



# **Spurgeon's Sermons Volume 14: 1868**

by

*Charles Spurgeon*

## About *Spurgeon's Sermons Volume 14: 1868* by Charles Spurgeon

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## Creation's Groans and the Saints' Sighs

A Sermon

(No. 788)

Delivered on Lord's-Day Morning, January 5TH, 1868, by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, .

“We know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the first-fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.”—Romans 8:22-23.

MY venerable friend, who, on the first Sabbath of the year, always sends me a text to preach from, has on this occasion selected one which it is very far from easy to handle. The more I have read it, the more certainly have I come to the conclusion that this is one of the things in Paul's epistles to which Peter referred when he said, “Wherein are some things hard to be understood.” However, dear friends, we have often found that the nuts which are hardest to crack have the sweetest kernels, and when the bone seems as if it could never be broken, the richest marrow has been found within. So it may by possibility be this morning; so it will be if the Spirit of God shall be our instructor, and fulfil his gracious promise to “lead us into all truth.”

The whole creation is fair and beautiful even in its present condition. I have no sort of sympathy with those who cannot enjoy the beauties of nature. Climbing the lofty Alps, or wandering through the charming valley, skimming the blue sea, or traversing the verdant forest, we have felt that this world, however desecrated by sin, was evidently built to be a temple of God, and the grandeur and the glory of it plainly declare that “the earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof.” Like the marvellous structures of Palmyra or Baalbek, in the far off east, the earth in ruins reveals a magnificence which betokens a royal founder, and an extraordinary purpose. Creation glows with a thousand beauties, even in its present fallen condition; yet clearly enough it is not as when it came from the Maker's hand—the slime of the serpent is on it all—this is not the world which God pronounced to be “very good.” We hear of tornadoes, of earthquakes, of tempests, of volcanoes, of avalanches, and of the sea which devoureth its thousands: there is sorrow on the sea, and there is misery on the land; and into the highest palaces as well as the poorest cottages, death, the insatiable, is shooting his arrows, while his quiver is still full to bursting with future woes. It is a sad, sad world. The curse has fallen on it since the fall, and thorns and thistles it bringeth forth, not from its soil alone, but from all that comes of it. Earth wears upon her brow, like Cain of old, the brand of transgression. Sad would it be to our thoughts if it were always to be so. If there were no future to this world as well as to ourselves, we might be glad to escape from it, counting it to be nothing better than a huge penal colony, from which it would be a thousand mercies for both body and soul to be emancipated. At this present time, the groaning and travailing which are general throughout creation, are deeply felt among the sons of men. The dreariest thing you can read is the newspaper. I heard of one who sat up at the end of last year to groan last year out; it was ill done, but in truth it was a year of groaning, and the present one opens amid turbulence and distress. We heard of abundant harvests, but we soon discovered that they were all a dream, and that there would be scant in the worker's cottage. And now, what with strifes between men and masters, which are

banishing trade from England, and what with political convulsions, which unhinge everything, the vessel of the state is drifting fast to the shallows. May God in mercy put his hand to the helm of the ship, and steer her safely. There is a general wail among nations and peoples. You can hear it in the streets of the city. The Lord reigneth, or we might lament right bitterly.

The apostle tells us that not only is there a groan from creation, but this is shared in by God's people. We shall notice in our text, first, *whereunto the saints have already attained*; secondly, *wherein we are deficient*; and thirdly, *what is the state of mind of the saints in regard to the whole of the matter*.

#### I. WHEREUNTO THE SAINTS HAVE ATTAINED.

We were once an undistinguished part of the creation, subject to the same curse as the rest of the world, "heirs of wrath, even as others." But distinguishing grace has made a difference where no difference naturally was; we are now no longer treated as criminals condemned, but as children and heirs of God. We have received a divine life, by which we are made partakers of the divine nature, having "escaped the corruption which is in the world through lust." The Spirit of God has come unto us so that our "bodies are the temples of the Holy Ghost." God dwelleth in us, and we are one with Christ. We have at this present moment in us certain priceless things which distinguish us as believers in Christ from all the rest of God's creatures. "*We have*," says the text, not "we hope and trust sometimes we have," nor yet "possibly we may have," but "we have, we know we have, we are sure we have." Believing in Jesus, we speak confidently, we have unspeakable blessings given to us by the Father of spirits. Not we *shall have*, but *we have*. True, many things are yet in the future, but even at this present moment, we have obtained an inheritance; we have already in our possession a heritage divine which is the beginning of our eternal portion. This is called "the first-fruits of the Spirit," by which I understand the first works of the Spirit in our souls. Brethren, we have repentance, that gem of the first water. We have faith, that priceless, precious jewel. We have hope, which sparkles, a hope most sure and steadfast. We have love, which sweetens all the rest. We have that work of the Spirit within our souls which always comes before admittance into glory. We are already made "new creatures in Christ Jesus," by the effectual working of the mighty power of God the Holy Ghost. This is called the first-fruit because *it comes first*. As the wave-sheaf was the first of the harvest, so the spiritual life which we have, and all the graces which adorn that life, are the first gifts, the first operations of the Spirit of God in our souls. We have this.

It is called "first-fruits," again, because *the first-fruits were always the pledge of the harvest*. As soon as the Israelite had plucked the first handful of ripe ears, they were to him so many proofs that the harvest was already come. He looked forward with glad anticipation to the time when the wain should creak beneath the sheaves, and when the harvest home should be shouted at the door of the barn. So, brethren, when God gives us "Faith, hope, charity—these three," when he gives us "whatsoever things are pure, lovely, and of good report," as the work of the Holy Spirit, these are to us the prognostics of the coming glory. If you have the Spirit of God in your soul, you may rejoice over it as the pledge and token of the fulness of bliss and perfection "which God hath prepared for them that love him."

It is called "first-fruits," again, because *these were always holy to the Lord*. The first ears of corn were offered to the Most High, and surely our new nature, with all its powers, must be regarded by us as a consecrated thing. The new life which God has given to us is not ours that we should ascribe its excellence to our own merit: the new nature is Christ's peculiarly; as it is Christ's image and Christ's creation, so it is for Christ's glory alone. That secret we must keep separate from all

earthly things; that treasure which he has committed to us we must watch both night and day against those profane intruders who would defile the consecrated ground. We would stand upon our watch-tower and cry aloud to the Strong for strength, that the adversary may be repelled, that the sacred castle of our heart may be for the habitation of Jesus, and Jesus alone. We have a sacred secret which belongs to Jesus, as the first-fruits belong to Jehovah.

Brethren, the work of the Spirit is called “first-fruits,” because *the first-fruits were not the harvest*. No Jew was ever content with the first-fruits. He was content with them for what they were, but the first-fruits enlarged his desires for the harvest. If he had taken the first-fruits home, and said, “I have all I want,” and had rested satisfied month after month, he would have given proof of madness, for the first-fruit does but whet the appetite—does but stir up the desire it never was meant to satisfy. So, when we get the first works of the Spirit of God, we are not to say, “I have attained, I am already perfect, there is nothing further for me to do, or to desire.” Nay, my brethren, all that the most advanced of God’s people know as yet, should but excite in them an insatiable thirst after more. My brother with great experience, my sister with enlarged acquaintance with Christ, ye have not yet known the harvest, you have only reaped the first handful of corn. Open your mouth wide, and God will fill it! Enlarge thine expectations—seek great things from the God of heaven—and he will give them to thee; but by no means fold thine arms in sloth, and sit down upon the bed of carnal security. Forget the steps thou hast already trodden, and reach forward towards that which is before, looking unto Jesus.

Even this first point of what the saint has attained will help us to understand why it is that he groans. Did I not say that we have not received the whole of our portion, and that what we have received is to the whole no more than one handful of wheat is to the whole harvest, a very gracious pledge, but nothing more? Therefore it is that we groan. Having received something, we desire more. Having reaped handfuls, we long for sheaves. For this very reason, that we are saved, we groan for something beyond. Did you hear that groan just now? It is a traveller lost in the deep snow on the mountain pass. No one has come to rescue him, and indeed he has fallen into a place from which escape is impossible. The snow is numbing his limbs, and his soul is breathed out with many a groan. Keep that groan in your ear, for I want you to hear another. The traveller has reached the hospice. He has been charitably received, he has been warmed at the fire, he has received abundant provision, he is warmly clothed. There is no fear of tempest, that grand old hospice has outstood many a thundering storm. The man is perfectly safe, and quite content, so far as that goes, and exceedingly grateful to think that he has been rescued; but yet I hear him groan because he has a wife and children down in yonder plain, and the snow is lying too deep for travelling, and the wind is howling, and the blinding snow flakes are falling so thickly that he cannot pursue his journey. Ask him whether he is happy and content. He says, “Yes, I am happy and grateful. I have been saved from the snow. I do not wish for anything more than I have here, I am perfectly satisfied, so far as this goes, but I long to look upon my household, and to be once more in my own sweet home, and until I reach it, I shall not cease to groan.” Now, the first groan which you heard was deep and dreadful, as though it were fetched from the abyss of hell; that is the groan of the ungodly man as he perishes, and leaves all his dear delights; but the second groan is so softened and sweetened, that it is rather the note of desire than of distress. Such is the groan of the believer, who, though rescued and brought into the hospice of divine mercy, is longing to see his Father’s face without a veil between, and to be united with the happy family on the other side the Jordan, where they rejoice for evermore. When the soldiers of Godfrey of Bouillon came in sight of Jerusalem,

it is said they shouted for joy at the sight of the holy city. For that very reason they began to groan. Ask ye why? It was because they longed to enter it. Having once looked upon the city of David, they longed to carry the holy city by storm, to overthrow the crescent, and place the cross in its place. He who has never seen the New Jerusalem, has never clapped his hands with holy ecstasy, he has never sighed with the unutterable longing which is expressed in words like these—

“O my sweet home, Jerusalem,  
 Would God I were in thee!  
 Would God my woes were at an end,  
 Thy joys that I might see!”

Take another picture to illustrate that the obtaining of something makes us groan after more. An exile, far away from his native country, has been long forgotten, but on a sudden a vessel brings him the pardon of his monarch, and presents from his friends who have called him to remembrance. As he turns over each of these love-tokens, and as he reads the words of his reconciled prince, he asks “When will the vessel sail to take me back to my native shore?” If the vessel tarries, he groans over the delay; and if the voyage be tedious, and adverse winds blow back the barque from the white cliffs of Albion, his thirst for his own sweet land compels him to groan. So it is with your children when they look forward to their holidays; they are not unhappy or dissatisfied with the school, but yet they long to be at home. Do not you recollect how, in your schoolboy days, you used to make a little almanack with a square for every day, and how you always crossed off the day as soon as ever it began, as though you would try and make the distance from your joy as short as possible? You groaned for it, not with the unhappy groan that marks one who is to perish, but with the groan of one who, having tasted of the sweets of home, is not content until again he shall be indulged with the fulness of them. So, you see, beloved, that because we have the “first-fruits of the Spirit,” for that very reason, if for no other, we cannot help but groan for that blissful period which is called “the adoption, to wit, the redemption of the body.”

II. Our second point rises before us—WHEREIN ARE BELIEVERS DEFICIENT? We are deficient in those things for which we groan and wait. And these appear to be four at least.

The first is, that *this body of ours is not delivered*. Brethren, as soon as a man believes in Christ, he is no longer under the curse of the law. As to his spirit, sin hath no more dominion over him, and the law hath no further claims against him. His soul is translated from death unto life, but the body, this poor flesh and blood, doth it not remain as before? Not in one sense, for the members of our body, which were instruments of unrighteousness, become by sanctification, the instruments of righteousness unto the glory of God; and the body which was once a workshop for Satan, becomes a temple for the Holy Ghost, wherein he dwells; but we are all perfectly aware that the grace of God makes no change in the body in other respects. It is just as subject to sickness as before, pain thrills quite as sharply through the heart of the saint as the sinner, and he who lives near to God, is no more likely to enjoy bodily health than he who lives at a distance from him. The greatest piety cannot preserve a man from growing old, and although in grace, he may be “like a young cedar, fresh and green,” yet the body will have its grey hairs, and the strong man will be brought to totter on the staff. The body is still subject to the evils which Paul mentions, when he says of it that it is subject to corruption, to dishonour, to weakness, and is still a natural body.

