two.

A second remark. James never intended, for a moment, nor do any of his words lead us into such a belief, that there can be any merit whatever in any good works of ours. After we have done all, if we could do all, we would only have done what we were bound to do! Surely there is no merit in a man's paying what he owes—no great merit in a servant who has his wages for doing what he is paid to do. The question of merit between the creature and his Creator is not to be raised—He has a right to us. He has the right of creation, the right of preservation, the right of Infinite Sovereignty and, whatever He should exact of us, we should require nothing from Him in return! And, having sinned as we all have, for us to talk of salvation by merit—by our own works—is worse than vanity! It is an impertinence which God will never endure—

***“Talk they of morals, O You bleeding Lamb!
The best morality is love of You.”***

Talk of salvation by works and Cowper's reply seems apt—

***“Perish the virtue, as it ought, abhorred,
And the fool with it, who insults his Lord.”***

What James does mean, however, is this, no doubt, in brief and short—that while faith saves, it is faith of a certain kind. No man is saved by persuading himself that he is saved! Nobody is saved by believing Jesus Christ died for him. That may be, or may not be true in the sense in which he understands it. In a certain sense Christ died for all men, but since it is evident that many men are lost, Christ's dying for all men is not at all a ground upon which any man may hope to be saved. Christ died for *some* men, in another sense, in a peculiar and special sense. No man has a right to believe that Christ peculiarly and specially died for him until he has an evidence of it in casting himself upon Christ, trusting in Jesus and bringing forth suitable works to evince the reality of his faith. The faith that saves is not a historical faith, not a faith that simply believes a creed and certain facts—I have no doubt devils are very orthodox—I do not know which church they belong to, though there are some in all churches! There was one in Christ's Church when He was on earth, for He said one was filled with devils—and there are some in all churches. Devils believe all the facts of Revelation. I do not believe they have a doubt—they have suffered too much from the hand of God to doubt His existence! They have felt too much the terror of His wrath to doubt the righteousness of His government! They are stern believers, but they are not saved—and such a faith, if it is in us, will not, cannot save us—but will remain to all intents and purposes, a dead, inoperative faith! It is a faith which *produces* works which saves us. The works do not save us. And a faith which does *not* produce works is a faith that will only deceive—and cannot lead us into Heaven. Now this evening we shall first speak a few words upon—

I. WHAT KIND OF WORKS ARE NECESSARY TO PROVE OUR FAITH IF IT IS A SAVING FAITH.

The works which are absolutely necessary are, in brief, these—First, there must be *fruits meet for repentance*, works of repentance. It is wrong to tell a man he must repent before he may trust Christ, but it is right to tell him that, having trusted Christ, it is not possible for him to remain impenitent. There never was in this world such a thing as an impenitent Believer in Jesus Christ, and there never can be! Faith and repentance are born in a spiritual life *together* and they grow up together! The moment a man believes, he repents, and while he believes, he both believes and repents, and until he shall have done with faith, he will not have done with repenting. If you have believed, but have never repented of your sins, then beware of your believing! If you pretend, now, to be a child of God, and if you have never clothed yourself in dust and ashes. If you have never hated the sins which once you loved—if you do not now hate them and endeavor to be rid of them, if you do not humble yourself before God on account of them—as the Lord lives, you know nothing about saving faith! For faith puts a distance between us and sin! In a moment it leads us away from the distance between us and Christ—nearer to Christ, we are now far off from sin! But he who loves his sin, thinks little of his sin, goes into it with levity, speaks of sin as though it were a trifle, has the faith of devils—but the faith of God’s elect he never knew! True faith purges the soul, since the man now hunts after sin that he might find out the traitor that lurks within his nature. And though a Believer is not perfect, yet the drift of faith is to make him perfect—and if it is faith to be perfected, the Believer shall be perfected—and then he shall be caught up to dwell before the Throne of God! Judge yourselves, my Hearers! Have you brought forth the fruits of repentance? If not, your faith without them is dead!

Works of secret piety are also essential to true faith. Does a man say, I believe that Jesus died for me, and I hope to be saved, and does he live in a constant neglect of private prayer? Is the Word of God never read? Does he never lift up his eyes in secret with, “My Father, be You the guide of my youth”? Has he no secret regard in his heart to the Lord his God and does he hold no communion with Christ, his Savior, and is there no fellowship with the Holy Spirit? Then how can faith dwell in such a man? As well say that a man is alive when he does not breathe, and in whom the blood does not circulate, as to say that a man is a Believer with living faith who does not draw near to God in prayer, that does not live, indeed, under the awe and fear of the Most High God as ever present and seeing Him in all places! Judge yourselves, you professors—are you neglecting prayer? Have you no secret spiritual life? If so, away with your notion about saving faith! You are not justified by such a faith as that! There is no life in it! It is not a faith that leads to the Lamb and brings salvation! If it were, it would show itself by driving you to your knees and making you lift up your heart to the Most High!

Another set of works are those which I may call *works of obedience*. When a man trusts in Jesus, he accepts Jesus as his Master. He says, “Show me what You would have me to do.” The Father shows Christ what

He would have Him to do. He does not set up His own will and judgment, but He is obedient to His Father's will. I will not tonight speak of those who know not their Lord's will, who shall be beaten with few stripes, but I do fear there are some professors who are living in willful neglect of known Christian duties, and yet suppose themselves to be the partakers of saving faith. Now a duty may be neglected, and yet a man may be saved, but a duty persistently and willfully neglected may be the leak that will sink the ship! Or the neglect of any one of such duties for the surrender of a true heart to Christ does not go such-and-such a length and then stop! Christ will save no heart upon terms and conditions—it must be an unconditional surrender to His government if you would be saved by Him. Now, some will draw a line here, and some will draw a line there, up to this and say, "I will be Christ's servant." That is to say, Sir, you will be your own master, for that is the English of it! But the true heart that has really believed says, "I will make haste and delay not to keep Your commandments. Make straight the path before my feet, for Your commandments are not grievous." "I have delighted in Your commandments more than in fine gold." Now, sons and daughters of sin, professedly, what do you say about this? Have you an eye to the Master, as servants keep their eyes to their mistress? Do you ever ask yourselves what would Christ have you to do? Or do you live habitually in the neglect of Christ's Law and wills? Do you go to places where Christ would not meet you, and where you would not like to meet with Him? Are some of you in the habit of professing maxims and customs upon which you know your Lord would never set His seal? You say you believe, you have faith in Him? Ah, Sirs, if it is a *living* faith, it will be an *obedient* faith!

Living faith produces what I shall call *separating works*. When a man believes in Jesus, he is not what he was, nor will he consort with those who were once his familiars. Our Lord has said, "You are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." Now Christ was not an ascetic—He ate and drank as other men do so that they even said of Him that He was a gluttonous Man and a winebibber because He mingled with the rest of mankind. But was there ever a more unearthly life than the life of Christ? He seems to go through all the world a complete Man in all that is necessary to manliness, but His Presence is like the presence of a seraph among sinners! You can discover at once that He is not of their mold, nor of their spirit, but harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners. Now such will the Believer be if his faith is genuine. This is a sharp cut to some professors, but not a whit more sharp than the Scripture warrants! If we are of the world, what can we expect but the world's doom in the day of the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ? If you find your pleasure with the world, you shall meet your condemnation with the world! If with the world you live, with the world you shall die—and with the world you shall live again forever—lost! Where there is no separation, there is no Grace! If we are conformed to this world, how dare we talk about Grace being in our souls! And if there is no distinguishing difference between us and worldlings, what vanity it is, what trifling, what hypocrisy, what a

delusion for us to come to the Lord's Table talking about being the Lord's sons when we are none of His! Faith without the works which denote the difference between a Believer and a worldling is a dead, unsaving faith!

Now I have not said that any Believer is perfect. I have never thought so, but I have said that if a Believer could be a Believer altogether, and faith could have her perfect work, he would be perfect, and that in proportion as he is truly a Believer, in that proportion he will bring forth fruit that shall magnify God and prove the sincerity of his faith.

One other set of works will be necessary to prove the vitality of his faith, namely, *works of love*. He that loves Christ feels that the love of Christ compels him—he endeavors to spread abroad the knowledge of Christ! He longs to win jewels for Christ's crown. He endeavors to extend the boundaries of Christ's and Messiah's Kingdom—and I will not give a farthing for the loftiest profession coupled with the most flowing words that never shows itself in direct deeds of Christian service. If you love Christ, you cannot help serving Him! If you believe in Him, there is such potency in what you believe, such power in the Grace which comes with believing, that you *must* serve Christ! And if you serve Him not, you are not His!

This proof, before we leave it, might be illustrated in various ways. We will just give one. A tree has been planted Now the source of life to that tree is at the root, whether it has apples on it or not. The apples would not give it life, but the whole of the life of the tree will come from its root. But if that tree stands in the orchard, and when the springtime comes there are no buds, and when the summer comes there are no leaves and no fruit. And the next year, and the next, it stands there without bud or blossom, or leaf or fruit, you would say it is dead—and you are correct—it is dead. It is not that the leaves could have made it live, but that the absence of the leaves is a proof that it is dead! So, too, is it with the professor. If he has life, that life must give fruits. If not fruits, works. If his faith has a root, but if there are no works, then depend upon it, the inference that he is spiritually dead is certainly a correct one! When the telegraph cable flashed no message across to America. When they tried to telegraph again and again, but the only result following was “dead earth”—they felt persuaded that there was a fracture, and well they might! And when there is nothing produced in the life by the supposed Divine Grace which we have, and nothing is telegraphed to the world but, “dead earth,” we may rest assured that the link of connection between the soul and Christ does not exist!

I need not enlarge. We should just put it into that one sentence—“Without holiness no man shall see the Lord. Bring forth, therefore, works meet for repentance! And now we turn to the second point with more brevity—

II. SOME FACTS THAT BACK UP THE DOCTRINE THAT “FAITH WITHOUT WORKS IS DEAD.”

These facts show that it is evident to all observers that many professors of faith without works are not saved. It would be very ludicrous, if it

were not very miserable, to think of some who wrap themselves in the conceit that they are saved about whose salvation nobody but themselves can have any question. I remember a professor who used to talk of being justified by faith who was most assured about it when he had consumed much beer. Such professors are not at all uncommon, sad to say! They seem at the moment, when their condemnation seems written on their very brow to all who know them, to be most confident that they, themselves, are saved! Now, Brothers and Sisters, if such cases are convincing and you entertain no doubt but decide in their case, apply the same rule to yourselves, for although you may not plunge into the grosser vices, yet if you make your homes wretched by your selfishness, if you fall into constant habits of vicious temper, if you never strive against these sins, and the Grace of God never leads you out of them—if you can live in private sin and yet pacify your conscience and remain just as you were before your pretended conversion—when you sit in judgment and pronounce the verdict on others, feel that you pronounce it upon yourself, for surely for one sin that is openly indulged in, which is manifested to you in the dissipation of your fellow creatures, it is not hard for you to believe that any other sin, if it is constantly indulged and is loved, will do the same to you as it does to him! You know men who have not faith, but have a sort of faith, are not saved. It must be true, or else where were the Savior's words, "Straight is the gate and narrow the way, and few there are that find it"? For this is no straight gate and no narrow way, merely to be orthodox and hold a creed and say, "I believe Jesus died for me." No, it is a very narrow gate so to believe as to become practically Christ's servants, so to trust as to give up that which Christ hates! Truths which Jesus bids us believe are all Truths which if believed, *must have an effect upon the daily life.*

A man cannot really believe that Jesus Christ has taken away his sin by such sufferings as those of the Cross, and yet trifle with sin! A man is a liar who says, "I believe that yonder bleeding Savior suffered on account of my sins," and yet holds good fellowship with the very sins that put Christ to death! Oh, Sirs, a faith in the bleeding Savior is a faith that craves for vengeance upon every form of sin! The Christian religion makes us believe that we are the sons of God when we trust in Christ. Will a man believe that he is really the son of God, and then daily and willfully go and live like a child of the devil? Do you expect to see members of the royal court playing with beggars in the street? When a man believes himself to possess a certain station of life, that belief leads him to a certain carriage and conversation—and when I am led to believe I am elected of God, that I am redeemed by blood, that Heaven is secured to me by the Covenant of Grace, that I am God's priest, made a king in Christ Jesus, I cannot, if I believe, unless I am more monstrous than human nature, itself, seems capable of being—go back to live after just the same fashion, to run in the same course as others and live as the sons of Belial live! We constantly see in Scripture, and all the saints affirm it, that faith is linked with Divine Grace—and that where faith is, the Grace of God

is—but how can there be the gift of God reigning in the soul and yet a love of sin and a neglect of holiness? I cannot understand Grace reigning and vice ruling over the living and incorruptible Seed which abides forever in the inner man—and for this man to give himself up to be a slave of Satan is a thing impossible!

Faith, again, is always *in connection with regeneration*. Now regeneration is making of the old thing new. It is infusing a new nature into a man. The new birth is not a mere reformation, but an entire renovation and revolution! It is making the man a new creation in Christ Jesus. But a new creature, if he has no repentance, if he has no good works, no private prayer, no charity, no holiness of any kind—regeneration will be a football for scorn! The new birth would be a thing to be ridiculed if it did not really produce a hatred of sin and a love of holiness. That kind of new birth which is dispensed by the Church of Rome, and also by some in the Church of England, is a kind of new birth which ought to excite the derision of all mankind, for children are said to be born-again—certified to be born-again, made members of Christ and children of God—and afterwards they grow up, in many cases—in most cases—let me say, to forget their baptismal vows and live in sin as others do! Evidently it has had no effect upon them! But regeneration such as we read of in the Bible changes the nature of man, makes him hate the things he loved, and love the things he hated! This is regeneration! This is regeneration which is worth the seeking! It always comes with faith, and consequently good works must come with faith, too. But we pass on to the last matter, which is this—

III. WHAT OF THOSE MEN WHO HAVE FAITH, BUT WHO HAVE NO GOOD WORKS?

Then what about them? Why, this about them—that their supposed faith generally makes them *very careless and indifferent*, and ultimately hardened and depraved men! I dread beyond measure that any one of us should have a name to live when we are dead, for an ordinary sinner who makes no profession may be converted, but it is extremely rare that a sinner who makes a profession of being what he is not is ever converted! It is a miserable thing to find a person discovering that his profession has been a lie. A man sits down and he says, “Why, I believe,” and as he walks he is careful, because he is afraid of what others might say. By-and-by, he begins to indulge a little. He says, “This is not of works. I may do this and yet get forgiveness.” Then he goes a little further away. I do not say that, perhaps, at first he goes to the theater, but he goes next door to it. He does not get drunk, but he likes jovial company. A little further and he gets confirmed in the belief that he is a saved one, and he gets so much confirmed in that idea that he thinks he can do just as he likes! Having sported on the brink without falling over, he thinks he will try again—and he goes a little further and further until I may venture to say, if Satan needs raw material of which to make the worst of men, he generally takes those who profess to be the best! And I have questioned whether such a valuable servant of Satan as Judas was, could ever have

been made of any other material than an apostate Apostle. If he had not lived near to Christ, he never could have become such a traitor as he was! You must have a good knowledge of religion to be a thorough-faced hypocrite! And you must become high in Christ's Church before you can become fit tools for Satan's worst works. Oh, but why do men do this? Oh, what is the use of maintaining such a faith? I think if we do not care to get the vitality of religion, I would never burden myself with the husks of it, for such people get the *chains* of godliness without getting the *comforts* of godliness. They dare not do this, they dare not do that—if they do, they feel hampered. Why don't they give up professing—they would at least be free! They would have the sin without the millstone about their neck! Surely there can be no excuse for men who mean to perish coming to cover themselves with a mask of godliness! Why cannot they perish as they are? Why add sin to sin by insulting the Church through the Cross of Christ?

When men make a profession of religion, and yet their works do not follow their faith, what about them? Why, this about them. *They have dishonored the Church* and, of all others, these are the people who make the world point to the Church and say, "Where is your religion? That is your religion, is it?" So it is when they find a man who professes to be in Christ and yet walks not as Christ walked. These give the Church her wounds! She receives them in the house of her friends! These make the true ministers of God go to their closets with broken hearts, crying out, "Oh, Lord, why have You sent us to this people to speak and minister among them, that they should play the hypocrite before You?" These are they who prevent the coming in of others, for others take knowledge of them, as they think religion is hypocrisy, and they are hindered. And, if not seriously, they get, at any rate, comfort in their sin from the iniquity of these professors! What their judgment will be when Christ appears, it is not for my tongue to say. In that day when, with tongue of fire, Christ shall search every heart and call on all men to receive their judgment, what must be the lot of the base-born professor who prostituted his profession to his own honor and gain? He sought not the glory of God. What shall be the thunder bolt that shall pursue his guilty soul in its timorous flight to Hell? And what the chains that are reserved in blackness and darkness forever for those who are wells without water and clouds without rain? I cannot tell, and may God grant that you may never know! Oh, may we all tonight go to Christ Jesus humbly and freely, confessing our sins and take Christ to be our complete Savior in very deed and truth! Then shall we be saved! And then, being saved, we shall seek to serve Christ with heart, and soul, and strength!

Lest I have missed my mark, this one illustration shall suffice and I have done. There is a vessel drifting. She will soon be on the shore, but a pilot has come on board. He is standing on the deck and he says to the captain and crew, "I promise and undertake that if you will solely and alone trust me, I will save your vessel. Do you promise it? Do you believe in me?" They believe in him. They say they believe the pilot can save the

vessel and they trust the vessel implicitly to his care. Now listen to him. "Now," he says, "you at that helm there!" He does not stir. "At the helm there! Can't you hear?" He does not stir! He does not stir! "Well but, Jack, haven't you confidence in the pilot?" "Oh, yes. Oh, yes, I have faith in him," he says, "he will save the vessel if I have faith in him." "Don't you hear the pilot, as he says, "have faith in me and you won't touch the helm?" "Now, you aloft there! Reef that sail." He does not stir, but lets the wind still blow into the sail and drift the vessel on to the coast "Now then, some of you, look alive and reef that sail!" But they do not stir! "Why, Captain, what shall I do? These fellows won't stir or move a peg." "Oh," says the captain; "I have every confidence in you, Pilot. I believe you will save the vessel." "Then why don't you attend to the tiller, and all that?" "Oh, no," says he, "I have great confidence in *you*. I don't mean to do anything." Now when that ship goes down amid the boiling surges, and each man sinks to his doom, I will ask you—had they faith in the pilot? Hadn't they a mimicking, mocking sort of faith, and only that? For if they had been really anxious to have the vessel rescued and have trusted in the pilot, it would be the pilot who had saved them, and they could never have been saved without him. They would have proved their faith by their works! Their faith would have been made perfect, and the vessel would have been secured.

I call upon every man here to do what Christ bids him! I call upon you, first of all, to prove that you believe in Christ by being baptized! "He that believes in Christ and is baptized shall be saved." The first proof that you believe in Christ is to be given by yielding to the much despised ordinance of Believers' Baptism and then, having done that, going on to the other means of which I have spoken. Oh, I charge you by your soul's salvation, neglect nothing Christ commands, however trivial it may seem to your reason! Whatever He says to you, do it, for only by a childlike obedience to every bidding of Christ can you expect to have the promise fulfilled, "They that trust in Him shall be saved." The Lord bless these words, for His name's sake. Amen.

**EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:
JAMES 1:1-26.**

Verse 1. *James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting.* James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. He was an Apostle and he was the Lord's brother, yet he mentions not these greater things, but he takes the lowly title, in which, no doubt, he felt the highest honor—and calls himself, "a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ." Happy is that man who serves the Lord, whose whole life is not that of an independent master of himself, but of one who is fully submissive to the Divine command! Where is the fiction of the ten lost tribes? He writes to the *twelve* tribes that were scattered abroad, and gives them greeting, so that this Epistle is first directed to the seed of Israel, and then, as in all things, to all the

Church of God, seeing all the saints of God are the true seed of believing Abraham, the father of Believers.

2. *My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into divers trials.* Do not sorrow over your trials, do not look upon them as misfortunes and calamities—they are black vessels, but they are loaded with gold! Your choicest mercies come to you disguised as your sharpest trials. Welcome them! Do not sorrow over them, but rejoice in them!

3, 4. *Knowing this, that the trying of your faith works patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that you may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.* Endure everything. Suffer everything that God sends you. Bathe yourself in this rough sea till, by God's blessing, it has strengthened you and cleansed you, for to that end He sends it, that it may perfect you by discipline, educating all your spiritual faculties and bringing out all your powers for His Glory. Shrink not, then, seek not to escape by any wrong means from trial, but go through with it, have perfect endurance of it, that you may be perfect and whole, wanting nothing. "If any of you lack wisdom," and that is the point where you are most likely not to be perfect and entire—

5. *If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that gives to all men, liberally and unbraids not; and it shall be given him.* We are so apt, when we give anything, to diminish the value of it by some unkind remarks. But God does not so—He gives, as He bids us give, with simplicity. There is the gift and He will not detract from it by upbraiding us. Why, some will upbraid the poor while they help them—"How did you come to be in such a condition?" But God says not so to us—the gift is given in pure liberality without any upbraiding. Wisdom is a gift! The best wisdom is not that which we acquire by study, but that which is the distinct gift of God in answer to prayer!

6. *But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavers is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed.* Now on the shore, now sinking back, now driving fearlessly ahead, then sinking down. This is not the kind of man that prevails with God in prayer! It is not the kind of faith we ought to have in God—a faith that is very brilliant on Sunday, but very dull on the Monday—a faith that is triumphant after a sermon, but which seems to be defeated when we get into actual trouble.

7, 8. *For let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord. A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways.* Unstable in everything! Till you get a single heart, till your whole soul is bound up in confidence in God, you cannot expect to be stable in your ways. "Unite my heart to fear Your name," and then I shall not be a double-minded man.

9. *Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted.* The lowness of his estate is an exaltation! He shall find in his troubles a double blessing—he shall be made greater by being so little. "But let the rich rejoice in that he is made low," so that what would have been foolish pomp and pride is taken away from him and, by the Grace of God, he is kept low. "Because as the flower of the grass, he shall pass away."

10, 11. *But the rich, in that he is made low, because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away. For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withers the grass, and the flower thereof falls, and the grace of the fashion of it perishes, so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways.* Oh, to be delivered from all glorying in such uncertain riches! Whatever God gives you, He may soon take away from you. If He takes it not away, He may take away your power to enjoy it! It is poor, slippery stuff at the very best. Rejoice that you have something better, something lasting!

12. *Blessed is the man who endures temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to them that love Him.* It is promised to love, but it is given to endurance! It is the love of God which spies out our love and rewards it, but rewards it partly by trying it and then ultimately by bringing forth the *stephanos*, the crown. Men ran for a crown in the Greek games, and could not win the crown without the running. So does God give to them that run, a crown, but not without the running. He gives to them, first, the privilege of suffering for His name's sake—and then of being rewarded for it.

13. *Let no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God, for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempts He any man.* God tries men, but the *motive* of a trial is that which differentiates it from a temptation. In a temptation we try a man with a view of inducing him to do wrong, but God tries men to better them, that they may, by finding out their weakness, be saved from doing wrong. He never inclines a heart to evil. While He does all things, and is in all things, yet not so that He, Himself, does evil, or can be charged therewith.

14. *But every man is tempted when he is drawn away by his own lust, and enticed.* This is the wanton harlot that deceives the heart of man—his own desire, grown strong and hot till it comes to be a lusting—this draws a man away. It baits the hook and man swallows it and is thus entrapped and enticed.

15. *Then when lust has conceived, it brings forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, brings forth death.* There is the history and pedigree of sin! God save us from having any connection with the desire to sin, lest from that we be led into sin and then, from sin, descend into death!

16, 17. *Do not err, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above.* All good from God, all evil from ourselves!

17. *And comes down from the Father of Lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.* There is variableness and there is the shadow of turning in the sun, but in that greater Father of Lights there is neither parallax nor tropic—He is always the same and we may go to Him with unwavering confidence because He is the same. Oh, what a blessing to such changing creatures as we are to have an unchanging God! “Of His own will.” If you want to know the power of God's will, it never goes towards evil.

18. *Of His own will He brought us forth with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of His creatures.* The best and noblest part

of His Creation, the twice-begotten, the immortals that shall be the body-guard of His Son, that shall stand about His bed, which is Solomon's, each man with his sword upon his thigh, because of fear in the night. What a privilege it is to be begotten of God, to be the "first fruits" of His creatures!

19. *Therefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear.* Because it is by the Word that we are begotten—let us be swift to hear it. "Slow to speak," because there is so much sin in us that the less we speak, the better. In the multitude of words there lacks not sin. Great talkativeness is seldom dissociated from great sinfulness. "Slow to wrath."

20. *Slow to speak, slow to wrath. For the wrath of man works not the righteousness of God.* There is a tendency to grow angry with those who do not see the Truth of God, but is it not a foolish thing to be angry with blind men because they do not see? What if you see yourself? Who opened your eyes? Give God the praise for what you see, and never think that your anger, your indignation, your hot temper can ever work the righteousness of God! It is contrary thereto and cannot work towards it.

21-23. *Therefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness and receive with meekness the engrafted word which is able to save your souls. But be you doers of the word, and not hearers, only, deceiving your own selves. For if any is a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass.* It is a good thing for him to do that, to see himself as others see him. "Beholding his natural face," even as men in looking into the Word of God behold the face of their nature—they see what they are like as they look into the mirror.

24-26. *For he beholds himself, and goes his way, and straightway forgets what manner of man he was. But who so looks into the perfect law of liberty, and continues therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed. If any man among you seems to be religious and bridles not his tongue, but deceives his own heart, this man's religion is vain.*

—Adapted from the C. H. Spurgeon Collection, Version 1.0, Ages Software.

**PRAY THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL USE THIS SERMON
TO BRING MANY TO A SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST.**

RAHAB

NO. 1061

**A SERMON DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JULY 21, 1872,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.**

***“By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not,
when she had received the spies in peace.”
Hebrews 11:31.***

***“Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had
received the messengers, and had sent them out another way?”
James 2:25.***

THESE are two New Testament summaries of the life of Rahab and they are equally honorable to her. Paul puts her among the great worthies who, by faith, worked wonders. The 11th chapter of Hebrews is a triumphal arch to the soldiers of faith and among the illustrious names inscribed there are the name of this harlot of Jericho. We are not, however, so much surprised at that, for she was evidently an instance of great faith—but we are somewhat surprised, I think, to find her name recorded by James because he is an eminently practical writer—and was writing of good *works* rather than of faith. His object is to show that the faith which justifies the soul is a faith which *produces* good works, and therefore he looks for instances of holy service of God.

We should not have thought that he would have singled out Rahab, but he has done so and this is the more remarkable because the only other person whom he mentions is Abraham—Abraham the Father of the Faithful, the Friend of God, a perfect and an upright man! James cites Abraham as standing for the one sex and Rahab the harlot for the other. I have no doubt that James knew what he was doing and that the Inspiration which guided him was infallible. Possibly Rahab was chosen to represent the Gentiles in connection with the founder of Israel who fitly stood for the Jews. While Abraham possessed a faith which manifested itself by works, so also did Rahab, the daughter of the Gentiles descended from a race doomed to destruction—a Gentile of the Gentiles.

But possibly another reason for mentioning her may be that as Abraham renounced his own kindred at the call of God and came forth from Ur of the Chaldees, separated unto the Most High, so did this woman leave all her associations with Jericho, practically renouncing her nationality, forsaking her country and leaving it to its destiny and doom while she took her part with Israel to be a partaker with the people of God in the promised inheritance. It is no small honor, then, to this remarkable woman that she has her name recorded, not only with the heroes of faith, but also that she is selected by the great practical Apostle as one of two remarkable instances of the works which *result* from faith.

Let us consider her faith and her character all the more attentively because of this high position which the Holy Spirit has accorded to her. With the commendation of Paul and the praise of James, backed as they

both were by the witness of the Spirit of God, this woman's character is well worthy of attentive consideration. May the Spirit of God bless our meditation to our profit.

I. Our first observation upon her shall be that she possessed SINGULAR FAITH. This will be apparent if we reflect that she received no instruction from her parents. Birth-right membership was not a question which touched the case of Rahab. Her parents were of the condemned race of the Canaanites. They had no faith in God, themselves, and could not inculcate it. She did not become a worshipper of Jehovah because the family had always been so. They had no family pew in the sanctuary, no Prophet's chamber in the house, no name to keep up among the Lord's people. She was the first and only one of her race called out by Grace. God had chosen her as "one of a family" by His electing love, and though we hope that Grace continued in the household for many generations, yet it first of all came by her.

Now we do not so much wonder, though I believe in many respects it is equally to God's Glory when we see the children of godly parents becoming Believers in Christ—for we remember the many prayers offered for them, the instructions which they have received, the affectionate admonitions which they have heard—and above all the godly examples which they have seen. We do not so much wonder, though indeed, even in that case it is a work of the Spirit of God as much as in any other if the conversion is genuine. But we do marvel, and we cannot help it, when we see one rising out of a family in which no true religion had ever been seen before! Here we see a lone palm in the desert, a solitary life among the tombs.

It is a struggle, as some of you know, to stand in the position of a lonely witness for God in a family. When in seeing enquirers I have to talk to young persons who are the only ones of the family attending the House of God at all—the only ones who make any pretensions to godliness—I feel great sympathy with them because I know they will have much to put up with and a heavy cross to carry. Such converts are not plants in the conservatory, but flowers exposed to the winter's cold. Yet it is right to add that I have often observed that these have become among the strongest and most decided Christians that I have ever met! Even as Rahab, though her faith was solitary and was like a lily among thorns, yet was her faith none the less strong and perhaps, all the more unwavering.

Reflect again that her faith was singular because she was not in a believing country. Not only within doors had she none to sympathize with her, but in the whole city of Jericho, so far as we know, she was the only believer in Jehovah. It is right to conclude that if there had been other Believers there, either the city would have been spared for the sake of ten righteous, or else there would have been means found for their preservation—but she was the only one there. If we could have taken a birds-eye view of the city of Jericho and had been informed that there was one Believer there, I assure you we would not have looked to Rahab's house! She would have been about the *last* person that we should have supposed had been a possessor of faith in the true God.

God has a people where we little dream of it and He has chosen ones among a sort of people whom we dare not hope for. Who would think that Grace could grow in the heart of one who was a harlot by name, as though her sin was openly known to all? Yet it grew there, like a fair flower blooming upon a dunghill, or a bright star glittering on the brow of night. There her faith grew and brought forth glory to God! I know not what god they worshipped at Jericho, but the whole city was full of idolatry and Rahab, alone, looked to the living God! The whole city was full of filthiness, and, bad as she had been, her faith must have made her loathe the sin. Jericho was neighbor to Sodom, not only as to locality but as to condition, and bad as this woman had been, it is probable that her sin was among the least of the offenses practiced there.

It is a shame even to speak of the loathsome crimes which defiled Jericho. When reclaimed by Sovereign Grace Rahab must have found herself as much alone in Jericho as Lot had found himself alone in Sodom. She was the one and only Believer amidst an idolatrous and depraved generation. May we not have hope, dear Friends, that from the lowest slums of our vast city there may come other Rahabs? Why not a Rahab in the Haymarket as well as in Jericho? May we not trust that among those who have been in our prisons, there yet may arise believers in the Lord God of Israel? May we not even hope that the fame of the Gospel may have been carried by rumor into cities unvisited by missionaries and that here and there Rahabs in unknown cities may be seeking after the Lord? There is no telling what Divine Grace may be silently doing throughout the world in culling out the ones and twos whom God has chosen! Israel dreamed not of finding an ally within her enemy's walls, yet the Lord would have it so, and so it was.

Remember, too, that Rahab's faith was remarkable because her means of knowledge were very slender and, therefore, the food of her faith was comparatively scant. She had no book inspired of God to read. She had been instructed by no Prophet—no Elijah had spoken to her in the name of God—no Jonah had gone through the streets of her city, warning men to repent. What information she had obtained she had gathered by odds and ends. She had put together the talk of the marketplace, the chat at the well and the gossip outside the city gates. And she had concluded that a nation had come out of Egypt, and that for their sakes and by their God, Jehovah, the Egyptian king had been destroyed at the Red Sea—that Sihon, king of the Amorites, and Og, king of Bashan, had been overthrown in battle by this people—and that it was certain they were on their way to take the whole of Palestine to themselves because their God had given it to them.

Out of these common reports this woman had gathered evidence sufficient for faith to rest upon. The proverb has it that common fame is a common liar, but in this case the general panic with which her countrymen had been seized convinced her that the reports were true. The terms in which the advance of Israel was everywhere described convinced her that a terrible calamity hung like a cloud over the country. A cloud that paralyzed the court, the army and the people. She saw that the ground of fear was that a living God was with this people and she said within herself, "Verily, there is one God," and her conscience within responded to

that declaration. She felt it was so and light streamed in upon her spirit. She believed in Jehovah, the God of Israel, and she began to worship Him, expecting that the cause which He espoused would be successful and that those who were His enemies would certainly come to destruction. Slender, I say, was the basis—strong enough in itself—but far inferior to that line upon line, precept upon precept, which we have so long received.

Many here present have the whole of God's Book before them and yet do not believe! They have the testimony of His saints by the thousands and yet do not believe! They are earnestly entreated by living witnesses, yet do not believe! But this poor woman, with her few opportunities, became a believer in Jehovah! Take heed lest in the day of judgment she should rise up against you! She believed with far less testimony—how will you be able to excuse your own persistent unbelief? I pray you, dear Hearers, think of this! Perhaps the most wonderful thing about her faith was that she should be a woman of such a character. She was apparently the most unlikely person to become a believer in Jehovah. She was a *harlot*, a woman that was a sinner and universally known to be such!

Desperate attempts have been made to find some other meaning for the word rendered *harlot*, but they have been utterly fruitless. Both Paul and James declare, concerning her, that she was what we commonly call her. The idea that she was a hostess or tavern keeper is absurd because such a thing as an innkeeper was not known in those days, as everybody knows. To foist such an interpretation as that upon the original Hebrew is not to translate, but to misinterpret—and no one has ever attempted it with the Greek! She had doubtless been a great sinner—it is no use trying to mince the matter. Let the glory be to Divine Grace! Why should we wish to rob God of His honor in having delivered such a woman from her sin?

But after she became a believer in Jehovah, it strikes me she forsook her sin and became another character though she was still known by her old title. We read that she hid the spies among the stalks of flax. For what purpose had she stalks of flax upon her roof if she had not begun to be an industrious working woman? A little thing will often indicate character. A straw shows which way the wind blows and it seems to me to be most probable that she had forsaken her unhallowed life. And then, since hospitality had come to be forgotten in Jericho and the other Canaanite cities, she, being a follower of Jehovah and knowing that hospitality was His delight, would go to the city gate every now and then, just as Lot had been accustomed to do, and watch for strangers to see if she could entertain them.

She was under no suspicion in doing this, because her old name would stick to her and give her a license to do what others might not attempt without being suspected of treason against the crown by entertaining aliens and as such, adversaries. So I doubt not she most honestly entertained strangers and the reason why, on this occasion the spies came to her was because she was generally on the lookout to receive wayfarers who else perhaps would have received bad treatment at the hands of her wicked townsmen. So the generous spirit which true religion gave her brought her into contact with the Israelites who came to spy the land—

and they became, in God's hands, the means of her safety when the city was destroyed.

The Grace of God had, even before these men came, lifted her up out of her former self! And though her old name stuck to her, I think I see reason to believe that her old *character* was gone and she had become a new creature through the power of faith. However, she was a harlot once and the wonder is that she became a Believer! Wonders of Grace are God's delight! He loves, for Jesus' sake, to call unto Himself the lowest of the low and the vilest of the vile. The Lord still works in the same manner. Let us rest assured that Jesus still receives sinners and that publicans and harlots enter into the kingdom of Heaven before the self-righteous and captious! It is very remarkable that in the pedigree of Christ there should be so many women with blotted characters—that there should be an incestuous Tamar, a harlot Rahab, an idolatrous Ruth and an adulterous Bathsheba—so that Jesus Christ, the Savior of sinners, has descended His earthly parentage from the loins of sinners and so is nearly akin to them! O the depths of the Grace of God! How matchless is the condescension of the Redeemer!

Once more, Rahab's faith was singular because the subject of it was difficult. What was it she had to believe? Was it not this—that Israel would destroy Jericho? Now, between Jericho and the tribes flowed the Jordan and the Israelites had no means of crossing it. Only a miracle could divide that overflowing river. Did Rahab's faith expect a miracle? If so, it was remarkably strong. Around Jericho stood a gigantic wall. There was no likelihood of the assailants scaling it or making a breach in it. Did Rahab think that those walls would fall flat to the ground? Or did she leave the way of the capture with God, firmly believing that it would be conquered? If so, she was a woman of no small faith! I have known intelligent Christians whose faith could neither have divided a flood nor leaped over a wall—but this poor woman's faith in God did both!

She was sure that the God of the Red Sea would be the God of the Jordan and that He who smote Og, king of Bashan, could strike the king of Jericho, too! Her faith was special because it was strong and stronger than faith often is in those who have far more of a basis on which to rest it. Now, let each one of us say, as we think of this woman's strange faith, "Why should not I have the same faith in the living God? God can give it to me. Though my past life may have been greatly defiled with sin, yet why should I not put my trust in the Lord, the Savior? Is not faith the very Grace which best becomes a sinner and does most for a sinner? Has not God sent Jesus Christ into the world to redeem men from sin? Has He not redeemed many already by the power of His Spirit and the application of His precious blood? I will believe in Jesus."

Oh, may the Holy Spirit give you faith at this moment! May God's electing love single out some here who have been, if not actually yet in heart, as bad as Rahab—and may they be led by infinite mercy, having followed her in sin—to imitate her in faith! Come, you fallen, Jesus can raise you! Come, you filthy, Jesus can cleanse you! Believe and eternal life is yours!

II. In the second place RAHAB'S FAITH WAS ACTIVE. It was not a sleeping faith, or a dead faith—it was an operative faith. It was active

first, mentally. When she believed, she began to think. Some persons get converted at revivals and wild excitement and seem to me as if they either have no brains or else their heads were never entered by Grace. You have always to keep up a great excitement or you will miss them. They have no well-considered principles. If you asked them what they believe they would not know, nor would they be able to tell *why* they believe.

They probably believe because other people believe—the minister is earnest and they had a good time in general, hence their faith—but reasonable reason they have none. The best Believers to wear and endure are the thoughtful ones, men of principle, men who weigh and judge. They, of course have their conflicts all the more for their thoughtfulness, but then, on the other hand, they gather strength by the mental exercise and these are the men who are not carried about with every wind of doctrine, but who stand fast in the trying hour. Would to God we had a large army of thoughtful Believers, for then Ritualism and Rationalism would do far less mischief!

Rahab was a thoughtful woman and had quite a system of theology of her own. She knew the past—she knew the story of the Red Sea and of Og and Sihon. She knew something about God's having promised by Covenant to give the country to the Israelites and from that she gathered the present. Notice her doctrine upon present things, "The Lord Jehovah, He is God in Heaven above and in earth beneath." She laid that down as a certain fact that the Lord Jehovah who had done so much must be the God in Heaven above and in the earth beneath! And then from that she drew her inference as to the future. She believed that God would give the country into Israel's hand and she asked that when the Lord did actually do so, they would deal kindly and truly with her.

So she had a doctrine about the present, the past and the future and she had it all arranged in her own mind. Her thought was not only so active that she became a doctrinalist—one commentator even calls her a semi-prophetess—she was active in her mind as to her decision for the Lord. She said, "I belong to this town. I have citizen privileges in Jericho, but I will give them all up. God is against this city and it will be destroyed—and I shall be destroyed in it if I am against God. But He is the true God—I, therefore, side with Him and take part with His people. If He will but have me, I will put myself beneath the shadow of His wings and ask Him to cast the skirt of His garment over me. Henceforth I am no citizen of Jericho—I disavow my allegiance to its king."

When the spies came she knew her course of action. She did not regard herself as bound to take any part in the defense of the city by sending word to the king that spies had come. She considered herself as an Israelite and acted as such. Oh, I wish that some professors were half as decided as this! They know the Truth of God but they do not stand up for it! They will hear it laughed at and ill words thrown at it, yet their blood never boils with indignation against the adversaries of God! They keep very quiet and perhaps one reason is that they have nothing to say. They have not learned Christ—they have no reason for the hope that is in them and therefore they cannot give it with meekness and fear—and so their religion appears to be a dead letter as far as their mind is concerned. God deliver us from such a faith as that! May we have a faith

which thrills our entire manhood, moves our judgment, enlightens our understanding and makes us decide for the Truth of God and righteousness in whatever company we may be thrown!

But next came another form of activity. Her faith was active in her own sphere. As I have already conjectured that she became willing to entertain strangers, so when she saw the servants of God in the form of the two spies she knew at once what to do. She took them home and she did her best to hide them. She did not set up to be a heroine and say, "Now I am a follower of Jehovah I must be doing something extraordinary." She did not pack up her clothes and start off to some distant place where she could find more glittering service for Jehovah—she stopped where she was and served God there! She minded her own guests and kept her own house. I believe that home duties are one of the very best forms of the activity of faith—our business is not to do what we fancy but what the Lord appoints for us.

Of many a Christian woman it is best to have it said, as of Sarah, when they said, "Where is Sarah?" and the answer was, "In her tent." It is a good thing when a Christian feels he will not choose his work but will take the work God chooses for him—he resolves not to be somebody else, but to follow the special path which the Lord marks out for him. Now Rahab was not to anticipate Joel, and drive a tent pin through the head of the King of Jericho, nor to be a Deborah and call some Barak to the battle. She had work at home ready to hand and what her hand found to do she did with all her might. May we see in all of you who are Christians the faith which works in its own sphere! May you exhibit the religion of common things.

Do not believe in knight-errantry. Do not be spiritual Don Quixotes. God has made you what you are, a mother, or a daughter—a husband, a servant, or a master—serve God as such. There is something for you to do in your position. Extraordinary calls may come and I pray they may come to some here present, but they are not likely to be given to those who cannot use their present everyday opportunities. We may be called to very special service and have special Grace given, but it is best for us, till such calls are felt, to mind our business in the station of life in which God has placed us. Moses kept sheep till he was bid to deliver Israel. Gideon was threshing when the angel appeared to him. And the disciples were fishing when Jesus called them. They used diligence in their callings and then threw their hearts into their higher calling.

And so did Rahab. The spies came to her; she received them in peace; she hid them and after she hid them she led them down by a rope from her house on the wall—which perhaps she did before to very different characters. Then she gave them the best advice she could and was thus the means of preserving their lives. She fulfilled a very necessary part in Israelite history. Her faith was truly active and is to be commended. And let me say that she did all this to the best of her ability and used her common sense. She covered them up with flax—she put them on the housetop—she let them down after it was dark. She told them to go to the mountain. She recommended them wait three days till the heat of the search was over—she acted prudently. She did all she could and she did it with remarkable tact and shrewdness.

I never could see why true religion should be so often associated with stupidity and yet I have remarked that some gracious people either affect a babyish simplicity, or else the Lord has, indeed, chosen the foolish things of this world. If you have faith surely you are not, therefore, to act as if you had lost your reason! It seems to me that faith is common sense spiritualized—carried into the affairs of religion and that it is quite consistent—there is no imperative upon us to discontinue common sense in our ordinary affairs. We are to be wise as serpents, as well as harmless as doves.

Does not the Apostle say, “In understanding be you men”? Oh, if men had their wits as much about them when they serve God as they have when they are looking for guineas, how much more would be done in the Church and the world! But there is often a blundering in the management of Christian societies and Christian Churches which would not be tolerated for a moment in a house of business—and men are allowed to be head and foremost in Christian enterprises who would not be reckoned worth their salt for selling pins or driving pigs! We ought to be as thoughtful, as careful, as prudent, as quick, as enterprising—what if I say as go-a-head—in the service of God as we should be in the pursuits of life.

I commend Rahab’s faith because while she was thoroughly active, she was active in the way in which she could best serve the Church of God, and brought all her wits and abilities into full play. Rahab was also active at great risk. Rahab’s faith made her run the risk of being put to death, for if the spies had been discovered there would have been short work of Rahab. The king of Jericho’s sword would soon have taken off the head of the woman who dared to conceal the enemies of her country! She gladly staked all upon the Truth of God and ran all risks to save the servants of the Lord. In this she was being far superior to those, today, who will not risk their employment, their situation, their good name or even the love of a single relative for Jesus Christ’s sake.

She was thus possessed of an active faith and we may say as James does, “Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers and had sent them out another way?” Did not her works go with her faith? Was not the faith which justified her a faith which produced works? Did not the Holy Spirit work in her a manifest activity which justified her *faith* by proving it to be real, and justified *her* by showing that she was sincere?

III. RAHAB’S FAITH WAS MARRED WITH GROSS WEAKNESS. She *lied* to the men who came to the door to seize the spies. She said that two strangers had come to her but she did not know from where they came, which was a lie—and she did not know where they were gone and they had departed some time ago, and they had better be pursued—this was another falsehood and is altogether inexcusable. But at the same time, please remember that she did not know it was wrong to lie.

There were, no doubt, in her conscience, indistinct glimmerings of an idea that to lie was an evil thing, but, nevertheless, her surroundings prevented her clearly knowing it as we know it. To this very day among many Orientals it is far more usual to lie than to speak the truth. In fact, a thoroughbred aboriginal eastern never speaks the truth unless by mis-

take, and he would be very sorry for it if he knew he had done so, even by accident! Among the Hindus men cannot readily be believed upon their oaths in courts of justice. We despise a great liar, but the Easterns consider him a genius! Sad it is, but it has always been so and this very much accounts for our finding such men as Abraham and Isaac deliberately saying, under certain trying circumstances, a thing that was not.

You must judge individuals from their own standpoint, and consider their circumstances, or you may do them an injustice. I am not going to excuse Rahab's lie. A lie in Rahab, or in Abraham, is as bad as in anyone else—but in this case there is this to be said—she had not been taught, as most of us have been, that a lie is a degrading sin. Nobody had ever said to her, "To deceive is contrary to the Law of God, for His Spirit teaches us not to lie to one another, seeing we have put off the old man with his deeds." There is one thing else to be said. I have often tried to put myself in Rahab's place, and have said, "Now suppose I had been hiding two servants of God during the old days of Claverhouse's dragoons. For instance, if I had Alexander Peden and Cameron in the back room and two dragoons should ride up to my door and demand, "Are the ministers here?" I have tried to imagine what I would say and I have never yet been able to make up my mind.

I suppose I have more light than Rahab and certainly I have had more leisure to consider the case, and yet I do not see my way. I do not wonder, therefore, that she blundered. And I am not much astonished that she said what she did say, for it would most readily suggest itself to her ignorant and anxious mind. I have turned over a great many schemes of what I would have said. I do not see how I could have said, "Yes, they are indoors." That would be to betray God's servants and that I would not do. I have concocted a great many pretty-looking plans, but I confess that, upon examination, they appear to be more or less tinctured with the deceit which tries to justify or conceal deceit—and therefore I have had to abandon them as being no better than falsehood and perhaps not quite so good.

I am not sure whether Rahab's lie was not more honest and outspoken than many an evasion which has suggested itself to very clever people. In fact, as a rule, things which are not obvious and need cleverness to suggest them, are rather suspicious. Strip a Russian and you find a Tartar, and if you strip these clever plans, they peel into falsehoods, after all. I do not need to say a word of apology for the falsehood—far from it. It is wrong, wrong, wrong, wrong, wrong, altogether wrong! But, for all that, before you condemn Rahab be quite sure that you do not condemn yourself, and ask yourself first, what you would have said, or what you would have done under the circumstances. To tell the truth is always right. Consequences are not so much to be thought of as the claims of the God of Truth. Sometimes plain truth has had a very wonderful effect and doubtless it would, in every case, be the best policy.

I have heard of a man, a Mr. Story, who had been brought up before Judge Jeffreys to be tried for rebellion against King James II, and there was always very faint hope of a man escaping who had once been introduced to that monster. By some means, Story had gained a great repute for honesty and Jeffrey brought him before the king to speak for himself.

As I remember the history it ran somewhat in this way—The king said, “Well, Mr. Story, you were in Monmouth’s army, were you not?” “Yes, please your majesty.” “And you were a commissary there, were you not?” “Yes, please your majesty.” “Did you not preach and make speeches to the crowd?” “Yes, your majesty.” “Pray,” said the king, “If you have not forgot what you said, let us have a taste of your fine florid speech—give us some flowers of your rhetoric and a few of the main points on which you insisted.”

“I told them, your Majesty, that it was you that set fire to the City of London.” “Upon my word,” said the king, “and pray, what else did you tell them?” “I said you poisoned your brother and that you were determined to make us all papists and slaves.” By this time the king had heard enough and asked him what he would say if, after all this, he should grant him his life and a free pardon. Mr. Story there upon declared that he should, in such an unlikely case, become a right loyal subject—whereupon he received a free pardon as an honest, though mistaken man. In his case plain speaking did what falsehood could not have done, and if, in all cases, it did not turn out so, yet our duty is clear, and, therefore, we must be prepared to do it and take the consequences.

I suppose if Rahab had possessed great faith she would have said, “It is my business to serve God but not to break God’s Laws, and as it will be breaking God’s Laws to lie, I will not do it. I will take care of His servants as far as possible, but it is His business to take care of them, after all, and I must not do evil that good may come.” Though that would have been the best course, Rahab was not yet so instructed as to have thought of it and I fear that a great many here would not have thought of it either. Her fault was by no means one which we can afford to throw stones at—avoid it carefully—but do not censure it self-complacently.

IV. Rahab’s was A FAITH THAT WAS NOT ABOVE THE USE OF OUTWARD SIGNS AND SEALS. Please note this. There are persons in the world who altogether despise the outward ordinances. They may be good but they are not wise. Rahab, first of all, required from these spies an oath that they would preserve her and next they gave her a token, a scarlet line, which was to be hung in her window. This was the blood red flag of Israel. Was it not hoisted on the Passover night so that the angel might pass by and deliver the people?

She felt great comfort when she had placed the token in her window. She was not superstitious—she did not believe that anything mystical was in the red cord—but she put it there because she had been told to do so. Now, the highest faith in Christ is perfectly consistent with the obedient use of Christian ordinances. We are resting on the precious blood of Christ, not upon sacraments! God forbid we should ever build our hope upon Baptism or on the Lord’s Supper. What are these things in themselves but very vanity if we repose confidence in them? At the same time the Lord has given us Baptism as the emblem of His death, His burial and His resurrection. If we believe we have been buried with Him and are risen with Him, let us hang this scarlet cord in our window.

He has given us the ordinance of the Lord’s Supper to be the emblem of His death—let us eat the bread and drink the wine in memory of Him. We do not *trust* in the emblems in the slightest degree. We abhor the

idea! Still, we put the scarlet cord in our window and thus let all men know that we believe in Jesus. We are not ashamed to show His death till He come. Yes, and we enter the house, that is the Church, and we delight to dwell there, numbered among God's people! We are not ashamed to be known to be members of the Brotherhood of the Lord Jesus Christ! Do not seek to get a faith that would cast off the assistance which God's Spirit appoints you! Everything that is of man's invention put aside—but that which is of God's ordaining is for your benefit—and you are bound to hold to it even though it is little as a scarlet line in the window.

V. HER FAITH WAS SAVING FAITH. I have shown how it was grievously marred but it was effectual, notwithstanding. She was saved when all the city wall went down. Her house was on the wall but there it stood. Must it not have seemed strange? The walls began to rock and shake and then down they fell with a thundering sound, and upward flew dense clouds of dust—but above all there stood the piece of the wall on which was Rahab's house—like an island in the midst of a tempestuous sea!

The Israelites dashed over the ruins of the wall, pursued the doomed men with fury and slew them, for they had been ordained of God to be their executioners. Not one escaped! But no sword came near to Rahab's bosom. No death took away one of her kindred! She was saved! She was taken out of her house with her friends and put outside the camp of the Israelites BUT afterwards received into it. She was married to Salmon, a prince of Judah, and afterwards had the high dignity of being one of the ancestors of our Lord Jesus Christ!

So, dear Brothers and Sisters, true faith in Christ, despite its weakness will save us! It separates us from the world, joins us unto God's Israel, marries us to the true Prince of Judah, gives us kinship with the Lord Jesus Christ—and what higher dignity is there to receive?

IV. With this I shall close when I have mentioned the last point, and that is HER FAITH BECAME ACCEPTABLE WITH GOD SO THAT SHE WAS THE MEANS OF THE SALVATION OF OTHERS. Oh, I like this in Rahab, that she did not bargain for her own safety, alone! Her sin had not hardened her heart as sin does in many cases. She thought of her father, her mother and her brothers and her sisters. Now, wherever there is a real child of God there will be anxiety for his family. If you do not want to have your children saved you are not saved yourself!

I have seen professors who thought it quite enough if they, alone, went to Heaven. I knew a man who would walk 20 miles on Sunday to hear "the truth"—nobody preached it but at one place. But when he was asked where his family went, he said that it was no business of his—God would save His own elect. Such people are not the children of God, because God's children are not *worse* than heathen men and publicans, for they care for their own households. Rahab was a good daughter—with all her wrong she loved her father and her mother. She was a good sister and desired her brother and sisters to be saved.

O you Christian people, seek to be good in your relationships at home! I won't give a penny for you if you are not a good husband or a good wife. Away with your Christianity if it makes you a bad child. A domineering, surly father—a rebellious child, a gossiping wife, an idle servant, a tyrannical master—these may belong to Satan, but God will not own them!

Rahab, with all that was wrong about her, had an intense love for her kindred. But notice, love them as she might, she could not *save* them unless she got them under the red flag. If any of them stopped in the streets when the Israelites were slaying the people, they might say, "We belong to Rahab," but the reply would be, "We cannot help that, the oath we took was to spare all in the house where the red line was in the window, and if you are not there you cannot be spared."

It will be of no use, when you die, to say, "Spare me, O avenging Angel, my mother prayed for me! My sister agonized for my conversion." No, you must *personally* get into Christ yourself and have a real faith in Him or no prayers of others can be of any use for you. But the mercy was that somehow Rahab was helped by God to bring all her family in. Her father did not say, "No, my Girl, I do not believe in it." Some of you have fathers who say that. Pray hard for them! And the mother did not say, "My Child you are mad. I have always thought you a little affected in the brain. Do not come teaching your mother." No, but mother came, too.

When the Israelites marched round the city the six days and the people of Jericho laughed and said what fools they were to think they were going to make the walls tumble down by walking round them, she still confided in God—and I dare say she had some difficulty in persuading her lively sisters and her argumentative brothers to believe, too. They would say, "Rahab, are you quite clear about this? Is it not all a mere farce?" Somehow, such was the influence God gave her, such was the power of her faith—that they all remained in the house and with their families were saved.

The house, I dare say, was filled as full as could be from top to bottom and glad was Rahab to see it. God grant I may have all my family thus preserved! I am sure every child of God here is breathing the same prayer—"God of Rahab, give me my father and my mother and my brothers and my sisters and all my kindred." The Lord hear your prayers, and bless you for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

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FIGS AND OLIVES

NO. 3226

A SERMON
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“Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olives?”
James 3:12.

[This is one of the series of Sermons upon the olive tree that Mr. Spurgeon had intended to make into a volume if he had been spared long enough. Others which have been already published are #s 1569, Volume 26—THE GOLDEN LAMP AND ITS GOODLY LESSONS; #Olive 1, Volume 55—THE BEAUTY OF THE OLIVE TREE and #3208, Volume 56—THE FAITHFUL OLIVE TREE—
Read/download all the sermons, free of charge, at <http://www.spurgeongems.org>.]

THERE is only one answer to the question, of course, the fig tree can do nothing of the kind. It would be quite contrary to its nature and, therefore, the Apostle argues that Christians ought to act according to their nature. If we are, indeed, the children of God, we should act as His children and always act as His children. We are not consistent if at one time we speak as heirs of Heaven should speak and at another time speak as the heirs of wrath speak! James truly tells us that a fountain cannot, at the same time pour forth sweet water and bitter, salt water and fresh and he, therefore, rightly argues that from the same mouth there must not proceed blessing and cursing—there must be consistency of conduct in those who are the Lord’s.

I am going, in the first place, to take the question of our text out of its literal context. And in the second place to come closer to it. And, perhaps, in the third place to come still closer!

I. So, first, “can the fig tree, my Brothers and Sisters, bear olives?” No. And IT IS VERY UNDESIRABLE THAT IT SHOULD! There is no need for it to do so, and there would be no gain if it should do so! I am, of course, taking the question altogether apart from its context. A fig tree is better employed in bearing figs than it would be in bearing olives. The olive tree is meant to bear olives and the fig tree to bear figs. And it would not be any advantage if it were to leave off bearing figs and begin bearing olives, or if it alternately bore figs and olives.

Now, beloved Friends, all of us that are as trees of the Lord’s right-hand planting are bringing forth fruit to His praise and glory. If we are carrying out His great purpose concerning us, we are producing the peaceable fruits of righteousness, the fruit of the Spirit, fruit unto holiness—but this fruit does not always take the same shape in every one of us. We cannot all do the same work! And even when our work is similar, we have various ways of doing it. I cannot do your work, my Brother or

Sister, and you cannot do mine—and the two of us together cannot do a third person's work! There is a certain tree that produces a particular kind of fruit and a certain plant on which a special sort of seed is found, but no tree produces all kinds of fruit and no plant bears all sorts of seeds. So it is in the Church of God—all true Believers are members of the mystical body of Christ, but all the members have not the same office. It would be very foolish if any one member of the body were to attempt to perform the work of all the organs of the body or, indeed, of any beside its own. The best thing is for the eye to see and let the ear do the hearing, for the ear to hear and let the mouth do the speaking, for the feet to carry the body wherever the brain directs, and for the hands to perform their own special handicraft and not to usurp the office of the organs of locomotion!

But why is it that the fig tree cannot bear olives and that one Christian cannot do all kinds of work? I answer, first, *because the variety is, itself, charming*. If anybody had the power to destroy all the fruit trees in the world and then to make a tree that would bear all the fruits at once—what a pity it would be! It is much better to have three trees to bear figs, olives and grapes than to have one tree bearing figs on one branch, olives on another and grapes on a third. It might seem a fine thing to have Christians who could do everything—men who could preach and pray and sing, who could be entrusted with great wealth and great talents, who could lead the Church and who could, at the same time, control the world, but that is not God's plan for any of His children! There is a beautiful variety in the Church of God—one exercises this gift and another exercises that. One is entrusted with one form of Grace and another is entrusted with equal Grace but in quite a different form. It would be no improvement if all flowers were of one color, or if all precious stones were of equal brilliance or if all stars gave exactly the same amount of light. Variety is a great part of beauty and God delights to have it so.

We have here, in the next place, *a display of Divine Sovereignty*. It is God's will that makes yon bird that looks the sun in the face into an eagle! And that other whom sits moodily on the ivy-mantled tower into an owl! It is He who makes one of His creatures into an archangel and another into an aphid crawling on a rose leaf. None may ask Him why He acts thus, for He has the right to do as He pleases and, as Elihu said to Job, "He gives no account of any of His matters." Or, as Paul put it to the Romans, "Has not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor?" It is quite certain that there are great differences among men. In the very size and shape of our bodies and in the natural conformation of our minds, we are not all alike. Let us say what we may, there are differences of capacity which are with us from our birth, even as God intended that there should be. He is in this matter, as in everything else, both Lord and King—so what folly and sin it is for us to quarrel with Him about our condition, or to attempt to arraign Him before our judgment seat! If God makes some other Brother to be like the fruitful tree that bears olives,

shall I be jealous of him if my fruit is of another kind? Shall I not rather be thankful to resemble the tree that bears figs? And if we two see another Brother whose fruit is like the grapes of Eshcol, shall we envy him because we cannot bring forth such welcome clusters? Oh no! But let us all three bless the Lord for the sweetness of the figs, the fatness of the olives and the lusciousness of the grapes that He enables us severally to produce to His praise and glory!

Further, *these diversities of gifts should excite in us humility*. What if the olive tree does bear its rich purple berries? It cannot bear sweet figs—and sweet as the figs are, they cannot supply the oil which gives a relish to the peasants' bread, feeds the lamp which lights his cottage in the evening hours and furnishes the medicine which heals him when he is sick or wounded. When the Lord entrusts you with talents, my Brother, you are naturally inclined to be proud. But when you hear of another whom the Lord has honored far more, do not quarrel either with the Lord or with your Brother, but rejoice that there is someone whose Master thinks he may be trusted to a very high degree! And remember that the responsibilities of your own position are quite sufficient for you. I am often amazed at the stupidity of certain Christians. They will not do what they *can* do—and they want to do what they *cannot* do! They are not satisfied with walking, so they take up David's cry, "Oh that I had wings like a dove!" The Lord knew that they would not make a proper use of wings so He did not give them any! No doubt they think, if they had wings, they would fly away and be at rest, but I question whether they would be able to rest if they flew away from their right place and the work God has committed to their charge! Many a man is a first-rate Sunday school teacher, but that does not satisfy his ambition—he must be a preacher! When he gets into the pulpit, the only part of his discourse that is appreciated by his hearers is the end of it—yet he says that he must preach! Many a good worker has been spoiled through imbibing the notion that he must do something for which God has not fitted him. There is a humbling truth that we cannot do some things which others can do well, just as the fig tree cannot bear olives though the olive tree growing close beside it is laden with the precious oily berries!

