



Spurgeon's Sermons Volume 12: 1866

by

Charles Spurgeon

About *Spurgeon's Sermons Volume 12: 1866* by Charles Spurgeon

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Sin Laid on Jesus

A Sermon

(No. 694)

Delivered on Sunday Morning, June 10th, 1866, by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

“All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.”—Isaiah 53:6.

THE VERSE OPENS with a confession of sin *common* to all the persons intended in the verse. The whole of the elect people of God seem to me to be here represented; they have all fallen, those of them who have lived to years of responsibility have all actually sinned, and therefore in common chorus they all say from the first who entered heaven to the last who shall enter there, “All we like sheep have gone astray.” But the confession while thus hearty and unanimous, is also special and particular: “We have turned every one to his own way.” There is a peculiar sinfulness about every one of the individuals; all are sinful, but each one with some special aggravation not found in his fellow. It is the mark of genuine repentance that while it naturally associates itself with other penitents, it also feels that it must take up a position of loneliness. “We have turned every one to his own way” is a confession importing that each man had sinned against light peculiar to himself, or sinned with an aggravation which he at least could not perceive in his fellow. This confession being thus general and particular has many other traits of excellence about it of which we cannot just now speak. It is very *unreserved*. You will observe that there is not a single syllable by way of excuse; there is not a word to detract from the force of the confession. It is moreover singularly *thoughtful*, for thoughtless persons do not use a metaphor so appropriate as the text: “All we like sheep have gone astray.” Not like the ox which “knoweth its owner,” nor even like the ass which “remembers its master’s crib nor even like the swine which if it wandereth all day long cometh back to the trough at night, but “like sheep we have gone astray;” like a creature cared for but not capable of grateful attachment to the hand that cares for it; like a creature wise enough to find the gap in the hedge by which to escape, but so silly as to have no propensity or desire to return to the place from which it had perversely wandered; like sheep habitually, constantly, wilfully, foolishly, without power to return, we have gone astray. I wish that all our confessions of sin showed a like thoughtfulness, for to say that we are “miserable sinners” may be an increase of our sin unless we have really felt it, to use words of general confession without our soul entering into them may be but a “repentance that needeth to be repented of,” an insult and mockery to high Heaven vented in that very place where there ought to have been the greatest possible tenderness and holy fear. I like the confession of the text because it is a giving up of all pleas of self-righteousness. It is the declaration of a body of men who are guilty, consciously guilty; guilty with aggravations, guilty without excuse; and here they all stand with their weapons of rebellion broken in pieces, saying unanimously, “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way.”

I hear no dolorous wailings attending this confession of sin; for the next sentence makes it almost a song. “The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.” It is the most grievous sentence of the three; but it is the most charming and the most full of comfort. Strange is it that where misery

was concentrated mercy reigned, and where sorrow reached her climax there it is that a weary soul finds sweetest rest. The Savior bruised is the healing of bruised hearts.

I want now to draw the hearts of all who feel the confession to the blessed doctrine set forth in the text: the Lord hath laid on Christ the iniquity of us all.

We shall take the text first by way of *exposition*; then by way of *application*; and we shall conclude with serious and I hope profitable *contemplation*.

I. First, let us consider the text by way of EXPOSITION.

1. It may be well to give the marginal translation of the text, "Jehovah hath made to meet on him the iniquity of us all." The first thought that demands notice is *the meeting of sin*. Sin I may compare to the rays of some evil sun. Sin was scattered throughout this world as abundantly as light, and Christ is made to suffer the full effect of the baleful rays, which stream from the sun of sin. God as it were holds up a burning glass, and concentrates all the scattered rays in a focus upon Christ. That seems to be the thought of the text, "The Lord hath focused upon him the iniquity of us all." That which was scattered abroad everywhere is here brought into terrible concentration; upon the devoted head of our blessed Lord all the sin of his people was made to meet. Before a great storm when the sky is growing black and the wind is beginning to howl, you have seen the clouds hurrying from almost every point of the compass as though the great day of battle were come, and all the dread artillery of God were hurrying to the field. In the center of the whirlwind and the storm, when the lightnings threaten to set all heaven on a blaze, and the black clouds fold on fold labor to conceal the light of day, you have a very graphic metaphor of the meeting of all sin upon the person of Christ; the sin of the ages past and the sin of the ages to come, the sins of those of the elect Who were in heathendom, and of those who were in Jewry; the sin of the young and of the old, sin original and sin actual, all made to meet, all the black clouds concentrated and brought together into one great tempest that it might rush in one tremendous tornado upon the person of the great Redeemer and substitute. As when a thousand streamlets dash down the mountain side in the day of rain, and all meet in one deep swollen lake; that lake the Savior's heart, those gushing torrents the sins of us all who are here described as making a full confession of our sins. Or to take a metaphor not from nature but from commerce; suppose the debts of a great number of persons to be all gathered up, the scattered bonds and bills that are to be honored or dishonored on such and such a day, and all these laid upon one person who undertakes the responsibility of meeting every one of them without a single assistant; such was the condition of the Savior; the Lord made to meet on him the debts of all his people so that he became responsible for all the obligations of every one of those whom his Father had given him whatsoever their debts might be. Or if these metaphors do not suffice to set forth the meaning, take the text in our own version, "The Lord hath *laid on him* the iniquity of us all;" put upon him as a burden is laid upon a man's back all the burdens of all his people; put upon his head as the high priest of old laid upon the scape-goat all the sin of the beloved ones that he might bear them in his own person. The two translations you see are perfectly consistent; all sins are made to meet, and then having met together and been tied up in one crushing load the whole burden is laid upon him.

2. The second thought is that *sin was made to meet upon the suffering person of the innocent substitute*. I have said "the suffering person" because the connection of the text requires it. "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed." It is in connection with this, and as an explanation of all his grief, that it is added, "The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." The

Lord Jesus Christ would have been incapable of receiving the sin of all his people as their substitute had he been himself a sinner: but he was, as to his divine nature, worthy to be hymned as “Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Sabaoth;” and, as to his human nature, he was by miraculous conception free from all original sin, and in the holiness of his life he was such that he was the spotless Lamb of God, without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing, and therefore he was on all accounts capable of standing in the room, place, and stead of sinful men. The doctrine of the text is, that Jesus Christ, who was man of the substance of his mother, and who was, nevertheless, very God of very God, most true and glorious Creator, Preserver, did stand in such a position as to take upon himself the iniquity of all his people, remaining still himself innocent; having no personal sin, being incapable of any, but yet taking the sin of others upon himself—it has been the custom of theologians to say—*by imputation*; but I question whether the use of that word, although correct enough as it is understood by us, may not have lent some color to the misrepresentations of those who oppose the doctrine of substitution. I will not say that the sins of God’s people were imputed to Christ, though I believe they were; but it seems to me that in a way more mysterious than that which imputation would express, the sins of God’s people were actually laid upon Jesus Christ; that in the view of God, not only was Christ treated as if he had been guilty, but the very sin itself was, I know not how, but according to the text it was somehow laid upon the head of Christ Jesus: “For he hath made him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” Is it not written, “He shall bear,” not merely the punishment of their sin, nor the imputation of their sin, but “He shall bear their iniquities”? Our sin is laid on Jesus in even a deeper and truer sense than is expressed by the term imputation. I do not think I can express it, nor convey the idea that I have in my own mind, but while Jesus never was and never could be a sinner,—God forbid that the blasphemous thought should ever cross our lips or dwell upon our heart!—yet the sin of his people was literally and truly laid upon him.

3. It has been asked, *Was it just that sin should thus be laid upon Christ?* Our reply is fourfold. We believe it was rightly so, first because *it was the act of him who must do right*, for “the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.” Jehovah, he against whom the offense was committed, and who has ordained that the sin of the people spoken of should be laid upon Christ. To impugn this, then, would be to impugn the justice of Jehovah, and I pray that none of us may have the hardihood to do that. Shall the potsherd venture to strive with the potter? shall the thing formed contend with the Creator of all things? Jehovah did it; and we accept it as being right, caring not what men may think of Jehovah’s own deed. Remember, moreover, that *Jesus Christ voluntarily took this sin upon himself*. It was not forced upon him, he was not punished for the sins of others with whom he had no connection and against his will; but He his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, and while bearing it said, “No man taketh my life from me, but I lay it down of myself.” It was according to his own eternal agreement made with the Father on our behalf; it was according to his own expressed desire, for he had a baptism to be baptized with, and he was straitened until it was accomplished; and therefore whatever of injustice might be supposed, it is removed by the fact that he who was mainly concerned in it was himself voluntarily placed in such a position. But I would have you remember, beloved, that *there was a relationship between our Lord and his people*, which is too often forgotten, but which rendered it natural that he should bear the sin of his people. Why does the text speak of our sinning like sheep? I think it is because it would call to our recollection that Christ is our Shepherd. It is not, my brethren, that Christ took upon himself the sins of strangers. Remember that there always was a union of a most mysterious and intimate kind between those

who sinned and the Christ who suffered. What if I say that it is not unjust but according to law that when a woman gets into debt her husband should bear it? And the church of God sinning it was but right that her Husband, who had espoused her unto himself, should become the debtor on her behalf. The Lord Jesus stood in the relationship of a married husband unto his church, and it was not, therefore, a strange thing that he should bear her burdens. It was natural for the next of kin to redeem the inheritance, it was most seemly that Immanuel, the next of kin, should redeem his lost church by his own blood. Recollect that there was a union closer even than the marriage bond, for we are members of his body. You shall not punish this hand of mine without making the sentient nature which dwells in the brain to suffer therewith; and does it seem strange to you that when the inferior members of the body have transgressed the Head should be made to suffer? It seems to me, my brethren, that while substitution is full of grace, it is not unnatural, but according to the laws of everlasting love. Yet there is a fourth consideration that may remove the difficulty of sin being laid upon Christ. It is not only that God laid it there, that Jesus voluntarily took it, and moreover was in such a union with his church that it was natural that he should take it, but you must remember that *this plan of salvation is precisely similar to the method of our ruin*. How did we fall, my brethren? Not by any one of us actually ruining himself. I grant you that our own sin is the ground of ultimate punishment, but the ground of our original fall lay in another. I had no more to do with my fall than I have to do with my restoration; that is to say, the fall which made me a sinner was wholly accomplished long before I was born by the first Adam, and the salvation by which I am delivered was finished long before I saw the light by the second Adam on my behalf. If we grant the fall,—and we must grant the fact, however we may dislike the principle,—we cannot think it unjust that God should give us a plan of salvation based upon the same principle of federal head-ship. Perhaps it is true, as has been conjectured by many, that because the fallen angels sinned one by one, there was no possibility of their restoration; but man sinning, not one by one in the first place, but transgressing under a covenant head, there remained an opportunity for the restoration of the race by another covenant head-ship. At any rate we, accepting the principle of the federal head-ship in the fall, joyfully receive it as to the restoration in Christ Jesus. It seems right, then, on these four grounds, that the Lord should make the sins of all his people to meet upon Christ.

4. I beg you to observe in the fourth place, *that lying upon Christ brought upon him all the consequences connected with it*. God cannot look where there is sin with any pleasure, and though as far as Jesus is personally concerned, he is the Father's beloved Son in whom he is well pleased; yet when he saw sin laid upon his Son, he made that Son cry, "My God! my God! why hast thou forsaken me?" It was not possible that Jesus should enjoy the light of his Father's presence while he was made sin for us; consequently he went through a horror of great darkness, the root and source of which was the withdrawing of the conscious enjoyment of his Father's presence. More than that, not only was light withdrawn, but positive sorrow was inflicted. God must punish sin, and though the sin was not Christ's by his actually doing it, yet it was laid upon him, and therefore he was made a curse for us. What were the pangs, which Christ endured? I cannot tell you. You have read the story of his crucifixion. Dear friends, that is only the shell, but the inward kernel who shall describe? It is certain that Christ not only bore all that humanity could bear, but there was a Deity within which added extraordinary strength to his humanity, and enabled it to bear far more than it would otherwise have been able to endure. I doubt not that in addition to this the Godhead within gave a peculiar sensitiveness to the holiness of Christ's nature, so that sin must have become even more abhorrent to him than it would have been to a merely perfect man. His griefs are worthy

to be described according to the Greek Liturgy as “unknown sufferings.” The height and depth, the length and breadth of what Jesus Christ endured nor heart can guess, nor tongue can tell, nor can imagination frame; God only knows the griefs to which the Son of God was put when the Lord made to meet upon him the iniquity of us all. To crown all there came death itself. Death is the punishment for sin, and whatever it may mean, whatever over and beyond natural death was intended in the sentence, “In the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die,” Christ felt. Death went through and through him, until “he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.” “He became obedient to death, even to the death of the cross.”

5. Dear friends, for a moment think of the result of all this. Sin meets on Christ and Christ is punished for sin, and what then? Why then sin is put away. If the penalty be endured justice asks no more. The debt discharged—there is no debt; the claim made and the claim met—the claim ceases to be. Though we could not meet that claim in our proper persons, yet we have met it in one who is so united and allied to us that we are in him even as Levi was in the loins of Abraham. Jesus himself also is free. Upon him the gathered tempest has spent itself, and not a single cloud lingers in the serene sky. Though the waters came his love has dried them up, his suffering has opened the sluices, and made the floods for ever spend themselves. Though the bills were brought he has honored them all, and there is not one outstanding account against a single soul for whom he died as a substitute.

6. We cannot close the exposition of this verse without just remarking upon the “*us*” here intended. “The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of *us* all.” It is usually conceded by us who hold the doctrine of particular redemption that there was in the death of Christ very much of generality and universality. We believe that the atonement of Christ was infinite in value, and that if Christ had decreed to save every man of woman born, he need not have suffered another pang; there was sufficient in his atonement if he had so willed it to have redeemed the entire race. We believe also that by the death of Christ there is a general and honest invitation given to every creature under heaven in terms like these:—“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.” We are not prepared, however, to go an inch beyond that. We hold that from the very nature of the satisfaction of Christ it could not have been made for any but for his elect; for Christ either did pay the debts of all men or he did not; if he did pay the debts of all men they are paid, and no man can be called to account for them. If Christ was the surety of every man living, then how in the name of common justice is Christ to be punished, and man punished too? If it be replied that the man would not accept the atonement, then I ask again, Was there a satisfaction given, for if so it was given whether the man accepts it or not, or else satisfaction by itself is powerless until man puts efficacy in it, which is preposterous to suppose. If you take away from us the fact that Christ did really satisfy for those for whom he stood, we cry like Jacob, “If I am bereaved I am bereaved;” you have taken away all that is worth having, and what have you given us in its place? You have given us a redemption, which confessedly does not redeem; you have given us an atonement, which is made equally for the lost in hell and for the saved in heaven; and what is the intrinsic value of such an atonement? If you tell us that Christ made a satisfactory atonement for every one of the human race, we ask you how it was that he made an atonement for those that must have been in the flames of hell thousands of years before he came into this world? My brethren, ours has the advantage of universality in its proclamation and in its *bona fide* offer, for there is no man living who shall believe in Jesus who shall not be saved by Christ; but it has a greater advantage than this; namely, that those who do believe are saved by it, and they know that Christ made such an atonement

for them that for them to be punished for sin would be as much a violation of justice as it would of mercy. O my soul! thou knowest this day that all thy sins were made to meet on Christ, and that he bore the punishment for them all.