Nor is this little, for the body has a depressing effect upon the soul. A man may be full of faith and joy spiritually, but I will defy him under some forms of disease to feel as he would. The soul is like an eagle, to which the body acts as a chain, which prevents its mounting. Moreover, the

appetites of the body have a natural affinity to that which is sinful. The natural desires of the human frame are not in themselves sinful, but through the degeneracy of our nature, they very readily lead us into sin, and through the corruption which is in us, even the natural desires of the body become a very great source of temptation. The body is redeemed with the precious blood of Christ, it is redeemed by price, but it has not as yet been redeemed by power. It still lingers in the realm of bondage, and is not brought into the glorious liberty of the children of God. Now this is the cause of our groaning and mourning, for the soul is so married to the body that when it is itself delivered from condemnation, it sighs to think that its poor friend, the body, should still be under the yoke. If you were a free man, and had married a wife, a slave, you could not feel perfectly content, but the more you enjoyed the sweets of freedom yourself, the more would you pine that she should still be in slavery. So is it with the Spirit, it is free from corruption and death; but the poor body is still under the bondage of corruption, and therefore the soul groans until the body itself shall be set free. Will it ever be set free? O my beloved, do not ask the question. This is the Christian's brightest hope. Many believers make a mistake when they long to die and long for heaven. Those things may be desirable, but they are not the ultimatum of the saints. The saints in heaven are perfectly free from sin, and, so far as they are capable of it, they are perfectly happy; but a disembodied spirit never can be perfect until it is reunited to its body. God made man not pure spirit, but body and spirit, and the spirit alone will never be content until it sees its corporeal frame raised to its own condition of holiness and glory. Think not that our longings here below are not shared in by the saints in heaven. They do not groan, so far as any pain can be, but they long with greater intensity than you and I long, for the "adoption, to wit, the redemption of the body." People have said there is no faith in heaven, and no hope; they know not what they say—in heaven it is that faith and hope have their fullest swing and their brightest sphere, for glorified saints believe in God's promise, and hope for the resurrection of the body. The apostle tells us that "they without us cannot be made perfect;" that is, until our bodies are raised, theirs cannot be raised, until we get our adoption day, neither can they get theirs. The Spirit saith Come, and the bride saith Come—not the bride on earth only, but the bride in heaven saith the same, bidding the happy day speed on when the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For it is true, beloved, the bodies that have mouldered into dust will rise again, the fabric which has been destroyed by the worm shall start into a nobler being, and you and I, though the worm devour this body, shall in our flesh behold our God.

"These eyes shall see him in that day,  
The God that died for me;  
And all my rising bones shall say,  
'Lord, who is like to thee?'"

Thus we are sighing that our entire manhood, in its trinity of spirit, soul, and body, may be set free from the last vestige of the fall; we long to put off corruption, weakness, and dishonour, and to wrap ourselves in incorruption, in immortality, in glory, in the spiritual body which the Lord Jesus Christ will bestow upon all his people. You can understand in this sense why it is that we groan, for if this body really is still, though redeemed, a captive, and if it is one day to be completely free, and to rise to amazing glory, well may those who believe in this precious doctrine groan after it as they wait for it.

But, again, there is another point in which the saint is deficient as yet, namely, *in the manifestation of our adoption*. You observe the text speaks of waiting for the adoption; and another

text further back, explains what that means, waiting for the manifestation of the children of God. In this world, saints are God's children, but you cannot see that they are so, except by certain moral characteristics. That man is God's child, but though he is a prince of the blood royal, his garments are those of toil, the smock frock or the fustian jacket. Yonder woman is one of the daughters of the King, but see how pale she is, what furrows are upon her brow! Many of the daughters of pleasure are far more fair than she! How is this? The adoption is not manifested yet, the children are not yet openly declared. Among the Romans a man might adopt a child, and that child might be treated as his for a long time; but there was a second adoption in public, when the child was brought before the constituted authorities, and in the presence of spectators its ordinary garments which it had worn before were taken off, and the father who took it to be his child put on garments suitable to the condition of life in which it was to live. "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be." We have not yet the royal robes which become the princes of the blood; we are wearing in this flesh and blood just what we wore as the sons of Adam; but we know that when he shall appear who is the "first born among many brethren," we shall be like him; that is, God will dress us all as he dresses his eldest son—"We shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." Cannot you imagine that a child taken from the lowest ranks of society, who is adopted by a Roman senator, will be saying to himself, "I wish the day were come when I shall be publicly revealed as the child of my new father. Then, I shall leave off these plebeian garments, and be robed as becomes my senatorial rank." Happy in what he has received, for that very reason he groans to get the fulness of what is promised him. So it is with us to-day. We are waiting till we shall put on our proper garments, and shall be manifested as the children of God. Ye are young princes, and ye have not been crowned yet. Ye are young brides, and the marriage day is not come, and by the love your spouse bears you, you are led to long and to sigh for the marriage day. Your very happiness makes you groan; your joy, like a swollen spring, longs to leap up like some Iceland Geyser, climbing to the skies, and it heaves and groans within the bowels of your spirit for want of space and room by which to manifest itself to men.

There is a third thing in which we are deficient, namely, *liberty*, the glorious liberty of the children of God. The whole creation is said to be groaning for its share in that freedom. You and I are also groaning for it. Brethren, we are free! "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." But our liberty is incomplete. When Napoleon was on the island of St. Helena, he was watched by many guards, but after many complaints, he enjoyed comparative liberty, and walked alone. Yet, what liberty was it? Liberty to walk round the rock of St. Helena, nothing more. You and I are free, but what is our liberty? As to our spirits, we have liberty to soar into the third heaven, and sit in the heavenly places with Christ Jesus; but as for our bodies, we can only roam about this narrow cell of earth, and feel that it is not the place for us. Napoleon had been used to gilded halls, and all the pomp and glory of imperial state, and it was hard to be reduced to a handful of servants. Just so, we are kings—we are of the blood imperial; but we have not our proper state and becoming dignities—we have not our royalties here. We go to our lowly homes; we meet with our brethren and sisters here in their earth-built temples; and we are content, so far as these things go, still, how can kings be content till they mount their thrones? How can a heavenly one be content till he ascends to the heavenlies? How shall a celestial spirit be satisfied until it sees celestial things? How shall the heir of God be content till he rests on his Father's bosom, and is filled with all the fulness of God?

I wish you now to observe that we are linked with the creation. Adam in this world was in liberty, perfect liberty; nothing confined him; paradise was exactly fitted to be his seat. There were no wild beasts to rend him, no rough winds to cause him injury, no blighting heats to bring him harm; but in this present world everything is contrary to us. Evidently we are exotics here. Ungodly men prosper well enough in this world, they root themselves, and spread themselves like green bay trees: it is their native soil; but the Christian needs the hothouse of grace to keep himself alive at all—and out in the world he is like some strange foreign bird, native of a warm and sultry clime, that being let loose here under our wintry skies is ready to perish. Now, God will one day change our bodies and make them fit for our souls, and then he will change this world itself. I must not speculate, for I know nothing about it; but it is no speculation to say that we look for new heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness; and that there will come a time when the lion shall eat straw like an ox, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid. We expect to see this world that is now so full of sin as to be an Aceldama, a field of blood, turned into a paradise, a garden of God. We believe that the tabernacle of God will be among men, that he will dwell among them, and they shall see his face, and his name shall be in their foreheads. We expect to see the New Jerusalem descend out of heaven from God. In this very place, where sin has triumphed, we expect that grace will much more abound. Perhaps after those great fires of which Peter speaks when he says, “The heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat,” earth will be renewed in more than pristine loveliness. Perhaps since matter may not be annihilated, and probably cannot be, but will be as immortal as spirit, this very world will become the place of an eternal jubilee, from which perpetual hallelujahs shall go up to the throne of God. If such be the bright hope that cheers us, we may well groan for its realisation, crying out,

“O long-expected day, begin;

Dawn on these realms of woe and sin.”

I shall not enlarge further, except to say that *our glory* is not yet revealed, and that is another subject of sighing. “The glorious liberty” may be translated, “The liberty of glory.” Brethren, we are like warriors fighting for the victory; we share not as yet in the shout of them that triumph. Even up in heaven they have not their full reward. When a Roman general came home from the wars, he entered Rome by stealth, and slept at night, and tarried by day, perhaps for a week or two, among his friends. He went through the streets, and people whispered, “That is the general, the valiant one,” but he was not publicly acknowledged. But, on a certain set day, the gates were thrown wide open, and the general, victorious from the wars in Africa or Asia, with his snow-white horses bearing the trophies of his many battles, rode through the streets, which were strewn with roses, while the music sounded, and the multitudes, with glad acclaim, accompanied him to the Capitol. That was his triumphant entry. Those in heaven, have, as it were, stolen there. They are blessed, but they have not had their public entrance. They are waiting till their Lord shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the trump of the archangel, and the voice of God; then shall their bodies rise, then shall the world be judged; then shall the righteous be divided from the wicked; and then, upstreaming in marvellous procession, leading captivity captive for the last time, the Prince at their head, the whole of the blood-washed host, wearing their white robes, and bearing their palms of victory, shall march up to their crowns and to their thrones, to reign for ever and ever! After this consummation the believing heart is panting, groaning, and sighing.

Now, I think I hear somebody say, “you see these godly people who profess to be so happy and so safe, they still groan, and they are obliged to confess it.” Yes, that is quite true, and it would be

a great mercy for you if you knew how to groan in the same way. If you were half as happy as a groaning saint is, you might be content to groan on for ever. I showed you, just now, the difference between a groan and a groan. I will shew you yet again. Go into yonder house. Listen at that door on the left, there is a deep, hollow, awful groan. Go to the next house, and hear another groan. It seems to be, so far as we can judge, much more painful than the first, and has an anguish in it of the severest sort. How are we to judge between them? We will come again in a few days: as we are entering the first house we see weeping faces and flowing tears, a coffin, and a hearse. Ah, it was the groan of death! We will go into the next. Ah, what is this? Here is a smiling cherub, a father with a gladsome face: if you may venture to look at the mother, see how her face smiles for joy that a man is born into the world to cheer a happy and rejoicing family. There is all the difference between the groan of death and the groan of life. Now, the apostle sets the whole matter before us when he said, "The whole creation groaneth," and you know what comes after that, "travaileth." There is a result to come of it of the best kind. We are panting, longing after something greater, better, nobler, and it is coming. It is not the pain of death we feel, but the pain of life. We are thankful to have such a groaning.

The other night, just before Christmas, two men who were working very late, were groaning in two very different ways, one of them saying, "Ah, there's a poor Christmas day in store for me, my house is full of misery." He had been a drunkard, a spendthrift, and had not a penny to bless himself with, and his house had become a little hell; he was groaning at the thought of going home to such a scene of quarrelling and distress. Now, his fellow workman, who worked beside of him, as it was getting very late, wished himself at home, and therefore groaned. A shopmate asked, "What's the matter?" "Oh, I want to get home to my dear wife and children. I have such a happy house, I do not like to be out of it." The other might have said, "Ah, you pretend to be a happy man, and here you are groaning." "Yes," he could say, "and a blessed thing it would be for you if you had the same thing to groan after that I have." So the Christian has a good Father, a blessed, eternal home, and groans to get to it; but, ah! there is more joy even in the groan of a Christian after heaven, than in all the mirth and merriment, and dancing, and lewdness of the ungodly when their mirth is at its greatest height. We are like the dove that flutters, and is weary, but thank God, we have an ark to go to. We are like Israel in the wilderness, and are footsore, but blessed be God, we are on the way to Canaan. We are like Jacob looking at the wagons, and the more we look at the wagons, the more we long to see Joseph's face; but our groaning after Jesus is a blessed groan, for

"'Tis heaven on earth, 'tis heaven above,

To see his face, and taste his love."

III. Now I shall conclude with WHAT OUR STATE OF MIND IS.

A Christian's experience is like a rainbow, made up of drops of the griefs of earth, and beams of the bliss of heaven. It is a checkered scene, a garment of many colours. He is sometimes in the light and sometimes in the dark. The text says, "we groan." I have told you what that groan is, I need not explain it further. But it is added, "We groan *within ourselves*." It is not the hypocrite's groan, when he goes mourning everywhere, wanting to make people believe that he is a saint because he is wretched. We groan *within ourselves*. Our sighs are sacred things; these griefs and sighs are too hallowed for us to tell abroad in the streets. We keep our longings to our Lord, and to our Lord alone. We groan within ourselves. It appears from the text that this groaning is universal among the saints: there are no exceptions; to a greater or less extent we all feel it. He that is most endowed with worldly goods, and he who has the fewest; he that is blessed in health, and he who

is racked with sickness; we all have in our measure an earnest inward groaning towards the redemption of our body.

Then the apostle says we are “waiting,” by which I understand that we are not to be petulant, like Jonah or Elijah, when they said, “Let me die,” nor are we to sit still and look for the end of the day because we are tired of work; nor are we to become impatient, and wish to escape from our present pains and sufferings till the will of the Lord is done. We are to groan after perfection, but we are to wait patiently for it, knowing that what the Lord appoints is best. Waiting implies being ready. We are to stand at the door expecting the Beloved to open it and take us away to himself.

In the next verse we are described as hoping. We are saved by hope. The believer continues to hope for the time when death and sin shall no more annoy his body; when, as his soul has been purified, so shall his body be, and his prayer shall be heard, that the Lord would sanctify him wholly, body, soul, and spirit.