This fact ought also *to promote in us brotherly admiration*. It is one of the most beautiful exhibitions of a Christian spirit when a Christian man admires the gifts and graces of others more than he admires his own! When, instead of thinking of anything in which he excels others, he delights in those things in which they excel him. We ought to emulate the spirit of that noble Roman who, when he was beaten at an election, said he was glad that his country had so many better men than himself. It is not always easy to feel, "I am happy in knowing of a Brother who is so much more brilliant than I am, for the world sadly needs far more light than I can give." It is not always easy to play the least important instrument in the band and to rejoice that somebody else can beat the big drum, or blow the silver cornet, yet that ought to be our feeling. You remember how prettily Bunyan speaks of Christiana and Mercy admiring

each other after they had been in the bath—"They could not see that glory, each one on herself, which they could see in each other. Now, therefore, they began to esteem each other better than themselves. 'For you are fairer than I am, said one. And you are more comely than I am,' said another." So should Christians see and admire the work of the Spirit in other Christians and should bless God that there are such gracious men and women in the world! While those who are thus admired should, in their turn, see greater excellence in others than they see in themselves.

And once more, *this variety of gifts and graces helps to foster fellowship*. I often feel, when I am conversing with some of the poorest and feeblest members of this Church, that I am greatly profited by what they say to me. They usually speak very kindly concerning the comfort they receive from my preaching and the advice I am able to give them when they come to see me. But I am certain that I derive benefit from them! It is impossible for two Christian men or women who are in a right state of heart, to converse with one another about the things of God without both of them being thereby spiritually enriched! As different countries have different products, and one nation sends its produce to supply the needs of another nation and thus, by mutual exchange, commerce is created and each nation's wealth is increased, so is it in spiritual things. You with your olives and this Brother with his figs, and that other Brother with his clusters of grapes will interchange your various fruits and all of you will benefit by the transaction! It is a great blessing for a bold and confident Believer to have a talk with a trembling, desponding Christian—and the poor timid soul will be strengthened by coming into contact with the more fully established saint. The man who has a very sweet disposition is apt to develop a sugariness which is most nauseating, so it will do him good to meet with a Christian who is very straightforward and outspoken—while *that* Brother—by associating with the more gentle spirit, may be kept from becoming too rough and coarse. I need not multiply instances of this helpful fellowship beyond just reminding you of how often, in God's mercy, a Christian husband and wife are the counterpart and complement of one another, so that what is lacking in one of them is supplied by the other and *vice versa*—and thus they both become the better, the holier, the happier and the more useful in the service of their Lord!

II. Now, in the second place I am going to take the text more nearly in the way in which it was used by the Apostle. "Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olives?" No. IT WOULD BE ALTOGETHER CONTRARY TO ITS NATURE.

It would be a monstrosity, a thing to be wondered at and stared at as unnatural and absurd if a fig tree started bearing olives! And *it is just as unnatural for a Christian to live in sin*. Can he so live as to bear the fruits of iniquity instead of the fruits of righteousness? God forbid that it should be so! If the fig tree should ever bring forth olives, we might have good reason to question whether it was a fig tree, for a tree is known by

its fruits. So, when one who professes to be a Christian lives as worldings live, there is grave reason to fear that he is a worldling, notwithstanding his profession! If we are to know him by his fruits, which is our Lord's Infallible test, how can we imagine that he is a partaker of the Divine Life when he acts as he does? Inconsistency of life casts a very serious doubt upon many who call themselves the children of God. No wonder they are, themselves, often the subjects of doubts and fears—as they *ought* to be—for if they judge themselves by their fruits, they may well question whether they have ever been born-again! Those who are new creatures in Christ Jesus seek to live as He lived as far as it is possible for them to do so.

Besides, if a man for a while brings forth the fruits of righteousness and then bears the fruits of iniquity, *he casts a slur upon all his former goodness*. Suppose I saw a fig tree bearing olives and its owner assured me that it bore figs last year? I would say, "Well, I should not think the figs were worth much to judge from the look of those olives." So, when a man is in a passion and makes use of very strong language, perhaps even cursing and swearing as Peter did, one naturally asks, "Can that man ever have been a Christian?" "Well," says someone who knows him, "he used to speak very kindly and lovingly, and seemed to be a sincere Christian." That may have been the case with him, but it is a poor sort of Christianity that can even *occasionally* produce such iniquity! May God save all of us from bearing two kinds of fruit in this unnatural and dishonoring fashion! Suppose the whole Church of God should act thus and at one time be eminent for holiness and at another time be notorious for sin—what would be the consequence? Suppose, for instance, that certain people were very particular about their attendance at public worship and yet were known to frequent the theater? Would it not be a strange state of things? Should we judge them to be Christians or worldings? If a man is *sometimes* a sinner and sometimes a saint, we would need to have an almanac to tell us which he was likely to be, or a tide-table to let us know whether, like the tides of the sea, he was ebbing or flowing! Think, too, what the consequences would be to such a man if he were to die—or if the Lord were to come just when he was bearing the fruits of unrighteousness!

I am only imagining a monstrous case—such a case as must not be ours. O my dear Friends, let it never be so with you! If God is God, serve Him and follow Him! Or if the devil is God, serve him—but to try to serve God and the devil at the same time is to attempt a compromise that God abhors and which even Satan is not mean enough to approve! Even his disciples laugh to scorn those inconsistent professors who seek to serve God and mammon and to walk, at the same time, in the narrow way that leads unto life and in the broad road that leads to destruction! The other day I saw a man trying to walk on both sides of the street at once. Of course, he was drunk and whenever I see a man trying, spiritually, to do the same sort of thing—attempting to serve God and to serve the devil, too—I know that he is intoxicated, or infatuated under a fatal delusion,

or he would never imagine that such a combination could be possible! Oil and water will not mix, nor light and darkness, nor saintliness and worldliness—you must have one or the other, you cannot have both at once, so “choose this day whom you will serve,” Christ or Belial—you cannot serve both, for “no servant can serve two masters.” The true Church of Christ is “fair as the moon, clear as the sun and terrible as an army with banners.” But an inconsistent church, a double-dealing church, a worldly church, (what an anomaly)—a church that holds with the hare and runs with the hounds, a church that makes a great profession but has little or nothing worth having in possession—such a church is the scorn of the world, a mere blown-up football for men and devils to kick wherever they will!

An unholy man or woman who pretends to be a Christian is a stench in the nostrils of the thrice-holy God and a by-word and reproach among those who make no pretense of being the Lord’s. How can you rebuke sin in others while you are living in it, yourself? How can you preach the Christ whom you dishonor in your daily life? How can you reprove worldliness when you are, yourself, worldly? We speak with contempt of Satan rebuking sin and of the pot calling the kettle black, so if in any degree any of us have been guilty of this great crime against God, may we now sincerely repent of our sin and may the sanctifying Grace of the Holy Spirit preserve us from such evil walking for all time to come!

III. Now, thirdly—and this is the point upon which I want most strongly to insist—IT IS IMPOSSIBLE FOR A FIG TREE TO BEAR OLIVES—and it is impossible for an unconverted man to produce the fruits of righteousness! That is a task which is altogether beyond his power. The real text of this last division of my sermon is this—

“YOU MUST BE BORN-AGAIN.”

Unless you are regenerated, born from above by a new and heavenly birth, you are not Christians, whatever you may be called, and you cannot produce the fruit which is acceptable to God any more than a fig tree can produce olives.

Let us suppose that we are in the South of France and that we are standing by a fine fig tree. We want to make it bring forth olives and we will, for the sake of my argument, imagine that it is quite willing to do so—how shall we go to work?

Well, first, let us label the fig tree, “OLIVE TREE.” Get a label, write the word, “olive tree,” on it and hang it on the fig tree. We have done that, entered its name on the list of olive trees, and when the next olive season comes round, we will bring our basket and gather the olives. At the appointed time, we do come, but what do we find? I cannot see an olive on the tree! There are fig leaves and figs, but nothing else. Ah, but we called it an olive tree! Yes, but calling it an olive tree did not change its nature, for it is still a fig tree! And calling a person a child of God will never make that person really be a child of God! I remember reading of someone being taught to speak of “my Baptism wherein I was made a member of Christ, the child of God and an inheritor of the Kingdom of

Heaven.” And if I recollect, rightly, that expression is often used by those who do not show any sign of having been regenerated by the Holy Spirit and adopted into the family of God! It is just a case of hanging a label on them—their nature remains the same as it was when they were born and, by nature they are children of wrath! Persons are said to be Christians because “they were born in a Christian country.” I have often heard and read that England is a Christian country, but I have never seen any evidence of the truth of that title! Though there are some Christians in England, as there are some in India, China, Africa and other countries which no one regards as Christian! Yet according to some people, all Englishman are Christians, though some of them never enter a place of worship and others are drunk every night in the week—and many do not even believe in the existence of God! To call a horse an angel will not make him an angel. And to call a man a Christian will not make him a Christian. You may label, enroll, number the unsaved as much as you like, but you will not make even one of them a Christian by that process any more than putting the name, “olive tree,” on a fig tree will change its nature and make it produce olives!

As re-naming the fig tree is no use, *let us try to trim it to the shape of an olive tree.* That will not be an easy task, for the two trees bear very slight resemblance to one another. Still, we will see what we can do with axe, knife and shears, to make the fig tree look like an olive tree. When we come again, at the proper season, to gather the olives, how many shall we find? Not one, though we search diligently from the trunk to the topmost branch. If we have not ruined the tree by our cutting and shaping, we may find figs on it, but we shall gather no olives! So we may be very careful in trying to shape our children’s lives and characters. We may teach them to be truthful, honest, upright, amiable, heroic and so on—and we may succeed so far that some of them may even look like young Christians! But if the Grace of God has not made them to be new creatures in Christ Jesus, all our training, trimming, shaping and directing will leave them unsaved and we shall then search in vain to find in them, “the fruit of the Spirit.” There is far more needed than anything *we* can do! There must be a deeper, more enduring work than making them look and act like Christians—there must be a Divine work in the heart, a complete change of nature which can only be worked by the effectual working of the Holy Spirit!

In our next attempt to get olives from the fig tree, *we will treat the fig tree as if it were an olive tree.* When at Mentone, I have often noticed the men in the olive gardens digging a trench all round the trees and filling it with old rags and, somehow, the trees seem to draw suitable nutriment out of that strange sort of manure. Very well then, let us treat our fig tree in the same fashion and dig about it and fertilize it with all the old rags we can find. We do so and wait patiently for the result—and then we discover that we have wasted all those precious bales of rags which might have made the olive trees bring forth an abundant crop, for there is not an olive on the fig tree and probably even fewer figs than it would have

produced if we had given it the nourishment suited to its nature! So you may take your young people and treat them as if they were Christians and do all that you can to nourish the Divine Life that has not yet entered their souls—but all your efforts will be in vain, for you cannot give them new natures—you cannot make the children of Adam into the children of God! You will do far more lasting good by entreating the Lord to accomplish the great work of Grace which is altogether beyond your power—and by teaching each unsaved one, old or young, to pray David's prayer—"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me."

Here is our fig tree without a single olive on it! Now *let us surround it with olive trees* and see what a change that will make in it. The tree is very lonely where it is, so we will see what helpful associations will do for it. It will be another difficult task for us, but we will not shirk it, for we are determined to transplant it right into the middle of an olive garden—and we will tie it up to a fruitful olive tree and then, when it has no other trees near it, surely it must bear olives! But will it? Oh no—when the time of figs arrives, it will bear figs unless we have destroyed its fruit-bearing power by disturbing it—but there will be no olives on it except those that fall among its branches when the tree by its side is beaten to yield up its thousands of purple, oily berries. So here is an unconverted man right in the midst of Christian people! He is not very comfortable, for he feels that he is out of his element. He would be much more at home in a public house or at a music hall, or at home reading a novel or the newspaper—yet here he is surrounded by Christians. Possibly, like the fig tree tied to an olive tree, the man is united to a godly wife, yet it is not enough to make him a Christian. He has a gracious, loving daughter—she has persuaded him to come with her tonight in the hope that he may get a blessing here, as I most sincerely hope he may. But, my dear Friend, let me tell you that it is not sufficient for you to have a Christian wife, or Christian children, or Christian parents unless there is a *work of Grace* within your own heart—unless your very nature is changed by the Holy Spirit so that you are made a new creature in Christ Jesus! All these hallowed relationships and associations will only increase your condemnation! I must repeat to you Paul's message to the Philippian jailor, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved." And very likely it will then be possible to add in your case as in his, "and your house." God grant that it may be so!

Now suppose we take *that fig tree to the top of a hill, like the Mount of Olives, and plant it there?* It is still a fig tree and it brings forth nothing but figs! Yes, and if the Lord were to take an unconverted man up to Heaven, just as he is, he would remain unconverted even there. Unless and until he was born-again, the mere change of place, even from earth to Heaven, would not make him acceptable to God! He would be like that man without the wedding garment—and the King would say to his servants, "Bind him, hand and foot, and take him away and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Perhaps someone asks, “But, Sir, what is it to be born-again?” Well, it is *not* a mere outward change of life. It is *not* simply a giving up of certain sins and a desire to possess certain virtues. It is as great a work as if you were to be annihilated—to pass absolutely out of existence—and God were to make a new man in your place! Everyone who is in Christ Jesus is a *new creation*—old things have passed away and all things have become new.

“But can such a change as that be worked?” asks an anxious enquirer. “It would be a glorious thing for me if it could be worked in me.” Yes, my Friend, it can be done by the Almighty Spirit and if you are ever to be found in the Presence of God in Glory, this change must be worked in you! I am speaking to some of you who have been very moral and admirable from your youth up, yet you have never experienced a saving change of heart, so to you I must repeat those solemn words of the Lord Jesus, “Except you are converted and become as little children, you shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.”

“Well,” says some self-satisfied person, “I feel quite good enough already.” Ah, that is the very strongest possible proof that you are *not good enough*. Do you remember the people, in our Lord’s lifetime on earth, who thought they were good enough, and do you recollect what Jesus said concerning their righteousness? “I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall in no case enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.” And that is what He says to you who think you are good enough. The man who has been born-again confesses with sorrow and shame that he has no goodness of his own—and he ascribes all that is good in him to the Almighty Grace of God, alone. With Toplady, he sings—

**“Because Your Sovereign Love
Was bent the worst to save—
Jesus who reigns enthroned above,
The free salvation gave.”**

“Ah,” says another friend, “but if that is true, it makes my case so hopeless.” That is just what I want you to feel, so that you may look right away from yourself and look alone unto Jesus! You cannot regenerate yourself any more than that which is not in existence can create itself! It must be a work that is accomplished by Omnipotence and, therefore, no power less than that which is Divine can accomplish it. So you are obliged to acknowledge your absolute dependence upon the Grace of God. If He leaves you to yourself, you will be most certainly lost—and He is not bound by anything but the love of His own heart to interpose to rescue you. Therefore if, in His Infinite Sovereignty, as King of Mercy and of Grace, He deigns to smile upon you and to create you anew in Christ Jesus, you will have reason to praise and bless Him forever and ever, will you not? That is the point to which I want to bring you so that you will admit that if you are ever saved, it will be all of God’s Grace and all God’s work from first to last!

“Oh, that I had this new birth!” cries one. That very wish, if it is the sincere desire and prayer of your heart, may be the first evidence that you have already been born-again, even as the Lord’s testimony concerning Saul of Tarsus, “Behold, he prays,” proved that he had already uttered the first cry of a newborn child of God! Remember that text which the Lord blessed to my conversion so many years ago, “Look unto Me, and be you saved all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else”—and do as I did, then—look and live! Look this very instant, by faith, to Jesus hanging on the Cross of Calvary, for—

***“There is life for a look at the Crucified One!
There is life at this moment for thee—
Then look, Sinner—look unto Him and be saved—
Unto Him who was nailed to the tree.”***

If you will do this, that faith-look of yours will be the evidence that this new life is already pulsating within you! And as this life is everlasting life, you have received that life which neither devils nor men can ever take away from you. “He that believes on the Son has everlasting life,” and no man ever truly believed on Jesus and yet remained unregenerate! Faith in Christ is one of the first signs and tokens of the new life within the soul. If I find on you even one olive, I know that it has the oil of Grace within it and that is proof positive that you are one of the good olive trees in the garden of the Lord! If I found figs on you, I would know that you were a fig tree. But if I find only one little olive, I know that the hidden life that can produce one olive can produce bushels of the same sort and even larger and richer ones, to the praise and glory of the great Owner of the olive garden in which you have been planted by His own right hand! The little feeble faith that You have already exercised is the gift of God—and under the gracious nurture of His Ever-Blessed Spirit, it will grow until you are, like Abraham, “strong in faith, giving glory to God.”

May the Lord enable you to have done with yourself and to have begun with Him! The end of the creature is the beginning of the Creator. When you acknowledge that you cannot save yourself and trust Him to save you, He will do it! Cast yourself upon Him this very moment and then, by an act of Almighty Grace, the fig tree shall be changed into a fruitful olive tree and your fruit shall be unto holiness—and the end everlasting life!

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON: PSALM 56; 57.

Psalm 56:1. *Be merciful unto me, O God, for man would swallow me up. Fighting all day he oppresses me.* “Man has no mercy upon me, but, O God, be You merciful to me! If Your Justice does for a while let my enemies loose upon me, let Your mercy diminish their power over me, for they are very cruel. They would make a complete end of me if they could, utterly devouring me.”

2-4. *My enemies would daily swallow me up: for they are many that fight against me, O most High. What time I am afraid, I will trust in You. In God I will praise His Word.* David means, “Through His Grace, I will

praise His Word,” for we cannot rightly praise God unless He gives us the Grace to do it. To receive from God is most easy for us, but to return gratitude to God is impossible except as His Grace enables us to do it. “In God I will praise His Word.”

4, 5. *In God I have put my trust; I will not fear what flesh can do to me. Every day they twist my words.* This is a common calamity of God’s servants and a common crime of the oppressors of God’s people in all ages—“They twist my words.”

5, 6. *All their thoughts are against me for evil. They gather themselves together, they hide themselves, they mark my steps when they wait for my soul.* “They watch to see if they can find some matter of accusation against me, or some opportunity for tempting me to turn aside from my God. ‘They mark my steps,’ as the huntsman follows the trail of the lion he seeks to kill, so they follow my tracks to see if by any means they may slay me.”

7, 8. *Shall they escape by iniquity? In Your anger cast down the people, O God. You number my wanderings.* David’s was a life of wandering, from the sheep-folds to his father’s house, then to the palace of Saul, then to the camp of Israel, then to the palace, again, then to the cave Adullam, then among the Philistines—I scarcely remember all the places where he went, but there were at least 12 great changes in David’s life. And God had them all written down and so He has all yours, you who believe in Jesus—all your wanderings are recorded because God sets a high value upon everything that happens to you! Not a sparrow falls to the ground without being noticed by Him, and not a single step is taken by you without being noted by Him.

8. *Put You my tears into Your bottle.* This is thought by some to have been an allusion to an old Roman custom of catching the tears of the friends of the dying in a lachrymatory, or small bottle, and then burying them in their tomb. I see no reason to believe that David meant anything so absurd! There is probably a very much better meaning than that to be attached to these words. Bottles, large capacious bottles, were used to catch the copious drops which streamed forth from the wine-press and David felt that his tears would be, in God’s sight, as precious and as plentiful as the grape drops, and that a great bottle would be needed to hold them—such a bottle as the Jews used for holding milk or wine. Though his soul suffered much sorrow, he believed God would treasure it all up—“Put You my tears into Your bottle.”

8. *Are they not in Your Book?* “Are they not all duly recorded there?”

9. *When I cry unto You, then shall my enemies turn back.* “When I cry, they shall fly, so swift is prayer to reach the ear and heart of God! And so kind is God to me.”

9-12. *This I know; for God is for me. In God will I praise His Word: in the LORD will I praise His Word. In God have I put my trust: I will not be afraid what man can do unto me. Your vows are upon me, O God.* “I am bound to praise You, I am bound to love You and I will, come what may.”

12, 13. *I will render praises unto You. For You have delivered my soul from death: will You not deliver my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of the living?*

Psalm 57:1. *Be merciful unto me, O God.* He begins with the same note as in the last Psalm. It is a note that cannot be too often on the Believer's tongue—"Be merciful unto me, O God."

1. *Be merciful unto me.* As an old writer says, "The tongue of the bell strikes on both sides, and the note is the same in each case, 'Be merciful unto me, be merciful unto me.'" You cannot have that petition offered too often! David feels his deep need of mercy and the great value of mercy and, therefore, he prays again and again, "Be merciful unto me, be merciful unto me."

1, 2. *For my soul trusts in You: yes, in the shadow of Your wings will I make my refuge, until these calamities have passed over me. I will cry unto God Most High; unto God that performs all things for me.* "That perfects all things for me," so it may be read. "That perfects all His mercies, all His promises—and who will perfect all that concerns me whatever it may be—unto this God will I cry."

3-5. *He shall send from Heaven, and save me from the reproach of him that would swallow me up. Selah. God shall send forth His mercy and His truth. My soul is among lions: and I lie even among them that are set on fire, even the sons of men whose teeth are spears and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword. Be You exalted, O God, above the heavens; let Your Glory be above all the earth.* "Exalt Yourself by overcoming all Your enemies. If they are very great, be You greater still. If they are mighty, be You the more mighty in my defense and so glorify Your holy name."

6-11. *They have prepared a net for my steps, my soul is bowed down: they have dug a pit before me, into the midst whereof they are fallen themselves. Selah. My heart is fixed. God, my heart is fixed: I will sing and give praise. Awake, my glory; awake, psaltery and harp: I myself will awake early. I will praise You, O Lord, among the people: I will sing unto You among the nations. For Your mercy is great unto the heavens and Your truth unto the clouds. Be You exalted, O God, above the heavens; let Your Glory be above all the earth.*

—Adapted from *The C. H. Spurgeon Collection*, Ages Software, 1.800.297.4307

**PRAY THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL USE THIS SERMON
TO BRING MANY TO A SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST.**

ASK AND HAVE

NO. 1682

**DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, OCTOBER 1, 1882,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.**

***“You lust, and have not: you kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: you fight and war, yet you have not, because you ask not. You ask, and receive not, because you ask amiss, that you may consume it upon your lusts.”
James 4:2, 3.***

MAY these striking words be made profitable to us by the teaching of the Holy Spirit. Man is a creature abounding in needs and ever restless and, therefore, his heart is full of desires. I can hardly imagine a man existing who has not many desires of some kind or another. Man is comparable to the sea anemone with its multitude of tentacles which are always hunting in the water for food; or like certain plants which send out tendrils, seeking after the means of climbing. The poet says, “Man never is, but always wishes to be, blest.” He steers for which he thinks to be his port, but, as yet, he is tossed about on the waves. One of these days he hopes to find his heart's delight and he continues to desire with more, or less, expectancy.

This fact appertains both to the worst of men and the best of men. In bad men, desires corrupt into lusts—they long after that which is selfish, sensual and, consequently, evil. The current of their desires sets strongly in a wrong direction. These lusts, in many cases, become extremely intense—they make the man their slave. They domineer over his judgment; they stir him up to violence—he fights and wars—perhaps he literally kills. In God's sight, who counts anger, murder, he does kill often. Such is the strength of his desires that they are commonly called passions. And when these passions are fully excited, then the man, himself, struggles vehemently, so that the kingdom of the devil suffers violence and the violent take *it* by force!

Meanwhile, in gracious men there are also desires. To rob the saints of their desires would be to injure them greatly, for by these they rise out of their lower selves. The desires of the gracious are after the best things—things pure and peaceable, laudable and elevating. They desire God's Glory and, therefore, their desires spring from higher motives than those which inflame the unrenewed mind. Such desires in Christian men are frequently very fervent and forcible. They ought always to be so. Those desires begotten of the Spirit of God stir the renewed nature, exciting and stimulating it, and making the man to groan and to be ill in anguish and in travail until he can attain that which God has taught him to long for. The lusting of the wicked and the holy desiring of the righteous have their own ways of seeking gratification. The lusting of the wicked develops itself in contention—it kills and desires to have its fights and its wars. While, on

the other hand, the desire of the righteous, when rightly guided, betakes itself to a far hotter course for achieving its purpose, for it expresses itself in fervent and importunate *prayer*. The godly man, when full of desire, asks and receives at the hands of God.

At this time, I shall, by God's help, try to set forth from our text, first, the poverty of lusting—"You lust and have not." Secondly, I shall sadly show the poverty of many professing Christians in spiritual things, especially in their Church capacity—they also long for and have not. Thirdly, we shall speak, in closing, upon the wealth with which holy desires will be rewarded if we will but use the right means. If we ask we shall receive.

I. First, consider THE POVERTY OF LUSTING—"You lust, and have not." Carnal lusts, however strong they may be, do not, in many cases, obtain that which they seek after. As says the text, "You desire to have, and cannot obtain." The man longs to be happy, but he is not. He pines to be great, but he grows meaner every day. He aspires after this and after that which he thinks will content him, but he is still unsatisfied. He is like the troubled sea which cannot rest. One way or another, his life is disappointment. He labors as in the very fire, but the result is vanity and vexation of spirit. How can it be otherwise? If we sow the wind, must we not reap the whirlwind and nothing else?

Or, if, perhaps, the strong lusts of an active, talented, persevering man do give him what he seeks after, yet how soon he loses it! He has it so that he has it not. The pursuit is toilsome, but the possession is a dream. He sits down to eat and lo! the feast is snatched away, the cup vanishes when it is at his lips! He wins to lose! He builds and his sandy foundation slips from under his tower and his efforts lie in ruins. He that conquered kingdoms, died discontented on a lone rock in mid ocean and he who revived his empire, fell never to rise again. As Jonah's gourd withered in a night, so have empires fallen on a sudden, and their lords have died in exile. What men obtain by warring and fighting is an estate with a short lease—the obtaining is so temporary that it still stands true, "they lust, and have not."

Or if such men have gifts and power enough to retain that which they have won, yet in another sense they have it not while they have it, for the pleasure which they looked for in it is not there. They pluck the apple and it turns out to be one of those Dead Sea apples which crumble to ashes in the hand. The man is rich, but God takes away from him the power to enjoy his wealth. By his lusts and warring the licentious man, at last, obtains the objective of his cravings and, after a moment's gratification, he loathes that which he so passionately lusted for! He longs for the tempting pleasure, seizes it and *crushes* it by his eager grasp!

Watch the boy hunting the butterfly which flits from flower to flower while he pursues it ardently. At last it is within reach and with his cap he knocks it down! But when he picks up the poor remains, he finds the painted fly spoiled by the act which won it! Thus may it be said of multitudes of the sons of men—"You lust, and have not." Their poverty is set forth in a threefold manner. "You kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain," "You have not, because you ask not." "You ask, and receive not, because you ask amiss." If the lusters fail, it is not because they did not set

to work to gain their ends, for, according to their nature, they used the most practical means within their reach and used them eagerly, too!

According to the mind of the flesh, the only way to obtain a thing is to fight for it and James sets this down as the reason of all fighting. "Why come wars and fighting among you? Come they not, therefore, even of your lusts that war in your members?" This is the form of effort of which we read, "You fight and war, yet you have not." To this mode of operation men cling from age to age. If a man is to get along in this world, they tell me, he must contend with his neighbors, and push them from their vantage ground. He must not be particular how they are to thrive, but he must mind the main chance on his own account and take care to rise, no matter how many he may tread upon. He cannot expect to get on if he loves his neighbor as himself! It is a fair fight and every man must look to himself!

Do you think I am satirical? I may be, but I have heard this sort of talk from men who meant it. So they take to fighting and that fighting is often victorious, for, according to the text, "you kill"—that is to say, they so fight that they overthrow their adversary and there is an end of him. They are men of great strength, young lions that can go forth and tear their prey to pieces and yet, it is said of them, that they "lack and suffer hunger." But they that wait upon the Lord shall not need any good thing, while these lusts are unrestrained in their efforts to gain their point! They stop at nothing, they kill and desire to have.

Moreover, they fight with great perseverance, for the text says, "You fight and war." Now, war is a continuation of the act of fighting, prolonging it from campaign to campaign and conducting it by the rules of military art till the victory is won. Multitudes of men are living for themselves, competing here and warring there, fighting for their own hand with the utmost perseverance. They have little choice as to how they will do it. Conscience is not allowed to interfere in their transactions, but the old advice rings in their ears, "Get money! Get money honestly, if you can, but by any means get money." No matter though body and soul are ruined and others are deluged with misery—fight on—for there is no discharge in this war! If you are to win, you must fight—and everything is fair in war!

So they muster their forces, they struggle with their fellows, they make the battle of life hotter and hotter, they banish love and brand tenderness as folly—and yet, with all their schemes, they obtain not the end of life in any true sense. Well says James, "You kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain; you fight and war, yet you have not." When men who are greatly set upon their selfish purposes do not succeed, they may possibly hear that the reason of their non-success is "Because you ask not." Is, then, success to be achieved by *asking*? So the text seems to hint—and so the *righteous* find it. Why does not this man of intense desires take to asking? The reason is, first, because it is unnatural to the natural man to pray—as well expect him to fly!

He despises the idea of supplication. "Pray?" he says. "No, I want to be at work. I cannot waste time on devotions; prayers are not practical. I want to fight my way. While you are praying, I shall have beaten my opponent. I go to my counting house and leave you to your Bibles and your

prayers.” He has no mind for asking of God. He declares that none but canting hypocrites care to pray, thus confessing that if he *were* to pray, he would be a canting hypocrite! As for him, his praying is of quite another sort, and woe to those who come into his clutches! They will find that with him, business is business, and pretty sharp business, too. He will never stoop to pray, He is too proud. God’s reliance he does not understand—self-reliance is his word! Self is his god and to his god he looks for success!

He is so proud that he reckons himself to be his own Providence! His own right hand and his active arm shall get him the victory. When he is very liberal in his views, he admits that though he does not pray, yet there may be some good in it, for it quiets people’s minds and makes them more comfortable. But as to any answer ever coming from prayer, he laughs at the idea and talks both philosophically and theologically about the absurdity of supposing that God alters His course of conduct out of respect to the prayers of men and women. “Ridiculous,” he says, “utterly ridiculous!” And, therefore, in his own great wisdom, he returns to his fighting and his warring, for by such means he hopes to attain his end. Yet he obtains not!

The whole history of mankind shows the failure of evil lusts to obtain their objective. For a while the carnal man goes on fighting and warring, but, by-and-by, he changes his mind, for he is ill, or frightened. His purpose is the same, but if it cannot be achieved one way, he will try another. If he must ask, well, he will ask—he will become religious and do good to himself in that way. He finds that some religious people prosper in the world and that even sincere Christians are by no means fools in business and, therefore, he will try their plan. And now he comes under the third censure of our text—“You ask and receive not.” What is the reason why the man who is the slave of his lusts obtains not his desire, even when he takes to asking?

The reason is because his asking is a mere matter of form. His heart is not in his worship. He buys a book containing what are called, “forms of prayer,” and he repeats these, for repeating is easier than praying and demands no thought! I have no objection to your using a form of prayer if you *pray* with it, but I know a great many who do not pray with it, but only repeat the form. Imagine what would come of our families if, instead of our children speaking to us frankly when they have any need, they were always to think it requisite to go into the library and hunt up a form of prayer and *read* it to us! Surely there would be an end to all home-feeling and love! Life would move in fetters! Our household would become a kind of boarding-school, or barracks—and all would be parade and formality—instead of happy eyes looking up with loving trust into fond eyes that delight to respond!

Many spiritual men use a form, but carnal men are pretty sure to do so, for they end in the form. This man’s prayer is asking amiss because it is entirely for himself. He wants to prosper that he may enjoy himself. He wants to be great simply that he may be admired—his prayer begins and ends with self. Look at the indecency of such a prayer even if it is sincere. When a man so prays, he asks God to be his servant and gratify his de-

sires. No, worse than that! He wants God to join him in the service of his lusts! He will gratify his lusts and God shall come and help him to do it! Such prayer is blasphemous, but a large quantity of it is offered and it must be one of the most God-provoking things that Heaven ever beholds!

No, if a man will live to himself and his lusts, let him do so, and the further he gets off from God the more consistent he will be. Let him not mouth the Lord's Prayer as though God were *his* father, or drag in Christ's sacred name to sanctify his greed, or invoke the Spirit's blessed power in connection with his personal aggrandizement or his selfish ambition! If he does so, he will be no better off than he was at the beginning—he will ask, and have not. His asking will miss because he asks amiss, that he may consume it upon his lusts. If your desires are the longings of fallen nature; if your desires begin and end with yourself and if the chief end for which you live is not to glorify God, but to glorify *yourself*, then you may fight, but you shall not have!

You may rise up early and sit up late, but nothing worth gaining shall come of it! Remember how the Lord has spoken in the 37th Psalm—"Cease from anger, and forsake wrath: fret not yourself in any wise to do evil. For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be: yes, you shall diligently consider his place, and it shall not be. But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace."

So much upon the poverty of lusting.

II. Secondly, I have now before me a serious business, and that is, to show HOW CHRISTIAN CHURCHES MAY SUFFER SPIRITUAL POVERTY so that they, too, "desire to have, and cannot obtain." Of course the Christian seeks higher things than the worldling, otherwise he were not worthy of that name at all. At least, professedly, his objective is to obtain the true riches and to glorify God in spirit and in truth. Yes, but look, dear Brothers and Sisters, all Churches do not get what they desire. We have to complain, not here and there, but in many places, of Churches that are nearly asleep and are gradually declining.

Of course they find excuses. The population is dwindling, or another place of worship is attracting the people. There is always a handy excuse when a man needs one. But still, there stands the fact—public worship is almost deserted in some places, the ministry has no rallying power about it—and those who put in an appearance are discontented or indifferent. In such Churches there are no conversions. If they had half-a-dozen added to them in a year, they would need to sing the "Hallelujah Chorus"! But as to bringing thousands to Christ, they secretly fear that this would be an undesirable thing, for it might involve *excitement*—and they are so proper that they dread anything of that sort!

To do nothing and let men be damned is, in their judgment, proper and respectable. But to be alive and energetic is a perilous state of affairs, for it might lead to fanaticism and indecorum! They are specially afraid of anything like "sensationalism." That ugly-looking word they set before us very much as the Chinese try to frighten their enemies by painting horrible faces on their shields! Never mind that terrible word—it will hurt no one! These Churches "have not," for no Truth of God is made prevalent

through their zeal; no sin is smitten; no holiness promoted; nothing is done by which God is glorified. And what is the reason for it?

First, even among professed Christians there may be the pursuit of desirable things in a wrong method. "You fight and war, yet you have not," Have not Churches thought to prosper by competing with other Churches? At such-and-such a place of worship they have a very clever man—we must get a clever man, too! In fact, he must be a little cleverer than our neighbor's hero. That is the thing—a clever man! Ah me, that we should live in an age in which we talk about clever men in preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ! Alas, that this holy service should be thought to depend upon human cleverness! Churches have competed with each other in architecture, in music, in apparel and in social status. The leaders fancy that to succeed they must have something more handsome, artistic, or expensive than their neighbors—therefore they build Gothic edifices in which the minister's voice gets up among the timbers and is never properly heard—or else they purchase an organ with every stop except the full one!

The opinion would seem to be widely spread that there is a deal of Grace in an organ. To pray to God with a windmill, like the Tartars, would be very absurd! But to praise God with wind passing through a set of pipes is eminently proper! I never have seen the distinction and do not see it now. Organ or no organ is not, now, the question, but I speak of instances in which these machines are set up as a matter of *rivalry*. Is it not the design of many to succeed by a finer building, better music and a cleverer ministry than others? Is it not as much a matter of competition as a shop front and a dressed window are with drapers? Is this the way by which the Kingdom of God is to grow up among us?

In some cases there is a measure of bitterness in the rivalry. It is not pleasant to little minds to see other Churches prospering more than their own. They may be more earnest than we are and be doing God's work better, but we are too apt to turn a jealous eye towards them—and we, frankly, would rather they did not get on quite so well. Do you think that the Scripture says in vain, "The spirit that dwells in us lusts to envy?" If we could see a disturbance among them, so that they would break up and be ecclesiastically killed, we would not rejoice. Of course not! But neither should we suffer any deadly sorrow! In some Churches an evil spirit lingers. I bring no railing accusation and, therefore, say no more than this—God will never bless such means and such a spirit—those who give way to them will desire to have, but never obtain.

Meanwhile, what is the reason why they do not have a blessing? The text says, "Because you ask not." I am afraid there are Churches which do not ask. Prayer in all forms is too much neglected. Private prayer is allowed to decay. I shall put it to the conscience of every man how far secret prayer is attended to and how much of fellowship with God there is in secret among the members of our Churches. Certainly its healthy existence is vital to Church prosperity. Of family prayer it is more easy to judge, for we can see it. I fear that in these days many have quite given up family prayer. I pray you do not imitate them!

I wish you were all of the same mind as the Scotch laborer who obtained employment in the house of a wealthy farmer who was known to pay well. All his friends envied him that he had gone to live in such a service. In a short time he returned to his native village. And when they asked him why he had left his situation, he replied that, he “could not live in a house which had no roof to it.” A house without prayer is a house without a roof! We cannot expect blessings on our Churches if we have none on our families! As to the congregational prayer, the gathering together in what we call our Prayer Meetings—is there not a falling off? In many cases the Prayer Meeting is despised and looked down upon as a sort of second-rate gathering. There are members of Churches who are never present and it does not prick their consciences that they stay away.

Some congregations mix up the Prayer Meeting with a lecture, so as to hold only one service in the week. I read the other day an excuse for all this—it is said that people are better at home, attending to family concerns. This is idle talk! Who among us wishes people to neglect their domestic concerns? It will be found that those best attend to their own concerns who are diligent to get everything in order, so that they may go out to assemblies for worship. Negligence of the House of God is often an index of negligence of their own houses! They are not bringing their children to Christ, I am persuaded, or they would bring them up to the services. Anyway, the prayers of the Church measure its prosperity. If we restrain prayer we restrain the blessing.

Our true success as Churches can only be had by asking it of the Lord. Are we not prepared to reform and amend in this matter? Oh for Zion’s travailing hour to come, when an agony of prayer shall move the whole body of the faithful! But some reply, “There are Prayer Meetings and we *do* ask for the blessing, and yet it comes not.” Is not the explanation to be found in the other part of the text, “You have not, because you ask amiss”? When Prayer Meetings become a mere form; when Brothers and Sisters stand up and waste the time away with their long orations instead of speaking to God in earnest and burning words; when there is no expectation of a blessing—when the prayer is cold and chill—then nothing will come of it. He who prays without fervency does not pray at all! We cannot commune with God, who is a consuming fire, if there is no fire in our prayers!

Many prayers fail of their errand because there is no faith in them. Prayers which are filled with doubt are requests for refusal. Imagine that you wrote to a friend and said, “Dear Friend, I am in great trouble and I, therefore, tell you, and ask for your help because it seems right to do so. But though I thus write, I have no belief that you will send me any help. Indeed, I should be mightily surprised if you did and should speak of it as a great wonder.” Will you get the help, do you think? I should say your friend would be sensible enough to observe the little confidence which you have in him and he would reply that, as you did not expect anything, he would not astonish you. Your opinion of his generosity is so low that he does not feel called upon to put himself out of the way on your account. When prayers are of *that* kind you cannot wonder if we “have not, because we ask amiss.”

Moreover, if our praying, however earnest and believing it may be, is a mere asking that our Church may prosper because we want to glory in its prosperity—if we want to see our own denomination largely increased and its respectability improved, that we may share the honors thereof—then our desires are nothing but lusts, after all! Can it be that the children of God manifest the same emulations, jealousies and ambitious as men of the world? Shall religious work be a matter of rivalry and contest? Ah, then, the prayers which seek success will have no acceptance at the Mercy Seat! God will not hear us, but bid us be gone, for He cares not for the petitions of which *self* is the object. “You have not, because you ask not, or because you ask amiss.”

III. Thirdly, I have a much more pleasing work to do, and that is to hint at THE WEALTH WHICH AWAITS THE USE OF THE RIGHT MEANS, namely, of asking rightly of God. I invite your most solemn attention to this matter, for it is vitally important. And my first observation is this—how very small, after all, is this demand which God makes of us. Ask? Why, it is the *least* thing He can possibly expect of us, and it is no more than we ordinarily require of those who need help from us! We expect a poor man to ask and if he does not, we lay the blame of his lack upon himself. If God will give for the asking and we remain poor, who is to blame? Is not the blame most grievous? Does it not look as if we were out of order with God, so that we will not even condescend to ask a favor of Him? Surely, there must be, in our hearts, a lurking enmity to Him, or else, instead of its being an unwelcome necessity, it would be regarded as a great delight!

However, Brothers and Sisters, whether we like it or not, remember, asking is the rule of the Kingdom. “Ask, and you shall receive.” It is a rule that never will be altered in *anybody’s* case. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the elder Brother of the family, but God has not relaxed the rule for Him! Remember this text—Jehovah says to His own Son, “Ask of Me and I will give You the heathen for Your inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for Your possession.” If the royal and Divine Son of God cannot be exempted from the rule of asking, that He may have, you and I cannot expect the rule to be relaxed in our favor!

Why should it be? What reason can be pleaded why we should be exempted from prayer? What argument can there be why we should be deprived of the privilege and delivered from the necessity of supplication? I can see none—can you? God will bless Elijah and send rain on Israel, but Elijah must pray for it. If the chosen nation is to prosper, Samuel must plead for it. If the Jews are to be delivered, Daniel must intercede. God will bless Paul and the nations shall be converted through him, but Paul must pray! Pray he did, without ceasing—his Epistles show that he expected nothing except by asking for it. If you may have everything by asking and nothing *without* asking, I beg you to see how absolutely vital prayer is! And I beseech you to abound in it.

Moreover, it is clear to even the most shallow thinker that there are some things necessary for the Church of God which we cannot get except by prayer. You can get that clever man I spoke about—the *less*, perhaps, you pray about him, the better! And that new Church, and the new organ,

and the choir you can also get without prayer—but you cannot get the heavenly anointing—the gift of God is not to be purchased with money! Some of the members of a Church in a primitive village in America thought that they would raise a congregation by hanging up a very handsome chandelier in the Meeting House. People talked about this chandelier and some went to see it—but the light of it soon grew dim.

You can buy all sorts of ecclesiastical furniture! You can *purchase* any kind of paint, brass, muslin, blue scarlet and fine linen—together with flutes, harps, sackbuts, psalteries and all kinds of music—you can get these without prayer. In fact, it would be an impertinence to pray about such rubbish! But you cannot get the Holy Spirit without prayer. “He blows where He wills.” He will not be brought near by any process or method at our command apart from *asking*. There are no mechanical means which will make up for His absence! If the Holy Spirit is not there, what is the use of that clever man of yours? Will anybody be converted? Will any soul be comforted? Will any children of God be renewed in spiritual life without the Holy Spirit? Neither can you get communion with God without prayer. He that will not pray, cannot have communion with God. Yet more, there is no real, spiritual communion of the Church with its own members when prayer is suspended. Prayer must be in action, or else those blessings which are vitally essential to the success of the Church can never come to it. Prayer is the great door of spiritual blessing and if you close it, you shut out the favor.

Beloved Brothers and Sisters, do you not think that this asking, which God requires, is a very great *privilege*? Suppose there were an edict published that you must *not* pray—that would be a hardship, indeed! If prayer rather interrupted, than increased the stream of blessing, it would be a sad calamity. Did you ever see a dumb man under a strong excitement, or suffering great pain and, therefore, anxious to speak? It is a terrible sight to see! The face is distorted, the body is fearfully agitated—the mute writhes and labors in dire distress. Every limb is contorted with a desire to help the tongue, but it cannot break its bonds! Hollow sounds come from the breast and stuttering of ineffectual speech awaken attention, though they cannot reach so far as expression. The poor creature is in unspeakable pain!

Suppose we were, in our spiritual nature, full of strong desires and yet dumb as to the tongue of prayer? I think it would be one of the direst afflictions that could possibly befall us! We should be terribly maimed and dismembered—and our agony would be overwhelming! Blessed be His name, the Lord ordains a way of utterance and bids our heart speak out to Him! Beloved, we *must* pray—it seems to me that it ought to be the first thing we ever think of doing when in need. If men were right with God and truly loved Him, they would pray as naturally as they breathe! I hope some of us are right with God and do not need to be driven to prayer, for it has become an instinct of our nature.

I was told by a friend, yesterday, the story of a little German boy—a story which his pastor loved to tell. The dear little child believed his God and delighted in prayer. His schoolmaster had urged the scholars to be at school on time and this child always tried to be so. But his father and

mother were slow people and, one morning, through their fault, alone, he just left the door as the clock struck the hour for the school to open. A friend, standing near, heard the little one cry, "Dear God, do grant I may be in time for school." It struck the listener that for once, prayer could not be heard, for the child had quite a little walk before him and the hour was already come. He was curious to see the result.

Now it so happened that morning that the master, in trying to open the schoolhouse door, turned the key the wrong way and could not move the bolt. They had to send for a locksmith to open the door. Hence a delay and just as the door opened, our little friend entered with the rest, all in good time! God has many ways of granting right desires. It was most natural that, instead of crying and whining, a child that really loved God should speak to Him about his trouble. Should it not be natural to you and to me, spontaneously and at once, to tell the Lord our sorrows and ask for help? Should not this be the first resort? Alas, according to Scripture and observation—and, I grieve to add—according to *experience*, prayer is often the *last* thing!

Look at the sick man in the 107th Psalm. Friends bring him various foods, but his soul abhors all manner of meat. The physicians do what they can to heal him, but he grows worse and worse, and draws near to the gates of death—"Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble." That was put *last* which should have been *first*! "Send for the doctor. Prepare him nourishment. Wrap him in flannels!" All very well, but when will you pray to God? God will be called upon when the case grows desperate! Look at the mariners described in the same Psalm. The ship is well-near wrecked. "They mount up to the Heaven, they go down, again, to the depths: their soul is melted because of trouble." Still they do all they can to ride out the storm. But when "they reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wit's end: then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble."

Oh, yes; God is sought when we are driven into a corner and ready to perish! And what a mercy it is that He hears such laggard prayers and delivers the suppliants out of their troubles! But ought it to be so with you and with me, and with Churches of Christ? Ought not the *first* impulse of a declining Church to be, "Let us pray day and night until the Lord appears for us. Let us meet together with one accord in one place and never separate until the blessing descends upon us"? Do you know, Brothers and Sisters, what great things are to be had for the asking? Have you ever thought of it? Does it not stimulate you to pray fervently? All Heaven lies before the grasp of the asking man! All the promises of God are rich and inexhaustible—and their fulfillment is to be had by prayer!

Jesus says, "All things are delivered unto Me of My Father," and Paul says, "All things are yours, and you are Christ's." Who would not pray when all things are thus handed over to us? Yes, and promises that were first made to special individuals are all made to *us* if we know how to plead them in prayer. Israel went through the Red Sea ages ago and yet we read in the 66th Psalm, "There did we rejoice in Him." Only Jacob was present at Peniel and yet Hosea says, "There He spoke with us." Paul wants to give us a great promise for times of need and he quotes from the

Old Testament, “For He has said, I will never leave you nor forsake you.” Where did Paul get that? That is the assurance which the Lord gave to *Joshua*—“I will never leave you nor forsake you.”

Surely the promise was only for Joshua! No, it is for us! “No Scripture is of private interpretation.” All Scripture is ours. See how God appears unto Solomon at night and says, “Ask what I shall give you.” Solomon asks for wisdom. “Oh, that is Solomon,” you say. Listen!—“If any man lacks wisdom, let him ask of God.” God gave Solomon wealth and fame in the bargain! Is not that peculiar to Solomon? No, for it is said of true wisdom, “Length of days is in her right hand, and in her left hand riches and honor”—and is not this much like our Savior’s words, “Seek you first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you”? Thus, you see, the Lord’s promises have many fulfillments and they are waiting to pour their treasures into the lap of prayer! Does not this lift prayer up to a high level, when God is willing to repeat the biographies of His saints in us when He is waiting to be gracious, and to load us with His benefits?

I will mention another Truth of God which ought to make us pray and that is, that if we ask, God will give to us much more than we ask. Abraham asked of God that Ishmael might live before Him. He thought, “Surely this is the promised seed: I cannot expect that Sarah will bear a child in her old age. God has promised me a seed, and surely it must be this child of Hagar. Oh that Ishmael might live before You.” God granted him that and He gave him Isaac, as well, and all the blessings of the Covenant! There is Jacob. He kneels down to pray and asks the Lord to give him bread to eat and raiment to put on. But what did his God give him? When he came back to Bethel, he had two bands, thousands of sheep and camels, and much wealth! God had heard him and done exceeding abundantly above what he asked!

It is said of David, “The king asked life of You, and You gave him length of days,” yes, gave him not only length of days, but a throne for his sons throughout all generations, till David went in and sat before the Lord, overpowered with the Lord’s goodness. “Well,” you say, “but is that true of New Testament prayers? “Yes, it is so with the New Testament pleaders, whether saints or sinners! They brought a man to Christ, sick of the palsy, and asked Him to heal him. And He said, “Son, your sins are forgiven you.” He had not asked that, had he? No, but God gives greater things than we ask for! Hear that poor, dying thief’s humble prayer, “Lord, remember me when You enter into Your Kingdom.” Jesus replies, “Today shall you be with Me in Paradise”! He had not *dreamed* of such an honor!

Even the story of the Prodigal teaches us this. He resolved to say, “I am not worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired servants.” What is the answer? “This my son was dead, and is alive again: bring forth the best robe and put it on him; put a ring on his hands, and shoes on his feet.” Once get into the position of an asker and you shall have what you never asked for and never thought to receive! The text is often misquoted—“God is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask, or even think.” We could ask, if we were but more sensible and had

more faith, for the very greatest things, but God is willing to give us infinitely more than we ask for!

At this moment I believe that God's Church might have inconceivable blessings if she were but ready, now, to pray. Did you ever notice that wonderful picture in the 8th chapter of Revelation? It is worthy of careful notice. I shall not attempt to explain it, in its context, but merely point to the picture as it hangs on the wall by itself. Read on—"When He has opened the seventh seal, there was silence in Heaven about the space of half an hour." *Silence* in Heaven!? There were no anthems, ho hallelujahs, not an angel stirred a wing! Silence in Heaven!? Can you imagine it? And look! You see seven angels standing before God and to them are given seven trumpets. There they wait, trumpet in hand, but there is no sound! Not a single note of cheer or warning during an interval which was sufficiently long to provoke lively emotion, but short enough to prevent impatience.

Silence unbroken, profound, awful, reigned in Heaven! Action is suspended in Heaven, the center of all activity. "And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer." There he stands, but no offering is presented—everything has come to a standstill. What can possibly set it in motion? "And there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the *prayers* of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne." Prayer is presented together with the merit of the Lord Jesus! Now, see what will happen—"And the smoke of the incense, which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel's hands." *That* is the key of the whole matter!

Now you will see—the angel begins to work—he takes the censer, fills it with the altar fire and flings it down upon the earth, "and there were voices, and thundering and lightning and earthquake." "And the seven angels which had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound." Everything is moving now! As soon as the prayers of the saints were mixed with the incense of Christ's eternal merit and begun to smoke up from the altar, then prayer became effectual! Down fell the living coals among the sons of men, while the angels of the Divine Providence, who stood still, before, sound their thunder blasts, and the will of the Lord is done! Such is the scene in Heaven, in a certain measure, even to this day. Bring here the incense! Bring here the prayers of the saints! Set them on fire with Christ's merits and on the golden altar let them smoke before the Most High! *Then* shall we see the Lord at work and His will shall be done on earth as it is in Heaven! God send His blessing with these words, for Christ's sake. Amen.

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MORE AND MORE

NO. 3459

A SERMON
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“But He gives more Grace.”
James 4:6.

PRACTICAL as the Epistle of James is, this Apostle does not neglect to extol the Grace of God. He would be very unpractical if he did. There are some professors of religion who talk as if they loved the doctrines and loathed the duties. They cling to the faith, while they shrink from the works! They accept the principles that are announced, but refuse the precepts that are enjoined. Herein they err. Yet we would be equally at fault and, perhaps, commit a graver error, were we to be biased in the opposite direction! Did we constantly expound and enforce the great things to be done *by us* without reference to the greater things that have been done *for us*. Did we commend the fruits regardless of the root from where they spring. Did we applaud the deeds of men without lauding the Grace of God, we would, I say, commit a graver error! Happily we have been taught both the saintship and the service, the Covenant engagements, as well as the creature obligations, the Divine enabling and the divers abilities of Believers that are set in motion, so that we discern without difficulty how the principle of Grace combines and co-operates with the practice of goodness. In our conflict with the natural spirit of enmity, Grace takes the form of, “more Grace,” and it is bestowed upon us that we may be able to overcome and prove victorious.

We shall first consider *the words of our text in their natural connection*. Secondly, we shall *contemplate their general instructions*. Then, thirdly, we shall *connect them with a special application*, seeking, each one of us, to appropriate them to ourselves.

I. OUR TEXT IN ITS NATURAL CONNECTION.

Directly you look at the matter, you are struck with the contrast. It is not merely that a comparison is instituted, but *two potent motives are confronted*—the one a strong instinct, the other a liberal endowment. “The spirit that is in us lusts to envy, but He gives more Grace.” On our side it is a “spirit”—a turbulent passion! On God’s side it is a sweet gratuity—a supply of more Grace! We fretful and murmuring, anxious and complaining. He, far from grudging, stinting, or withholding (which would be a fit retaliation), succors us and augments and multiplies His liberality, as if to compensate the aggravation of our waywardness by the enlargement of His concessions! The spirit that is in us complains of God, as though we were jealous that He gave more to others than to us. Still, the Spirit that is in God goes on to give, saying, “Is your eye evil be-

cause Mine is good? May I not do what I will with My own?" The spirit that is in us undervalues what we possess, because, under some aspects, it may not be equally precious with that which somebody else possesses. But God, instead of taking away from us what He has given, because we judge Him so unworthily, only gives more! "He gives more Grace." One might have supposed, that because "the spirit that is in us lusts to envy," therefore we should discover God opposing us, restraining the bottles of Heaven, commanding the dew no longer to fall upon us and withdrawing all the benedictions of His love! But no, it does not say, "He is opposed to us and, whereas we run in one direction, He runs in another. His thoughts are not our thoughts, neither are His ways our ways. And then, again, our ways are not His ways, nor our thoughts His thoughts. We do not rise to Him and He does not stoop to us, so as to lower His Character, by meeting us with that return that would seem due to us if strict laws of retaliation were carried out." Note that contrast! Note it always! Observe how weak we are, how strong He is—how proud we are, how condescending He is—how erring we are, and how Infallible He is! Note how changing we are, and how Immutable He is—how provoking we are, and how forgiving He is. Observe how in us there is only evil, and how in Him there is only good. Yet our evil but draws His goodness forth, and still He blesses! Oh, what a rich contrast!

Do we not get a *hint, here, as to the quarter from which we are to derive the weapons of war against our sin?* "The spirit that is in us lusts to envy." What will you say to this? Will you, therefore, sit still and consider that you are excused because this is a positive instinct of your nature? Do you say that envy is a natural proclivity, a craving passion of many men and that it is, therefore, to be accounted of rather as a mental cast than as a moral crime—a flaw in one's constitution rather than a fault in his conscience? Or, to say the worst, more of a distressing temptation than of a detestable transgression against God? Ah, no, my Brothers and Sisters, there is not a word in Holy Scripture that gives the least countenance or the faintest indulgence to any sin! Indulgences for sin may come from Rome, but they never come from Zion! I have known persons attempt to exculpate themselves after a fit of anger by a cool acknowledgment like this—"I was always hot-tempered." What is that but a bitter aggravation? You do but admit that your sin is of long standing and frequent recurrence! You confess, indeed, your greater guilt, and there is no repentance to regret it, no force of conviction to forsake it. So it is with envy—"The spirit that dwells in us lusts to envy." So much the worse for our spirit! So much the more guilty we are. This is not only an infirmity which our circumstances have betrayed, but it is an inherent quality of the animal, debased propensity of the creature! Oh, how defiled must the nature be to which vice is as natural as a black skin to the Ethiopian, or as a spotted skin to the leopard! In vain your every plea—you cannot lighten the sin, albeit you may heighten the shame! There is no cause to tamper, but there is a call to arms. "He gives more Grace." This is as much as to say, "Sit not coolly down and parley with the spirit that is in

you lusting to envy, but up! Resist, withstand and oppose till you quench it!”

Here is counsel to instruct you in this arduous encounter. That evil spirit must be met with a pure, a devout spirit. The weapons of this warfare are not carnal—they are only to be found in the armory of Grace. “He gives more Grace.” You cannot overcome your sins by denouncing them, or frustrate their malignity by fostering an admiration of virtues that never grew in the soil of your own hearts. Nor can you, resolve as you may, keep the moral Law. Neither is it possible, by religious services in the future, to make amends for the perversity of your past life. Such proposals and such efforts would become the race of Ishmael, for they are under bondage. But we are the children of the free woman and we are not moved to holiness by the hope of gaining Heaven, or the fear of being sent to Hell. We live under a different Covenant from that! They have to do with Sinai, which made men tremble—we are not under the Law, but under Grace, so other arguments persuade us! When we need weapons wherewith to fight against our sin, we turn to Divine Love and say, “Behold how God has loved us. Can we act unloving to Him?” Or we go to Calvary and there see what a bitter thing it is to our Well-Beloved. We take the spear that pierced His heart, to see if it cannot pierce the heart of our sin. And we take the nails that nailed Him to the tree and pray the Holy Spirit to crucify our flesh with its affections and lusts. Our warfare is not carried on by weapons from the armory of Moses—the shield and spear of David suit us better. By faith in the living God who defends us from danger and guards us with strength, we shall bring down the lion, rend the bear like a kid, and vanquish the Philistine! By the help of His right hand we expect to kill the enemy. We are not going back to legal bondage—we have “more Grace.” And with Divine Grace there always comes joy, peace and security. That Doctrine which, it has been often argued, gives liberty to sin does really set forth the way in which to overthrow and conquer it! The text, then, gives an indication of the place where we may find the shield and buckler of our sacred war—“He gives more Grace.”

And then the text, besides giving thus a contrast and a suggestion, appears to me to give us an encouragement for the continuance of our spiritual warfare. “He gives more Grace.” You had Grace at first with which to struggle against the envying and every other sin. You are now alarmed because the warfare of your spirit is so protracted. “He gives more Grace” to continue the struggle! As long as there is one passion in your soul that dares to rise, there will be Grace in your soul to answer! Are you distressed because you don’t appear to be making the headway you could wish against sin? It is a blessed distress and I would not mitigate it, but, meanwhile, let us not degenerate into unbelief. Know this, that though there may be more temptation, God will give more Grace! And though advancing years may bring more infirmity and, consequently, more temptation, He will always give you more Grace! As long as the fight shall last, the help will last. You shall have manna all the while you are in the wilderness—it shall never cease to drop till you come where

you no more require it, having crossed the Jordan. Fight on, then! Never think of saying, "I cannot overcome this sin." By God's help you must, for no sin can enter Heaven with you! You must overcome it. It cannot be permitted that you sit down in peace with any foe to purity. You are never to have peace with any sin. When, first of all, the Lord Jesus made peace with us, He proclaimed war against sin on every side and of every size, and the loyal Christian never dreams of peace, but contemplates only a perpetual fighting against sin, expecting to have perpetual Grace bestowed!

And then it seems to me that, in this matter, we have a prediction of victory, for if He gives more Grace, it seems to me thus, that He promises so to augment the force of Grace that the sin must ultimately yield to repeated assaults. There shall be more Grace than sin—where sin abounded, Grace did much more abound. Such shall be the climax of every Christian's experience when it comes to be summed up. O Sin, you cruel, deadly foe! You seek to capture us, and, if possible, to slay us—but you shall not prevail! Sin seeks to enter, Grace shuts the door. Sin tries to get the mastery, but Grace, which is stronger than sin, resists and will not permit it. Sin gets us down at times and puts its foot on our neck—Grace comes to the rescue and faith prompts us to say, "Rejoice not over me, O my enemy, for though I fall, yet shall I rise up again." Sin comes up like Noah's flood, but Grace rides over the tops of the mountains like the Ark! Sin, like Sennacherib, pours forth its troops to swallow up the land—Grace, like the Angel of the Lord, goes through the camp of Sennacherib and lays sin dead. O glorious Grace, you shall certainly get the victory! "He gives more Grace." Surely, therefore, there is a prediction, here, of ultimate victory! "The spirit that is in us lusts to envy," but for us there is victory, and to Jehovah shall it be ascribed, for He gives more Grace! Such, as it seems to me, is the instruction to be drawn from the text, if we take it in its connection. Now let us take it out of the connection and—

II. USE IT AS A GENERAL TRUTH.

"He gives more Grace." Does not this mean that *He gives new supplies of Grace*? The Grace you had yesterday is of no use today. It would breed worms and stink like the old manna. The man who has no new experience of Divine Love, but tries to live on the memory of the past, will find the food very musty and apt to breed diseases. The child of God will never prosper on Tuesday through Monday's Grace—and you will not find the supplies of Grace for last year keep you afloat during this year! "He gives more Grace." Grace is like a river—its waters are always sweet and fresh as it comes rushing from the eternal hills. Like the sunlight, it never sends the same beams twice! It is always fresh, always new. Blessed be God for this! There are perpetual streams of Grace.