“He bore that we might never bear,
His Father’s righteous ire.”

Here is a rock to stand on, a safe resting-place for those who trust in Jesus. As for you who trust him not, your blood be upon your own heads! If ye trust him not, ye have no part nor lot in this matter, ye shall go down to your own punishment to bear it yourselves; the wrath of God abideth on you; you shall find that the blood of Jesus has made no atonement for your sins. You have rejected the invitation that was given, and put far from you the cross of Christ, and upon your heads the pardoning blood shall never drop, and for you it shall never plead, but you must perish under the law, seeing you refuse to be saved under the gospel.

II. Let us come briefly to the APPLICATION.

Dear hearer, a friend now puts a question to you. There is a countless company whose sins the Lord Jesus bore; *did he bear yours?* Do you wish to have an answer? Are you unable to give one? Let me read this verse to you and see if you can join in it. I do not mean join in it saying, “That is true,” but feeling that it is true in your own souls. “All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned every one to his own way, and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.” If there be in you this morning a penitential confession which leads you to acknowledge that you have erred and strayed like a lost sheep, if there be in you a personal sense of sin which makes you feel that you have turned to your own way, and if now you can trust in Jesus, then a second question is not wanted; the Lord hath laid on him your iniquity, and the iniquity of all such as confess their sin and look alone to Christ. But if you will not trust to Christ, I cannot say to you that the Lord hath taken the sin from you and laid it upon Christ, for in my soul I know that living and dying as you now are, that sin of yours will rise up in judgment against you to condemn you. Dear friend, I will venture to say to you, are you reconciled to God’s way of getting rid of sin? Do you feel any joy in your heart at the thought of Jesus bearing sin for you and suffering for you? If you do not, I cannot offer you the consolation, which the text gives to those who submit to it. But let me ask you, do you mean to bear your sin yourself? Do you know what that means? Jesus smarted when he bore the sin of his people, but what a smart shall yours be when you bear your own! “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” There are some now-a-days who are mightily angry at the doctrine of everlasting punishment; I, too, might be angry at it if it were an invention of man; but when it is most certainly threatened in God’s Book, it is vain for me to kick against the pricks; my question should not be, “How can I dispute against it?” but “How can I escape from it?” Dear hearer, do not venture into God’s presence with your sins upon yourself; even our God is a consuming fire, and his fury will break forth against you when you come to stand there. Have you an imagination that your own merits may make atonement for sin? I pray you think what Christ had to do before he could cast sin off from himself, what griefs he bore, through what an ocean of wrath he passed; and do you think that your poor merits, if they be merits, can ever avail to do what the Savior suffered so much to accomplish? Do you hope to escape without a punishment? If you do, let me pray you to think the matter over; for if God smote his own Son, do you think he will permit you to go scot-free? If the King of Glory, when he only takes others’ sins upon him, must needs die, what think you will become of you, poor worm of the dust? Think you that God will be unjust in order to save you? Do you suppose that he will be hail fellow, well met! with you, and

revoke his own sentence, because you do not choose to be saved by a plan which is both just to him and safe to you? Shall God be unjust to pander to your fancies, or indulge your lusts? Sinner, bow the knee to this plan of salvation, for be it known to you—and I speak now, knowing what I say, and coolly too—there is, none other plan of salvation under heaven. There may be other ways of salvation preached, but other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, Jesus Christ the Righteous. If thou shalt struggle after salvation individually, and hope to get to heaven apart from the head-ship of Christ, thou mayest struggle, but thou shalt be like the Jews of old, who had a zeal for God but not according to knowledge; if thou shalt be going about to establish thine own righteousness, but not submitting thyself to the righteousness of Christ, thou shalt perish. But let me ask thee, does not this plan commend itself to thee? If I trust Jesus, this is to me the evidence that he took my sins and suffered in my stead. Oh the joy it gives me! I speak to you honestly of my own experience now; there is no doctrine that fires my soul with such delight as that of substitution. The doctrine of atonement, as it is often preached, is a hazy, misty doing of something by which the law is honored, or perhaps dishonored, for I scarce know which to call it; this yields me no joy; but when I know that Christ was literally and positively, not metaphorically and by way of figure, but literally and positively the substitute for his own people, and when I know that trusting in him I have the evidence of being one of his people, why my soul begins to say, Now let me live! I'm clean, through Jesu's blood I'm clean. Now let me die! for I shall boldly stand in the day of resurrection, through Jesus my Lord. Why, soul, it seems to me as if it were enough to make you leap into the arms of Christ, crucified! covered with blood for you! disinterestedly suffering for his own enemies that they might live! Oh stay not away!

“Come, guilty souls, and flee away
 Like doves to Jesu's wounds;
 This is the welcome gospel-day,
 Wherein free grace abounds.
 God loved the church, and gave his Son
 To drink the cup of wrath;
 And Jesus says he'll cast out none
 That come to him by faith.”

III. Now consecrate a few minutes to hallowed CONTEMPLATION.

You do not want talk, you want thought: I will give you four things to think of. The first is *the astounding mass of sin that must have been laid on Christ*. Now do not jump at it, and say, “Yes, the sins of the millions of his elect.” Do not leap at that, get at it by degrees. Begin with your own sin. Have you ever felt that?—your own sin. No, you never felt the full weight of it; if you did you would have been in hell. It is the weight of sin that makes hell. Sin bears its own punishment in its own weight. Do you remember when you felt that the pains of hell get hold upon you, and you found trouble and sorrow? That hour when you called upon the name of the Lord, saying, “O Lord, I beseech thee, deliver my soul!” Then you only felt as it were the little end of your sins, but all your sins, what must they weigh! How old are you? You know not how old you may be before you enter into rest, but all the sins of all your years he carried. All the sins against light and knowledge, sins against law and gospel, week-day sins, Sabbath sins, hand sins, lip sins, heart sins, sins against the Father, sins against the Son, sins against the Holy Ghost, sins of all shapes, all laid upon him; can you get the thought now? Now multiply that. Think of the sins of all the rest of his people; persecutions and murders at the door of such an one as Saul of Tarsus; adultery at the door of

David—sins of every shape and size, for God's elect have been among the chief of sinners; those whom he has chosen have not been the best of men by nature, but some of them the very worst, and yet sovereign grace delighted to find a home for itself where seven devils had dwelt before, nay, where a legion of devils held their carnival. Christ looks abroad among the sons of men, and while a Pharisee is passed by, Zaccheus the publican is selected—and the sins of all these with their full weight laid upon him. The weight of sin would have crushed all these into hell for ever, and yet Christ bore all that weight; and what if I venture to say the very eternity and infinity of wrath that was due for all that mass of sin, the Son of God, marvellously sustained by the infinity of the Godhead within, bore and sustained the whole. I would like to stop a minute and let you turn it over, but when you go home perhaps you will spend half an hour very profitably in thinking that

“The enormous load of human guilt
Was on my Savior laid;
With woes as with a garment he
For sinners was array'd.”

2. The next subject I offer you for contemplation is this, *the amazing love of Jesus, which brought him to do all this*. Remember Paul's way of putting it. “Scarcely for a righteous (or strictly just) man will one die; peradventure for a good (or benevolent) man one might even dare to die; but God commendeth his love towards us in that, while we were yet sinners, in due time, Christ died for the ungodly.” When Christ has renewed us by his Spirit, there may be a temptation to imagine that some excellency in us won the Savior's heart; but, my brethren, you must understand that Christ died for us while we were yet sinners. Not that infant washed and swaddled, not that fair maiden with the jewel in her ear, and with the pure golden crown upon her head, not that lovely princess, presented like a chaste virgin to her husband; no, that was not what Jesus saw when he died. He saw all that in the glass of his prescience, but the actual condition of that fair maid was very different when he died for her; she was cast out, unwashed, unsalted, unswaddled, in her blood, a foul, filthy thing. Ah! my brethren, there is no filthy thing under heaven so filthy as a filthy sinner. When there was not a ray of beauty to be discovered in us, when neither without nor within a single thing could be found to commend us, but we were morally altogether abhorrent to the Holy nature of Christ, then—oh wondrous grace!—he came from the highest heaven that the mass of our sin might meet on him. I met with this question the other day, which seemed a novel one to me. The question was asked thus: “Suppose you had a child that had the leprosy, or some other foul disease. Suppose this dear child of yours was infected and contaminated to the most loathsome degree in every part, till the eyes were blinded and the hands were rotting, and the heart was turning to stone, and the whole body was covered with wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores. Now, suppose there were no cure for this child but for your perfectly sane and healthy soul, suppose it to be such, to be put into that child's body, and for you to bear that child's diseases instead of that child; would you consent to it?” I can suppose a mother's love yielding even to that; but the more disgusted you had been with those putrifying sores, the more terrible would the task become. Now, that only touches the fringe of the work, which Jesus did for us when he himself took our sins and bore our sicknesses. Such a wonderful union is there between Christ and the sinner that I venture to say there are some expressions in the New Testament and in the Old with regard to Christ's connection with the sin of man that I would not dare to use except as direct quotations from Holy Writ; but being there you shall see how wondrously the love of Jesus Christ induced him to take upon himself our sad condition and plight. But, oh the love! oh the love! Nay, I will not speak of it; ye must muse

upon it. Silence is sometimes the best eloquence; and it will be best for me to say to you, oh the depths of the love of Jesus! unsearchable, past finding out! God over all, blessed for ever, should have laid on him the iniquity of us all!

3. Wonder of wonders that I need another minute to set you thinking on another subject, *the matchless security which this plan of salvation offers*. I do not see in what point that man is vulnerable who can feel and know that Christ has borne his sin. I look at the attributes of God, and though to me, as a sinner, they all seem bristling as with sharp points, thrusting themselves upon me; yet when I know that Jesus died for me, and did literally take my sin, what fear I the attributes of God? There is justice, sharp and bright, like a lance; but justice is my friend. If God be just, he cannot punish me for sin for which Jesus has offered satisfaction. As long as there is justice in the heart of Deity, it cannot be that a soul justly claiming Christ as his substitute can himself be punished. As for mercy, love, truth, honor, everything matchless, Godlike and divine about Deity, I say of all these, "You are my friends; you are all guarantees that since Jesus died for me I cannot die." How grandly does the apostle put it! It seems to me as if he never was worked up by the Holy Spirit to such a pitch of eloquence as when speaking about the death and resurrection of the Savior, he propounds that splendid question, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?" There, where eternal justice sits upon a flaming throne, the apostle gazes with eye undimmed into the ineffable splendor, and though some one seems to say, "The Judge will condemn," he replies, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth." Can he justify and then condemn us? He justifies those for whom Christ died, for we are justified by his resurrection. How then shall he condemn? And then he lifts up his voice yet again—"Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea, rather that is risen again, who sitteth at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us." On other grounds a man must feel unsafe, but here he may know himself sure. Go ye that will, and build upon your sandy foundations; run up your superstructures till they are as high as Babel's tower, and tumble about your ears unable to support their own weight; but as for me, my soul shall rest upon this solid rock of substitution; and clinging to the rock with confident resolve, I know that I have no cause for fear since Jesus died for me.

4. Lastly, I desire to give you as a subject for contemplation, and I pray you do not forget it, this question, *What then are the claims of Jesus Christ upon you and upon me?* Brethren and sisters, I have sometimes wished to be eloquent; never when I had a cause to plead in which I was myself involved, but when I have had to speak for Jesus. But indeed, there is no need of eloquence here. Your hearts shall be the pleaders, his agonies shall be the plea. Did our blessed Lord take your sin, my brethren, and suffer all its terrific consequences for you, so that you are delivered. By his blood and wounds, by his death, and by the love that made him die, I conjure you treat him as he should be treated! Love him as he should be loved! Serve him as he should be served! You will tell me that you have obeyed his precepts. I am glad to hear it. Are you sure that you have? "If ye love me, keep my commandments." Have you kept the ordinances as he delivered them? Have you sought to be obedient to him in all respects? In all your Lord's appointed ways have you scrupulously pursued your journey? If you can say this I am not content; it does not seem to me that with such a leader as Christ mere obedience should be all. Napoleon singularly enough had power to get the hearts of men twisted and twined about him; when he was in his wars there were many of his captains and even of his private soldiers who not only marched with the quick obedience of a soldier wherever they were bidden, but who felt an enthusiasm for him. Have you never heard of him who threw himself in the way of the shot to receive it in his bosom to save the Emperor? No obedience,

no law could have required that of him, but enthusiastic love moved him to it; and it is such enthusiasm that my Master deserves in the very highest degree from us. It is out of and beyond all categories of law, it is far exceeding all that law ventured to ask, and yet not supererogation for all that, for ye are not under the law but under grace; and ye will do more out of love than ye would have done out of the compulsion of demand. What shall I do for my Master? What shall I do for my Lord? How shall I set him forth? My brethren and sisters, my highest aim before God, next to the conversion of the unconverted among you, is this, that you who do love Christ may really love him and act as if you (lid. I hope you will never become a dead cold church. Oh may my ministry never help to lull you into such a state as that! If Jesus Christ does not deserve everything of you he does not deserve anything; you do not know anything of his claims if you do not feel that

“If you could make some reserve,
And duty did not call;
You love the Lord with zeal so great
That you must give him all.”

Christ stands for me, oh may I learn to stand for him, and plead for him, and live for him, and suffer for him, and pray for him, and preach and labor for him as he may help me! May I remind you each individually as you all followed your own way, and individually had some sin to increase that burden, pay him individual service? Contribute of your substance to the common work of the church, and do that constantly, and as a matter of delight. Our College, which is doing so much service greatly needs, and demands the help of all who love our work, and love the Lord's truth. But in addition to that, do something for yourself, speak for Christ yourself, have some work in hand on your own account. Do, I say again, at all times assist the work of the combined body, for that will be a great work, God being in us as our life and stay, and let no man withhold of his substance from Christ's cause; but still that is not all, he does not ask your pocket only but your heart. It is not the pence, it is the activities of the soul; it is not the shillings and the guineas and so on, but it is your very inmost soul, the core of your spirit. O Christian, by the blood of Jesus devote yourself to him again! In the old Roman battles it sometimes happened that the strife seemed dubious, and a captain inspired by superstitious patriotism would stand upon his sword and devote himself to destruction for the good of his country, and then, according to those old legends, the battle always turned. Now, men and brethren, sisters, every one of you who have tasted that the Lord is gracious, devote yourselves this day to live, to die, to spend, and to be spent for King Jesus. You will be no fool, for no man ever had an ambition more worthy. You will not be devoting yourself to one who does not deserve it. You know how much you owe him; nay, you do not know, to the fullest extent, the depth of your obligation, but you know you owe him all that you have; your escape from hell and your hope of heaven. Follow me this morning in these verses—

“‘Tis done, the great transaction's done;
I am my Lord's, and he is mine:
He drew me, and I follow'd on,
Charm'd to confess the voice divine.
Now rest, my long-divided heart;
Fix'd on this blissful center rest;
With ashes who would grudge to part,
When call'd on angel's bread to feast?
High heaven, that heard the solemn vow,

That vow renew'd shall daily hear;
Till in life's latest hour I bow,
And bless in death a bond so dear."

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Isaiah 53.

The Axe at the Root—A Testimony Against Puseyite Idolatry

A Sermon

(No. 695)

Delivered on Sunday Morning, June 17th, 1866, by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

“But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.”—John 4:23-24.