Now, beloved, the practical use to which I put this, I am afraid somewhat discursive, discourse of this morning is just this. Here is a test for us all. You may judge of a man by what he groans after. Some men groan after wealth, they worship Mammon. Some groan continually under the troubles of life; they are merely impatient—there is no virtue in that. Some men groan because of their great losses or sufferings; well, this may be nothing but a rebellious smarting under the rod, and if so, no blessing will come of it. But the man that yearns after more holiness, the man that sighs after God, the man that groans after perfection, the man that is discontented with his sinful self, the man that feels he cannot be easy till he is made like Christ, that is the man who is blessed indeed. May God help you, and help me, to groan all our days with that kind of groaning. I have said before, there is heaven in it, and though the word sounds like sorrow, there is a depth of joy concealed within,

“Lord, let me weep for nought but sin,  
And after none but thee;  
And then I would, O that I might,  
A constant weeper be.”

I do not know a more beautiful sight to be seen on earth than a man who has served his Lord many years, and who, having grown grey in service, feels that, in the order of nature, he must soon be called home. He is rejoicing in the first-fruits of the Spirit which he has obtained, but he is panting after the full harvest of the Spirit which is guaranteed to him. I think I see him sitting on a jutting crag by the edge of Jordan, listening to the harpers on the other side, and waiting till the pitcher shall be broken at the cistern, and the wheel at the fountain, and the spirit shall depart to God that made it. A wife waiting for her husband’s footsteps; a child waiting in the darkness of the night till its mother comes to give it the evening’s kiss, are portraits of our waiting. It is a pleasant and precious thing so to wait and so to hope.

I fear that some of you, seeing ye have never come and put your trust in Christ, will have to say, when your time comes to die, what Wolsey is said to have declared, with only one word of alteration:—

“O Cromwell, Cromwell!  
Had I but served my God with half the zeal  
I served *the world*, he would not, in mine age,  
Have left me naked to mine enemies.”

Oh, before those days fully come, quit the service of the master who never can reward you except with death! Cast your arms around the cross of Christ, and give up your heart to God, and then, come what may, I am persuaded that “Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come. Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” While you shall for awhile sigh for more of heaven, you shall soon come to the abodes of blessedness where sighing and sorrow shall flee away.

The Lord bless this assembly, for Christ’s sake. AMEN.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Romans 8.

## Good Earnests of Great Success

A Sermon

(No. 802)

Delivered on Lord's-Day Evening, January 12th, 1868, by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle,

“And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.”—Acts 6:7.

CERTAIN things preceded this prosperity—the counterpart of which I verily believe we have experienced among ourselves. There had been a little trouble in the church; some had thought one thing, some had thought another. There appeared to have been a just cause for complaint. The apostles, conciliatory in their temper, and earnest in their endeavour to keep the church together, as all true ministers should be, proposed the election of seven men who should distribute the contributions impartially among the poor. This was agreed to and acted upon by the entire assembly, and straightway the multitude of them that believed were of *one heart, and of one soul*. Well might great grace rest upon them all, for *they loved each other with a pure heart fervently*. Such unanimity, as a rule, I consider essential to church prosperity. If there be divisions amongst you, and one shall say, “I am for this,” and another, “I am for that,” how can you expect that the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of peace, should be present with you, and working among you? But when we are knit together in brotherly affection, the Lord commandeth the blessing, even life for evermore. Where brotherly love continues, and saints walk in holy unity, the witness they bear is powerful, and the increase they gather is palpable.

So I felt when I met with the brethren last Thursday night. The attendance at the church meeting was very numerous, and the unanimity that prevailed not only gratified me, but I must confess astounded me too. I think all of us who know anything of the history of churches, especially those of a democratic order, where we recognize the rights of every member, understand how easy it is for thoughts to diverge, for counsels to vary, and for excellent brethren conscientiously to disagree. A breach once made has a tendency to widen, and a rent, unless speedily repaired, may tear a church to pieces. But not so much as a single word was spoken, nor do I know that so much as a single thought crossed the breast of any one that evening, contrary to the general current of unanimous opinion with which you elected my brother to take upon himself the office proposed to assist me in my work. I felt as if I could only weep my joy. I knew of no words by which I could express it, because I looked not only at the unity itself, but regarding it as one of the qualifications for future prosperity, I thought within myself, “Surely God will bless us; surely he will bless us yet more abundantly than aforesaid.”

Moreover, my dear brethren and sisters in Christ, you know that some two or three years ago, Baptist churches of London scarcely knew each other. There might have been some secret love between them, but certainly there was no manifest display of it. But now for two years we have been associated together to the number of eighty or ninety; in fact, there are now nearly a hundred of the churches among whom union has been cemented. We have been enabled to do some service for the Master by this incorporation, but whatever service we may have done or may not have done,

this certainly has been the result of our meeting with each other, that the churches have come to feel themselves to be a whole, they keep rank, they walk together as a phalanx, desire to be faithful to Christ, and to bear each others' burdens. If anyone had told me, three or four years ago, that I should live to see, as I did last year, this house filled with the representatives of our Baptist churches met together to pray, I should have said, "If the Lord will open windows in heaven, may such a thing be!" But it has been, and by God's grace it will be yet again, and we shall clasp hands next Tuesday, and go on for another campaign against the common enemy, united as one man, first to Christ, and then to one another. May we not look upon this as a sign that God is intending to bless all our churches, to pour us out a blessing such as we shall not have room enough to receive? The Lord send prosperity. Amen, say we, amen from our hearts. And amen we hope all God's saints will say. May the blessing speedily be sent. Since we have the first matter I am hopeful.

But many will urge discouragements. "How is it likely," says one, "that we can hope to make an impression upon the present age? What means have we but the simple gospel of Jesus Christ?" We are certainly not among the wealthy, and we count not amongst us the great ones of the land. Our membership has always been, and still is, among the poor. How shall we expect to tell upon so huge a city as this, or to exert any influence upon so great a country; and, above all, how shall we make any impress upon the population of the whole globe? My dear brethren, we are weak, but we are not weaker than the first disciples of Christ. Neither were they learned, nor were they the wealthy of the earth: fishermen, the most of them, by no means men of cultivated ability—their tramp was that of a legion that went forth to conquer as well as to fight. Wherever they went and wielded the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, their enemies were put to confusion. It is true they died in the conflict. Some of them were slain by the sword, and others of them were rent in sunder by wild beasts; but in all these things they were more than conquerors through him that loved him. The primitive church did tell upon its age, and left a seed behind which the whole earth could not destroy; and so shall we by God's grace if we are equally set upon it, equally filled with the divine life, equally resolved by any means and by all means to spread abroad the savour of Jesus Christ's name: our weakness shall be our strength, for God shall make it to be the platform upon which the omnipotence of his grace shall be displayed. Keep together, brethren, keep close to Christ; close up your ranks. Heed the battle cry; hold fast the faith; quit yourselves like men in the conflict, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against you. Only may the King himself lead us onward to the fray, and we shall not fear the result.

Having thus looked at the precedents of that prosperity enjoyed by the church at Jerusalem, we shall, this evening, with deep earnestness, *ask your attention to the means by which a like prosperity may be procured for such churches as do not enjoy it now; secondly, we shall have a word or two upon the results of such prosperity; and then, thirdly, upon the alternative which is before every church, either to obtain such prosperity or else to mourn over grievous evils.*

#### I. WHAT ARE THE MEANS BY WHICH THIS PROSPERITY MAY BE PROCURED?

If we pant to see the Word of God increase, multitudes added to the disciples, and a great company of those who are least likely to be saved brought in, there must be an adequate instrumentality. Nothing can avail without *the operation of the Holy Spirit and the smile from heaven*. Paul planteth, Apollos watereth, and God giveth the increase. We must never begin our catalogue of outward means without referring to that blessed and mysterious potentate who abides in the church, and without whom nothing is good, nothing efficient, nothing successful.

"Come, Holy Spirit, heavenly dove,

With all thy quickening powers.”

This should be our first prayer whenever we attempt to serve God, for if not, we begin with pride, and can little hope to succeed by prowess. If we go the warfare at our own charges we must not marvel if we return stained with defeat. O Spirit of the living God, if it were not for thy power we could not make the attempt, but when we rely upon thee we go forward in confidence.

As for the ostensible means, would any church prosper, *there must be much plain preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ*. I have been struck lately in looking through the history of the Reformation, and of the times before the Reformation, with the remarkable downrightness of the testimony of the early preachers. If you look at the life of Farren you find him not preaching *about* the gospel, but preaching *the gospel*. So it was with John Calvin. He is looked upon now, of course, a theologian only, but he was really one of the greatest of gospel preachers. When Calvin opened the Book and took a text, you might be sure that he was about to preach “Through grace are ye saved, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.” And it was the same with Luther. Luther’s preaching was just the ringing of a big bell, the note of which was always, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and live! It is not of works, lest any man should boast, but by faith are ye saved, and by faith alone.” They spake this, and they spake it again; neither did they couch the doctrine in difficult words, but they laboured with all their might, so to speak, that the ploughman at the plough-tail should understand, and that the fish-wife should comprehend the truth. They did not aim at lofty periods and flowing eloquence; of rhetoric they had a most contemptible opinion, but they just dashed right on with this one truth, “He that believeth hath everlasting life;” “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” And, my brethren, if we are to see the church of God really restored to her pristine glory, we must have back this plain, simple, gospel-preaching. I do believe that the hiding of the cross beneath the veil of fine language and learned dissertation is half the cause of the spiritual destitution of our country. Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. He came to seek and to save that which was lost. I would sooner say these few words and then cease my testimony, than utter the most splendid oration that ever streamed from the lips of Demosthenes or of Cicero, but not have declared the gospel of Christ. We must keep to this. This must be the hammer that we bring down upon the anvil of the human heart again, and again, and again. God forbid that we should glory save in the cross of Jesus Christ our Lord! God forbid that we should know anything among men save Jesus Christ and him crucified! Look to him—not to the priest, not to your good works, not to your prayers, not to your church-goings or your chapel-goings, but to Christ Jesus exalted. Look to him in faith, and God is willing to forgive you, able to forgive you, to receive you, to make you his children, and for ever to glorify you with himself. We must have much more of this plain preaching, and not only plain preaching but plain teaching. Sunday School teachers, *you* must teach this same gospel. I know *you* do, but full many Sunday School teachers do not. A certain denomination has made the confession that after having had their schoolrooms crowded with children, they do not know that any of those children have afterwards come to be attendants at the places of worship. Miserable confession! Miserable teachers must they be! And have we not known teachers who believed in the doctrines of grace, and upstairs in the chapel they would have fought earnestly for them, but downstairs in the schoolroom they have twaddled to the little children in this kind of way—“Be good boys and girls; keep the Sabbath; do not buy sweets on a Sunday; mind your fathers and your mothers; be good, and you will go to heaven”!—which is not true, and is not the gospel; for the same gospel is for little children as for grown-up men—not “Do this and live,” which is after the law that was given by Moses, but “Believe

and live," which is according to the grace and truth that came by Jesus Christ. Teachers must inculcate the gospel if they are to see the salvation of their classes, the gospel, the whole gospel, and nothing but the gospel, for without this no great thing will be done.

And if we would see the gospel spread abroad in London as once it did in Geneva, as once, under John Knox, it did in Scotland, as it did in Luther's day throughout Germany, we *must have much holy living to back it all up*. After we have done the sermon, people say, "How about the people that attend there? What about the church members, are they upright? Are they such people as you can trust? What about their homes? Do they make good husbands? Are they good servants? Are they kind masters?" People will be sure to enquire this, and if the report of our character be bad, it is all over with our testimony. The doctor may advertise, but if the patients are not cured, he is not likely to establish himself as being well-skilled in his art; and the preacher may preach, but if his people do not love the gospel, they kick down with their feet what he builds up with his hands. As I told you this morning, the followers of the early Reformers were distinguished by the sanctity of their lives. When they were about to hunt out the Waldenses, the French king, who had some of them in his dominions, sent a priest to see what they were like, and he, honest man as he was, came back to the king, and said, "As far as I could find, they seem to be much better Christians than we are. I am afraid they are heretics, but really they are so chaste, so honest, so upright, and so truly pious, that, though I hate heresy—I hope your majesty does not suspect me on that account—yet I would that all Catholics were as good as they are." Now, this was what made the gospel victorious in those days—the stern integrity of those who received it, and thus it will be still. It cannot be otherwise. But if you become worldly, if you members of this church are just the same as other men who have no grace and make no pretensions, what is the good of your profession? You are liars before God unless you live above the common life of the rest of mankind. Oh! to get back to the simplicity of Christian manners! I cannot go into particulars, and ordain that this you shall do and that you shall avoid, but you know very well what the simplicity is, and were it carried out there is a great deal that is now practised amongst professors that would have at once to be given up. As the books were burned when Paul preached, so there would be a great deal to be burned in the Christian church if we had the Spirit of God in all his power to bring us back to the old simplicity of the Christian faith. And why not? If you put the sword into the scabbard, you cannot kill with it; you must pull it out, and let it glitter in all its naked sharpness. If you put the sword of the gospel into the scabbard of worldly conformity, as some of you do, you cannot expect that there will be any power in it. Draw it away from your worldly company, and your pernicious customs, and then shall you see that it still has power to kill and to make alive. There must, then, be holy living as well as plain testimony.