And He gives *larger supplies of Grace*. He gives new drops to the blade, He gives a greater watering to the corn in the ear, sends heavy showers when it comes to the full corn in the ear. There is comparatively little Grace with him who is but a babe in Grace, though enough for his present need. There is more Grace for the young man who has tempta-

tions to avoid that he may cleanse his way. And there is the most Grace for the valiant man who is strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Little faith has Grace, but great faith has more Grace. Little love has Grace, but God gives greater Grace where there is greater love. None of us have got so far but what there is much beyond. Suppose a man says he is perfect? You may conclude that he does not know himself, or the course that lies before him, for if he is perfect in his own estimation, he has not a perfect standard to judge himself by and probably he is not so perfect in his humility as it is desirable he should be!

“God gives more Grace,” that is, *higher, larger, deeper, stronger Grace*, so that we may go from strength to strength. When it is said, “He gives more Grace,” it means that He gives higher styles of Grace, for there are differences and degrees of Grace. One man has Grace—a proportionate amount of it, but it is of one kind. Now the Grace of patience appears to me to be a higher Grace than many others, and to come late to some of us. We have not got to it yet. We have got courage and we have faith in a measure and that will produce every other virtue, doubtless, but as yet we have not the full closeness of fellowship, the perfectness of acquiescence, the keen susceptibility of the Presence of God, and certain other and higher forms of Grace of which we cannot now particularly speak. But these are not things that are reserved and laid by—He gives these higher Graces—they are to be had. There is no degree of Divine Grace which we ought not to seek—not with the covetousness that seeks Grace for a graceless object like self-exaltation, but with that sacred eagerness which longs for more Grace that God may have more Glory! God gives to His people the highest forms of Grace and, therefore, they ought to be encouraged to ask for them.

This precious Word of God which I have before me, dear Friends, on which my heart is fondly set, and which my tongue gladly repeats, expresses *a statute of the Lord which we ought to live upon every day*. “He gives more Grace,” By the Grace of God I have got to the end of another day! Well, then, I need to go to Him again at my bedside, before my eyes are closed in slumber, and seek fresh fellowship with Him—“He gives more Grace.” What He is prepared to give most certainly I am prone to need! Tomorrow, when I go forth to follow my calling, I know not what may befall me, for I have not trod that way before—but “He gives more Grace.” Every day there are fresh supplies of Grace as fresh needs for Grace arise. And oh, how I ought to recollect this in my pleadings for others! Should I not pray for my minister, that he might have more Grace? If I do not profit under his ministry as I could wish, I should pray more, being confident of this very thing, that, “God gives more Grace.” And if I do profit as I could wish, then I have new reasons for praying that he will continue to get more Grace, for God has promised to give it! Have I a child whom I hope to see grow up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord? As I see the budding, the beginning of Grace in him, I should plead for more Grace! And how, my Christian Brothers and Sisters in the service of the Church, should I fail to plead with God on your behalf?

Much blessed use, too, Beloved, may we make of this verse *when called to any fresh service*. If you who never preached before, should be invited to speak to a few people, do not measure your ability by your inexperience. He who calls you to more service will give you more Grace! Or should you be about to move from a little to a larger occupation, you may be timid—cast down because of the littleness of your strength—but “He gives more Grace.” Possibly, you are entering into deeper trials. You have only been a coaster before, and you kept among the headlands near the shore. Now you are to cross the sea and get out of the sight of land. Well, the Pilot knows all about the sea which you are about to traverse—trust Him. “He gives more Grace.” I know you have more fear. The only way to overcome it is by more Grace. Do not be over-anxious to make more provision, or trust to the exercise of more prudence, or rely upon anything you have got, else you will make shipwreck in that manner! But go to the Lord for more Grace. It is the straight way, the right way, the safe way—and in that way you will always find that more Grace will carry you through more trouble! Possibly you are about to undergo sharper tests than ever. You are to be tried this time as to whether you are really God’s servant. Well, if the Lord permits Satan to tempt you, He will give you more Grace! He who preserved you in prosperity, will preserve you in adversity! He who kept you in the high places will not forsake you in the lowlands. He who blessed your substance will not suffer you to starve in time of famine. If you need more Grace, you shall have more Grace to supply your need! Do not be afraid, dear Brothers and Sisters, as to what may happen to you. Go in this your strength—seek the Lord’s guidance. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will direct your paths. If God should bid any one of us go right through a wall of stone, we are to go straight through it and He shall clear our way! He cuts the gates of brass and breaks the bars of iron asunder. Ours is to obey—not to reason or ask why! Ours is to dare and die, if need be, for Him—not to halt or draw back! When He bids us go, He will clear the way. Through the Red Sea, Israel went. “Forward,” was the word, and the floods divided and stood upright as a heap! So shall it be, if Providence should call you to the most extraordinary pathway ever trod by human pilgrims! He that calls you will preserve you and cause you to triumph in the way of obedience, for “He gives more Grace.” Again, let us endeavor to—

III. MAKE APPLICATION OF THIS PRINCIPLE TO OURSELVES.

I would urge each dear Brother and Sister here to take the words and see what they say to you. “He gives more Grace.” Do you suffer from spiritual poverty? It is your own fault, for He gives more Grace. If you have not got it, it is not because it is not to be had, but because you have not gone for it—you have not sought for it—you have not walked in such a way that you could possess it and exhibit its fruit! If there is anyone—a hired servant of our Father—that is hungry, it is not because our Father’s larder is bare, for He has provided bread enough and to spare! And if there is one of our Father’s children who cannot fill his belly, it is not because there is not food enough, nor because there is not abundance on the Father’s table, but because he chooses to go after the swine husks in

some form or other. We might rejoice, we might triumph, but we take the course which leads to poverty, littleness of Grace, leanness of soul! It is our own choice—not the Lord's. The text forbids us ever to lay blame on God. "Have I been a wilderness to Israel?" You might well consider this. You have little love—have I given you little cause for love? Your zeal burns very low—have I given you objects so contemptible that you might reasonably relax your fervor? Ah, no. "He gives more Grace." He always gives. You hungry ones that stand shivering there, faint and ready to die—it is not because the oxen and the fatlings are not killed, and all things are not ready—you that pinch yourselves and starve yourselves are not straitened in Him, but straitened in your own heart. May God teach us this lesson! May we come now to God with open mouths that He may fill them. May our desires be strong and our faith a mighty enthusiasm, that, according to our faith, it may be done unto us!

Spiritual growth, if we have any, must never be the subject of our self-congratulation, but we must give all the Glory to God, for if you look at the text from another point of view, the more Grace we have, the more has been given us! If we have it not, it is our own fault, but if we have it, it is not our earning, but His bestowal! If you have more than another, you have no cause to thank yourself for it. If you can say, "I bless myself that I have more Grace than my brother," you have already shown that you are naked, poor and miserable, though you think yourself to be rich and increased in goods. All Grace leads us to gratitude. Grace never leads us to lift ourselves up and say, "I have done well to obtain it." Grace, like the cargo in the vessel, makes the ship sink deeper in the stream. He that has most Grace is the lowliest man. You shall measure your rising in Grace by your sinking in humility.

Oh, Beloved, what satisfaction and what security we should feel in meditating on the goodness of God. Verily, God is good. This is not an occasional display of His bounty, but it is the universal order of His government in the Church, "He gives more Grace." There is no time given here. You do not find any timetable in Scripture, saying, "At such an hour of the day He gives more Grace," or, "At such a time in the year He gives more Grace," but it is day by day, all the year round, long as the cycles roll, while the dispensation of mercy lasts! So long as there is an heir of Heaven that needs, our Father, who is in Heaven, supplies! "He gives more Grace." What a blessing for us that the Grace of God is "unlimited" as to time!

Nor is there any restriction as to the way of our getting it. When "He gives more Grace," you need not apply through certain appointed priests, or use a prescribed ritual, or put yourselves in certain peculiar postures. No, no! Nothing ceremonial—everything substantial! This provision, like every other promise, is in and through Jesus Christ, the Mediator. If you do but go and seek from Him, He gives what none others can give—He gives more Grace! Oh, for the agony of prayer that will lead us to the Mercy Seat with power! And for the humility of soul that empties us in order that there may be room for God to fill us! Oh, for the life of faith which believes that God will do great things, and expects Him to do

them! How then should we, each one, have to say, “He gives me more Grace: blessed be His name! He leads me on from height to height, enlarges my capacity and still fills me! He makes me feel that there is a greater capacity yet to receive, and an undiminished fullness when my capacity expands.” Turn the meditation into music in your heart! Let the rich melody charm your thoughts and henceforth may our song be, “He gives more Grace.”

Are any of you seeking more Grace? If He has given you Grace to seek, He will surely give you more Grace—Grace to find! Are any of you grieving for sin? That is of His Grace—He will give you more Grace to rejoice in the pardon of all your sins through Christ! Have you begun to pray? That is according to His Grace bestowed on you—but He will give you more Grace to continue in prayer until you receive such answers as are the ripe fruit of your supplications! Thank God for little Grace—mind that you do. If you have only starlight, thank Him for it, and He will give you moonlight. Or if you have only moonlight, thank Him for it, and He will give you sunlight! Then, if you have sunlight, thank Him fervently and He will give you, shortly, as the light of seven days! Be thankful, since a little Grace is more than you deserve! Be thankful for the least grain that the Lord adds to it. Oh, that you might be all led to believe in Christ! It pleased the Father to give Christ Jesus to us, and in Him all fullness dwells. He cannot give you more, because in this one Gift every other gift is concentrated. You cannot need more than Jesus! With Him you shall find that you receive more and more Grace adequate to your needs and according to His exceeding riches of glory. So shall you praise Him more and more forever and ever! Amen.

**EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:
GENESIS 24:1-16; 1 SAMUEL 30:1-13; 1 JOHN 1:1-3.**

Our subject is the value of Divine Guidance, and we shall, therefore, read two passages of Scripture illustrating the Truth of God which we hope to enforce.

GENESIS 24:1-16.

Verse 1. *And Abraham was old, and well advanced in age: and the LORD had blessed Abraham in all things.* Happy man that can say that, who has a blessing everywhere! And yet Abraham had his, “but,” for as yet Isaac was unmarried and, perhaps, he little dreamed that for 20 years afterwards, he who was to build the house of Abraham was to remain childless. Yet so it was. There was always a trial for Abraham’s faith, but even his trials were blessed, for “God blessed Abraham in all things.”

2. *And Abraham said unto his eldest servant of his house, that ruled over all that he had, Put, I pray you, your hand under my thigh—* According to the Eastern manner of swearing.

3. *And I will make you swear by the LORD, the God of Heaven, and the God of the earth, that you shall not take a wife unto my son of the daugh-*

ters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell. This holy man was careful of the purity of his family—he knew what an ill effect a Canaanite wife might have upon his son, and also upon his offspring. He was, therefore, particularly careful here. I would that all parents were the same.

4, 5. *But you shall go unto my country, and to my kindred, and take a wife unto my son Isaac. And the servant said unto him, Perhaps the woman will not be willing to follow me unto this land: must I bring your son again unto the land from where you came?* The servant was very careful. Those that swear too readily they know not what, will, before long, swear till they care not what. Better still is it for the Christian to remember the Words of Christ, “Swear not at all, neither by Heaven, nor by earth, nor by any other oath.” Doubtless the Doctrine of the Savior is that all oaths of every sort are lawful to the Christian, but if they ever are taken, it should be with deep circumspection and with earnest prayerfulness—that there be no mistake about the matter.

6. *And Abraham said unto him, Beware you that you bring not my son there again.* He knew that God had called him and his kindred to inherit the land of Canaan and, therefore, he was not willing that they should go back to their former dwelling places.

7. *The LORD God of Heaven, which took me from my father’s house, and from the land of my kindred, and which spoke unto me, and that swore unto me, saying, Unto your seed will I give this land; He shall send His angel before you, and you shall take a wife unto my son from there.* What simple faith! This was the very glory of Abraham’s faith—it was so simple, so childlike. It might be many miles to Padan-aram, but it does not matter to faith. “My God will send His angel.” Oh, we are always making difficulties and suggesting hardships, but if our faith were in lively exercise, we would do God’s will far more readily! “Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain.” Brothers and Sisters, let us be of good heart and of good courage in all matters, for doubtless the angel of God will go before us!

8-11. *And if the woman will not be willing to follow you, then you shall be clear from this my oath: only bring not my son there again. And the servant put his hand under the thigh of Abraham, his master, and swore to him concerning that matter. And the servant took ten camels of the camels of his master, and departed; for all the goods of his master were in his hand: and he arose and went to Mesopotamia, unto the city of Nahor. And he made his camels to kneel down outside the city, by a well of water at the time of the evening, even the time that women go out to draw water.* Now I think I may freely say that this looks something like what we call “a wild goose chase.” He was to go and find a wife for a young man left at home. He knew nothing of the people among whom he was to sojourn, but he believed that the angel of God would guide him aright. What ought he to do, now he had come near to the time when the decision must be made? He should seek counsel of God—and observe that he did so!

12-14. *And he said, O LORD God of my master Abraham, I pray You, send me good speed this day, and show kindness unto my master Abra-*

ham. Behold, I stand here by the well of water, and the daughters of the men of the city come out to draw water. And let it come to pass that the damsel to whom I shall say, Let down your pitcher, I pray you, that I may drink, and she shall say, Drink, and I will give your camels drink, also; let the same be she that you have appointed for Your servant Isaac and, thereby, shall I know that You have showed kindness unto my master. I do not know that he is to be imitated in setting a sign to God. Perhaps not, but he did his best—he left the matter with God, and a thing is always in good hands when it is left with Him. There is a deal of wisdom in this sign, however. Why did he not say, “The damsel that shall first offer me a drink”? No, she might be a little too forward, and a forward woman was not a fit spouse for the good and meditative Isaac. He himself was to address her, first, and then she must be ready, with all cheerfulness, to do far more than he asks! She was to offer him a drink, and draw water for his camels. She would thus not be afraid of work, she would be courteous, she would be kind and all these meeting in one might show him! And by this test he might very wisely discover that she was a fitting woman for Isaac, and might become his spouse.

15. *And it came to pass, before he had done speaking*—No, he did not know that promise, “While they are yet speaking I will hear,” but God keeps His promises before He makes them and, therefore, I am sure He will keep them after He has made them!

15, 16. *That, behold, Rebekah came out, who was born to Bethuel, son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham’s brother, with her pitcher upon her shoulder. And the damsel was very fair to look upon, a virgin, neither had any man known her. And she went down to the well, and filled her pitcher, and came up.* And so on—I need not read the rest of the story, because we now find that, through earnest prayer, the good servant has been rightly led. We will now turn to another passage where we shall have another instance of a difficult case—where another person put his case before the Lord—sought guidance and found it.

1 SAMUEL 30:1-13.

Verses 1, 2. *And it came to pass, when David and his men were come to Ziklag on the third day, that the Amalekites had invaded the south, and Ziklag, and smitten Ziklag, and burned it with fire. And had taken the women captives, that were therein: they slew not any, either great or small, but carried them away, and went on their way.* What a singular Providence! There was a blood-feud between Amalek and Israel since Israel endeavored to exterminate the Amalekites, and it is written, “The Lord shall have war with Amalek forever and ever.” Yet God holds in these tigers and will not let the lions devour their prey!

3, 4. *So David and his men came to the city, and behold, it was burned with fire; and their wives, and their sons, and their daughters, were taken captives. Then David and the people that were with him lifted up their voice and wept, until they had no more power to weep.* They were tired and weary after a long march with Achish, and then another long march home. Oh, how they longed for their couches! How they desired to sit

down and converse with their wives and their little ones! Tears did not seem a sufficient expression for their sorrow, and yet when a strong man weeps—a burly warrior like Joab, a rough, coarse man like Abishai, or a strong young man like Asahel—there must be deep grief. They wept till they had no more power to weep.

5, 6. *And David's two wives were taken captives, Ahinoam the Jezreelitess and Abigail the wife of Nabal the Carmelite. And David was greatly distressed; for the people spoke of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man for his sons and for his daughters. But David encouraged himself in the LORD his God. He had not only his own personal sorrow, but that of all his people. And then, instead of comforting him, every friend had turned into a foe! His house was a heap of ashes—he might have said—“Ahinoam is not, and Abigail is not, and my children have You taken away. All these things are against me!” But he had more faith than Job, and so he encouraged himself in the Lord his God.*

7. *And David said to Abiathar, the priest, Ahimelech's son, I pray you, bring me here the ephod. And Abiathar brought there the ephod to David. Ah, that's the thing! Bring here the old family Bible! Let us go to prayer about it! Down on our knees and tell the Lord the case.*

8. *And David inquired of the LORD, saying, Shall I pursue after this troop? Shall I overtake them? And He answered him, Pursue: for you shall surely overtake them, and without fail recover all. But it is easier said than done! Where are they? How shall they find these fleet Amalekites who fly away so rapidly?*

9, 10. *So David went, he and the six hundred men that were with him, and came to the Brook Besor, where those that were left behind stayed. But David pursued, he and four hundred men: for two hundred stayed behind, which were so faint that they could not go over the Brook Besor. Worse and worse you see! But the case is in God's hands and no matter what the circumstances may be, all's well that ends well, and God always has the enemy in His hands!*

11-13. *And they found an Egyptian in the field, and brought him to David, and gave him bread, and he did eat; and they made him drink water. And they gave him a piece of a cake of figs, and two clusters of raisins: and when he had eaten, his spirit came again to him; for he had eaten no bread, nor drunk any water, three days and three nights. And David said unto him, To whom do you belong? And from where did you come? And he said, I am a young man of Egypt, servant to an Amalekite; and my master left me, because three days ago I fell sick. Shame on his master, I say, and yet there are some who stop their men's wages as soon as they get a little ill! Shame on them, I say! It might be fit for an Amalekite to do this, but certainly not for an Israelite! So this young Egyptian tells David all about what they had done. And David follows them, kills them with the sword, takes away their plunder and, moreover, gets a great spoil to himself, and so the Lord hears the voice of David. Now Abraham's servant and David were men in like difficulties with us, but they asked guidance*

of God and received it! Let us be sure in every time of difficulty to do the same.

1 JOHN 1:1-3

Verse 1. *That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and our hands have handled of the Word of life*—The fact that Christ was really in the flesh, that He was no phantom, no shadow mocking the eyes that looked upon Him, is exceedingly important, and hence John (whose style, by the way, in this Epistle is precisely like the style which he uses in his Gospel)—John begins by declaring that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who in His eternity was from the beginning, was really a substantial Man, for he says, “We have heard Him”—hearing is good evidence. “Which we have seen with our eyes”—eyesight is good, clear evidence certainly. “Which we have looked upon”—this is better still, for this imports a deliberate, careful, circumspect gaze. But better still, “Which our hands have handled”—for John had leaned his head on Jesus Christ’s bosom, and his hands had often met the real flesh and blood of the living Savior. We need have no doubt about the reality of Christ’s Incarnation when we have these open eyes and hands to give us evidence!

2. *For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and show unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us.* That same eternal Being who is Very God of Very God, and is worthy to be called essentially Life, was made flesh and dwelt among us, and the Apostles could say, “We beheld His Glory.”

3. *That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you.* See how he hammers this nail as if he will drive it fast! How he rings this bell that it may toll the death-knell of every doubt!

3. *That you also may have fellowship with us.* But John, what is the value of fellowship with *you*, you and your brethren, a parcel of poor fishermen? Who wants fellowship with you—hooted, despised, mocked and persecuted in every city—who wants fellowship with you?

3. *And truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son, Jesus Christ.* What a leap from the fisherman to the Father’s Throne, from the poor, despised son of Zebedee up to the King of Kings! Oh, John, we would have fellowship with you now! We will have fellowship with your scorn and spitting, that we may have fellowship with you, and with the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ.

—Adapted from the *C. H. Spurgeon Collection*, Version 1.0, Ages Software.

**PRAY THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL USE THIS SERMON
TO BRING MANY TO A SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST.**

UNCONDITIONAL SURRENDER

NO. 1276

**A SERMON DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JANUARY 30, 1876,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.**

***“Submit yourselves therefore to God.”
James 4:7.***

THIS advice should not need much pressing. “Submit yourselves to God”—is it not right upon the very face of it? Is it not wise? Does not conscience tell us that we ought to submit? Does not reason bear witness that it must be best to do so? “Submit yourselves to God.” Should not the creature be submissive to the Creator, to whom it owes its existence, without whom it had never been and without whose continuous good pleasure it would, at once, cease to be? Our Creator is infinitely good and His will is love—to submit to One who is “too wise to err, too good to be unkind,” should not be difficult.

If He were a tyrant, it might be courageous to resist, but since He is a Father, it is ungrateful to rebel. He cannot do anything which is not perfectly just, nor will He do anything which is inconsistent with the best interests of our race. Therefore, to resist Him is to contend against one's own advantage and, like the untamed bullock, to kick against the pricks to our own hurt. “Submit yourselves to God”—it is what angels do. It is what kings and Prophets have done. It is what the best of men delight in—there is, therefore, no dishonor nor sorrow in so doing. All Nature is submissive to His Laws. Suns and stars yield to His commands. We shall but be in harmony with the universe in willingly bowing to His sway.

“Submit yourselves to God”—you must do it whether you are willing to do so or not. Who can stand out against the Almighty? For puny man to oppose the Lord is for the chaff to set itself in battle array with the wind, or for the twig to make war with the flame. As well might man attempt to turn back the tide of the ocean, or check the march of the hosts of Heaven as dream of overcoming the Omnipotent. The Eternal God is irresistible and any rebellion against His government must soon end in total defeat. By the mouth of His servant, Isaiah, the Lord challenges His enemies, saying, “Who would set the briars and thorns against Me in battle? I would go through them, I would burn them together.”

God will be sure to overthrow His adversaries. He may, in His infinite patience, permit the rebel to continue for a while in his revolt, but as surely as the Lord lives, He will compel every knee to bow before Him and every tongue to confess that He is the living God. “Submit yourselves to God.” Who would do otherwise since *not* to submit is injurious now and will be fatal in the end? If we oppose the Most High, our opposition must

lead on to defeat and destruction, for the adversaries of the Lord shall be as the fat of rams—into smoke shall they consume away. For the man who strives with his Maker there remains a fearful looking for of judgment and the dread reward of everlasting punishment! Who will be so foolhardy as to provoke such a result?

“Submit yourselves to God” is a precept, which, to thoughtful men, is a plain dictate of reason. It needs few arguments to support it. Yet because of our foolishness, the text enforces it by a, “therefore.” With the previous verse—“He resists the proud, but gives Grace unto the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God”—His wrath and His mercy both argue for submission. We are both driven and drawn to it. The Romans were known to say of their empire that its motto was to spare the vanquished, but to war continually against the proud. This saying aptly sets forth the procedure of the Most High. He aims all His arrows at the lofty and turns the edge of His sword against the stubborn.

But the moment He sees signs of submission, His pity comes to the front and through the merits of His Son, His abounding mercy forgives the fault. Is not this an excellent reason for submission? Who can refuse to be vanquished by love? Who will not say as our hymn puts it—

***“Lord, You have won, at length I yield!
My heart, by mighty Grace compelled,
Surrenders all to Thee.
Against Your terrors long I strove,
But who can stall against Your love?
Love conquers even me.”***

If resistance will only call forth the Omnipotent wrath of God, but true submission will lead to the obtaining of His plenteous Grace, who will continue in arms? I shall not tarry to carry the argument further, but aim at once to press home this precept upon you as God the Holy Spirit may enable me.

I believe it to be addressed both to saint and sinner and, therefore, I shall urge it home first upon the child of God, and say to all of you who love the Lord, “Submit yourselves to God.” And then we shall take a little longer time to say in deep solemnity to those who are not reconciled to God by the death of His Son, “Submit yourselves to God” if you would be saved.

I. To THE PEOPLE OF GOD, “Submit yourselves to God.” He is your God, your Father, your Friend—yield yourselves to Him. What does this counsel mean? It means, first, exercise *humility*. We do well to interpret a text by its connection. The connection here is, “God resists the proud, but gives Grace unto the humble” and, therefore, the submission here meant must include humility, even if it is not the chief thing intended. Brothers and Sisters, let us take our right place before God. And what is that? Is it the highest seat in the synagogue? Is it the place of those who thank God that they are not as other men are?

I scarcely need reply! You who are the children of God will not dream of occupying such a position! If by reason of temporary foolishness you ever boast, I am sure, my dear Friends, when you think it over in the watches of the night, you are very much ashamed of yourselves and would be glad to eat your own words. A pardoned sinner boasting? A debtor to Sovereign Grace extolling himself? It is horrible! Nothing can be more out of place than boasting upon the lips of a child of God. If I heard Balaam's ass speak, I should impute it to a miracle that it should use the language of man, but that a man of God should use the braying of vanity is a miracle another way—not of God but of Satan!

Is it not one of the fundamental Truths of our faith that we are saved by Grace? And what says the Apostle? "Where is boasting, then? It is excluded." The word, "excluded," means shut out. Boasting comes to the door, it knocks, it pleads for admission but it is *excluded*. Possibly through our unwatchfulness it gains a momentary entrance, but as soon as ever the Grace of God within us ascertains that the intruder is within our gates, it ejects him, shuts the door in his face and bars him out! And in answer to the question, "Where is boasting, then?" Free Grace replies, "It is excluded, by the Law of Grace."

If all the good we have has been given to us freely by Divine favor, in what can we glory? If we possess the highest degree of spirituality—if our life is perfectly clear from any open fault and if our hearts are wholly consecrated to the Lord—yet we are unprofitable servants, we have done no more than it was our duty to have done. But, alas, we fall far short of this, for we have not done what it was our duty to have done and in many things we fail and come short of the glory of God. The right position of a Christian is to walk with lowly humility before God and with meekness towards his fellow Christians. The lowest room becomes us most and the lowest seat in that room.

Look at Paul, who knew far more of Christ than we do—and who served Him far better! It is edifying to notice his expressions. He is an Apostle and he will by no means allow anyone to question his calling, for he has received it from the Lord. But what does he say? "Not meet to be called an Apostle." What can be lower than this? But we shall see him descending far below it! He takes his place among the ordinary saints and he will not give up his claim to be numbered with them, for he has made his calling and election sure. But where does he sit among the people of God? He styles himself, "less than the least of all saints." That is no small a descent from, "not meet to be called an Apostle," to, "less than the least of all saints"!

But he went lower, for at another time he confessed himself to be still a sinner, and coming into the assembly of sinners, where does he take his position? He writes himself down as, "the chief of sinners." This is submission to God, the true surrender of every proud pretension or conceited claim! If, my Brothers, the Lord has called us to be ministers, let us always feel that we are not worthy of so great a Grace. Since He has made

us saints, let us confess that the very least of our Brothers is more esteemed by us than we dare to esteem ourselves! And since we know that we are sinners, let us look at our sins under that aspect which most reveals their heinousness, for in some respects and under certain lights there are evils in our character which make us guiltier than the rest of our fellow sinners.

The stool of repentance and the foot of the Cross are the favorite positions of instructed Christians. Such humility is not at all inconsistent with believing that we are saved, nor with the fullest assurance of faith, no, not at all inconsistent with the nearest familiarity with God! Listen to Abraham—"I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, I that am but dust and ashes." He has drawn very near to the Lord and speaks with Him as a man speaks with his friend, and yet he says, "I am but dust and ashes." His boldness did not destroy his humbleness, nor his sense of nothingness hinder his near approach to the Lord.

My dear Brothers and Sisters, we know that in Christ we are accepted. We know that we are dear to God and loved with an everlasting love. We know that He hears our prayers and answers us continually. We know that we walk in the light of His Countenance. But still, our posture should always be that of deep humiliation before the Lord. In the attitude of complete submission we should sit at the Master's feet and say, "By the Grace of God I am what I am." May the Holy Spirit work this gracious submission in every regenerated soul!

Let us next observe that our text bears a second meaning, namely, that of *submission to the Divine will*. That, of course, would strike you in the wording of the verse—"Submit yourselves therefore to God." Beloved Christian Friends, be willing to accept whatever God appoints. Let us each pray to be—

***"Simple, teachable and mild,
Made into a little child;
Pleased with all the Lord provides,
Weaned from all the world besides."***

Is it, indeed, so with us? Are you not, some of you, very far from it? Are you quite sure that you are submissive to the Divine will as to your rank in society? Have you accepted your position in the scale of worldly wealth? Are you satisfied to be sickly, obscure, or of small ability? Are you content with God's appointments?

Too many professors are quarrelling with God that they are not other than they are. This is evil and shows that pride is still in our hearts, for were we conscious of our own wickedness, we would know that anything short of Hell is more than we deserve! As long as we are not in the pit of torment, gratitude becomes us! It is a happy thing when the mind is brought to submit to all the chastisements of God and to acquiesce in all the trials of His Providence. Knowing, as we do, that all these things work together for our good, and that we never endure a smart more than our

heavenly Father knows is necessary, we are bound to submit ourselves cheerfully to all that He appoints.

Though no trial for the present is joyous, but grievous, yet ought we to resign ourselves to it because of its results. Even the beasts of the field may teach us this! I read the other day of an elephant which had lost its sight—it was brought to the surgeon and he placed some powerful substance upon the eyes which caused it great pain. And, of course, the huge creature was very restless during the operation. After a while it began to see a little and when it was brought, the next day, to the surgeon, it was as docile as a lamb, for it evidently perceived that benefit had resulted from the painful application.

If such a creature has enough intelligence to perceive the benefit and to accept the pain, how much more should we! Since we know that we owe infinite blessings to the rod of the Covenant, we ought to be willing to bare our own back to the scourge and let the Lord do as He wills with us. Yes, I go beyond this, even if we did *not* know that good would come of it, we ought to submit because it is the Lord's will, for He has a right to do whatever He wills with us. Can you subscribe to this? As a true child, can you make a complete surrender to your Father's good pleasure? If not, you have not fairly learned the mind of Christ.

It is a great thing to have the soul entirely submitted to God about everything so that we never wish to have anything in Providence other than God would have it to be, nor desire to have anything in His Word altered. Not one ordinance of the Church of God, not one doctrine of Revelation, not one precept or warning other than it is! We shall never be at rest till we come to this. It is essential to our happiness to say at all times, "Nevertheless, not as I will but as You will." Brothers and Sisters, ought it not to be so? Who ought to rule in the house but the Father? Who should govern in the body but the Head? Who should lead the flock but the Shepherd? We owe so much to Jesus and so entirely belong to Him, that even were it put to the vote, all of us would give our suffrages so that the Lord Jesus should be Head and Chief among us! For is He not the First-Born among many Brethren?

Submit, then, my Brothers and Sisters! Beseech the Holy Spirit to mold your wills to complete subjection. You will never be happy till self is dethroned. I know some of God's children who are in great trouble only because they will not yield to the Divine will. I met with one, I believe a good Sister, who said she could not forgive God for taking away her mother. And another friend said he could not see God to be a good God for he had made him suffer such terrible afflictions. Their furnace was heated seven times hotter by the fuel of rebellion which they threw into it! So long as we blame the Lord and challenge His rights, our self-tortured minds will be tossed to and fro.

No father can let his boy bend his little fist in defiance and yet treat that child with the same love and fondness as his other children who submit themselves to him! You cannot enjoy your heavenly Father's smile,

my dear Brother or Sister, till you cease from being in opposition to Him and yield the point in debate—for He has said that if we walk contrary to Him, He will walk contrary to us. It will be wise for you to cry, “My Father, my evil spirit has rebelled against You, my wicked heart has dared to question You, but I cease from it now! Let it be even as You will, for I know that You do right.”

So the text means first humility and then submission to the Lord’s will. Lord, teach us both! It means, also, *obedience*. Do not passively lie back and yield to the necessities of the position, but gird up the loins of your mind and manifest a voluntary and active submission to your great Lord. The position of a Christian should be that of a soldier to whom the centurion said, “Go,” and he goes. And he says, “Do this,” and he does it. It is not ours to question—that were to become masters. But ours it is to obey without questioning, even as soldiers do. Submission to our Lord and Savior will be manifested by ready obedience.

Delays are essentially insubordinations and neglects are a form of rebellion. I fear that there are some Christians whose disobedience to Christ is a proof of their pride. It may be said that they do not know such-and-such a duty to be incumbent upon them. Yes, but there is a proud ignorance which does not *care* to know—a pride which despises the Commandments of the Lord and counts them nonessential and unimportant. Can such scorn be justifiable? Is that a right temper for the Lord’s servant to indulge? Can any point in our Lord’s will be unimportant to us? Can the wish of a dear Friend be trivial to those who love Him? Has Jesus said, “If you love Me, keep My commandments,” and shall I treat them as matters of no importance? No, my Lord, if it were the lifting of a stone from the road. If it were the moving of a sere leaf, or the brushing away of a cobweb, if You ordain it, then it becomes important straightway—important to my loving allegiance that I may, by my prompt obedience, show how fully I submit myself to You.

Love is often more seen in little things than in great things. You may have, in your house, a servant who is indifferent and yet she will perform all the necessary operations of the household. But the loving child attends to the little details which make up the comfort of life and are the tests of affection. Let your love be shown by a childlike obedience which strives to do all the Master’s will in all points. I am afraid there are some who do not obey the Master because they are proud enough to think that they know better than He does! They *judge* the Lord’s will instead of *obeying* it. Are you a judge of the Law, my Brother? Are you to sit on the judgment seat and say of this or that statute of the Law, “This is not important,” or, “That may be set aside without any loss to me”?

This is not according to the mind of Christ, who did His Father’s will and asked no questions. When next you pray, “Your will be done in earth, even as it is in Heaven,” remember how they do that will before the Throne of God, without hesitation, demur, or debate—being wholly subservient to every wish of the Most High. Thus, dear Brethren, “Submit yourselves to

God.” The expression, however, is not well worked out unless I add another explanation and, perhaps, even then I have not brought out, fully, its meaning. “Submit yourselves to God” by *yielding your hearts to the motions of the Divine Spirit*, by being impressible, sensitive and easily affected.

The Spirit of God has hard work with many Christians to lead them in the right way. They are as the horse and the mule which have no understanding, whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle. There is the stout oak in the forest and a hurricane howls through it and it is not moved. But the rush by the river yields to the faintest breath of the gale. Now, though in many things you should be as the oak and not as the rush, yet in *this* thing be as the bulrush and be moved by the slightest breathing of the Spirit of God! The photographer’s plates are rendered sensitive by a peculiar process—you shall take another sheet of glass and your friend shall stand before it as long as ever he likes and there will be no impression produced—at least none which will be visible to the eye.

But the *sensitive* plate will reveal every little wrinkle of the face and perpetuate every hair of the head. Oh, to be rendered sensitive by the Spirit of God! We can be made so by submitting ourselves entirely to His will. Is there not a promise to that effect?—“I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh.” Sometimes the Spirit of God whispers to you, “Retire to pray.” At such times enter your closet at once. Remember how David said, “When you said unto me, Seek you My face, my heart said unto You, Your face, Lord, will I seek.” The Spirit of God will sometimes impel you to a duty which involves self-denial, which will take up much of your leisure and will bring you no very great honor as a reward. Be not disobedient to His call, but go about your work speedily. Say with the Psalmist, “I made haste and delayed not to keep Your commandments.”

The Spirit will, at times, urge us to deep repentance on account of faults in which we have been living. He will rebuke us for some ugly temper which we have indulged, or for some hard word which we have spoken against a Brother. Or because of the worldliness of mind into which we have fallen. Oh, Brothers and Sisters, bestir yourself at such times and examine and purge your soul! Let a hint from the Holy Spirit be enough for you! As the eyes of the handmaiden are towards her mistress, so let your eyes be to your Lord. The handmaid does not require the mistress to speak. It will often happen when she is waiting at table and there are friends. The mistress nods or puts her finger up and that is enough.

She does not call out, “Mary, do this or that,” or speak to her loudly a dozen times, as the Lord has to do to us! But a wink suffices. So it ought to be with us. Half a word from the Divine Spirit—the very gentlest motion from Him—should be enough guidance and straightway we should be ready to do His bidding. In this matter it is not so much your *activity* as your *submission* to the Holy Spirit which is needed. It is not so much your running as your *willing* to be drawn by Him. There is to be an *activity* in

religion—we are to wrestle and to fight, but side by side with that we are to yield ourselves to the Spirit's impulse—for it is He that works in us to will and to do of His own good pleasure. He strives in us mightily and if we will but resign ourselves, and no longer be obstacles in His Divine way, He will carry us to greater heights of Grace and create in us more fully the likeness of Christ.

“Submit yourselves to God.” Learn the sweetness of lying passive in His hands, knowing no will but His! Learn the blessedness of giving yourselves up entirely to His Divine sway, for in so doing you will enter into Heaven below!

II. Now we come to that part of our discourse in which we must earnestly pray God the Holy Spirit to help us doubly. I desire now to address myself TO THOSE WHO ARE NOT SAVED but have some desire to be so. I am thankful to God that there should be even the faintest wish of the kind. May it grow at once into an impetuous longing, yes, may that longing be fulfilled this very morning and may you go out of this house saved!

You tell me that you have been anxious about your soul for some time, but have made no headway. You have been putting forth great efforts. You have been very diligent in attending the means of Grace, in searching the Scriptures and in private prayer, but you cannot get on. It is very possible, my dear Friend, that the reason is this—that you have not submitted yourself to God. You are trying to *do* when the best thing would be to cease from yourself and drop into the hands of the Savior who is able to save you though you cannot save yourself. For a proud heart, the very hardest thing is to submit. Do you find it so?

“No surrender” is the stubborn sinner's motto. I have known men who would give their bodies to be burned sooner than yield to God. Their high stomach has stood out long against the Most High and they have been little Pharaohs till the Lord has brought them to their senses. “Must I yield, must I bow at His feet?”—they could not submit to such humiliation! If the Gospel had tolerated their pride and given them a little credit they would have rejoiced in it. But to be tumbled in the dust and made to confess their own nothingness they could not bear. “Submit” is wormwood and gall to haughty sinners! Yet they must drink the cup or die.

Hear, then, you stout-hearted! You can never be saved unless you submit! And when you are saved, one of the main points in your salvation will be that you have submitted! I desire to whisper one little Truth of God in your ear and I pray that it may startle you—*You are submitting even now*. You say, “Not I. I am lord of myself.” I know you *think* so, but all the while you are submitting to the *devil*. The verse before us hints at this. “Submit yourselves to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” If you do not submit to God you never will resist the devil—and you will remain constantly under his tyrannical power!

Which shall be your master, God or devil, for one of these must? No man is without a master. Some power or other is paramount within us, either good or evil is supreme in our hearts. And if we will not be mastered

by the good, the evil has already gained the sway. "How, then, am I to submit?" one asks, "*To what shall I submit, and in what respects?*" Well, first, submit yourself, if you would be saved, to the Word of God. Believe it to be true. Believing it to be true, yield yourself to its force. Does it accuse you? Confess the accusation! Does it condemn you? Plead guilty! Does it hold out hope to you? Grasp it! Does it command you? Obey it! Does it guide you? Follow it! Does it cheer you? Believe it! Submit yourself to Him who in this blessed Book proclaims Himself the Savior of all such as will throw down the weapons of their rebellion and end their futile war by relying upon His power to save them!

Yield yourself, next, to your conscience. You have quarreled with your conscience and your conscience with you. It persists in speaking and you desire it to be quiet. After dissipation, in the lull which comes after a storm of evil pleasure, a voice is heard saying, "Is this right? Is this safe? Will this last? What will the end of this be? Would it not be better to seek some better and nobler thing than this?" God speaks often to men through the still small voice of conscience. Open your ears, then, and listen. Your conscience can do you no harm! It may disturb you, but it is well to be disturbed when peace leads on to death! He was a fool who killed the watch dog because it alarmed him when thieves were breaking into his house! If conscience upbraids you, feel its upbraiding and heed its rebuke. It is your best friend! Faithful are its friendly wounds, but the kisses of a flattering enemy are deceitful.

God also sends many messengers. To some of you He has sent the most tender of monitors. Harken their admonitions and regard their kind warnings, for they mean good to your souls. Is it hard, O son, is it hard to submit when the message comes by a mother's loving lips? Is it hard to submit when her tears bedew each word she speaks? It must have been difficult for some of you, in your young days, to stand out against a mother's entreaties when she not only pointed you to Heaven, but led the way—not only spoke of Jesus, but reflected His love in her daily walk and conversation. You have a sister, young man, whom you love and respect. You could hardly tell how much an object of admiration she is to you.

Now, that letter of hers, which you turned into a joke? You did feel it, after all, didn't you? Yield to its pathetic pleading! Yield to its tender entreaties! Remember, God has other messengers whom He will send if these loving ones do not suffice. He will soon send you a sterner summons. If you listen not to the gentle word, the still, small voice, He can send to you by the rougher messengers of disease and death! Be not so foolish as to provoke Him to do so. Moreover, submit yourselves to God, since He has, perhaps, already sent His messengers in sterner shapes to you. It was but a few days ago that you lost your old friend. Many a merry day you had spent together and many a jovial night, too.

He was in as good health as yourself, apparently, but he was struck down and you have followed him to the tomb. Is there no voice from that new grave to you? Do you think your friend, in his sudden end, was a

warning to you to be ready for the same departure? You have also suffered from premonitory symptoms of sickness. Perhaps you have actually been sick and been made to lie where your only prospect was eternity—a dread eternity—how surely yours! You trembled to gaze into it, but the very tones of the surgeon’s voice compelled you to do so. You feared that you would have to leave this body and you could not help saying to yourself, “To where shall I fly? My naked spirit, where must it go when once it leaves the warm precincts of this house of clay?”

It is not my business one-tenth as much as it is yours—but I charge you, hear the voice of these Providences! Listen to these solemn calls! The Angel of Death has stood at your bedside and pointed to you and said, “Young man, it is the fever this time and you may recover, but the next time you will never rise from the bed on which you lie.” Or, “You have been rescued, now, from a dreadful accident, but the next time there will be no escape for you. Because I will do this, prepare to meet your God.”

Above all, I pray you submit yourselves if you are conscious of such things, to the whispers of God’s Holy Spirit. God’s Holy Spirit does not strive with every man alike. Some have so grieved Him that He has ceased to strive with them, or does so very occasionally and then they so resist His striving that they are never very long continued. The worst men that lives has his better moments. The most careless has some serious thoughts. There are lucid intervals in the madness of carnal pleasure. At such times men hear what they call, “their better selves.” It is hardly so. I prefer to call it the general reproofing of God’s Spirit in their souls. He says to them, “Is this right? Is this wise? This trifling, this time-killing, this depraving of the soul by allowing the bodily appetites to rule. This lowering of the man to the level of the brute, can this be right? Is there no eternity? Is there no immortality, no God, no judgment to come?”

The Holy Spirit sometimes opens the man’s eyes, as He did the eyes of Balaam, and makes him see the certainty of the Judgment Day and the nearness of its approach. The man is led to anticipate the trumpet’s sound which heralds the assize, the coming of the Judge upon His Great White Throne, the gathering of the multitudes of the quick and the dead, the opening of the books, the dividing of the throng, the driving away of the goats to their everlasting punishment and the reception of the righteous to their everlasting joy! Oh, when you are made to feel all this, I pray you submit yourself to it!

It costs some men a great deal of trouble to be damned! And a man who blasphemes and talks infidelity merely does so to conceal his inward struggles. Like the boy who whistles as he goes through the churchyard to keep his courage up, they talk blasphemy to divert their mind from its own fears. He who is most fierce in the utterance of his disbelief is not the greatest disbeliever. When the heathen offered children to Moloch, they beat their drums to drown the cries of the victims, and even so these men make a great noise to drown the voice of Conscience. The man knows better and I charge him to let that better knowledge come to the front and

lead him to his God and Father. It will be a blessed thing for him if it shall be so, even this day. "Submit yourselves to God."

If you ask me again, "*In what respect am I to submit myself?*" I answer as briefly as I can. First, submit yourself by confessing your sin. Cry *peccavi*. Do not brazen it out and say, "I have not sinned." You will never be pardoned while that is the case. "He that confesses his sin shall find mercy." Sinner, choose between one of two things—judge yourself or be judged of God. If you will judge yourself and put in a plea of guilty, then will the Great Judge grant you forgiveness! Condemn yourself and you shall not be condemned! Confess the indictment to be true, for true it is, and to deny it is to seal your doom. Next, honor the Law which condemns you. Do not persevere in picking holes in it and saying that it is too severe and requires too much of a poor fallible creature. The Law is holy, just and good. Put your lips down and kiss it, though it condemns you, and say, "though it charges me with guilt and convicts me of deadly sin, yet it is a good Law, and ought not to be altered, even to save me."

Next, admit the justice of the penalty. Your sins condemn you to Hell. Do not say, "God is too severe. This is a punishment disproportionate to the offense." You will never be pardoned if you think so, but God will be justified in your condemnation. The pride of your heart will be a swift witness against you. Confess with your heart, "If my soul were sent to Hell it is no more than I deserve." When you have confessed the guilt and honored the Law, and acknowledged the justice of the penalty, then you are nearing the position in which God can be merciful to you! Submit yourself, Sinner—I pray you do it *now*—submit yourself to God as your King!

Throw down your weapons! Lower your crest and cast away those robes of pride. Surrender unconditionally and say, "Lord God, I admit You, now, to be king. No longer like stout-hearted Pharaoh will I ask, 'Who is the Lord that I should obey His voice?' But like one brought to his senses, I yield as reason and Grace suggest." It will go well with you when you make a full capitulation, an unconditional surrender. Fling wide the gates of the city of Mansoul and admit the prince Emanuel to rule as sole Sovereign in every street in the city! Dispute no longer His sovereignty, but pray to be made a loyal subject, obedient in all things. You shall find Grace in the sight of the Lord if you will do this.

Furthermore, submit yourself to God's way of saving you. Now God's way of saving you is by His Grace, not by your merits. It is by the blood of Jesus, not by your tears and sufferings. He will justify you by your simply trusting Jesus now. Your proud heart does not admire the Lord's way of salvation. You stand up and say, "How is this consistent with morality?" As if you were the guardian of morality, as if the King of Heaven and earth could not take care of the moralities without assistance from you! Who are you to be, all of a sudden, the champion of morality? How dare you dream that the thrice holy God will not take care of that?

He bids you trust His Son, Jesus. Will you do so or not? If you will not, there is no hope for you. If you will, you are saved the moment that you

believe—saved from the guilt of sin by trusting Jesus! You must also surrender yourself at discretion to His method of operating upon you. One says, “I would believe in Jesus, Sir, if I felt the horror and terror which some have experienced on account of sin.” What? Do you demand of God that He should drag you through horrors and terrors before you will believe? Submit yourself to be saved in a gentler way! “But I read of one,” says another, “who had a dream! I would believe if I, too, saw a vision.” Must God give you dreams? Must He play lackey to you and save you in your way?

He tells you plainly, “If you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ you shall be saved.” Will you believe or not? For if you do not, neither dreams, nor visions, nor terrors, nor anything else can save you. There is God’s way, Sinner! I ask you—and perhaps your answer will settle your fate forever—will you follow that way or not? If you will not, you have chosen your own destruction! But if you will have it and will submit yourself to be saved by believing in Jesus Christ, it is well with you! I know there are some in this place who feel ready to burst, for their broken hearts are saying, “I yield at once. Oh, if He would but save me.” How glad I am to hear you say so, for, “He gives Grace to the humble.”

I remember the time when I stood and cried to God, “O God, if I must lie on a sick bed till I die, I care not if You will but have mercy on me! If You will but conquer my proud will and make a new man of me, You may do whatever You please with me! Only save me from the guilt, the power of sin!” It was when the Lord brought me down *there* that He enabled me to see life and salvation in Jesus Christ! And if He has brought you down to that point, Sinner, then you have nothing to do but simply trust the Lord Jesus Christ and you are assuredly saved!

When He brings you to submit, He has given you His Grace. Submission to His Divine will is the essence of salvation. Now, who will yield? Who will yield at once? The Master has come among us! The King, Himself is here! Your Maker, your Redeemer! See the marks of His wounds! See the scars on His hands and feet and side! He asks of you, “Will you yield to Me? Will you throw down your weapons? Will you end the war? Will you surrender at discretion?” If so, He gives you His hand and says, “Go in peace. There is peace between Me and you.”

Kiss the Son lest He be angry and you perish from the way, while His wrath is kindled but a little. I prayed the Lord to give me many souls and I believe I shall have them this morning! I feel sure of it! Grant me this favor—if you submit yourselves to Christ, let me hear of it and do not delay to unite yourselves with those who rejoice to be led in triumph as the captives of His Grace!

**PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—James 4.
HYMNS FROM—“OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—181, 578, 654.**

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THE REASON WHY MANY CANNOT FIND PEACE NO. 1408

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, APRIL 7, 1878,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He shall lift you up.”
James 4:7-10.

WE frequently meet with persons who tell us that they cannot find peace with God. They have been bidden to believe in the Lord Jesus, but they misunderstand the command and, while they think they are obeying it, they are really unbelievers and, therefore, they miss the way of peace. They attempt to pray, but their petitions are not answered and their supplications yield them no comfort whatever, for neither their faith nor their prayer is accepted of the Lord. Such persons are described by James in the 3rd verse of the chapter now open before us—“You ask, and receive not, because you ask amiss.” We cannot be content to see seekers in this wretchedness and, therefore, we endeavor to comfort them, instructing them, again and again, in the great Gospel precept, “Believe and live.”

Yet as a rule they get no further, but linger in an unsatisfactory condition. They assure us that they believe in Jesus, but we see none of the fruits of faith in them, neither can they, themselves, say that they derive any spiritual benefit from the faith which they profess. Now I fear that comfort is misplaced in these cases. When we have endeavored to cheer such people, I fear we may have been filming over a wound which needs a sharp knife rather than a soft bandage—a keen lancet rather than a healing liniment.

We shall try at this time to show certain uneasy souls why they do not obtain peace and what they must be brought to by the Holy Spirit before they can rightly claim that they are saved. Though our words may be somewhat caustic, they will be uttered in loving faithfulness and may the Lord our God make them effectual to the ending of the inner strife and the establishment of settled peace. I fear that many who profess to be Christians are in a very questionable condition—they have no joy of their faith and no success in their prayers. Whether they are Christians or not is a moot point and the practical James does not waste time in discussing the

doubtful question, but speaks to them from both sides of their apparent condition.

In his previous chapters he calls them, “my brethren,” and even, “my beloved brethren.” He draws no line of demarcation when he, afterwards, addresses them as, “sinners,” whose hands must be cleansed and, as, “double-minded” persons, whose hearts must be purified. They were both of these—they were professedly Brothers and Sisters, but they were at heart unchaste to Christ—they indulged in grievous sins of contention and malice—and their hearts were divided between the love of sin and the hope of salvation. We will not, therefore, raise personal questions, or try to discriminate where certainty is hard to reach, but we will speak to suspicious characters without determining whether they are truly Believers or not.

If such persons claim to be called Brothers and Sisters, we will address them as such, but it will be in a sentence like this, “My Brothers and Sisters, such things ought not to be.” On the other hand, we will use no condemnatory title, but leave the question between God and each man’s own conscience. We will go to the root of the matter and set forth the reason for the lack of peace and salvation of which some complain. May the sacred Spirit help us to point out the fatal failure which keeps the soul from rest. If any man is not sure that he is in Christ, he ought not to be easy one moment more until he is so.

Dear Friend, without the fullest confidence as to your saved condition, you have no right to be at ease and I pray you may never be so! This is a matter too important to be left undecided. Instantly should every man of prudence make assurance doubly sure and bind all things fast that he may find them fast for eternity—for *eternity* I say—for thus says the Lord. Never risk your souls, for your souls are yourselves, your *real* selves and nothing can make up for their loss. If you lose your souls, it will be no recompense to have gained the whole world! Be careful, then! Leave nothing insecure. Carefully measure and weigh every important step. Consider and examine, lest being so near to the kingdom, any of you should seem to come short of it.

To help you to a settled peace, let me, first of all, urge upon you to obey the comprehensive command of our text—“Submit yourselves therefore to God.” And then, secondly, let me further press upon you to practice the other precepts which follow, such as, “Resist the devil.” “Draw near to God.” “Cleanse your hands.” “Purify your hearts.” “Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep.” And, “Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord.”

I. First listen to THE COMPREHENSIVE COMMAND—“Submit yourselves therefore to God.” According to the connection, the lighting spirit within many men shows that they have not submitted themselves to God—lusting, envy, strife, contention, jealousy, anger—all these things declare that the heart is not submissive but remains violently self-willed and rebellious. Those who are still wrathful, proud, contentious and selfish are evidently unsubdued. There are some men to whom the very idea

of submission is distasteful—they will be subjective to no one, but wish to be their own gods and a law unto themselves. “Submit” is a galling word to them. They say in their hearts, “Who is the Lord that I should obey His voice?”

They are willing, enough, to accept His favors, willing enough, after their fashion, to say, “Thank God,” but as to *submission*, they will have none of it—it suits not their high mightiness! They strive for the mastery. They push for the front place, aiming to advance their own interests and make the great *I* to be lord above all. The Apostle quietly indicates in the words of our text that many Christian professors need to submit, for at present their unhumiliated nature leads them to lusting and striving—and effectually prevents their asking so as to receive at the Lord’s hands. A lack of submission is no new or rare fault in mankind. Ever since the Fall it has been the root of all sin. When the heart submits to God in sincerity, the work of Grace is begun. And when it submits perfectly, the work is complete. But for this, Divine Grace must display its power, for the heart is obstinate and rebellious.

From the moment when our mother Eve stretched out her hand to pluck the forbidden fruit and her husband joined her in setting up the human will against the Divine, the sons of men have universally been guilty of a lack of conformity to the will of God. They choose their own way and will not submit their wills. They think their own thoughts and will not submit their understanding. They love earthly things and will not submit their affections. Man wants to be his own law and his own master. This is abominable, since we are not our own makers, for, “it is He that has made us and not we ourselves.”

The Lord should have supremacy over us, for our existence depends on His will. I have heard much of the rights of man, but it were well also to consider the rights of *God*, which are the first, highest, surest and most solemn rights in the universe and lie at the base of all other rights! The Lord has an absolute right to the beings whom He has fashioned and it is shameful that the great mass of men seem never even to remember that He exists, much less to ask themselves what is due to Him. Alas, great God, how are You a stranger even in the world which You have, Yourself, made! Your creatures, who could not see if You had not given them eyes, look everywhere except to You. Creatures who could not think if You had not given them minds, think of all things except You! And beings who could not live if You did not keep them in being, forget You utterly, or, if they remember Your existence and see Your power, are foolhardy enough to become Your foes!

The hemlock of sin grows in the furrows of opposition to God. When the Lord is pleased to turn the hearts of opposers to the obedience of His Truth, it is an evident token of salvation. In fact, it is the dawn of salvation itself! To submit to God is to find rest! The rule of God is so beneficial that He ought readily to be obeyed. He never commands us to do that which, in the long run, can be injurious to us, nor does He forbid us any-

thing which can be to our real advantage. Our God is so kind, so wise, so full of loving forethought, that it is always be to our best interest to follow His lead. Even if we could be left to choose our own way and were under no bonds of duty, it would be wise and prudent to choose the way of the Lord, for it is the path of pleasantness and safety.

Beloved, the Lord is far too great to have any need to deal unjustly, or unkindly with His creatures. Indeed, He is so great that He cannot desire any personal advantage from His government, but He condescends to govern us because without His rule and guidance we would be utterly undone. It is for our good that like a father in a family He commands us this or forbids us the other. It is wanton cruelty to ourselves when we break away from the liberty with which Jesus makes us free, to place ourselves under the tyranny of selfishness and the baser passions of the mind. It is madness to forsake the honorable service of the great King to become the slave of Satan. O that men would submit themselves unto God and be willing to be blessed!

All resistance against God is, from the necessity of the case, be futile. Common sense teaches that rebellion against Omnipotence is both insanity and blasphemy. The Lord's purpose must stand and His pleasure must be done! His power will assuredly crush all opposition and it is idle to raise it. Why, then, should a man contend against his Master? Wisdom as well as righteousness call upon him to submit to God. And then let it always be known that submission to God is absolutely necessary to salvation. A man is not saved until he bows before the supreme majesty of God. He may say, "I believe in Jesus," but if he goes on to follow out his own desires and to gratify his own passions, he is a mere *pretender*, a wolf in sheep's clothing.

Dead faith will save no man! It is not even as good as the faith of devils, for they "believe and tremble," and these men believe in a fashion which makes them brazen in their iniquity. No, salvation means being saved from the domination of self and sin! Salvation means being made to long after likeness to God, being helped by Divine Grace to reach to that likeness and living after the mind and will of the Most High. Submission to God is the salvation which we preach, not a mere deliverance from eternal burning, but deliverance from present rebellion, deliverance from the sin which is the fuel of those unquenchable flames. There must be conformity to the eternal Laws of the universe and according to these God must be first and man must bow to Him—nothing can be right till this is done. Submit is a command which in every case must be obeyed—or no peace or salvation will be found.

Now, it is generally, in this matter of submission, that the stumbling block lies in the way of souls when seeking peace with God. It keeps them unsaved and, as I have already said, necessarily so, because a man who is not submissive to God is not saved. He is not saved from rebellion. He is not saved from pride. He is still evidently an unsaved man, no matter what he may think of himself. Perhaps by a few personal remarks I may

hit upon the reason why certain of my hearers cannot get the peace which the Gospel so freely sets before them. There is a lack of submission in some point or other. In the saved man there is and must be a full and unconditional submission to the Law of God. He must consent unto the Law that it is good.

If your mind has up to now quibbled against the Law, you must end the fight, for it is impossible that you should be right while you quarrel with the Law of Righteousness! If you set yourself up to be a judge of the Law, you judge the Lawgiver Himself, and what is this but the blackest presumption? Traced to its real meaning, the thought of judging the Law is *treason* and would dethrone God and reign in His place! How sad to see a sinful mortal criticizing the perfect Law of his Maker! Dare you do this? If you say in your heart, "He is too strict in marking sin and too severe in punishing it," what is this but condemning your Judge? If you say, "He calls me to account for idle words and even for sins of ignorance and this is hard," what is this but to call your Lord unjust?

Should the Law be amended to suit *your* desires? Should its requirements be accommodated to ease *your* indolence? If you ask for this you are not saved, for a saved person delights in the Law of God after the inward man. He says of it, "the Law is holy," though he weeps as he adds, "but I am carnal, sold under sin." He honors the Law as he bows before it and confesses his shortcomings. Yes, and before a man can have peace with God he must submit himself to the sentence of the Law. Though that Law in its severity searches the thoughts and tries the heart, arraigns us before the bar of God and pronounces sentence upon us, we must acknowledge it to be just!

Grace working in the heart brings the penitent to plead guilty to the sin and to admit that the penalty is deserved. In my own case I unreservedly acknowledge that when the Law in my conscience condemned me to Hell, I dared not lift a finger nor even think a thought by way of disputing the sentence. The conscience is not Divinely quickened, nor the soul renewed, nor the man saved, unless he cries, "I acknowledge my transgressions and my sin is always before me. Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight, that You might be justified when You speak and be clear when You judge."

You must submit yourselves to the righteousness and severity of God or He will resist you as He does all the proud. There can be no pardon for a man unless he will honor the Law by hearty submission. If your plea is, "not guilty," you will be committed for trial according to *justice*—and then you cannot be forgiven by *mercy*! You are in a hopeless position! God Himself cannot meet you upon that ground, for He cannot admit that the Law is unrighteous and its penalty too severe. The Lord cannot be at peace with you while you defy His Law! He declares that you are guilty and you dispute this declaration, therefore between you and Himself there is a quarrel which never can be ended till you admit your error and beg for pardon.

He can deal with you in mercy when you once stand where mercy can meet with you, namely, in the sinner's place. But if you say "I am not guilty," and begin to vindicate or excuse yourself, you are on a ground which the Lord cannot recognize. If you are professedly righteous, how can the Lord deal with you except in justice? And if He deals with you in justice He will readily enough summon His witnesses and prove you guilty and condemn you to Hell. Submit, then, unto God, and say, "Guilty, Lord. I throw down the weapons of my rebellion and acknowledge that I stand condemned before You. And if I am saved at all it must be by Your free forgiveness, by Your unmerited mercy, by Your boundless love."

A man must next submit himself to the plan of salvation by Grace alone. God meets the sinner on the footing of Grace. "I cannot exonerate you," He seems to say, "but I can forgive you. I cannot tolerate your denial of guilt, but if you confess your sin, I am faithful and just to forgive you your sin and to save you from all unrighteousness." Now, are you willing, my dear Hearer—are you sure that you are willing to be saved by Grace, alone, and to owe your deliverance from sin and its punishment entirely to the free favor of God? Will you yield to that? I trust you will.