THE WOMAN'S CONSCIENCE had been aroused by Christ's declaration of her sin. He was touching upon matters of the most vital importance, and her depraved heart naturally shrunk from the lancet, From the truth which was becoming inconveniently personal she flew to that natural resort of the carnal mind, namely, to religious discourse upon points of outward observance. Instead of confessing her sin, and asking how it may be forgiven, she must needs say, “Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.” The carnal heart dreads the contact of spiritual truth, and finds a most convenient way of avoiding it by running to questions of holy places, holy times, and holy customs. Jesus, to her astonishment, informs her that the question which she had asked was of only temporary importance. There had been a time when it was well to know that salvation was of the Jews, and that the rival temple of the Samaritans was an imposture; but he says in effect to her, “Woman, believe me that question is of no importance now, for the hour cometh, yea and now is, when the external is to be abolished and the ritualistic is to be put away, and a purer, simpler, and more spiritual worship, is to take its place.”

The worship which our Lord Jesus Christ established involved a change. That is implied in the expressions here used. He announced to her that the hour was just then come when all questions about this or that place must cease, and be superseded by spiritual worship. Our Lord gave a very brief, but I think a very instructive description of what this worship was to be. If you observe carefully the words, you will see that it was a *distinguishing* kind of worship, for he mentions *true* worshippers. There had been but little distinction before; so long as they all passed through the same outward form they all seemed to be worshippers; but a distinction was now to be made clear and manifest. Merely outward worshippers were now false worshippers, and only those who pressed into spiritual worship were to be regarded as true. The gospel of Christ is a great discerner and an accurate judge. Christ has the winnowing fan in his hand; he sits as a refiner; he is compared by the prophet to the “refiner's fire” and to “fuller's soap;” and hence you see he discerns at once between worshippers and worshippers. There they stand both alike with bended heads, perhaps both repeating the same words, but the Savior distinguishes: “there is,” saith he, “a false worshipper, and there is a true worshipper, and he alone who is spiritual is true.” He announces further that under the gospel *God is to be worshipped in the character of a Father*; true worshippers shall worship the Father. This had not been the case before. The Lord had been adored as the Adonai, and revered as Jehovah; but to say “Our Father which art in heaven” remains the prerogative of the enlightened Christian who, having believed in Christ, has received power to become a son

of God. True Christian worship addresses God, not merely as Creator and Preserver, or as the great Lord of the Universe, but as one who is very near of kin to us, our Father, beloved of our souls. Jesus likewise states that gospel worship is to be of a kind which does not result from the man himself merely, but comes from God, and is *a work of grace*. This is implied in the sentence, "The Father seeketh such to worship him," as if no true worship would come from any man unless God sought it. True devotion under the Christian dispensation is not merely human but also divine. It is the work of the Spirit in the soul returning to its author; or as our hymn puts it—

"Prayer is the breath of God in man,
Returning whence it came."

These are very grave points, and draw a broad line of distinction between the living worship of the chosen of God and the dead formal worship of the world which lieth in the wicked one.

Furthermore, the Savior goes on to say that they who worship God are to worship him "*in spirit*." No longer with the visible sacrifice of a lamb, but inwardly trusting in him who is the Lamb of God's passover; no more with sprinkled blood of goats, but heartily relying upon the blood once shed for many; no longer worshipping God with ephod, breastplate, and mitre, but with prostrate soul, with uplifted faith, and with the faculties not of the body but of the inward spirit. We who worship God under the Christian dispensation are no longer to fancy that bodily exercise in worship profiteth anything, that genuflexions and contortions are of any value, but that acceptable worship is wholly mental, inward, and spiritual.

But he adds, lest there should seem an omission in the description, "must worship him in spirit *and in truth*;" for though we should profess to worship God only with the spirit and so despise forms, yet unless the soul shall truly love, and really adore, and sincerely bow, our worship will be as unacceptable as though it were formal and outward. See then, brethren, putting the whole three together, the worship under the Christian dispensation which God ordains, and which he accepts through Christ Jesus, is a worship distinguished by an inward vitality from the outward worship of the carnal mind. It is the worship of a child towards a father, feeling within himself a kinship with the divine; it is a worship wrought in us by God the Holy Ghost, because the Father has sought us out and taught us how to worship him. It is a worship which is not outward, but of the inner man, and occupies not hand, eye, and foot, but heart and soul and spirit: and it is a worship which is not professional and formal, but real, hearty, earnest, and so acceptable before God.

Let me give a sketch of this worship as it actually exhibits itself. A man may have been to a place of worship from his youth up, and he may have fallen into a habit of repeating a sacred form every morning and every evening, he may even have been a tolerably diligent reader of the Word of God, and yet though this may have been continued for sixty years and more, he may never once have worshipped God after the fashion prescribed in the text. But see him! the Father seeks him, truth comes home to his soul, and in the light of that truth he feels himself a sinner, and feeling himself so, he cries, "Father, I have sinned." That is his first true worship. See, brethren, his spirit feels it, he means what he says. All that he said before was as nothing, but that first cry "I have sinned" has in it the vitality of worship. He hears the story of the cross, the full atonement made by God's appointed sacrifice, and he prays, "Lord, I believe in Jesus, and I trust him;" here is another specimen of true worship; here is the spirit resting upon God's appointed sacrifice, and reverencing God's way of salvation by accepting it. Being saved by the precious blood of Jesus, he cries, "Father, I bless thee that I am saved, I thank thee that my sins are washed away." This is true worship. Whether a man sings in the assembly, or sings alone; whether he prays aloud, or prays

in silence, if he feels gratitude to God for pardon received, he offers the true worship. The whole of the Christian's life, consisting as it must do of dealings with the invisible God through Jesus Christ by his heart, is a life of worship, and when at last he comes to die, you perceive that his worship will not cease with death, because it has always been spiritual, and did not depend upon the body. So that while the outward man faileth him, the inward spiritual man grows more strong in devotion than ever it was before; and when at last the spirit leaves its earthly tenement, and is disembodied, it has still a song for God, and throughout eternity its spiritual worship can continue; which worship must have been suspended if it had been connected with the body, and not with the immortal part of man.

If I understand the Savior's words, and I hope I do, not only theoretically but practically, he means that those of us who are his true worshippers must worship him with our better and our nobler part, and our soul, with all the power she has, must pay reverence to the unseen God, Brethren, this is the kind of worship that men will not render to God; they will render him anything else but this; and until divinely effectual grace shall work such worship in man's heart it is obnoxious to him; he will worship God with robes, and incense, and flowers, and banners, but he will not consent to worship him in spirit and in truth.

I. I shall proceed to my work by giving A BRIEF OUTLINE OF THE HISTORY OF WORSHIP, in connection with the doctrine that we are now to worship more manifestly than ever God in spirit and in truth. It appears from Scripture that worship *before the flood* was of the very simplest form. The outward ordinances were very few; the chief of them being the offering of sacrifice. This was probably instituted by God himself when he clothed Adam and his wife with skins of beasts; it has been thought that he then indicated to them the slaughter of beasts for sacrifice. Certain it is that the first worship of fallen man was by sacrifice. There was connected with this no doubt the meeting of gracious hearts for prayer, and also the ministration of truth, for Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied concerning the coming of the Lord; so that they appear to have had what was tantamount to a ministry, and the sons of God had appointed times for meeting. But this simple form of worship seems to have been too high, too spiritual for fallen man at the first; at any rate the seed of the serpent could not endure it, for Cain at the very first commenced a schism; instead of bringing a sacrifice by blood he must needs bring a sacrifice of the fruits of the ground. Perhaps he was a man of taste, and desired to bring something that should look more decorous than a poor bleeding victim; he would lay those rich grapes, those ruddy fruits upon the altar; and those fair flowers that gemmed the bosom of earth, surely he might consecrate those. At any rate he was the first man who set up taste and self as the guide in religious worship, and God had no respect unto his sacrifice. The two stood by their altars; Abel by faith, exercising spiritual worship, offered a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain; Cain's offering was possibly even more fair to look upon but it was of his own invention; Abel was accepted, but Cain discarded. The ultimate result of man's sinfulness in connection with this early type of worship was general neglect of all religion. The sons of God seem to have maintained their simplicity for a time, but at last by unholy alliances with the ungodly race there arose a widespread neglect of all thought of God, so that they were married and given in marriage, they ate and they drank till the day when the flood came and swept them all away. Depraved nature thus refused to render spiritual worship. After the flood we find worship restored in very much the same form: let us distinguish it as the *patriarchal* method of worship. The head of a family was accustomed to offer sacrifice, and no doubt if Job be taken as a type thereof family prayer and household religion were maintained, But you see very early the

indication that man, although he could not forget God, for the deluge had struck to the very heart of manhood an awful dread of the Most High, began to interpose symbols and visible objects between God and himself. The use of teraphim became very common; so that in the house even of Abraham's ancestors teraphs were found; and when we come down to the time of Jacob, we find one of his wives stealing her father's images, thus proving that Laban, one of a once God-fearing family, had become a worshipper of God through the medium of images. Thus was it among those who still had some knowledge of God; but the nations being dispersed, soon lost the pure idea of the invisible One, and worshipped gods of their own devising. From the plagues of Egypt, which were no doubt intended to be a blow against all Egypt's gods, we find out that, in addition to the worship of the calf or bull, the Egyptians paid religious reverence to flies, the river Nile, the elements, beetles, and all kinds of creatures; and throughout the world, as a general rule, through the introduction of visible symbols of the unseen Being, the Lord himself had become forgotten, and spiritual worship had almost ceased, except in one elect household; and even there, alas! how fallen had spirituality become!

Keeping to the line of grace, we shall now introduce you to the *ceremonial* form of worship which God instituted after the more spiritual method had entirely broken down. He saw that the children of Israel whom he loved were but a mob of slaves; their spirits had been broken by bitter bondage; like the poor African race of the present day, they seemed as a whole incapable of rising at once to mental dignity, and needed to pass through a generation or two before they could as a nation achieve manly self-government. So when he brought his people out of Egypt the Lord did not try them with an altogether spiritual form of worship; because of the hardness of their hearts among other reasons, though he was still to be worshipped as a spirit, yet he gave them certain outward signs by which they might be enabled to understand his character. A great deal has been made of the symbolical worship of the Jew, as if it were an excuse for the manmade symbolism of the Roman and Anglican Antichrist. We would remark that nothing ought to be made of it at all now, since it has been positively declared many times in Scripture that the age of the shadow has gone, and that the age of the substance now reigns. Whatever may or may not have been the excellence of the old Jewish economy—and being divinely ordained, God forbid we should say a word against it—yet the apostle Paul always talks of it as being but a yoke of bondage to which we are no more to submit ourselves, being but the shadow and not the very image of the good things which were to come; and he speaks of it as a thing so passed away, that to go back to it is to go back to the rudiments, and not to go onward in the full-grown manliness of Christianity. If there were no other passage my text might show that the ceremonialism of the Jew is no excuse whatever for ceremonialism now, but that we ought to stand in direct contrast to that, hearing the Savior declare, that whatever may have been before his time, the hour had come when the true worshipper must worship the Father in spirit and in truth.

Remember that symbolical worship was suitable merely to the infancy of God's church, and that now having received the Spirit of God to dwell in us it would be as unsuitable as would the swaddling bands of babyhood to full-grown men. Besides, even while it existed it was spoken of as soon to be superseded by a new and better covenant. It was frequently broken through by divine authority. Elijah though not at all of the house of Levi offered sacrifice, and prophet after prophet as he arose manifested and declared by his actions that God did not intend to give the Levitical form of worship undivided sway, but that when he poured his Spirit upon special men they were

to break through all ritual regulations in order to show that they were not meant to be fixed and permanent.

It is not sufficiently remembered that the most of God's people in the Jewish nation had very little to do with this symbolical worship. When they were all in the wilderness, and gathered round the one tent called the tabernacle, they might all see the fiery cloudy pillar; but when they came into the land which God had given them, what had they most of them to see? Why the temple itself the most of them would only see once or twice in a year. Scarcely any one ever saw the ark, the cherubim, or the golden candlestick; they were always within the veil, and only once in the year did the high priest enter that sacred place. Even the place where the sacrifices were carried on continually, no one entered but the priests; so that to at least eleven tribes out of twelve the ceremonials were mainly invisible. Little was done outside the court of the priests, but the most of the sacrifices, and of the typology of Judaism, was as much a hidden thing as the spiritual things of God are to us at the present day; and thus there was a great exercise of the spiritual faculties, and comparatively little of outward display. Moreover, it is to be remembered that there was *nothing whatever visible for the Jew to worship*. It is not so in the symbology of that false Church which is trying to raise up and revive the beggarly elements; there men bow before a cross; a piece of bread inside a box is revered and treated with worship; cast-off clouts and rotten rags, called relics, are the objects of adoration; but there was nothing like this with the Jews, they did worship toward the temple, but they did not adore the temple, or mercy-seat, the altar, or any other emblem. Is it not said expressly, "Ye saw no similitude"? When God descended upon Sinai, and all the people worshipped there, they saw nothing which they dared to worship; God was to them still invisible, and they had to exercise their mental faculties in the worship of the invisible God. When at one time it was thought that the miraculous powers of the brazen serpent entitled it to worship, Hezekiah called it Nehushtan, that is, a piece of brass, and broke it to pieces. So that with all its splendor of imagery, embroidered vest, and glittering breastplate, to a great extent there was a powerful element of spirituality even about Aaronic worship; I mean, of course, only to spiritual men. David himself utterly outstripped the outward, when he declared, "Sacrifice and offering thou dost not desire;" and when he said again, "Thou desirest not sacrifice, else would I give it thee." The prophet declares that God is weary of their sacrifices, and in another place the Lord himself says that if we could come before him with rivers of oil, or ten thousand of the fat of fed beasts, he would not accept us with these. To obey is better than sacrifice, is told us even under the law. So that even there, though not so distinctly as now, the spirituality of worship was taught and declared.

But, dear friends, what became of this accommodation of worship to the childhood of the church? You know that very soon after Israel came out of Egypt they said, "Let us make gods that they may go before us." They could not do without a visible God. Do not think that when they set up the calf they meant to worship the calf instead of Jehovah, that would be a slander upon them; they worshipped Jehovah through the calf—that was their plea, for they said, "Tomorrow is a feast unto Jehovah." They thought to represent Jehovah by a bull, "they changed their glory into the similitude of an ox that eateth grass." Though severely rebuked, it was the constant sin of Israel to desire to worship God under the favourite Egyptian emblem of the bull. At last they had so far gone into idolatry that they were driven far away; and in captivity they were so chastened, and moreover brought into such contact with the abominations of idolatry that they were heartily sick of it, and no Jew has been an idolater ever since. Still, spiritual worship they would not offer, and therefore fell into rigid ritualism, reverencing the mere letter of the law, and fighting over trifling refinements

of regulation and observance; so that in Christ's day they made broad their phylacteries and the borders of their garments, but they forgot the Great Spirit who is to be worshipped in spirit and in truth.