Yet all this would not suffice, if the church is to be multiplied and many are to be saved, unless we add *individual, personal exertion*. I am so full with one theme today, that if I plough in the same furrow this evening as I did this morning I cannot help it, for I am anxious to make that furrow very deep and broad. I believe that no Christian church can have prosperity if only a part of the members are active for the conversion of souls. Why, sirs, it had got to be a thought among Christians that we ministers were to do all the work of bringing souls to Christ, and that you were to sit still and enjoy the sermon, and perhaps criticise it and pull it to pieces. But this was not orthodox; according to Christ's law, every Christian is to be a minister in his own sphere; every member of the church is to be active in spreading the faith which was delivered not to the ministers, but delivered to the saints, to every one of them, that they might maintain it and spread it according to the gift

which the Spirit has given them. Shall I venture a parable? A certain band of men, like knights, had been exceedingly victorious in all their conflicts. They were men of valour and of indomitable courage; they had carried everything before them, and subdued province after province for their king. But on a sudden they said in the council-chamber, "We have at our head a most valiant warrior, one whose arm is stout enough to smite down fifty of his adversaries; would it not be better if, with a few such as he to go out to the fight, the mere men-at-arms, who make up the ordinary ranks, were to stop at home? We should be much more at our ease; our horses would not so often be covered with foam, nor our armour be bruised in returning from the fray, and no doubt great things would be done." Now, the foremost champions, with fear and trembling, undertook the task and went to the conflict, and they fought well, no one could doubt it; to the best of their ability they unhorsed their foe and they did great exploits. But still, from the very hour in which that scheme was planned and carried out, no city was taken, no province was conquered, and they met together and said, "How is this? Our former prestige is forgotten; our ranks are broken; our pennons are trailed in the dust; what is the cause of it?" When out spoke the champion, and said, "Of course it is so! How did you think that some twelve or fifteen of us could do the work of all the thousands? When you all went to the fight, and every man took his share, we dashed upon the foe like an avalanche, and crushed him beneath our tramp; but now that you stay at home and put us, but a handful, to do all the work, how can you expect that great things should be done?" So each man resolved to put on his helmet and his armour once again, and go to the battle, and so victory returned. I speak to you tonight, I, one of the rank of God's servants, and I say, my brethren, if we are to have the victory you must be every one of you in the fight. We must not spare a single one, neither man nor woman, old nor young, rich nor poor, but you must each fight for the Lord Jesus according to your ability, that his kingdom may come, and that his will may be done upon earth even as it is in heaven. We shall see great things when you all agree to this and put it in practice.

Combined with this *there must be much earnest prayer*. The prayer of faith! have we not held it in high esteem, have we not made some considerable proof of it in this place? We hope to have more faith—a great increase both of volume and power. Nothing is impossible to the man who knows how to overcome heaven by wrestling intercession. When we have seen one, two, or ten, or twenty penitents converted, and when we have sometimes been heartily thankful that a hundred have been added to this church in a month, ought we ever to have been satisfied? Should we not have felt that the prayer which was blessed to the conversion of a hundred, had it been more earnest, might, in the divine purpose, have been answered with the conversion of a thousand? Why not? I do not know why London should not be shaken from end to end with gospel truth before this day twelve months. You will say, "We have not enough ministers." But God can make them. I tell you, sirs, he can find ministers for his truth—ay, if he willed it, among the very offscourings of the earth. He can take the worst of men, the vilest of the vile, and change their hearts, and make them preach the truth if he pleases. We are not to look to what we have. The witness of the senses only confuses those who would walk by faith. See what he did for the church in the case of Saul of Tarsus. He just went up to the devil's army, and took out a ringleader, and said to him, "Now, sir, you preach the gospel which once you despised." And who preached it better? Why, I should not wonder if ere long in answer to prayer we see the Ritualistic clergy preaching the gospel! Who can tell—the Romish priests may yet do it, and repeat the tale of Luther and Melancthon. Were not Luther, and Melancthon, and Calvin, and their comrades, brought out of Papal darkness to show light unto the people? We have heard with our ears, why may we not see with our eyes, the mighty works of

God? The Lord can find his men where we know nothing about them. "Of these stones," said the Baptist, as he pointed to the banks of the Jordan, "Of these stones God can raise up children unto Abraham;" and as he could then, so he can now. Let us not despair. If we will but pray for it, our heavenly Father will deny his children nothing. Come, do but come, in simplicity of heart, and *according to your faith* shall it be done unto you.

Would you see the church greatly increase, and the kingdom come to the throne of the Son of David? then *we must all get more intense glowing spiritual life*. Do you understand me. There are two persons yonder. They are both alive, but one of them lies in bed. He wakes, but he says, with the sluggard—

"You have woke me too soon, I must slumber again,"

and when he gets up he gazes round with vacant wonder and strange bewilderment. He has no energy, he is listless, and we say of him, "What a lifeless creature he is!" "He is living, but with how little vitality! Now, you see another man. His sleep is short; he wakes soon; he is out to his business; takes down the shutters; he is standing behind the counter waiting upon this customer and that; he is all active; he is here, there, and everywhere, nothing is neglected; his eyes are wide open, his brain is active, his hands are busy, his limbs are all nimble. Well, what a different man that is! you are glad to get this second man to be your servant; he is worth ten times the wages of the first. There is life in them both, but what a difference there is between them! The one is eagerly living, the other is drawling out an insipid existence. And how many Christians there are of this sort! They wander in on a Sunday morning, sit down, get their hymn book, listen to the prayer without joining in it, hear the sermon, but might almost as well not have heard it, go home, get through the Sunday, go into business. With them there is never any secret prayer for the conversion of men, no trying to talk to children, or servants, or friends, about Christ, no zeal, no holy jealousy, no flaming love, no generosity, no consecrating of the substance to God's cause! This is too faithful a picture of a vast number of professing Christians. Would it were not so. On the other hand, we see another kind of man—one that is renewed in the spirit of his mind; though he has to be in the world, his main thoughts are how he can use the world to promote the glory of Christ. If he goes into business, he wants to make money that he may have wherewith to give bountifully for the spread of the gospel. If he meets with friends, he tries to thrust a word in edgeways for his Master; and whenever he gets an opportunity, he will speak, or write, but he will be aiming to do something for him who has bought him with his precious blood. Why, I could pick out, if it were right to mention names, some here who are all alive, till their bodies seem to be scarcely strong enough for the real vitality and energy of their souls. Oh! these are the cream of the church, the pick and choice of the flock, the men who are true men, and the women who are the true daughters of Jerusalem. The Lord multiply the number of such; yea, may he make every one of us to be such, for I am afraid that we all of us need quickening. I know I do myself. It is a long time since I preached a sermon that I was satisfied with. I scarcely recollect ever having done so. You do not know, for you cannot hear my groanings when I go home, Sunday after Sunday, and wish that I could learn to preach somehow or other; wish that I could discover the way to touch your hearts and your consciences, for I seem to myself to be just like the fire when it wants stirring; the coals have got black when I want them to flame forth. If I could but say in the pulpit what I feel in my study, or if I could but get out of my mouth what I have tried to get into my own soul, then I should preach indeed, and move your souls, I think. Yet perhaps God will use our weakness, and we may use it with ourselves, to stir us up to greater strength. You know the difference between slow motion and rapidity. If there

were a cannon ball rolled slowly down these aisles, it might not hurt anybody; it might be very large, very huge, but it might be so rolled along that you might not rise from your seats in fear. But if somebody would give me a rifle, and ever so small a ball, I reckon that if the ball flew along the Tabernacle, some of you might find it very difficult to stand in its way. It is the force that does the thing. So, it is not the great man who is loaded with learning that will achieve work for God; it is the man, who, however small his ability, is filled with force and fire, and who rushes forward in the energy which heaven has given him, that will accomplish the work—the man who has the most intense spiritual life, who has real vitality at its highest point of tension, and living, while he lives, with all the force of his nature for the glory of God. Put these three or four things together, and I think you have the means of prosperity.

II. Time flies, and therefore while I briefly hint, I must leave you largely to meditate, **THE RESULTS WHICH FLOW FROM THIS PROSPERITY—*souls are saved.***

John Owen said that if you had to preach to a whole nation for twelve months, in order to win one soul, it would be good wages, for a soul is so priceless, that to redeem it from going down to the pit would be worth the expenditure of all human strength. Richard Knill once said, that if there were only one unconverted person in the wilds of Siberia, and that God had ordained that every Christian in the world must go and talk to that one person before he would be converted, it would be an exceedingly little thing for us all to do, to go all the way there through the cold, and frost, and snow, to win that one soul. And he was right, and I may well stir you up to energy when the result will be the conversion of souls.

*The name of our Lord Jesus Christ is glorified.* Who would not wish to live, or even to die, for this?

“Let him be crowned with majesty,  
Who bowed his head in death,  
And let his praise be sounded high,  
By all things that have breath.”

If you have not forgotten what he suffered for you, dear friends, do you not wish to see him crowned with many crowns? He wore the crown of thorns for you, would not you wish to see the fruit of his soul's travail, the removal of the curse, the extension of his kingdom, the honour of his fame, the growing enthusiasm of his subjects—to make his excellency apparent, and his praise more and more famous to the very end of time? I know you would, and therefore I ask you to strive together with us in your prayers and your efforts, that the number of his disciples may be multiplied greatly.

Moreover, the result will be *to build up the church itself*, for there is no good done in the name of Jesus which does not redound to the satisfaction of his bride. If you do good to another, you are taking the shortest way to do good to your own soul. As those who promote sanitary measures for the benefit of the neighbourhood are thereby favouring the conditions of their own health, so the promulgation of saving knowledge throughout the world is augmenting the peace and the welfare of our own hearts, and of all who are already saved. Truly, I believe, that some persons are never comfortable in religion, because they are selfish in it. If they began to live with some object, their constant distress of mind would soon be rolled away. May God, therefore, stir us up, that the whole church may thereby be blessed.

III. But I must now come to the point with which I proposed to finish, namely, **THE ALTERNATIVE WHICH I THINK STANDS BEFORE THIS CHURCH AND EVERY OTHER CHURCH.**

Either we must get a high state of prosperity, or else we shall lack what is to be dreaded to the very uttermost. How many churches there are which have proved the truth of what I am now going to say! They have not tried to increase; they have not cared about conversions, and very soon there has been murmuring. One did not like the minister; another did not like the deacons; a third objected to a brother that was introduced; and all this, perhaps, was quietly hushed up because they were too respectable to come to an open disturbance, but still there it was—the fire in the embers; and thus it kept on till, by-and-by, they come to one of two things, either lethargy or else division. They settled down as quiet and sober religious people. The minister was not excited; not he! The people could not be stirred. The boast was that there were so many carriages on a Sunday outside the chapel. Some trusted in chariots and some in horses, but there was nothing about conversion. Why, I know churches whose baptismal pool would have been green by now if the water had been standing in it, so few have there been added to their number. And yet they are not at all dissatisfied. “No,” the good deacon says, “you know our pew-rents keep up very well; we have not a seat to let in the gallery!” “Ah!” and says the minister, “And while we have the most respectable people in the town come among us, we do not approve of these revivalists down the back street who are trying to catch those poor sinners; at least, if they want them, they may have them, for we do not want them.” That is the style in which some of these people talk. If they do not say it in words, they think it in their hearts. Well, and when a church does get into that dreadful state, it becomes noxious as a very dunghill. And when there is very little spiritual animation there soon comes to be the ferment of very great division. Somebody or other cannot bear this. Some young and fervent spirit speaks out about it, and the minister does not like it, the deacons do not like it, and they try to put him down. Then half-a-dozen more of the members think that he is right, and the life that is in the church wakes up. The trumpet is sounded, and there is a troop led off to establish a healthy organization somewhere else, and the old corpus is left to rot as it may, and to decay as many churches do. Now, were I a prophet, I might tell you what should come to pass in latter days; but speaking as a monitor, rather than as a seer, I should not wonder but I could almost tell what you will come to by-and-by. In my day may it never, never be. You will get to be very respectable over at the Tabernacle; after I die you will have an organ, I dare say, and you will get a fine parson to deliver the most polished discourses to you, and where you will then drift I can readily guess. The Lord have mercy upon you, and save you from it. This is the tendency, however, of every church, it matters not what it is. Where the most honest, simple, faithful preachers have been, the people have got to be too great for the gospel, and too proud to receive the truth in the love of it. May it never happen in our days, however, and if earnest prayer can prevent it, may it never happen so long as the world stands, but till Christ comes may you be an honest, truth-loving people, striving together for the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, and never departing from the earnest simplicity of the faith. But unless we keep up the earnest spirit amongst us, we shall very soon degenerate into the ordinary dead-alive Christianity, which is only half as good as nothing at all, because it gives men a name to live when they are dead.