But there are some who will not, for they go about to establish their own righteousness and do not submit themselves to the righteousness of God. They think that so much Chapel-going, Church-going, sermon-hearing, Prayer Meeting-attending, Bible reading and so on, will certainly work up something like a claim upon God! O, Sirs, have done with claims! If you come with anything like a claim, the Lord will not touch the case at all, for you have no claim and the pretense of one would be an insult to God! If you fancy you have demands upon God, go into the court of Justice and plead them, but the sentence is certain to be against you, for by the deeds of the Law no flesh can be justified.

Try the other way! Come to God with no claim and appeal to His pity, saying, "Lord, I cry for mercy. Gladly will I accept Your free Grace if You will but give it to me." You will be accepted on that footing, for the Lord is gracious and casts out none who come to Him confessing their sins. You must also submit yourselves to God's way of saving you through an atoning Sacrifice and by means of your personal faith in that Sacrifice. You must receive His Son as Divine and you must believe in that atoning blood which was shed for many for the remission of sins. Surely there should be no difficulty about surrendering the mind to this! Salvation by the great Mediator is such a delightful way of salvation, so just to God, so safe to man, that we ought to clap our hands for very joy to think that such a royal road to Heaven is opened for us!

What do you say, dear Hearers? Does the Holy Spirit incline you to trust in the blood of Jesus? And then there must be a full submission to God in the matter of giving up every sin. Numbers of persons pray for mercy, but they continue in their sins. Such men cannot be saved because salvation is salvation *from* sin—not *in* sin. How can we be saved from sin if we are its slaves? If you come to God and cry, "Lord, deliver me

and have mercy upon me,” and yet you practice private drinking and tipple yourselves into semi-drunkenness, how can you be saved? If you keep on cheating in business, or telling lies, or indulge a malicious or angry temper in the family, or are proud and unkind, selfish and miserly, how can you be saved?

I warn you, Friends, that faith itself cannot save you while these things are so, for if your faith were a saving faith it would rescue you from these evils! This, indeed, is salvation, namely, deliverance from the power and habit of sin! Many prayers are semi-hypocritical—there is a kind of sincerity about them, but there is no whole-hearted desire after holiness and, therefore, they will never gain a comfortable answer from God. O Seeker, are you willing to give up every sin? Come, drunkard, you pray to be forgiven, but are you willing to leave the intoxicating cup once and for all? You, my Friend, ask to be pardoned—it is well, but are you, at the same time, desirous to cease from your transgressions?

Yes or no? Are you anxious to search out every false way and abandon it as soon as it is discovered? Do you wish to have a holy, truthful, godly tongue? Do you long to be saved from every lust and secret vice? If so, believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, you are already saved! Your sigh to be delivered from evil is the commencement of the work of sanctification! But if you say, “I would be saved from every wrong way except my one indulgence, my one secret iniquity,” then you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bonds of iniquity! Your prayers will come back to your bosom unanswered and your pretended faith in Christ will condemn you! Your fancied faith cannot save you, seeing you love your sin.

A certain man has been accustomed to eat of a certain dish which is bad for his health and when he calls in a physician, their talk is after this fashion—“If you trust me,” says the doctor, “I can cure you.” “Yes,” replies the patient, “I do trust you heartily.” The doctor proceeds, “That dainty of yours must be given up, for it is the cause of your disease and so long as you eat it, you must suffer the consequence.” “Well, doctor,” he says, “I trust you, but I cannot give up my favorite food.” Is it not apparent to everybody that he does *not* trust the physician at all? Even so, when a man declares, “I trust in Christ to save me from sin,” and then continues in his wickedness, he mocks the Good Physician and is in danger of sudden destruction! Either you must cast sin out of your heart or it will keep you out of Heaven!

This point must be insisted on—receiving Christ is impossible without, at the same time, renouncing sin! If we would be saved there must be submission to the Lord as to all His teachings. A very necessary point in this age, for a multitude of persons who appear to be religious, judge the Scriptures instead of allowing the Scriptures to judge them. Hear, O you wise men, “Except you be converted and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of Heaven.” Submission to the Infallible authority of the Inspired Word is absolutely required of every disciple of Jesus, but this age delights in the opposite spirit!

Even some of those who call themselves ministers of the Gospel persistently indulge a spirit which is precisely the reverse of the childlike faith which saves the soul. They industriously endeavor to excite rebellion against the teachings of Christ and cry it up under the name of, "honest doubt." They do not wish men to believe, but to *think*—and their Gospel, practically, is—"Doubt, and do not be baptized, and you shall be saved." Shame on them! Our Gospel is, "He that believes and is baptized, shall be saved!" And we are content to teach what Jesus Christ, our Lord, told His disciples to preach to all nations!

If I will never yield my reason. If I will never believe what I cannot understand. If I will carry an open knife about with me to cut and hack at texts of Scripture. If I will not sit at Jesus' feet with Mary, but want Him to sit at *my* feet that I may tell Him what His religion ought to be and what He ought to have said, how can I be saved? If, after all, we are *personally* infallible and are to spend all our days in selecting our opinions, how can we know Christ? If instead of yielding my judgment to the plain teachings of my Lord, I revise His doctrines, how can I be saved? If I have not submitted my intellect to God, what peace can there be? Mark this well, you wise young men who know so much more than your fathers and are too intellectual to reverence your fathers' God!

And, now, I must ask another question of you who desire peace and cannot find it. Have you submitted yourselves to the Providential arrangements of God? I know persons who often sit in this House of Prayer who have a quarrel with God. He took away a beloved object and they not only thought Him unkind and cruel at the time, but they *still* think so! Like a child in a fit of the sulks, they cast an evil eye upon the great Father! They are not at peace and never will be till they have acknowledged the Lord's supremacy and ceased from their rebellious thoughts. If they were in a right state of heart they would thank the Lord for their sharp trials and consent to His will as being assuredly right.

I fear that unsubmission on this point affects a great number of persons. They cannot succeed in business and, therefore, they are out of temper with God. He knows very well that they are not fit to be made rich and could not be trusted with a large business and, therefore, He does not grant their suicidal desires. Some men would never win the race of life if they had an ounce of gold to carry! The only hope for their running at all lies in keeping them unencumbered. We know, also, thoughtful young men who cannot pursue their studies because of failing health. They want to be famous, but they are not strong enough to continue their work for the examination and so they are vexed with the Lord. Or, it may be they have less talent than ambition and they rebel because their Maker has not given them intellects as capacious as that of Solomon. Let them be satisfied to use the talent they have and cease from contending with their Creator!

Many men have a sort of private resentment with Providence and sit down like Jonah under their withered gourd and mutter, "We do well to be

angry even unto death.” Now, if such is the case with any before me, I would say to them—leave off quarrelling with your God! What can be the use of it? The very best and wisest thing for you is to make friends with Him and let *His* will be *your* will. After all, He deals well with you, if you would but see it. Depend upon it, there is something to be made out of the position you occupy—gain will come to you out of all those losses—profit will arise even from those sad bereavements if you will stand still and see the salvation of God. Acquaint yourselves with God and be at peace, for thereby good shall come unto you—for unless you do this you may say, “I believe,” but you have no faith in God!

How can a man believe in God when he charges God with treating him wrongly? Faith begets resignation and submission—where there is strife and enmity—unbelief is still supreme. Until you submit yourselves to God it cannot be well with your souls, for He resists the proud but gives Grace to the humble. This is the long and the short of it—you must, as a guilty sinner, cast yourself at God’s feet and say, “Have mercy upon me, O Lord, and have mercy upon me in Your own way. I dictate not to You, but I implore Your Grace! I humbly beg forgiveness. Be pleased to pity me. I yield up myself to You, asking You to make me holy. I do from my very heart give up the love of sin. I fear I shall sin, help me to loathe myself when I do so! Make me what You will have me to be and then deal as You will with me. I make no terms nor conditions. Mine is an unconditional surrender. Only for Your mercy’s sake renew me. Make me Your child and save me. As You bid me trust Your Son, I trust Him. Lord, I believe! Help you my unbelief.”

You will have peace when your heart is brought to this point. At present your wound does not heal because it needs washing, for the grit of *pride* has fallen into it and is causing a wretched irritation. When pride is gone and you are fully submissive, then shall the wound heal and your broken bones shall rejoice! I am not asking you to submit to a priest! I am not asking you to submit to a mere man! But I speak very earnestly when I say, “Submit yourselves to *God*”—it is natural, it is right—it is good in itself and filled with the highest good to you.

Submission is essential to salvation, therefore bow before the Lord at once! May the Lord bend that stubborn will and conquer that wayward heart. Yield yourselves to God and pray to be delivered from future rebellion. If you have submitted, do so yet more completely, for so shall you be known to be Christians when you submit yourselves to God. If you will not submit, your faith is a lie, your hope is a delusion, your prayer is an insult, your peace is presumption and your end will be despair! Rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. “But God shall wound the head of His enemies and the hairy scalp of such an one as goes on still in his trespasses.”

II. But now, secondly, having thus spoken upon the great duty of submission, let us consider the other and FOLLOWING PRECEPTS. I think I am not suspicious without reason when I express a fear that the preach-

ing which has lately been very common and, in some respects very useful, of, “only believe and you shall be saved,” has sometimes been altogether mistaken by those who have heard it. Cases occur in which young persons go on living light, frivolous, giddy, and even wicked lives—and yet they claim that they believe in Jesus Christ. When you come to examine them a little, you find that their belief in Christ means that they believe that He has saved them, although everybody who knows their character can clearly see that they are not saved at all!

Now, what is their faith but the belief of a lie? They are living just as they did live and, therefore, it is clear that they are not saved from their former foolish conversation, nor from their bad tempers, nor from their old sins. And yet they try to persuade themselves that they are saved! Now, true faith never believes lies! Presumption lives upon lies, but faith will only feed on the Truth of God! My faith does not teach me to believe I am saved when straight before my very eyes I have the evidence that I am *not* saved, since I am living in the very sin I pretend to be saved from! Though we would not, for a moment, cast a doubt upon the doctrine of Justification by Faith and Free Salvation, we must also preach more and more that parallel Truth of God—“You must be born again.”

We must bring to the front the grand old word which has been thrown into the background by some evangelists, namely, “Repent.” Repentance is as essential to salvation as faith. Indeed, there is no faith without repentance except the faith which needs to be repented of. A dry-eyed faith will never see the kingdom of God! A holy loathing for sin always attends upon a childlike faith in the Sin-Bearer. Where the root Grace of faith is found, other Graces will grow from it. Now notice how the Spirit of God, after having bidden us submit, goes on to show what else is to be done. He calls for a brave resistance of the devil. “Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”

The business of salvation is not all *passive*—the soul must be awakened to active warfare! I am to fall into the arms of Christ, that He may save me—I must trust Him completely. And when I depend upon Him I receive life—and the very first effort of that life is to strike with all its might the adversary of Christ and of my own soul. I am not only to contend with sin, but with the spirit which fomented and suggests sin! I am to resist the secret spirit of evil as well as its outward acts.

“But oh,” says one, “I cannot give up an inveterate habit.” Sir, you must give it up! You must resist the devil or perish. “But I have been so long in it,” cries the man. Yes, but if you truly trust Christ, your first effort will be to fight against the evil habit. And if it is not merely a habit, nor an impulse, but if your danger lies in the *existence* of a cunning spirit who is armed at all points and both strong and subtle, yet you must *not* yield, but resolve to resist to the death, cheered by the gracious promise that he will flee from you! You shall, in the name of Jesus overcome temptation, master evil habits and escape from bondage! Only strike for freedom and disdain the chain of sin. If you are to have peace with God there must be

war with Satan! You cannot rest in your spirit and know the peace which faith gives unless you wage war to the knife against every evil and against the patron and Prince of Evil, even Satan. Are you ready for this? You cannot have peace unless you are!

Next the Apostle writes, "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you." He who sincerely believes in Christ will be much in prayer. Yet there are some who say, "We want to be saved," but they neglect prayer! They cannot make out how it is that they have no enjoyment of religion. But why need they be puzzled? Ask your neglected closet! Ask your own heart how you can be happy and prosperous and blessed in Divine things if you do not pray! Remember that the mere *saying* of prayers is *not* praying. The essence of prayer lies in the *heart* drawing near to God—and it can do that without words. Prayer is the feeling that God is present and the desire of the soul to come near to Him so as to know His influence, to know His love, to feel His power and to be conformed to His will.

This kind of praying can be continued by the power of God's Holy Spirit all day long. We must know something of this. "Behold he prays" is one of the first marks of a saved soul and if you think that by some momentary act of faith which you suppose you exercised you are therefore saved—while your heart remains at a distance from God, prayerless and careless—you are fatally deceived! Such is not the teaching of Scripture and there is no guarantee for it in the promises of God. If prayer is utterly neglected, the soul is dead!

The next precept is, "Cleanse your hands, you sinners." What? Does the Word of God tell sinners to cleanse their hands and purify their hearts? Yes, it does. Some Brother whispers, "Ah, that is Arminianism." Who are you that reply against God's Word? If such teaching is in this Inspired Book, how *dare* we question it? It comes with a, "thus says the Lord"—"Cleanse your hands, you sinners." When a man comes to God and says, "I am willing and anxious to be saved and I trust Christ to save me," and yet he keeps his dirty black hands exercised in filthy actions doing what he knows is wrong, does he expect God to hear him? Do I need spend even so many as a half-dozen words to show that this man does not believe and is not really honest before the Most High? "Cleanse your hands, you sinners."

Can you ask God to be at peace with you while your hands grasp your sins with loving embrace and are full of bribes, or are foul with lusts, or are smiting with the fist of anger and wrath? If you do the devil's work with your hands, do not expect the Lord to fill them with His blessings! It cannot be! You must break off your sins by righteousness and, as Paul shook off the viper from His hand into the fire, so must you. By the power of faith, if it is a *real* faith, you will be able to purge your outward life. Why, when men talk about being spiritual and are not even decently *moral*, it makes us sick to hear them! How dare they talk about being Christians when they do not live as well as Muslims or heathens? Oh you dogs, howling out your shame, what portion have you among the children

so long as you bite and devour and love your filthiness? It is idle to talk about salvation while sin is hugged to the heart with both hands. Away with such hypocrisy!

Then it is added, "Purify your hearts, you double-minded." Can they do this? Assuredly not by *themselves*, but still, in order to have peace with God there must be so much purification of the heart that it shall no longer be double-minded. He who would have salvation must seek it with all his heart—must so seek it that he is resolved to give up anything and to endure anything so that he may but be rescued from sin. "Purify your hearts, you double-minded." Get rid of that leering eye of yours towards uncleanness and that cross eye which squints towards worldly gain—for till your whole heart cries after the Most High, He will not hear you!

When you can say with David, "My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God," you shall find the Lord! When you cease trying to serve two masters and submit yourselves unto God, He will bless you, but not till then! I believe that this touches the center of the mischief in many of those hearts which fail to reach peace—they have not given up sin—they are not whole-hearted after salvation. Then the Lord bids us "be afflicted, and mourn, and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness."

I grieve to say that I have met with persons who say, "I cannot find peace, I cannot get salvation," and talk very prettily in that way. But yet, outside the door they are giggling one with another, as if it were matter of amusement. The Sabbath is spent in vain, idle, frivolous conversation—seriousness they do not seem even to have *felt*. The whole matter appears to be a mere sport. Some converts seem to jump into religion as people do into a bath—they jump out, again, about as fast. They never weigh the matter. They have no thought, no sorrow for sin, no humiliation before God. Stop that laughter if you are an unsaved soul—for decency's sake, stop that laughter!

For you to laugh while in danger of being lost sounds to me as ghastly and as grim as if the fiends of Hell were to set up a theater and perform a comedy in the Pit. What right have you with laughter while sin is unforgiven, while God is angry with you? No, go to Him in fitter form and fashion or He will refuse your prayers. Be serious! Begin to think of death, judgment, the wrath to come. These are not trifles, Friends, nor things to make sport about. Neither is true religion a thing that is to be attended to as easily as when one snaps his finger and says, "Heigh presto! Quick. It's done!" By no means! If you are saved, your mind is solemnly impressed by eternal realities and you are serious about matters of life and death. The very thought of sin pains you—and since you meet with it in your daily life, you have cause for daily humbling and are afflicted because of it. Many, I fear, fail to get peace because it is not a solemn matter at all for them. They trifle with it as if it were a game for boys and girls to play and not for the heart and spirit to enter upon with deep concern.

Then the Lord sums up His precepts by saying, “Humble yourselves in the sight of God.” With that I close. There must be a deep and lowly prostration of the spirit before God. If you happen to have a boy who shows a high rebellious spirit against you and you have chastened him for it, but yet he continues in his rebellion, you tell him that there must be a humbling of himself before you can forgive him. If he is a wise child and wishes to escape your anger, he makes a dutiful confession, acknowledges that he was wrong and appeals to your love—and you freely pardon him. But in many who pretend to come to God there is no humbling. They do not admit that they ever did anything particularly wrong and they do not *care* if they did! Still, they hear there is such a thing as believing in Jesus and they profess to believe, not because there is any need for it, as they think, but for fashion’s sake.

Ah, Friends, Jesus Christ did not come to heal the whole, but the sick! Neither did He die to bind up those who are not broken, nor to make alive those who were never killed. There must be in you—and may God give it to you—a brokenness of spirit! A broken and a contrite heart He will not despise! If your heart has never been broken, how can He bind it up? If it were never wounded, how can He heal it? These are weighty matters and I speak them weightily lest anyone among you should be deceived. God help you to cry, “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there is any wicked way in me and lead me in the way everlasting.”

This is the way of salvation—that you believe in Jesus Christ whom God has sent! But remember that He saves us FROM our sins, not IN our sins! Faith in Jesus Christ saves and will save all who have it—but it is by purging out sin. It assures us that we are pardoned and thus it makes us love the Christ by whom we are forgiven. This love leads us to abhor ourselves for our sins and we endeavor to purify ourselves from them by His Spirit. Faith without works is dead, being alone, and though a man is justified by faith and not by works—and by faith *alone*—not even in *part* by his works!

Yet the faith which saves is a faith which *produces good works* and leads into the way of holiness. He who does not seek after righteousness and true holiness, let him pretend what he may, he is dead while he lives! The Lord have mercy upon you, for Christ’s sake. Amen.

Adapted from *The C.H. Spurgeon Collection*, Ages Software, 1.800.297.4307.

THE DOUBLE DRAWING NEAR NO. 2795

A SERMON
INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, SEPTEMBER 7, 1902.

DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,
ON LORD'S-DAY EVENING, SEPTEMBER 22, 1878.

*“Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you.”
James 4:8.*

As soon as man had disobeyed God, he ran away from Him. Our first parents hid themselves among the trees of the Garden when they heard the voice of the Lord God calling them. They did not come to Him at once, confess the wrong which they had committed and ask for mercy. The natural effect of their sin was to harden their hearts and not to lead them penitently to the great Father—and it led them impertinently to run away from Him. So, when the Lord came walking in the Garden, in the cool of the day, Adam did not seek Him, to plead for mercy from Him, but the first words had to come from God—“the Lord God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where are you?” It was God’s voice speaking in mercy to His wandering child.

Our blessed Savior has set forth the result of sin in His parable of the lost sheep which has strayed from the fold and which, if left to itself, continues to go further and yet further away. We have, all of us, gone astray, as Dr. Watts says—

*“Each wandering in a different way,
But all the downward road.”*

Our Lord Jesus has set forth this same Truth in that other parable in which He describes the prodigal son as gathering all together and taking his journey into a far country, away from his father. He could not live as he wished in his father’s house. He could not, there, waste his substance with riotous living. His father’s eyes would have been a check upon him at home, so, the only way for him to obtain that foolish and ruinous liberty for which he sought was to get as far off as he could from his father. Alas, this is the condition of every unregenerate sinner—he has gone away from God and he tries continually to get further and further away from God. Why do men neglect to keep holy the Sabbath, unless it is that they do not want to think of God? Why do they put religious books on one side? Why do they leave their Bibles unread but because God’s name, God’s Person, God’s Law, God’s Gospel—all about God—has become distasteful to them? Like the fool of whom David tells us, they say in their hearts, “No God!” They do not want Him and if there could be an official announcement made that there is no God, they would welcome it! God is not in all their thoughts, or if He is there at all, it is as an ene-

my, or as One for whom they have no care, One whom they are not willing to have to reign over them. O heart of man, you have, indeed, gone astray from your God when the distance at which you are from Him is loved by you and you even wish, in your unkindness and your folly, to make that distance greater! If you wish to return, you are already half-way back, but, alas, you do not wish to return! That thought comes not to you and, if you could, you would take the wings of the morning and fly to the uttermost parts of the earth in the hope that there you could be hidden from the eyes and the Presence of God!

Knowing this to be true, I am glad to be able to give the message of my text to those who are far off from God because the only cure for such sinful wandering is for the sinner to come back to God. While the prodigal was in the far country, he could not be set right. The first step towards getting back into his right position was his resolve, "I will arise and go to my father." If he could have filled his belly with husks or anything else—if he could have had his rags exchanged for robes—if he could have been made a nobleman in that far-off land, it would have been a mischief rather than a benefit to him, for the radical cure, in his case, must lie in his saying, "Father, I have sinned," and in receiving his father's kiss of forgiveness and all the tokens of restoration to his father's favor. It must be the same with any of you who are far off from God—if you would be right with Him, you must come back to Him.

Poor creatures, how can you be right till you love your Creator? Poor sheep, how can you be right till you are back under the care of the Good Shepherd? O poor immortal, how can you hope for an eternity of blessedness till the Immortal God is reconciled to you and you are reconciled to Him? A creature remaining at enmity against God must expect to dwell forever with the devils in Hell! Where can it dwell but where other rebels are confined in chains? You must come back to your God, Man, if you would have eternal bliss, for if you could have one of the harps of Heaven, it would yield no music to you till you had yielded yourself into submission to the God of Heaven! If you would have the street of gold, it would not enrich you until you had the God of Heaven to be your Friend! So I say again that the only remedy for sin—the only radical efficient cure for the great evil of iniquity—is for the sinner to come back to God! I want to impress this one point upon you and I pray that God, the Holy Spirit, will work effectually upon some who are here and draw them back to God while, in His name, I deliver this gracious message to them, "Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you."

First, I shall ask you to *consider this message with hope*. When we have done that, we shall, secondly, *learn how to put it into practice*. And then, thirdly, we shall *think of how many ways it will help us if we do draw near to God*.

I. First, then, let us CONSIDER THIS MESSAGE WITH HOPE—"Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you."

We may consider it with hope, because, first, *here is a sincere call to us to come back to God*. When we preach from such a text as this, "Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you," somebody is sure to say, "But is not that the wrong order? Is it not a fact that God draws near to

us and *then* we draw near to Him?" Yes, that is the right order and our text is in the right order, too, because there is understood here something which is manifest to every careful reader and which shows that the Grace of God is implied at the back of it all. The text itself is a call from God and no sinner ever comes back to the Lord until the Lord calls him back. But in this text He does call him—by the mouth of the Apostle, He says, "Draw near to God" and He bids us repeat this message in His name. To those who are the furthest off and who have wandered the greatest distance from Him, God says, "Draw near to Me." If you had offended some friend and wished to make up, you would feel that it was an easy matter if your friend, himself, invited you to come—if he took the initiative and asked you to come to him. Then, I think, you would feel great gratitude to him and say, "He has taken the first step towards our reconciliation. Now I will willingly and cheerfully take the second." It is thus that the Lord sends you this message to induce you to return to Him, "Draw near to God."

"But may I come to Him?" someone asks. May you do what He bids you do? Of course you may! The text is not merely an invitation, it is a *command!* Obey it, I beseech you! You must have liberty to obey when God commands. You need not entertain any fear that you will be an intruder when, in the exercise of His gracious Sovereignty, He says to you, "Come, come, come!" Surely, among those here who are still unconverted, there must be some who will say to Him, "O Lord, You have said to us, Seek you My face, and our heart says to you, 'Your face, Lord, will we seek.'"

I have next to remind you that in addition to a sincere call from God, *there is also an open road to Him.* God says to you, "Draw near to Me," but He would not bid you come to Him if there were no road by which you could come. Once there was a great gulf fixed between you and God. Your sin had dug a fathomless gulf which you could never have bridged—but Jesus bridged the awful chasm by throwing His Cross across it and now there is a plain and easy way by which the sinner may come back to God. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and has committed unto us the word of reconciliation."

When the Babe was born at Bethlehem, a multitude of the heavenly host praised God and said, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." And when that Babe, after a life of perfect obedience to God's Law, offered up Himself on Calvary's Cross, He said, "It is finished"—and then every mountain was laid low and every valley was filled up that there might be a magnificent causeway over which fallen and far-off sinners might draw near to God! The making of that way cost the Savior His life, but He did make it. His heart bled out its life that He might make plain that way of expiation by which, alone, a sinner can come near to God. The road is made and there is now nothing in the way—no Divine anger, no righteous wrath, no avenging Law—to prevent your coming, O you who desire to return to your God! Christ has made the way and cleared it and "no lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon, it shall not be found there; but the redeemed

shall walk there.” So, draw near, for the road is open! Draw near, “without money, and without price,” for the road is free to all who believe in Jesus! Christ has completed it. He has not merely made it half way, but He has finished it all the way and He, Himself, has said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” Oh, then, with what force does the command come, “Draw near to God,” when there is an open road by which you may come to Him!

Consider the invitation of the text with great hopefulness, next, *because there is an encouraging promise appended to it*. You fear that if you were to try to get to God, you could not—and that if you did reach Him, He is so pure and holy that He must spurn you because of your impurity—and drive you from His Presence. But read the whole of the text—“Draw near to God, *and He will draw near to you.*” There is nothing in it about casting out, or spurning, or rejecting! The promise is emphatic, “He will draw near to you.” I have already referred to the parable of the prodigal son. I will refer to it again by reminding you that, “when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.” It is, after all, but little of the way that the sinner has to go in returning to his God. The greater part—no, I might say, all the way—God comes to the sinner who desires to return to Him! Only turn your face God-ward and your God is at once with you!

“Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you.” That is the Inspired declaration! Do you believe it? Oh, I think if you do, you will at once draw near to Him! Satan will perhaps whisper, “He does not mean *you.*” But, indeed, He means any soul that comes to Him, for His promise is, “Him that comes to Me I will in no wise cast out.” And the “*him that comes*” means any sinner, all the world over, who trusts in Jesus! Yes, you shall be received graciously and loved freely if you will but come back to your God through Jesus Christ His dear Son. “Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you.” Our text ought to be like a hand to beckon you and to draw you back to your God—and you ought to run to Him as swiftly as the doves fly to their windows! You have seen the pigeons hastening home to their dove-cotes as if anxious to reach their nests—may the gracious Spirit thus move you to flee away to your resting place in the loving heart of your Lord!

There is one more thing that I want to say before I leave this first point in which I am urging you to a hopeful consideration of the text, and that is, draw near to God, O dear trembling ones, *because He will help you to come to Him*. Before our Lord Jesus Christ went up on high, He promised that the Holy Spirit would be given to His Church. And He had not long sat upon His Throne before the Spirit descended—and that Spirit has never gone away, but He is still here to help our infirmities, to guide us in prayer, to convince us of sin, to reveal Christ to us, to create faith in us and to strengthen that faith while it is yet weak! If you cannot come to God by yourself, here is One for you to lean upon, who will help you to come! If you feel as if you could not move a foot, here is a sweet prayer for you to present to God, “Draw me, we will run after You,” and He will draw you! I hope He is drawing some of you now. Do you feel as if you wish you could come to Him? I think that wish is a proof of His gentle

drawing. Are you saying to yourself, "I will think this matter over. I will be careless no longer"? He is, as it were, putting out His finger to guide you, to help you, as a nurse does to a little child whose tottering footsteps can scarcely avoid a fall! Only be you willing to be helped and He will help you! Yield yourself up to Him and He will bless you. Be like the mariners who spread the ship's sails, after which they can do no more—but when the sails are spread, the wind fills them and the vessel is driven onward to its desired haven. Be you like the needle of the mariner's compass and the Spirit of God will be like the magnet to attract you. Be you willing to be cleansed from all defilement and He will say to you, "Be you clean," and so you shall be, for, where the will has yielded itself to Him, the citadel of the town of Mansoul is won and Prince Immanuel takes the entire possession and control of it!

Listen to me, for a moment or two, while I put together these things of which I have been speaking. God says, "Draw near." There is His call—will you disobey it? It is implied, in that call, that He has made a way for you to come to Him—will you not avail yourself of it? He has added to His call an encouraging promise that you shall be welcomed if you come to Him—will you suffer that promise to be made known to you, and yet not obtain the blessing that is promised? Then, beside all this, there is the Holy Spirit waiting to be gracious—will you resist the Spirit, as so many have done who have perished in their sin? I can do no more than tell you these things with affectionate earnestness, but, dear Hearers who are far off from God, the day will come when, however poorly I have told you these things, if you despise or neglect them, you will have to answer, not to me, but to Him who sent me! Therefore, consider, I pray you, what answer you will give to Him—to the question whether you will come to Him or not—while He says to you, "Draw near to Me, and I will draw near to you."

II. The second part of our subject is very practical. It is this—LET US LEARN HOW TO DRAW NEAR TO GOD.

"How can a man draw near to God?" someone asks. Well, we must begin thus. Draw near to Him *by thinking of Him*. God is not fixed in any one place so that we need to go on a pilgrimage in order to reach Him. "God is a Spirit," and the way to draw near to a spirit is, first of all, to think of Him in our own spirit. I shall begin to have hope of any man's salvation when he begins to seriously think about God and about his own relationship to God. Will you do so, dear Hearer? Take time to think about your Creator, your Preserver, your Provider, your Guardian, your Friend, your Judge, your Savior. To help you to think of Him, read His Word, for Scripture will both give you the best subject for thought and assist you to understand and know more of God.

Seek, also, *to hear the Gospel*. If you know anyone who speaks to your heart about God, Christ and the Gospel, give him the opportunity of speaking to you as often as it is possible. Also try to talk with some of God's friends—with men who pray to Him, who have communion with Him—and get as far away as you can from those who deny Him and blaspheme Him. In this way, I believe that it will not be long before He will begin to show Himself to you. You will be astonished to find how He

is everywhere present around you—in every flower, in every blade of grass, in every drop of dew you will see signs of His Presence. If you are willing to find Him, you will see traces of His skill and of His wisdom there. If you look at the workings of His Providence, expecting to find Him, you will not look long before you do find Him, for, as we have often been reminded, He who watches Providence will never be without a Providence to watch. And when you begin to say, “Wherever I go, I feel that God surrounds me. He is within me and I am in Him.”—As such thoughts as those possess you, I shall begin to have bright hopes concerning you!

Draw near to God, next, *by trusting Him*. Some of you will not be able to do that immediately—you will have to think a little about Him first. And when you have thought about Him and, especially when you have received what this Book tells you about Him, then draw near to Him by trusting Him! If you trust God, He will not deceive you. If you believe in Him that He will pardon your sin, He will pardon it. His rule still is, “According to your faith, be it done unto you.” Whatever you can believe concerning God, that is in accordance with what He has revealed in His Word and that is for His Glory, you shall find that He will do. He has been pleased to give His dear Son to be the Redeemer of men and He tells us that all those who trust in Him have everlasting life. Now draw near to Him by saying, “If these things are true, I will trust myself upon them. As God has revealed them, they are true and I will just cast myself upon Him. Jesus Christ has shed His precious blood to put away sin and He promises to forgive all who confess their sin and trust Him. I will confess my sin and trust Him to forgive me.” One is getting very near to God when he does that, so I bid you, in that sense, draw near to God by trusting Him. And if you do, He will draw near to you by forgiving you. He will accept your trust and He will welcome you. He will be as good to you as your faith, and better still.

Next, draw near to God *by repentance*. You have done wrong. Do not stay away from Him and so do more wrong. Do not try to hide your sin, or to make up a righteousness of your own, but go to God and tell Him that you have done wrong and plead for His forgiveness for Christ’s sake. Tell Him that you have a tendency to do wrong and ask Him to change your heart. Tell Him that you seem to be wrong altogether and beg Him to make you “a new creature in Christ Jesus.” Draw near to Him in a penitential spirit! It is your sense of sin that keeps you back from Him, but, rightly considered, that sense of sin should drive you to Him rather than restrain you from going to Him! What would a man do, if he has offended another, but try to make matters right between them? To my mind it is a beautiful thing to clear up difficulties and to settle disagreements—but it is the sweetest thing of all to get right with God—to tell Him that you have been all wrong, to plead the merit of His dear Son’s obedience and Sacrifice, and to ask Him to set you right both as to the past and as to the future, too! Draw near to God in that way, by repentance.

Then draw near to Him *in prayer*. Did I hear you say, “I do pray”? Yes, but do you *really* pray? That is the question! You may have said certain words, morning and night, for many years, yet you may never once have

prayed. Do you know that prayer is the soul speaking to God? It is not the act of repeating something that you have learned, or heard, or read. The mere utterance of any particular form of words is nothing. You might as well set up one of the prayer windmills, at which so many have smiled, as expect to pray by the mere repetition of good words! No, no—speak to God! Any true speech, straight from the heart, is accepted by God. Mr. Rowland Hill stayed one night at an inn and he told the landlord that he must have family prayer there. “But, Sir,” said the man, “we never had such a thing in our lives.” “Then,” said Mr. Hill, “order out my horses, for I will not stay in any house where I cannot get the people together to pray.” “We shall all come in, Sir,” said the landlord, hardly realizing the preacher’s purpose. Then the Bible was read and Mr. Hill said, “Now, Sir, you pray. Every master should pray in his own house.” “But I cannot pray,” he said, “I wish I could.” “Tell the Lord that,” said Mr. Hill, and the man said, “Lord, I cannot pray. I wish I could.” Then Mr. Hill said, “You have begun to pray already, so I will go on for you. Only tell the Lord, from your heart, anything that is true about yourself and you have begun praying.”

I pray you, dear Friends, to draw near to God in prayer! Make it your habit to ask of Him what you really need and He will draw near to you and you will get what you have asked of Him. You will be surprised to find what gracious answers you will receive to your supplications, for I have noticed that if the Lord delays His answers to the prayers of His saints when they grow strong, He generally hears them very quickly, indeed, when they first begin to pray. I have often known the answer come while they have yet been speaking. Try it, dear Friend! In your own case draw near to God in prayer and see what answers He will give you! How I wish that those who doubt the existence of God had ever tried to speak to Him! If they once came into familiar acquaintance with Him from day to day, doubts of His existence would be no more possible to them than doubts of their own existence, for they would say, “We have spoken to Him and He has heard us, and given us the desire of our heart.” Draw near to God in prayer, and He will draw near to you.

Then, dear Friend, try to draw near to God every day *by laying all your affairs before Him and yielding up all your plans to His will*. Begin the day by asking Him to be with You and to glorify Himself in you. Ask Him to stay near you and to let you feel His Presence and you will have truly blessed times if you draw near to God in that way.

Sometimes, you will most appropriately draw near to God by praise—with sweet songs in your mouth and thankfulness in your heart. You will feel it to be indeed a—

“Happy day, happy day,”

when you are thus brought near to God. You will do well to keep on at that praise till there will come a day—(you need not mind how soon it comes) when the Lord will say to you, in another sense, “Draw near to Me”—and you will go up to your chamber and gather up your feet in bed and He will draw near to you with such a glorious vision of His Presence that before you are ever aware, you will find yourself at His right hand—your poor mortal body left behind to wait a little while for the resurrec-

tion—but you, yourself, very near to Him in Heaven! Then, before long, there will sound out that blast of the archangel’s trumpet that shall wake even your body from its slumber among the dust into which it had moldered—and it shall rise again and then there shall come One whom you have known in this life, and known still better in Heaven, who will say to you and to all the redeemed, “Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” Then your body, soul and spirit shall draw near to Him as He draws near to you and so shall you be “forever with the Lord!” That is what will come of your drawing near to God—it will end in your *being with Him* where He is, that you may behold His Glory forever and forevermore! And therefore do I feel a deep stirring within my soul that every far-off sinner should hear this gracious invitation and obey it at once—“Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you.”

III. Now I shall conclude by just a few words upon THE PRACTICAL EFFECT WHICH THIS DRAWING NEAR TO GOD WILL HAVE UPON OUR LIVES.

Well, now, if we draw near to God, it will have an effect upon our common, everyday life. How? Why, first, if you will follow the run of the chapter, you will see that drawing near to God *will help us to resist the devil*. The injunction, and promise, “Resist the devil, and he will flee from you,” are immediately followed by the words of our text, “Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you.” The devil is not quite everywhere, but it is difficult to tell where he is not to be found. He, and the powers of darkness under his control, tempt us in all sorts of ways and all manner of places. And if any one of us would be so armed as to be able to resist the great adversary of souls, the very best thing we can do is to draw near to God! The sheep is never so safe as when it is close to the shepherd. And the prodigal son is never so safe and happy as when he is sitting at his father’s table and feasting on the good things provided by his father’s love. Draw near to God and you will be able to resist the tempter and drive him away from you!

In the next place, drawing near to God *will help you to become pure*. Read the whole verse from which our text is taken—“Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.” You do wish to be chaste, do you not? You wish to be sober. You wish to be honest. You wish to be pure in speech and pure in action, do you not? Well, nothing purifies us like getting near to God in Christ! There is cleansing by water as well as by blood—the blood that washes away the *guilt* of sin is accompanied by a cleansing flood that takes away the *power* of sin—so that hands are cleansed and hearts are purified when we draw near to God.

Further, drawing near to God will help us to sorrow for sin, for the next verse to our text says, “Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep.” “Oh,” says some thoughtless person, “I do not want to be helped to sorrow for sin.” And yet—and yet—and yet, if you did but know it, one of the sweetest things in all the world is godly sorrow for sin! Often do I quote to myself that verse—

“Lord, let me weep for nothing but sin,

***And after none but Thee!
And then I would—oh, that I might!—
A constant weeper be!”***

“It is a bitter sweet,” say some, but I say that it is a sweet bitter and that the sweetness predominates—the sweetness of so feeling the evil of sin as to loathe and shun it! It is a miserable state of things to have a hard heart. Even a hard hand may be a burden. It happened to a poor blind woman, who read with her fingers, that, after a while, they lost the delicacy of touch so that she could not distinguish the letters. It was a great grief to her, but, putting up to her lips the precious Bible that she had been accustomed to read, she found that she could read with her lips. She was very glad to have tenderness somewhere. A tender heart is necessary to the reading of the mind of God, so always try to keep your heart tender. A hard heart, or a stony heart, is an awful curse. When you feel your heart beginning to ossify or to petrify, pray God to plunge it in a bath of the Redeemer’s blood to make it soft again! The Lord grant that we may so draw near to Him that our heart may be kept soft, for hardness of heart can never come to the man who is kept near to God.

If you draw near to God, dear Friends, *it will also help you to think well of other people.* “Do not speak evil of one another,” says the Apostle in the 11th verse. When you know that the great Judge of all, Himself, is near, you will not be so quick as you sometimes are to take His work out of His hands, but you will let *Him* judge. I am sure that the man who lives near to God gets to have a kindly feeling towards others. If ever you find a person saying that there is no life in the Church and finding fault with everybody, you may be sure that that man has not seen Jesus Christ of late, for Jesus Christ speaks not so. He says of His people all He can that is good. Surely, if Christ loves His Church, you ought not to find so much fault with it. “Do not speak evil of one another,” Brothers and Sisters, else it will prove that you have not been anywhere near your Master of late!

And, last of all, if we live near to God, *it will help us to think of eternal things.* The Apostle warns us not to say, “We will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain,” and all that kind of talk. He who speaks like that has not seen God of late, for he who is much with God thinks of eternal things and he knows how near they are. And he says to himself, “I shall soon be gone. This world is not my rest—there is nothing here that is substantial and abiding.” So he is waiting to hear the trumpet sound, “Boot and saddle! Up and away!” and he stands ready, at his Captain’s call, to be gone to another and a better world! If you dwell near to God, you will not be afraid of dying—you will rather dread to remain here than to be taken away! Remember, this is your place of exile, and your state of probation. O Lord, bring us near to You! Really, Brothers and Sisters, I do not know anything that can do us so much good in our daily life as walking with God. If you live near to God, the family worries and troubles will not vex your spirit as they now do. You will live above them and the outside world, with all its fault-finding, its anxieties and its ups and downs will seem very small and insignificant to you when you dwell on high and your place of defense is the muni-

tions of rocks. Some of us know what it is not to care even a snap of the fingers when the world seems enraged against us—if we can but get away into the secret chamber of communion where God is pleased to manifest Himself to us.

If you live down in the marshes, you will get the chills and fever. But if you live up on the mountaintop, you will rejoice in the sun's rays before your fellow creatures see them and you will bask in them long after those below have lost sight of them! You will also find the air up there to be fresh and bracing and, among the eagles, you will grow like an eagle, yourself, for you will mount up with wings as eagles, till, one of these days, you will mount so high that you will not come down again, for you will have gone to dwell forever near your Lord!

May the Lord bless you, Beloved, with all that this drawing near to Him is capable of giving to you, for His dear name and mercy's sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON: JAMES 4.

Verse 1. *Where do wars and fights come from among you?* Whether between nations, or parties or individuals—if there are wars and fights, where do they come from?

1. *Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members?* Do they not arise from one desiring something, and another desiring the same thing? Is there not a competition or emulation of an evil kind in which each one prefers himself and seeks not the good of his neighbor?

2. *You lust, and have not: you kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: you fight and war, yet you have not.* This is nature's way of trying to get by contention what it desires to possess—fighting, warring and killing—yet the result of all this is nil. After all is done, “yet you have not.” There is a simpler and a surer way which men forget—they leave that Divine path untrod—“You have not,”

2. *Because you ask not.* With all your efforts you do not succeed because you omit to pray to God! Prayer would have brought you every blessing that you need, but, instead of going to God and asking at His hands, you rush upon your neighbor and seek to take what you desire as spoil from him. Perhaps some say, “But we do ask.” “Well, then,” says the Apostle—

3. *You ask, and receive not because you ask amiss, that you may consume it upon your lusts.* The lusts of the flesh come in and put us upon the wrong track. Or if we take the right road, yet, if the lusts are there, God will not bless us because, in doing so, He would be helping us to gratify our lusts.

4. *You adulterers and adulteresses, know you not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?* The Apostle uses this strong language not concerning the actual sin of adultery as the term is commonly understood, but in relation to our not loving God with true chastity of heart, but lusting after something else. This is the very essence of *spiritual* adultery.

We ought to give God the whole affection of our being, but, instead of doing so, we allow at least some of it to wander to other objects and, therefore, we are called, by the Holy Spirit Himself, “adulterers and adulteresses.” These may seem to be hard words, but they are true ones. May they bring us to our spiritual senses and cause us to love our God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength!

4. *Whoever, therefore, will be a friend of the world, is the enemy of God.* In one sense, Christians are the greatest friends of the world, for they desire the good of all men and seek their salvation. But, in another sense, viewing the world as a great conglomerate of evil, we are no friends of the world. There is a certain form of theology, popular nowadays, which teaches us that we ought to remove the line of demarcation between the Church and the world. This kind of teaching may be *called* theology, but it comes not of God—it is a gross lie which we ought to abhor in the very depth of our spirit!

5, 6. *Do you think that the Scripture says in vain, The Spirit that dwells in us yearns jealously? But He gives more Grace.* There is a spirit, resident in the *natural* man, the human nature of man, which is always inclined toward hate and envy, always wanting to get something from other men and always grieved if other men seem to be or to have more than the person himself has. How is this spirit to be met? This verse supplies the answer, “He gives more Grace.” “More Grace”—this is the great remedy for hate and envy! “More Grace”—this is the balm for sorrow. “More Grace”—this is our greatest help out of all difficulties. “More Grace”—this is the universal recipe for all that we need—“He gives more Grace.”

6, 7. *Therefore, He says, God resists the proud, but gives Grace unto the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God.* Lay aside that fighting spirit—that effort to pull others down so as to raise yourself up—and bow before God! Yield yourself wholly to His blessed will. This is the way of peace and the way of joy, too!

7. *Resist the devil.* Who will seek to stir you up to rebellion! Give no place to him. “Resist the devil.”

7, 8. *And he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you.* Hear this command and practice it. Get near to God in Christ Jesus and you shall soon find Him come to your help in every hour of need.

8. *Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.* For, if you are double-minded, your hands and your hearts must both be cleansed. The Apostle does not say, “Concentrate your thoughts,” but he does say, “Cleanse your hearts,” for, to have two objectives in life is a kind of spiritual adultery from which we need to be purged, so the command is, “Purify your hearts, you double-minded.”

9. *Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness.* If the previous verses have rightly accused you of sin, confess your guilt with shame and sorrow—and so come to Christ imploring pardon.

10. *Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He shall lift you up.* If you exalt yourself, He will pull you down. If you lie down in the dust before Him, He will lift you up. It is according to God’s usual way of act-

ing to practice these reversals. Mary truly sang, “He has put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. He has filled the hungry with good things; and the rich He has sent away empty.”

11. *Do not speak evil of one another, brethren. He that speaks evil of his brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the Law and judges the Law: but if you judge the Law, you are not a doer of the Law, but a judge.* If you cease to think of that which is evil, you will also cease to speak evil. If I speak evil of my brother, I have condemned the Law which bids me love him as I love myself. I have practically said that it is an absurd Law and an unrighteous Law—and this is a great evil in God’s sight.

12-15. *There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who are you that judges another? Come now, you who say, Today or tomorrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: whereas you do not know not what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor, that appears for a little time, and then vanishes away. For that you ought to say, If the Lord wills, we shall live, and do this, or that.* We are all too apt to say what we will do and where we will go, forgetting to add, “If the Lord wills, we shall live, and do this, or that.”

16, 17. *But now you rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil. Therefore to him that knows to do good, and does it not, to him it is sin.* There are sins of omission as well as sins of commission! May the Lord graciously keep us from both forms of the evil, for His dear Son’s sake! Amen.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—130, 590, 537.

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**A SERMON
PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY, AUGUST 25, 1910.**

**DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,
ON LORD'S-DAY EVENING, JULY 19, 1863.**

***“Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you.”
James 4:8.***

[Another Sermon by Mr. Spurgeon, upon the same text, is #2795, Volume 48—THE DOUBLE DRAWING NEAR—Read/download the entire sermon, free of charge, at <http://www.spurgeongems.org>.]

NOTICE the sentences immediately preceding our text—“Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you.” Wherever we are, we must come into contact with the unseen powers either for good or evil. Go where we may, we cannot shut ourselves away from them. If we could take the wings of the morning and fly to the uttermost parts of the earth, spiritual beings would still be all around us there. Doubtless there are many invisible spirits, good or evil, in our midst at this moment, and when we go forth to our homes, or tomorrow go to our business or other duties, they will still attend us—the evil spirits seeking to lead our souls astray and the holy angels carrying out their sacred commission—“to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation.”

These spiritual beings are divided into two bands. One band is under the leadership of that great fallen spirit—great, though fallen—who, by his masterly genius, has secured control over multitudes of other spirits who do his bidding and yield to his will with unquestioning obedience. You also may surrender yourself to him if you will—he is the god of this world, the prince of the power of the air—and you may, if you will, be his slave. You may be girded with his chains, you may serve in his servitude and you may earn the wage which he will pay you at the last, for, “the wages of sin is death.” But, surely, the admonition of the practical Apostle James is a wise one and we shall do well to take heed to it and revolt from our old master! Let us break his bonds asunder and cast away his cords from us! In the name of Jesus let us resist the devil and he will flee from us. Jesus has a far greater host of spirits under his leadership than Satan has and, at His command, they shall keep us in all our ways, and bear us up in their hands lest we dash our feet against a stone. His legions are far mightier than those of the black Prince of Darkness and their services shall all be at our disposal, whenever we need them—as soon as we have renounced all allegiance to our former tyrant lord!

Now, having noted the connection of our text, I am going to apply it to three classes of persons. First, *to the Believer*. Secondly, *to the backslider*. And then, last of all, *to the unconverted*.

I. First, then, we have here, A MESSAGE TO THE BELIEVER. “Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you.”

In Scripture, drawing near has various meanings. First, it means, *draw near to God in worship, in prayer and in praise*. When the hen sees a hawk in the air hovering over her brood, she gives a peculiar warning cluck, calling her little ones to come to her while, at the same moment she, herself, draws near to them. In a far higher fashion, the voice of God calls you to Him, warning you of the danger that lurks all round you. And while you run to hide from peril beneath the shadow of His wings, He, on His part, runs to meet you as the forgiving father ran to meet his prodigal son. You draw near to Him in the fearfulness and feebleness of your supplication and He draws near to you in the faithfulness and almightiness of His everlasting love! I am afraid that we often pray as if our God were at a distance from us—this can never be prevailing prayer. I do not despise that prayer which is like shooting an arrow up to the Throne of God, but I love still better the prayer that grips the Angel of the Covenant, the prayer that stands foot to foot with Him and wrestles with Him until the breaking of the day, and even then cries, “I will not let You go, except You bless me.” If you can draw near to your Lord in prayer like that, He will certainly draw near to you and you will be like a prince who has power to prevail with God and with men.

Let me encourage you, dear Friends, who have been backward in your private prayer, or who have cried to Him as though He were a long way off—“Draw near to Him.” There are no bounds set around this mount of Grace as there were around Mount Sinai. You may climb up to the place called Calvary and clasp to your bosom the Christ who there died upon the accursed tree, for He is your Brother, your Friend, your Savior, your All-in-All, if you are truly trusting Him! So to you I say, as Paul wrote to the Hebrews, “Let us, therefore, come boldly unto the Throne of Grace, that we may obtain mercy and find Grace to help in time of need.” “Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you.” Come near to Him and you shall soon have an answer to your prayers!

It is the same with praise, but I am afraid that often we do not really draw near to God when we are professing to praise Him. I know that, sometimes, when we are singing God’s praises in our great assemblies here, we are drawn very near to the gates of Heaven. At such times I have felt as though I were swimming in an ocean of sacred delight! It should be so with *every* act of worship—it should all draw us nearer to our God. There are times when we feel more closely drawn to Him in the closet of private prayer than in the public services of the sanctuary, but still, there is a special blessing attending united prayer and praise which is not to be realized elsewhere. I remember reading of a Jew who would not open a business in a certain town because there was no synagogue in it.

I wish that Christians would always be as careful to settle down, if possible, in a place where they would not lack religious privileges, for prayer and praise, like the two wheels of the chariot which carried Jacob down to Joseph, bring us near to our Beloved Lord and Master! And He, at the same time, comes to meet us and draws near to us.

But I find that in Scripture, the term, “Draw near to God,” is often used in the sense of *asking counsel of God*. Thus the Israelites, when they were in perplexity or difficulty, consulted the priest and he, wearing the ephod and the breastplate with the mysterious Urim and Thummim, was able to interpret the will of God as it had been revealed to him. And now, though no sacred ephod or breastplate is worn by mortal man, though the ancient oracles are dumb and though no earthly prophet speaks infallibly according to the will of God, you may still draw near to God, Himself, in the name of Jesus Christ, His Son, and seek the guidance of His ever-blessed Spirit! I hope you will do so at every step of your life, for what step is there that is not important? Those that seem to us to be of the least significance may be the very ones that will the soonest lead us into mischief. But there are certain periods in our history when it is absolutely necessary that we should say to ourselves, “Let us consult the Lord about this matter.” Many of you would never have been in the trouble in which you now are if you had but waited upon God before you took a certain course which has brought you nothing but sorrow. We heedlessly run before the fiery-cloudy pillar moves—and when we find that we have rushed into the waste howling wilderness, we lay the blame for our own folly at the door of God’s Providence! Let it not be so with any of you, dear Friends. Let every morning’s plans be spread out before the Lord to see whether they meet with His approval. And let every evening’s joys and sorrows be brought to Him that He may show you how to glorify Him in all that happens to you! Solomon truly said, “He that trusts in his own heart is a fool.” And David just as truly said, “But he that trusts in the Lord, mercy shall compass him about.” You need never lack Divine guidance, for you can have it by asking for it! God is willing to guide you if you will only seek His guidance. See to it, then, that you practice the text in the sense of asking counsel of God—“Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you.”

There is a third meaning to the phrase, “Draw near to God.” It is used in the sense of *enjoying communion with God*. There are some here who do not understand what I mean by communion with God. They are completely puzzled by the very simple language of the Apostle John, “Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son, Jesus Christ.” There are hundreds and thousands of people constantly attending church or chapel who do not know the meaning of the word, “communion.” If you were to ask them what they understand by it, they would probably say that it means eating a piece of bread and drinking a little wine at the Lord’s Supper. And more than that, if they were to ask me to explain to

them what true spiritual communion with God means, I would probably fail to make them comprehend it. Yet you who, by Grace, have been enabled to drink of these cooling streams, know well what that communion means! Some of you who have been the most deeply taught of the Spirit could sing through the whole Song of Solomon and see your Beloved in it all—while to others it is only an Eastern love song which is to them quite incomprehensible. You know Christ, not only by faith, but by a sort of second sense which makes Him very real to you. You have drawn near to Christ and talked with Him—and He has drawn near to you and talked with you—and He has been nearer to you and dearer to you than any earthly friend has ever been! Oh, what joy Believers know when they realize Christ's Presence! When His left hand is under their heads and His right hand embraces them! Talk of Heaven—such communion is Heaven begun below! When Heaven's gates are opened wide and the celestial sunshine comes streaming through, it falls upon the eyes that have been illuminated by the Holy Spirit—that is true spiritual communion—and the glorified spirits above do but know that bliss to the full in knowing God and rejoicing in the Glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Perhaps, my dear Brother, you have been reading Rutherford's letters and you have said to yourself. "Alas, I cannot hope to enjoy such communion with Christ as Rutherford enjoyed!" But why shouldn't you? Read our text again. "Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you." You, my dear Sister, may have read the life of Madame Guyon and you have said, "What an angel in human form that woman must have been!" But if you draw near to God, you may have as much love to Christ as she had! And you may enjoy as much fellowship with Christ as she had, for, "He will draw near to *you*." You have envied Mary because she sat at Jesus' feet, or you have wished that you had been John, to lean your head upon your Master's bosom. Well, you may do both these things in a spiritual sense—and that is better than the carnal! "Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you." To you, even to *you*, the very feeblest of those who resist the devil, will God draw near if you draw near to Him!

I think, however, that there is another meaning in our text, and that is, "draw near to God" *in the general strain and tenor of your life*. We all know that the sun, the great center of the solar system has several planets revolving around him. Some of them comparatively near, others at a greater distance, and some still more remote. And Jesus Christ, the great Sun of Righteousness, has His people revolving around Him as the planets circle round the sun! Some of them are very near the great central Luminary. Others are far away, at a vast distance from Him, and others are neither very near nor very far off, but somewhere between the two. There are some Believers who are like the planet Mercury. You do not often see that fast revolving planet because it keeps so near the sun that it is usually lost in his bright rays. So is it with some Christians—the world knows little of them—they make no noise as they move along in their ap-

pointed orbit and they keep so near to Christ that they seem to be absorbed into His radiance! Their thoughts are so much occupied with Christ, their heart's affection is so fully given to Him, that they do not talk much about earthly things. Their great desire is to live in close and hallowed fellowship with their Lord. There are others who are like the planets that are far away from the sun, yet some rays of light and heat reach even them. And those Believers who are living at a distance from Christ have some of the Divine Light and heat within them, but oh, so little compared with what they might have! Oh, that you who are so far off from God, would leave your distant orbits and draw near to Him—for then He would also draw near to you!

You know, dear Friends, that there is almost as much difference between some Christians and others as there is between Christians and worldlings—I said, almost, for there is not quite the same difference, though there is nearly the same. There are heights of lofty consecration and of intimate communion with Christ to which some Believers have attained, but of which others have not yet even dreamed. There is an inner circle of fellowship into which only a few privileged saints have ever entered—these are the elect out of the elect who have been distinguished above all the rest of Christ's disciples by the loftier Grace which has been their peculiar characteristic. Oh, that we had many more such Christians in all our Churches! There are a few of them scattered about Christendom, like grains of salt, but we need many more of them—men who, like Moses, have their faces made to shine with a supernatural brightness because they have dwelt with God upon the mount of secret communion—men who are not afraid to die because they have looked without alarm into the face of God, through Jesus Christ their Lord—and men who have learned how to live as becomes the Gospel of Christ—and there is no higher life than that!

Brothers and Sisters in Christ, “draw near to God!” Press towards the highest degree of godliness that is possible for you to obtain! Seek to have the closest communion with Christ that mortals can ever know while here on earth. Do not be content to be in the outer courts, the lobbies, the ante-chambers of religion—strive to gain admission to the very Holy of Holies, itself, for that is where your Lord would have you to be! You know that there is a sort of border-land where many professors live, where a man is thought to be a Christian, but all the while he is not even half a Christian. He is counted among the saved, yet he lives on the very borders of damnation! And if at the last he *is* saved, we shall sorrowfully have to add, “yet so as by fire.” In some respects he is a righteous man, as Lot was, yet, like Lot, he dwells in Sodom. He is in some ways a good man, as Noah was, yet, like he, he falls into shameful sin. Oh, that we could all rise above this wretched condition and live continually so close to Christ that men would take knowledge of us that we had been with

Jesus, and had caught something of His spirit—and had been so changed by Grace that we were far more like He is than we now are!

There I leave my text with the Believer. I would gladly draw you near to God, Beloved, by my words, if I could. But I know that He must, Himself, draw you by His Grace if the drawing is to be effectual. So let this be your prayer and resolve this very moment, “Draw us, and we will run after You.”

II. Now, in the second place, we have in our text AN ENTREATY TO THE BACKSLIDER. “Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you.” I must speak but briefly on this point, but I need to be as earnest as I am brief.

So, Backslider, you have come in here, tonight. A friend who is up from the country persuaded you to accompany him, or you would probably not have been here, for you have almost given up going to a place of worship—you think there is no hope for you. *Friend, do you know what your doom will be if you continue as you are now?* Have you ever read the story of Judas? Do you know what became of Demas, Simon Magus, Alexander the coppersmith and others who turned aside from the faith in the days of the Apostles? Remember those terrible, yet Inspired words, “If we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remains no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation which shall devour the adversaries.” It would have been better for you never to have had any knowledge of the Truth of God than to have known it and then sinned willfully against it, and so, after all, to be a castaway! If you are a true child of God, though a wanderer from His ways, you will be brought back to Him and I pray that you may be brought back to Him this very hour! But if you are an apostate, a backslider in heart, you will be filled with your own ways! Having filled up the measure of your iniquity, you will be driven from God’s Presence into the place of woe where hope and mercy can never come!

Yet listen to me, Backslider, *this terrible sentence has not yet been pronounced on you.* The voice of God still cries to you, “Draw near unto Me.” Where are you flying, my Brother? Are you seeking to escape from God’s righteous judgments? That is impossible, for His thunderbolts will soon overtake you and seal your eternal doom! Run not away from Him, but draw near to Him! Cast down your weapons of rebellion and fall prostrate before Him, seeking the forgiveness which He is willing and waiting to bestow upon you. Let me take you by the hand and try to encourage you to come near to the Lord this very moment. Do you ask, “How can I come near to Him?” Come just as you came to Him at the first! Perhaps you reply, “But I never really came to Him aright.” Then come to Him aright right now! I came to Him as a sinner and He gave me a hearty welcome—and He will receive you just as graciously if you only come to Him with wholehearted repentance for your sin and true faith in Jesus Christ as your only Savior!

But here is one who did run well, yet she has been hindered. Backsliding woman, remember that your God is married to you and that He bids you return to Him! Backsliding man, you have turned aside from your God, yet He still loves you and cries out to you, "Return, return, return!" The Lord still says, as He did in Jeremiah's day, "Return, you backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings." Oh, that you would reply even as they did—"Behold, we come unto You, for You are the Lord our God"! I am sure that you are not happy in your present condition. On the contrary, you are as sad and miserable as you can possibly be. This very House of Prayer reminds you of your former privileges and joys, of the days when you delighted in God and felt that you were, indeed, on your way to Heaven. You cannot be content to live in the far country among the swine that are not fit companions for you! Leave the husks to the pigs—they can never satisfy your hunger! Come back to your Father, poor prodigal! Though your clothes are in rags, though you are steeped in filth, though you have sinned most grievously, come back to your Father and He will receive you with open arms and open heart! I will not act towards you as the elder brother did to the prodigal, but I will welcome you as a Brother if you are, indeed, a Brother. But if you are not a Brother, you are a sinner—and "this is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners," even the very chief! So, "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved." Put your soul's affairs into His hands! ask Him to be your Advocate to plead your cause before the King! He never yet lost a case that was entrusted to Him—and He will not lose yours!

III. I have almost anticipated the last division of my discourse, but I must close by giving from my text AN INVITATION TO THE UNCONVERTED. "Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you."