Since that day the Lord has been treated by carnal men in one of three ways; either God is adored by outward symbols as among Brahminists, Romanists, Puseyites, and other idolaters; or else he is worshipped through ritualism, as among too many who claim to be orthodox, who contend for pre-arranged, and unbending forms; written or unwritten as the case may be: or else men show an utter indifference to God altogether, and then rush into superstitious reverence for something or other which is evil, and therefore to be dreaded and spoken of with awe. This is the history of religious worship, that let spiritual worship assume what form it may, man always will if he can, get away from it and forget his God and set up something seen, instead of bowing down before the unseen; hence the necessity of the second commandment in the Decalogue, "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, and so on." This is not a command against worshipping another God, that is the first commandment, but a command against worshipping God under any shape, or through any medium or under any symbol; for he is a spirit, and must be worshipped in spirit and in truth and not by symbols. Against this command the human mind is always dashing itself, and in one shape or another idolatry is the ruling religion of mankind.

Christ comes to tell us that now his worship is to be wholly spiritual, even the altar which belongs to antediluvian times is gone, for we have an altar of another kind; even the sacrifice which belonged to the early period has departed like a shadow, because we have the sacrifice of Christ in which to trust. As for the institutions which suited the infancy of the church, they also have disappeared, for now Jesus would have the worship of men enlightened by the indwelling of the Holy Ghost; he would have us understand that a perfect revelation demands of us, that in the perfection of our spiritual powers we should adore the invisible God without the interference of visible signs. Now he would have us cast away all outward types and signs, except the two which he has himself ordained, and even these are types of the Savior's manhood and not of his Godhead at all, to be only valued because of the spiritual communion which they enable our hearts to hold with Jesus; baptism being intended for spiritual men, that they may enter into the Savior's death and burial, and the Lord's supper that the same persons may remember his body broken and his blood shed for them; the water, the bread, the wine, being mere emblems, not to be treated with reverence, but put to their proper emblematic use.

II. I shall now, in the second place, try to ACCOUNT FOR THE EXTREME RARITY OF SPIRITUAL WORSHIP. The reason is, my brethren, because man has fallen. If man were what he once was, pure and holy, I cannot conceive of his wanting holy places and crosses, copes, and dalmatics, crosiers, and chasubles. I cannot conceive of the temptation to bow down before a bull, or a Virgin Mary, or a wafer. There the noble creature walks in paradise, and if he reclines beneath a shady tree, he lifts up his eyes and says, "My Father, thou hast made this grateful shade, here I will adore thee;" or if he walks in the full heat of the sun, he says, "My God, it is thy light that shineth on me,—I adore thee." Up yonder on the mountain's brow, or down by the gleaming river, or the silvery lake, he needs build no altar, his altar is within himself; he needs make no temple, his temple is everywhere. The morning is holy, and the evening is holy; he hath no prescribed hour of prayer, it is devotion all day long; his morning bath is his baptism; each meal is his Eucharist.

Depend upon it, the nearer we get back to the nakedness of worship, the nearer we get to its truth and purity; and it is because man has fallen, that as his body wants clothing, so he is always dressing up his religion.

Moreover, it is far more difficult to worship God in spirit than in form. To patter through a dozen Ave Marias or Paternosters is so easy, that I can nearly go to sleep over them: to repeat a form of prayer in the morning and evening is a very small matter, and one can be thinking of the shop all the while; to go to church or chapel so many times a week is a cheap duty, and withal one may still be a thief or a hypocrite; but it is hard, very hard, to bring the heart down to humble penitence, and the soul to holy meditation. The last thing that most people will do is to think. The noblest part of our nature is still the least exercised. Humbly to tremble before God, to confess sin before him, to believe him, to love him—this is spiritual worship! Because this is so hard, men say, "No, no, let me crawl on my knees around a shrine! Let me kneel down before a pyx, let me help to make a cope, or to manufacture some pretty piece of millinery for the priest to wear. Let me go every morning to the steeple house and come out in half an hour, and feel I have done my religion." That is quite easy, but the hard part of religion is the part of spiritual worship.

And yet again, to worship God spiritually men would have to part with their sins. There is no effect produced upon a man's conscience by his being sprinkled, or by his taking the sacraments, he can do all that and be as much a pleasure-lover, or a worshipper of Mammon, as he was before; but, to worship God spiritually, a man must give up his sins, must overcome his pride and lust, and his evil concupiscence must be cast out of him. Many persons might honestly declare, "I do not mind worshipping God if it consists in doing penance, or going without meat on Fridays; but if I am to give up my sins, love God, seek Christ, trust to him, I cannot attend to that." Furthermore, man, for the most part, somehow cannot get the idea of this spiritual worship into his brain, Oh the many times I have tried to preach spiritual worship here, and yet I am conscious that when I try at it I do not interest many of you, and some of you think, "if he would only give us more metaphors, more anecdotes, and so on;" I say I will do that, for I believe we should speak by parable, but sometimes I do not know how to clothe these spiritual things without making you look at the clothing rather than the spirit. It is not your worshipping God by words in hymns and prayers, or sitting in a certain place, or covering your faces at certain times that is acceptable to him; true worship lies in your heart paying reverence to him, your soul obeying him, and your inner nature coming into conformity to his own nature, by the work of his Spirit in your soul; and because men can scarcely get the idea of this till the Holy Spirit gives it to them, this is a reason why it is so rare, so exceedingly rare. There is one other reason, dear friends, why spiritual worship is unusual, and that is because man cannot traffic in spiritual religion. The priest is up at arms directly. "Oh," saith he, "spiritual! spiritual! why they will do without me one of these days. Spiritual—why, if you tell these people that every place is holy, and that there are no holy places; and that one believer is as much a priest as another, and that prayer is as acceptable at home, as it is in a particular spot, why," says he, "*there is an end of me.*" Yes, sir, there is an end of you, and the sooner the better for the world; for of all the curses that have ever fallen upon the human race the priesthood is the worst. Its claims are imposture, and its actions are full of deceit, In the age of witches and ghosts priesthood might be tolerated, but he who now sets himself up as a priest is as much a common nuisance as a fortune-teller. Nothing has been such a nightmare upon the intellect of man; nothing has sat like old Sindbad the Sailor upon the back of humanity, like the pretensions of priesthood. God forbid that Christianity should even for a moment endorse the lie! Christ has put it all down. Christ says,

“All ye are brethren,” and he says of the whole body of his elect, “Ye are a royal priesthood.” Concerning all the saints, Scripture declares, “Ye are God’s clergy,” for that is the Greek word in the passage—“Ye are God’s heritage.” We know no clergy and no laity; we know nothing whatever now of priesthood and of the common people, for ye are made priests and kings unto God to offer spiritual sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

III. Turning from that point, a third subject is this, WHY IS SUCH WORSHIP TO BE RENDERED? Why did not God ordain worship by windmills as in Thibet? Why has he not chosen to be worshipped by particular men in purple and fine linen, acting gracefully as in Roman and Anglican churches? Why not? He gives two reasons which ought to suffice. The first is, *he himself seeks spiritual worship*. It is his own wish that the worship should be spiritual, And in the second place, he is himself a spirit, and is to be spiritually worshipped. Whatever kind of worship the great Ruler desires he ought to receive, and it is impertinence on my part if I say to him, “No, not that, but this.” It is true I may say, “I am very sincere in all this, very earnest in it. It suits my taste. There is a beauty about it; it excites certain emotions which I think to be devotional.” What is all that but saying, “Great God, thou hast chosen such-and-such a way of being worshipped, but I will not render it to thee?” Is not that in effect saying, “I will not worship thee at all;” for must not worship, to be worship, be such as the person worshipped himself will accept? To invent our own forms of worship is to insult God; and every mass that is ever offered upon the Romish altar is an insult to heaven, and a blasphemy to God who is a Spirit. Every time any form of worship by procession, celebration, or ceremonial of man’s invention is offered to God, it is offered in defiance of this word of Christ, and cannot and will not be received; however earnest people may be they have violated the imperative canon of God’s Word; and in fighting for rubrics they have gone against the eternal rubric that God as a Spirit must be worshipped in spirit and in truth.

The second reason given is, that God is a Spirit. If God were material, it might be right to worship him with material substances; if God were like to ourselves, it might be well for us to give a sacrifice congenial to humanity; but being as he is, pure spirit, he must be worshipped in spirit. I like the remark made by Trapp in his commentary on this passage, when he says that perhaps the Savior is even here bringing down God to our comprehension; “for,” saith he, “God is above all notion, all name.” Certainly, this we know, that anything which associates him with the grossness of materialism is infinitely removed from the truth. Said Augustine, “When I am not asked what God is, I think I know, but when I try to answer that question, I find I know nothing.” If the Eternal were such an one as thou art, O man, he might be pleased with thy painted windows. But what a child’s toy must coloured glass be to God! I can sit and gaze upon a cathedral with all its magnificence of architecture, and think what a wonderful exhibition of human skill; but what must that be to God, who piles the heavens, who digs the foundation of the deep, who leads Arcturus with his sons? Why, it must be to him the veriest trifle, a mere heap of stones. I delight to hear the swell of organs, the harmony of sweet voices, the Gregorian chant, but what is this artistic sound to him more than sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal? As a sight, I admire the choristers and priests, and the whole show of a grand ceremonial; but do you believe that God is imposed upon by those frocks and gowns of white, and blue, and scarlet, and fine linen? It seems to me as if such a notion brings down God to the level of a silly woman who is fond of finery. The infinite God, who spreads out the heavens and scatters stars with both his hands, whom heaven and earth cannot contain, to whom space is but a speck, and time is as nothing, do you think that he dwelleth in temples made with hands, that is to say, of man’s building? And is he to be worshipped with your organs, and

your roodscreens, and your gaudy millinery? He laugheth at them, he treadeth on them as being less than nothing and vanity. Spiritual worship is what he regardeth, because he is a Spirit. My brethren, if you could get together a procession of worlds, if you could make the stars walk along the streets of some great new Jerusalem, dressed in their brightest array; if instead of the songs of a few boys or men you could catch the sonnets of eternal ages; if instead of a few men to officiate as priests you could enlist time, eternity, heaven and earth to be the priesthood, yet all this would be to him but as a company of grasshoppers, and he would take up the whole as a very little thing. But let me tell you that even God himself, great as he is, does not despise the tear that drops from a repentant eye, nor does he neglect the sigh that comes from a sinner's soul. He thinks more of your repentance than of your incense, and more of your prayers than of your priesthoods. He views with pleasure your love and your faith, for these are spiritual things in which he can take delight; but your architecture, your music and your fine arts, though they lavish their treasures at his feet, are less than nothing and vanity. Ye know not what spirit ye are of. If ye think to worship my God with all these inventions of man, ye dream like fools. I feel glowing within me the old iconoclastic spirit. Would God we had men now like Knox or Luther, who with holy indignation would pull in pieces those wicked mockeries of the Most High, against which our soul feels a hallowed indignation as we think of his loftiness, and of that poor paltry stuff with which men degrade his name.

IV. WHAT THEN? What is the practical drift of this? Why two things.

The first is, my dear brothers and sisters, I mean you who have learned to worship God in spirit and in truth, who have got above the beggarly elements of the outward, and can worship him in spirit and in truth, what then? Why, in the first place, let us be particularly jealous of anything which looks at all like going back to ceremonialism. As a matter of taste I have a great liking for noble architecture. Many an hour have I lingered in the ruins of some splendid abbey or our own majestic buildings still used for sacred worship. I have a great delight in a well-painted window. I cannot say that I like most Dissenting painted windows, because they look to me as if they were a sort of would be if you could. I cannot say I have any kind of liking for most of our Dissenting Gothic, for it seems to me such a paltry thing to build a front just like St. Paul's or Westminster Abbey, and then as if to cheat the Lord to make the back part shabby. I cannot say I care for that kind of thing. But a really splendid place of worship I admire, as a matter of taste. I like an organ very well, as a matter of musical taste. But, my brethren, I feel that these are times when we must stand out even against allowable things, lest going one step we should go another. I do pray you therefore if you have any influence anywhere always use it in favor of simplicity, and if you see at any time in the churches of which you are the members a tendency to creep on to something a little nearer, a little towards the way of Rome, cry "Halt!" Let us rather go back to the barns in which our fathers worshipped, or better still to the hill side, and to the green sward than go forward to anything like symbolism, which will tempt the soul away from spiritual worship. We ought ourselves to guard against falling into formalism by means of simplicity, for we may do it the one way as well as the other, by laying it down as a rule that a service must begin with prayer or begin with singing, that the preacher must preach at such a time in the service, that the service must commence, continue, and conclude in some fixed fashion; that seems to me to have a tendency to breed another form of ritualism inconsistent with worshipping God in spirit and in truth. I am afraid I have hardly grace enough to worship God by two or three hours together in silence as our Quaker friends do. I do enjoy a quarter of an hour's silence every now and then; to sit quite still seems to me to be an admirable way of getting into contact with God. Our service is so much words, words, words, that

I am almost afraid you get to think as much of words as other people do of banners, and flags, and so on. Now, to sit still, to get might away from words, if so your heart keeps to God, is better even than preaching and singing. Juan De Yaldes, a Catholic, but a good Protestant for all that, remarks that the vulgar in seeking to remember Christ by the crucifix do not exercise their mind but stop at the crucifix, and therefore that which was intended to be a help becomes a hindrance; so the learned get their bibles which should help them to think upon divine things, but being content with having read the letter of Scripture they often fail to reach the spiritual truth which it containeth, and so after all do not worship God. Remember that while we should be jealous of anything which would make it easy to be formal of worship which might be adopted, yet we may still after all have missed the main thing, the worshipping of God in spirit and in truth.

Let us make it a matter of heart-searching as to whether we ourselves have been in the habit of worshipping the Father in spirit and in truth. Dear friends, I am jealous of some of you that you do not do this. If the preacher happens to be away you do not feel in so good a frame; somebody else takes my place, and there are certain feeble folk among you who feel as if the sabbath had lost its enjoyment. But God is here, and you might worship God as much surely without me as with me; and though the instruction received from one man may not seem so edifying as that which may come from another, and possibly may not be so, yet still if your object be the worship of God, which should be the main object of our gathering, surely you should do that as well under the ministry of Mr. A. as Mr. B. I am afraid too that many of you are content with singing through the hymn; now all that singing which is not thought-singing is of no use; you may have very sweet voices but God does not regard your voice, he hears your heart, and if your heart does not sing you have not sung at all. When we stand up to pray it may be that the preacher's words may happen to be suitable to your case, but it is not prayer so far as you are concerned, though it may be as far as he is, unless you join in it. Recollect that if you do not put your hearts into the worship of God, you might for that matter as well be at home as here; you are better here than at home for other reasons, because you are in the way where good may come to you; but for worship's sake you might as well have been in bed as here. You who have no spiritual worship may even clog the devotions of those who have; an invisible savor of death unto death may be stealing from you, helping to pollute or to render dead the worship of those who truly adore God. At any rate, my dear hearers, if you have not with your whole hearts loved and worshipped God, repent over it, and pray the Holy Ghost to make you spiritual. Go to Christ's cross, and trust in him; then, and not till then, will you be capable of adoring the most High God in a style in which he can accept your worship. God grant that this may be impressed upon the hearts of all of us, that we may worship God in spirit and in truth.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—John 4:1-30.

Turning Back in the Day of Battle

A Sermon

(No. 696)

Delivered by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

“The children of Ephraim, being armed, and carrying bows, turned back in the day of battle.”—Psalm 78:9.