The picture I have drawn may seem to you too highly-coloured, but I assure you that I have seen such things. I am not old, but I have lived long enough to see churches go in this way; ay, and churches too, that were once warm-hearted. I have seen young members who were once earnest

grow cold. I have seen old members who were once content to worship with the humble ones, get a little up in the world. Then “of course” they must go to *church!* I have seen congregations broken to pieces, and churches split up, and the bottom of it all has been because the vital godliness has been drained out of the system; the love of God has not remained in the heart, for when the rich man has the love of God in his heart, he delights to see the multitude gathered together; he is glad to do his part, and help in all he can. And the learned man, if the preaching does not always suit him, yet he is glad to think that the unlearned have a preacher whom they can understand. Whoever the man may be, or however great and famous, if he loves Christ he is satisfied with the simple truth. “Give me that,” says he, “and that is enough. I can get my fine thinking and my fine reading in the weekdays if I want it; but on the Sabbath let me hear of Jesus; let me hear the story of the cross; let me see sinners led to Calvary—it is all I want, and I am well content if I have this.”

Are there not many here tonight who are unconverted? They will wonder perhaps what I am making all this stir about. Let me address myself personally to you. O ye unconverted women, it *is about you* that we are concerned. And *you*, ye unconverted men, it *is about you* that we are anxious; we are seeking after you. Why, for our own sakes, if there were none to be saved, we might be content to hear far different doctrine from this. The doctrines of grace are sweet in our ears, and our souls would be well enough fed by them. But because we want to see you saved we have to talk with you, and attend to these practical matters since we want to see you brought to Christ. Now look at the text, and it may give you some comfort if you are willing to lay hold on Christ. Do you notice, it is said that “a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith”? Now, these priests were they that conspired to crucify Christ. They were once the bigoted enemies of the gospel, but they became obedient to the faith. Why should not you, then? I know the devil tells you that you have been too great a sinner. That cannot be. Perhaps he reminds you that you have been a scoffer, or have lived in immorality, or have been self-righteous, which is as heinous a sin as any other. Ah! well, but the blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanseth us from all sin. A young woman wrote to me the other day—I do not know who she is, but she said, “I cannot tell anybody, but I have done so-and-so, a dreadful sin indeed, if my mother knew it it would break her heart.” I do not know here, and therefore her mother will never know it from me, but she says, “Can I be saved?” Young woman, you can! She says that she is worse than Magdalene, for Magdalene did not know Christ when she was a sinner, but she did know the gospel, and yet sinned. Oh! well, if you are worse than Magdalene, Christ will be glorified in saving such a one as you are. Only come with all your sin about you, and throw yourself at his feet. Trust him! Trust him! Do him the honour to believe that he can save even such an abominable sinner as you have been. Though you have gone to the utmost extremity of human guilt, and looked over the gulf of endless misery, yet still believe him; trust him, and he will be as good as ever you can think him to be; for when you think your highest thoughts of him, he is higher than your highest thoughts, and can save even to the uttermost. The priests were obedient to the faith; why not you? They believed in Christ, saw the fold, entered in, and were saved; why should not you be like them? Did you notice how it is described? They were *obedient to the faith.*” Then it seems that the gospel is all summed up in that word “faith.” To be obedient to the faith; to believe that Jesus is the Son of God; to trust him because he has suffered in your stead; to believe that the divine justice is satisfied with the death of Christ, and to rely upon that satisfaction which Christ has rendered, that is to be saved, to be obedient to the faith. We sang at the Lord’s Table, this morning, that sweet verse which really is the quintessence of the gospel, and therefore I will repeat it to you, though you already know it so well:—

“Nothing in my hand I bring:  
 Simply to thy cross I cling;  
 Naked, come to thee for dress;  
 Helpless, look to thee for grace;  
 Foul, I to the fountain fly;  
 Wash me, Saviour, or I die.”

Yes, just as you are come and depend upon the blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved. And this is what the stir is all about, we cannot bear that you should drift down to destruction, we cannot bear that there should be cataracts of souls leaping down the eternal gulf. We cannot endure that Satan should gloat his malicious soul with the prey of tens of thousands of mankind. We cannot bear that Christ should stand neglected, that his cross should be despised, that his blood should be trampled on. O come to him! He will not reject you. Him that cometh unto him he will in no wise cast out. Breathe a silent prayer to him now. Cast your soul upon him, sink or swim.

“Venture on him, venture wholly,  
 Let no other trust intrude,  
 None but Jesus  
 Can do helpless sinners good.”

But he can do it. Rely on him, and eternal life is yours.

Brethren and sisters, as we are in the New Year now, and have only reached the second Sabbath in it, let us begin and sweep out of the house the old leaven of ease and self-indulgences and lukewarmness, and let it be our cry before we go to our beds tonight, that the Lord would make us to be real living Christians, make us flames of fire from this time forth truly to serve him who served us even to the death. You will never get to be too warm. I am persuaded you will not be too zealous. I only wish I could get into such a devout enthusiasm myself as that of the apostle Paul when constrained by the love of Christ, he said, “Whether we be beside ourselves, it is to God.” When we have done all, we are unprofitable servants. How much more unprofitable when we have done so little! The Lord quicken this church. The February meetings are coming on, when we shall be specially and earnestly seeking the ingathering of souls. Believers, you who are mighty with God in secret, pray for these February meetings, that the month may be a holy month to us, the best month we have ever had, that more may be gathered into the church than ever have been in our times. Make that a point of prayer, and prove God now whether he will not hear you, and you shall find he will to your soul’s comfort. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Acts 6 and 7:54-60.

## Apostolic Exhortation

A Sermon

(No. 804)

Delivered on Lord's-Day Morning, April 5th, 1868, by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, .

“Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.”—Acts 3:19.

AFTER the notable miracle of healing the lame man, when the wondering people clustered round about Peter and John, they were not at all at a loss for a subject upon which to address them. Those holy men were brimful of the gospel, and therefore they had but to run over spontaneously, speaking of that topic which laid nearest to their hearts. To the Christian minister it should never be difficult to speak of Christ; and in whatever position he may be placed, he should never have to ask himself, “What is an appropriate subject for this people?” for the gospel is always in season, always appropriate, and if it be but spoken from the heart, it will be sure to work its way. Turning to the assembled multitude, Peter began at once to preach to them the gospel without a single second's hesitation. Oh! blessed readiness of a soul on fire with the Spirit, Lord, grant it to us evermore. Observe how earnestly Peter turns aside their attention from himself and his brother John to the Lord Jesus Christ. “Why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk?” The object of the Christian minister should always be to withdraw attention from himself to his subject, so that it should not be said, “How well he spake!” but, “Upon what weighty matters he treated!” They are priests of Baal, who, with their gaudy dresses, and their pretensions to a mysterious power, would have you look to themselves as the channels of grace, as though by their priestcraft, if not by their holiness, they could work miracles; but they are true messengers of God who continually say, “Look not on us as though we could do anything: the whole power to bless you lies in Jesus Christ, and in the gospel of his salvation.”

It is noteworthy that Peter, in addressing this crowd, came at once to the very essence and bowels of his message. He did not beat the bush; he did not shoot his arrow far afield, but he hit the very centre of the target. He preached not merely the gospel of good news, but Christ, the person of Christ; Christ crucified—crucified by them, Christ risen, Christ glorified of his Father. Depend upon it, this is the very strength of the Christian ministry, when it is saturated with the name and person and glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. Take Christ away, and you ungospelise the gospel, you do but pour out husks such as swine do eat, while the precious kernel is removed, seeing you have taken away the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. If there was ever an occasion when a preacher of the gospel might have forgotten to speak of Christ, it was surely the occasion on which Peter spake so boldly of him. For, might it not have been said, “Talk not of Jesus; they have just now haled him to the death: the people are mad against him; preach the truth, but do not mention his name; deliver his doctrine, but withhold the mention of his person, for you will excite them to madness; you will put your own life in jeopardy; you will scarcely do good while they are so prejudiced, and you may do much mischief”? But, instead of this, let them rage as they would, Peter would tell them about Jesus Christ, and about nothing else but Jesus Christ. He knew this to be the power of

God unto salvation, and he would not flinch from it; so to them, even to them, he delivered the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, with a pungency as well as a simplicity scarcely to be rivalled. Notice how he puts it: “Ye” have slain him; “ye” have crucified him; “ye” have preferred a murderer. He is not afraid of being personal; he does not shirk the touching of men’s consciences; he rather thrusts his hand into their hearts and make them feel their sin; he labours to open a window into the darkness of their spirits, to let the light of the Holy Ghost shine into their soul. Even thus, my brethren, when we preach the gospel, must we do: affectionately but graciously must we deal with men. Far hence be all trimming and mincing of matters. Accursed let him be that takes away from the gospel of Jesus Christ that he may win popular applause, or who bates his breath and smoothes his tongue that he may please the unholy throng. Such a man may have for a moment the approbation of fools, but, as the Lord his God liveth, he shall be set as a target for the arrows of vengeance in the day when the Lord cometh to judge the nations. Peter, then, boldly and earnestly preached the gospel—preached the Christ of the gospel—preached it personally and directly at the crowd who were gathered around him.

Nor did Peter fail, when he had enunciated the gospel, to make the personal application by prescribing its peculiar commands. Grown up among us is a school of men who say that they rightly preach the gospel to sinners when they merely deliver statements of what the gospel is, and of the result of dying unsaved, but they grow furious and talk of unsoundness if any venture to say to the sinner, “Believe,” or “Repent.” To this school Peter did not belong—into their secret he had never come, and with their assembly, were he alive now, he would not be joined. For, having first told his hearers of Christ, of his life and death and resurrection, he then proceeds to plunge the sword, as it were, up to the very hilt in their consciences by saying, “Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out.” There, I say, in that promiscuous crowd, gathered together by curiosity, attracted by the miracle which he had wrought, Peter felt no hesitation, and asked no question; he preached the same gospel as he would have preached to us today if he were here, and preached it in the most fervent and earnest style, preached the angles and the corners of it, and then preached the practical part of it, addressing himself with heart, and soul, and energy, to every one in that crowd, and saying, “Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out.”

Now there are four remarks which will make up the discourse of this morning, when they are enlarged.

I. And the first is this, that **THE APOSTLE BADE MEN REPENT AND BE CONVERTED.** Of this our text is proof enough without our going afield for other instances. Repent signifies, in its literal meaning, to change one’s mind. It has been translated, “after-wit,” or “after-wisdom;” it is the man’s finding out that he was wrong, and rectifying his judgment. But although that be the meaning of the root, the word has come in scriptural use to mean a great deal more. Perhaps there is no better definition of repentance than that which is given in our little children’s hymnbook—

“Repentance is to leave  
The sins we loved before,  
And show that we in earnest grieve,  
By doing so no more.”

Repentance is a discovery of the evil of sin, a mourning that we have committed it, a resolution to forsake it. It is, in fact, a change of mind of a very deep and practical character, which makes the man love what once he hated, and hate what once he loved. Conversion, if translated, means a

turning round, a turning from, and a turning to—a turning from sin, a turning to holiness—a turning from carelessness to thought, from the world to heaven, from self to Jesus—a complete turning. The word here used, though translated in the English, “Repent and be converted,” is not so in the Greek; it is really, “Repent and convert,” or, rather, “Repent and turn.” It is an active verb, just as the other was. “Repent and turn.” When the demoniac had the devils cast out of him—I may compare that to repentance; but when he put on his garments, and was no longer naked and filthy, but was said to be clothed and in his right mind, I may compare that to conversion. When the prodigal was feeding his swine, and on a sudden began to consider and to come to himself, that was repentance. When he set out and left the far country, and went to his father’s house, that was conversion. Repentance is a part of conversion. It is, perhaps, I may say, the gate or door of it. It is that Jordan through which we pass when we turn from the desert of sin to seek the Canaan of conversion. Regeneration is the implanting of a new nature, and one of the earliest signs of that is, a faith in Christ, and a repentance of sin, and a consequent conversion from that which is evil to that which is good.

The apostle Peter, addressing the crowd, said to them, “Change your minds; be sorry for what you have done; forsake your old ways; be turned; become new men.” That was his message as I have now put it into other words.

Now, brethren, it has been said, and said most truly, that repentance and conversion are the work of the Holy Spirit of God. You do not need that I should stop to prove that doctrine. We have preached it to you a thousand times, and we are prepared to prove that if anything be taught in Scripture, that is. There never was any genuine repentance in this world which was not the work of the Holy Spirit. For this purpose our Lord Jesus has gone on high: “He is exalted on high to give repentance and remission of sins.” All true conversion is the work of the Holy Ghost. You may rightly pray in the words of the prophet, “Turn thou us, and we shall be turned;” for until God turn us, turn we never shall; and unless he convert us, our conversion is but a mistake. Hear it as a gospel summons—

“True belief and true repentance,  
Every grace which brings us nigh;  
Without money  
Come to Jesus Christ and buy.”