The great Gospel rings out again and the same note sounds to the sinner as to the saint—not that there is any implication in this text that the sinner can draw near to God by his own unaided power, or that he comes first, and God comes next, or that there is any natural willingness in the sinner to come to God. The text seems to me *to show the difference between the Law and the Gospel*. God even said to Moses, the chosen leader of His ancient people, "Draw not near here: take off your shoes, for the place where you stand is holy ground." But under the Gospel, God says to the sinner, "Draw near here. It is true that this is holy ground, but it is sprinkled with blood—the blood of My only-begotten and well-beloved Son. And if the blood is also sprinkled upon you, you may draw near and you cannot come too near, so come and welcome, Sinner, come!" If it were a question of merit, or of justification by the works of the Law, the sinner might well try to flee from the avenging hands of Divine Justice. But on the ground of Divine Love, and pity, and mercy, and free and Sovereign Grace, the sinner may draw near to God though he has nothing to recommend him! He may come just as he is and God, in mer-

cy, will draw near to Him! Should there be here a swearer, a drunk, or one who has committed the foulest of sins—the text says to him in the sense in which I have explained it—“Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you.” Sinner, if you repent of your sins and trust in Jesus as your Savior, God will not spurn you and drive you from Him, but He will draw near to you as you draw near to Him!

Then, next, the text *shows the sinner what God means to do for him*. He means to draw the sinner near to Himself and then Himself to draw near to the sinner! This is done in two ways. It is done, first, by what Jesus did for us when He split the veil that separated us from God. And it is done, next, by what the Holy Spirit does in us when He splits the veil that hides God from us! There are, or were, these two veils—the veil that concealed the visible manifestation of God from men, which was torn asunder at the moment of Christ’s death—and the veil that is over our own hearts which conceals God from us until the Holy Spirit takes it away and we see God in Christ Jesus reconciled to us by the death of His Son. I fear that there are even some in this congregation who are living just as if there were no God at all. If there really were no God, you would probably not be any different from what you are now. God is not in all your thoughts or if you ever do think of Him, you say, with the fool of whom the Psalmist tells us, “No God. No God for me. I need no God and, as far as I am concerned, there is no God.” Well then, if you are ever to be saved, you will have to be brought near to God by a power altogether outside yourself! You will have to be made to feel that God is One whom you must love. You will be reconciled to Him by the death of His Son and your heart will be filled with love to Christ through the gracious influences of the Holy Spirit!

The text further shows what *God will lead the sinner to do for himself*. Ungodly man, if you are ever to be saved, you must draw near to God in prayer! Go to Him at this moment, just where you are sitting, and confess all your sin to Him. There is no need for you to utter a word that any of us can hear, for God can read the language of your heart. Then you must draw near to Christ by faith. Just as that poor woman in the crowd touched the hem of His garment and was immediately made whole, so must you, by faith, get into contact with Christ! Trust in Him as your one and only Savior, and He will certainly save you! And this shall be the grand result of it all—you will draw near to God, and He will draw near to you. Oh, that you would now cry to Him, “God be merciful to me, a sinner.” That will be drawing near to God in penitence and contrition and supplication—and He will draw near to you in gracious acceptance and blessing. And then one day He will call you to draw near to Him in Heaven, itself, to sit at His table in Glory, to feast with Him in His Kingdom! Then shall you, even you, wear a crown, and wave a palm and forever adore that matchless Grace which first drew you near to Him—and then draw near to you!

If there is one here who will go home to pray, “Draw me near, O God!” Or better still, if there is one anywhere in this vast throng, whose heart is praying, “Lord, save me! Draw me with the cords of a man, (even the Man, Christ Jesus, the Friend of sinful man), with the bands of love. O God, draw near to me, for I would gladly draw near to You!” If there is one here whose eyes have in them the tears of penitence, I point that one to Jesus, hanging on the Cross, and say—

**“There is life for a look at the Crucified One!
There is life at this moment for thee.
Then look, Sinner—look unto Him and be saved—
Unto Him who was nailed to the tree!”**

Remember that the Son of God, the Lord of Life and Glory, suffered indescribable shame and ignominy and, at last, death, itself, for sinners—for every sinner who trusts in His great atoning Sacrifice! If you are trusting in Him, that is proof positive that He died for you, died in your place, died that you should never die, for He bore all the punishment that your sin deserved, so there is none left for you to bear! He drank to the last dregs the cup of wrath that was your due, so there is not one drop left for you to drink! He suffered all that could ever have been your portion even in Hell, itself, for being Infinite, there was no limit to His agonies. And now, for you, there is no Hell, no torment, no condemnation! You may know assuredly whether Christ died for you or not—do you trust Him? Will you trust Him now? Will you say—

**“Just as I am—and waiting not
To rid my soul of one dark blot.
To You, whose blood can cleanse each spot,
O Lamb of God, I come”?**

If You have said that from your heart, you are now a saved soul and you may go to your home rejoicing in the Lord, for your sins, which were many, are all forgiven and you are on your way to Heaven! God grant that it may be so, for Jesus Christ’s sake!

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON: JAMES 1.

Verse 1. *James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greetings.* The Apostle James evidently believed in no lost ten tribes, as some, nowadays, do. They were never lost—the Israelites whom we see nearly every day belong to some of all the 12 tribes, so James addressed his Epistle, “to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greetings.”

2. *My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into divers temptations.* Or, *trials.* [See Sermon #1074, Volume 29—ALL JOY IN ALL TRIALS—Read/download the entire sermon, free of charge, at <http://www.spurgeongems.org>.]

3-5. *Knowing this, that the trying of your faith works patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that you may be perfect and entire, want-*

ing nothing. If any of you lack wisdom. That is just what most of us lack—“If any of you lack wisdom”—

5. *Let him ask of God.* That is the short road to true knowledge—to pray. Study is good, no doubt, for the acquisition of knowledge. But praying is the best way to obtain true wisdom!

5, 6. *Who gives to all men liberally, and upbraids not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing unwavering.* For the very essence of prayer lies in believing that God can and will give us the things which we seek at His hands.

6. *For he that wavers.* The man who does not know whether prayer will succeed or not—

6. *Is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed.* [See Sermon #2537, Volume 43—A WARNING TO WAVERERS—Read/download the entire sermon, free of charge, at <http://www.spurgeongems.org>.] You can never tell what will become of the wave. It goes just where it is driven—and there are many men who can be good, after a certain fashion, if they are in good company—but they can be just as bad if the wind blows from another quarter! But if we have true faith in God and true faith in prayer, we shall not be “like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed.”

7. *For let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord.* What the wild waves are saying, we know not. So is it with a man who is “like a wave of the sea.” He utters words without meaning and his prayer dies away like the roar of the billows upon the shore when the fury of the storm has abated. “Let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord.”

8. *A double-minded man.* A man with two minds—a mind to the religious and another mind to enjoy the pleasures of the world—such a man—

8. *Is unstable in all his ways.* There is nothing solid or substantial about him, nothing enduring. You cannot rely on him, for he is blown here and there, as chaff flies before the wind.

9. *Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted.* For the Gospel lifts him up out of his poverty and makes him a child of God who is spiritually rich, even though he is poor in temporal things.

10. *But the rich, in that he is made low: because as the flower of the grass, he shall pass away.* Let him not, therefore, rely upon his wealth as though it were anything but a trust and a burden laid upon him, for he will have to leave it and he, himself, “as the flower of the grass, shall pass away” Let him rejoice to get down to the Rock of Ages! Let him lay hold of eternal things as if he had nothing else in which he could trust!

11, 12. *For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withers the grass, and the flower falls and the beauty of the fashion of it perishes; so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways. Blessed is the man that endures temptation.* [See Sermon #1874, Volume 31—A DISCOURSE UPON TRUE BLESSEDNESS HERE AND HEREAFTER—Read/download the entire sermon, free of charge, at <http://www.spurgeongems.org>.] Or, trial. The man that holds on and holds out

under it and does not give way under it—blessed is the man that is tried—

12, 13. *For when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to them that love Him. Let no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God.* Here we must take the word, “tempted,” in its dark meaning, for the Scriptural word, “temptation,” means two very different things. When we are drawn towards evil, that is the black meaning of the word, “temptation.” But when we are tested or tried in order that it may be seen that the good in us is real—that is the bright meaning of the word, “temptation.” In that sense, God did tempt (try or test) Abraham, but not in the other sense.

13-15. *For God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempts He any man: but every man is tempted when he is drawn of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust has conceived, it brings forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, brings forth death.* There is the parentage and the progeny of sin. Sin comes of unbridled desire. A man feels that he must have a certain thing—right or wrong—he is determined to have it. Then there comes of that determination the overt act of sin! And what comes of that? Why, death—for every sin, in its measure, helps to kill us—to destroy that which is the real life of our manhood. Every sin is a drop of poison. There are sweets that are poisonous and the pleasures of sin are of this kind. And leave the poison of sin alone, let it work in its natural way and it will bring forth death! That man, therefore, who lives in sin and loves it, has nothing before him but everlasting death! He may well tremble!

16, 17. *Do not err, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above.* It never comes from within our own hearts! It does not even come by imitation of better men—it must come from God.

17. *And comes down from the Father of Lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.* As every sunbeam comes from the sun, so all Grace and virtue must come from God with whom there is neither parallax nor tropic, as there is with the natural sun. He never declines, He never varies—He is always the same. Now, in proof that everything in us comes from God, James says that our very spiritual life comes from God.

18. *Of His own will begat He us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of His creatures.* True Believers have been twice created. The second time we were begotten, again, by the Word of God that became the living seed within our spirits—out of which the new life grew—and now we are “a kind of first fruits of His creatures.” Just as the first ears of ripe corn were brought into the sanctuary and dedicated to God, so are all true Believers consecrated persons, the “first fruits of His creatures.”

19, 20. *Therefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath, for the wrath of man works not the righteousness of God.* We never do much for the Truth of God or goodness by

getting angry about it. Whenever a man debates about the Truth of God and loses his temper, he has also lost his cause! I have heard of one who knew little of true religion, who watched a missionary and a Brahmin disputing. And he decided that the missionary was in the right. When he was asked why he thought so, he said, “Because he kept his cool, and the other man flew into a passion.” Although that may not always be a good test of the truth of the matter in question, it certainly is a good test of how the dispute is going!

21. *Therefore, lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted Word, which is able to save your souls.* [See Sermon #1847, Volume 31—BEFORE SERMON, AT SERMON AND AFTER SERMON—Read/download the entire sermon, free of charge, at <http://www.spurgeongems.org>.] That evil branch is cut away—now be ready to have a branch of a better kind inserted into you, even “the engrafted Word, which is able to save your souls”—that you may bring forth better fruit than the old crabbed stock of Nature can possibly yield!

22-26. *But be you doers of the Word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if any is a hearer of the Word, and not a doer, he is like a man beholding his natural face in a mirror: for he beholds himself, and goes his way, and straightway forgets what manner of man he was. But whoever looks into the perfect law of liberty, and continues therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.* [See Sermons #1467-B, Volume 25—TWO SORTS OF HEARERS and #1848, Volume 31—THE LOOKING GLASS—Read/download both sermons, free of charge, at <http://www.spurgeongems.org>.] If any man among you seems to be religious, but bridles not his tongue and deceives his own heart, this man’s religion is vain. That which is in the well will come up in the bucket, and that which is in the heart will come up on the tongue. An unbridled tongue denotes an unrenewed heart. Oh, that God would always give us Grace in our heart to move our tongue aright! Then, as the water guides the whole ship, our tongue will guide our whole body and the whole of our manhood will be under holy government and control.

27. *Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.* [See Sermon #2313, Volume 39—CHARITY AND PURITY—Read/download the entire sermon, free of charge, at <http://www.spurgeongems.org>.] Oh, how much this means—tenderness to others and tenderness of conscience in ourselves! How much Divine Grace we need in order that these two virtues may shine brightly within us!

—Adapted from *The C. H. Spurgeon Collection*, Ages Software, 1.800.297.4307

**PRAY THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL USE THIS SERMON
TO BRING MANY TO A SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST.**

GOD'S WILL ABOUT THE FUTURE

NO. 2242

**INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, FEBRUARY 7, 1892,
DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,
ON THURSDAY EVENING, OCTOBER 16, 1890.**

“Come now, you that say, today or tomorrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: whereas you know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor, that appears for a little time, and then vanishes away. For that you ought to say, If the Lord wills, we shall live, and do this or that. But now you rejoice in your boasting: all such rejoicing is evil. Therefore to him that knows to do good, and does it not, to him it is sin.”
James 4:13-17

["It is remarkable that the sermon selected for this week should be so peculiarly suitable for the present trying time. It ought to be read with special solemnity. Oh, that it may be the means of leading many to make the great preparation for the future which only Believers in the Lord Jesus Christ have made!"]—Words noted at the bottom of page one of this sermon—read to the congregation at the Metropolitan Tabernacle the Sunday after Brother Spurgeon died—EOD.]

MEN, today, are just the same as when these words were first written. We still find people saying what they are going to do today, tomorrow, in six months time or at the end of another year and, perhaps, still further. I have no doubt there are persons here who have their own career mapped out before them pretty distinctly—and they feel well-near certain that they will realize it all! We are like the men of the past, but this Book, though it has been written so long, might have been written yesterday, so exactly does it describe human nature as it is at the end of this 19th Century!

The text applies with very peculiar force when our friends and fellow workers are passing away from us. Sickness and death have been busy in our midst. Perhaps in our abundant service we have been reckoning what this Brother would do this week, and what that Sister would be doing next week, and so on. Even for God's work we have had our plans, dependent in great measure on the presence of some beloved helpers. They have appeared among us in such buoyant health that we have scarcely thought it possible that they would be struck down in a moment. Yet so it has often been. The uncertainty of life comes home to us when such things occur—and we begin to wonder that we have reckoned anything at all safe, or even *probable*, in such a shifting, changing world as this! With this in full view, I am going to talk about how we ought to behave with regard to the

future—and attempt to draw some lessons for our own correction and instruction from the verses before us.

Following the line of the text and keeping as close to it as we can, we will notice, first, that counting on the future is folly. Then we will observe what is clear enough to us all, that *ignorance of the future is a matter of fact*. In the third place, I shall set before you the main truth of this passage, that *recognition of God in the future is wisdom*. Our fourth point shall be that *boasting of the future is sin*. And our final thought will be that the *using of the present is a duty*.

I. To begin with, it will need but few words to convince you that COUNTING ON THE FUTURE IS FOLLY. The Apostle says, "Come now!" as if he meant, "you are acting absurdly! See how ridiculous your conduct is." "Come now, you that say, Today or tomorrow we will do such and such a thing." There is almost a touch of sarcasm in the words. The fact of frail, feeble man so proudly ordering his own life and forgetting God seems, to the Apostle James, so preposterous that he scarcely deems it worthwhile to argue the point! He only says, "Come now!"

Let us first look at *the form of this folly* and notice what it was that these people said when they were counting on the future. The text is very full of suggestions upon this matter.

They evidently thought everything was at their own disposal. They said, "We will go, we will continue, we will buy, we will sell, we will get gain." But is it not foolish for a man to feel that he can do as he likes and that everything will fall out as he desires—that he can both propose and dispose—and has not to ask God's consent at all? He makes up his mind and he determines to do just what his mind suggests. Is it so, O Man, that your life is self-governed? Is there not, after all, One greater than yourself? Is there not a higher Power that can speed you or stop you? If you do not know this, you have not yet learned the first letter of the alphabet of wisdom! May God teach you that everything is not at your disposal, but that the Lord reigns, the Lord sits King forever and ever! Notice that these people, while they thought everything was at their disposal, used everything for worldly objectives. What did they say? Did they determine with each other, "We will today or tomorrow do such and such a thing for the glory of God and for the extension of His Kingdom"? Oh, no, there was not a word about *God* in it, from beginning to end!

Therein they are only too truly the type of the bulk of men today. They said, "We will buy. Then we will carry our goods to another market at a little distance. We will sell at a profit and so we will get gain." Their first and their last thoughts were of the earth, earthy, and their one idea seemed to be that they might get sufficient gain to make them feel that they were rich and increased in goods. That was the highest ambition upon their minds. Are there not many who are living just in that way now? They think that they can map out their own life and the one objective of their efforts seems to be to buy and sell and get gain! Or else to obtain honor, or to enjoy pleasure. Their heart rises not into the serene air of Heaven—they are still groveling here below!

All that these men of old spoke of doing was to be done entirely in their own strength. They said, "We will. We will." They had no thought of asking

the Divine blessing, nor of entreating the help of the Most High. They did not care for that—they were self-contained—they called themselves, “self-made men” and they intended to make money! Who cannot make money who has made himself? Who cannot succeed in business who owes his character and his present standing entirely to his own exertions and to his own brain? So they were full of self-confidence and began reckoning for the future without a shadow of doubt as to their own ability. Alas, that men should do so, even today, that without seeking counsel of God, they should go forward in proud disdain or in complete forgetfulness of “the arrow that flies by day” and, “the pestilence that walked in darkness,” until they are suddenly overwhelmed in eternal ruin!

It is evident that to those men everything seemed certain. “We will go into such a city.” How did they know that they would ever get there? “We will buy, and sell, and get gain.” Did they regulate the markets? Might there be no fall in prices? Oh, no, they looked upon the future as a dead certainty and upon themselves as people who were sure to win, whatever might become of others.

They also had the foolish idea that they were immortal. If they had been asked whether men might not die, they would have said, “Yes, of course, all men must die some time or other,” for all men count all men mortal. But in their hearts they would have made an exception in their own case—if we may judge them by what we were apart from Sovereign Grace. “All men count all men mortal but themselves.” Without any saving clause, they said, “We will continue there a year.” How did they know that they would see a single quarter of that year through? But you must not press such men too closely with awkward questions! If you had done so, they would have said, “Do not talk about death—it makes one melancholy.”

Having looked at the form of this folly of counting on the future, let us speak a little on *the folly itself*. It is a great folly to build hopes on that which may never come. It is unwise to count your chickens before they are hatched—it is madness to risk everything on the unsubstantial future.

How do we know what will be on the morrow? It has grown into a proverb that we ought to expect the unexpected, for often the very thing happens which we thought would *not* happen. We are constantly surprised by the events which occur around us. In God's great oratory of Providence, there are passages of wondrous eloquence because of the surprise power that is in them. They come upon us at unawares and overwhelm us. How can we reckon upon anything in a world like this—where nothing is certain but uncertainty? Besides, the folly is seen in the fact of the frailty of our lives and the brevity of them. “What is your life? It is even a vapor, that appears for a little time.”

That cloud upon the mountain—you see it as you rise in the morning—you have scarcely dressed yourself before all trace of it has gone! Here in our streets, the other night, we came to worship through a thick fog and found it even here in the House of Prayer. But while we worshipped, there came a breath of wind and on our way home a stranger would not have thought that London had been, but a few hours before, so dark with dirty mist—it had all disappeared! Life is even as a vapor. Sometimes these va-

pers, especially at the time of sunset, are exceedingly brilliant. They seem to be magnificence, itself, when the sun paints them with heavenly colors. But in a little while they are all gone and the whole panorama of the sunset has disappeared. Such is our life. It may sometimes be very bright and glorious, but it is still only like a painted cloud and, very soon, the cloud and the color in it are both gone. We cannot reckon upon the clouds—their laws are so variable and their conditions so obscure—and such, also, is our life!

Why, then, is it, that we are always counting upon what we are going to do? How is it that, instead of living in the eternal future, where we might deal with certainties, we continue to live in the more immediate future, where there can be nothing but uncertainties? Why do we choose to build upon clouds and pile our palaces on vapor to see them melt away, as before they have often melted, instead of, by faith, getting where there is no failure, where God is All in All and His sure promises make the foundations of eternal mansions? Oh, I would say with my strongest emphasis—Do not reckon upon the future! Young people, I would whisper this in your ears—Do not discount the days to come! Old men, whispering is not enough for you—I would say with a voice of thunder—Count not on distant years! In the course of nature, your days must be few! Live in the present! Live unto God! Trust Him now and serve Him now, for very soon your life on earth will be over!

We thus see that counting on the future is folly.

II. Secondly, IGNORANCE OF THE FUTURE IS A MATTER OF FACT. Whatever we may say about what we mean to do, we do not know anything about the future. The Apostle, by the Spirit, speaks truly when he says, “You know not what shall be on the morrow.” Whether it will come to us laden with sickness or health, prosperity or adversity, we cannot tell. Tomorrow may mark the end of our life—possibly even the end of the age. Our ignorance of the future is certainly a fact.

Only God knows the future. All things are present to Him—there is no past and no future to His all-seeing eyes. He dwells in the present tense forevermore as the great I AM. He knows what will be on the morrow and He, alone knows! The whole course of the universe lies before Him, like an open map. Men do not know what a day may bring forth, but Jehovah knows the end from the beginning! There are two great certainties about things that shall come to pass—one is that God knows—and the other is that *we do not* know.

As the knowledge of the future is hidden from us, *we ought not pry into it.* It is perilous, it is wicked to attempt to lift even a corner of the veil that hides us from things to come. Search into those things that are revealed in Holy Scripture and know them, as far as you can, but be not so foolish as to think that any man or woman can tell you what is to happen on the morrow. And do not think so much of your own judgment and foresight as to say, “That is clear, I can predict that.” Never prophesy until *after* the event and then, of course, you cannot prophesy! Therefore never attempt to prophesy at all. You know not what shall be on the morrow and you ought not to make any unhallowed attempt to obtain the knowledge. Let

the doom of King Saul on Mount Gilboa warn you against such a terrible course.

Further, *we are benefited by our ignorance of the future*. It is hidden from us for our good! Suppose a certain man is to be very happy, by-and-by? If he knows it, he will be discontented till the happy hour arrives. Suppose another man is to have great sorrow very soon. It is well that he does not know it, for now he can enjoy the present good. If we could have all our lives written in a book—with everything that was to happen to us recorded therein—and if the hand of Destiny should give us the book, we would be wise not to read it, but to put it by and say—

***“My God, I would not long to see
My fate with curious eyes,
What gloomy lines are writ for me,
Or what bright lines arise.”***

It is sufficient that our heavenly Father knows—and His knowledge may well content us. Knowledge is not wisdom. His is wisest who does not wish to know what God has not revealed. Here, surely, ignorance is bliss—it would be folly to be wise.

Because we do not know what is to be on the morrow, *we should be greatly humbled by our ignorance*. We think we are so wise, do we not? And we make a calculation that we are sure is correct! We arrange that this and the other thing is going to be done—but God puts forth His little finger and removes some friend, or changes some circumstance—and all our propositions fall to the ground! It is better for us, when we are low before the Throne of God, than when we stand up and plume ourselves because we think we can say, “Oh, I knew it would be so! See how well I reckoned! With what wondrous forethought I provided for it all!” Had God blown upon our plans, they would have come to nothing! We know nothing for sure. Let that thought humble us greatly.

Seeing that these things are so, *we should remember the brevity, the frailty and the end of our life*. We cannot be here long. If we live to the extreme age of men, how short our time is! But the most of us will never reach that period wherein we may say to one another, “My lease has run out.” How frail is our hold on this world! In a moment we are gone—gone like the moth! You put your finger upon it and it is crushed. Man is not great—man is less than little! He is as nothing. He is but a dream. Before he can scarcely say that he is here, we are compelled to say that he is gone!

We are glad that we do not know when our friends are to die and we feel thankful that we cannot foretell when we shall depart out of this life. What good would it do us? Some who are in bondage through fear of death might be in greater bondage, still, while those who are now careless about it would probably feel more content in their carelessness. If they had to live another 20 years, they would say, “At any rate, we may sport away 19 of them.” As for those of us to whom this world is a wilderness and who count ourselves as pilgrims hurrying through it—we know enough when we know that this is not our rest because it is polluted—and that the day will soon come when we shall enter the Canaan of our inheritance and be, “forever with the Lord.” Meanwhile, the Presence of the Lord

makes a Heaven even of the wilderness! Since He is with us, we are content to leave the ordering of our lives to His unerring wisdom! We ought, for every reason, to be thankful that we do *not* know the future, but, at any rate, we can clearly see that to count on it is folly—and that ignorance of it is a matter of fact.

III. Thirdly, RECOGNITION OF GOD WITH REGARD TO THE FUTURE IS TRUE WISDOM. What says our text? “For that you ought to say, if the Lord wills, we shall live, and do this, or that.” I do not think that we need always, in every letter and in every handbill, put, “If the Lord wills,” yet I wish that we more often used those very words! The fashionable way is to put it in Latin and, even then, to abbreviate it, and use only the consonants, “D.V.,” to express it. You know, it is a fine thing when you can put your religion into Latin and make it very short. Then nobody knows what you mean by it, or, if they do, they can praise your scholarship and admire your humility!

I do not care about those letters, “D.V.” I rather like what Fuller says when he describes himself as writing in the letter such passages as, “God willing,” or, “God lending me life.” He says, “I observe, Lord, that I can scarcely hold my hand from encircling these words in parenthesis, as if they were not essential to the sentence, but may as well be left out as put in. Whereas, indeed, they are not only of the commission at large, but so of the quorum, that without them all the rest is nothing! Why, hereafter, I will write these words freely and fairly, without any enclosure about them! Let critics censure it for bad grammar—I am sure it is good divinity.” So he quaintly puts the matter. Still, whether you write, “If the Lord wills,” or not, always let it be clearly understood! And let it be conspicuous in all your arrangements that you recognize that God is over all and that you are under His control. When you say, “I will do this or that,” always add, in thought, if not in words, “If the Lord wills.” No harm can come to you if you bow to God’s sovereign sway.

We should recognize God in the affairs of the future, because, first, *there is a Divine will which governs all things*. I believe that nothing happens apart from Divine determination and decree! Even the little things in life are not overlooked by the all-seeing eyes! “The very hairs of your head are numbered.” The nest of a rush by the river is as fixed and foreknown as the station of a king! And the chaff from the hand of the winnow is steered as much as the stars in their courses! All things are under regulation and have an appointed place in God’s plan—and *nothing* happens, after all, but what He permits or ordains! Knowing that, we will not always say, “If the Lord wills,” yet we will always *feel* it. Whatever our purposes may be, there is a higher Power which we must always acknowledge—and there is an Omnipotent purpose before which we must bow in lowliest reverence, saying, “If the Lord wills.”

But while many of God’s purposes are hidden from us, *there is a revealed will which we must not violate*. It is chiefly in reference to this that the Christian should always say, “I will do this or that, provided that, when the time comes, I shall see it to be consistent with the Law of God and with the precepts of the Gospel.” I say now, “I will do this or that,” but certain other things may occur which will render it improper for me to do

so. Therefore, to be quite in accordance with the Word I so deeply reverence, I must always put in the saving clause, sometimes giving utterance to it, but in every case meaning, whether I put it into words or not, "I will do so and so, if it is right to do it. I will go, or I will stay, if it is the will of God."

In addition to this, *there is a Providential will of God which we should always consult.* With this guidance, which comes from the circumstances that surround us, Believers are familiar. Sometimes a thing may seem to us to be right enough, morally, and yet we may not quite know whether we should do it or not. Or, perhaps, there are two courses equally right, when judged by the Word of God, and you are uncertain which to follow. The highest wisdom, in such a case, is to wait for God to make a path plain by some act of Providence. When you come where two roads meet in your perplexity, pull up, kneel down and lift your hearts to Heaven, asking your Father the way! And whenever we are purposing what we should do—and we *ought* to make some purposes, for God's people are not to be without forethought or prudence—we should always say, or mean without saying, "All my plans must wait till the Lord sets before me an open door. If God permits, I will do this. But if the Lord wills, I will stop and do nothing. My strength shall be to sit still unless the Master wishes me to go forward."

May I whisper into the ear of some very quick, impetuous and hasty people, that it would be greatly to their soul's benefit if they knew how to sit still? Many of us seem as if we must always do everything at once and, therefore, we make no end to muddle for ourselves. There is often a blessed discipline in postponement. It is a grand word, that word, "wait"—especially in this particular connection. "Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart: wait, I say, on the Lord." Be patient! Sometimes even to be passive in the hand of God will be our strength—and to stand still until the cloudy, fiery pillar moves in front of us will be our highest wisdom.

There is yet another sense I would give to this expression—*there is a royal will which we would seek to fulfill.* That will is that the Lord's people should be saved and come to the knowledge of the Truth of God. So, as the servants of the Most High, we go forth to do this or that, "if the Lord wills," that is to say, if, by so doing, we can fulfill the great will of God in the salvation of men! I wish that this was the master motive with all Christians—that we were each willing to say, "I will go and live in such a place if there are souls to be saved there. I will take a house in such a street if, by living there, I can be of service to my Lord and Master. I will go to China or Africa, or to the ends of the earth if the Lord wills—that is to say, if, by going there, I can be helping to answer that prayer, 'Your will be done in earth, as it is in Heaven.'"

Dear Christian Friends, do you put yourselves entirely at God's disposal? Are you really His, or have you kept back a bit of yourself from the surrender? If you have retained any portion for yourself, that little reserve that you have made will be the channel by which your life will bleed away! You say, "We are not our own; we are bought with a price," but do you really mean it? I am afraid that there is a kind of mortgage on some Chris-

tians. They have some part they must give, as they fancy, to their own aggrandizement. They are not *all* for Christ. May the Lord bring us all to His feet in whole-hearted consecration till we can say, "We will not go to that city unless we can serve God there! We will not buy and we will not sell unless we can glorify God by buying and selling. And we will not even wish for the honest gain that comes of trading unless we can be promoting the will of God by getting it! Our best profit will consist of doing God's will."

A man can as much serve God by measuring calico, or by weighing groceries, as he can by preaching the Gospel, if he is called to do it and if he does it in a right spirit! This should *always* be our aim and we should put this *always* in the forefront of our life. "I go or stay, I ascend or I descend if the Lord wills. The Lord's will shall be done in my mortal body whether I live or whether I die."

May this be your resolve, then. Let this clause, "if the Lord wills," be written across your life and let us all set ourselves to the recognition of God in the future. It is a grand thing to be able to say, "Wherever I go and whatever happens to me, I belong to God, and I can say that God will prepare my way as well when I am old and gray-headed as He did when I was a boy. He shall guide me all the way to my everlasting mansion in Glory. He was the guide of my youth, He shall be the guide of my old age. I will leave everything to Him—all the way from earth to Heaven—and I will be content to live only a day at a time! And my happy song shall be—

***"So for tomorrow and its need I do not pray,
But keep me, guide me, hold me
Lord, just for today."***

IV. And now, fourthly, **BOASTINGS ABOUT THE FUTURE ARE EVIL.** "But now you rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil." I will not say much upon this point, but briefly ask you to notice the various ways in which men boast about the future.

One man says, about a certain matter, "*I will do it, I have made up my mind,*" and he thinks, "You cannot turn me. I am a man who, when he has once put his foot down, is not to be shifted from his place." Then he laughs and prides himself upon the strength of his will—but his boasting is sheer arrogance! Yet he rejoices in it and the Word of God is true of such a one—"All such rejoicing is evil."

Another man says, "*I shall do it, the thing is certain.*" And when a difficulty is suggested, he answers, "Tut, do not tell me about my proposing and God's disposing—I will propose and I will also dispose! I do not see any difficulty. I shall carry it out, I tell you. I shall succeed!" Then he laughs in his foolish pride and rejoices in his proud folly. All such rejoicings are evil! They are foolish, but, what is worse, they are *wicked*. Do I address myself to any who have no notion about Heaven or the world to come, but who feel that they are perfect masters of this world and, therefore, talk in the manner I have indicated and rejoice as they think how great they are? To such I will earnestly say, "All such rejoicing is evil."

I heard a third man say, "*I can do it. I feel quite competent.*" To him the message is the same—his boasting is evil. Though he thinks of himself, "Whatever comes in my way, I am always ready for it," he is greatly mis-

taken and errs grievously. I have often been in the company of a gentleman of this sort, but only for a very little while, for I have generally got away from him as soon as I could. He knows a thing or two. He has got the great secret that so many are seeking in vain. All of you ordinary people, he just snuffs you out. If you had more sense and could do as *he* does—well, then, you could be as well off as he is! Poor man! “Nobody needs to be poor,” he says. “Nobody needs to be poor. I was poor a little while, but I made up my mind that I would not remain poor. I fought my own way and I could begin again with a crust and work myself up.” You will notice his frequent use of the capital “I,” but ah, dear Sir, God has thunderbolts for these great “I”s! They offend Him! They are a smoke in His nostrils. Pride is one of the things which His soul hates. No man should speak in such a strain—“All such rejoicing is evil.”

But that young man yonder talks in a different tone. He has been planning what he will do when he succeeds, for, of course, he is going to succeed! Well, I hope that he may. He is going to buy and sell—and get gain—and he says, “*I will do so and so when I am rich.*” He intends, then, to live his fling and to enjoy himself! He laughs as he thinks what he will do when his toilsome beginnings are over and he can have his own way! I would ask him to pause and consider his life in a more serious vein—“All such rejoicing is evil.”

There is, of course, a future concerning which you *may* be certain. There is a future in which you may rejoice! God has prepared for them that serve Him, a crown of life and, by humble hope, you may wear the crown even now! You may, by the thoughts of such amazing bliss, begin to partake of the joy of Heaven—and this will do you no harm! On the contrary, it will set your heart at rest concerning your brief stay on earth, for what will it matter to you whether your life is cloudy or bright, short or long, when eternity is secure? But concerning the *uncertainties* of this fleeting life, if you begin to *rejoice*, “All such rejoicing is evil.”

V. That brings me to my last and most practical point, which is this—THE USING OF THE PRESENT IS OUR DUTY. “Therefore to him that knows good, and does it not, to him it is sin.” I take this text with its context. It means that he who knows what he ought to do, but does not do it *at once*, to him it is sin. The text does not refer to men who live in guilty knowledge of duty and neglect it—its message is to men who know the present duty and who think that they will do it by-and-by.

In the first place, *it is sinful to defer obedience to the Gospel.* “He that knows to do good, and does it not, to him it is sin.” Do you say, “I am going to repent”? Your duty is to repent *now*. “I am going to believe,” do you say? The command of Christ is, “Believe now.” “After I have believed,” says one, “I shall wait a long time before I make any profession.” Another says, “I am a Believer and I shall be baptized some day.” But as Baptism is according to the will of the Lord, you have no more right to postpone it than you have to postpone being honest or sober! All the commands of God to the characters to whom they are given come as a present *demand*. Obey them *now*! And if anyone here, knowing that God bids him to believe, refuses to believe, but says that he hopes to trust Christ one of these days,

let me read him this—"To him that knows to do good, and does it not"—this word is in the *present* tense—"to him it is sin."

In the next place, *it is sinful to neglect the common duties of life* under the idea that we shall do something more, by-and-by. You do not obey your parents, young man, and yet you are going to be a minister, are you? A pretty minister will you make! As an apprentice you are very dilatory and neglectful—and your master would be glad to see the back of you! He wishes that he could burn your indentures and yet you have an idea you are going to be a missionary, I believe. A pretty missionary you would be! There is a mother at home and her children are neglected while she talks to her neighbors. But when her children are off her hands, she is going to be a true mother in Israel and look after the souls of others. Such conduct is sin! Mind your children! Darn the stockings and attend to your other home duties! And when you have done that, talk about doing something in other places. If present duties are neglected, you cannot make up for the omission by some future piece of quixotic endeavor to do what you were never called to do! If we could all be quiet enough to hear that clock tick, we should hear it say, "Now! Now! Now! Now!" The clock resembles the call of God in the daily duties of the hour. "To him that knows to do good, and does it not, to him it is sin," even though he may dream of how he will, in years to come, make up for his present neglect!

Then, dear Friends, *it is sinful to postpone purposes of service*. If you have some grand project and holy purpose, I would ask you not to delay it. My dear friend, Mr. William Olney, whose absence we all mourn tonight, [This sermon was preached at the time Mr. William Olney, the senior deacon of the Tabernacle Church, was lying unconscious, after a paralytic stroke. He fell asleep in Jesus the next morning. On the following Lord's Day evening, the Pastor preached from Aces 13:36, the sermon that will be published next week—"If the Lord Wills"—A postscript at the bottom of the page—EOD.] was a very prompt, energetic man. He was here, he was there, he was everywhere serving his Lord and Master! And now that he is suddenly stricken down, his life cannot be said to be in any sense, unfinished! There is nothing to be done in his business. There is nothing to be done in his relation to this Church. There is nothing left undone with regard to anybody! It is all as finished as if he had known that he was going to be struck down.

Mr. Whitefield said that he would not go to bed unless he had put even his gloves in their right place. If he should die in the night, he would not like to have anybody asking, "Where did he leave his gloves?" That is the way for a Christian man to always live—to have everything in order, even to a pair of gloves! Finish up your work every night—no, finish up every minute! I have seen Mr. Wesley's journal, though it is not exactly a "journal"—it does not give an account of what he did in a day, nor even what he did in an hour. He divided his time into portions of 20 minutes each—and I have seen the book in which there is the record of something done for his Lord and Master every 20 minutes of the day! So exactly did he live that no single half-minute ever seemed to be wasted. I wish that we all lived in that way, so that we looked, not at projects in some distant future that never will be realized, but at something to be done *now*.

Last Thursday, when I was speaking, I said that some Christian people had never told the story of the Cross to others, and urged them to begin to do so at once. A young friend, sitting in this place, leaned over the front of the pew and touched a friend sitting there, saying to her, "I would like to speak to you about that." He had never spoken to her before—he did not even know her—and he thus addressed her while the service was proceeding. A member of the Church, sitting by her side, who heard what the young man said, was so pleased with his prompt action that she stayed after the service to sympathize and help while he explained the way of salvation! The young person to whom he spoke, came to tell me, last Tuesday, that she had found the Savior through that well-timed effort!

Dear Friends, that is the way to serve the Lord! If we were to do things at the moment when they occurred to us, we should do them to purpose! But, oh, how many pretty things you have always meant to do and have never even attempted! You have strangled the infant projects that have been born in your mind—you have not allowed them to live and grow into manhood of real action. First thoughts are best in the service of God and the carrying of them out would secure great benefit to others and much fruit for ourselves. "To him that knows to do good, and does it not, to him it is sin."

God help us, if we are saved, to get at this holy business of serving the Lord Christ, which as far exceeds buying and selling and getting gain, as the heavens are higher than the earth! Let us do something for Christ at once! You young people that are newly converted, if you do not, very soon, begin to work for Christ, you will grow to be idle Christians, scarcely Christians at all! But I believe that to attempt something suited to your ability almost immediately, as God shall direct you, will put you on the line of a useful career. God will bless you and enable you to do more as the years roll onwards.

I have this last word—"To him that knows to do good, and does is not, to him it is sin," that is, *it is sinful in proportion to our knowledge*. If there is any Brother here, into whose mind God has put something fresh, something good, I pray him to translate it into action at once! "Oh, but nobody has done it before!" Somebody must be first, and why should not *you* be the first if you are sure that it is a good thing and it has come into your heart through God the Holy Spirit? But if you know to do good, and do not do it—it will be *sin* every minute that you leave it undone. Therefore get to it at once! And you, my Sister, who tonight, while sitting here thinking of something you might have done which you have not yet attempted, attempt it at once! Do not let another sun rise, if you can help it, before you have begun the joyful and blessed service! "The time is short." Our opportunities are passing, "For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away." Be up and doing! Soon we shall be gone!

May we never hear the summons to go Home while there is anything left undone that we ought to have done for our Lord and Master! I am conscious of having spoken but very feebly and imperfectly, but, you know, my heart is heavy because of this sore trial which has come upon us through the stroke that has fallen on our beloved deacon, William Ol-

ney. And when the heart is so sad, the brain cannot be very lively. May God bless this word, for Jesus' sake! Amen.

Portion of Scripture Read before Sermon—James 4.
HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—90, 39, 211.

When last week's sermon was sent to the printers. Mr. Spurgeon was unable to write a letter to go at the end of it, for he was suffering so severely that he could not even dictate a message for his sermon readers. It was not, then, anticipated that his illness would take the terrible form it afterwards assumed, but on *Tuesday, January 26*, when the doctor came, he was obliged to report his patient's condition as “serious.” Since then, the daily bulletins have carried the sad tidings far and wide and most of the readers of the sermons probably know, by this time, that their beloved preacher has been suffering the same malady that so grievously afflicted him during last summer and autumn. His illness, on this occasion, has not developed exactly the same symptoms as before, but at the date of writing this note (January 31), the doctor reports that, “*his condition gives cause for the greatest anxiety.*”

It is with profound regret that the Publishers record the death of the beloved Pastor of the Metropolitan Tabernacle. He was called to his rest, at Mentone, on Sunday, January 31st, at 11 p.m.

To all who were privileged to know Mr. Spurgeon, this event has come as a great sorrow—a sorrow which will certainly be shared by every reader of the weekly sermons.

“I heard a voice from Heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yes, says the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them.”
Revelation 14:13.

The weekly Sermon and *The Sword and the Trowel* will be continued as usual, the Publishers having a large quantity of manuscripts and Sermons hitherto unpublished.

Adapted from *The C. H. Spurgeon Collection*, Ages Software, 1.800.297.4307

WHAT IS YOUR LIFE? NO. 1773

A sermon suggested by the sudden death of H.R.H., the Duke of Albany.

**DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, MARCH 30, 1884,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.**

*“For what is your life? It is even a vapor, that appears
for a little time, and then vanishes away.”
James 4:14.*

WHEN a prince dies, they toll the great bell of the cathedral that all the city may hear it and that for miles around the tidings may spread. Swift messengers of the press bear the news through the length and breadth of the land and all men's ears are made to tingle. A royal death is a national warning! A death in any of our families is a loud call to our own household, a call which I trust we hear. But a death in the Royal Family has a voice to the whole nation. It will be heard, it must be heard! In this great city, the crowds who care not to come to the house of God will, nevertheless, hear of this lamented death, and think of it and speak of it, each man to his fellow. Death is an orator whose solemn periods demand attention, especially when he preaches from the steps of the throne. “The Lord's voice cries unto the city”—let Believers be quick to hear the call to humiliation, to awakening and to prayer, that the visitation may be overruled for great and lasting good.

A sudden death is an especially impressive warning. If men die of old age, we regard it as coming in the common course of things. But when a young man is suddenly snatched away, then we understand that though the old *must* die, the young *may* die and that no one among us may reckon upon any long day of life, since, in a moment, our sun may go down before it is yet noon. So falls the grass beneath the mower's scythe! So fades the leaf from the tree! In a moment our strength is turned to weakness and our comeliness into corruption. Then, in accents as plain as they are terrible, the Lord says, “Because I will do this unto you, prepare to meet your God, O Israel!”

We have, this week, received fresh proof that death is impartial. As the Arab proverb has it, the black camel stops at every man's door. Sorrow has entered in at the windows of palaces and even in the royal chamber there lies one dead. If, therefore, Death is so impartial that he smites down the captains, let not the rank and file hope to escape. Death, which forces entrance to a prince's bedchamber, will not respect our cottage door. To us, also, in due time, shall be brought the message, “The Master is come and calls for you.” My ear hears a voice crying aloud, “Set your house in order; for you shall die and not live.” Will not you hear it? Will

any one of you refuse the voice which speaks from Heaven? Death evidently pays no respect to character, age, or hopefulness. A man may addict himself to the service of his country, but his patriotism will not protect him.

He may be surrounded with a wall of affection, but this will not screen him. He may have at his command all the comforts of life and yet life may ooze out before the physician is aware. He may be tenderly loved by an affectionate mother and his name may be engraved on the heart of the fondest of wives, but death has no regard to the love of women. "It is appointed unto men once to die." There is no discharge in this war—we shall all march into this fight—and unless the Lord, Himself, shall speedily come and end the present dispensation, we shall, each one, fall upon this battlefield, for the shafts of Death fly everywhere and there is no armor for either back or breast by which his cruel darts may be turned aside.

I would to God that all of us retained this Truth of God in our memories. "Lord, make me to know my end and the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am." We have a very clear conviction that others will die, but as to ourselves, we put far from us the evil day and care not to dwell upon a subject which smells so unpleasantly of the morgue! Yes, we admit that we shall die, but not so soon as to make it a pressing matter—we imagine that we are not within measurable distance of the tomb. Even the oldest man gives himself a little longer lease on life. And when he has passed his four-score years, we have seen him hugging life with as much tenacity as if he had just commenced it! Brothers and Sisters, in this we are not wise—Death will not spare us because we avoid him. What is there about any one of us that we should fare better than the rest of our fellow men? We are in the same army, marching upon the same field—why should we escape where all others fall? Only two of our race have gone into the better land without crossing the dark river of death—Enoch and Elijah—but no one among us will make a third.

Now, upon this matter we have nothing to say but what is commonplace, for, garnish them as you may, graves are among the most common of common things. Yet a solemn reflection upon the shortness of life and the certainty of death may prove to be important and even invaluable, if it is allowed to penetrate our hearts and influence our lives. History tells us of Peter Waldo, of Lyons, who was sitting at a banquet as thoughtless and careless as any of the revelers, when suddenly, one at the table bowed his head and died. Waldo was startled into thought and went home to seek his God. He searched the Scriptures and, according to some, became a great helper, if not the second founder of the Waldensian Church, which in the Alpine valleys kept the lamp of the Gospel burning when all around was veiled in night! The whole Church of God was thus strengthened and perpetuated by the hallowed influence of death upon a single mind!

I suppose it is also true that Luther, in his younger days, walking with his friend, Alexis, saw him struck to the ground by a flash of lightning

and became, from that day on, prepared in heart for that deep work of Grace through which he learned the Doctrine of Justification by Faith—and rose to be the liberator of Europe from Papal bondage! How much, every way, we owe to this weighty subject! Among the earnest, the prayerful, the holy, many must acknowledge that the vaults of death have brought them spiritual health! Men have been helped to live by remembering that they must die—yes, some men knew nothing of the highest form of life till Death awakened them from their deadly slumbers.

I hope that God's Spirit may, this morning, impress many of you with these reflections, and lead you to the Cross of Christ by the way of this *memento mori*. May a prince's death awaken many of you to life! He, being dead, now speaks to you! From yonder sunny shores he reminds you of the valley of death which you must shortly traverse. With an intense desire for our spiritual profit I shall speak upon our text in two ways—first, let us consider *the Truth of God in the text* and, secondly, *the lessons in that Truth*.

I. We commence with THE TRUTH IN THE TEXT, upon which we have already touched. The text begins by reminding us that we have no foresight—"Whereas you know not what shall be on the morrow." God has given us memory that we may look *backward*—and it were well if we used our memories better for remembrance, reflection and repentance—but God has given us no eyes with which to pry into the *future*. He unveils the past to our penitence, but He veils the future from our curiosity. Dark days may be near at hand for some of us, but we do not perceive them. Let us be thankful that we do not, for we might multiply our afflictions by the foresight of them—and the prospect of evil to come might cast a gloom over pleasure near at hand. As we may feel a thousand deaths in fearing one, so may we faint under a thousand lashes in dreading a single stroke.

It is good, also, that our God conceals from us our earthly joys until the time for their arrival. Great prosperity may await you and a considerable enlargement of your temporal comfort, but you do not know it and it is as well that you should not, for you might be none the better for the prospect. Earth's goods are like birdlime and are fearfully apt to glue us down to things below and prevent our soaring towards Heaven. If, then, we could know all the pleasurable events that may happen to us, we might become more worldly and more earthbound than we are. None of us should desire that this present evil world should have an increased influence over us—we are glad that it should have less and, therefore, we rejoice that its future has such slight power over us because of its being unknown. No, we cannot see far, and those who act as if they could see into coming days behave most foolishly.

Hear these people whom James describes—they boast most wretchedly! They will go into the city—they are sure they will—what is to hinder them? "Today or tomorrow we will go into such a city"—they have plenty of time and can make a selection according to their pleasure—they can go where they like and when they like. They see themselves, with prophetic glance, entering in at the city gate, and they are fully assured that

they shall “continue there a year.” Of course, a year is a small matter—if they please, they will stay longer. They allot themselves a lease for three, seven, 14, or 21 years, at discretion—at least they *talk* as if they could do so. They are going into the city to “buy and sell.” They are sure of that, too. Of course they will not be laid up with sickness! They do not fear that accident or disease will keep them away from market, or hinder the active transacting of their business.

No, they are going to buy and sell, and such is their confidence in their own superior abilities that they are sure to make a profit—the markets cannot fall below the price which they have fixed in their own minds—neither will they make bad debts, nor incur other losses, for they have decided that they will “get gain.” Up to now they have been self-made men and they mean to go on making themselves until they put the finishing stroke by adding a few more thousands. They have visions of going on to fortune. Ah, you prophets, you are going to your graves! This is a sure oracle. The tomb will be your only patrimony and the shroud your sole possession! Let none of us talk of what we *resolve* to do at some future date. Look well to the present, for that is all the time we can be sure of—and there may be little enough of that.

“Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave, where you go.” Thus said the wise man. Let wise men take heed to his counsel. The Apostle emphasizes the folly of this supposed foresight by telling us that we cannot even reckon upon another *day*. You have come close up to the end of March, but if you reckon upon what you will do upon the first of April, you may find, by the event, that you are a fool! You may get to the last day of the year, but if you reckon on a new year, you may be giving new proof of your ignorance! Even in the morning we cannot make sure of the eventide, nor in the evening can we reckon upon the morning. James puts the matter strongly when he asks—“What is your life?” You do not know what is going to happen on the morrow, for you do not know your own life. What is it? The text divides itself into an emphatic question, “What is your life?” And an instructive answer—“It is even a vapor, that appears for a little time, and then vanishes away.”

First, I say, we have, here, *an emphatic question*. He asks, “What is your life?” For solidity, for stability, what is it? What is there in it? Is it not composed of such stuff as dreams are made of? The breath in your nostrils is not more unsubstantial than is your life. There, breathe it out! On such a morning as this, you see your breath, but it is only in your sight for a moment and then it vanishes away. Your own breath is a fair picture of the flimsy, airy thing which men call life. What is your life? What is it for continuance? Some things last for centuries—but what is *your* life?

Even garments bear some little wear and tear, but what is *your* life? A delicate texture—no cobweb is a tenth as frail. It will fail before a touch, a breath! Justinian, an emperor of Rome, died by going into a room which had been newly painted! Adrian, a pope, was strangled by a fly! A consul struck his foot against his own threshold and his foot mortified,

so that he died thereby! There are a thousand gates to death and, though some seem to be narrow wickets, many souls have passed through them! Men have been choked by a grape seed; killed by a tile falling from the roof of a house; poisoned by a drop; carried off by a whiff of foul air. I know not what there is that is too little to slay the greatest king!

It is a marvel that man lives at all! So unstable is our life that the Apostle says, What is it? So frail, so fragile is it, that he does not call it a flower of the field, or the snuff of a candle, but asks, What is our life? It is as if he had said—Is it anything? Is it not a near approach to nothing? Have you ever noticed how David answers this question in the 39th Psalm? He says in the 5th verse of that Psalm that *man is vanity*. What is vanity? It is nothing in reality! It is merely the presence of something. It is an idle dream, an empty conceit, a delusion, a make-believe! Such is man. But David says more than that—he declares that *every man is vanity*. Princes, kings, philosophers, the strongest, the healthiest, the ablest, the most virtuous—*every man is vanity!* Among the millions of mankind, none rises above this dreary state of nothingness! He says more than that. He writes—*every man at his best state is vanity*—when he is in the prime and glory of his life, when he is most healthy and vigorous, when his eyes are clearest and his muscles are firmest, he is still no better than sheer vanity!

David goes even further, for he thus speaks—“*Every man at his best state is altogether vanity.*” That is, he is nothing but vanity, there is nothing more enduring about him. He is gone with a puff! He spends his years as a tale that is told. Do not overlook one more emphatic word which David sets in the forefront of the sentence, “*Verily,*” as if he were quite sure of it and could not tolerate a question upon the subject—“*Verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity.*” Have you ever observed how Job, when he speaks of our life, sets us a sign in each of the three elements whereon and wherein we dwell? See his ninth chapter, at the 25th verse. He says, “My days are swifter than a runner.” Here is an emblem upon the land. Oriental kings employed swift-footed runners and horses and camels—and these, to the Oriental imagination, were the very *essence* of speed. Even we, before the days of electricity, knew of nothing faster than the royal mail! Job, therefore, well says, “My days are swifter than a runner.”

Then he bids us look to sea, for he says, “They are passed away as the swift ships.” Ships which are built for speed seem to fly as on wings when they spread their sails to a favoring wind. We ought not to view ships at sea without remembering the brevity of our days. But lest we should *still* forget, the Patriarch further likens his days to “the eagle that hastens to the prey.” As the vulture spies, from a distance, the carcass of a camel and descends upon it with hasty sloop, so our life hastens to descend. Thus earth, sea, and air all remind us of the speed at which life flies towards its end! St. Augustine used to say he did not know whether to call it a dying life or a living death—and I leave *you* to choose between those two expressions.

This is certainly a dying life—its march is marked by graves. Nothing but a continuous miracle keeps any one of us from the sepulcher. Were Omnipotence to stay its power but for a moment, earth would return to earth and ashes to ashes. It is a dying life—and equally true is it that it is a living death. We are always dying. Every beating pulse we count leaves the number less. The more years we count in our life, the fewer remain in which we shall behold the light of day. While we are sitting still in this house, the earth is revolving round the sun and bearing us all through space at an amazing rate. We are all moving and yet we do not perceive it! Even so, while you are listening to this sermon you are all being borne onward towards eternity at lightning speed. As though we were laid in the bosom of some mighty angel and he, with outstretched wings, darted along like a flame of fire, we are always going our onward way.

Though we dream that we are at a stay, yet we never rest for an instant! The stream is bearing us onward—we are nearing the cataract! We must always obey the mandate—“Onward, onward, onward.” From childhood to youth, from youth to manhood, from manhood to gray old age we march onward in serried ranks from which no man can retire. We tarry not even when we sleep—we are continually moving forward like the waters of yonder river, on whose banks we find a habitation. What, then, is our life? That is a question which remains, to a large degree, unanswered and *unanswerable*. Yet our text affords us what is, in some aspects, *an instructive answer*. It does not so much tell us what life actually is as what it is *like*. “*It is even a vapor.*” James compares our life, you see, to a very subtle, unsubstantial, flimsy thing—a vapor.

If you live upon a high hill, from which you can look down upon a stretch of country, you see in the early morning a mist covering all the valleys. It is singular to mark the tops of the great elms appearing above it, like islands in a sea of cloud, with, perhaps, here and there a Church spire rising like a sharp pyramid from the waste of mist. In a little time you look from the same window and the vapor has all vanished. It was so thin, so fine, so much like a gas, that a breath of wind has scattered it, or perhaps the sun has drawn it aloft. At any rate, not a trace of that all-encompassing vapor remains. Such is your life!

Or you have marked a cloud in the western sky, illuminated with those marvelous lights which glowed during those extraordinary sunsets, the like of which none of our fathers had seen. You looked at the jeweled mass—it shone in the perfection of beauty and all the colors of the rainbow were blended in its hues! In another instant, lo, it was not! It was gone past all recall. Such is your life! This morning, as we came here, we saw our breath—it was before our eyes for an instant and then it had gone. Such is the picture which James presents to us. “What is your life? It is even a vapor.” He proceeds to explain his own symbol in a sentence which is full of meaning. “It is even a vapor, *that appears.*” Notice that. He does not speak of it as a substance, having a true existence, but says that it “*appears.*”

Vapor is so ethereal, phantom-like and unreal, that it may rather be said to appear than to exist. If you could reach yon fleecy cloud, you

would scarcely know that you had entered it, for it would possibly appear to be the thinnest of mist. The vapor which steams from your mouth—how light, how airy it is! It is next door to *nothing*—it only “appears.” And such is this life—a dream, a vain show, an apparition of the night! Half our joys and sorrows are but the presence of joy and the shadow of sorrow—and the most of things through which we travel are not what they seem. We ought to know this in a practical way and set less store by the thing which are seen, which are temporal. This life “appears”—that is all.

Further, the Apostle says, it, “appears *for a little time.*” It is only a very little while that a man lives at the longest. Compare a man’s life with that of a tree. There is so striking a contrast between our present short life and that of a cedar, or an oak, that to set forth the longer life of saints in the millennial age, the Lord says, “As the days of a tree are the days of My people, and My elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands.” In that happy age men shall nourish long as the trees of the forest, but now, a man standing beneath an oak is a mere infant compared with the branches which overshadow him. A hundred years ago that oak seemed every way as venerable as it does today, whereas the man was then unthought of by his grandfather. Compare our life with the existence of this world. I mean not the present state of the earth as fitted up for man, but I allude to those unknown ages which intervened between the present arrangement and that beginning wherein God created the heavens and the earth.

The long eras of fire and water, the reigns of fishes and reptiles, the periods of tropical heat and polar ice make one think of man as a thing of yesterday. Then contrast our life with the being of the eternal Lord—and what is man—man when most venerable with years? A Methuselah—what is he? He is but an insect born in the morning’s sunbeam, sporting in the noontide ray and dead when the dews begin to fall! He appears for a little while. The parallel is further consummated by the Apostle’s adding, “*And then vanishes away.*” The cloud is gone from the mountain. Where is it? It has vanished away. No trace of it is left—neither can you recall it.

We, too, shall soon be gone—gone as a dream when one awakens. With the most of us, our memory will be short. Many leave us concerning whom it would be a pity that they should be remembered, while many fail to live for others and, therefore, their fellows speedily forget them. Amid the crowded cemetery a single grave is lost—amid 10,000 deaths no one departure can long abide in human memory. As far as this world is concerned, we all shall, by-and-by, vanish away. Then shall our near companion say of us—

***“One morn I missed him on the accustomed hill,
Along the heath, and near his favorite tree.
Another came, nor yet beside the rill,
Nor up the lawn, nor at the wood was he.”***

The air has felt the passing bell and now the stars look down upon a stone on which is written in large letters, “HERE HE LIES!”

Or the dews shall wet a grass-grown mound, girt about with brambles, on which a few wild flowers have sprung up spontaneously to show how

life shall yet triumph over death. Children may bear our name and yet a fourth generation shall quite forget that we ever sojourned in this region! Such is our life—"a vapor, that appears for a little time, and then vanishes away." This is the Truth of God—you know it—but I cannot impress it upon your hearts as it ought to be impressed. Therefore I invite you to join me in the prayer, "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom."

II. Secondly, let us now learn THE LESSONS WHICH LIE WITHIN THIS TRUTH. May we read, mark, learn and inwardly digest the same. First, if this life is as unsubstantial as a vapor—and nobody can deny the fact—let us regard it as such and let us seek for something substantial elsewhere—

***"This world's a dream, an empty show.
But the great world to which I go
Has joys substantial and sincere—
When shall I wake and find me there?"***

It may be well to make the best of both worlds, but of this poor world, *nothing* can be made unless it is viewed in the light of another. This is a poor withering life at the best, for we all fade as a leaf. Unless we purposely live with a view to the *next* world, we cannot make much out of our present existence. Such rags as this poor present world of time and sense, can never be made up into an array in which a man would care to robe himself. At the same time, do not be frightened at the unhandsome form in which this life, at times, appears—it is, after all, but a vapor—and who will be alarmed at it?

Do not be overjoyed as he was who hoped to embrace a goddess and was deceived by a cloud—it is, after all, but a semblance—its sorrows are scarcely worth a tear, nor do its joys deserve a smile! Vanity and vapor are things which wise men set small store by. Children may be pleased with the bubbles which they blow by the aid of an old pipe and a piece of soap, but as for men who have put away childish things, they ought not to be greatly moved by the things of this life, for they are but bubbles of less brilliance and less substance than those which delight the child! "Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher; all is vanity." Let the lower lights burn dimly before your eyes—they are mere sparks and they are soon quenched.

Let us grip the eternal and sit loose by the temporal. The jewels of eternity will glitter in our crowns when all things pass away, but the trifles of this life are as the flowers which children pluck in the meadows, which wither in their hands before they can carry them home. In this place I suggest as your prayer that stanza of the poet, in which he addresses the Well-Beloved thus—

***"Show me Your face—
My faith and love
Shall henceforth fixed be,
And nothing here have power to move
My soul's serenity.
My life shall seem a trance, a dream,
And all I feel and see
Illusive, visionary—***

You, the one reality.”

Next, is life most uncertain? We know it is—no one attempts to deny it. It is certain that life will come to an end, but it is most uncertain when it will come to that end. Is it so uncertain? Then let us not delay! I would to God I could whisper this wisdom into every procrastinator’s ear. Why do you halt and hesitate? If you are desirous to be saved from the wrath to come, why do you put it off till a tomorrow which may never come? Will you delay repenting and die impenitent? Will you delay faith and perish as an unbeliever? Will you keep back from mercy and pardon—and refuse the free Grace of God? I pray you do not, for if you delay another day, it may be you will be in the land where hope can never come to you!

Think of your peril, O you ungodly men! Within an hour you may be at the Judgment Seat of God, or in the pit of Hell. Nothing keeps you where there is hope except a thread so fine as to be invisible and, so easily broken, that none but a madman would trust his soul’s destiny upon it! Awake, I pray you! Since death is hastening, hasten yourself until you have found a refuge in the cleft of the Rock of Ages—and are safe in the arms of Jesus! Since life is so uncertain, oh, hasten, Christian, to serve your God while the opportunity is given you! Be diligent, today, to do those works which perfect saints above and holy angels cannot do. You will soon be where you can no more give alms to the poor, nor instruct the ignorant, nor visit the fatherless and the widow. You shall have no opportunities for speaking to men about their souls, or winning them for Christ, when once this shadowy life has vanished away!