I DO NOT THINK that it has ever been clearly ascertained to what particular historical event Asaph here refers, but I do not find that any of the commentators mention a very obscure passage in the First Book of Chronicles, which I venture to suggest may give us the explanation. In the first Book of Chronicles, the seventh chapter and the twentieth verse, you read:—“And the sons of Ephraim, Shuthelah, and Bered his son, and Tabath his son, and Eladah, and Tabath his son, and Zabad his son, and Shuthelah his son, and Ezer, and Elead, whom the men of Gath that were born in that land slew, because they came down to take away their cattle. And Ephraim their father mourned many days, and his brethren came to comfort him.” This event appears to have occurred while the children of Israel were still in Egypt. It has been supposed by some that these sons of Ephraim made a raid upon the promised land, and attacked the men of Gath. Believing the land to be theirs by promise they went to take it before they had divine authority so to do. They made God’s decrees the rule of their life instead of God’s revealed will, and so they soon fell into trouble,—as those people always do who make that mistake,—and their father Ephraim mourned over them many days. But it appears to have been rather an attack made upon them by some men of Gath. The people seem some of them to have been of Egyptian origin, and they probably made an attack upon the cattle of the men of Ephraim. These young men defended their cattle for a time, but at last—if this be the event, which this Psalm refers to—it would appear they turned their backs and so fell slain. That may or may not be. Still there are other passages in history, which might serve to illustrate the text. You are aware that Joshua was of the tribe of Ephraim, and probably on account of this, the ark of God was first placed at Shiloh. On the occasion when Hophni and Phineas were slain, the children of Israel, we are told, fled. It appears to have been the peculiar duty of the men of Ephraim, in whose tribe Shiloh was, to guard the ark. It may be possible that they were set around the ark as a body-guard to it, but fled at the approach of the Philistines, or fell slain together with Hophni and Phineas on that terrible and disastrous day. If this is the event alluded to you will find the history of it in the fourth chapter of the First Book of Samuel. Perhaps, however, reference is made to the whole history of the tribe of Ephraim, that though they were well armed and were dexterous men in the use of the bow, yet on many occasions they turned their backs in the day of battle. Whether any of these explanations interpret the historical reference or not, the subject in itself will furnish us with a theme for meditation.

I. We will first consider for a little while WHAT THESE MEN DID.

They turned their backs. When the time for fighting came they ought to have shown their fronts. Like bold men they should have kept their face to the foe and their breast against the adversary, but they dishonorably turned their backs and fled. This, I am sorry to say, is not an unusual thing

amongst professing Christians. They turn back; they turn back in the day of battle. Some do this *at the first appearance of difficulty*. "There is a lion in the way," saith the slothful man, "I shall be slain in the streets." They hear that there is some trouble involved in Christian service, or that some persecution may be met with in the pursuit of truth, and straightway they look before they leap, as the world hath it, and turn back from the way which they supposed to be that of safety. Timorous and Mistrust come running down the hill crying, "The lions! the lions!" and thus may a pilgrim turn back towards the City of Destruction.

Others are somewhat braver. They bear the first brunt. When the skirmishers begin these are as bold as any; they can return blow for blow, and you bear them boast, as they buckle on their armor, at such a rate, that you would suppose, if you did not know that boasters are seldom good at fighting, that they must certainly be victorious. During the first thrust they stand like martyrs and behave like heroes, but very soon, when the armor gets a little battered, and the fine plume on their helmet a little stained, they turn back in the day of battle.

Some professors bear the fight a little longer. They are not to be laughed out of their religion; they can stand the jeers and jests of their old companions. When they find that they have got the cut direct in the society which once loved them so much they can put up with that, and they are very much complimented by themselves on having done it. "Cowards," say they, "are those who flee; but we shall never do this." But by and by the skirmishers have done their work, and it comes to a hand-to-hand fight; the struggle begins to be somewhat more arduous, and now shall we see what metal they are made of. The enemy gets hold of them, and

"That desperate tug their soul might feel
Through bars of brass and triple steel."

Then they find that they are being hugged in the wrong place; they are touched in a tender part, and so they also turn back in the day of battle!

And, alas! sad as it is to say it—firmly as we believe that every child of God is safe, yet is it true that many who profess to be so, after having fought so long that you would suppose the next thing would be for them to rest upon their laurels and receive their crown, just at the very last they fall and turn hack! We have seen grey-headed apostates as well as juvenile ones. There have been those who seemed to wear well for a time, but at last one crushing blow came which they could not bear, and they gave way before it! Oh, brethren, it is only those who persevere to the end that will be saved, and only those who have a true faith in Jesus Christ have a sure evidence of their election of God; these be they who shall be clothed with white raiment, and shall sit down upon his throne for ever. But, how many who bade fair to do this, after all turn back!

I may be describing—I hope I am not—some actual case here. Some of you may say as you turn the thought over in your minds,—

"My feet had almost gone;
My steps had well nigh slipped."

That young man over yonder was so much jeered at the other day by those with whom he works, that he felt it was very unkind, and he did think something about renouncing his religion altogether. And my other brother yonder, who has had so many losses, has lately had such a time as he never had before, and he thinks nobody else ever had; and he cries, "God has forsaken me." He cannot just now say, "Though he slay me yet will I trust in him;" but he thinks, "Surely I had better turn to the world; I had better leave my religion and give it up, for I am encompassed about with such a terrible conflict that I shall never win the victory!" Ah! brethren, these are often the trials that

God sends, and it is by these that he separates the chaff from the wheat, and lets us see who are true soldiers, and who are only the lacqueys who wear regimentals, but have not the soldier's heart pulsing beneath the scarlet. God grant us grace to be found at last men that turned *not* back in the day of battle.

If I take the history of the children of Ephraim, I should say that they turned their backs and *failed to defend the ark*. There are some who, when they are defending the truth, shun controversy. They are of such a timid disposition—a loving disposition they call it—that as soon as ever the war-trumpet sounds they find it to be their duty to attend to the baggage in the rear. They are very brave men indeed in that particular quarter of the conflict where it does not happen to rage; but there in the van, where the corpses are piled on heaps, and where the battle-axes drip with gore, they never will be found, because they have not the courage to fight and to conquer for Jesus. As far as they are concerned the ark of God may be taken by the Philistines, because they turn their backs.

These Ephraimites ought, too, as Joshua had set them the example, *to have conquered Canaan, and to have driven out the Canaanites still left*. Ah! my brethren, there are some of you whose sins still live, because you have turned your backs upon them, but not in the right sense, for you have turned your backs against contending with sin. There is that bad temper of yours—you have given up trying to curb it now. You say, “Well, you know many of God's children have bad tempers,” whereas you know that this is very wicked talking. You ought to slay that Agag. You have no business to tolerate a bad temper. You must never have any peace with that spiteful temper, or that hasty temper of yours; you must down with it, or else it will down with you, and if you do not overcome it, it will overcome you. Rest assured that you are guilty, and that you turn your back if you do not fight with it. So too with that worldliness of yours and that want of a prayerful spirit. If you say, “Well, I will be content to be as I am; I will not try after a high state of piety,” you turn your backs, my brethren. You ought to slay all these Canaanites, and you must in Christ's name do it, and not spare so much as one of them, but say, “they compass me about, like bees, yea, they compass me about, but in the name of the Lord will I destroy them.”

And then, when these people turned their backs, *Canaan was not won*. So it is with you. The Lord's kingdom is not yet fully extended, and just when you ought to be pushing far and wide the conquests of the cross, and be letting this great city of ours know that the King reigneth mighty to save, you turn back in the day of battle. There are some Christians here who are doing nothing. I should not say this, perhaps, if I were preaching on Sunday, for I thank God that I could not in my own heart say it of my own members; the most of them are doing, I believe, as much as lieth in them, or if not, I hope they very soon will be. But I am persuaded that there are many other Christians who are not doing what they should do, but are shrinking from practical service. They come in here, perhaps, on a Thursday night, and get a little bit, and they go elsewhere on other evenings of the week and pick up sweet morsels and crumbs. They like feeding very well, but they do not like work so much. There is a certain little company that come here on week-day evenings, into whose ears I should like to whisper, and ask them what they are doing for Christ. They are spiritual vagrants who go from one place to another, but have no settled home where they work for the Master, and they are of very little credit to anybody. We must all of us have a sphere of labor, and though I am glad to see all of you, as many as like to come, yet I pray you do have your own place for your own work, and do not be like the children of Ephraim who “turned back in the day of battle.”

II. Having thus observed what these men of Ephraim did, we come to look at the inopportune time WHEN THEY DID IT.

They turned back, and their doing so would not have mattered much had they done it in a day of feasting. They could always be spared then, but that was not when they did it. They always had their faces to the front when there was any feasting to be done. They turned back; when? On holidays, when the banners waved high and the silver trumpets sounded? No; they were in the front then! Exeter Hall! May meetings! How many people are in the front there and then? When there is something sweet to feed upon they do not think of turning back. But these people turned back on rather a different occasion; they turned back *in the day of battle*. They turned back, it seems then, just when they were to be tried. Ah! how much there is we do that will not stand trial! How much there is of godliness which is useful for anything excepting that which it is meant for! It is all in vain for me to say, if I have bought a water-proof coat, that it is good for everything except keeping the water out. Why, then it is good for nothing, and so there are some Christians who have got a religion that is good for every day except the day when it has to be tested, and then it is good for nothing. An anchor may be very pretty on shore, and it may be very showy as an ornament when it lies on the ship's deck or hangs from the side, but what is the good of it if it will not hold when the wind blows and the vessel needs to be held fast? So, alas! there is much of religion and of godliness, so called, that is no good when it comes to the day of trial. The soldier is truly proved to be a soldier when the war-trumpet sounds and the regiment must go up to the cannon's mouth. Then shall you know, when the bayonets begin to cross, who has the true soldier's blood in him; but ah! how many turn back when it really comes to the conflict, for then the day of trial is too much for them!

They turned back *at the only time when they were of any sort of use*. A man who has to fight is not of any particular use to his country, that I know of, except when there is fighting to be done. Like a man in any other trade, there is a season when he is wanted. Now, if the Christian soldier never fights, of what good is he at all? That is a very remarkable passage in one of the prophets, where the Lord compares his people to a vine, and then he says of them, in words of which I will give the sense, "If the vine bears fruit it is very valuable, but, if it bears no fruit, then it is good for nothing at all." An oak without fruit is valuable for its timber, and even thorns are useful, for you may make a hedge of them. Smaller plants may be used for some medicinal purposes, but the vine, if it bear no fruit, is absolutely good for nothing. "Will a man even make a peg of it, whereon to hang a vessel?" saith the prophet. No, it is of no service whatever. So is it with the Christian. If he be not thorough and true he is no good at all; you can make nothing of him whatever; he is, to use Christ's expressive words, "Neither fit for the land nor even for the dunghill, and men cast him out." Who would enlist a soldier that knew he would turn back? and who amongst us would like to be in his regiment? Take off his colors, play "The Rogue's March," and turn him out of the barracks! And this is what will come to some professors who turn back in the day of battle! Their regimentals will be torn off, and they will be excluded from the church of God because they turned back in the day of trial and at the time when they were needed.

They turned their backs, too, like fools, *in the day when victory was to be won*. The soldier wants to distinguish himself; he wants to rise out of the ranks; he wants to be promoted. He hardly expects an opportunity of doing this in time of peace; but the officer rises when in time of war he leads a successful charge. And so it is with the Christian soldier. I make no advance while I am not fighting. I cannot win if I am not warring. My only opportunity for conquering is when I am fighting.

If I run away when there is a chance of winning the crown, then I am like the ship that does not come out of harbour when there is a fair wind, or like the man who does not avail himself of the high tide to get his vessel over the bar at the harbour's mouth. I cannot win without fighting, and therefore I thank God when the trial comes, and count it a joy when I fall into manifold temptations, because now I may add to my faith one virtue after another, till my Christian character is all complete. To throw away the time of conflict is to throw away the crown. Oh simple heart! Oh silly heart! to be afraid of suffering for Jesus! You are, in fact, afraid of reigning with him, for you must do the one if you would do the other. You, young woman, who are so alarmed at a little laughing, recollect you cannot go to heaven without being laughed at sometimes in the circle in which you move, or the family in which you live. He that will live a godly life in Christ Jesus must suffer persecution. Since, then, this is the way to heaven, why do you turn from it? Be not like these children of Ephraim who turned back when there was a crown to be won.

They turned back, once more, *when turning back involved the most disastrous defeat*. The ark of God was taken. "Ichabod," the enemy cried, for the glory was departed from Israel, because the children of Ephraim turned back in the day of battle. And so, dear friends, unless God gives you preserving grace to stand fast to the end, do you not see that you are turning back to—what? *To perdition*. You do not turn back merely to the world. That is what it looks like, perhaps, to you, but you really turn back to hell. If, after having once put your hand to the plough, you look back, you are unworthy of the kingdom; but what are you worthy of? Why, those "reserved seats" in hell! Did you ever think of that? There are such, and let me quote a passage, which proves it. We are told in one place of darkness "reserved" for some who were "wandering stars, for whom is *reserved* the blackness of darkness for ever!" When *you* turn back you turn back to those reserved places where the darkness is more black and the pain more terrible. Oh! may God save you from ever turning back in the day of battle! This, then, is when they did it—they turned back in the day of battle.

III. But now let us notice, WHO THEY WERE THAT TURNED BACK.

They were "children of Ephraim," and they are described as "being armed and carrying bows," or bows throwing forth sharp arrows. *They were men of a noble parentage*. They were the *children of Ephraim*. Joshua was of that line, and he was the greatest of conquerors, who led the people into the promised land. And you professors, you profess to be descended from our Joshua,—Jesus the Conqueror, and will you turn back? Are you followers of the Savior who gave his back to the smiters, and his cheeks to them that plucked off the hair, and are you afraid or ashamed of anything? He gave his face to be spat upon, and will you hide your faces at the mention of his name, because fools choose to laugh at you? Followers of Joshua, and yet afraid? Followers of Jesus, and yet blush? God grant that we may never blush, except when we think that we ever blushed at the thought of his Son! Oh! thou dear, despised, and persecuted One, I see thee on thy way amidst the scoffers. One plucks thy beard; another pulls thy hair; a third casts his accursed spittle into thy face; another beats thee; another cries, "Let him be crucified." They mock thee with all forms of mockery. Taunt and jeer they heap upon thee. They fill thy mouth with vinegar, and give thee gall to drink. They pierce thy hands and thy feet, and yet thou goest on along thy way of kindness and of mercy! And I—what have I ever suffered compared with thee? And these thy people—what have any of these endured, or what can they endure, compared with all thy griefs? Thy martyrs follow thee. Up from their fiery stakes they mount to their thrones. Confessors follow thee; from dungeons and from racks their testimony sounds. And, shall we, upon whom the ends of the earth are come, in these

softer and gentler times, shall we turn back, and say we know not the Man? O God, forbid! but do thou keep us faithful unto thee, that we, the sons of Ephraim, may not turn back in the day of battle.