“And yet,” say you, “and yet the apostle Peter actually says to us, ‘Repent, and be converted!’ That is, you tell us with one breath that these things are the gift of the Holy Spirit, and then with the next breath you read the text, ‘Repent, and be converted.’” Ay, I do, I do, and thank God I have learned to do so. But you will say, “How reconcile you these two things?” I answer, it is no part of my commission to reconcile my Master’s words: my commission is to preach the truth as I find it—to deliver it to you fresh from his hand. I not only *believe* these things to be agreeable to one another, but I think I see wherein they do agree, but I utterly despair of making the most of what is written in Scripture, and to accept it all, whether we can see the agreement of the two sets of truths or no—to accept them both because they are both revealed. With that hand I hold as firmly as any man living, that repentance and conversion are the work of the Holy Spirit, but I would sooner lose this hand, and both, than I would give up preaching that it is the duty of men to repent and to believe, and the duty of Christian ministers to say to them, “Repent and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out.” If men will not receive truth till they understand it, there are many things which they never will receive. Ay, there are many facts, common facts in nature, which

nobody would deny but a fool, which yet must be denied if we will not believe them till we understand them. There is a fish fresh taken from the sea: you take it to the cook to serve it on the table. You eat salt with it, do you? What for? You will have it dried and salted, but what for? Did not it always live in the salt sea? Why then is it not salt? It is as fresh as though it had lived in the purling brooks of the upland country—not a particle of salt about it—yet it has lived wholly in the salt sea! Do you understand that? No, you cannot. But there it is, a fresh fish in a salt sea! And yonder are an ox and a sheep, and they are eating in the same meadow, feeding precisely on the same food, and the grass in one case turns to beef, in the other case to mutton, and on one animal there is hair and on the other wool. How is that? Do you understand it? So there may be two great truths in Scripture, which are both truths, and yet all the wise men in the world might be confounded to bring those two truths together. I do not understand, I must confess, why Moses was told to cut down a tree and put it in the bitter waters of Marah; I cannot see any connection between a tree and the water, so that the tree should make it sweet, but yet I do believe that when Moses put the tree into the water the bitterness of Marah departed, and the stream was sweet. I do not know why it is that Elisha, when he went to Jericho, and found the water nauseous, said “Bring me a cruse of salt;” I do not know why his putting the salt into the stream should make it sweet—it looks to me as if it would operate the other way; but I believe the miracle, namely, that the salt was put in, and that it was sweetened. So I do not understand how it is that my bidding impenitent sinners to repent should in any way be likely to make them do so, but I know it does—I see it every day. I do not know why a poor weak creature saying to his fellow men, “Believe,” should lead them to believe, but it does so, and the Holy Spirit blesses it, and they do believe and are saved; and if we cannot see how, if we see the fact, we will be content and bless God for it. Perhaps you may be aware that an attempt has been made by ingenious expositors to get rid of the force of this text. Some of our Hyper-Calvinist friends, who are so earnest against anything like exhortations and invitations, have tried by some means to disembowel this text if they could, to take something out and put something else in; they have said that the repentance to which men are here exhorted is but an outward repentance. But how is it so, when it is added, “Repent and be converted, *that your sins may be blotted out*”? Does a merely outward repentance bring with it the blotting out of sin? Assuredly not. The repentance to which men are here exhorted is a repentance which brings with it complete pardon—“that your sins may be blotted out.” And, moreover, it seems to me to be a shocking thing to suppose that Peter and John went about preaching up a hollow, outward repentance, which would not save men. My brethren who make that remark would themselves be ashamed to preach up outward repentance. I am sure they would think they were not ministers of God at all if they preached up any merely outward virtue. It shows to what shifts they must be driven when they twist the Scriptures so horribly with so little reason. Brethren, it was a soul-saving repentance, and nothing less than that, which Peter commanded of these men. Now, let us come to the point. We tell men to repent and believe, not because we rely on any power in them to do so, for we know them to be dead in trespasses and sins; not because we depend upon any power in our earnestness or in our speech to make them do so, for we understand that our preaching is less than nothing apart from God; but because the gospel is the mysterious engine by which God converts the hearts of men, and we find that, if we speak in faith, God the Holy Ghost operates with us, and while we bid the dry bones live, the Spirit makes them live—while we tell the lame man to stand on his feet, the mysterious energy makes his ankle-bones to receive strength—while we tell the impotent man to stretch out his hand, a divine power goes with the command, and the hand is stretched out and the

man is restored. The power lies not in the sinner, not in the preacher, but in the Holy Spirit, which works effectually with the gospel by divine decree, so that where the truth is preached the elect of God are quickened by it, souls are saved, and God is glorified. Go on, my dear brethren, preaching the gospel boldly, and be not afraid of the result, for, however little may be your strength, and though your eloquence may be as nought, yet God has promised to make his gospel the power to save, and so it shall be down to the world's end.

See then, ye that are unsaved, before I leave this point, see what it is we are bound to require of you this morning. It is, that ye repent and be converted. We are not satisfied with having your ear, nor your eyes; we are not content with having you gathered in the house of worship—it is all in vain that you have come here, except you repent and be converted. We are not come to tell you that you must reform a little, and mend your ways in some degree: except you put your trust in Christ, forsake your old way of life, and become new creatures in Christ Jesus, you must perish. This—nothing short of this—is the gospel requirement. No church-going, no chapel-going, will save you; no bowing of the knee, no outward form of worship, no pretensions and professions to godliness—ye must repent of your sins and forsake them, and if ye do not this, neither shall your sins be blotted out. Thus much, then, on the first point: the apostle commanded men to repent and be converted.

## II. In the second place, THERE WAS GOOD REASON FOR THIS COMMAND.

The text says, “Repent ye *therefore*.” The apostle was logical: he had a reason for his exhortation. It was not mere declamation, but sound reasoning. “Repent ye therefore.” What, then, was the argument? Why, first, because you, like the Jews, have put Jesus Christ to death. This was literally true of the people to whom he spake: they had had a share in Christ's execution. And this is spiritually true of you to whom I speak this morning. Every sin in the essence of it is a killing of God. Do you comprehend me? Every time you do what God would not have you do, you do in effect, so far as you can, put God out of his throne, and disown the authority which belongs to his Godhead; you do in intent, so far as you can, kill God. That is the drift of sin—sin is a God-killing thing. Every violation of law is treason in its essence—it is rebellion against the lawgiver. When our Lord Jesus Christ was nailed to the tree by sinners, sin only did then literally and openly what all sin really does in a spiritual sense. Do you understand me? Those offendings of yours which you have thought so little of, have been really a stabbing at the Deity. Will you not repent, if it be so? While you thought your sins to be mere trifles, light things to be laughed at, you would not repent; but now I have shown you (and I think your conscience will bear me out) that every sin is really an attempt to thrust God out of the world, that every sin is saying, “Let there be no God.” Oh! then there is cause enough to repent of it. Come hither and reason with me, thou who hast broken God's law. Suppose the principle of thy disobedience were carried out to the full, would not all laws be disregarded, and moral government subverted? And why not, since what one may do another has clearly the same right to do? What, then, if the authority of God should be no more owned in the universe—where should we all be? What a hell above ground would this world become! What a moral chaos and den of beasts! Do you not see what a mischievous thing, then, your iniquity has been? Repent and turn from it. If you can really believe this morning that though you did not nail Christ to the cross, nor plait the crown of thorns and put it on his head, nor stand and mock him there, yet that every sin is a real crucifixion of Christ, and a mockery of Christ, and a slaughter of Christ. Then, truly, there is abundant reason why you should repent and turn from it.

The apostle also used another argument, namely, that he whom they had slain was a most blessed person—one so blessed that God the Father had exalted him. Jesus Christ came not into this world with any selfish motive, but entirely out of philanthropy, full of love to men; and yet men put him to death! Now, every sin is an insult against the good and kind God. God does not deserve that we should rebel against him. If he were a great tyrant domineering over us, putting us to misery, there might be some excuse for our sin, but when he acts like a tender father to us, supplying our wants day by day, and forgiving our offenses, it is a shame, a cruel shame, that we should live in daily revolt against him. You who have not believed in Christ, have mighty cause for repenting that you have not believed in him, seeing he is so good and kind. What hurt has he ever done you that you should curse at him? What injury has Jesus done to any one of you that you should despise him? You deny his Deity, perhaps; or, at any rate, you despise the great salvation which he came into this world to work out. Does he deserve this of you? Prince of life and glory, King of angels, the adored of seraphs, art thou despised of men for whom thy blood was shed? Oh, what an accursed thing, then, sin must be, since it treats so badly so kind and blessed a person! This ought to make us melt, this should make us shed the drops of pity and of grief; we ought, indeed, to turn from our idle and evil ways when against Jesus we have so offended.

Moreover, Peter used another plea, that while they had rejected the blessed Christ they had chosen a murderer. Sinner, thou hast despised Christ, and what is it thou hast chosen? Has it been the drunkard's cup? Oh, what a bestial thing to prefer to Christ! Or has it been thy lust? What a devilish thing to set in the place of Christ! Man, what have thy sins done to thee that thou shouldst prefer them to Jesus? Have you lived in them for years? then what wages have you had? what profit have you had? Tell me now, you that have gone the farthest in sin, tell me now, are you satisfied with the service? Would you wish to go over again the days you have lived, and to reap in your own bodies the fruit of your misdeeds? Nay, but you serve a hard master; a murderer from the beginning is that devil to whom you surrender your lives. Oh, then, this is a thing to be repented of—that you have cast Christ away, but have chosen a murderer. “Not this man,” say you, “but Barabbas.” You will take this murderous world, this killing sin, but the blessed Saviour, you let him go. Is not there good argument here for repentance and conversion? Surely there is.

Peter clenches his reasoning with another argument, bringing down, if I may so say, the big hammer this time upon the head of the nail. It is this, that the Lord Christ, whom you have hitherto despised, is able to do great things for you. “His name through faith in his name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know.” Christ then, by faith in him, is able to do for you all that you want. If you will trust Jesus today, all your iniquities shall be blotted out; the past shall not be remembered; the present shall be rendered safe, and the future blessed. If thou trustest in Christ, there is no sin which he will not forgive thee, no evil habit the power of which he will not break, no foul propensity the weight of which he cannot remove. Believing in him, he can make thee blessed beyond a dream. And is not this cause for repentance, that thou shouldst have slighted one who can do thee so much good? With hands loaded with love he stands outside the door of your heart. Is not this good reason for opening the door and letting the heavenly stranger in, when he can bless you to such a vast extent of benediction? What, will you reject your own mercies? Will you despise the heaven which shall be yours if you will have my Master? Will you choose the doom from which none but he can rescue you, and let go the glory to which none but he can admit you? When I think of the usefulness of Christ to perishing sinners, there is indeed abundant cause for

repentance that you should not have closed with him long ago, and accepted him to be your all in all. Thus you see the apostle argued with them by that word "Therefore."

There was one other plea which he used, which I would employ this morning. He said, "Brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it." As if he would say, "Now that ye have more light, repent of what you did in the dark." So might I say to some here present. You had not heard the gospel, you did not know that sin was so bad a thing, you did not understand that Jesus Christ was able to save to the uttermost them that came unto God by him. Well, now you do understand it. The times of your ignorance God winks at, but now, "commandeth all men everywhere to repent." Greater light brings greater responsibility. Do not go back to your sin, lest it become tenfold sin to you; for if you do in the light what once you did in the darkness, he who winked at you when you knew no better, may lift his hand, and swear that you shall never enter into his rest, because you sinned presumptuously, and did despite to the Spirit of his grace. I charge every unconverted man here to mind what he is at in future. If he did not know that Jesus was able to save him before, he knows it now; if he was in the dark till this morning, he is not in the dark any longer. "Now ye have no cloak for your sin." Therefore, because the cloak is pulled away, and you sin against the light, I say as Peter did, "Repent and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out."