How earnest every worker ought to be to do his work well while he has the opportunity. I have charged myself again and again—I would to God the charge had been more effectual—to preach—

***“As though I never might preach again,
A dying man to dying men.”***

I am persuaded that if we were in possession of all the wisdom that Grace will give us, we should do everything for the good of men most speedily, with deep prayerfulness, with true spiritual life and with an entire dependence upon the Spirit of God for the blessing of it. Come, my Brothers and Sisters, what you do, do quickly! If you wish to honor your Lord while you are here, and win jewels for His crown, up and at it, for the day is far spent! You cannot afford to waste a moment, for you have much to do, and very little time to do it in! Help us, O Spirit of the Lord!

Is life so short? Does it only appear for a little time and then vanish away? Then let us put all we can into it. If life is short, it is wisdom to have no fallows, but to sow every foot of ground while we can. It will be prudent to pack our little space as full as possible. Somebody said, the other day, of our dear friend, Mr. Moody, that he was the only man who could pronounce “Jerusalem” in two syllables. It shows the activity of the man that he can speak as much in two syllables as other people can say in four! He is always at it, working for his Master, double tides, rowing with both hands! Some speakers are long in delivering short sentences—instead of saying much in little, they say little in much! Oh, for someone to teach them to say “Jerusalem” in two syllables!

Let us put plenty of life into our existence, plenty of work into our life, plenty of heart into our work and plenty of warmth into our heart. Oh, may God give us to live while we live! May we not only live but be all alive. Is life so short? Then do not let us make any very great provision for it. I have heard of certain people who are so imprudent that they never lay by anything for a rainy day, to whom I would say, "Go to the ant, you sluggard—consider her ways and be wise—which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, provides her meat in the summer and gathers her food in the harvest." It would be a poverty-stricken world if all followed the example of improvidence which is set by certain spiritual blunders.

There is a thriftiness which we all ought to exercise, but there is no justification for laying up treasure which will never be used! Ants do not store up grain for storing's sake—they do but divide over the whole year the harvest of a month. To hoard up endless gold is a species of insanity! If I were going a day's voyage, I would not wish to take with me enough biscuit and salt beef to last for three years—it would only cumber the boat. One walking stick is an admirable help, as I often find. But to carry a bundle of them when going on a journey would be a superfluity of absurdity! Alas, how many load themselves as if life's journey would last a thousand years at the least? Some men have amassed hundreds of thousands of pounds—when are they going to enjoy their wealth? They are getting more and more and this occupies all their time—they are so busy cooking that they never have time to dine! They are so taken up with filling the wardrobe that they are all in rags. We do not need a ton weight of candles if we are only going to sit up for a few minutes. Let us be wise enough to suit the supply to the need.

Is time so short? Then do not let us fret about its troubles and discomforts. A man is on a journey and puts up at an inn. And when he is fairly in the hostelry, he perceives that it is a poor place with scant food and a hard bed. "Well, well," he says, "I am off the first thing tomorrow morning and so it does not matter." This world is an inn and if there are certain discomforts in it, let us remember that we are not tenants for years, but only guests for a day! Let us make the best we can of the temporary accommodation which this poor shanty of a world affords. Our life is removed as a shepherd's tent, which was a hovel in which the shepherds watched their sheep. A shepherd who has to watch the sheep for a short time does not set to work to build a granite palace, or a brick house—he is satisfied with a reed hut—and does not complain of its scant space and slender strength.

So let it be with us! Let us sing together—

"The way may be rough, but it cannot be long!

So let's smooth it with hope and cheer it with song."

Must life vanish away? We know it must! What then? That vanishing is the end of one life and the beginning of another! Dear Friends, may I recommend you to remember that death is the end of this life? Do not leave this life to be raveled out at the end. I would like to have a well-hemmed life, with a finish about it. I would like to have my life enclosed with a fence of completeness. Too many leave life's business in such a way that

they leave endless trouble for their families—lawyers devour their substance—and their children are impoverished. See that your will is made, your debts paid, your charities distributed and all your affairs are arranged! Set your house in order—it is your duty as a *citizen*—it is your higher duty as a *Christian*!

Do all that you would like to have done if you knew you would die tomorrow. I like Mr. Whitefield's order, for he could not go to bed comfortably if his gloves were not in his hat ready for the morning! He felt that he could not tell when he would be called away—but he wished to have everything in its place whenever the summons should come. Must this life vanish away? Then remember it is the beginning of another. The present life melts into the life to come! What kind of life will that other be? Do you not think that if it is to be a glorious life, it ought to commence here? Who would like to enter Heaven, could it be possible, and feel compelled to say, "I cannot join in the music, for I do not know the tune. I cannot take up the hymn, for I know nothing of the song. I cannot glorify God, for I never did so while below. I cannot adore the Lamb, for I never trusted in Him while I was on earth."

You must learn the music here, or you will never sing in the choirs of Heaven! Oh, that this might awaken some of you! By the memory that this life must vanish away, may you be led to seek that *eternal* life which will abide in its excellency, world without end! And is death quite sure to come to me? Then, as I cannot avoid it, let me face it! If there were a way of avoiding it, I might postpone all consideration of it. But since I must meet it, let me know what I am doing—let me get ready for the inevitable and maybe it will become desirable. The thought of death will be one of two things to us—it will be a ghost to haunt us if we remain out of Christ, unreconciled to God and unrenewed in heart. To Godless and Christless persons, death will be the king of terrors in prospect and in reality. Ungodly men cannot bear to think of being called away!

This morning they feel very uncomfortable while I am treading upon this troublesome subject. I hope they will not soon recover their composure, but will remain uncomfortable till they yield to Divine love and trust in the living Savior! Death is an awful thing to those who have their all in this world! If they could but live here forever, they would be at peace. But it cannot be so. God will not give men an immortality in *this* life to spend in disregarding Him. They must die. They may put Christ far from them, but they cannot put *death* far from them! They may avoid the Cross, but they cannot avoid the grave! The ungodly man frowns upon death because Death frowns upon him. Death is the skeleton in his closet—it is the goblin at the foot of his bed—it is the canker of his fairest joy. I would not like to be in such a position. Count me down all the red gold that could buy this round world, yet would I not accept it if I must live in fear of death!

But death will become another thing to you if you are renewed in heart. To the Christian it is an angel beckoning him onward and upward! It were not worth while to live on earth if this life were not to be crowned by death—I mean by leaving this world to go unto the Father. It is the

supreme delight of the man who runs the race that is set before him that that course concludes with the winning post—and so comes to an end. We are not of those who voyage the sea of this life for the sake of it—we ask not to forever sail over this rough ocean—we long for land! It is our delight to think of the port ahead! It is our joy to see the snow-white cliffs of our heavenly Albion! We do not desire to live here always. Why should we? Banished from our God, liable to sin, subject to temptation, vexed with infirmities, with corruptions, O Lord, what do we wait for?—

***“Welcome, sweet hour of full discharge
That sets my longing soul at large,
Takes off my chains, breaks up my cell,
And gives me with my God to dwell!”***

Believers have everything to gain by dying. “To die is gain.” We shall lose *nothing* which will be a loss to us! If one should take from us a jewel, but should give us another a thousand times its value, we should not regret the exchange. We lose this life—let it be such a jewel as you like—but we win the life to come which is infinitely more precious! Beloved, instead of *fearing* death, we should be willing to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better! Why should we be unwilling to be glorified? Our departing day is our wedding day! Oh, that the bells would ring it in! It is our home-coming from the school where we have been in training here below! Why are the minutes so slow, the years so long? Let the holidays, the holy days, come soon, when we shall be at home in the Father’s house!

“It does not yet appear what we shall be,” but it very soon *will* appear, and it will be no mere appearing—it will be real joy and lasting pleasure—solid, substantial, eternal, like the God who has prepared it for us from of old! It is a blessed thing to be able to go through the world thanking God for this life, yet blessing Him *more* that it will land us at His right hand! Death is thus stripped of all dread! The curse is turned into a blessing! At the thought of it I feel ready to join in that rough but sweet verse—

***“Since Jesus is mine, I’ll not fear undressing!
But gladly take off these garments of clay—
To die in the Lord is a covenant blessing
Since Jesus to Glory through death led the way.”***

God grant us so to live and die that we may live to die no more, for Christ’s sake. Amen.

**PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SESSION—
Psalm 39, James 4:11-17.
HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—90, 823, 39.**

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PICTURES OF LIFE

NO. 3126

A SERMON
PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY, JANUARY 7, 1909.

DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON
AT NEW PARK STREET CHAPEL, SOUTHWARK,
ON MONDAY EVENING, JUNE 18, 1855.

“What is your life?”
James 4:14.

[This Sermon was delivered by Mr. Spurgeon on the evening before he came of age, having been born on June 19, 1834. A much later Sermon on the same verse is #1773, Volume 30—WHAT IS YOUR LIFE? It was suggested by the sudden death of the Duke of Albany in 1884. A still later Sermon by Mr. Spurgeon, upon verses 13-17, #2242, Volume 38—GOD’S WILL ABOUT THE FUTURE, was delivered in connection with the “Home going” of Mr. William Olney, and was published in the very week that the Beloved preacher was “called Home” in January 1892—Read/download the entire sermons, free of charge, at <http://www.spurgeongems.org>.]

IT well behoves me, now that another year of my existence has almost gone, standing on the threshold of a fresh era, to consider what I am, where I am going, what I am doing, whom I am serving and what shall be my reward. I will not, however, do so publicly before you—I hope that I may be enabled to perform that duty in secret. But rather let me turn this occurrence to another account by speaking to you of the frailty of human life, the fleeting nature of time, how swiftly it passes away, how soon we all shall fade as a leaf and how speedily the place which knows us now shall know us no more forever! The Apostle James asks, “What is your life?” and, thanks to Inspiration, we are at no great difficulty to give the reply, for Scripture, being the best interpreter of Scripture, supplies us with many very excellent answers. I shall attempt to give you some of them.

I. First, we shall view life with regard to ITS SWIFTNESS.

It is a great fact that though life to the young man, when viewed in the prospect appears to be long, to the old man it is always short and to all men life is really but a brief period. Human life is not long. Compare it with the existence of some animals and trees and how short is human life! Compare it with the ages of the universe and it becomes a span—and especially measure it by eternity—and how little does life appear! It sinks like one small drop into the ocean and becomes as insignificant as one tiny grain of sand upon the seashore!

Life is swift. If you would picture life, you must turn to the Bible—and this evening we will walk through the Bible-gallery of old paintings.

You will find its swiftness spoken of in the Book of Job where we are furnished with three illustrations. In the ninth Chapter and at the 25th verse, we read, “Now my days are *swifter than a post*.” We are, most of us, acquainted with the swiftness of post-conveyance. I have sometimes, on an emergency, taken post horses where there has been no railway, and have been amazed and pleased with the swiftness of my journey. But

since, in this ancient Book, there can be no allusion to modern posts, we must turn to the manners and customs of the East. And in so doing, we find that the ancient monarchs astonished their subjects by the amazing swiftness with which they received intelligence. By well-ordered arrangements, swift horses and constant relays, they were able to attain a speed which, although trifling in these days, was in those slower ages a marvel of marvels, so that, to an Eastern, one of the clearest ideas of swiftness was that of “a post.” Well does Job say that our life is swifter than a post. We ride one year until it is worn out, but there comes another just as swift and we are borne by it—and soon it is gone and another year serves us for a steed! Post-house after post-house we pass as birthdays successively arrive! We loiter not, but vaulting at a leap from one year to another, still we hurry onward, onward, ever onward! My life is like a post—not like the slow wagon that drags along the road with tiresome wheels, but like a post, it attains the greatest speed!

Job further says, “My days are passed away *as the swift ships.*” He increases, you see, the intensity of the metaphor, for if, in the Eastern’s idea, anything could exceed the swiftness of the post, it was the swift ship. Some translate this passage as “the ships of desire,” that is, the ships hurrying home, anxious for the haven and, therefore, crowding on all sail. You may well conceive how swiftly the mariner flies from a threatening storm, or seeks the port where he will find his home. You have sometimes seen how the ship cuts through the billows, leaving a white furrow behind her and causing the sea to boil around her. Such is life, says Job, “as the swift ships,” when the sails are filled by the wind and the vessel dashes on, cleaving a passage through the crowding waves. Swift are the ships, but swifter by far is life! The wind of time bears me along. I cannot stop its motion. I may direct it with the rudder of God’s Holy Spirit. I may, it is true, take in some small sails of sin which might hurry my days on faster than otherwise they would go but, nevertheless, like a swift ship my life must speed on its way until it reaches its haven. Where is that haven to be? Shall it be found in the land of bitterness and barrenness, that dreary region of the lost? Or shall it be that sweet haven of eternal peace where not a troubling wave can ruffle the resting glory of my spirit? Wherever the haven is to be, that Truth of God is the same—we are “as the swift ships.”

Job also says that life is “*as the eagle that hastens to the prey.*” The eagle is a bird noted for its swiftness. I remember reading an account of an eagle attacking a fish hawk which had obtained some booty from the deep and was bearing it aloft. The hawk dropped the fish, which fell towards the water, but before the fish had reached the ocean, the eagle had flown more swiftly than the fish could fall and, catching it in its beak, it flew away with it. The swiftness of the eagle is almost incalculable—you see it and it is gone! You see a dark speck in the sky yonder—it is an eagle soaring. Let the fowler imagine that, by-and-by, he shall overtake it on some mountain’s craggy peak—it shall be long gone before he reaches it! Such is our life. It is like an eagle hastening to its prey—not merely an eagle flying in its ordinary course, but an eagle hastening to its prey. Life appears to be hastening to its end! Death seeks

the body as its prey—life is ever fleeing from hungry Death, but Death is too swift to be outrun—and as an eagle overtakes *his* prey, so shall Death!

If we require a further illustration of the swiftness of life, we must turn to two other passages in the Book of Job upon which I shall not dwell. One will be found in the seventh Chapter, at the sixth verse, where Job says, "*My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle,*" which the weaver throws so quickly that the eyes can hardly discern it. But he gives us a yet more excellent metaphor in the seventh verse of the same Chapter, where he says, "O remember that *my life is wind.*" Now this excels in velocity all the other figures we have examined. Who can outrun the winds? Proverbially, the winds are rapid—even in their gentlest motion they appear to be swift. But when they rush in the tornado, or when they dash madly on in the hurricane, when the tempest blows and tears down everything—how swift, then, is the wind! Perhaps some of us may have a gentle gale of wind and we may not seem to move so swiftly. But with others who are only just born and then snatched away to Heaven, the swiftness may be compared to that of the hurricane which soon snaps the ties of life and leaves the infant dead. Surely our life is like the wind!

Oh, if you could but catch these idea, my Friends! Though we may be sitting still in this chapel, yet you know that we are all really in motion. This world is turning round on its axis once every 24 hours and besides that, it is moving around the sun in the 365 days of the year. So that we are all moving—we are all flitting along through space—and as we are travelling through space, so are we moving through time at an incalculable rate! Oh, what an idea this is could we but grasp it! We are all being carried along as if by a giant angel with broad outstretched wings, which he flaps to the blast and, flying before the lightning, makes us ride on the winds! The whole multitude of us are hurrying along—where, remains to be decided by the test of our faith and the Grace of God—but certain it is that we are all travelling! Do not think that you are stable, fixed in one position! Fancy not that you are standing still—you are not! Your pulses each moment beat the funeral marches to the tomb. You are chained to the chariot of rolling time—there is no bridling the steeds, or leaping from the chariot—you must be constantly in motion!

Thus have I spoken of the swiftness of life.

II. But next, I must speak concerning THE UNCERTAINTY OF LIFE, of which we have abundant illustrations. Let us refer to that part of Scripture from which I have chosen my text, the Epistle of James, the fourth Chapter, at the 14th verse—"For what is your life? It is even a *vapor* that appears for a little time and then vanishes away." If I were to ask for a child's explanation of this, I know what he would say. He would say, "Yes, it is even a vapor, like a bubble that is blown upward." Children sometimes blow bubbles and amuse themselves. Life is even as that bubble. You see it rising into the air—the child delights in seeing it fly about, but it is all gone in one moment. "It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away." But if you ask the poet

to explain this, he would tell you that in the morning, sometimes at early dawn, the rivers send up a steamy offering to the sun. There is a vapor, a mist, an exhalation rising from the rivers and brooks, but in a very little while after the sun has risen, all that mist has gone. Hence we read of “the morning cloud and the early dew that passes away.” A more common observer, speaking of a vapor, would think of those thin clouds you sometimes see floating in the air which are so light that they are soon carried away. Indeed, a poet uses them as the picture of feebleness—

**“Their hosts are scattered like thin clouds
Before a Biscay gale.”**

The wind moves them and they are gone. “What is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away.” So uncertain is life!

Again, if you read in the Book of Ecclesiastes, at the sixth Chapter, and the 12th verse, you will there find life compared to something else, even more fragile than a vapor. The wise man there says that it is even “*as a shadow*.” Now, what can there be less substantial than a shadow? What substance is there in a shadow? Who can lay hold of it? You may see a person’s shadow as he passes you, but the moment the person passes away, his shadow is gone. Yes, and who can grasp his life? Many men reckon upon a long existence and think they are going to live here forever—but who can calculate upon a shadow? Go, you foolish man who says to your soul, “You have much goods laid up for many years—take your ease! Eat, drink and be merry.” Go and fill your room with shadows! Go and pile up shadows and say, “These are mine and they shall never depart.” “But,” you say, “I cannot catch a shadow.” No, and you cannot reckon on a year, or even a moment, for it is as a shadow that soon melts away and is gone!

King Hezekiah also furnishes us with a simile where he says that *life is as a thread which is cut off*. You will find this in the prophecy of Isaiah, the 38th Chapter, at the 12th verse—“My age is departed and is removed from me as a shepherd’s tent: I have cut off my life like a weaver.” The weaver cuts off his thread very easily—and so is life soon ended.

I might continue my illustrations at pleasure concerning the uncertainty of life. We might find, perhaps, a score more figures in Scripture if we would search. Take, for instance, the grass, the flowers of the field, etc.

But though life is swift and though it is to pass away so speedily, we are still generally very anxious to know what it is to be while we have it! For we say if we are to lose it soon, still, while we live, let us live—and while we are to be here, be it ever so short a time, let us know what we are to expect in it.

III. And that leads us, in the third place, to look at LIFE IN ITS CHANGES.

If you want pictures of the changes of life, turn to this wonderful Book of poetry, the Sacred Scriptures, and there you will find metaphors piled on metaphors! And, first, you will find life compared to *a pilgrimage* by good old Jacob in the 47th Chapter of Genesis, and the 9th verse. That

hoary-headed Patriarch, when he was asked by Pharaoh what was his age, replied, "The days of the years of *my pilgrimage* are an hundred and thirty years; few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not obtained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage." He calls life a pilgrimage. A pilgrim sets out in the morning and he has to journey many a day before he gets to the shrine which he seeks. What varied scenes the traveler will behold on his way! Sometimes he will be on the mountains, but soon he will descend into the valleys. Here he will be where the brooks shine like silver, where the birds warble, where the air is balmy and the trees are green—and luscious fruits hang down to gratify his taste. And soon he will find himself in the arid desert where no life is found and no sound is heard except the screech of the wild eagle in the air. He finds no rest for the soles of his feet—the burning sky above him and the hot sand beneath him—no shade tree and no house to rest himself. At another time he finds himself in a sweet oasis, resting himself by the wells of water and plucking fruit from palm trees. At one time he walks between the rocks in some narrow gorge where all is darkness. At another time he ascends the hill Mizar! Now he descends into the valley of Baca and soon he climbs the hill of Bashan—and a high hill is the hill Bashan—and yet again going into the mountains of leopards, he suffers trial and affliction.

Such is life, always changing. Who can tell what may come next? Today it is fair, tomorrow there may be the blundering storm. Today I may lack for nothing, tomorrow I may be like Jacob with nothing but a stone for my pillow and the heavens for my curtains! But what a happy thought it is, though we know not how the road winds, we know where it ends! It is the straightest way to Heaven to go round about. Israel's 40 years wanderings were, after all, the nearest path to Canaan. We may have to go through trial and affliction. Our pilgrimage may be a tiresome one, but it is safe! We cannot trace the river upon which we are sailing, but we know it ends in floods of bliss at last! We cannot track the roads, but we know that they all meet in the great metropolis of Heaven, in the center of God's universe! God help us to pursue the true pilgrimage of a pious life!

We have another picture of life in its changes given to us in the 90th Psalm, at the 9th verse—"We spend our years *as a tale that is told.*" Now David understood about tales that were told. I daresay he had been sometimes annoyed by them and amused by them at other times. There are, in the past, professed storytellers who amused their hearers by inventing tales such as those in that foolish book, *The Arabian Nights*. When I was foolish enough to read that book, I remember sometimes you were with fairies, sometimes with genii, sometimes in palaces, and soon you went down into caverns. All sorts of singular things are conglomerated into what they call a tale. Now, says David, "we spend our years as a tale that is told." You know there is nothing so amazing as the history of the odds and ends of human life. Sometimes it is a merry rhyme, sometimes a prosy subject—sometimes you ascend to the sublime, soon you descend to the ridiculous. No man can write the whole

of his own biography! I suppose if the complete history of a man's thoughts and words could be written, the world itself would hardly contain the record, so amazing is the tale that might be told. Our lives are all singular and must, to ourselves, seem strange—of which much might be said—our life is “as a tale that is told.”

Another idea we get from the 38th Chapter of the Prophecy of Isaiah, at the 12th verse—“I am removed *as a shepherd's tent.*” The shepherds in the East build temporary huts near the sheep which are soon removed when the flock moves on. When the hot season comes on, they pitch their tents in the most favorable place they can find and each season has its suitable position. My life is like a shepherd's tent. I have already pitched my tent in a variety of places, but where I shall pitch it, by-and-by, I do not know. I cannot tell. Present probabilities seem to say that—

**“Here I shall make my settled rest,
And neither go nor come—
No more a stranger or a guest,
But like a child at home.”**

But I cannot tell and you cannot, either. I know that my tent cannot be removed till God says, “Go forward.” And it cannot stand firm unless He makes it so—

**“All my ways shall always be
Ordered by His wise decree.”**

You have been opening a new shop, lately, and you are thinking of settling down in trade and managing a thriving concern. Now paint not the future too brightly! Do not be too sure as to what is in store for you. Another has, for a long time, been engaged in an old establishment—your father always carried on trade there, and you have no thought of moving. But here you have no abiding city—your life is like a shepherd's tent! You may be here, there, and almost everywhere before you die. It was once said by Solon, “No man ought to be called a happy man till he dies”—because he does not know what his life is to be! But Christians may always call themselves happy men, here, because wherever their tent is carried, they cannot pitch it where the cloud does not move and where they are not surrounded by a circle of fire. God will be a wall of fire round about them and their Glory in the midst. They cannot dwell where God is not the bulwark of their salvation!

If any of you who are God's people are going to move, or are going to change your employment, start a new business, or move to another county, you need not fear—God was with you in the last place and He will be with you in this! He has said, “Fear you not, for I am with you: be not dismayed, for I am your God.” That is an often-told story of Caesar in a storm. The sailors were all afraid, but he exclaimed, “Fear not! You carry Caesar and all his fortunes!” So is it with the poor Christian. There is a storm coming on, but fear not—you are carrying Jesus—and you must sink or swim with Him! Well may any true Believer say, “Lord, if You are with me, it matters not where my tent is. All must be well, though my life is removed like a shepherd's tent.”

Again, our life is compared in the Psalms to *a dream*. Now, if a tale is singular, surely a dream is still more so. If a tale is changing and shifting, what is a dream? As for dreams, those flutters of the benighted

fancy, those revelries of the imagination—who can tell what they consist of? We dream of everything in the world and a few things more! If we were asked to tell our dreams, it would be impossible for us to do so. You dream that you are at a feast and lo, the food changes into Pegasus and you are riding through the air! Or suddenly transformed into a morsel for a monster's meal! Such is life. The changes occur as suddenly as they happen in a dream. Men have been rich one day and they have been beggars the next. We have witnessed the exile of monarchs and the flight of a potentate. Or in another direction, we have seen a man, neither reputable in company nor honorable in station, at a single stride exalted to a throne! And you who would before have shunned him in the streets, were foolish enough to throng your thoroughfares to stare at him! Ah, such is life! Leaves of the Sibyl were not more easily moved by the winds, nor are dreams more variable. "Boast not yourself of tomorrow; for you know not what a day may bring forth." How foolish are those men who wish to pry into the future! The telescope is ready and they are going to look through it, but they are so anxious to see that they breathe on the glass with their hot breath—and they dim it so that they can discern nothing but clouds and darkness! Oh, you who are always conjuring up black fiends from the unknown deep and foolishly vexing your minds with fancies, turn your fancies out of doors and begin to rest on never-failing promises! Promises are better than forebodings! "Trust in the Lord and do good; so shall you dwell in the land and verily you shall be fed."

Thus I have spoken of the changes of this mortal life.

IV. And now, to close, let me ask, WHAT IS TO BE THE END OF THIS LIFE?

We read in the Second Book of Samuel, Chapter 14 and verse 14—"We will surely die and are as water spilt on the ground which cannot be gathered up again." Man is like a great icicle which the sun of time is continually thawing and which is soon to be as water spilt upon the ground which cannot be gathered up again! Who can recall the departed spirit, or inflate the lungs with a new breath of life? Who can put vitality into the heart and restore the soul from Hell? No one! It cannot be gathered up again—the place that once knew it shall know it no more forever.

But here a sweet thought charms us. This water cannot be lost, but it shall descend into the soil to filter through the Rock of Ages—at last to spring up a pure fountain in Heaven, cleansed, purified and made clear as crystal! How terrible if, on the other hand, it should percolate through the black earth of sin and hang in horrid drops in the dark caverns of destruction!

Such is life! Then make the best use of it, my Friends, because it is fleeting. Look for another life because this life is not a very desirable one—it is too changeable. Trust your life in God's hands because you cannot control its movements. Rest in His arms and rely on His might, for He is able to do for you exceeding abundantly above all that you ask or think—and unto His name be glory forever and ever! Amen.

**EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:
PSALM 39.**

Verse 1. *I said, I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue: I will keep my mouth with a bridle, while the wicked is before me.* This is what David said—what he had deliberately resolved upon and solemnly determined in his own mind! “I said, I will take heed to my ways.” That is a good thing for all of us to resolve and to say—“I will take heed.” To be heedless is to be graceless. No man ever does a good thing by accident. We shall, none of us, get to Heaven by blundering.

“I said, I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue.” The tongue may be a most powerful instrument of evil. Tongue sins are terrible sins. They are like sparks of fire which may set a whole town on fire. He that can take heed to his tongue will probably be able to manage all the rest of the members of his body. The tongue is the most unmanageable member of our frame and if we sin not with our tongue, we shall most likely be kept from sinning in other ways. “I will keep my mouth with a bridle,” says David. It should be rendered, “with a muzzle.” He did not mean that he would merely control his tongue, but that he would silence it altogether!

“I will keep my mouth with a muzzle, while the wicked is before me.” I do not know whether that was a right resolution on David’s part. Tongues were meant to be used and there are often opportunities of using them to God’s Glory even in the presence of the wicked. Sometimes, we are bound to use our tongue in rebuking their sin, yet we cannot criticize David’s resolution very much because when the wicked are before us, it may be only like casting pearls before swine if we begin to speak to them even upon the best themes. And we may be drawn away, by their company, to speak that which is questionable. So that, often, it may be best to keep our mouth muzzled while the wicked are before us.

2. *I was dumb with silence.* “I was as silent as if I had been dumb. I did not say a word.” It seems to me that this silence of the Psalmist was partly sullen and partly judicious. “I was dumb with silence.”

2. *I held my peace, even from good.* He was a total abstainer from all speech. Perhaps he felt that he could not speak a little without speaking too much and so he refrained from speech altogether. Yet we must not follow his example too closely in this matter, for there is a time for speech as well as a time for silence. It was not good for David to hold his peace even from good. It is good for us to hold our peace rather than speak unwisely, but it would be better for us to speak wisely, discreetly—as God’s Spirit should direct us.

2. *And my sorrow was stirred.* It is a great relief to sorrow to be able to speak about it. Be not silent in your grief, lest your grief should burn too fiercely within your heart. It is often one of the signs of a failing mind when persons sit quite still and will not tell their grief to anyone. Tell your grief to your God, first of all, and you may also tell it with advantage to some sympathizing friend. But David felt that he could not speak, so

his sorrow was stirred, troubled, agitated, like a pent-up fire that must sooner or later burst into a blaze.

3. *My heart was hot within me. While I was musing the fire burned.* While he was musing, his heart was fusing and there was much that was most confusing to him. He saw the prosperity of the wicked and the oppression of the righteous. He heard the reproaches of the ungodly and he felt the stings of affliction and trial in his own soul. So, as he did not speak, his heart grew hot within him. “While I was musing the fire burned. [See Sermon #576, Volume 10—QUIET MUSING—Read/download the entire sermon, free of charge, at <http://www.spurgeongems.org>.]

3. *Then spoke I with my tongue.* We say, “Murder will out,” and so will misery. David’s heart had become like a volcano and the fire burned so furiously within that he was obliged to let the burning lava flow forth—and so give his soul vent. There is no speech like that which comes from a hot heart! That shot from the tongue which has been made red-hot in the heart is sure to tell upon the adversary. “Then spoke I with my tongue.” And what he said was not unwise. There was nothing of boasting or excitement in it—it was a very wise, plain, earnest prayer.

4. *LORD.* That was a good beginning of David’s speech. When we turn our burning words towards God and not towards men, good will come of them. David’s hot heart finds a vent Godward! This was the wisest thing that he could do, cry unto his God. “Lord.”

4. *Make me to know my end.* Did David mean to pray, “Let me die,” like Elijah did? I am half afraid that he did. And many a time some of God’s servants, in their great heats when their soul has been more full of passion than of faith have prayed in this sense, “Make me to know my end.” Yet a better meaning may be put upon the Psalmist’s words and we are bound to put the best meaning upon them that we can. He may have meant, “Let me know, Lord, that my sorrows will come to an end, that they are not to last forever.” Death may be looked at through the glass of faith till it becomes even a goodly and desirable object! “Lord, make me to know my end.”

4. *And the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am.* Our days are all measured. They do not come to an end by accident. As merchants measure their yards of silk or cotton goods, so does God measure out life to us. There is not half an inch more or less than God Himself determines that we shall have! If David wanted to know what the measure of his days was, he was trying to pry into the folded leaves of the future. Such prying is both wrong and futile—and we may be thankful that we do not know what the measure of our days is in this sense! We do know that at their utmost, they are not likely to exceed the threescore years and ten, or the fourscore years, which now make up the ordinary measure of human life!

5. *Behold, You have made my days as an handbreadth.* That is a very short measure—the breadth of a hand, the space that we can span with one of our hands—yet that is the true measure of our life! “You have made my days as an handbreadth.”

5. *And my age is as nothing before You.* What are 70 or 80 years, even if we live as long as that, out of the thousands of years that men have

lived on the face of the earth? One man's life seems but a drop in the great ocean of human history. Yet what an insignificant thing human history itself is! Some thousands of years ago there were no men upon this earth, yet what is the history of the whole world compared with eternity? It is not worth speaking of! It is scarcely one tick of the clock of eternity! Why, this world is only like a newly blown bubble and the sun is but a spark fresh from the eternal fire. As compared with the eternal God, man is a nonentity, a nullity—and David was right when he said to the Lord—“My age is as nothing before You.”

5. *Verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity. Selah.* When he is strongest, calmest, happiest. When he is in his prime, when he is at his best—his best, of which he is so vain—is itself vain! Whatever there may be true about man, this is true, that he is unstable and soon passes away. He is constant in nothing but his inconstancy. “Verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity.”

6. *Surely every man walks in a vain show.* [See Sermon #2346, Volume 40—EARTH'S VANITIES AND HEAVEN'S VERITIES—Read/download the entire sermon, free of charge, at <http://www.spurgeongems.org>.] This world is a mere theater and men strut across its stage acting their various parts. They come and they go as if they were mere figures moved by invisible wires! The most of men do not live at all, but only *seem* to live, for they have not the true, spiritual, eternal life within them. Every man walks like a performer in a pageant, or like those who march in a procession. We think we are standing still and watching others pass by, but we are, ourselves, part of the vain show and are passing away with the rest!

6. *Surely they are disquieted in vain.* They fret, they fume, they vex themselves, but it is all in vain. They make a noise, so the Hebrew says, in vain. Hear the clamor of the streets. Hear the buzz of the Exchange. Hear the noise of war, the shouts of conflict—it is all in vain, it is all for nothing! You are troubled about your business, troubled about your children, troubled about your wealth, troubled about I know not what—surely you are disquieted in vain! Oh, that we could but believe that all this disquietude is only vanity! Then might we live much more peaceful lives.

6. *He heaps up riches and knows not who shall gather them.* He has cut his corn and it stands in sheaves in the field, but his enemy comes and carts it away! Or if he has gathered it into his granary, it is consumed by rats or mice, or it becomes mildewed and useless! How many there are who spend their lives gathering wealth with the muck rake and then their sons come with the fork and shovel and scatter it quite as quickly as their fathers gathered it! What is the good of getting all this gold together—and stinting yourself in order to get it—when the one who has it after you will never thank you for it, or if he did, you would be dead and buried and would know nothing of his gratitude?

7. *And now, Lord, what do I wait for?* The Psalmist improves as he advances. Now you see that he is cut loose from the world. He has seen the vanity of man and he has seen the vanity of wealth, so he says, “Now, Lord, what do I wait for? What is there here, in this land of shadows, that I should wait for? Why do I sit down where nothing good

has ever come, or ever can come?" The ropes that held the balloon to earth are cut and up it mounts!

7. *My hope is in You.* This is a glorious hope! This is a hope that finds its all in God! This hope will outlast death and the grave! This hope will be our treasure in eternity! Can each of you truly say this, "My hope is in You"? Let this be the language of your heart as you speak to your God, "This is what I wait for—that I may enjoy Your Presence here and that I may rejoice in Your Presence hereafter—I wait for the coming of my Lord! I wait for the time when the Lord shall call me Home."

8. *Deliver me from all my transgressions.* That is a better prayer than if David had said, "Deliver me from all my sorrows." Now he has hit the very center of the target! "Deliver me from all my transgressions." So let each one of us pray at this moment, "O Lord, I do not ask to be saved from Your rod, but I do ask to be washed from my sin. Do what You will with me, but do forgive me, do sanctify me, do let me be washed in the precious blood of Jesus! 'Deliver me from all my transgressions.'"

9. *Make me not the reproach of the foolish.* Do not let the wicked be able to say, "See the sadness of that man's countenance! Look how sullen he looks. His face is like a thundercloud—it is clear that a Christian has no joy." Let not the wicked be able to say that, my Lord, but save me from sin and give me the full joy of Your salvation and then they will not be able to reproach me.

9. *I was dumb, I opened not my mouth; because You did it.* You will understand this verse much better if we read it in another tense, as it should be read—"Now I will be dumb. I will not open my mouth because you did it." David was wrong the first time when he was dumb, but he is right this second time. Two things may be very much like one another outwardly, yet very different inwardly. There is a silence which the Christian ought to keep.

10. *Remove Your stroke away from me.* The child of God who is perfectly resigned to his heavenly Father's will may yet pray to be delivered from his trouble. Prayer for deliverance from grief is quite consistent with perfect submission to the will of God. We may pray, for Jesus prayed, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me." But we must take care to also add, "Nevertheless not as I will, but as You will."

10. *I am consumed by the blow of Your hand.* "You have beaten me sorely! Oh, strike me not again!" This is good pleading, for God does not mean to consume His own children! He means to consume our sins—and when He makes us cry, "Deliver me from all my transgressions," and when we submit to His holy will, He will soon put His rod away. As soon as you are willing to bear it, you shall not have to bear it any longer. When you submit yourself to the stroke, then the stroke will cease to be given!

11. *When You with rebukes do correct man for iniquity, You make his beauty to consume away like a moth: surely every man is vanity. Selah.* When God whips His children, He does not play with them. God is in earnest even if we are not. And when He corrects us, He means us to feel

His rod—and He means us to bear the scars it leaves upon us! There must be real strokes and real smarts before we are likely to be cured of sin and, sometimes, when He is dealing in chastisement with His people, He makes their beauty to depart like a piece of cloth or fur when the moth gets into it and utterly destroys it. What a poor thing beauty is if the moth can eat it up! If a little affliction can take away our beauty, we may well pray for that beauty for which Moses pleaded, “Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us.” That is a beauty of quite another kind—the beauty of Divine Grace which no moth can consume. But if we have not that, our beauty is a poor thing. Let no man, let no woman be vain of beauty which can so soon be gone!

12. *Hear my prayer, O LORD.* David is dumb, yet he prays. Dumb as to complaints, but eloquent as to pleading with his God.

12. *And give ear unto my cry.* The Psalmist goes from pleading to crying. And Believers often thus intensify their prayers. There is something more sorrowful, more earnest, more prevalent about crying unto God than mere ordinary praying. “Give ear unto my cry.”

12. *Hold not Your peace at my tears.* David goes still further, for the most eloquent things in the world are tears. They are the irresistible weapons of weakness. Many a woman, many a beggar, many a child has gained by tears what could not be obtained in any other way—so David pleaded most powerfully when he prayed, “Hold not Your peace at my tears.”

12. *For I am a stranger with You, and a sojourner, as all my fathers were.* “You do entertain me in Your tent as I have entertained wanderers many a time. I have broken bread with You and eaten of Your salt. Be kind to the stranger and sojourner as You have bidden Your servants to be.” Or does David mean that, as God is a Stranger in His own world, so are we while necessarily passing through it?

13. *O spare me.* That is a singular petition, for just now he seemed to be wanting to get to the end of his days, yet he says, “O spare me,” like Elijah, who was afraid to die and so ran away from Jezebel and then prayed to God, “Let me die.” So are God’s children still a mass of contradictions—longing for death and yet, when death comes, they cry, “O spare me! O spare me!”

13. *That I may recover strength before I go from here and am no more.* “Give me a little respite that I may take my nourishment and have my sleep before I go hence to be no more, for soon I shall do that. But first give me a little interlude, wherein I may again take my harp and sing to Your praise.” If worldlings cannot understand this mingled experience, God’s children know that this is only one of the many paradoxes with which they are perfectly familiar! In any case, may each one of us be ready when it shall be God’s time for us to “go from here and are no more”!

—Adapted from *The C. H. Spurgeon Collection*, Version 1.0, Ages Software, 1.800.297.4307

**PRAY THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL USE THIS SERMON
TO BRING MANY TO A SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST.**

A VISIT TO THE HARVEST FIELD

NO. 1025

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

“Be patient therefore, Brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, and has long patience for it, until he receives the early and latter rain. Be you also patient. Establish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draws near.”
James 5:7, 8.

THE earth that yields seed to the sower and bread to the eater has received its constitution from God. And it is governed through His wise Providence by fixed laws that are infinitely reliable. And yet, at the same time, with such diversified conditions and minute peculiarities as may well convince us that the Almighty intended the operations of Nature to supply us with spiritual instruction as well as with material good. He who ordained the seed time and the harvest meant to teach us by them. Nor has He left us in vague uncertainty as to the lessons we should learn! In metaphor and parable He has interpreted them to us.

The Author of the Bible is also the Architect of the universe. The Book that is written and the things that are made alike bear witness to His eternal power and Godhead. He who shall study them both will see clearly the idioms of one Author. In the two masterpieces the hand of the same great Artist may be discerned. We are all so dependent upon the labors of the field that we ought at the season of harvest to remember how much we owe to the God of Harvest. It is but common gratitude that we should go to the field awhile, and there hear what God the Lord may have to say to us among the waving sheaves.

No matter what our business may be, the wealth of the country must, after all, to a large extent, depend upon the crops that are produced, and the well-being of the whole state has a greater dependence upon the harvest than many of you could probably imagine. We will not forget the bounties of God. We will not fail, at least, to endeavor to learn the lesson which this bountiful season is intended to teach us. Our Lord Jesus often preached of the sowing and of the reaping. His were the best of sermons and His the choicest of illustrations—therefore we shall do well if all repair to the field, mark the scattering of the corn, and the ingathering of it—to enforce the exhortation of the text.

Our subject, tonight, will involve three or four questions—*How does the farmer wait? What does he wait for? What is his encouragement? What are the benefits of his patient waiting?* Our experience is similar to his. We are farmers, so we have to toil hard, and we have to wait long—then the hope that cheers, the fruit that buds and blossoms, and verily, too, the profit of that struggle of faith and fear incident to waiting will all crop up as we proceed.

I. First, then, HOW DOES THE FARMER WAIT? He waits *with a reasonable hope* for the precious fruit of the earth, and has long patience for

it until he receive the early and latter rain. He expects the harvest because he has plowed the fields and sown the grain. If he had not, he would not be an example for our imitation. Had he left his fields fallow, never stirred the clods, and never cast in among them the golden seed, he would be an idiot were he expecting the soil to produce a harvest. Thorns and thistles would it bring forth to him—nothing more.

Away with the folly of those who flatter their souls with a prospect of good things in times to come while they neglect the opportunity of sowing good things in the time present! They say they hope it will be well with them at the end—but since it is not well with them now, why should they expect any change—much less a change contrary to the entire order of Providence? Is it not written, “He that sows to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption”? Do you expect to sow to the flesh and reap salvation? That is a blessing reserved for him who sows to the Spirit. For he that sows to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.

As for the man who scatters nothing but the wild oats of sin, who simply lives to indulge his own passions and determinately resolves to neglect the things that make for his peace—he can but upbraid himself if he expects to reap anything good of the Lord. They that sow to the wind shall reap the whirlwind. They that sow nothing shall reap nothing. They that sow sparingly shall reap sparingly. It is only those who, by God’s Grace, have been enabled to sow abundantly, though they have gone forth weeping, who shall afterwards come again rejoicing, bringing their sheaves with them.

Patience by all means, but not that foolish patience which expects something good to turn up in spiritual things, as some fools do in business when they turn aside from legitimate trade to foster bubble schemes. You shall have, my Brother, after all according to what you are, and to what you are fairly going for. If you are a Believer, to you shall be the promise—you shall share the victories and spoils of your Lord. If you are a careless, godless worldling, to you shall be the fruit of your deeds, and sad and bitter shall be those grapes of Gomorrah that you shall have to eat.

The farmer waits with a reasonable hope. He does not look for grain where he has cast in garlic. Unless, then, that you are a fool, you will, like he, count only on the fruit of your own sowing. While he waits with a patient hope, he is, no doubt, all the more patient of the issue, because his hope is so reasonable. And not only does he wait with patience, but some stress is put upon the length of it—“and has long patience for the precious fruit of the earth.”

Now, Brethren in Christ, our waiting, if it is the work of the Holy Spirit, must have this long patience in it. Are you a sufferer? There are sweet fruits to come from suffering! “Not for the present seems it to be joyous but grievous, nevertheless, *afterward* it yields the peaceable fruits of righteousness unto them that are exercised thereby.” Have *long* patience for those peaceable fruits. You shall be brought out of your trouble, deliverance will be found for you out of your affliction when the discipline for which you were brought into it has been fulfilled.

Have a lot of patience, however, for not the first month does the farmer find a harvest. If he has sown in the winter, he does not expect he will reap in the early spring—he does not go forth with his sickle in the month of May and expect to find golden sheaves. He waits. The moons wax and

wane—suns rise and set. But the farmer waits till the appointed time is come. Wait you, O Sufferer, till the night is over. Watch after watch you have already passed through. The morning breaks. Tarry you a little longer, for if the vision tarries it shall come. “You shall stand in your lot in the end of the days.” Before long you shall have a happy exit out of your present trials.

Are you a Worker? Then you need as much patience in working as you do in suffering. We must not expect to see immediate results in all cases from the preaching of the Gospel, from the teaching of Scripture in our classes, from distributing religious literature, or from any other kind of effort. Immediate results may come. Sometimes they do, and they greatly cheer the worker. But it is given to some to wait long, like the farmer, before the fruit reaches maturity. Truth, like the grain of mustard seed, does not wax into a tree tomorrow being sown today—it takes its leisure.

Or, like the leaven in the measure, it does not work in the next moment. It must have its time. If you have some principle to teach that is now obnoxious, go on with it. Perhaps you may never see it popular in your day. Do not mind the fickle winds or fret yourself because of the nipping frosts. Truth is mighty and it will prevail, though it may have a hard fight before it wins the victory. Souls may not be won to God the first time you pray for them, nor the first time you exhort them—no, nor the twentieth time!

If you have gone to a sinner once on Christ’s errand and he has rejected you, go again seven times. No, go again seventy times seven—for if you should at last succeed by your Master’s gracious help, it will well repay you. The long, tedious winter of your waiting will appear as a short span to look back upon when you have reaped the field of your labor. The little patience that you had to exert for a while will seem as nothing, like the travail of the mother when the man-child is born into the world. Hush, then, your sad complaints, and still your petulant wailings—

***“O dreary life! We cry, O dreary life!
And still the generations of the birds
Sing through our sighing.
And the flocks and herds
Serenely live while we are keeping strife.”***

Be patient, O Worker, for impatience sours the temper, chills the blood, sickens the heart, prostrates the vigor of one’s spirit and spoils the enterprise of life before it is ripe for history. Wait, clothed with patience, like a champion clad in steel. Wait with a sweet Grace, as one who guards the faith and sets an example of humility. Wait in a right spirit—anxious, prayerful, earnest, submissive to the ways of God—not doubtful of His will. Disciple of Jesus, “learn to labor and to wait.” With regard to the result of Christian obedience, the lesson is no less striking. The first thing that a farmer does by way of seeking gain on his farm is to make a sacrifice which could seem immediately to entail on him a loss.

He has some good wheat in the granary, and he takes out sacks full of it and buries it. He is so much the poorer, is he not? At any rate, there is so much the less to make bread for his household. He cannot get it again. It is under the clod, and there, too, it must die. For except it die, it brings not forth fruit. You must not expect, as soon as you become a Christian, that you shall obtain all the gains of your religion. Perhaps you may lose all that you have for Christ’s sake. Some have lost their lives. They have

sown their house and land, relatives, comfort, ease, and at last they have sown life itself in Christ's field, and they seemed, for the time, to be losers.

But, verily I say unto you, this day, if you could see them in their white robes before the Throne of God, rejoicing, you would see how rich a harvest they have reaped, and how the sowing which seemed a loss at first has ended, through God's abundant Grace, in the greatest eternal gain! Have patience, Brother, have patience. That is a false religion that aims at present worldly advantages. He who becomes religious for the loaves and fishes, when he has eaten his loaves and fishes, has devoured his religion. There is nothing in such piety but pretension. If you can be bought, you can be sold—if you have taken it up for gain, you will lay it down for what promises you a better bargain. Be willing to be a loser for Christ, and so prove you are His genuine follower.

The farmer, I say, does not expect immediate reward, but reckons upon being a loser for awhile. He waits, waits with long patience, for the precious fruit of the earth. It is a reasonable waiting on the outset, and not regretful when wearied and worried with delay. And, while the farmer waits, you observe in the text he waits with his eyes upward, he waits until God shall send him the early and the latter rain. He has brains enough for this. Even if he is a worldly man, he knows that the harvest depends not only on the seed he sows and on the soil he cultivates, but upon the rain which he cannot control.

The rain that comes at the bidding of the Almighty. If the skies are brass, the clods will be iron. Unless God shall speak to the clouds, and the clouds shall speak to the earth, the earth will not speak to the corn, and the corn will not make us speak the words of rejoicing. Every farmer is aware of this, and every Christian must remember it. "I am to wait," says a sufferer, "for God's help and for the Graces that come by affliction. But I must wait with my eyes upward, for all the plowing of affliction will not profit me, and all the sowing of meditation will not speed me unless God sends His gracious Spirit like showers of heavenly rain. If I am a Worker, I must work. When I wait, I must wait always looking upward."

The keys of the rain clouds which water the earth hang at the girdle of Jehovah. None but the eternal Father can send the Holy Spirit like showers on the Church. He can send the Comforter, and my labor will prosper. It will not be in vain in the Lord. But if He denies—if He withholds this Covenant blessing, ah me, work is useless, patience is worthless, and all the cost is bootless—it is in vain. In spiritual, as in temporal things, "it is vain to rise up early and sit up late, and eat the bread of carefulness." "Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it."

We must have the dew, O God, or else our seed shall rot under the clod. We must wait, and wait with our eyes upwards, or else our expectation will perish as a still-born child. So with regard to the comfort, and joy, and ultimate fruit of our faith, we must have our eyes upward looking for the coming of the Lord from Heaven, for the day of His appearing will be the day of our manifestation. Our life is hid with Christ now. When He shall appear we shall appear with Him. When He shall be revealed in Glory before the eyes of the assembled multitude, we shall be conspicuous in Glory, too.

Not till then shall the fullness of the reward be bestowed, but the risen saints shall be glorified in the Glorification of their coming Lord. Oh, for

more of this living with the eyes upward, less minding of earthly things, and more looking for and hasting unto the coming of the Son of God! Note, however, that while the farmer waits with his eyes upward, he waits with his hands at work, engaged in restless toil. He sows, and it is a busy time. When he sees the green blade, what then? He has to work. Those weeds must not be suffered to outgrow the wheat and choke it. Up and down the field the laborer must go, and the farmer must be at the expense of this. And all along, until the wheat is ripened there is sure to be something to do in this field, so his eyes must be keen, his skill must be taxed, and no drudgery must be disdained.

In all labor there is profit, but nothing is gained without pains. We look up to God. He will not accept the look of a sluggard. The eyes that look up to God must be attended with the hands that are ready for work. So if I suffer and expect the blessing for the suffering, I must spend solitary hours in my chamber seeking and searching. To wit, seeking in prayer, and searching God's Word for the blessing. If I am a Worker, I must look to God for the result, but then I must also use all the means. In fact, the Christian should work as if all depended upon *him*, and *pray* as if it all depended upon *God*.

He should be always nothing in his own estimation. Yet he should be one of those gloriously active nothings of which God makes great use, for He treats the things that are not as though they were, and gets glory out of them! Yes, the farmer waits. He cannot push on the months. He cannot hasten the time of the harvest home. But he does not wait in silence, in sluggishness and negligence. He keeps to his work and waits, too. So do you, O Christian! Wait for the coming of your Lord, but let it be with your lamps trimmed and your lights burning, as good servants attending to the duties of the house, until the Master of the house returns to give you the reward.

The farmer waits under changeful circumstances, and various contingences. At one time he sees the fair prospect of a good crop. The wheat has come up well. He has never seen more green springing from the ground. But, perhaps, it may be too strong and may need even to be put back. By-and-by, after long showers and cold nights, the wheat looks yellow, and he is half afraid about it. In a while there comes, or he fancies there is a blight or a black smut. Nobody knows what may happen. Only a farmer knows how his hopes and fears alternate and fluctuate from time to time. It is too hot, too cold. It is too dry. It is too wet. It is hardly ever quite right, according to his judgment—or rather according to his unbelief.

He is full of changes in his mind because the season is full of changes. Yet he waits, he waits with patience. Ah dear Friends, when we work for God, how often will this happen! I speak from no inconsiderable experience. There are always changes in the field of Christian labor. At one time we see many conversions, and we bless God that there are so many seals to our testimony. But some of the converts after a while disappoint us. There was the blossom, but it produced no fruit. Then there will come a season when many appear to backslide. The love of many waxes cold. Perhaps we have found in the Church the black smut of heresy. Some deadly heresy creeps in, and the anxious farmer fears there will be no harvest, after all.

Oh, patience, Sir, patience! Ten thousand farmers' fears have been disappointed this year. Many a fretful expression and murmuring word need to be repented of, as the farmer has looked, at last, upon the well-filled ear, and the heavy wheat sheaf. So, too, maybe, O evangelical Worker, it will be with you. When God shall give you a rich return for all you have done for Him, you will blush to think you ever doubted. You will be ashamed to think you ever grew weary in His service. You shall have your regard. Not tomorrow, so wait—not the next day perhaps, so be patient. You may be full of doubts one day, your joys sink low.

It may be rough windy weather with you in your spirit. You may even doubt whether you are the Lord's, but if you have rested in the name of Jesus—if by the Grace of God you are what you are, if He is all your salvation, and all your desire—have patience, have patience—for the reward will surely come in God's good time. Now this is how the farmer waits, and becomes to us the model of patience.

II. Very briefly, in the second place, we have to ask, WHAT DOES THE FARMER WAIT FOR? For we are in this respect like he. He waits for results, for real results, right results. He hopes also *rich* results. And this is just what we are waiting for—waiting as sufferers for the results of sanctified affliction. May those results be real, may they be right, may they be rich. Oh that we might have every virtue strengthened, every Grace refined by passing through the furnace!

There are great blessings connected with patient endurance as in Job's case. He had a plenteous harvest, may we have the same. And you Workers, you must work for results, for, though conversion is the work of God, it is in many cases as clearly a product of the holy living, the devout teaching, and the fervent praying of His servants, as anything can be the result from a cause. Go on, go on, and may you have real conversions—not pretended conversions—not such as are sometimes chronicled in newspapers—"fifty-one conversions of an evening"—as if anybody knew! May there be real conversions, and ripe fruits for Jesus in the growth and advance of those who are converted, and may many of them turn out to be such fruit-bearing Christians when they are matured in Grace, that the richest result in the prosperity of the Church may come to you from all your work.

You are waiting for results. And you are, also, dear Brethren, like the farmer, waiting for a reward. All the while till the harvest comes, he has nothing but outlay. From the moment he sows, it is all outgoing until he sells his crops, and then, recovering at once the principal and the interest, he gets his reward. In this world, look not for a recompense. You may have a grateful acknowledgment in the peace, and quiet, and contentment of your own spirit, but do not expect even that from your fellow men.

The pure motive of any man who serves his generation well is generally misrepresented. As a rule the loungers look on at the laborer not to praise but to blame him—not to cheer him but to chide him. The less he does, the less he will be open to rebuke, and the more he does oftentimes, and the more vigorously, the more he shall be upbraided. Look not for your reward *here*.

Suppose men praise you, what is their praise worth? It would not fill your nostrils if you were about to die. The approbation of those who have neither skill nor taste—what pleasure can it afford the artist? Should one

stoop for it, or, having it, lift his head the higher? Our reward is the approbation of *God*, which He will give of His abundant Grace. He first gives us good works, as one observes, and then rewards us for those good works, as if they were altogether our own! He gives rewards though they are not a debt, but altogether of Grace.

Look for the reward *hereafter*. Wait a bit, Man, wait a bit. Your reward is not yet. Wait till the week is over, and then shall come the wage. Wait until the sun is gone down, and then there will be the penny for every laborer in the vineyard. Not yet, not yet, not yet. The farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth. This is what we wait for.

III. Thirdly, WHAT IS THE FARMER'S ENCOURAGEMENT IN WAITING? Well, he has many. The first is that the fruit he waits for is precious. He waits for the precious fruit of the earth. It is worth waiting for. Who that walks through a corn field, such corn fields as we have seen this year, where the crops are plentiful, but will say, "Well, this *was*, after all, worth all the trouble and all the expense, and all the long patience of that winter which is over and gone"?

If the Lord should draw you near unto Himself by your affliction, if He should make His image in you more clear, it will be worth waiting for. And if, after your labors, He should give you some soul for your reward, oh, will it not repay you? Mother, if your dear child should, after all, be brought back from his sinful ways to love his Savior? Sunday school teacher, if some of those little girls should love the name of Jesus, and you should live to see them honored members of the Church of God, will it not be worth waiting for?

It were worth while to preach every Sunday for a million years, if but one soul were brought in at last. I remember Mr. Richard Knill saying if there were one unconverted person, and he were in Siberia, and God had ordained that he should only be saved by all the Christians in all the world (and that would be a vast number), all of them making a journey to Siberia to talk with him, it would be worth all the trouble if the soul were at length brought in. And so it would!

We may wait, therefore, with patience, because the reward of our labor will be precious. Above all, the reward of hearing the Master say, "Well done, good and faithful servant," is worth waiting for! Even now to get a word from Him is quite enough to cheer us on, though He is a soft, still voice that speaks it, but oh, the joy of that loud voice, "Well done!" It were worth going through a thousand perils by land and by sea to come out and win that "Well done." We might count it worth while to face the lions of Hell and do battle with Apollyon himself, to snatch but one poor lamb from between their jaws. It were worth while to do all that, I say, if we might hear the Master say to us, "Well done," at the last. This, then, encourages us, as well as the farmer—the preciousness of the fruit.

A godly farmer waits with patience, again, because he knows God's Covenant. God has said, "seed time and harvest, summer and winter, shall not cease," and the Christian farmer, knowing this, is confident. Oh, what strong confidences have we who have looked to Christ and who are resting on the faithful word of a Covenant God! He cannot fail us. It is not possible that He should suffer our faith to be confounded. "Heaven and earth may pass away," and they *shall*, but His Word shall not fail. They that sow in faith shall reap abundantly. The glory shall be theirs.

And, Brother Workers, if we do not, for a time, see all the results we expect, yet the Lord has said, "Surely all flesh shall see the salvation of God." The day must come when the dwellers in the wilderness shall bow before Him and lick the dust. "He has set His king upon His holy hill of Zion," and they that said, "Let us break their bands asunder, and cast their cords from us," will have to submit themselves and lick the dust at His feet. Have courage, therefore. The Covenant stands good, the harvest must come as surely as the seed time has come.

Moreover, every farmer is encouraged by the fact that he has seen other harvests. I suppose if the farmer had never heard of a harvest, and had never seen one, it would take some considerable persuasion to get him to sow his seed. But then he knows his father sowed seed and his grandsire, and that the race of men in all generations have put their seed under the clods as an act of faith, and God has accepted their faith, and sent them a return. And, O Brethren, have not we multitudes of instances to confirm our confidence? Let us cheerfully resign ourselves to the Lord's will in suffering, for as others of His saints who went before us have reaped the blessing, so shall we!

Let us work on for our Lord and Master, knowing that Apostles and confessors, and a great cloud of witnesses who have gone before have seen great results, and so shall we. Let us patiently tarry till the Lord comes, for as in the first coming those that waited for Him rejoiced, so shall those who are found watching and waiting at His Second Advent. We have not only the promise of God, but that promise fulfilled to tens of thousands who have preceded us. Therefore we should be ashamed to be impatient—rather let us patiently wait and work on, till the day breaks, and the harvest comes!

IV. And now, Brethren, do you ask, WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF PATIENCE? To patiently wait God's appointed time is our business. I have shown you how we are to wait, but note this—whatever benefit there may be in patience, it is very clear there is *none* in impatience. Suppose a man should be impatient under suffering. Will it diminish his suffering? Will it increase the probabilities of his restoration? We all know that the irritability of temper which is caused by impatience is one of the difficulties which the physician has to battle with.

When the patient is calm there is a better chance of his recovery. If we were near impatient till there was any good to be derived from our fretfulness, we should not be impatient just yet. There is a story told of Mr. Hill being on board a vessel once. It is said he heard the mate swear, and afterwards he heard the captain use a profane oath. I think Mr. Hill interposed as the captain was about to swear again, and said, "No, no, let us be fair, let us have everything turn and turn about. Your mate has sworn, and you have had an oath. Now it is my turn—my turn to swear."

The captain looked at him somewhat astonished, and could not but admit that there was a degree of rightness and propriety in every man having his turn. However, Mr. Hill did not swear, and the captain said, "I suppose, Sir, you don't mean to take your turn, you don't mean to swear." "Oh, yes," said the good old man, "I mean to swear as soon as ever I can see the good of it."

We might do the same by our impatience, Brethren. Let us be impatient as soon as ever we can see the use it will serve. If the farmer should want

rain just now, his impatience would not influence the clouds and make them pour out their torrents. If your child happened to be very petulant, and have a very noisy tongue, and a mischievous disposition, the mother's impatience would not calm the child, control its temper, still its fitful passion, or subdue its stubborn humor. Whatever happens to you, there is nothing can happen to you worse than your being impatient, for of all troubles in the world that one can be troubled with, an impatient spirit is about the worst.

O that you would endeavor to conquer impatience! It cast Satan out of Heaven, when he was impatient at the honor and dignity of the Son of God. He was impatient at being a servant to his Maker, and was driven from his high estate. Let us be rid of impatience which made Cain kill his brother, and which has done a thousand mischievous things since. May God grant us, like the farmer, to watch and wait patiently. But the benefits of patience are too many for me to hope to enumerate them. Suffice it to say, patience saves a man from great discouragement.

If I expect that God will bless my labors to a large extent the first month, and so strain every nerve and toil with every sinew till my strength is ready to yield, and my spirit begins to flag, and the blessing does not come at the time I looked for, I shall be disheartened. But, if I expect some result, a great result in God's appointed week of harvest, even though I may not count on seeing it myself at once, I shall keep on renewing my labors, reviving my hopes, and encouraging myself in the Lord my God.