Then, again, *they were armed, and had proper weapons, weapons which they knew how to use, and good weapons for that period of warfare.* And as Christians, what weapons have we? Here is this “Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.” Here is a quiver, filled with innumerable arrows, and God has put into our hands the bow of prayer, by which we may shoot them, drawing that bow by the arm of faith against our innumerable foes. What weapons of holy warfare do you want better than those which this sacred armoury supplies? Read the last chapter of the Epistle to the Ephesians, and see how the apostle, with a triumphant glorying, takes you through God’s armoury, and bids you look at the various pieces of armor, and the various weapons that are provided for you. If you lose the battle, it is not for want of being armed, and if you desert from the ranks, it is not for the want of bows.

But what is more. Another translation seems to show that these Ephraimites were very *skillful in the use of the bow*, and yet they turned back. Oh! may God grant that none of us who have preached to others, and preached to others with fluency and zeal may ever have our own weapons turned against us. I may make a confession here now. I have read some of my own utterances and have trembled as I have read them, and afterwards I have wept over them, not wanting to alter them, not regretting them, but fearing and trembling lest I should have my own words used in judgment against me at the last great day, for there can be no more dreadful thing than for a man to have known and taught the Word to others, and then to hear the Master say,—just listen to it,—“Thou wicked servant! *Out of thine own mouth will I condemn thee!*” O God! Condemn me out of anybody’s mouth rather than out of my own. It will be a dreadful thing to have known how to use the bow, and yet not to win the victory one’s-self; to have been a sort of drill-sergeant to God’s people, showing them how to use the weapons, and then not to have fought the battle one’s-self! This will be a terrible thing! Some of you know how to use this Bible. You are acquainted with it, you have studied its doctrines, you know the points of divinity and theology, you are well read up in the teachings of God’s Word; you know how to use the bow. And some of you pray very sweetly at prayer-meeting. Ah! beloved, what I said about myself may well apply to you. Some of you are Sunday-school teachers and others tract distributors, and you all know how to use the bow. I hope I can say to you who sit here that I have, like Saul, taught you to use the bow. We have sought to teach you young men to use God’s Word both in prayer and in other exercises of your holy faith; but, beloved, if you turn back, the art, which you have learned, shall rise up in judgment against you to condemn you! If as professors taught the use of God’s Word you are marched out to fight, but have not courage enough for the conflict, and turn your backs and slink into inglorious ease or into vain-glorious self-righteousness, or into false glorious pleasure, oh! how terrible must be your ruin at the last! May you not be like the children of Ephraim, who, though skilled in the use of the bow, yet turned back in the day of battle! This, then, is who they were.

IV. And ask ye now—WHY DID THEY DO IT?

Why did they, indeed? We might well have been at a loss to tell, for they were armed and carried bows. What then was the reason? The Word of God tells us and gives us three reasons. You will find them in the verses following the text. “They kept not the covenant of God and refused to walk in his law, and forgot his works, and his wonders that he had showed them.”

“*They kept not the covenant.*” Oh! that great covenant, “ordered in all things and sure,” when you can fall back upon that how it strengthens you! When you can read in it eternal thoughts of

divine love to you, and can hear Jesus say, "I give unto my sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand." How it encourages you to go forward! You cannot be killed, you are invulnerable, you have been dipped in the covenant stream that makes you invulnerable from head to foot. Why, then, should you fear to face the foe? If you forget that covenant you will soon turn back, and so prove that you are not in it; but the remembrance of it gives strength to God's people to persevere, since they feel that God's purpose is that they shall persevere, and so win the victory. The covenant, however, not only secures safety, but it also provides all sorts of blessings. If a Christian always had his eye on the covenant storehouse he could never desert his God for the world. Will a man leave a treasury that is full of gold to go to a beggar's cottage for money? Will a man turn from the flowing stream that comes cool and fresh from Lebanon's melting snow to go and drink of some filthy stagnant pool? No, not he, and when a man knows the treasures of grace that are in Christ Jesus, and remembers that it pleased the Father that in him should all fullness dwell, and that he hath made him a covenant for the people, will such a man turn back? Assuredly not, but every promise of the covenant will enable him to face his foes and prevent his turning back in the day of battle. Perhaps, however, the covenant which we forget is the covenant we feel we made with Christ in the day when we said, "My beloved is mine, and I am his," when we give ourselves up in a full surrender, body, soul, and spirit, to God. Oh! let us never forget that covenant! Supposing we should lose our character for Christ's sake? Did we not give Christ our character to begin with? You are of no use in the ministry, my dear brother, if you are not quite willing to be called a fool, to be called a thief, or even to be called a devil! You will never be successful if you are afraid of being pelted. The true minister often finds his pulpit to be a place but little preferable to a pillory, and he is content to stand there, feeling that all the abuse and blasphemy which may come upon him are only the means by which the world recognises and proves its recognition of a God-sent man. Oh! to rest upon the covenant which is made in grace, and to hold fast the covenant which Christ has compelled us to make with him, resolved that even should he take all away, our joy, our comfort, and our ease, we will still stand to it, and still keep the covenant.

Another reason why they turned back was that "*they refused to walk in his law.*" When we get a proud heart we very soon get beaten, for with the face of a lion, but the heart of a deer, such an one is afraid of the world. If I am willing to do what God tells me, as he tells me, when he tells me, and because he tells me, I shall not turn back in the day of battle.

They also seem to have turned back *because they had bad memories.* "They forgot his works, and the wonders that he had showed them." My dear friends, we the members of this church have seen many of God's wonders, and have rejoiced in them, and if we were to forget these we should lack one means of comfort in our own darkness. Some of you have had very wonderful manifestations of the Lord's kindness, and if you forget all these I should not wonder if you should prove to be a mere professor and turn your back, for God's true people are like that Mary, whom all generations call "blessed," they treasure these things in their hearts. We ought to stir up our remembrances of God's loving-kindness, for if we do not it will soon be a powerful reason for our turning back in the day of battle. Oh! have we not fought in days gone by, and shall we now be afraid? Have we not slain old Giant Grim? Did we not fight with dragons and with lions? Have we not gone through the Valley of the Shadow of Death? Have we not had a conflict with Apollyon himself foot to foot, and shall Giant Despair or his wife Mrs. Diffidence make us afraid? No, in the name of God we will use the good old sword, the true Jerusalem blade that we wielded aforetime, and we shall yet

again be more than conquerors through him that loved us. Let us, then, not forget God's works in the days of yore, lest we fail to trust him in the days that are to come. This was why they turned back.

V. And now the last enquiry is—WHAT WAS THE RESULT OF THEIR TURNING BACK?

One result of their turning back was, *that their father mourned over them*. We are told, in the passage I quoted first, that "Ephraim their father mourned for them many days." What a lamentation it brings into the Christian church when a professor falls! There is one heart, which feels it with peculiar poignancy—the heart of him who thought he was the spiritual father of the person so falling. There are no griefs connected with our work like the grief of mourning over fallen professors, especially if these happen to be ministers, men who are armed and carry bows, for when they turn back, well accoutred and well skilled in war, it is heart breaking work indeed! I do not exaggerate, but I know I only speak the sober truth, when I say that if I could submit to any form of corporeal torture that I have ever heard of, I would be willing to bear it sooner than submit to the torture I have sometimes felt over members of this church, or what is worse, over young men educated in our College, or what is worse still, over ministers who have been for some time settled over their flocks. If at any time you desire to be malicious towards the man whom you look upon as your spiritual father; if you would send an arrow through his very liver and smite him with a dagger in the core of his heart, you have nothing to do but I to turn back in the day of battle and you have done it. It were better that you had never been born than that you should go back to the world. It were better that you should be taken out of this house a corpse than that you should live to disgrace the profession which you have espoused, especially those of you who stand in a prominent place. O God, keep us who witness before the multitude, keep us by thine eternal power, keep us as the apple of thine eye, hide us beneath the shadow of thy wings, or else we who are chief and foremost, though armed and carrying bows, shall yet turn back in the day of battle.

Another result, which you perhaps will think more important far, was that owing to their turning back *the enemy remained*. Owing to many Christians not doing what they ought to do in the day of battle, Romanism is still in this land, and infidelity is rife. If in the days of Elizabeth and Cranmer men had acted up to the light they then had, we should not be as we now are, a semi-Popish nation. Had Luther himself been faithful to some of the light to which he shut his eyes, he might have inaugurated a more perfect Reformation than that for which we are still devoutly grateful to God and for which we always cherish his memory. There was a want of thoroughness even in that day. And at the present moment, if some of our brethren were but faithful to their own convictions, they would not be bolstering up an alliance of the State with a depraved Church; they would not dare to perform some ceremonies which are atrociously bad, and many of us, if we acted according to our inward monitor, would not do many things which we are now doing. Oh! may God give us grace to smite the foe! What has sin to do in this world? Christ has bought the world with his blood, and oh! for grace to clear sin out of Christ's heritage! The earth is the Lord's, and the kingdoms thereof, the world and they that dwell therein; and if we were but faithful to God we should not turn back in the day of battle, and Rome and all our foes would be slain.

Then, again, if we did not turn our backs, *the country would be conquered for Christ*. I do not like the way in which some brethren say, that if we were more faithful half London would be saved. I say that I believe God's purpose is achieved, but still we are bound to speak of our sins according to their tendencies, and the tendency of our want of confidence in God, and our not boldly persevering, is to destroy souls. Paul talked once of destroying with meat him for whom Christ

died, that being the tendency to destroy such souls if they could be destroyed. So humanly speaking, the darkness of the world at present is owing to the unfaithfulness of the church, and if the church had been as true to Christ as she was in the first century, long ere this there would not have been a village without the gospel, nor a single empire in the world in which the truth had not been proclaimed. It is our turning back in the day of battle that leaves Canaan unconquered for our Lord.

But, worse than this, *the ark itself was actually taken*. My dear friends, those of you who are armed and carry bows, men of learning, men who understand the Scriptures, I do pray you, do not turn back just now, for just now seems to be a time when the ark of God will be taken. It can never really be so, but still we must mind that it be not the tendency of our actions. We are in great danger from what some people will not believe, but what is most certainly a fact, and that is the marvellous increase of Popery in this land. There are certain brethren who are always harping upon this one string, till we have grown sick of the theme, but, without at all endorsing their alarm, I believe there is quite enough for the most quiet and confident spirit to be alarmed at. The thing has become monstrous, and there is need to awaken the anxious care and the earnest efforts of God's church. You need not be long without good evidence of this. Every nerve is being strained by Rome to win England to itself, and, on the other hand, while we have less neology, and less of all sorts of scepticism throughout the whole country, I am afraid that we have more of it than we used to have inside the church itself. There are many doctrines that are now matters of question, which I never heard questioned ten years ago. I am not altogether sorry for this, but rather glad, because there are some doctrines which are not preached now, but which will be preached more in future in consequence of doubts being thrown upon them. But it is a very ominous sign of the times, that most of those truths which we have been accustomed to accept as being the received and orthodox faith of Christendom are now being questioned, and questioned too by men who are not to be despised, men who from their evident earnestness, from their deep knowledge, and from their close attention to the matter, deserve a hearing in the forum of common sense, even if they do not deserve it from spiritual men. We must all of us hold fast the truth now. If there is a man who has got a truth, let him draw his bow and shoot his arrows now, and not turn back in the day of battle. Now for your arrows! Now for your arrows! The more our foes shall conspire against Christ, the more do you make war against them. Give them double for their double; reward them as they reward you. Spare no arrows against Babylon. "Happy shall he be that taketh thy little ones and dasheth them against the stones." Happy shall he be who slays the little errors, who kills the minor falsehoods, who does battle against Popery in every shape and form, and against, infidelity in all its phases! If we do not come to the front now, the ark of God, as far as we are concerned, will be taken!

And then, worst of all, *we shall hear the Philistines shouting while God's church is weeping!* The Philistines are good hands at shouting. They shout rather loudly about nothing, but when they get a little they bark loudly enough then. If they see but one Christian turn back what rejoicing there is! They ring the bells and make great mirth over the fall of the very least among us, but if those of us who are armed and carry bows should turn back in the day of battle, oh "Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Askelon, lest the daughters of Philistia rejoice, lest the sons of the uncircumcised triumph!" God grant that we may never make mirth for hell. If Satan must have merriment may he find it anywhere rather than in us. Oh! may we stand at last, and, having done all, may we still stand.

To conclude, brethren. If we do not stand fast, *you know what will come of it*. Supposing the churches of which we are members do not stand fast, what will come of you and what of me? What

became of Shiloh? What became of Ephraim? Instead of the ark being any longer in the custody of Ephraim it was taken away from Shiloh, and God transferred the custody of it to Judah, and it rested upon Mount Zion under the government of King David. So, mark you, whenever a church becomes unfaithful, and turns back in the day of battle, God takes away from it the keeping of his ark and entrusts it to others. "I have looked upon a neighbor of thine," saith he, "who is better than thou," and so he takes the sword and gives it to David, and thus perhaps may he do with us. There are many churches that were once flourishing but now are deserted altogether. So it may be with us individually, and with the churches at large unless we are faithful to God.

Now, I have said nothing to the unconverted. My drift seemed to be to speak to professing believers. Some of you say you never went to this war, and therefore you will not turn back; you never made a profession. Ah! dear friends, it will be a very poor excuse at the last great day to say, "I never made a profession." Did you ever hear of a thief being brought up at the Mansion House before the Lord Mayor who said, when he was accused of being a thief, "Why, my Lord, I am not a very honest man; I never professed to be; I never professed that I would not pick people's pockets; I never professed that I would not steal a watch if I had the chance; I was regularly known as a thief; I never professed to be anything else, therefore you cannot blame me." If a man should make such a defense as that, I should think it very likely that the Lord Mayor would give him an extra six months, and I think it would serve him very well right. You smile at this, but the very same argument may be applied to you. "Well," you say, "you know I do not make any profession of religion;" that is to say, you do not make any pretense of serving and loving the God who made you, who gave you life, and has kept and preserved you in it; you do not make any profession of being washed in the precious blood of Christ; you do not make a profession of being on the road to hell. Well, may God save you from that excuse, and may he give you grace to look it in the face and say, "Well, I do not dare even to hope that I am saved; I know I am not." Then, my brother, if you are not saved, you are lost. I would like to stop while you turn that thought over, and when you have done so I would say, "The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."

May God's eternal mercy seek and save you, and, if it be his will, may he find you, and lead you to put your trust in Jesus Christ, and resting upon him, and looking to his cross, you shall not, as the children of Ephraim did, "turn back in the day of battle."

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalm 78.