III. But now, our third remark shall be given with brevity, and it is this, **THAT WITHOUT REPENTANCE AND CONVERSION, SIN CANNOT BE PARDONED.**

The expression used in the text, "blotted out," in the original may be better explained in this way. Many Oriental merchants kept their accounts on little tablets of wax. On these tablets of wax, they indented marks which recorded the debts, and when these debts were paid, they took the blunt end of the stylus or pencil, and just flattened down the wax, and the account entirely disappeared. That was the form of "blotting out" in those days. Now, he that repents and is pardoned, is, through the precious blood of Christ, so entirely forgiven, that there is no record of his sin left. It is as though the stylus had levelled the marks in the wax, and there was no record left. What a beautiful picture of the forgiveness of sin! It is all gone, not a trace left. If we blot out an account from our books, there is the blot: the record is gone, but there is the blot; but on the wax tablet there was no blot—it was all gone, and the wax was smooth. So is it with the sin of God's people when removed by Jesus' blood, it is all gone and gone for ever. But rest assured it cannot be removed except there be repentance and conversion as the result of faith in Jesus. This must be so, for this is most seemly. Would you expect a great king to forgive an erring courtier unless the offender first confessed his fault? Where is the honour and dignity of the throne of God, if men are to be pardoned while as yet they will not confess their sin? In the next place, it would not be moral; it would be pulling up the very sluices of immorality to tell men that they could be pardoned while they went on in their sins and loved them. What, a thief pardoned and continue to thieve! A harlot forgiven and remain unchaste! The drunkard forgiven and yet delight in his tankards! Truly, then, the gospel would be the servant of unrighteousness, and against us who preach it morality should make a law. But it is not so, impenitent sinners shall be damned, let them boast what they will about grace. My hearer, thou must hate thy sin, or God will hate thee. Thou must turn or burn. Thou canst not have thy sins and go to heaven. Which shall it be? Wilt thou leave thy sins and go to heaven, or hold thy sins and go to hell? Which shall it be, for it must be one or the other; there must be a divorce between us and sin, or there cannot be a marriage between us and Christ. Does not conscience tell us this? There is not a conscience here that will say to a man, "You can hope to be saved and yet live as you list." Some have said this—I query if any have believed it. No, no, no, blind as conscience is,

and though its voice be often very feeble, yet there is enough of sight about conscience to see that continuance in sin and pardon cannot consist, and that there must be a forsaking of iniquity if there is to be a forgiving of it. But, my hearer, whether your conscience shall say so or not, God says it; "He that confesseth and forsaketh his sin shall find mercy," but there is no promise for the unrepenting. God declares that he that repents shall be forgiven. "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word;" but for haughty Pharaoh, who says, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey him?" there is nothing but eternal destruction from the presence of the Lord. He who goeth on in his iniquity and hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy. Ah! I have no pardons to preach to you who settle your minds to continue in sin, no gentle notes of love at all, nothing but a fearful looking for of judgment and of fiery indignation. But ah! if you loathe your sins, if God's Holy Spirit has made you hate your past lives, if you are anxious to be made new men in Christ Jesus, I have nothing but notes of love for you. Believe in Jesus, cast yourself on him, for he has said, "Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out." "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." The door is shut and fast bolted to every man who will keep his sin, but it is wide open even to the biggest sinner out of hell, if he will but leave his sin and lay hold of Jesus and put his trust in him.

IV. The last remark is this—**REPENTANCE AND CONVERSION WILL BE REGARDED AS PECULIARLY PRECIOUS IN THE FUTURE**, for my text says, "That your sins may be blotted out, *when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.*"

A very difficult passage indeed. Its meaning is scarcely known. Three or four meanings have been attached to it. In the first place, I think it means this—he that repents and is converted, shall enjoy the blotting out of sin in that season of sweet peace which always follows pardon. After a man has been thoroughly broken down on account of sin, God deals with him very tenderly. Amongst the very happiest parts of human life are the hours immediately after conversion. You know how we sing—

"Where is the blessedness I knew  
When first I saw the Lord?"

When the broken bone begins to heal, David puts it, "Thou makest the bones which thou hast broken to rejoice." When the prisoner first gets out of prison, when the fetters for the first time clank music as they fall broken to the ground! when the sick man leaves the sick chamber of his convictions to breathe the air of liberty, and to feel the health of a pardoned sinner! Oh, if you did but know what a bliss it is to be forgiven, you would never stay away from Christ! But you do not know, and cannot tell how sweet it is to be washed in the precious blood, and wrapped about with the fair white linen, and to have the kiss of the heavenly Father on your cheek! O "repent and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord."

Perhaps these "times of refreshing" may also relate to times of revival in the Christian church. The only way in which you, dear friends, can share in the refreshment of a revival, is by your own repenting and being converted. A revival is a great refreshment to the church. I pray that a mighty wave may sweep over Great Britain, for much we need it. But of what use is a revival to an unpardoned sinner? It is like the soft south wind blowing upon a corpse—it can bring no genial warmth therewith. If you repent, and be converted, then, amidst the general joy of the revival, you shall have this joy, that your sins have been blotted out. What a mournful cry is that, "The harvest

is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved!" I think I hear that cry from some in the Tabernacle this morning. Oh, that blessed month of February and the beginning of March! It was to us like a harvest and a summer. What prayers, what tears, what cries! How full this house was to pray! How all day long from before the daystar shone til long after sunset we continued in prayer! But you are not saved, some of you. The harvest and the summer is ended, and you are not saved. Ah! I have been praying to God that you may yet be saved now. I am unable to achieve a purpose which has been hot upon my heart—to go and preach to a greater congregation in the Agricultural Hall during the next month: I find myself restrained by the Master's hand. Ill-health has returned to me, and most probably there are months of weariness and pain awaiting me; but I have prayed that if I may not cast the net in the greater place, I may have the more of you here. We cannot have a larger congregation, but I would fain have more conversions. It is hard preaching, it is dull working, unless there be results. We must have conversions. As that woman of old said, "Give me children or I die," so is it with the preacher: he must have sinners saved, or he prays to die. Dear hearer, if these times of refreshing may come, our prayer is that you may repent and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, and so may partake to the full in the priceless blessings of the season.

Once more, the text means, according to the context, the second advent. Jesus is yet to come a second time, and like a mighty shower flooding a desert shall his coming be. His church shall revive and be refreshed; she shall once again lift up her head from her lethargy, and her body from her sepulchre. But woe unto you who are not saved when Christ cometh, for the day of the Lord will be darkness and not light to you. When Christ cometh to the unconverted, "the day shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble." "But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap: and he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi." Oh, if ye repent and be converted, ye shall stand fully absolved in the day of his coming, when heaven and earth do reel, when the solid rock begins to melt, and the stars, like fig-leaves withered, fall from the tree, when the trumpet sounds exceeding loud and long, "Awake, ye dead and come to judgment," when the grand assize is sitting, and the Judge shall be there—the Judge of quick and dead, to separate the righteous from the wicked. The Lord have mercy upon you in that day; and so he shall if his grace shall make you obedient to the words of our text, "Repent and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord."

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Acts 3.

## Justification by Faith—Illustrated by Abram's Righteousness

A Sermon

(No. 844)

Delivered on Lord's-Day Morning, December 6th, 1868, by

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At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

“And he believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness.”—Genesis 15:6.

YOU will remember that last Lord's-day morning we spoke upon the calling of Abram, and the faith by which he was enabled to enter upon that separated life at the bidding of the Most High. We shall today pass from the consideration of his calling to that of his justification, that being most remarkably next in order in his history, as it is in point of theology in the New Testament; for, “whom he called, them he also justified.”

Referring to the chapter before us for a preface to our subject, note that after Abram's calling his faith proved to be of the most practical kind. Being called to separate himself from his kindred and from his country, he did not therefore become a recluse, a man of ascetic habits, or a sentimentalist, unfit for the battles of ordinary life—no; but in the noblest style of true manliness he showed himself able to endure the household trouble and the public trial which awaited him. Lot's herdsmen quarrelled with the servants of Abram, and Abram with great disinterestedness gave his younger and far inferior relative the choice of pasturage, and gave up the well-watered plain of Sodom, which was the best of the land. A little while after, the grand old man who trusted in his God showed that he could play the soldier, and fight right gloriously against terrible odds. He gathered together his own household servants, and accepted the help of his neighbours, and pursued the conquering hosts of the allied kings, and smote them with as heavy a hand as if from his youth up he had been a military man. Brethren, this every-day life faith is the faith of God's elect. There are persons who imagine saving faith to be a barren conviction of the truth of certain abstract propositions, leading only to a quiet contemplation upon certain delightful topics, or a separating ourselves from all sympathy with our fellow creatures; but it is not so. Faith, restricted merely to religious exercise, is not Christian faith, it must show itself in everything. A merely religious faith may be the choice of men whose heads are softer than their hearts, fitter for cloisters than markets; but the manly faith which God would have us cultivate, is a grand practical principle adapted for every day in the week, helping us to rule our household in the fear of God, and to enter upon life's rough conflicts in the warehouse, the farm, or the exchange. I mention this at the commencement of this discourse, because as this is the faith which came of Abram's calling, so also does it shine in his justification, and is, indeed, that which God counted unto him for righteousness.

Yet the first verse shows us that even such a believer as Abram needed comfort. The Lord said to him, “Fear not.” Why did Abram fear? Partly because of the reaction which is always caused by excitement when it is over. He had fought boldly and conquered gloriously, and now he fears. Cowards tremble before the fight, and brave men after the victory. Elias slew the priests of Baal without fear, but after all was over, his spirit sank and he fled from the face of Jezebel. Abram's fear also originated in an overwhelming awe in the presence of God. The word of Jehovah came

to him with power, and he felt that same prostration of spirit which made the beloved John fall at the feet of his Lord in the Isle of Patmos, and made Daniel feel, on banks of Hiddekel that there was no strength in him. "Fear not," said the Lord to the patriarch. His spirit was too deeply bowed. God would uplift his beloved servant into the power of exercising sacred familiarity. Ah, brethren, this is a blessed fear—let us cultivate it; for until it shall be cast out by perfect love, which is better still, we may be content to let this good thing rule our hearts. Should not a man, conscious of great infirmities, sink low in his own esteem in proportion as he is honoured with communion with the glorious Lord?

When he was comforted, Abram received an open declaration of his justification. I take it, beloved friends, that our text does not intend to teach us that Abram was not justified before this time. Faith always justifies whenever it exists, and as soon as it is exercised; its result follows immediately, and is not an aftergrowth needing months of delay. The moment a man truly trusts his God he is justified. Yet many are justified who do not know their happy condition; to whom as yet the blessing of justification has not been opened up in its excellency and abundance of privilege. There may be some of you here today who have been called by grace from darkness into marvellous light; you have been led to look to Jesus, and you believe you have received pardon of your sin, and yet, for want of knowledge, you know little of the sweet meaning of such words as these, "Accepted in the Beloved," "Perfect in Christ Jesus," "Complete in him." You *are* doubtless justified, though you scarcely understand what justification means; and you are accepted, though you have not realized your acceptance; and you are complete in Jesus Christ, though you have today a far deeper sense of your personal incompleteness than of the all-sufficiency of Jesus. A man may be entitled to property though he cannot read the title-deeds, or has not as yet heard of their existence; the law recognizes right and fact, not our apprehension thereof. But there will come a time, beloved, when you who are called will clearly realize your justification, and will rejoice in it; it shall be intelligently understood by you, and shall become a matter of transporting delight, lifting you to a higher platform of experience, and enabling you to walk with a firmer step, sing with a merrier voice, and triumph with an enlarged heart.

I intend now, as God may help me, first to note *the means of Abram's justification*; then, secondly, *the object of the faith which justified him*; and then, thirdly, *the attendants of his justification*.

#### I. First, brethren, HOW WAS ABRAM JUSTIFIED?

We see in the text the great truth, which Paul so clearly brings out in the fourth chapter of his epistle to the Romans, that Abram was *not justified by his works*. Many had been the good works of Abram. It was a good work to leave his country and his father's house at God's bidding; it was a good work to separate from Lot in so noble a spirit; it was a good work to follow after the robber-kings with undaunted courage; it was a grand work to refuse to take the spoils of Sodom, but to lift up his hand to God that he would not take from a thread even to a shoe latchet; it was a holy work to give to Melchisedec tithes of all that he possessed, and to worship the Most High God; yet none of these are mentioned in the text, nor is there a hint given of any other sacred duties as the ground or cause, or part cause of his justification before God. No, it is said, "He believed in the Lord, and he counted it to him for righteousness." Surely, brethren, if Abram, after years of holy living, is not justified by his works, but is accepted before God on account of his faith, much more must this be the case with the ungodly sinner who, having lived in unrighteousness, yet believeth on Jesus and is saved. If there be salvation for the dying thief, and others like him, it

cannot be of debt, but of grace, seeing they have no good works. If Abram, when full of good works, is not justified by them, but by his faith, how much more we, being full of imperfections, must come unto the throne of the heavenly grace and ask that we may be justified by faith which is in Christ Jesus, and saved by the free mercy of God!