Surely a farmer would give up his farm in sheer despair if he expected a harvest in a month's time after sowing. He would be month after month in a very sad way, if waiting to see it were not a condition for which he was thoroughly prepared. If you expect an interval during which your patience will be tried, you will not grow discouraged, because it is absolutely requisite that you should wait. Expect to wait for the Glory. Expect to wait for the reward which God has promised. And while you are waiting on the Lord, your bread shall be certain, and your water shall be sure—you shall often eat meat, thank God, and take courage.

The short days and long nights shall not be all charged with gloom, but full often they shall be tempered with good cheer. When we have patience it keeps us in good heart for service. A man to whom it is given to wait for a reward keeps up his courage, and when he has to wait, he says, "It is no more than I expected. I never reckoned that I was to slay my enemy at the first blow. I never imagined that I was to capture the city as soon as ever I had dug the first trench. I reckoned upon waiting, and now that is come, I find that God gives me the Grace to fight on and wrestle on, till the victory shall come."

And patience saves a man from a great deal of haste and folly. A hasty man never is a wise man. He is wise that halts a little, and ponders his ways, especially when adversity crosses his path. I have known Brethren in the ministry get discouraged and leave their pulpits, and repent as long as ever they lived that they left a sphere of labor where they ought to have toiled on. I have known Christian people get discouraged, and touchy, and angry—fall out with the Church of which they were members—go out in the wilderness and leave the fat pastures behind them. They have only had to regret all their lives that they had not a little more patience with their Brethren, and with the circumstances which surrounded them.

Whenever you are about to do anything in a great hurry, pause and pray. The hot fever in your own system ill fits you to act discreetly. While you tarry for a more healthy temperature of your own feelings, there may be a great change in the thermometer outside as to the circumstances that influence you. Great haste makes little speed. He that believes shall not make haste. And as the promise runs, he shall never be confounded. Above all, patience is to be commended to you because it glorifies God. The man that can wait, and wait calmly, astonishes the worldling, for the worldling wants it now.

You remember John Bunyan's pretty parable (as you all know it, I will only give the outline)—of Passion and Patience? Passion would have all his best things first, and one came in, and lavished before him out of a bag all that the child could desire. Patience would have his best things last, and Patience sat and waited, so when Passion had used up all his joy, and all he sought for, Patience came in for his portion, and as John Bunyan very well remarked, there is nothing to come after the last, and so the portion of Patience lasted forever.

Let me have my best things last, my Lord, and my worst things first. Be they what they may, they shall be over, and then my best things shall last forever and forever. He that can wait has faith, and it is faith that marks the true Christian. He that can wait has Grace, and it is Grace that marks the child of God. O that the Lord would grant to every one of you more and more of this excellent Grace of patience, to the praise and glory of His name! I am well near done. Yet there is one other respect in which our case is like that of the farmer. As the season advances, his anxieties are prone to increase rather than to abate.

If he has had long need of patience while the seasons have succeeded each other, and while organic changes have been in course of development, surely there is a stronger challenge of his patience as the crisis approaches when he shall reap the produce. How anxiously at this season will he observe the skies, watch the clouds, and wait the opportune time to get in his crops and garner them in good condition! Is there no peril that haunts him lest, after all, the blast or the mildew should cheat his hopes? Lest fierce winds should lay the full-grown stems prostrate on the ground? Lest then the pelting showers of rain should drench the well-filled ears of corn? I might almost call this the farmer's last fear, and yet the most nervous fear that agitates his mind.

In like manner, Beloved, we have a closing scene in prospect which may, and will, in all probability, involve a greater trial of faith, and a sterner call for patience than any or all of the struggles through which we have already passed. Perhaps I can best describe it to you by quoting two passages of Scripture, one specially addressed to Workers, the other more particularly to sufferers. The first of these texts, you will find it in Hebrews 10:35, 36—*“Cast not away therefore your confidence, which has great recompense of reward. For you have need of patience, that, after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise.”*

This is sweet counsel for you, O Pilgrim, to Zion's city bound. When you were young and strong, you did walk many a weary mile with that staff of promise. It helped you over the ground. Don't throw it aside as useless, now that you are old and infirm. Lean upon it. Rest upon that promise, in your present weakness, which lightened your labor in the days of your

vigor. “Cast not away your confidence.” But, Brethren, there is something more. The Apostle says, “You have need of patience, after you have done the will of God.” But, why, you will say, is patience so indispensable at this juncture of experience?

Doubtless you all know that we are never so subject to impatience as when there is nothing we can do. All the while the farmer is occupied with plowing, harrowing, tilling, drilling, hoeing, and the like, he is too busy to be fretful. It is when the work is *done*, and there is nothing more to occupy his hands that the very leisure he has to endure gives occasion to secret qualms and lurking cares. So it ever is with us. While “we are laborers together with God,” our occupation is so pleasant that we little heed the toil and moil of hard service. But when it comes to a point where we have no province, for it is, “God that gives the increase,” we are apt to be grievously distrustful. Our unbelief finds full play.

Here it is, Brethren, that after our fight is fought, after our race is run, after our allotted task is finished, there is so much need of patience—of such patience as waits only on God and watches unto prayer—that we may finish our course with joy and the ministry we have received of the Lord Jesus. And what about the second text? Where is that to be found? It is in the early part of this Epistle of James.

Turn to James 1:4—“*Let patience have her perfect work, that you may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.*” Oh, how indisposed we all of us are to take this advice! I think I see Paul retiring thrice to wrestle with God in prayer, that He would remove the thorn from his flesh. He felt the rankling, and he craved for relief. He had hardly thought of it as something that must irritate before it could relieve, or as a medicine that must gripe before it could heal. But oh, patience is then worked up to its climax, when the soul so accepts the chastisement from the hand of God that she cannot, and will not, ask Him to change His treatment or alter His discipline.

Seems it not as though patience were a virtue *par excellence* which puts the last polish on Christian chastity? We will hasten back to the cornfields again—I am afraid we were forgetting them. But this time we will not talk so much with the farmer as with the crops. Know you, then, what it is that gives that bright yellow tinge of maturity to those blades which were green and growing? What, think you, imparts that golden hue to the wheat? How do you suppose the farmer judges when it is time to thrust in the sickle?

I will tell you. All the while the corn was growing, those hollow stems served as ducts that drew up nourishment from the soil. At length the process of vegetation is fulfilled. The fibers of the plant become rigid. They cease their office. Down below there has been a failure of the vital power which is the precursor of death. From this time on the heavenly powers work quick and marvelous changes. The sun paints his superscription on the ears of grain. They have reached the last stage—having fed on the riches of the soil long enough, they are only influenced from above. The time of their removal is at hand, when they shall be cut down, carried away in the team, and housed in the garner.

So, too, Beloved in the Lord, it is with some of you. Do I speak as a prophet? Do I not rather echo a trite observation? “The fall of the year is most thickly strewn with the fall of human life.” You have long been suc-

cored with mercies that have come up from Mother Earth. You have been exposed to cold dews, chilling frosts, stormy blasts. You have had the trial of the vapory fog, the icy winter, the fickle spring, and the summer drought. But it is nearly all over now. You are ready to depart. Not yet for a brief space has the reaper come. "You have need of patience." Having suffered thus far, your tottering frame has learned to bend. Patience, Man—patience!

A mighty transformation is about to be worked on you in a short space. Wait on the Lord. Holiness shall now be legibly, more legibly than ever, inscribed on your forefront by the clear shining of the Sun of Righteousness. The heavenly Farmer has you daily, hourly, in His sight, till He shall say to the angel of His Presence, "Put in your sickle." Then, as we pronounce your obituary with the wage of praise due to one in whom God has worked a perfect work, we shall record that you were patient under affliction, resigned to the will of the Lord, and ready to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better. Patience has had her perfect work—you lack nothing. God grant unto you this gracious "*nunc dimittis*" when your time for ingathering has come!

Now, I have only spoken to Believers, because as I have already said the unbeliever cannot wait with patience, for he has nothing to wait for. There is nothing for him but a fearful looking for judgment. Oh, it must be an awful thing to go from a life of poverty, or of suffering, or of drudgery here, into the world where the wrath of God abides forever! It matters not what your position here may be, if at the end you enter not into rest. Equally little does it matter what joys or wealth you have here, if after all you are driven from the Lord's Presence. May you be led to believe in Jesus. There lies safety. May you rest in His precious blood. There is pardon. There is salvation. God grant it, for Christ's sake Amen.

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THE PITY OF THE LORD—THE COMFORT OF THE AFFLICTED

NO. 1845

A SERMON DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JUNE 14, 1885,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,
ON BEHALF OF THE LONDON HOSPITALS.

*“Behold, we count them happy which endure. You have heard
of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord;
that the Lord is full of pity, and of tender mercy.”
James 5:11.*

WE are far too apt to entertain hard thoughts of God. The horrible atheism of our depraved nature continually quarrels with the Most High and, when we are under His afflicting hand and things go cross to our will, the evil of our nature becomes sadly evident. When sorely distressed, we are too apt to think and to speak as we ought not to do concerning the Most High. Let us never forget that our hard speeches have all been *false* speeches and that our suspicions of our God have always been libels upon Him. When we have not thought and spoken well of His name, we have thought and spoken amiss! Looking back, we desire, if possible, to blot out every murmuring thought with our tears and we would cancel every complaining word with humble sorrow. We would eat our bitter words—they were all unwarranted and, therefore, with deep repentance we call them back. On taking a survey of our whole life, we see that the kindness of God has run all through it like a silver thread. Goodness and mercy have followed us all our days, always pursuing us even when we have wickedly fled from them.

Even our apparent ills have been real blessings. As I said in prayer, so I say now—I do not know for which I would bless God most—for my sorrows or for my joys. The best piece of furniture I have ever had in my house is the cross of affliction! Adversity is the richest field in all the farm of life. We have never reaped such a harvest from any seed as from that which fell from our hands while tears were falling from our eyes. When we have gone forth weeping, bearing precious seed, we have invariably come, again, rejoicing, bringing our sheaves with us! O Sufferer, when your bed grew hard beneath you and your pain was exceedingly great, it may be that your groans and complaints were not altogether those of sorrow, but a measure of rebellion mingled with them! For this, be ashamed and confounded! Confess those rebellions! Acknowledge that your hard thoughts were all founded upon error and ask for Grace to be forever at one with your Lord. You who have suffered the loss of property or the loss of be-

loved friends, you, too, perhaps, have thought of God foolishly—remember those thoughts with shame and be all the more eager, at once, to bear willing testimony that the Lord is good and that His mercy endures forever. It is true, however circumstances may look otherwise, that “the Lord is full of pity, and of tender mercy.” Whatever may or may not be, the Lord must be good! Set your seal to that Truth of God. Hold up your head and your hand as one who can speak well of His name and say, “I will bless the Lord at all times! His praise shall continually be in my mouth!”

Let each restored man say, “He heals all my diseases.” Let each tried one now say, “Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all.” Let the aged man bring the spoils of his experience and lay them down at the feet of the Lord who, up to now, has helped him. Our desire, this morning, will be to help one another to avoid future murmuring. We have really nothing to complain about—even our disappointments will yet be causes for praise! O, may the Spirit of God now make us wise to avoid such hasty blunders in the future and teach us to know the Lord so well that we may henceforth be at peace with Him, whatever He may do! O that we may never bear false witness against our God! The Apostle James, in this passage, aims at setting us right in our judgments of the Lord’s dealings that patience may become an easier lesson.

Will you notice that the Apostle, first, in this verse, *sites an instructive instance* of the tender pity of God—“Behold, we count them happy which endure. You have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord.” Then, secondly, he makes a consoling statement and lays it down as a matter of doctrine that “the Lord is full of pity, and of tender mercy.” When we have talked upon those two matters, we shall close by observing *the precious lessons* which we ought to gather from them, as bees fetch honey from the flowers.

I. Notice that when James is exhorting us to full confidence in God in the hour of trial, he gives us AN INSTRUCTIVE INSTANCE. He quotes the story of Job. In these days everything is doubted and a new theory is sure to run like fire among stubble, for this fickle age delights, like the Athenians, in anything new, however absurd it may be! Hence no part of Scripture has been left alone and, of the Book of Job, it has been said that it is a drama, a fiction, a fine piece of Oriental imagination. But see how the New Testament protects the Old! How can Job be an imaginary character? Does the Spirit of God quote for our guidance a fictitious person? Does He set Job before us as an example when Job never existed? The thing is too absurd to contemplate for a single moment! There *was* such a person as Job and possibly the present passage may confirm us in the belief that the Patriarch lived in the earliest ages, since this Apostle, when mentioning the Prophets, places Job in the forefront of them and quotes his case in preference to any other.

“Take, my brethren, the Prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering, affliction and of patience...You have heard of the patience of Job.” He might have mentioned Jacob, or Moses, or David as examples of heroic endurance, but he cites Job—in all prob-

ability as being first in order of time and in degree of trial. I conceive him to have been one of the earliest of those gracious persons who walked with God through much tribulation—and endured as seeing Him who is invisible.

At any rate, we are certain that James does not bring before us the imaginary actor in an Oriental tale as an argument for patience, for when men are suffering, they have no patience with *fiction*—they are in no humor for amusement—and suffering men will only endure to be comforted by the story of real persons who have literally known the sufferings of life. Should you try to stimulate the afflicted to patience by a piece of fiction, they would turn upon you with indignation and say—“Yes, you demand a patience of me which was never found in mortal man. You ask me to display a virtue which was never actually exemplified in history and so you are driven to invent a person for my imitation!” It is too absurd!

Observe, that when this Apostle introduces Job, it is with the view of pointing out the tender mercy of God in his case. He begins by saying, “Behold, we count them happy which endure.” The pity and tender mercy of God are to be seen *in the happiness of those who are called to suffer*. “We count them happy which endure.” *Who counts them happy?* It is a counting which is not general. This arithmetic is only known to *faith* and must be learned of the Lord Jesus. “We,” that is, the Church of God, count them happy who are counted worthy to suffer for Christ’s sake. We do not deem those to be happy who sport their lives away and end a wasted life of luxury by a dreadful death in unbelief. We do not count those to be happy who are fattened like the beasts in the pasture, but shall soon be brought to the slaughter—such are all around us—we *sorrow* because of them! We are not so foolish as to count those happy who spread themselves like a green bay tree, only to be the sooner laid low by the axe of doom!

We count those happy who endure because our Savior has taught us so to reckon. Did He not say, “Blessed are you, when men shall revile you and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for My sake. Rejoice, and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in Heaven, for so persecuted they the Prophets which were before you”? Did He not also say, “Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted”? This is the verdict of the Savior and the true disciple must not dream of disputing with His Master! It is ours to believe that those who endure the will of God are among the happiest of the race, for the inspired Psalmist has said, “Blessed is the man whom You chasten, O Lord.”

I may venture to say that the more sensible part of mankind, in some measure, concur with the people of God in this accounting. We count that man happy who has passed through trial and hardship with a brave endurance. Such life is of an interesting and manly kind. But life without struggle and difficulty is thin and tasteless. How can a noble life be constructed if there is no difficulty to overcome, no suffering to bear? What was there about Dives—his fine linen and sumptuous fare—to make life of? Who envies him? Studying the lives of eminent men, we come to the conclusion that on the whole, it is good for a man to bear the yoke; good

for a man to breast the billows; good for a man to pass through fire and through water—and so to learn sublime lessons. When we see what poor, paltry things those are who are nursed in the lap of luxury and, consequently, never come to a real manhood, “we count them happy that endure.” No wise man would seek to be exempted from the healthy discipline of trouble any more than an intelligent child would wish to be excused from school and to be allowed to play all day and every day in the meadows. No—we are not butterflies that flit from flower to flower—life is real, life is earnest and the tonic of sorrow braces and strengthens us to make it so! As a matter of faith and even as a matter of reasonable judgment, “we count them happy which endure.”

This counting is not mere fancy, but it is a correct estimate—there is a happiness in affliction which none will doubt who have tasted it. Within the rough shell of sorrow, we find a sweet kernel. When we look to the end of affliction; when we see all its comfortable fruit; when we mark what it corrects and observe what it produces, we judge that it is no mean blessing! Happy is the man who has been enabled to endure! He rises from the deeps of woe like a pearl-finder from the sea, rich beyond comparison. He has gained more than he has lost, even though he has lost *everything*, if he has gained contentment, conformity to the will of God, a deep experience and a surer hope. Beloved, those of us who have done business upon great waters and have endured abundant pain, count them happy that endure, even while they are enduring! The people of God find themselves more buoyant in the most salty seas of sorrow than in other waters. The cross does, in very deed, raise us nearer to Christ when it is fully sanctified! It could not do so if it were not sanctified by the Holy Spirit to that noble end—but under His hand it works out our lasting good. Rare gems glisten in the mines of adversity.

I believe that the child of God seldom trusts God so simply at other times as he does when he is in great trouble. Then the second causes are all knocked away like dog-shores from a new-built vessel and the soul glides like a ship from the stocks into the waters of Grace which are her element. Creatures too often come between us and the Creator—and when they are removed, we see Him more distinctly, whom to see is joy and peace! We never get so near to the source of all heavenly consolation as when earthly comfort is removed far away. God seems never so much a husband to any as to the widow and never so much a father as to the fatherless! Our Lord Jesus assures us that the rich man seldom enters His Kingdom—the general Truth of God which lies within that fact is this—the wealth which we possess, be it of what kind it may, impoverishes us by making faith more difficult. And it is only by faith that we enter the Kingdom of God. It is hard to learn swimming on dry land, but he that is in the water is driven to strike out. Our troubles are such “waters to swim in.” We are obliged—strange that we should need such forcing to it—we are *obliged*, I say, to cast ourselves on God when other helpers fail! It is written, “Blessed is he that trusts in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is.” Thus you see how *sorrow* compels us to the *trust* which makes us blessed and thus you see why, “we count them happy which endure.”

Endurance also works in the child of God a close clinging to God which produces near and dear communion with Him. Have you not, in time of trouble, found yourself admitted to inner chambers which, before, had been closed to you? Oh, the rare fellowship of tried saints! Sorrows reveal to us the Man of Sorrows! Grievings waft us to the bosom of our God! See the little chicks in the sunshine—they are running all over the yard to gather what they can. But a hawk is in the sky and the mother calls them with a sharp alarm. They perceive the danger and now they thrust themselves into her feathers and are hidden beneath her wings. He was a much afflicted man who wrote, “He shall cover you with His feathers and under His wings shall you trust.” The most delicious of sensations outside of Heaven is to faint away upon the bosom of the Lord! We find strength in helplessness, joy in submission, rest in resignation, Heaven in a full surrender!

It is delightful to look up to a stripping and chastening God and to say to Him, “My soul is even as a weaned child. Do what You will, for Your will is my will. I submit myself to the withdrawal of what has so long seemed the only source of my comfort and the fountain of my life—for You are better to me than all the breasts of consolation. I am sorely wounded, but You have done it and You always do well. Therefore, I will take pleasure in the grief You send.” Beloved, that suffering which gives new life to prayer and opens to us the palace gates through which we pass into Divine fellowship is so great a gift that, “we count them happy which endure.”

Besides, the Lord has a choice way of manifesting Himself unto His servants in their times of weakness. I speak what I know, for I have trod “that path which no bird of prey knows, neither has the falcon’s eye seen it”—the path upon which shines the inward *personal* revelation of God! He draws the curtain about the bed of His chosen sufferer and, at the same time, He withdraws another curtain which before concealed His Glory! He takes away the delights of health and vigor and then He implants energy of another and a higher order, so that the inner man waxes mighty while the outer man decays. So wondrously does Grace work beyond Nature that it transfigures bodily sickness into spiritual health! Men of God have been known to cry, “Take me back to the furnace, for there One like unto the Son of God was evidently with me!”

When they have had solace in the creature, they have somewhat missed the sweetness of the Creator, and have sighed amid their earthly comforts for the loneliness which afforded them the nearer company of Jesus. I have never known more blissful seasons than those which my Lord vouchsafed me when I was abused by men and had to fight a weary battle. After all, there is no place in all our pilgrim ways which, taken for all in all, has all the charms of the Valley of Humiliation! The tops of the Delectable Mountains are royal spots—from them we sometimes see the Golden City! But these are heights too steep for our trembling feet to continually stand upon—the lowly valley suits us better, though flesh and blood find it hard to go downhill. Here the herb, called heart’s-ease, grows luxuriantly and he that wears it is happier than the courtier in silk and velvet!

Delightful is that well-shaded valley where the shepherd's boy sits and sings among his father's sheep—

***“He that is down need fear no fall;
He that is low, no pride;
He that is humble ever shall
Have God to be His guide.”***

Bunyan truly says, “The Valley of Humiliation is, of itself, as fruitful a place as any the crow flies over.” It is chiefly so because in its wildernesses the Lord speaks to our hearts. To His child, when passing through the glens of tribulation, the Lord says, “Certainly I will be with you.” In the furnace of affliction, the Lord manifests Himself to His chosen as He does not to the world—yes, as He does not even to those of His people who are basking in prosperity! Therefore, “we count them happy which endure.” Brothers and Sisters, do you not see how this changes the face of affliction? This brightens *everything*, for if it is, in the judgment of those who have experienced it, a happy thing to endure! Then it is true that “the Lord is full of pity, and of tender mercy.”

Further, the Apostle gives us a hint of another matter. He adds, “you have heard of the patience of Job.” Now, notice here, *the notability*—I had almost said the *nobility*—of *endurance*. As one truly says, Job's bones had lain, this day, in the common morgue of oblivion if it had not been for his suffering and his patience. “You have heard of the patience of Job.” Who has not? But you would have never heard of *Job* if he had always been prosperous! His flocks and his herds, his gold and his silver, his children and their banquets would, *none* of them, have earned immortality for his *name*. But his poverty and his sickness have done it! He had been simply an Oriental sheik, honored in his own day, but forgotten like his fellows, had not the malice of Satan and the Grace of God forced him into notice. He was knighted on the battlefield. The stream of time has rolled over every other prince of his age and we have never heard of them but, “you have heard of the patience of Job”! Who gets a patent of nobility from the Throne of God unless it is by endurance? The names of the heroes of the Cross are written in black ink with a heavy pen!

Even in worldly histories it is by enduring hardness that men build their memorials. Who that has read the classics has not heard of Mutius Scaevola? And why? He was a valiant man, but he did not win his name by a common deed in battle. His fights are unrecorded, but you have heard of his laying his right hand upon the burning coals of an altar—to let Porsenna see how a Roman could endure pain without shrinking. When he suffered his right hand to burn, he was writing his name in his country's annals. A thousand instances prove that only by endurance can names be engraved in the brass of history! To make a man a man—to bring his manhood forward and to make other men see it—there must be endurance! Read the lives of any who have become the leaders of our race—read the stories of any that are written in the beadroll of fame—and you shall find that not without trial did they come to be renowned.

Poor tailors, husbandmen and apprentices live in the story of the Church of God because they counted not their lives dear to them for Christ's sake. Simple maids and wives, unlettered and poor, are heard of,

to this day, and shall be heard of in *eternity* because they were burned as martyrs for the Truth of God! Who would have heard of Ann Askew if it were not that she was put upon the rack and, when every bone was out of joint and all her body was in exquisite torture, she baffled her tormentors! Well did she say—

***“I am not she that list
My anchor to let fall
For every drizzling mist.
My ship’s substantial.”***

She that could suffer and sing gained high rank among “the ladies of the Covenant.” He who is content to go down to a dishonorable grave may choose the bastard’s portion and escape the rod—but the true-born child of God has no such desire! You may, if you please, enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, but if God intends to honor you, you will choose to suffer affliction with the people of God! If you would reign in Christ’s Kingdom, you must drink of His cup and be baptized with His baptism. Do not, therefore, look down upon those who suffer, but rather look *up* to them as among the higher classes of our race. The trials of Job elevated him into the peerage of the saints and, therefore, we gather from this honorable result of endurance, “that the Lord is full of pity, and of tender mercy,” when He sends afflictions to His beloved ones.

Once again, in order to see the pity of God in sorrow, we must *see the Lord’s end in it*, for, says the Apostle, “You have seen the end of the Lord.” God’s end in affliction is that which proves that He is full of pity and of tender mercy. Does it not strike you as rather a singular thing that when James wants to show us that the Lord is full of pity and of tender mercy, he points us to Job on a dunghill with all his property gone, with his children dead, with his wife ill-advising him, with his friends provoking him and he covered with sores from head to foot? Who can see the pity and tender mercy of God *there*? Nobody who is blind, but he who has had his eyes opened by the Spirit of God can see it because he does not look so much at the process as at the *result*—he stays not with the crucible and the furnace, but joyously gazes upon the pure gold which comes from the refining pot! We see not so much *how* Grace works as *what* it works. The design of the Lord is more to be noted than the method He pursues!

First, remember that the Lord’s end in sending affliction to His people is corrective. Sanctified sorrow is a sharp frost which kills the germs of spiritual disease. Our griefs, like a hailstorm, break off the buds from the branches of sin so that they do not produce the black, accursed fruit of actual transgression! How much we owe to the knife which cuts out the canker and the gangrene! Christ’s vines would soon be in an evil case if it were not for the Pruner. Let us bless God that though, before we were afflicted, we went astray, yet now, by the sanctifying processes of His Providence and Grace, we have learned to keep His Word! Look at the corrective influence of sorrow and you will not quarrel with the rod in a father’s hands.

Moreover, affliction is sent for the display of Grace. Our graces lie asleep within us like slumbering soldiers until affliction strikes its terrible drum and awakens them. You shall not know that there is a bird in the

woods if you are quiet. But if you break a branch, they will become visible, and thus affliction, passing through our soul, startles all our graces and we perceive them—and God is honored thereby. You cannot see the stars while the sun shines! Wait till it is dark and then you shall behold them! Many a Christian Grace is quite imperceptible until the time of trial—and then it shines out with great luster. All this supposes that Grace is there, but if it is lacking, trial discovers the lack. You know not what spirit you are of till you have been under tribulation. You count yourself rich, but in the fire your gold is tested. You reckon that your house is well built, but the flames find out the wood, hay and stubble. Self-knowledge is never sure if it come not of tests and temptations. Therefore, we count them happy who endure because they are less likely to be deceived. God is to be praised for the discovery of our graces, for thus affliction becomes a blessing without disguise.

Further, our trials are an education for the future. I do not think Job was fit to have any more substance until his heart had been enlarged by trouble. Then he could bear twice as much as before. A man of God is not prepared to enjoy success till he has tasted defeat. Many an heir of Heaven will never be fit for Heaven till, first of all, he has been brought near to the gates of Hell. You have been strengthened and prepared and made ready for a nobler future by your late experience of grief. A traveler said to me, yesterday, speaking of the heat, how different it is from cold, for the more you suffer heat, the less you can endure it. But the more you are tried with cold, the more you can bear it, for it hardens you. I am sure it is so as to the influences of prosperity and adversity. Prosperity softens and renders us unfit for more of itself. But adversity braces the soul and hardens it to patience.

Beloved, I would not have you forget that “the end of the Lord” is always with His tried people to give them greater happiness as the result of it. Job’s double portion was an instructive type of what God does with His children in some form, or other, after trial. “You have seen the end of the Lord.” Job came to the end of his words with great bitterness and sorrow of heart—but God’s end was not yet—and when it came, it was glorious and full of joy for His servant! Make note in Job 31:40, it is written, “The words of Job are ended”—ended amid thistles and cockle—but the end of the Lord was very different, for He loaded His servant with pieces of money, earrings of gold and blessed his latter end more than his beginning! Your end, O you that are tossed with tempest and not comforted, shall come forth from your God when He shall lay your stones with fair colors and your foundations with sapphire! He will restore your soul even in this life and give you joy and rest out of your sorrow!

As for the life to come, how little do we take it into our estimate! It is as the main ocean and this life is no better than the village brook! The sorrows of time are a mere pin’s prick, at the most, if we contrast them with the joy eternal! What shall we think of these temporary inconveniences when we reach eternal happiness? We shall look back upon our passing grief with wonder that we ever made so much of it! When the sunshine bursts upon us, we shall smile to think of the flying clouds. We shall

laugh to think that we were so depressed by our light affliction which is but for a moment! The far more exceeding and eternal weight of Glory will cause us to despise the trivial trials of our mortal life. All this makes me say and makes you see that the end of the Lord is LOVE—and that, in the trouble which He sends He is still—“full of pity, and of tender mercy.”

II. Secondly, OUR APOSTLE MAKES A CONSOLING STATEMENT—“the Lord is full of pity, and of tender mercy.” Observe that this is the teaching of God’s Holy Word and, therefore, if we have, at this moment, no evidence of it perceptible to sight or sense, *we are bound to believe it all the same.* I ask the child of God to settle this in his mind. “Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart.” Though as for me, “my feet were almost gone; my steps had well near slipped,” yet surely God is good to His own people. Whatever appears to conflict with this, nothing can possibly shake the certainty of this fact that, “the Lord is full of pity, and of tender mercy.” O weeping heir of Heaven, though your Father scourges you, believe this, for He scourges every son whom He receives! And this also is true, that He receives every son whom He scourges! Rest your heart upon this. Do not be persuaded by man or devil to think ill of your God. He has a father’s heart even when He makes you feel the strokes of His hand. Your God cannot be unkind to you. He cannot forsake you. Has He not said, “Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yes, they may forget, yet will I not forget you?”—

**“Such pity as a father has
Unto his children dear
Like pity shows the Lord to such
As worship Him in fear.”**

Do you believe this?

But, further, the text tells us that *this truth may be seen.* And though it is a matter of faith, yet it may be also a matter of sight. “You have *seen* the end of the Lord; that the Lord is full of pity.” This is so plain that you can see it! See, then, the pity of God in upholding His people under trouble. He presses down with one hand, but He lifts up with the other. “Though He cause grief, yet will He have compassion.” His dealings with us are of the nature of the raindrop and the sunbeam—these are united in fashioning the Covenant rainbow. Beloved, it is true, the Lord has burdened you. Is it not also true that He has sustained you? Above is the billow, but, “underneath are the everlasting arms.” See the pity of God in this!

How often the mercy of God is seen in sickness and suffering by His mitigating the pain and loss! One ounce more and the back had broken, but that ounce never came. One breath more and the ship, that even then staggered before the gale, would have been driven to the bottom of the sea, but that breath of wind did not come. There is always a restraining of affliction, even in the hour of severest trial. Those who are washed in the blood of Jesus shall never be drowned in the sea of sorrow.

Observe, also, the tender pity of God in forgiving the sin of His suffering people. I bless the Lord that He has not taken notice of what I have thought and said when I have been greatly depressed and distracted by

pain. Our Lord knows that the spirit is willing, even when the flesh is weak, and He thinks still kindly of us. If He did mark my foolish despondencies, what could I say but, “Lord, have mercy upon Your foolish child”? When your child has a fever, it may be he is fretful and begins to talk foolishly. Maybe he says unkind things against those very persons whom, in his heart, he loves best. Do you ever say to the child, afterwards, “John, I am very grieved that you said such shocking things about me and about your mother”? Far from it! You say, “Poor dear, he does not know what he is saying—he is wandering in his mind.” So does God deal with our naughtiness when we are under His hand—when He sees that it is rather weakness than willfulness. He is full of pity and full of compassion and blots out the transgressions of His people

See how the tenderness and pity of God are also seen in the revelations He makes to His saints—but of that I have spoken, though I would not have you forget it.

So, also, in the overruling of our sorrows, His love is conspicuous. He often sends a great sorrow that we may not be compelled to bear a greater one. By fire He prevents conflagration. By pain He kills a greater pain. If you had not endured a certain trouble you might have been visited by *seven* troubles, each one more terrible than your present one. Thank God for the preventive operations of His Providence! Bless Him, above all, for the sweet rewards that come to His tried people when, afterwards, they bear the comfortable fruits of righteousness and especially when He comes to them in the riches of His Grace and turns their midnight into everlasting day.

In closing the second head I should like to say I wish we could all read the original Greek, for this word, “The Lord is full of pity,” is a specially remarkable one. It means literally that the Lord has “many bowels,” or a great heart, and so it indicates great tenderness. The god in whom some believe is unable to feel—they lay it down in their theology as an axiom that God *cannot* feel. This, however, I take leave to deny. God is able to do *all* things. I cannot regard Him as though He were a block of wood, or a mass of iron unable to feel. On the contrary, He is represented to us as greatly feeling—the God of a great heart! You know how a sensitive person is affected at the sight of suffering. Some persons cannot bear to see a creature in pain—they are unmanned, thereby, and begin to weep like children. Our God is not only full of pity, but *very full of pity*—not only of mercy, but of *tender* mercy. Our Lord Jesus Christ, when He was here on earth, was the image of the Father and we often read of Him that, “He was moved with compassion.” After this sort are we to think of the great God who is full of pity towards suffering men.

The other word is the complement of the first—“and of tender mercy.” There is, then, you see, in these two words, pity for misery and mercy for sin. There is inward pity in the heart of God and *outward action* in the mercy of God. There is sympathy for suffering and Grace for guilt. These two things make up what we need. That God should pity our griefs and forget our sins—that God should think kindly of us and act helpfully towards us—these are our greatest needs. What a sea of goodness is in my

text—“full of pity, and of tender mercy!” Believe you, then, of God, and see it to be true that for the woes of man He has a tender heart!

Forget not that word, “In all their afflictions He was afflicted, and the angel of His Presence saved them.” Our God is not cold and hard, but full of pity! He is infinitely just and will assuredly punish sin—but side by side with His justice stands His love! He is as full of pity as if He had forgotten to be righteous. Indeed, He is much more so, for were He less righteous, He would be less kind. If you would see His goodness and His justice blended, behold the Son of God upon the tree, dying in our place. Never doubt His tenderness who gave His Only-Begotten Son, “that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

III. Now I have to close with THE LESSONS TO BE LEARNED out of the whole subject. I will but hint at them.

The first is *be patient*. The whole context teaches us patience. Read the chapter at home and see how James continues to say, “Be patient.” Be patient for this reason, that God “is full of pity, and of tender mercy.” A person going to a surgeon will bear sharp pain when he is convinced that by such pain his cure will be worked. If a man proposes to gash me with a lance, I decline his offer. But if I know that I shall die unless the incision is made and, if I believe that an intolerable pain will thus be the result, I say, “Welcome the knife.” Let him cut without mercy, if, by it he intends mercy. It might be unmerciful to stay the hand in such a case.

Such knowledge should make us patient under Divine chastisement. The Lord never grieves us because He likes to grieve us. “He does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men.” There is a necessity for every sorrow. Though now, for a season, we are in heaviness, there is a necessity for it. Do not kick against the goad, lest it prick you all the more. Be silent before God, lest He rebukes you for your foolish speech. When the sheep is being shorn, if it kicks, it will be cut with the shears. But if it will lie quite still, the shearer will take off all the wool and never harm the flesh. Lie still, Brothers and Sisters—let the Good Shepherd clip as He pleases! Though He may cut very close to the skin, He is full of pity and will only rid you of that which would harm you.

The next lesson is, *be penitent*. You unconverted ones here, today, if you are suffering and sorrowful, I want you to feel that God is sending this sorrow in love to your souls. He smites you that you may turn to Him in repentance. He chastens you that He may bring you to Himself, that you may not perish forever. He “is full of pity.” His hand is strong to smite, but it is also strong to save. Return to your Father, O you prodigal! Though you have spent your substance, though you have brought yourself to rags, return to your Father—there is bread enough in His house and, better still, there is love enough in His heart to welcome even you! See, He hastens to meet you as soon as your face is toward Him, for He is ready to forgive! Oh, you that have been hardened by your distresses, repent of this wickedness, lest, like Pharaoh, you are plagued even to destruction! Seek the Lord while He may be found! Call upon Him while He is near. He welcomes all who repent. He is eager to forgive! Delay no longer. O Spirit of the Lord, hasten the returning sinner!

The last lesson is, *be full of pity*. If God is full of pity and of tender mercy, children of God, you are to imitate Him and to be full of pity, too. This Truth of God is to be remembered at all times. And, just now, you have an opportunity of showing your pity towards the poor and *sick* of this great city. When you relieve the needs of a man in health, you may possibly assist him in his vices, but in helping the sick poor you can do no wrong. The door of a hospital is open for good and only for good. I am concerned to know that there are many beds unoccupied and many suffering persons kept out of the hospitals from lack of funds. Whole wards are rendered useless for lack of income. In some cases the authorities are compelled to use those wards for persons who can pay for attendance and though this is a good thing, yet I cannot forget that those who cannot pay are thus deprived of what they need so much more than others.

You that have been sick, yourselves, should give liberally, today, out of sympathy. You that have never been sick ought to give twice as much out of *gratitude*. Yet I must correct myself—those who have been afflicted and healed should feel both sympathy *and* gratitude—and so should give the double of those from whom I have asked double liberality. Let us try to give to this fourfold degree! When the box is passed round, be full of pity and of tender mercy, like your Father and your God—and then the hospitals will be largely helped this day.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalm 103.
HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—103 (VERSION III.), 214, 195.

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THE PEARL OF PATIENCE

NO. 3255

A SERMON
PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY, JUNE 22, 1911.

**DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,
ON LORD'S-DAY AFTERNOON IN JANUARY, 1880.**

***“You have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord,
that the Lord is full of pity and of tender mercy.”
James 5:11.***

[Another Sermon by Mr. Spurgeon upon the whole verse is #1845, Volume 31—
THE PITY OF THE LORD—THE COMFORT OF THE AFFLICTED—
read/download the entire sermon free of charge at <http://www.spurgeongems.org> .]

WE need to be reminded of what we have *heard*, for we are far too ready to forget. We are also so slow to consider and meditate upon what we have heard that is profitable to have our memories refreshed. At this time we are called upon to recollect that we have heard of the patience of Job. We have, however, I trust, gone beyond mere hearing, for we have also *seen* in the story of Job that which it was intended to set vividly before our mind's eye. “You have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord.” The Romish priest professes to make men hear the voice of the Gospel by *seeing*, but the Scriptural way is to make men see the Truth of God by *hearing*. Faith, which is the soul's sight, comes by hearing. The design of the preaching of the Gospel to the ear is “to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery which from the beginning of the world has been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ.” Inward sight is the result of all fruitful hearing!

Now, that which is to be *seen* in the Scriptures is somewhat deeper and calls for more thought than that which is merely heard. “You have heard of the patience of Job”—an interesting history which a child may understand, but it needs, Divine teaching to see to the bottom of that narrative, to discover the pearl which lies in the depths of it! It can only be said of enlightened disciples, “You have seen the end of the Lord, that the Lord is full of pity and of tender mercy.” At the same time, that which is seen is also more precious to the heart and more bountifully enriches the soul than anything which is only heard. I count it no small enrichment of our mind to have heard of the patience of Job—it comforts and strengthen us in our endurance, but it is as infinitely better thing to have seen the end of the Lord, and to have perceived the undeviating tenderness and pity which are displayed even in His sorest chastisements. This is, indeed, a choice vein of silver, as he that has dug in it is far richer than the more superficial person who has only heard of the patience of Job, and so has only gathered surface truth. “The patience of Job,” as we

hear of it is like the shell of some rare nut from the Spice Islands—full of fragrance. But “the end of the Lord,” when we come to see it, is as the kernel which is rich beyond expression with a fullness of aromatic essence!

Note well the reason why the text reminds us of what we have heard and seen. When we are called to the exercise of any great virtue, we need to call in all the helps which the Holy Spirit has bestowed upon us. All our wealth of hearing and seeing we shall have need to spend in our heavenly warfare. We shall be forced full often to gird up the loins of our mind by the recollection of examples of which we have heard, such as that of Job, and then to buckle up that belt and brace it fast with what we have. The patience of Job shall gird us and that “end of the Lord” which we have seen shall be the fastening of the band. We shall need all before our work is done. In the present case, the virtue we are called to exercise is that of *patience* and, therefore, to help us to do it, we are reminded of the things that we have heard and seen, because it is a Grace as difficult as it is necessary, and as hard to come at as it is precious when it is gained!

The text is preceded by a triple exhortation to patience. In the 7th verse we read, “Be patient, therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord.” And again, “Behold, the husbandman waits for the precious fruit of the earth, and has long patience for it, until he receives the early and latter rain. Be you also patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord draws near.” Further on, in the 10th verse, we read, “Take my brethren, the Prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering, affliction and patience.” Are we thrice exhorted to patience? Is it not clear that we have even now much need of it? We are, most of us, deficient in this excellent Grace and because of it we have missed most privileges and have wasted many opportunities in which we might have honored God, might have commended religion and might have been exceedingly profited in our own souls. Affliction has been the fire which would have removed our dross, but impatience has robbed the mental metal of the flux of submission which would have secured its proper purification. It is unprofitable, dishonorable, weakening—it has never brought us gain—and never will.

I suppose we are three times exhorted to patience because we shall need it much in the future. Between here and Heaven we have no guarantee that the road will be easy, or that the sea will be glassy. We have no promise that we shall be kept like flowers in a conservatory, from the breath of frost, or that, like fair queens, we shall be veiled from the heat of the sun.

The voice of Wisdom says, “Be patient, be patient, be patient. You may need a threefold measure of it. Be ready for the trial.” I suppose, also, that we are over and over again exhorted to be patient because it is so high an attainment. It is no child’s play to be dumb as the sheep before her shearers and to lie still while the shears are taking away all that warmed and comforted us. The mute Christian under the afflicting rod is

no everyday personage. We kick out like oxen which feel the goad for the first time! We are, most of us, for years as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke. “Be patient, be patient, be patient,” is the lesson to be repeated to our hearts many times, even as we have to teach children over and over again the same words till they know them by heart. It is the Holy Spirit, ever patient under our provocations, who calls us to be “patient.” It is Jesus, the un murmuring Sacrifice, who charges us to, “be patient.” It is the long-suffering Father who bids us “be patient.” O you who are soon to be in Heaven, be patient for yet a little while and your reward shall be revealed!

Upon these two things we will indulge a brief meditation. First, we are bidden to be patient and *it is not an unheard of virtue*. “You have heard of the patience of Job.” And, secondly, we are bidden to be patient and *it is not an unreasonable virtue*, for you “have seen the end of the Lord, that the Lord is full of pity and of tender mercy.”

I. IT IS NOT AN UNHEARD OF VIRTUE TO BE PATIENT—“You have heard of the patience of Job.”

Observe well that the patience of Job was the patience of *a man like ourselves*, imperfect and full of infirmity, for as one has well remarked, we have heard of the *impatience* of Job as well as of his patience! I am glad the Divine Biographer was so impartial, for had not Job been somewhat impatient, we might have thought his patience to be altogether inimitable and above the reach of ordinary men. The traces of imperfection which we see in Job prove all the more powerfully that Divine Grace can make grand examples out of common constitutions and that keen feelings of indignation under injustice need not prevent a man’s becoming a model of patience. I am thankful that I know that Job did speak somewhat bitterly and proved himself a man, for now I know that it was a man like myself who said, “The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.” It was a man of flesh and blood such as mine, who said, “Shall we receive good at the hands of God, and shall we not receive evil?” Yes, it was a man of like passions with myself who said, “Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him.”

You have heard of the patience of your Lord and Master, and tried to copy it, and half despaired! But now you have heard of the patience of His servant, Job, and knowing as Job did that your Redeemer lives, you should be encouraged to emulate him in obedient submission to the will of the Lord! “You have heard of the patience of Job,” that is, the patience of *a greatly tried man*. That is a very trite, yet necessary remark—Job could not have exhibited patience if he had not endured trial. And he could not have displayed a patience whose fame rings down the ages till we have heard of it, if he had not known extraordinary affliction! Reflect then, that it was the patience of a man who was *tried in his estate*. All his wealth was taken! Two or three servants were left—left only to bring him evil tidings—each one saying, “I only am escaped alone to tell you.” His flocks and his herds were gone. The house in which his children had met

was a wreck and the princely man of Uz sat upon a dunghill—and there were none so mean as to do him reverence. You have heard of the patience of Job in loss and poverty—have you not seen that if all estates should fail, God is still your portion?

Job was caused to suffer sharp *relative troubles*. All his children were snatched away without a warning, dying at a festival where, without being culpably wrong, men are usually unguarded and, in a sense, unready, for the spirit is in *déshabille*. His children died suddenly and there was a grievous mystery about it, for a strange wind from the wilderness smote the four corners of the house and overthrew it in an instant! And such an occurrence must have connected itself in Job's mind either with the judgment of God or with Satanic influence—a connection full of the most painful thoughts and surmises! The death of his dear ones was not a common or a desirable one, and yet all had so been taken. Not a son or daughter was left him. All gone! All gone! He sits among the ashes a childless man. “You have heard of the patience of Job.” Oh, to have patience under bereavements, patience even when the insatiate Archer multiplies His arrows!

Then, and I here speak most to myself, “You have heard of the patience of Job” under *personal affliction*. It is well said by one who knew mankind cruelly well, that, “we bear the afflictions of other people very easily,” but when it touches our bone and our flesh, trial assumes an earnest form and we have need of unusual patience. Such bitter pain as Job must have suffered, we have probably, none of us, known anything to the same degree. And yet we have had weary nights and dreary days. Each limb has claimed a prominence in anguish and each nerve has become a road for armies of pains to march over! We know what it is to feel thankful tears in our eyes merely for having been turned over in bed. Job, however, far excels us. “You have heard of the patience of Job,” and you know how he sinned not when from the crown of his head to the sole of his feet he was covered with irritating boils!

In addition to all this, Job bore what is perhaps the worst form of trial, namely, *mental distress*. The conduct of his wife must have much grieved him when she tempted him to “curse God and die.” However she meant it, or however her words may be translated, she evidently spoke like a foolish woman when her husband needed wise consolation. And then those “miserable comforters”—how they crowned the edifice of his misery! Cold-blooded mortals sneer at sentimental grievances, but I speak from my heart when I affirm that griefs which break no bones and take not a coin from our store may yet be among the sharpest whips of sorrow! When the iron enters into the soul, we know the very soul of suffering! See how Job's friends fretted him with arguments and worried him with accusations. They rubbed salt into his wounds! They cast dust into his eyes. Their tender mercies were cruel, though well-intentioned. Woe to the man who in his midnight hour is hooted at by such owls! Yet the hero of patience sinned not. “You have heard of the patience of Job.”

Job's was in all respects a most real trouble, he was no mere dyspeptic, no hysterical inventor of imaginary evil. His were not fancied losses nor minor calamities. He had not lost one child out of a numerous family, nor a few thousands out of a vast fortune, but he was brought to sad bereavement, abject poverty and terrible torment of body and mind! But despite it all, "You have heard of the patience of Job," and heard more of his patience than of his afflictions! What a mercy to have heard of such a man and to know that one of our own race passed through the seven-times heated furnace and yet was not consumed!

The patience of Job was the patience of *a man who endured up to the very end*. No break-down occurred. At every stage he triumphed and to the utmost point he was victorious! Traces of weakness are manifest, but they are grandly overlaid by evidences of gracious power. What a marvelous man was he with all those aches and pains, still bearing witness to his God, "But He knows the way that I take: when He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold." He reasons well even in the heat of his passionate zeal for his character. He reasons bravely, too, and catches up the points of his adversaries like a trained logician. He holds fast his integrity and will not let it go. And best of all, he cries, "I know that my Redeemer lives and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God." Oh, glorious challenge of a dying man to his Immortal Kinsman!

The enemy could not triumph over Job—he threw him on a dunghill and it became his throne, more glorious than the ivory throne of Solomon! The boils and blisters with which the adversary covered the Patriarch were more honor to him than a warrior's gilded body armor. Never was the arch-fiend more thoroughly beaten than by the afflicted Patriarch! And instead of pitying the sufferer, my pity curdles into contempt for that fallen spirit who must there have gnawed his own heart and drunk deep draughts of gall and wormwood as he saw himself foiled at all points by one who had been put into his power and one, too, of the feeble race of man! Surely, in this he experienced a foretaste of the bruising threatened at Eden's gate as to be given him by the woman's Seed! Yes, Job endured unto the end and, therefore, he stands as a pillar in the house of the Lord. Cannot we also endure unto the end? What hinders Divine Grace from glorifying itself in us?

We may once more say that the patience of Job is the virtue of *one who thereby has become a great power for good*. "You have heard of the patience of Job." Yes, and all the ages have heard of the patience of Job—and Heaven has heard of the patience of Job and Hell has heard of it, too—and not without results in each of the three worlds. Among men, the patience of Job is a great, mortal and spiritual force. This morning, when musing upon it, I felt ashamed and humbled, as thousands have done before me. I asked myself, "What do I know of patience when I compare myself with Job?" And I felt that I was as unlike the great Patriarch as I well could be. I recollect a minister who had been somewhat angered

by certain of his people and, therefore, preached from the text, "And Aaron held his peace." It was remarked that the preacher's likeness to Aaron reached no further than the fact that Aaron held his peace and the preacher did not. May we not penitently confess that our likeness to Job is much of the same order? He was patient and we are not. Yet, as I thought of the patience of Job, it caused me to hope! If Job was patient under trial and affliction, why should I not be patient too? He was but a man—what was worked in one man may be done in another! He had God to help him and so have I. He could fall back upon the living Redeemer—so can I and why should I not? Why should I not attain to patience as well as the man of Uz? It made me feel happy to believe in human capacity to endure the will of God, the Holy Spirit instructing and upholding! Play the man, beloved Friend! Be not cut down! What God has done for one, He can do for another. If the man is the same and if the great God is the same, and be sure He is, we, too, may attain to patience in our limited circle! Our patience may be heard of among those who prize the fruits of the Spirit!

II. I will not detain you, lest I weary you, except to say, in the second place, IT IS NOT AN UNREASONABLE VIRTUE TO BE PATIENT for, according to our text, there is great love and tenderness in it. "You have seen the end of the Lord, that the Lord is full of pity and of tender mercy."

We must have seen, in Job's story, if we have regarded it aright, that *the Lord was in it all*. It is not a narrative in which the devil is the sole actor—the great Lord of All is evidently present. He it was who challenged Satan to consider Job and then questioned him as to the result. Less seen than the Evil One, the Lord was nevertheless present at every act of the drama. God was not away while His servant suffered! In fact, if there was any place where the thoughts of God were centered more than anywhere else in Providence at that time, it was where the perfect and upright man was bearing the brunt of the storm. *The Lord was ruling, too*. He was not present as a mere spectator, but as master of the situation! He had not handed over the reins to Satan—far from it, for every step that the enemy took was only by express permission from the Throne of God. He allowed him to strip his servant, but he set the limit, "Only upon himself put not forth your hand." When to complete the test, the enemy was permitted to plague his body, the Lord added, "But save his life." The ruling hand is always on the curb. The Dog of Hell is allowed to snap and snarl, but his chain is not removed and the collar of Omnipotent restraint is on him. Come, dear Friends, you that are in trouble, remember that God is in your sorrow, ruling it to its desired end and checking it that it should go no further than according to His will! And you neither have suffered, nor in the future will suffer any more than He in Infinite Love permits!

Moreover, *the Lord was blessing Job by all his tribulation*. Untold blessings were coming to the grand old man while he seemed to be losing all. It was not simply that he obtained a double portion at the end, but

all along, every part of the testing process worked out his highest good. Now have we seen the end of the Lord and that end is unmingled goodness! The Lord was standing by every moment to stop the refining process when it had come to the proper point, so that no more of it should happen than was really beneficial and, at the same time, no less than should secure His gracious purpose. True mercy is bound, at times, to seem rough, for it might be a great and lifelong evil for the surgeon to stop the knife before its work is done. The Lord was wisely tender and tenderly wise with Job—and even in his case the sore affliction was not allowed to proceed a single degree beyond the necessary point of intensity.

And when we come to look all Job's life through, we see that *the Lord in mercy brought him out of it all with unspeakable advantage*. He who tested with one hand supported with the other! Whatever Satan's end might be in tempting the Patriarch, God had an end which covered and compassed that of the destroyer—and that end was answered all along the line, from the first loss which happened among the oxen to the last taunt of his three accusers! There was never a question, in the heights of Heaven as to the ultimate issue! Eternal Mercy was putting forth its irresistible energy, and Job was made to bear up though the trial and to rise from it a wiser and a better man!

Such is the case with all afflicted saints. We may well be patient under our trials, for the Lord sends them. He is ruling in all our circumstances. He is blessing us by them, He is waiting to end them and He is pledged to bring us through. Shall we not gladly submit to the Father of our spirits? Is not this our deepest wish, "Your will be done"? Shall we quarrel with that which blesses us? Shall we repine when the end of the trouble is so near and so blessed? No! We see that the Lord is full of pity and of tender mercy and, therefore, we will be patient.

Beloved, let us accept future sorrow with joy, for it is Divine Love which will add to our years whatever sorrowful seasons may yet come to us. Job's life might have ended in the first period without the trial, but if the Patriarch, with perfect knowledge of all things, could have had his choice, would he not have chosen to endure the trial for the sake of all the blessing which came of it? We would never have heard of the patience of Job if he had continued in his prosperity—and that first part of his life would have made a very poor commonplace history as compared with what we now find in the pages of Scripture! Camels, sheep, servants and children make up a picture of wealth, but we can see this any day! The rare sight is the patience—this it is which raises Job to his true glory! God was dealing well with His faithful servant and even rewarding his uprightness when He counted him worthy to be tried. The Lord was taking the surest and kindest way to bless and honor one who was a perfect and an upright man—one that feared God and eschewed evil.

The Lord was full of pity to permit sharp trial to come upon Job for his good. There was more tender mercy in subjecting him to it than there

would have been in screening him from it. False pity would have permitted the good man to die in his nest, but true pity put a thorn into it and made him mount aloft as the eagle! It was great mercy, after all, which took him out of the state in which he washed his steps with butter, and cast him into the mire, for thus he was weaned from the world and made to look the more eagerly for a better portion.

No doubt, in Job's character, the Lord saw certain failings which we cannot see, which He desired to remove and perhaps He also marked some touches of Grace which needed to be supplied—and Divine Love undertook to complete his perfect character. Perhaps his prosperity had sunned him till he had grown somewhat hard in tone and sharp in judgment and, therefore, the Lord would soften and mellow his gracious spirit. The things lacking were no common virtues, for in these he was perfect, but certain rich and rare tints of the higher life—and these could not be imparted by any other means than severe suffering. Nothing more could really be done for Job but by this special agency, for doubling the number of his camels and sheep would only enlarge his cares. Since he already had enough children, too, he had a sufficient family and of all earthly things, abundance. But to give him twice the Divine Grace, twice the experience, twice the knowledge of God, perhaps twice the tenderness of character he had always possessed, was a mode of enrichment which the tender and compassionate Lord adopted out of the greatness of His wisdom and favor. Job could only thus be made doubly rich in the rarest of all treasures—and the All-Merciful adapted that method.

Examining the matter from another point of view, it may appear that Job was tried in order that he might be better able to bear the extraordinary prosperity which the Lord had resolved to pour upon him. That double portion might have been too much for the Patriarch if he had not been lifted into a higher state. If abundance is hard to bear, superfluity is even worse and, therefore, to those He loves, the Lord gives more Grace.

Job by his trials and patience received not only double Grace, and double wealth, but double honor from God. He had stood very high in the peerage of the excellent as a perfect and an upright man before his trial, but now he is advanced to the very highest rank of spiritual nobility. Even our children call him "the most patient man under pains and suffering." He rose from the knighthood of sincere goodness to the peerage of heroic endurance. At first he had the honor of behaving admirably amid wealth and ease, but he was in the end elevated to sit among those who glorify God in the fires. Benevolence, justice and truth shone as bright stars in the sky of his heavenly character, but now the moon of patience silvers all and lights up the scene with a superior beauty! Perhaps the Lord may love some of us so specially that He means to put upon us the dignity of endurance—He will make us knights, not of the golden fleece, but of the iron Cross! What but great pity and tender mercy could plan such a lot for our unworthy selves?

Once more, Job by his trials and the Grace of God was lifted up into the highest position of usefulness. He was useful before his trial as few

men of wealth and influence have been, but now his life possesses an enduring fruitfulness which blesses multitudes every day! Even we who are here this afternoon “have heard of the patience of Job.” All the ages have this man for their teacher. Brothers and Sisters, we do not know who will be blessed by our pains, by our bereavements, by our crosses if we have patience under them! Specially is this the case with God’s ministers, if He means to make much of them, their path to usefulness is up the craggy mountain’s side. If we are to comfort God’s afflicted people, we must, first, be afflicted ourselves. Tribulation will make our wheat fit to be bread for saints. Adversity is the choicest book in our library, printed in black letters, but grandly illuminated! Job makes a glorious comforter and preacher of patience, but no one turns either to Bildad, Zophar, or Eliphaz, who were “miserable comforters” because they had never been miserable. You, dear Sisters, whom God will make daughters of consolation to your families, must in your measure pass through a scholarship of suffering—a sword must pass through your own hearts if you are to be highly favored and blessed among women. Yet, let us all remember that affliction will not bless us if it is impatiently borne. If we kick at the goad, it will hurt us, but it will not act as a fitting stimulus. If we rebel against God’s dispensations, we may turn His medicines into poisons and increase our grief by refusing to endure them. Be patient, be patient, be patient and the dark cloud shall drop a sparkling shower! “You have heard of the patience of Job.” Imitate it. “You have seen the end of the Lord.” Rejoice in it. “He is full of pity and of tender mercy.” Yield yourselves to Him. Divine Spirit, plant in us the sweet flower of patience, for our patient Savior’s sake! Amen.

**EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:
ROMANS 8:1-22.**

This precious Chapter reminds us of the description of the land of Havilah, “where there is gold, and the gold of that land is good.”

Verse 1. *There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are to Christ Jesus.* [See Sermon #1917, Volume 32—IN CHRIST NO CONDEMNATION—Read/download the entire sermon, free of charge, at <http://www.spurgeongems.org>.] There is no condemnation to them—it is gone, and gone forever. Not only is part of it removed, but the whole of it is gone. “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.” This is their legal status before God—in Christ Jesus, without condemnation. And this is their character—

1. *Who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.* Their daily conversation is according to their new spiritual nature and according to the guidance of the Holy Spirit—not according to their fleshly nature and the guidance of self and Satan.

2. *For the Law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the Law of life and death.* “It cannot any longer rule me and it cannot

now condemn me. I am free from it, for I am now under the new and higher Law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.”

3, 4. *For what the Law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the righteousness of the Law might be fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.* [See Sermons #699, Volume 12—SIN CONDEMNED AND EXECUTED BY CHRIST JESUS and #2228, Volume 37—THE LAW’S FAILURE AND FULFILLMENT—Read/download both sermons, free of charge, at <http://www.spurgeongems.org>.] If there are any men in the world who keep the Law of God, they are the very persons who do not hope to be saved by the keeping of it, for they have by faith found righteousness in Christ! And now by love and gratitude they are put under the power of the Law of the spiritual life in Christ and they so live, by God’s Grace, that they do manifest the holiness of the Law in their lives.

5. *For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh.* They care for nothing else—they are satisfied as long as their appetites are gratified. They are of this world and the things of this world fill them to the brim.

5. *But they that are after the Spirit [do mind] the things of the Spirit.* Spiritual joys, spiritual hopes, spiritual pursuits—these belong only to those who are spiritual!

6. *For to be carnally minded—To be fleshly minded—*

6. *Is death.* That is what it comes to, for the flesh comes to death at last and, after death, it goes to corruption. If we live after that carnal fashion, this will be the end of our living—“death.”

6. *But to be spiritually minded is life and peace.* For the spirit will never die and the spirit has that within it which will bring it perfect peace.

7, 8. *Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the Law of God, neither indeed can be. So then, they that are in the flesh cannot please God.* Those that have never been born-again, so as to be “in the Spirit,” are still just as they were born—“in the flesh”—so they cannot please God. Do what they may, there is an essential impurity about their nature so that they cannot be well-pleasing unto God. We must be born-again! We must become spiritual by the new birth which is worked by the Holy Spirit or else it is impossible for us to please God! O you who are trying your best to please God apart from the new birth and apart from Christ, see how this iron bar is put across your path—“they that are in the flesh cannot please God.” Go, then, to Him and ask Him to give you of His Spirit that you may be spiritual and no longer carnal!

9. *But you are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if any man has not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His.* It does not matter what he calls himself—he may be a preacher, he may be a bishop—if he has not the Spirit of Christ, “he is none of His,” and if he has the Spirit of Christ, though he may be the most obscure person on earth, he belongs to Christ!

10. *And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin.* The Grace of God has not changed the body—it still remains earth, dust—worms’

meat—and it must die unless Christ should come and transform it by His coming. “The body is dead because of sin” and, therefore, come those aches and pains, that heaviness, that weariness, that decay, those infirmities of age which we experience as long as we bear about with us this body of death!

10. *But the Spirit is life because of righteousness.* There is a living power within us which triumphs over this dying, decaying body! So we rejoice notwithstanding all our afflictions, trials and depressions.

11. *But if the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by His Spirit that dwells in you.* There is to be an emancipation even for this poor flesh—a translation and a Glory, for it is yet in Christ.