Order and Argument in Prayer

A Sermon

(No. 700)

Delivered on Sunday Morning, July 15th, 1866, by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

“Oh that I knew where I might find him! that I might come even to his seat! I would order my cause before him, and fill my mouth with arguments.”—Job 23:3,4

In Job's uttermost extremity he cried after the Lord. The longing desire of an afflicted child of God is once more to see his Father's face. His first prayer is not, “Oh that I might be healed of the disease which now festers in every part of my body!” nor even, “Oh that I might see my children restored from the jaws of the grave, and my property once more brought from the hand of the spoiler!” but the first and uppermost cry is, “Oh that I knew where I might find HIM—who is my God! that I might come even to his seat!” God's children run home when the storm comes on. It is the heaven-born instinct of a gracious soul to seek shelter from all ills beneath the wings of Jehovah. “He that hath made his refuge God,” might serve as the title of a true believer. A hypocrite, when he feels that he has been afflicted by God, resents the infliction, and, like a slave, would run from the master who has scourged him; but not so the true heir of heaven, he kisses the hand which smote him, and seeks shelter from the rod in the bosom of that very God who frowned upon him. You will observe that the desire to commune with God is intensified by the failure of all other sources of consolation. When Job first saw his friends at a distance, he may have entertained a hope that their kindly counsel and compassionate tenderness would blunt the edge of his grief; but they had not long spoken before he cried out in bitterness, “Miserable comforters are ye all.” They put salt into his wounds, they heaped fuel upon the flame of his sorrow, they added the gall of their upbraidings to the wormwood of his griefs. In the sunshine of his smile they once had longed to sun themselves, and now they dare to cast shadows upon his reputation, most ungenerous and undeserved. Alas for a man when his wine-cup mocks him with vinegar, and his pillow pricks him with thorns! The patriarch turned away from his sorry friends and looked up to the celestial throne, just as a traveller turns from his empty skin bottle and betakes himself with all speed to the well. He bids farewell to earthborn hopes, and cries, “Oh that I knew where I might find my God!” My brethren, nothing teaches us so much the preciousness of the Creator as when we learn the emptiness of all besides. When you have been pierced through and through with the sentence, “Cursed is he that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm,” then will you suck unutterable sweetness from the divine assurance, “Blessed is he that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is.” Turning away with bitter scorn from earth's hives, where you found no honey, but many sharp stings, you will rejoice in him whose faithful word is sweeter than honey or the honeycomb.

It is further observable that though a good man hastens to God in his trouble, and runs with all the more speed because of the unkindness of his fellow men, yet sometimes the gracious soul is left without the comfortable presence of God. This is the worst of all griefs; the text is one of Job's deep groans, far deeper than any which came from him on account of the loss of his children and his property: “Oh that I knew where I might find HIM!” The worst of all losses is to lose the smile

of my God. He now had a foretaste of the bitterness of his Redeemer's cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" God's presence is always with his people in one sense, so far as secretly sustaining them is concerned, but his manifest presence they do not always enjoy. Like the spouse in the song, they seek their beloved by night upon their bed, they seek him but they find him not; and though they wake and roam through the city they may not discover him, and the question may be sadly asked again and again, "Saw ye him whom my soul loveth?" You may be beloved of God, and yet have no consciousness of that love in your soul. You may be as dear to his heart as Jesus Christ himself, and yet for a small moment he may forsake you, and in a little wrath he may hide himself from you. But, dear friends, at such times the desire of the believing soul gathers yet greater intensity from the fact of God's light being withheld. Instead of saying with proud lip, "Well, if he leaveth me I must do without him; if I cannot have his comfortable presence I must fight on as best may be," the soul saith, "No, it is my very life; I must have my God. I perish, I sink in deep mire where there is no standing, and nothing but the arm of God can deliver me." The gracious soul addresseth itself with a double zeal to find out God, and sends up its groans, its entreaties, its sobs and sighs to heaven more frequently and fervently. "Oh that I knew where I might find him!" Distance or labour are as nothing; if the soul only knew where to go she would soon overleap the distance. She makes no stipulation about mountains or rivers, but vows that if she knew where, she would come even to his seat. My soul in her hunger would break through stone walls, or scale the battlements of heaven to reach her God, and though there were seven hells between me and him, yet would I face the flame if I might reach him, nothing daunted if I had but the prospect of at last standing in his presence and feeling the delight of his love. That seems to me to be the state of mind in which Job pronounced the words before us.

But we cannot stop upon this point, for the object of this morning's discourse beckons us onward. It appears that Job's end, in desiring the presence of God, was that he might pray to him. He had prayed, but he wanted to pray as in God's presence. He desired to plead as before one whom he knew would hear and help him. He longed to state his own case before the seat of the impartial Judge, before the very face of the all-wise God; he would appeal from the lower courts, where his friends judged unrighteous judgment, to the Court of King's Bench—the High Court of heaven—there, saith he, "I would order my cause before him, and fill my mouth with arguments."

In this latter verse Job teaches us how he meant to plead and intercede with God. He does, as it were, reveal the secrets of his closet, and unveils the art of prayer. We are here admitted into the guild of suppliants; we are shown the art and mystery of pleading; we have here taught to us the blessed handicraft and science of prayer, and if we can be bound apprentice to Job this morning, for the next hour, and can have a lesson from Job's Master, we may acquire no little skill in interceding with God.

There are two things here set forth as necessary in prayer—*ordering of our cause, and filling our mouth with arguments*. We shall speak of those two things, and then if we have rightly learned the lesson, a blessed result will follow.

I. First, IT IS NEEDFUL THAT OUR SUIT BE ORDERED BEFORE GOD.

There is a vulgar notion that prayer is a very easy thing, a kind of common business that may be done anyhow, without care or effort. Some think that you have only to reach a book down and get through a certain number of very excellent words, and you have prayed and may put the book up again; others suppose that to use a book is superstitious, and that you ought rather to repeat extemporaneous sentences, sentences which come to your mind with a rush, like a herd of swine

or a pack of hounds, and that when you have uttered them with some little attention to what you have said, you have prayed. Now neither of these modes of prayer were adopted by ancient saints. They appear to have thought a great deal more seriously of prayer than many do now-a-days. It seems to have been a mighty business with them, a long-practised exercise, in which some of them attained great eminence, and were thereby singularly blest. They reaped great harvests in the field of prayer, and found the mercy seat to be a mine of untold treasures.

The ancient saints were wont, with Job, to order their cause before God; that is to say, as a petitioner coming into Court does not come there without thought to state his case on the spur of the moment, but enters into the audience chamber with his suit well prepared, having moreover learned how he ought to behave himself in the presence of the great One to whom he is appealing. It is well to approach the seat of the King of kings as much as possible with pre-meditation and preparation, knowing what we are about, where we are standing, and what it is which we desire to obtain. In times of peril and distress we may fly to God just as we are, as the dove enters the cleft of the rock, even though her plumes are ruffled; but in ordinary times we should not come with an unprepared spirit, even as a child comes not to his father in the morning till he has washed his face. See yonder priest; he has a sacrifice to offer, but he does not rush into the court of the priests and hack at the bullock with the first pole-axe upon which he can lay his hand, but when he rises he washes his feet at the brazen laver, he puts on his garments, and adorns himself with his priestly vestments; then he comes to the altar with his victim properly divided according to the law, and is careful to do according to the command, even to such a simple matter as the placing of the fat, and the liver, and the kidneys, and he taketh the blood in a bowl and poureth it in an appropriate place at the foot of the altar, not throwing it just as may occur to him, and kindles the fire not with common flame, but with the sacred fire from off the altar. Now this ritual is all superseded, but the truth which it taught remains the same; our spiritual sacrifices should be offered with holy carefulness. God forbid that our prayer should be a mere leaping out of one's bed and kneeling down, and saying anything that comes first to hand; on the contrary, may we wait upon the Lord with holy fear and sacred awe. See how David prayed when God had blessed him—he went in before the Lord. Understand that; he did not stand outside at a distance, but he went in before the Lord and he sat down—for sitting is not a bad posture for prayer, let who will speak against it—and sitting down quietly and calmly before the Lord he then began to pray, but not until first he had thought over the divine goodness, and so attained to the spirit of prayer. Then by the assistance of the Holy Ghost did he open his mouth. Oh that we oftener sought the Lord in this style! Abraham may serve us as a pattern; he rose up early—here was his willingness; he went three days journey—here was his zeal; he left his servants at the foot of the hill—here was his privacy; he carried the wood and the fire with him—here was his preparation; and lastly, he built the altar and laid the wood in order, and then took the knife—here was the devout carefulness of his worship. David puts it, “In the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up”; which I have frequently explained to you to mean that he marshalled his thoughts like men of war, or that he aimed his prayers like arrows. He did not take the arrow and put it on the bowstring and shoot, and shoot, and shoot anywhere; but after he had taken out the chosen shaft, and fitted it to the string, he took deliberate aim. He looked—looked well—at the white of the target; kept his eye fixed on it, directing his prayer, and then drew his bow with all his strength and let the arrow fly; and then, when the shaft had left his hand, what does he say? “I will look up.” He looked up to see where the arrow went, to see what effect it had; for he expected an answer to his prayers, and was not as many who scarcely

think of their prayers after they have uttered them. David knew that he had an engagement before him which required all his mental powers; he marshalled up his faculties and went about the work in a workmanlike manner, as one who believed in it and meant to succeed. We should plough carefully and pray carefully. The better the work the more attention it deserves. To be anxious in the shop and thoughtless in the closet is little less than blasphemy, for it is an insinuation that anything will do for God, but the world must have our best.

If any ask what order should be observed in prayer, I am not about to give you a scheme such as many have drawn out, in which adoration, confession, petition, intercession, and ascription are arranged in succession. I am not persuaded that any such order is of divine authority. It is to no mere mechanical order I have been referring, for our prayers will be equally acceptable, and possibly equally proper, in any form; for there are specimens of prayers, in all shapes, in the Old and New Testament. The true spiritual order of prayer seems to me to consist in something more than mere arrangement. It is most fitting for us first to feel that we are now doing something that is real; that we are about to address ourselves to God, whom we cannot see, but who is really present; whom we can neither touch nor hear, nor by our senses can apprehend, but who, nevertheless, is as truly with us as though we were speaking to a friend of flesh and blood like ourselves. Feeling the reality of God's presence, our mind will be led by divine grace into an humble state; we shall feel like Abraham, when he said, "I have taken upon myself to speak unto God, I that am but dust and ashes." Consequently we shall not deliver ourselves of our prayer as boys repeating their lessons, as a mere matter of rote, much less shall we speak as if we were rabbis instructing our pupils, or as I have heard some do, with the coarseness of a highwayman stopping a person on the road and demanding his purse of him; but we shall be humble yet bold petitioners, humbly importuning mercy through the Saviour's blood. We shall not have the reserve of a slave but the loving reverence of a child, yet not an impudent, impertinent child, but a teachable obedient child, honouring his Father, and therefore asking earnestly, but with deferential submission to his Father's will. When I feel that I am in the presence of God, and take my rightful position in that presence, the next thing I shall want to recognize will be that I have no right to what I am seeking, and cannot expect to obtain it except as a gift of grace, and I must recollect that God limits the channel through which he will give me mercy—he will give it to me through his dear Son. Let me put myself then under the patronage of the great Redeemer. Let me feel that now it is no longer I that speak but Christ that speaketh with me, and that while I plead, I plead his wounds, his life, his death, his blood, himself. This is truly getting into order.

The next thing is to consider what I am to ask for? It is most proper in prayer, to aim at great distinctness of supplication. There is much reason to complain of some public prayers, that those who offer them do not really ask God for anything. I must acknowledge I fear to having so prayed myself, and certainly to having heard many prayers of the kind, in which I did not feel that anything was sought for from God—a great deal of very excellent doctrinal and experimental matter uttered, but little real petitioning, and that little in a nebulous kind of state, chaotic and unformed. But it seems to me that prayer should be distinct, the asking for something definitely and distinctly because the mind has realized its distinct need of such a thing, and therefore must plead for it. It is well not to beat round the bush in prayer, but to come directly to the point. I like that prayer of Abraham's, "Oh that Ishmael might live before thee!" There is the name and the person prayed for, and the blessing desired, all put in a few words,—“Ishmael might live before thee!” Many persons would have used a roundabout expression of this kind, “Oh that our beloved offspring might be regarded

with the favour which thou bearest to those who," etc. Say "*Ishmael*," if you mean "Ishmael"; put it in plain words before the Lord. Some people cannot even pray for the minister without using such circular descriptives that you might think it were the parish beadle, or somebody whom it did not do to mention too particularly. Why not be distinct, and say what we mean as well as mean what we say? Ordering our cause would bring us to greater distinctness of mind. It is not necessary, my dear brethren, in the closet to ask for every supposable good thing; it is not necessary to rehearse the catalogue of every want that you may have, have had, can have, or shall have. Ask for what you now need, and, as a rule, keep to present need; ask for your daily bread—what you want now—ask for that. Ask for it plainly, as before God, who does not regard your fine expressions, and to whom your eloquence and oratory will be less than nothing and vanity. Thou art before the Lord; let thy words be few, but let thy heart be fervent.

You have not quite completed the ordering when you have asked for what you want through Jesus Christ. There should be a looking round the blessing which you desire, to see whether it is assuredly a fitting thing to ask; for some prayers would never be offered if men did but think. A little reflection would show to us that some things which we desire were better let alone. We may, moreover, have a motive at the bottom of our desire which is not Christ-like, a selfish motive, which forgets God's glory and caters only for our own case and comfort. Now although we may ask for things which are for our profit, yet still we must never let our profit interfere in any way with the glory of God. There must be mingled with acceptable prayer the holy salt of submission to the divine will. I like Luther's saying, "Lord, I *will* have my will of thee at this time." "What!" say you, "Like such an expression as that?" I do, because of the next clause, which was, "I will have my will, *for I know that my will is thy will*." That is well spoken, Luther; but without the last words it would have been wicked presumption. When we are sure that what we ask for is for God's glory, then, if we have power in prayer, we may say, "I will not let thee go except thou bless me": we may come to close dealings with God, and like Jacob with the angel we may even put it to the wrestle and seek to give the angel the fall sooner than be sent away without the benediction. But we must be quite clear, before we come to such terms as those, that what we are seeking is really for the Master's honour.

Put these three things together, the deep spirituality which recognises prayer as being real conversation with the invisible God—much distinctness which is the reality of prayer, asking for what we know we want—and withal much fervency, believing the thing to be necessary, and therefore resolving to obtain it if it can be had by prayer, and above all these complete submission, leaving it still with the Master's will;—commingle all these, and you have a clear idea of what it is to order your cause before the Lord.

Still prayer itself is an art which only the Holy Ghost can teach us. He is the giver of all prayer. Pray for prayer—pray till you can pray; pray to be helped to pray, and give not up praying because thou canst not pray, for it is when thou thinkest thou canst not pray that thou art most praying; and sometimes when thou hast no sort of comfort in thy supplications, it is then that thy heart all broken and cast down is really wrestling and truly prevailing with the Most High.

II. The second part of prayer is FILLING THE MOUTH WITH ARGUMENTS—not filling the mouth with words nor good phrases, nor pretty expressions, but filling the mouth with arguments are the knocks of the rapper by which the gate is opened.