12. *Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh.* [See Sermon #96, Volume 2—THE CHRISTIAN—A DEBTOR—Read/download the entire sermon, free of charge, at <http://www.spurgeongems.org>.] Certainly not, for we owe the flesh nothing! It keeps us down and hampers us. It is a hindrance to us and we certainly owe it nothing! So let us not be subservient to it, let us not consult or even consider it and especially let us never come under its fatal bondage!

13. *For if you live after the flesh, you shall die.* It is a dying thing, and “you shall die” if you live after its dying fashion.

13. *But if you, through the Spirit—*That living, immortal power.

13, 14. *Do mortify the deeds of the body, you shall live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the Sons of God.* [See Sermon #1220, Volume 21—THE LEADING OF THE SPIRIT, THE SECRET TOKENS OF THE SON OF GOD—Read/download the entire sermon, free of charge, at <http://www.spurgeongems.org>.] Oh, high dignity and blessed privilege! As soon as we get away from the dominion of the flesh and come to be led by the Spirit of God, and so become spiritual men, we have the evidence that we are the sons of God, for “God is a Spirit,” so His sons must be spiritual.

15. *For you have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear.* We did have it once, and it worked some good effect upon us for the time being. When we were under the Law, we felt ourselves to be in slavery, and that made us go to Christ for liberty.

15. *But you have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.* Oh, blessed, blessed state of heart to feel that now we are born into the family of God and that the choice word which no slave might ever pronounce may now be pronounced by us, “Abba!” It is a child’s word, such as a little child utters when he first opens his mouth to speak, and it runs the same both backwards and forwards—AB-BA. Oh to have a childlike spirit that in whatever state of heart I am, I may still be able to say, in the accents even of spiritual infancy, “Abba, Father!”

16. *The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.* [See Sermons #339, Volume 6—THE SONS OF GOD; #402, Volume 7—THE JOINT-HEIRS AND THEIR DIVINE PORTION and #2961, Volume 51—“HEIRS OF GOD”—Read/download all these sermons, free of charge, at <http://www.spurgeongems.org>.] What better testimony can we have than that of these two witnesses, first of our own

spirit and then of the Holy Spirit, Himself, “that we are the children of God”? Note that this is not spoken concerning everybody. The doctrine of the universal Fatherhood of God is a doctrine of the flesh—not of the Spirit—it is not taught anywhere in God’s Word. This is a Fatherhood which relates only to those who are *spiritual*—we are born into it by the new birth and brought into it by an act of Divine Grace in adoption. “Beloved, now are we the sons of God,” this is a special privilege that belongs only to those who are spiritual!

17, 18. *And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ, if we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified together. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the Glory which shall be revealed in us.* Do we suffer now? Then let us wait for something better that is yet to come! Yes, we do suffer, and in this we are in accord with the whole creation of God, for the whole creation is just now, as it were, enduring birth pangs. There is something better coming, but meanwhile it is troubled and perplexed, moaning and groaning.

19-22. *For the earnest expectation of the creature waits for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of Him who has subjected the same in hope, because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and travails in pain together until now. See how it often weeps in the superabundant rain that seems like a minor deluge! Note how, at times, Creation’s very bowels seem to be tossed and torn with pain and agony by volcanoes and earthquakes. Mark the tempests, tornadoes, hurricanes and all kinds of ills that sweep over the globe, leaving devastation in their track! And the globe itself is wrapped in swaddling bands of mist, and shines not out like its sister stars in its pristine brightness and splendor. The animal creation, too, wears the yoke of bondage. How unnecessarily heavy have men often made that yoke!*

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**PRAY THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL USE THIS SERMON
TO BRING MANY TO A SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST.**

TO SUNDAY SCHOOL TEACHERS AND OTHER SOUL-WINNERS NO. 1137

A SERMON DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, OCTOBER 19, 1873,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

*“Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one converts him, let him know, that he which converts the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.”
James 5:19, 20.*

JAMES is pre-eminently practical. If he were, indeed, the James who was called, “The Just,” I can understand how he earned the title, for that distinguishing trait in his character shows itself in his Epistle, and if he were “the Lord’s brother,” he did well to show so close a resemblance to his great Relative and Master who commenced His ministry with the practical Sermon on the Mount.

We ought to be very grateful that in the Holy Scriptures we have food for all classes of Believers and employment for all the faculties of the saints. It was right that the contemplative should be furnished with abundant subjects for thought—Paul has supplied them—he has given to us sound doctrine, arranged in the symmetry of exact order. He has given us deep thoughts and profound teachings. He has opened up the deep things of God. No man who is inclined to reflection and thoughtfulness will be without food so long as the Epistles of Paul are extant, for he feeds the soul with sacred manna.

For those whose predominating affections and imagination incline them to more mystic themes, John has written sentences aglow with devotion and blazing with love. We have his simple but sublime Epistles, Epistles which, when you glance at them, seem in their wording to be fit for children, but when examined, their sense is seen to be too sublime to be fully grasped by the most advanced of men. You have from that same eagled-eyed and eagle-winged Apostle the wondrous visions of the Revelation where awe, devotion and imagination may enlarge their flight and find scope for the fullest exercise.

There will always be, however, a class of persons who are more practical than contemplative, more active than imaginative. And it was wise that there should be a James, whose main point should be to stir up their pure minds by way of remembrance and help them to persevere in the practical Graces of the Holy Spirit. The text before me is perhaps the most practical utterance of the whole Epistle. The whole Epistle burns, but this ascends in flames to Heaven! It is the culmination as it is the conclusion of the letter. There is not a word to spare in it. It is like a naked sword, stripped of its jeweled scabbard and presented to us with nothing to note but its keen edge.

I wish I could preach after the fashion of the text, but if I cannot, I will at least pray that you may act after the fashion of it. Downright living for the Lord Jesus is sadly needed in many quarters. Christian garnishing we have enough of, but solid, everyday, actual *work* for God is what we need. If our lives, however unornamented they may be by leaves of literary or polite attainments, shall, nevertheless, bring forth fruit unto God in the form of souls converted by our efforts, it will be well. They will then stand forth before the Lord with the beauty of the olive trees, which consist in its fruitfulness.

I call your attention very earnestly to three matters. First, here is a special case dealt with—"If any of you do err from the truth, and one converts him." While speaking of that special case the Apostle declares a general fact, "He who converts the sinner from the error of his ways shall save a soul from death and shall hide a multitude of sins." When I have spoken of these two points, I mean, thirdly, to make a particular application of the text—not at all intended by the Apostle, but I believe abundantly justified—an application of the text to increased effort for the conversion of *children*.

I. First, then, here is A SPECIAL CASE DEALT WITH. Read the verse and you will see that it was that of a backslider from the visible Church of God. The words, "If any of you," must refer to a professed *Christian*. The erring one had been named by the name of Jesus and for awhile had followed the Truth of God. But in an evil hour he had been betrayed into doctrinal error and had erred from the Truth. It was not merely that he fell into a mistake upon some lesser matter which might be compared to the fringe of the Gospel, but he erred in some vital doctrine—he departed from the faith in its fundamentals. There are some Truths of God which *must* be believed—they are essential to salvation—and if not heartily accepted the soul will be ruined. This man had professed orthodoxy, but he turned aside from the Truth on an essential point.

Now, in those days the saints did not say, as the sham saints do now, "We must be largely charitable and leave this Brother to his own opinion. He sees the Truth of God from a different standpoint and has a rather different way of putting it—but his opinions are as good as our own—and we must not say that he is in error." That is at present the fashionable way of trifling with Divine Truth and making things pleasant all round. Thus the Gospel is debased and another gospel propagated. I should like to ask modern Broad Churchmen whether there is any doctrine of any sort for which it would be worth a man's while to burn or to lie in prison. I do not believe they could give me an answer, for if their latitudinarianism is correct, the martyrs were fools of the first magnitude!

From their writings and their teachings, it appears to me that the modern thinkers treat the whole compass of revealed Truth with entire indifference and, though perhaps they may feel sorry that wilder spirits should go too far in free thinking, and though they had rather they would be more moderate, yet, upon the whole, so large is their liberality that they are not sure enough of anything to be able to condemn the reverse of it as a deadly error. To them black and white are terms which may be applied

to the same color, as you view it from different standpoints. Yes, and so are equally true in their esteem. Their theology shifts like the Goodwin Sands and they regard all firmness as so much bigotry. Errors and truths are equally comprehensible within the circle of their charity.

It was not in this way that the Apostles regarded error. They did not prescribe large-hearted charity towards falsehood, or hold up the errorist as a man of deep thought whose views were “refreshingly original.” Far less did they utter some wicked nonsense about the probability of there living more faith in honest doubt than in half the creeds. They did not believe in justification by doubting, as our neologians do. They set about the *conversion* of the erring professor—they treated him as a person who *needed* conversion—and viewed him as a man who, if he were not converted, would suffer the death of his soul and be covered with a multitude of sins.

They were not such easy-going people as our cultured friends of the school of “modern thought,” who have learned, at last, that the Deity of Christ may be denied, the work of the Holy Spirit ignored, the Inspiration of Scripture rejected, the Atonement disbelieved and regeneration dispensed with! They say the man who does all this may be as good a Christian as the most devout Believer! O God, deliver us from this deceitful infidelity which, while it does damage to the erring man, and often prevents his being reclaimed, does yet more mischief to our own hearts by teaching us that Your Truth is unimportant, falsehood a trifle and so destroys our allegiance to the God of Truth and makes us traitors, instead of loyal subjects, to the King of kings!

It appears from our text that this man, having erred from the Truth, followed the natural logical consequence of doctrinal error and erred in his life as well, for the 20th verse, which must, of course, be read in connection with the 19th, speaks of him as a “sinner converted from the error of his way.” His way went wrong after his thought had gone wrong. You cannot deviate from Truth without being wrong, in some measure—at any rate, deviating from practical righteousness. This man had erred from right acting because he had erred from right *believing*. Suppose a man shall imbibe a doctrine which leads him to think little of Christ? He will soon have little faith in Him and become little obedient to Him and so will wander into self-righteousness or licentiousness.

Let him think lightly of the punishment of sin and it is natural that he will commit sin with less compunction and burst through all restraints. Let him deny the need of the Atonement and the same result will follow if he acts out his belief. Every error has its own outgrowth, as all decay has its appropriate fungus. It is in vain for us to imagine that holiness will be as readily produced from erroneous as from truthful doctrine! Do men gather grapes off thorns, or figs off thistles? The facts of history prove the contrary.

When the Truth of God is dominant, morality and holiness are abundant. But when error comes to the front, godly living retreats in shame. The point aimed at with regard to this sinner in thought and deed was his *conversion*—the turning of him around, the bringing him to right thinking

and to right acting. Alas, many professed Christians do not look upon backsliders in this light—neither do they regard them as hopeful subjects for conversion. I have known a person who has erred hunted down like a wolf. He was wrong to some degree, but that wrong has been aggravated and dwelt upon till the man has been worried into defiance! The fault has been exaggerated into a double wrong by ferocious attacks upon it. The manhood of the man has taken sides with his error because he has been so severely handled. The man has been compelled, sinfully, I admit, to take up an extreme position and to go further into mischief, because he could not stand to be denounced instead of being reasoned with.

And when a man has been blameworthy in his life, it will often happen that his fault will be blazed abroad, retailed from mouth to mouth, and magnified until the poor erring one has felt degraded—and having lost all self-respect—has given way to far more dreadful sins. The object of some professors seems to be to amputate the limb rather than to heal it. Justice has reigned instead of Mercy. Away with him! He is too foul to be washed, too diseased to be restored! This is not according to the mind of Christ, nor after the model of Apostolic Churches. In the days of James, if any erred from the Truth and from holiness, there were Brethren found who sought their recovery and whose joy it was, thus, to save a soul from death and to hide a multitude of sins.

There is something very significant in that expression, “Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth.” It is akin to that other word, “Considering yourself, also, lest you also be tempted,” and that other exhortation, “Let him that thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.” He who has erred was one of *yourselves*, one who sat with you at the Communion Table, one with whom you took street counsel. He has been deceived and by the subtlety of Satan he has been decoyed. But do not judge him harshly. Above all do not leave him to perish unpitied. If he never was a saved man, he is still your Brother and it should be your business to bring back the prodigal, and so to make glad your Father’s heart. “Still, for all his slips,” he is one of God’s children.

Follow him up and do not rest till you lead him home again. And if he is not a child of God. If his professed conversion was a mistake, or a pretence—if he only made a profession, but had not the possession of vital godliness—yet still follow him with sacred importunity of love—remembering how terrible will be his doom for daring to play the hypocrite and profane holy things with his unhallowed hands. Weep over him if you feel compelled to suspect that he has been a *willful* deceiver, for there is sevenfold cause for weeping. If you cannot resist the feeling that he never was sincere, but crept into the Church under cover of a false profession, I say, sorrow over him the more, for his doom must be the more terrible and, therefore, the greater should be your commiseration for him. Seek his conversion, still.

The text gives us clear indications as to the persons who are to aim at the conversion of erring Brethren. It says, “If any of you do err from the truth, and one converts him.” One what? One minister? No, *anyone* among the Brethren. If the minister shall be the means of the restoration

of a backslider, he is a happy man and a good deed has been done. But there is nothing said here concerning preachers or pastors, not even a *hint* is given—it is left open to any member of the Church. And the plain inference, I think, is this—that every Church member seeing his Brother err from the truth, or else in practice, should set himself, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to this business of converting this special sinner from the error of his way.

Look after strangers by all means, but neglect not your Brothers and Sisters. It is the business, not of certain officers appointed by the vote of the Church hereunto, but of every member of the body of Jesus Christ, to seek the good of all the other members. Still there are certain members upon whom in any one case this may be more imperative. For instance, in the case of a young Believer, his father and his mother, if they are Believers, are called upon by a sevenfold obligation to seek the conversion of their backsliding child. In the case of a husband, none should be so earnest for his restoration as his wife—and the same rule holds good with regard to the wife. So, also if the connection is that of friendship, he with whom you have had the best acquaintance should lie nearest to your heart—and when you perceive that he has gone aside, you should, above all others, act the shepherd towards him with kindly zeal.

You are bound to do this to all your fellow Christians, but doubly bound to do it to those over whom you possess an influence which has been gained by former intimacy, by relationship, or by any other means. I beseech you, therefore, watch over one another in the Lord and when you see a Brother overtaken in a fault, “you which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness.” You see your duty—do not neglect it! Brethren, it ought to cheer us to know that the attempt to convert a man who has erred from the Truth of God is a hopeful one. It is one in which success may be looked for and when the success comes it will be of the most joyful character.

Verily it is a great joy to capture the wild, wandering sinner, but the joy of joys is to find the lost sheep which was once really in the fold and has sadly gone astray. It is a great thing to transmute a piece of brass into silver, but to the poor woman it was joy enough to find the piece of silver which was silver, already, and had the king’s stamp on it, though for awhile it was lost. To bring in a stranger and an alien and to adopt him as a son suggests a festival—but the most joyous feasting and the loudest music are for the son who was always a son, but had played the prodigal—and yet after being lost was found, and after being dead was made alive again!

I say, ring the bells twice for the reclaimed backslider! Ring them till the steeple rocks and reels! Rejoice doubly over that which had gone astray and was ready to perish, but has now been restored. John was glad when he found poor backsliding, but weeping Peter, who had denied his Master. He cheered and comforted him, and consorted with him till the Lord, Himself, had said, “Simon, son of Jonas, do you love Me?” It may not appear so brilliant a thing to bring back a backslider as to reclaim a harlot or a drunk—but in the sight of God it is no small miracle of Grace—

and to the instrument who has performed it, it shall yield no small comfort.

Seek, then, my Brothers and Sisters, those who were of us but have gone from us! Seek those who still linger in the congregation but have disgraced the Church and are put away from us, and rightly so, because we cannot countenance their uncleanness. Seek them with prayers, tears and entreaties, if perhaps God may grant them repentance that they may be saved. Here I would say to any backsliders who are present, let this text cheer you if you have a desire to return to God. Return, you backsliding children, for the Lord has bid His people seek you! If He had not cared for you He would not have spoken of our search after you. But having put it so and made it the duty of all His people to seek those who err from the faith—there is an open door before you—and there are hundreds who sit waiting like porters at the gate to welcome you!

Come back to the God whom you have forsaken, or if you never did know Him, O that this day His Spirit may break your hearts and lead you to *true* repentance, that you may in *real* truth be saved! God bless you, poor Backsliders! If He does not save you, a multitude of sins will be upon you and you must eternally die. God have mercy upon you, for Christ's sake.

II. We have opened up the special case and we have now to dwell upon a GENERAL FACT. This general fact is important and we are bound to give it special attention, since it is prefaced with the words, "Let him know." If any one of you has been the means of bringing back a backslider, it is said, "Let him know." That is, let him think of it, be sure of it, be comforted by it, be inspirited by it. "Let him know" it, and never doubt it. Do not merely hear it this morning, beloved fellow Laborer, but let it sink deep into your heart.

When an Apostle Inspired of the Holy Spirit, says, "Let him know," I evoke you, do not let any indolence of spirit forbid your ascertaining the full weight of the Truth. What is it that you are to know? To know that he who converts a sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death! This is something worth knowing, is it not? To save a soul from death is no small matter. Why, we have men among us whom we honor every time we cast our eyes upon them, for they have saved many precious lives! They have manned the lifeboat or they have plunged into the river to rescue the drowning. They have been ready to risk their own lives amid burning timbers that they might snatch the perishing from the devouring flames. True heroes, these, far worthier of renown than your bloodstained men of war. God bless the brave hearts! May England never lack a body of worthy men to make her shores illustrious for humanity.

When we see a fellow creature exposed to danger our pulse beats quickly and we are agitated with desire to save him. Is it not so? But the saving of a *soul* from death is a far greater matter! Let us think what that death is! It is not non-existence. I do not know that I would lift a finger to save my fellow creature from mere non-existence! I see no great hurt in annihilation—certainly nothing that would alarm me as a punishment for sin. Just as I see no great joy in mere eternal existence if that is all that is

meant by eternal life, so I discern no terror in ceasing to be. I would as soon not be as be, so far as mere colorless being or not being is concerned.

But eternal life in Scripture means a very different thing to eternal existence. It means existing with all the faculties developed in fullness of joy—existing not as the dried herb in the hay, but as the flower in all its beauty. To die, in Scripture, and, indeed, in common language, is not to cease to exist! Very wide is the difference between the two words to die and to be annihilated. To die as to the first death is the separation of the body from the soul—it is the resolution of our nature into its component elements. To die the second death is to separate the man, soul and body, from his God, who is the life and joy of our manhood. This is eternal *destruction* from the Presence of the Lord and from the Glory of His power. This is to have the palace of manhood destroyed and turned into a desolate ruin for the howling dragon of remorse and the hooting owl of despair—forever.

The descriptions which Holy Scripture gives of the second death are terrible to the last degree. It speaks of a “worm that never dies.” A “fire that never can be quenched.” Of “the terror of the Lord” and “tearing in pieces.” Of the “smoke of their torment which goes up forever and ever.” And of “the pit which has no bottom.” I am not about to bring all these terrible things together, but there are words in Scripture which, if pondered, might make the flesh creep and the hair stand on end at the very thought of the Judgment to come. Our joy is that if any of us are made, in God’s hands, the *means* of converting a man from the error of his ways, we shall have saved a soul from this eternal death! That dreadful Hell the saved one will not know. That wrath he will not feel. That being banished from the Presence of God will never happen to him! Is there not a joy worth worlds in all this?

Remember the addition to the picture. If you have saved a soul from death you have introduced it into eternal life. By God’s good Grace there will be another chorister among the white-robed host to sing Jehovah’s praise! Another hand to smite eternally the harp strings of adoring gratitude. Another sinner saved to reward the Redeemer for His passion. Oh, the happiness of having saved a soul from death! And it is added, that in such case you will have “covered a multitude of sins.” We understand this to mean that the result of the conversion of any sinner will be the covering up of all his sins by the atoning blood of Jesus. How many those sins are, in any case, none of us can tell, but if any man is converted from the error of his ways, the whole mass of his sins will be drowned in the red sea of Jesus’ blood and washed away forever.

Now remember, your Savior came to this world with two objects—He came to destroy death and to put away sin. If you convert a sinner from the error of his ways you are made like He in both these works. After your manner, in the power of the Spirit of God, you overcome death by snatching a soul from the second death, and you also put away sin from the sight of God by hiding a multitude of sins beneath the Propitiation of the Lord Jesus. Observe here that the Apostle offers no other inducement for

soul-winners. He does not say if you convert a sinner from the error of his ways you will have honor. True philanthropy scorns such a motive!

He does not say if you convert a sinner from the error of his ways you will have the respect of the Church and the love of the individual. Such will be the case, but we are moved by far nobler motives! The joy of doing good is found in the good itself—the reward of a deed of love is found in its own result. If we have saved a soul from death and hidden a multitude of sins, that is payment enough, though no ear should ever hear of the deed and no pen should ever record it. Let it be forgotten that we were the instrument, if good is but effected. It shall give us joy even if we are not appreciated and are left in the cold shade of forgetfulness. Yes, if others wear the honors of the good deed which the Lord has worked by *us*, we will not murmur—it shall be joy, enough, to know that a soul has been saved from death—and a multitude of sins have been covered.

And, dear Brothers and Sisters, let us remember that the saving of souls from death honors Jesus, for there is no saving souls except through His blood. As for you and for me, what can we do in saving a soul from death? Of ourselves nothing, any more than that pen which lies upon the table could write “Pilgrim’s Progress!” Yet let a Bunyan grasp the pen and the matchless work is written. So you and I can do nothing to convert souls till God’s eternal Spirit takes us in hand—but then He can do wonders *by* us and get Himself glory *by* us—and it shall be joy enough *for* us to know that Jesus is honored and the Spirit magnified! Nobody talks of Homer’s pen. No one has encased it in gold, or published its illustrious achievements. Nor do we wish for honor among men—it will be enough for us to have been the pen in the Savior’s hand with which He has written the Covenant of His Grace upon the fleshy tablets of human hearts. These are golden wages for a man who really loves his Master—Jesus is glorified—sinners are saved.

Now I want you to notice, particularly, that all that is said by the Apostle, here, is about the conversion of *one* person. “If any of you do err from the truth, and one converts him, let him know that he who converts the sinner from the error of his ways shall save a soul from death.” Have you ever wished you were a Whitfield? Have you ever felt, young man, in your inmost soul, great aspirations to be another McCheyne, or Brainerd, or Moffat? Cultivate the aspiration, but at the same time be happy to bring *one* sinner to Jesus Christ, for he who converts *one* is bid to know that no mean thing is done! He has saved a soul from death and covered a multitude of sins. And it does not say anything about the person who is the means of this work. It is not said, “If a minister shall convert a man, or if some noted eloquent Divine shall have worked it.”

If this deed shall be performed by the least babe in our Israel. If a little child shall tell the tale of Jesus to its father. If a servant girl shall drop a tract where some one poor soul shall find it and receive salvation. If the most humble preacher at the street corner shall have spoken to the thief or to the harlot, and such shall be saved, let him know that he that turns any sinner from the error of his ways, whoever he may be, has saved a soul from death and covered a multitude of sins! Now, Beloved, what

comes out of this but these suggestions? Let us long to be used in the conversion of sinners! James does not speak concerning the Holy Spirit in this passage, nor of Jesus Christ, for he was writing to those who would not fail to remember the important Truths of God which concern both the Spirit and the Son of God. But yet it may be right, here, to remind you that we cannot do spiritual good to our fellow creatures apart from the Spirit of God. Neither can we be blessed to them if we do not preach to them “Jesus Christ and Him crucified.” God must use us, but oh, let us long to be used! Pray to be used and cry to be used!

Dear Brothers and Sisters, let us purge ourselves of everything that would prevent our being employed by the Lord! If there is anything we are doing, or undoing, any evil we are harboring, or any Grace we are neglecting which may make us unfit to be used of God, let us pray the Lord to cleanse, mend and scour us till we are vessels fit for the Master’s use. Then let us be on the watch for opportunities of usefulness. Let us go about the world with our ears and our eyes open, ready to take advantage of every occasion for doing good. Let us not be content till we are useful and make this the main design and ambition of our lives. Somehow or other we must, and will, bring souls to Jesus Christ!

As Rachel cried, “Give me children, or I die,” so may none of you be content to be barren in the household of God! Cry and sigh until you have snatched some brand from the burning and have brought at least one to Jesus Christ, that so you, also, may have saved a soul from death and covered a multitude of sins.

III. And, now, a few minutes, only, to the point which is not in the text. I want to make A PARTICULAR APPLICATION of this whole subject to the conversion of children. Beloved Friends, I hope you do not altogether forget the Sunday school. And yet I am afraid a great many Christians are scarcely aware that there are such things as Sunday schools at all. They know it by hearsay but not by observation. Probably in the course of 20 years they have never visited the school, or concerned themselves about it. They would be gratified to hear of any success accomplished, but though they may not have heard anything about the matter, one way or the other, they are well content.

In most Churches you will find a band of young and ardent spirits giving themselves to Sunday school work. But there are numbers of others who might greatly strengthen the school who never attempt anything of the sort. In this they might be excused if they had other work to do. But, unfortunately, they have no godly occupation but are mere killers of time—while this work which lies ready to hand, and is accessible and demands their assistance—is entirely neglected. I will not say there are any such sluggards here, but I am not able to believe that we are quite free from them, and therefore I will ask Conscience to do its work with the guilty parties.

Children need to be saved! Children may be saved! Children are to be saved by instrumentality! Children may be saved while they are children. He who said, “Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of Heaven,” never intended that His

Church should say, "We will look after the children by-and-by when they have grown up to be young men and women." He intended that it should be a subject of prayer and earnest endeavor that children, as children, should be converted to God! The conversion of a child involves the same work of Divine Grace and results in the same blessed consequences as the conversion of an adult.

There is the saving of the soul from death, in the child's case, and the hiding of a multitude of sins. But there is this additional matter for joy—that a great *preventive* work is done when the young are converted. Conversion saves a child from a multitude of sins. If God's eternal mercy shall bless your teaching to a little prattler, how happy that boy's life will be compared with what it might have been if it had grown up in folly, sin, shame and had only been converted after many years! It is the highest wisdom and the truest prudence to pray for our children that while they are yet young their hearts may be given to the Savior—

***"It will save them from a thousand snares,
To mind religion young.
Grace will preserve their following years,
And make their virtues strong."***

To reclaim the prodigal is well, but to save him from ever *being* a prodigal is better! To bring back the thief and the drunk is a praiseworthy action, but so to act that the boy or girl shall never become a thief or a drunk is far better!

Therefore Sunday school instruction stands very high in the list of philanthropic enterprises and Christians ought to be most earnest in it. He who converts a child from the error of his way prevents, as well as covers, a multitude of sins. And, moreover, it gives the Church the hope of being furnished with the best of men and women. The Church's Samuels and Solomons are made wise in their youth. Davids and Josiahs were tender of heart when they were tender in years. Read the lives of the most eminent ministers and you shall usually find that their Christian history began early. Though it is not absolutely necessary, yet it is highly propitious to the growth of a well-developed Christian character, that its foundation should be laid on the bottom of youthful piety.

I do not expect to see the churches of Jesus Christ ordinarily built up by those who have, through life, lived in sin, but by the bringing up in their midst, in the fear and admonition of the Lord, young men and women who become pillars in the House of our God. If we want strong Christians we must look to those who were Christians in their youth. Trees must be planted in the courts of the Lord while yet young if they are to flourish well and long. And, Brothers and Sisters, I feel that the work of teaching the young has, at this time, an importance superior to any which it ever had before, for at this time there are abroad those who are creeping into our houses and deluding men and women with their false doctrine. Let the Sunday schools of England teach the children well!

Let them not merely occupy their time with pious phrases, but let them teach them the whole Gospel and the Doctrines of Grace intelligently. And let them pray over the children and never be satisfied unless the children are turned to the Lord Jesus Christ and added to the Church—and then I

shall not be afraid of Popery. Popish priests said of old that they could have won England back, again, to Rome, if it had not been for the catechizing of the children. We have laid aside catechisms, I think with too little reason, but at any rate, if we do not use godly catechisms we must bring back decided, plain, simple *teaching*—and there must be pleading and praying for the conversion of the children—the *immediate* conversion of children unto the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Spirit of God waits to help us in this effort. He is with us if we are with Him. He is ready to bless the most humble teacher and even the infant classes shall not be without a benediction. He can give us words and thoughts suitable to our little auditory. He can so bless us that we shall know how to speak a word in season to the youthful ear. And oh, if it is not so, if teachers are not found, or, being found, are unfaithful, we shall see the children that have been in our schools go back into the world like their parents—hating religion because of the tedium of the hours spent in Sunday school—and we shall produce a race of infidels, or a generation of superstitious persons! The golden opportunity will be lost and most solemn responsibility will rest upon us. I pray the Church of God to think much of the Sunday school. I beseech all lovers of the nation to pray for Sunday schools. I entreat all who love Jesus Christ and would see His kingdom come, to be very tender towards all youthful people and to pray that their hearts may be won to Jesus.

I have not spoken, this morning, as I should like to speak, but the theme lies very near my heart. It is one which ought to press heavily upon all our consciences, but I must leave it. God must lead your thoughts into it. I leave it, but not till I have asked these questions—What have you been doing for the conversion of children, each one of you? What have you done for the conversion of your own children? Are you quite clear upon that matter? Do you ever put your arms around your boy's neck and pray for him and with him? Father, you will find that such an act will exercise great influence over your lad. Mother, do you ever talk to your little daughter about Christ and Him Crucified? Under God's hands you may be a spiritual as well as a natural mother to that well-beloved child of yours.

What are you doing, you who are guardians and teachers of youth? Are you clear about their souls? You weekday schoolmasters, as well as you who labor on Sunday—are you doing all you should that your boys and girls may be brought, early, to confess the Lord? I leave it with yourselves. You shall receive a great reward if, when you enter Heaven, as I trust you will, you shall find many dear children there to welcome you into eternal happiness! It will add another Heaven to your own Heaven, to meet with heavenly beings who shall salute you as their teacher who brought them to Jesus. I would not wish to go to Heaven alone—would you?

I would not wish to have a crown in Heaven without a star in it because no soul was ever saved by my means—would you? There they go, the sacred flock of blood-bought sheep! The great Shepherd leads them. Many of them are followed by twins, and others have, each one, their lamb. Would you like to be a barren sheep of the great Shepherd's flock? The scene changes. Harken to the tramping of a great host! I hear their war music.

My ears are filled with their songs of victory! The warriors are coming home and each one is bringing his trophy on his shoulder, to the honor of the great Captain. They stream through the gate of pearl! They march in triumph to the celestial Capitol, along the golden streets, and each soldier bears with him his own portion of the spoil. Will you be there? And being there will you march without a trophy and add nothing to the pomp of the triumph? Will you bear nothing that you have won in battle, nothing which you have ever taken for Jesus with your sword and with your bow?

Again, another scene is before me: I hear them shout the “harvest home” and see the reapers bearing, everyone, his sheaf. Some of them are bowed down with the heaps of sheaves which load the happy shoulders—these went forth weeping, but they have come again rejoicing—bringing the sheaves with them. Yonder comes one who bears but a little handful, but it is rich grain—he had but a tiny plot and a little seed corn entrusted to him—and it has multiplied well according to the rule of proportion. Will you be there without so much as a solitary ear? Never having plowed nor sown, and therefore never having reaped? If so, every shout of every reaper might well strike a fresh pang into your heart as you remember that you did not sow—and therefore could not reap.

If you do not love my Master, do not profess to do so! If He never bought you with His blood, do not lie to Him and come to His Table and say that you are His servant! But if His dear wounds bought you, give yourself to Him and if you love Him feed His sheep and feed His lambs! He stands here unseen by my sight, but recognized by my faith! He exhibits to you the marks of the wounds upon His hands and His feet, and He says to you, “Peace be unto you! As My Father has sent Me, even so I send you. Go you into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature, and know this, that he that converts a sinner from the error of his ways shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.”

Good Master, help us to serve you! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—James 5.

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CONVERSION

NO. 45

**A SERMON DELIVERED ON SABBATH MORNING, OCTOBER 7, 1855,
BY THE REV. C. H. SPURGEON,
AT NEW PARK STREET CHAPEL, SOUTHWARK.**

***“Brethren, if any of you do err from the Truth and one converts him,
let him know that he who converts the sinner from the error
of his way shall save a soul from death,
and shall hide a multitude of sins.”
James 5:19, 20.***

THE true Believer is always pleased to hear of anything which concerns the salvation of his own soul. He rejoices to hear of the Covenant plan drawn up for him from all eternity, of the great fulfillment on the Cross at Calvary, of all the stipulations of the Savior, of the application of them by the Holy Spirit, of the security which the Believer has in the Person of Christ and of those gifts and Graces which accompany salvation to all those who are heirs thereof. But I feel certain that deeply pleased as we are when we hear of things touching our own salvation and deliverance from Hell, we, as preachers of God and as new creatures in Christ, being made like unto Him, have true benevolence of spirit and, therefore, are always delighted when we hear, speak, or think concerning the salvation of others! Next to our own salvation, I am sure as Christians we shall always prize the salvation of other people. We shall always desire that what has been so sweet to our own taste may also be tasted by others. And what has been of so inestimably precious a value to our own souls may also become the property of all those whom God may please to call unto everlasting life. I am sure, Beloved, now that I am about to preach concerning the conversion of the ungodly, you will take as deep an interest in it as if it were something that immediately concerned your own souls! After all, such were some of you once! You were unconverted and ungodly! And had not God taken thought for you and set His people to strive for your souls, where had you been? Seek then, to exercise that charity and benevolence towards others which God and God's people first exercised towards you.

Our text has in it, first of all, *a principle involved*—that of *instrumentality*. “Brethren, if any of you do err from the Truth and one converts him, let him know that he who converts the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death.” Secondly, here is *a general fact stated*—“He who converts the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.” And thirdly, there is *a particular application of this fact made*. “Brethren, if any of you do err from the Truth and one converts him”—that is the same principle as when a sinner is converted—“from the error of his way.”

I. First then, here is *a great principle involved*—a very important one—that of INSTRUMENTALITY. God has been pleased in His inscrutable wisdom and intelligence to work the conversion of others by instrumentality. True, He does not in all cases do so, but it is His general way. Instrumentality is the plan of the universe. In the new creation it is almost always God's invariable rule to convert by means of instruments. Now we will make one or two brief remarks upon this first principle.

First then, we say that *instrumentality is not necessary with God*. God can, if He pleases, convert souls without any instruments whatever. The mighty Maker who chooses to use the sword sometimes can, if He pleases, slay without it. He who uses the workman, the trowel, and the hammer can, if He so sees fit, build the house in a moment! And from the foundation-stone even to the topstone thereof can complete it by the Words of His own mouth. We never hear of any instrumentality used in the conversion of Abraham. He lived in a land in the midst of idolaters. He was called from Ur of the Chaldees and from there God called him and brought him to Canaan by an immediate voice—doubtless from above—by God's own agency without the employment of any Prophet. For we read of none who could, as far as we can see, have preached to Abraham and taught him the Truths of God. Then in modern times we have a mighty instance of the power of God in converting without human might. Saul, on his journey towards Damascus—upon his horse, fiery and full of fury against the children of God—is hastening to hail men and women and cast them into prison. To bring them bound unto Jerusalem. But suddenly a voice is heard from Heaven, "Saul! Saul! Why do you persecute Me?" And Saul was a new man! No minister was his spiritual parent, no book could claim him as its convert. No human voice, but the immediate utterance of Jesus Christ, Himself—at once, then and there, and upon the spot—brought Saul to know the Truth!

Moreover there are some men who never seem to need conversion at all. For we have one instance in Scripture of John the Baptist, of whom it is said, "he was filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb." And I do not know but what there are some who very early in life have a change of heart. It is quite certain that all *infants*, (who doubtless being, each of them, elect, do ascend to Heaven), undergo a change of heart without instrumentality. And so there may be some concerning whom it may be written that though they were born in sin and shaped in iniquity, yet they were so early taught to know the Lord, so soon brought to His name, that it must have been almost without instrumentality at all! God can, if He pleases, cast the instrument aside! The mighty Maker of the world who used no angels to beat out the great mass of Nature and fashion it into a round globe. He who without hammer or anvil fashioned this glorious world can, if He pleases, speak, and it is done! He can command, and it shall stand fast! He needs not instruments, though he uses them.

Secondly, we make another remark, which is that *instrumentality is very honorable to God, and not dishonorable*. One would think, perhaps,

at first sight that it would reflect more glory to God if He effected all conversions, Himself, without the use of men. But that is a great mistake. It is as honorable to God to convert by means of Christians and others, as it would be if He should effect it alone. Suppose a workman has power and skill with his hands, alone, to fashion a certain article? But you put into his hands the worst tools you can find! You know he can do it well with his hands but these tools are so badly made that they will be the greatest impediment you could lay in his way. Well now, I say if a man with these bad instruments, or these poor tools—things without edges, that are broken, that are weak and frail—is able to make some beautiful fabric, he has more credit from the use of those tools than he would have had if he had done it simply with his hands! The tools, so far from being an advantage, were a disadvantage to him. So far from being a help, are, of my supposition, even a detriment to him in his work! So with regard to human instrumentality. So far from being any assistance to God, we are all hindrances to Him. What is a minister? He is made by God a means of salvation, but it is an amazing thing that anyone so faulty, so imperfect, so little skilled, should yet be blessed of God to bring forth children for the Lord Jesus! It seems as amazing as if a man could fashion rain from fire, or if he could fabricate some precious alabaster vase out of the refuse of the dunghill! God in His mercy does more than make Christians without means—He takes bad means to make good men and so He even reflects credit on Himself because His instruments are, all of them, such poor things! They are all such earthen vessels that they do not even set out the glory of the gold which they hold—like the foil that sets forth the jewel, or like the dark spot in the painting that makes the light more brilliant! And yet the dark spot and the foil are not, in themselves, costly or valuable. So God uses instruments to set forth His own Glory and to exalt Himself.

This brings us to the other remark, that *usually God does employ instruments*. Perhaps in one case out of a thousand men are converted by the immediate agency of God—so indeed are all, in one sense. But usually, in 99 cases out of a hundred, God is pleased to use the instrumentality of His ministering servants of His Word—of Christian men or some other means to bring us to the Savior. I have heard of some—I remember them, now—who were called like Saul, at once from Heaven. We can remember the history of the Brother who, in the darkness of the night, was called to know the Savior by what he believed to be a vision from Heaven or some effect on his imagination. On one side he saw a black tablet of his guilt and his soul was delighted to see Christ cast a white tablet over it. And he thought he heard a voice that said, “I am He that blots out your transgressions for My own sake and will not remember your sins.” He was a man converted almost without any instrumentality. But you do not meet with such a case often. Most persons have been convinced by the pious conversation of sisters, by the holy example of mothers, by the minister, by the Sunday school teacher, or by the reading of tracts or Scripture. Let us not, therefore, believe that God will often work without

instruments! Let us not sit down silently and say, "God will do His own work." It is quite true He will. But then He does His work by using His children as instruments. He does not say to the Christian when he is converted, "Sit down. I have nothing for you to do but I will do all Myself and have all the Glory." No. He says, "You are a poor weak instrument. You can do nothing. But lo, I will strengthen you and I will make you thrash the mountains and beat them small, and make the hills as chaff—and so shall I get more honor through your having done it than if I would, had My own strong arm flattened the mountains and broken them in pieces!"

Now another thought, and that is—*If God sees fit to make use of any of us for the conversion of others, we must not, therefore, be too sure that we are, ourselves, converted.* It is a most solemn thought that God makes use of ungodly men as instruments for the conversion of sinners! And it is strange that some most terrible acts of wickedness have been the means of the conversion of men. When Charles II ordered the Book of Sports to be read in churches, and after the service, the clergyman was required to read to all the people to spend the afternoon in what are called harmless diversions and games that I will not mention here—even that was made the means of conversion! For one man said within himself, "I have always disported myself thus on the Sabbath. But now to hear this read in church! How wicked we must have become! How the whole land must be corrupt." It led him to think of his own corruption and brought him to the Savior! There have been words proceeding, I had almost said from devils, which have been the means of conversion. Grace is not spoiled by the rotten wooden spout it runs through. God did once speak by an *ass* to Balaam but that did not spoil His Words. So He speaks, not simply by an *ass*, which He often does, but by something worse than that! He can fill the mouths of ravens with food for an Elijah, and yet the raven is still a raven. We must not suppose because God has made us useful, that we are, therefore, converted!

But then another thing. *If God in His mercy does not make us useful to the conversion of sinners, we are not, therefore, to say we are sure we are not the children of God.* I believe there are some ministers who have had the painful labor of toiling from year to year without seeing a single soul regenerated. Yet those men have been faithful to their charge and have well discharged their ministry. I do not say that such cases often occur, but I believe they have occurred sometimes. Yet, mark you, the end of their ministry has been answered, after all—for what is the end of the Gospel ministry? Some will say it is to convert sinners. That is a collateral end. Others will say it is to convert the saints. That is true. But the proper answer to give is—it is to glorify God! And God is glorified even in the *damnation* of sinners! If I testify to them the Truth of God and they reject His Gospel—if I faithfully preach His Truth and they scorn it—my ministry is not therefore void. It has not returned to God void, for even in the punishment of those rebels, He will be glorified! Even in their destruction, He will get Himself honor. And if He cannot get praise from

their songs, He will at last get honor from their condemnation and overthrow when He shall cast them into the fire forever! The true motive for which we should always labor is the Glory of God in the conversion of souls, and the building up of God's people. But let us never lose sight of the great end. Let God be glorified! And He will be, if we preach His Truth faithfully and honestly. Therefore, while we should seek for souls, if God denies them unto us, let us not say, "I will not have other mercies that He has given." Rather let us comfort ourselves with the thought that though they are not saved, though Israel is not gathered in, God will glorify and honor us at last!

One thought more upon this subject—*God, by using us as instruments, confers upon us the highest honor which men can receive.* O Beloved, I dare not dilate upon this! It should make our hearts burn at the thought of it. It makes us feel thrice honored that God should use us to convert souls—and it is only the Grace of God which teaches us, on the other hand, that it is Grace, and Grace, alone, which makes us useful—which can keep us humble under the thought that we are bringing souls to the Savior! It is a work which he who has once entered, if God has blessed him, cannot renounce! He will be impatient. He will long to win more souls to Jesus. He will think that labor is but ease, so that by any means he may save some and bring men to Jesus. Glory and honor, praise and power be unto God that He thus honors His people! But when He exalts us most, we will still conclude with, "Not unto us, not unto us, but unto Your name be all the Glory forever and ever!"

II. Secondly, we come to the GENERAL FACT. "He who converts the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins." The choicest happiness which mortal breast can know is the happiness of benevolence—of doing good to our fellow creatures. To save a body from death is that which gives us almost Heaven on earth! Some men can boast that they have sent so many souls to Hell—that they have hurled many of their fellows out of the world. We meet, now and then, a soldier who can glory that in battle he struck down so many enemy—that his swift and cruel sword reached the heart of so many of his enemies. But I don't count that glory! If I thought I had been the means of the death of a single individual, I think I would scarcely rest at night, for the uneasy ghost of that murdered wretch would stare me in my eyes! I would remember I had slain him and, perhaps, sent his soul, unshaven and unwashed, into the Presence of his Maker. It seems amazing to me that men can be found to be soldiers—I say not if it is right or wrong—still, I wonder where they can find the men. I know not how, after a battle, they can wash their hands of blood, wipe their swords and put them by—and then lie down to slumber and their dreams be undisturbed! I think the tears would fall hot and scalding on my cheeks at night and the shrieks of the dying, and the groans of those approaching eternity would torture my ears! I know not how others can endure it! To me it would be the very portal of Hell, if I could think I had been a destroyer of my fellow creatures.

But what bliss it is to be the instrument of saving bodies from death! Those monks on Mount St. Bernard, surely must feel happiness when they rescue men from death. The dog comes to the door and they know what it means. He has discovered some poor weary traveler who has lain him down to sleep in the snow and is dying from cold and exhaustion. Up rise the monks from their cheerful fire, intent to act the good Samaritan to the lost one! At last they see him! They speak to him but he answers not. They try to discover if there is breath in his body and they think he is dead. They take him up, give him remedies. And hastening to their hostel they lay him by the fire and warm and chafe him, looking into his face with kindly anxiety, as much as to say, "Poor creature! Are you dead?" When, at last, they perceive some heaving of the lungs, what joy is in the breast of those brethren, as they say, "his life is not extinct." I think if there could be happiness on earth, it would be the privilege to help to chafe one hand of that poor, almost dying man and be the means of bringing him to life again! Or suppose another case. A house is in flames and in it is a woman with her child who cannot, by any means, escape. In vain she attempts to come down stairs. The flames prevent her. She has lost all presence of mind and knows not how to act. The strong man comes and says, "Make way! Make way! I must save that woman!" And cooled by the genial streams of benevolence, he marches through the fire! Though scorched and almost stifled, he gropes his way. He ascends one staircase, then another. And though the stairs totter, he places the woman beneath his arm, takes the child on his shoulder and down he comes! Twice a giant, having more might than he ever possessed before, he has jeopardized his life and, perhaps, an arm may be disabled, or a limb taken away, or a sense lost, or an irretrievable injury done to his body—yet he claps his hands, and says—"I have saved lives from death!" The crowd in the street hail him as a man who has been the deliverer of his fellow creatures, honoring him more than the monarch who had stormed a city, sacked a town, and murdered myriads!

But ah, Brothers and Sisters, the body which was saved from death today, may die tomorrow! Not so the soul that is saved from death—it is saved FOREVER! It is saved beyond the fear of destruction! And if there is joy in the breast of a benevolent man when he saves a body from death, how much more blessed must he be when he is made the means in the hands of God of saving "a soul from death, and hiding a multitude of sins." Suppose that by some *conversation* of yours, you are made the means of delivering a soul from death! My Friends, you are apt to imagine that all conversions, under God, are done by the minister. You make a great mistake! There are many conversions effected by a very simple observation from the most humble individual. A single spoken word may be more the means of conversion than a whole sermon! There you sit before me. I thrust at you, but you are too far off. Some Brother, however, addresses an observation to you—it is a very stab with a short poignard in your heart. God often blesses a short pithy expression from a friend, more than a long discourse from a minister! There was once, in a

village where there had been a revival in religion, a man who was a confirmed infidel. Notwithstanding all the efforts of the minister and many Christian people, he had resisted all attempts and appeared to be more and more confirmed in his sin. At length the people held a Prayer Meeting especially to intercede for his soul. Afterwards God put it into the heart of one of the Elders of the Church to spend a night in prayer on behalf of the poor infidel.

In the morning the Elder rose from his knees, saddled his horse and rode down to the man's smithy. He meant to say a great deal to him, but he simply went up to him, took him by the hand and all he could say was, "O Sir! I am deeply concerned for your salvation! I am deeply concerned for your salvation! I have been wrestling with God all this night for your salvation!" He could say no more, his heart was too full. He then mounted on his horse and rode away. Down went the blacksmith's hammer and he immediately went to see his wife. She said, "What is the matter with you?" "Matter enough," said the man, "I have been attacked with a new argument this time. There is elder B___. He has been here this morning. And he said, 'I am concerned about your salvation.' Why now, if he is concerned about my salvation, it is a strange thing that I am not concerned about it." The man's heart was clean captured by that kind word from the Elder. He took his own horse and rode to the Elder's house. When he arrived there, the Elder was in his parlor, still in prayer. And they knelt down together. God gave him a contrite spirit and a broken heart and brought that poor sinner to the feet of the Savior! There was "a soul saved from death, and a multitude of sins covered."

Again, you may be the means of conversion by a letter you may write. Many of you have not the power to speak or say much. But when you sit down alone in your chamber, you are able, with God's help, to write a letter to a dear friend of yours. Oh, I think that is a very sweet way to endeavor to be useful! I think I never felt so much earnestness after the souls of my fellow creatures as when I first loved the Savior's name. And though I could not preach and never thought I would be able to testify to the multitude, I used to write texts on little scraps of paper and drop them anywhere, that some poor creatures might pick them up and receive them as messages of mercy to their souls. There is your brother. He is careless and hardened. Sister, sit down and write a letter to him! When he receives it, he will perhaps smile, but he will say, "Ah, well! It is Betty's letter, after all!" And that will have some power. I knew a gentleman whose dear sister used to write to him often concerning his soul. "I used," said he, "to stand with my back up against a lamppost, with a cigar in my mouth, perhaps at two o'clock in the morning to read her letter. I always read them. And I have," he said, "wept floods of tears after reading my sister's letters. Though I still kept on the error of my ways, they always checked me—they always seemed like a hand pulling me away from sin. A voice crying out, 'Come back! Come back!'" And at last a letter from her, in conjunction with a solemn Providence, was the means of breaking his heart and he sought salvation through his Savior!

Again—many have been converted by *the example of true Christians*. Many of you feel that you cannot write or preach—you think you can do nothing! Well, there is one thing you can do for your Master—you can *live* Christianity. I think there are more people who look at the new life in Christ written out in you than they will in the old life that is written in the Scriptures. An infidel will use arguments to disprove the Bible, if you set it before him—but, if you do to others as you would they should do to you. If you give of your bread to the poor and dispense to the needy, living like Jesus, speaking words of kindness and love. If you live honestly and uprightly in the world—he will say, “Well, I thought the Bible was all hypocrisy. But I cannot think so now, because there is Mr. So-and-So—look how he lives! I could believe my infidelity if it were not for him. The Bible certainly has an effect upon his life and, therefore, I must believe it.”

And then how many souls may be converted by what some men are privileged to *write and print*! There is “*Dr. Doddridge’s Rise and Progress of Religion*.” Though I decidedly object to some things in it, I wish that everybody had read that book, so many have been the conversions it has produced! I think it more honor to have written “*Watt’s Psalms and Hymns*,” than “*Milton’s Paradise Lost*,” and more glory to have written that book of old Wilcocks, “*A Drop of Honey*.” Or the tract that God has used so much—“*The Sinner’s Friend*”—than all the books of Homer! I value books for the good they may do to men’s souls. Much as I respect the genius of Pope, or Dryden, or Burns, give me the simple lines of Cowper that God has used in bringing souls to Him. Oh, to think that we may write and print books which shall reach poor sinners’ hearts! The other day my soul was exceedingly gladdened by an invitation from a pious woman to go and see her. She told me she had been ten years on her bed and had not been able to stir from it. “Nine years,” she said, “I was dark, blind, and unthinking. But my husband brought me one of your sermons. I read it and God blessed it to the opening of my eyes. He converted my soul with it. And now, all glory to Him! I love His name! “Each Sabbath morning,” she said, “I wait for your sermon. I live on it all the week as marrow and fatness to my spirit.” “Ah,” I thought, “here is something to cheer the printers and all of us who labor in that good work!” One good brother wrote to me this week, “Brother Spurgeon, keep your courage up. You are known in multitudes of households of England and you are loved, too. Though we cannot hear you, or see your living form, yet throughout our villages your sermons are scattered. And I know of cases of conversion from them, more than I can tell you.” Another friend mentioned to me an instance of a clergyman of the Church of England, a canon of a cathedral who frequently preaches my sermons on the Sabbath—whether in the cathedral or not, I cannot say, but I hope he does. Oh, who can tell, when these things are printed, what hearts they may reach, what good they may effect? Words that I spoke three weeks ago, eyes are now reading—while tears are gushing from them as they read! “Glory be to God most high!”

But, after all, *preaching is the ordained means for the salvation of sinners*, and by this, ten times as many are brought to the Savior as by any other. Ah, my Friends, to have been the means of saving souls from death by preaching—what an honor! There is a young man who has not long commenced his ministerial career. When he enters the pulpit, everybody notices what a deep solemnity there is upon him, beyond his years. His face is white and blanched by an unearthly solemnity. His body is shriveled up by his labor. Constant study and midnight lamps have worn him away—but when he speaks he utters wondrous words that lift the soul up to Heaven! And the aged saint says, “Well! Never did I go so near to Heaven as when I listened to his voice!” There comes in some young man who listens and criticizes his aspect. He thinks it is by no means such as to be desired—but he listens. One thought strikes him, then another. See that man—he has been moral all his life—but he has never been renewed. Now tears begin to flow down his cheeks. Just put your ear against his breast and you will hear him groan out, “God be merciful to me a sinner.” Ah, good reward for a withered frame or a ruined constitution! Or, take another case. A man is preaching the Word of God. He is standing up to deliver his Master’s message and in steals some poor harlot. Such a case I knew not long ago. A poor harlot determined she would go and take her life on Blackfriars Bridge. Passing by these doors one Sunday night, she thought she would step in and, for the last time, hear something that might prepare her to stand before her Maker. She forced herself into the aisle and she could not escape until I rose from the pulpit. The text was, “See you this woman?” I dwelt upon Mary Magdalene and her sins—her washing the Savior’s feet with her tears and wiping them with the hair of her head. There stood the woman—melted away with the thought that she should thus hear herself described and her own life painted. Oh, to think of saving a poor harlot from death, to deliver such an one from going down to the grave and then, as God pleased, to save her soul from going down to Hell! Is it not worth ten thousand lives if we could sacrifice them all on the altar of God? When I thought of this text, yesterday, I could only weep to think that God should have so favored me! Oh, Men and Women, how can you better spend your time and wealth than in the cause of the Redeemer? What holier enterprise can you engage in than this sacred one of saving souls from death and hiding a multitude of sins? This is a wealth that you can take with you—the wealth that has been acquired under God by having saved souls from death and covered a multitude of sins!

I know there are some now before the Throne who first wept the penitential tear in this House of Prayer and who thanked God that they had listened to this voice. And I think they still have a tender and affectionate love for him whom God honored thus. Minister of the Gospel, if you on earth are privileged to win souls, I think when you die, those spirits will rejoice to be your guardian angels! They will say, “Father, that man is dying whom we love, may we go and watch him?” “Yes,” says God, “you may go, and carry Heaven with you.” Down come the spirits, ministering

angels and oh, how lovingly they look on us! They would, if they could, strike out the furrow from the forehead and take away the cold clammy sweat with their own blessed hands! They must not do it. But oh, how tenderly they watch that suffering man who was made the means of doing good to their souls! And when he opens his eyes to immortality, he shall see them like guards around his bed and hear them say, "Come with us, thrice welcome, honored servant of God. Come with us!" And when he speeds his way upwards towards Heaven on strong wings of faith, these spirits who stand by him will clap their wings behind him and he will enter Heaven with many crowns upon his head, each of which he will delight to cast at the feet of Jesus! Oh, Brothers and Sisters, if you turn a sinner from the error of his ways, remember you have saved a soul from death, and hidden a multitude of sins!

III. The APPLICATION I can only just mention. It is this—that he who is the means of the conversion of a sinner does, under God, "save a soul from death, and hide a multitude of sins." Particular attention ought to be paid to *backsliders*. For in bringing backsliders into the Church, there is as much honor to God as in bringing in sinners. "Brethren, if any of you do err from the Truth, and one converts him." Alas, the poor backslider is often the most forgotten! A member of the Church has disgraced his profession, the church excommunicated him and he was accounted "a heathen and a publican." I know of men of good standing in the Gospel ministry who, ten years ago, fell into sin. And that is thrown in our teeth to this very day! Do you speak of them? You are at once informed, "Why, ten years ago they did so-and-so." Brethren, Christians ought to be ashamed of themselves for taking notice of such things so long afterwards! True, we may use more caution in our dealings. But to reproach a fallen Brother for what he did so long ago is contrary to the spirit of John, who went after Peter three days after he had denied his Master with oaths and curses! Nowadays it is the fashion, if a man falls, to have nothing to do with him! Men say, "He is a bad fellow, we will not go after him." Beloved, suppose he is the worst—is not that the reason why you should go most after him? Suppose he never was a child of God—suppose he never knew the Truth of God—is not that the greater reason why you should go after him? I do not understand your mawkish modesty, your excessive pride that won't let you go after the chief of sinners! The worse the case, the more is the reason why we should go.

But suppose the man is a child of God and you have cast him off—remember, he is your Brother. He is one with Christ as much as you are! He is justified, he has the same righteousness that you have. And if, when he has sinned, you despise him, then you despise his Master. Take heed! You, yourself, may be tempted and may one day fall. Like David, you may walk on the top of your house rather too high and you may see something which shall bring you to sin. Then what will you say if the Brethren pass *you* by with a sneer and take no notice of *you*? Oh, if we have one backslider connected with our Church, let us take special care of him! Don't deal harshly with him. Remember you would have been a

backslider, too, if it were not for the Grace of God. I advise you, whenever you see professors living in sin, to be very shy of them. But if, after a time, you see any sign of repentance, or if you do not, go and seek out the lost sheep of the house of Israel. For remember that if one of you do err from the Truth, and one converts him, let him remember, that “he who converts the sinner from the error of his way, shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.”

“Backsliders, who feel your misery,” I will come after you one moment! Poor backslider, you were once a Christian. Do you hope you were? “No,” you say, “I believe I deceived myself and others. I was no child of God.” Well, if you did, let me tell you that if you will acknowledge that, God will forgive you! Suppose you did deceive the Church—you are not the first who did it. There are some members of this Church, I fear, who have done so and we have not found them out. I tell you, your case is not hopeless! That is not the unpardonable sin! Some who have tried to deceive the very Elect of God have yet been delivered! And my Master says He is able to save to the uttermost (and you have not gone beyond the uttermost) all who come unto Him! Come then, to His feet—cast yourself on His mercy. And though you did once enter His camp as a spy, He will not hang you up for it, but will be glad to get you as a trophy of mercy! But if you were a child of God and can say honestly, “I know I did love Him and He loved me,” I tell you He still loves you! If you have gone ever so far astray, you are as much His child as ever! Though you have run away from your Father, come back, come back! He is still your Father. Think not He has unsheathed the sword to slay you. Say not, “He has cast me out of the Family.” He has not! His heart yearns for you right now. My Father loves you! Come, then, to His feet and He will not even remind you of what you have done! The prodigal was going to tell his Father all his sins and ask him to make him one of his hired servants, but the Father stopped his mouth. He let him say that he was not worthy to be called his son, but he would not let him say, “make me as an hired servant.” Come back and your Father will receive you gladly! He will put His arms around you and kiss you with the kisses of His love! And He will say, “I have found this, My son who was lost. I have recovered this sheep that had gone astray.” My Father loved you without works—He justified you irrespective of them! You have no less merit, now, than you had then! Come and trust and believe in Him!

Lastly, you who believe you are not backsliders, if you are not saved, remember that a soul is saved from death and a multitude of sins hidden. Oh, my Friends, if I might but be a hundred-handed man to catch you all, I would love to be so. If anything I would say could win your souls—if by preaching here from now till midnight, I might by any possibility capture some of you to the love of the Savior—I would do it! Some of you are speeding your way to Hell blindfolded! My Hearers, I do not deceive you, you are going to Hell as fast as time can carry you! Some of you are deceiving yourselves with the thought that you are righteous, but you are not so. Many of you have had solemn warnings and have never

been moved by them. You have admired the way in which the warning has been given, but the thing, itself, has never entered your heart. Hundreds of you are without God and without Christ, strangers to the commonwealth of Israel—and may I not plead with you? Is a gloomy religious system to hold me captive and never let me speak? Why, poor Hearts, do you know your sad condition? Do you know that “God is angry with the wicked every day”? Do you know that “the way of transgressors is hard”? That “he that believes not is condemned already”? Has it never been told you that “he that believes not shall be damned”? And can you stand damnation? My Hearers, could you make your bed in Hell? Could you lie down in the pit of Hell? Do you think it would be an easy portion for your souls to be rocked on waves of flames forever, and to be tossed about with demons in the place where hope cannot come? You may smile now, but will not smile soon. God sends me as an ambassador. But if you listen not to me, He will not send an ambassador, next time, but an executioner! Soon there will be no wooing words of mercy—the only exhortation you will hear will be the dull cold voice of Death who shall say, “Come with me.” Then you will not be in the place where we sing God’s praises and where righteous prayers are daily offered. The only music you will hear will be the sighs of the damned, the shrieks of fiends and the yelling of the tormented! O may God in His mercy snatch you as brands from the fire to be trophies of His Grace throughout eternity! The way to be saved is to “renounce your works and ways with grief,” and fly to Jesus. And if now you are a conscience-stricken sinner, that is all I want! If you will confess that you are a sinner, that is all God requires of you and even *that* He gives you! Jesus Christ says, “Come unto Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” Do you hear His wooing words? Will you turn from His sweet looks of mercy? Has His Cross no influence? Have His wounds no power to bring you to His feet? Ah, then what can I say? Only the arm of the Spirit, which is mightier than man, can make hard hearts melt and bow stubborn wills to the ground!

Sinners, if you confess your sins this morning, there is a Christ for you. You need not say, “Oh, that I knew where to find Him.” The Word is near you, on your lips, and in your heart. If you will, with your heart, believe—and with your mouth confess the Lord Jesus, you shall be saved, for, “he that believes and is baptized shall be saved. And he that believes not shall be damned.”

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**PRAY THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL USE THIS SERMON
TO BRING MANY TO A SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST.**