Why are arguments to be used at all? is the first enquiry; the reply being, Certainly not because God is slow to give, not because we can change the divine purpose, not because God needeth to

be informed of any circumstance with regard to ourselves or of anything in connection with the mercy asked: the arguments to be used are for our own benefit, not for his. He requires for us to plead with him, and to bring forth our strong reasons, as Isaiah saith, because this will show that we feel the value of the mercy. When a man searches for arguments for a thing it is because he attaches importance to that which he is seeking. Again, our use of arguments teaches us the ground upon which we obtain the blessing. If a man should come with the argument of his own merit, he would never succeed; the successful argument is always founded upon grace, and hence the soul so pleading is made to understand intensely that it is by grace and by grace alone that a sinner obtaineth anything of the Lord. Besides, the use of arguments is intended to stir up our fervency. The man who uses one argument with God will get more force in using the next, and will use the next with still greater power, and the next with more force still. The best prayers I have ever heard in our prayer meetings have been those which have been fullest of argument. Sometimes my soul has been fairly melted down when I have listened to brethren who have come before God feeling the mercy to be really needed, and that they must have it, for they first pleaded with God to give it for this reason, and then for a second, and then for a third, and then for a fourth and a fifth, until they have awakened the fervency of the entire assembly. My brethren, there is no need for prayer at all as far as God is concerned, but what a need there is for it on our own account! If we were not constrained to pray, I question whether we could even live as Christians. If God's mercies came to us unasked, they would not be half so useful as they now are, when they have to be sought for; for now we get a double blessing, a blessing in the obtaining, and a blessing in the seeking. The very act of prayer is a blessing. To pray is as it were to bathe one's-self in a cool purling stream, and so to escape from the heats of earth's summer sun. To pray is to mount on eagle's wings above the clouds and get into the clear heaven where God dwelleth. To pray is to enter the treasure-house of God and to enrich one's-self out of an inexhaustible storehouse. To pray is to grasp heaven in one's arms, to embrace the Deity within one's soul, and to feel one's body made a temple of the Holy Ghost. Apart from the answer prayer is in itself a benediction. To pray, my brethren, is to cast off your burdens, it is to tear away your rags, it is to shake off your diseases, it is to be filled with spiritual vigour, it is to reach the highest point of Christian health. God give us to be much in the holy art of arguing with God in prayer.

The most interesting part of our subject remains; it is a very rapid summary and catalogue of a few of the arguments which have been used with great success with God. I cannot give you a full list; that would require a treatise such as Master John Owen might produce. It is well in prayer to plead with Jehovah *his attributes*. Abraham did so when he laid hold upon God's justice. Sodom was to be pleaded for, and Abraham begins, "Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city: wilt thou also destroy and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that are therein? that be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked: and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee: Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" Here the wrestling begins. It was a powerful argument by which the patriarch grasped the Lord's left hand, and arrested it just when the thunderbolt was about to fall. But there came a reply to it. It was intimated to him that this would not spare the city, and you notice how the good man, when sorely pressed, retreated by inches; and at last, when he could no longer lay hold upon justice, grasped God's right hand of mercy, and that gave him a wondrous hold when he asked that if there were but ten righteous there the city might be spared. So you and I may take hold at any time upon the justice, the mercy, the faithfulness, the wisdom, the long-suffering, the tenderness of God, and we

shall find every attribute of the Most High to be, as it were, a great battering-ram, with which we may open the gates of heaven.

Another mighty piece of ordinance in the battle of prayer is *God's promise*. When Jacob was on the other side of the brook Jabbok, and his brother Esau was coming with armed men, he pleaded with God not to suffer Esau to destroy the mother and the children, and as a master reason he pleaded, "And thou saidst, surely I will do thee good." Oh the force of that plea! He was holding God to his word: "Thou saidst." The attribute is a splendid horn of the altar to lay hold upon; but the promise, which has in it the attribute and something more, is yet a mightier holdfast. "Thou saidst." Remember how David put it. After Nathan had spoken the promise, David said at the close of his prayer, "Do as thou hast said." That is a legitimate argument with every honest man, and has *he* said, and shall he not do it? "Let God be true, and every man a liar." Shall not *he* be true? Shall *he* not keep his word? Shall not every word that cometh out of his lips stand fast and be fulfilled? Solomon, at the opening of the temple, used this same mighty plea. He pleads with God to remember the word which he had spoken to his father David, and to bless that place. When a man gives a promissory note his honour is engaged. He signs his hand, and he must discharge it when the due time comes, or else he loses credit. It shall never be said that God dishonours his bills. The credit of the Most High never was impeached, and never shall be. He is punctual to the moment; he never is before his time, but he never is behind it. You shall search this Book through, and you shall compare it with the experience of God's people, and the two tally from the first to the last; and many a hoary patriarch has said with Joshua in his old age, "Not one good thing hath failed of all that the Lord God hath promised: all hath come to pass." My brother, if you have a divine promise, you need not plead it with an "if" in it; you may plead with a certainty. If for the mercy which you are now asking, you have God's solemnly pledged word, there will scarce be any room for the caution about submission to his will. You know his will: that will is in the promise; plead it. Do not give him rest until he fulfil it. He meant to fulfil it, or else he would not have given it. God does not give his words merely to quiet our noise, and to keep us hopeful for awhile, with the intention of putting us off at last; but when he speaks, he speaks because he means to act.

A third argument to be used is that employed by Moses, *the great name of God*. How mightily did he argue with God on one occasion upon this ground! "What wilt thou do for thy great name? The Egyptians will say, Because the Lord could not bring them into the land, therefore he slew them in the wilderness." There are some occasions when the name of God is very closely tied up with the history of his people. Sometimes in reliance upon a divine promise, a believer will be led to take a certain course of action. Now, if the Lord should not be as good as his promise, not only is the believer deceived, but the wicked world looking on would say, "Aha! aha! Where is your God?" Take the case of our respected brother, Mr. Muller, of Bristol. These many years he has declared that God hears prayer, and firm in that conviction, he has gone on to build house after house for the maintenance of orphans. Now, I can very well conceive that, if he were driven to a point of want of means for the maintenance of those thousand or two thousand children, he might very well use the plea, "What wilt thou do for thy great name?" And you, in some severe trouble, when you have fairly received the promise, may say, "Lord, thou hast said, 'In six troubles I will be with thee, and in seven I will not forsake thee.' I have told my friends and neighbours that I put my trust in thee, and if thou do not deliver me now, where is thy name? Arise, O God, and do this thing, lest thy honour be cast into the dust." Coupled with this, we may employ the further argument of *the hard things said by the revilers*. It was well done of Hezekiah, when he took Rabshakeh's

letter and spread it before the Lord. Will that help him? It is full of blasphemy, will that help him? "Where are the gods of Arphad and Sepharvaim? Where are the gods of the cities which I have overthrown? Let not Hezekiah deceive you, saying that Jehovah will deliver you." Does that have any effect? Oh! yes, it was a blessed thing that Rabshakeh wrote that letter, for it provoked the Lord to help his people. Sometimes the child of God can rejoice when he sees his enemies get thoroughly out of temper and take to reviling. "Now," he says, "they have reviled the Lord himself; not me alone have they assailed, but the Most High himself. Now it is no longer the poor insignificant Hezekiah with his little band of soldiers, but it is Jehovah, the King of angels, who has come to fight against Rabshakeh. Now what wilt thou do, O boastful soldier of proud Sennacherib? Shalt not thou be utterly destroyed, since Jehovah himself has come into the fray? All the progress that is made by Popery, all the wrong things said by speculative atheists and so on, should be by Christians used as an argument with God, why he should help the gospel. Lord; see how they reproach the gospel of Jesus! Pluck thy right hand out of thy bosom! O God, they defy thee! Anti-christ thrusts itself into the place where thy Son once was honoured, and from the very pulpits where the gospel was once preached Popery is now declared. Arise, O God, wake up thy zeal, let thy sacred passions burn! Thine ancient foe again prevails. Behold the harlot of Babylon once more upon her scarlet-coloured beast rides forth in triumph! Come, Jehovah, come, Jehovah, and once again show what thy bare arm can do! This is a legitimate mode of pleading with God, for his great name's sake.

So also may we plead *the sorrows of his people*. This is frequently done. Jeremiah is the great master of this art. He says, "Her Nazarites were purer than snow, they were whiter than milk, they were more ruddy in body than rubies, their polishing was of sapphire: their visage is blacker than a coal." "The precious sons of Zion, comparable to fine gold, how are they esteemed as earthen pitchers, the work of the hands of the potter!" He talks of all their griefs and straitnesses in the siege. He calls upon the Lord to look upon his suffering Zion; and ere long his plaintive cries are heard. Nothing so eloquent with the father as his child's cry; yes, there is one thing more mighty still, and that is a moan,—when the child is so sick that it is past crying, and lies moaning with that kind of moan which indicates extreme suffering and intense weakness. Who can resist that moan? Ah! and when God's Israel shall be brought very low so that they can scarcely cry but only their moans are heard, then comes the Lord's time of deliverance, and he is sure to show that he loveth his people. Dear friends, whenever you also are brought into the same condition you may plead your moanings, and when you see a church brought very low you may use her griefs as an argument why God should return and save the remnant of his people.

Brethren, it is good to plead with God *the past*. Ah, you experienced people of God, you know how to do this. Here is David's specimen of it: "Thou *hast* been my help. Leave me not, neither forsake me." He pleads God's mercy to him from his youth up. He speaks of being cast upon his God from his very birth, and then he pleads, "Now also, when I am old and greyheaded, O God, forsake me not." Moses also, speaking with God, says, "Thou *didst* bring this people up out of Egypt." As if he would say, "Do not leave thy work unfinished; thou hast begun to build, complete it. Thou hast fought the first battle; Lord, end the campaign! Go on till thou gettest a complete victory." How often have we cried in our trouble, "Lord, thou didst deliver me in such and such a sharp trial, when it seemed as if no help were near; thou hast never forsaken me yet. I have set up my Ebenezer in thy name. If thou hadst intended to leave me why hast thou showed me such things? Hast thou brought thy servant to this place to put him to shame?" Brethren, we have to deal with

an unchanging God, who will do in the future what he has done in the past, because he never turns from his purpose, and cannot be thwarted in his design; the past thus becomes a very mighty means of winning blessings from him.

We may even use *our own unworthiness* as an argument with God. "Out of the eater comes forth meat, and out of the strong comes forth sweetness." David in one place pleads thus: "Lord, have mercy upon mine iniquity, for it is great." That is a very singular mode of reasoning; but being interpreted it means, "Lord, why shouldest thou go about doing little things? Thou art a great God, and here is a great sinner. Here is a fitness in me for the display of thy grace. The greatness of my sin makes me a platform for the greatness of thy mercy. Let the greatness of thy love be seen in me." Moses seems to have the same on his mind when he asks God to show his great power in sparing his sinful people. The power with which God restrains himself is great indeed. O brothers and sisters, there is such a thing as creeping down at the foot of the throne, crouching low and crying, "O God, break me not—I am a bruised reed. Oh! tread not on my little life, it is now but as the smoking flax. Wilt thou hunt me? Wilt thou come out, as David said, "after a dead dog, after a flea?" Wilt thou pursue me as a leaf that is blown in the tempest? Wilt thou watch me, as Job saith, as though I were a vast sea, or a great whale? Nay, but because I am so little, and because the greatness of thy mercy can be shown in one so insignificant and yet so vile, therefore, O God, have mercy upon me."

There was once an occasion when the very Godhead of Jehovah made a triumphant plea for the prophet Elijah. On that august occasion, when he had bidden his adversaries see whether their god could answer them by fire, you can little guess the excitement there must have been that day in the prophet's mind. With what stern sarcasm did he say, "Cry aloud: for he is a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awakened." And as they cut themselves with knives, and leaped upon the altar, oh the scorn with which that man of God must have looked down upon their impotent exertions, and their earnest but useless cries! But think of how his heart must have palpitated, if it had not been for the strength of his faith, when he repaired the altar of God that was broken down, and laid the wood in order, and killed the bullock. Hear him cry, "Pour water on it. You shall not suspect me of concealing fire; pour water on the victim." When they had done so, he bids them, "Do it a second time"; and they did it a second time; and then he says, "Do it a third time." And when it was all covered with water, soaked and saturated through, then he stands up and cries to God, "O God, let it be known that thou only art God." Here everything was put to the test. Jehovah's own existence was now put, as it were, at stake, before the eyes of men by this bold prophet. But how well the prophet was heard! Down came the fire and devoured not only the sacrifice, but even the wood, and the stones, and even the very water that was in the trenches, for Jehovah God had answered his servant's prayer. We sometimes may do the same, and say unto him, "Oh, by thy Deity, by thine existence, if indeed thou be God, now show thyself for the help of thy people!"

Lastly, the grand Christian argument is *the sufferings, the death, the merit, the intercession of Christ Jesus*. Brethren, I am afraid we do not understand what it is that we have at our command when we are allowed to plead with God for Christ's sake. I met with this thought the other day: it was somewhat new to me, but I believe it ought not to have been. When we ask God to hear us, pleading Christ's name, we usually mean, "O Lord, thy dear Son deserves this of thee; do this unto me because of what he merits." But if we knew it we might go in the city, "Sir, call at my office, and use my name, and say that they are to give you such a thing." I should go in and use your name,

and I should obtain my request as a matter of right and a matter of necessity. This is virtually what Jesus Christ says to us. "If you need anything of God, all that the Father has belongs to me; go and use my name." Suppose you should give a man your cheque-book signed with your own name and left blank, to be filled up as he chose; that would be very nearly what Jesus has done in these words, "If ye ask anything in my name, I will give it you." If I had a good name at the bottom of the cheque, I should be sure that I should get it cashed when I went to the banker with it; so when you have got Christ's name, to whom the very justice of God hath become a debtor, and whose merits have claims with the Most High, when you have Christ's name there is no need to speak with fear and trembling and bated breath. Oh, waver not and let not faith stagger! When thou pleadest the name of Christ thou pleadest that which shakes the gates of hell, and which the hosts of heaven obey, and God himself feels the sacred power of that divine plea.

Brethren, you would do better if you sometimes thought more in your prayers of Christ's griefs and groans. Bring before the Lord his wounds, tell the Lord of his cries, make the groans of Jesus cry again from Gethsemane, and his blood speak again from that frozen Calvary. Speak out and tell the Lord that with such griefs, and cries, and groans to plead, thou canst not take a denial: such arguments as these will speed you.

III. If the Holy Ghost shall teach us how to order our cause, and how to fill our mouth with arguments, the result shall be that **WE SHALL HAVE OUR MOUTH FILLED WITH PRAISES**. The man who has his mouth full of arguments in prayer shall soon have his mouth full of benedictions in answer to prayer. Dear friend, thou hast thy mouth full this morning, has thou? What of? Full of complaining? Pray the Lord to rinse thy mouth out of that black stuff, for it will little avail thee, and it will be bitter in thy bowels one of these days. Oh, have thy mouth full of prayer, full of it, full of arguments so that there is room for nothing else. Then come with this blessed mouthful, and you shall soon go away with whatsoever you have asked of God. Only delight thou thyself in him, and he will give thee the desire of thy heart.

It is said—I know not how truly—that the explanation of the text, "Open thy mouth wide and I will fill it," may be found in a very singular Oriental custom. It is said that not many years ago—I remember the circumstance being reported—the King of Persia ordered the chief of his nobility, who had done something or other which greatly gratified him, to open his mouth, and when he had done so he began to put into his mouth pearls, diamonds, rubies, and emeralds, till he had filled it as full as it could hold, and then he bade him go his way. This is said to have been occasionally done in Oriental Courts towards great favourites. Now certainly whether that be an explanation of the text or not it is an illustration of it. God says, "Open thy mouth with arguments," and then he will fill it with mercies priceless, gems unspeakably valuable. Would not a man open his mouth wide when he had to have it filled in such a style? Surely the most simple-minded among you would be wise enough for that. Oh! let us then open wide our mouth when we have to plead with God. Our needs are great, let our askings be great, and the supply shall be great too. You are not straitened in him; you are straitened in your own bowels. The Lord give you large mouths in prayer, great potency, not in the use of language, but in employing arguments.

What I have been speaking to the Christian is applicable in great measure to the unconverted man. God give thee to see the force of it, and to fly in humble prayer to the Lord Jesus Christ and to find eternal life in him.

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