Further, this justification came to Abram *not by obedience to the ceremonial law* any more than by conformity to the moral law. As the apostle has so plainly pointed out to us, Abram was justified before he was circumcised. The initiatory step into the outward and visible covenant, so far as it was ceremonial, had not yet been taken, and yet the man was perfectly justified. All that follows after cannot contribute to a thing which is already perfect. Abram, being already justified, cannot owe that justification to his subsequent circumcision—this is clear enough; and so, beloved, at this moment, if you and I are to be justified, these two things are certain: it cannot be by the works of the moral law; it cannot be by obedience to any ceremonial law, be it what it may—whether the sacred ritual given to Aaron, or the superstitious ritual which claims to have been ordained by gradual tradition in the Christian church. If we be indeed the children of faithful Abraham, and are to be justified in Abraham's way, it cannot be by submission to rites or ceremonies of any kind. Hearken to this carefully, ye who would be justified before God: baptism is in itself an excellent ordinance, but it cannot justify nor help to justify us; confirmation is a mere figment of men, and could not, even if commanded by God, assist in justification; and the Lord's-supper, albeit that it is a divine institution, cannot in any respect whatsoever minister to your acceptance or to your righteousness before God. Abram had no ceremonial in which to rest; he was righteous through his faith, and righteous only through his faith; and so must you and I be if we are ever to stand as righteous before God at all. Faith in Abram's case was the alone and unsupported cause of his being accounted righteous, for note, although in other cases Abram's faith produced works, and although in every case where faith is genuine it produces good works, yet the particular instance of faith recorded in this chapter was unattended by any works. For God brought him forth under the star-lit heavens, and bade him look up. "So shall thy seed be," said the sacred voice. Abram did what? Believed the promise—that was all. It was before he had offered sacrifice, before he had said a holy word or performed a single action of any kind that the word immediately and instanter went forth, "He believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness." Always distinguish between the truth, that living faith always produces works; and the lie, that faith and works co-operate to justify the soul. We are made righteous only by an act of faith in the work of Jesus Christ. That faith, if true, always produces holiness of life, but our being righteous before God is not because of our holiness in life in any degree or respect, but simply because of our faith in the divine promise. Thus saith the inspired apostle: "His faith was imputed to him for righteousness. Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification."

I would have you note that *the faith which justified Abram was still an imperfect faith*, although it perfectly justified him. It was imperfect beforehand, for he had prevaricated as to his wife, and bidden Sarai, "Say thou art my sister." It was imperfect after it had justified him, for in the next chapter we find him taking Hagar, his wife's handmaid, in order to effect the divine purpose, and so showing a want of confidence in the working of the Lord. It is a blessing for you and for me that we do not need perfect faith to save us. "If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove." If thou hast but the faith

of a little child, it shall save thee. Though thy faith be not always at the same pitch as the patriarch's when he staggered not at the promise through unbelief, yet if it be simple and true, if it confide alone in the promise of God—it is an unhappy thing that it is no stronger, and thou oughtest daily to pray, “Lord, increase my faith”—but still it shall justify thee through Christ Jesus. A trembling hand may grasp the cup which bears a healing draught to the lip—the weakness of the hand shall not lessen the power of the medicine.

So far, then, all is clear, Abram was not justified by works, nor by ceremonies, nor partly by works, and partly by faith, nor by the perfection of his faith—he is counted righteous simply because of his faith in the divine promise.

I must confess that, looking more closely into it, this text is too deep for me, and therefore I decline, at this present moment, to enter into the controversy which rages around it; but one thing is clear to me, that if faith be, as we are told, counted to us for righteousness, it is not because faith in itself has merit which may make it a fitting substitute for a perfect obedience to the law of God, nor can it be viewed as a substitute for such obedience. For, brethren, all good acts are a duty: to trust God is our duty, and he that hath believed to his utmost hath done no more than it was his duty to have done. He who should believe without imperfection, if this were possible, would even then have only given to God a part of the obedience due; and if he should have failed, in love, or reverence, or aught beside, his faith, as a virtue and a work, could not stand him in any stead. In fact, according to the great principle of the New Testament, even faith, as a work, does not justify the soul. We are not saved by works at all or in any sense, but alone by grace, and the way in which faith saves us is not by itself as a work, but in some other way directly opposite thereto.

Faith cannot be its own righteousness, for it is of the very nature of faith to look out of self to Christ. If any man should say, “My faith is my righteousness,” then it is evident that he is confiding in his faith; but this is just the thing of all others which it would be unsafe to do, for we must look altogether away from ourselves to Christ alone, or we have no true faith at all. Faith must look to the atonement and work of Jesus, or else she is not the faith of Scripture. Therefore to say that faith in and of itself becomes our righteousness, is, it seems to me, to tear out the very bowels of the gospel, and to deny the faith which has been once delivered to the saints. Paul declares, contrary to certain sectaries who rail against imputed righteousness—that we are justified and made righteous by the righteousness of Christ; on this he is plain and positive. He tells us (Romans 5:19) that, “as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.” The Old Testament verse before us as a text this morning, gives us but as it were the outward aspect of justification; it is brought to us by faith, and the fact that a man has faith entitles him to be set down as a righteous man; in this sense God accounts faith to a man as righteousness, but the underlying and secret truth which the Old Testament does not so clearly give us is found in the New Testament declaration, that we are accepted in the Beloved, and justified because of the obedience of Christ. Faith justifies, but not in and by itself, but because it grasps the obedience of Christ. “As by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so *by the righteousness of one* the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life.” To the same effect is that verse in the second epistle general of Peter (first chapter, first verse), which runs in our version as follows: “Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.” Now, everybody who is at all familiar with the original knows that the correct translation is “through the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ.” The righteousness which belongs to the

Christian is the righteousness of our God and Saviour, who is “made of God unto us righteousness.” Hence the beauty of the old prophetic title of the Messiah, “The Lord our Righteousness.” I do not wish to enter into controversy as to imputed righteousness this morning, we may discuss that doctrine another time; but we feel confident that this text cannot mean that faith in itself, as a grace or a virtue, becomes the righteousness of any man. The fact is, that faith is counted to us for righteousness because she has Christ in her hand; she comes to God resting upon what Christ has done, depending alone upon the propitiation which God has set forth; and God, therefore, writes down every believing man as being a righteous man, not because of what he is in himself, but for what he is in Christ. He may have a thousand sins, yet shall he be righteous if he have faith. He may painfully transgress like Samson, he may be as much in the dark as Jephtha, he may fall as David, he may slip like Noah; but, for all that, if he have a true and living faith, he is written down among the justified, and God accepteth him. While there be some who gloat over the faults of believers, God spieth out the pure gem of faith gleaming on their breast; he takes them for what they want to be, for what they are in heart, for what they would be if they could; and covering their sins with the atoning blood, and adorning their persons with the righteousness of the Beloved, he accepts them, seeing he beholds in them the faith which is the mark of the righteous man wherever it may be.

II. Let us pass on to consider THE PROMISE UPON WHICH HIS FAITH RELIED when Abram was justified.

Abram’s faith, like ours, rested upon *a promise received direct from God*. “This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir. And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be.” Had this promise been spoken by any other, it would have been a subject of ridicule to the patriarch; but, taking it as from the lip of God, he accepts it, and relies upon it. Now, brethren, if you and I have true faith we accept the promise, “He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved” as being altogether divine. If such a declaration were made to us by the priests of Rome, or by any human being on his own authority, we could not think it true; but, inasmuch as it comes to us written in the sacred word as having been spoken by Jesus Christ himself, we lean upon it as not the word of man, but the word of God. Beloved, it may be a very simple remark to make, but after all it is needful, that we must be careful that our faith in the truth is fixed upon the fact that God has declared it to be true, and not upon the oratory or persuasion of any of our most honoured ministers or most respected acquaintances. If your faith standeth in the wisdom of man, it is probably a faith in man; it is only that faith which believes the promise because God spake it which is real faith in God. Note that and try your faith thereby.

In the next place, Abram’s faith was *faith in a promise concerning the seed*. It was told him before that he should have a seed in whom all the nations of the earth should be blessed. He recognized in this the selfsame promise which was made to Eve at the gates of Paradise, “I will put enmity between thee and the woman, between thy seed and her seed.” “Abraham saw my day,” says our Lord, “he saw it and was glad.” In this promise Abram saw the one seed, as saith the apostle in Galatians 3:16, “He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, and to thy seed, which is Christ.” He saw Christ by the eye of faith, and then he saw the multitude that should believe in him, the seed of the father of the faithful. The faith which justifies the soul concerns itself about Christ and not concerning mere abstract truths. If your faith simply believeth this dogma and that, it saveth you not; but when your faith believes that God was in Christ reconciling the

world unto himself, not imputing unto them their trespasses; when your faith turns to God in human flesh and rests in him with its entire confidence, then it justifies you, for it is the faith of Abram. Dear hearer, have you such a faith as this? Is it faith in the promise of God? Is it faith that deals with Christ and looks alone to him?

Abram had faith in *a promise which it seemed impossible could ever be fulfilled*. A child was to be born of his own loins, but he was nearly a hundred years old, and Sarai also was said to be barren years before. His own body was now dead as it were, and Sarai, so far as childbearing was concerned, was equally so. The birth of a son could not happen unless the laws of nature were reversed; but he considered not these things, he put them all aside; he saw death written on the creature, but he accepted the power of life in the Creator, and he believed without hesitation. Now, beloved, the faith that justifies us must be of the same kind. It seems impossible that I should ever be saved; I cannot save myself; I see absolute death written upon the best hopes that spring of my holiest resolutions; "In me, that is, in my flesh, there dwelleth no good thing;" I can do nothing; I am slain under the law; I am corrupt through my natural depravity; but yet for all this I believe that through the life of Jesus I shall live, and inherit the promised blessing. It is small faith to believe that God will save you when graces flourish in your heart, and evidences of salvation abound, but it is a grand faith to trust in Jesus in the teeth of all your sins, and notwithstanding the accusations of conscience. To believe in him that justifieth not merely the godly but *the ungodly* (Romans 4:5). To believe not in the Saviour of saints, but in the Saviour of sinners; and to believe that if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous; this is precious, and is counted unto us for righteousness.

This justifying faith was faith which dealt with *a wonderful promise, vase and sublime*. I imagine the patriarch standing beneath the starry sky, looking up to those innumerable orbs. He cannot count them. To his outward eye, long accustomed in the land of the Chaldees to midnight observation, the stars appeared more numerous than they would to an ordinary observer. He looked and looked again with elevated gaze, and the voice said, "So shall thy seed be." Now he did not say, "Lord, if I may be the father of a clan, the progenitor of a tribe, I shall be well content; but it is not credible that countless hosts can ever come of my barren body." No, he believed the promise; he believed it just as it stood. I do not hear him saying, "It is too good to be true." No; God hath said it—and nothing is too good for God to do. The greater the grace of the promise, the more likely it is to have come from him, for good and perfect gifts come from the Father of Lights. Beloved, does your faith take the promise as it stands in its vastness, in its height, and depth, and length, and breadth? Canst thou believe that thou, a sinner, art nevertheless a child, a son, an heir, an heir of God, joint-heir with Christ Jesus? Canst thou believe that heaven is thine, with all its ecstasies of joy, eternity with its infinity of bliss, God with all his attributes of glory? Oh! This is the faith that justifies, far-reaching, wide-grasping faith, that diminishes not the word of promise, but accepts it as it stands. May we have more and more of this large-handed faith!

Once more, Abram showed faith in *the promise as made to himself*. Out of his own bowels a seed should come, and it was in *him* and in his seed that the whole world should be blessed. I can believe all the promises in regard to other people. I find faith in regard to my dear friend to be a very easy matter, but oh! When it comes to close grips, and to laying hold for yourself, here is the difficulty. I could see my friend in ten troubles, and believe that the Lord would not forsake him. I could read a saintly biography, and finding that the Lord never failed his servant when he went through fire and through water, I do not wonder at it; but when it comes to one's own self, the

wonder begins. Our heart cries, "Whence is this to me? What am I, and what my father's house, that such mercy should be mine? *I* washed in blood and made whiter than snow today! Is it so? *Can* it be? *I* made righteous, through my faith in Jesus Christ, perfectly righteous! O can it be? What! For me the everlasting love of God, streaming from its perennial fountain? For me the protection of a special providence in this life, and the provision of a prepared heaven in the life to come? For me a harp, a crown, a palm branch, a throne! For me the bliss of for ever beholding the face of Jesus, and being made like to him, and reigning with him! It seems impossible. And yet this is the faith that we must have, the faith which lays on Christ Jesus for itself, saying with the apostle, "He loved me, and gave himself for me." This is the faith which justifies; let us seek more and more of it, and God shall have glory through it.

### III. In the third place, let us notice THE ATTENDANTS OF ABRAM'S JUSTIFICATION.

With your Bibles open, kindly observe that after it is written his faith was counted to him for righteousness, it is recorded that the Lord said to him, "I am Jehovah that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it." When the soul is graciously enabled to perceive its complete justification by faith, then *it more distinctly discerns its calling*. Now, the believer perceives his privileged separation and discerns why he was convinced of sin, why he was led away from self-righteousness and the pleasures of this world, to live the life of faith; now he sees his high calling and the prize of it, and from the one blessing of justification he argues the blessedness of all the inheritance to which he is called. The more clear a man is about his justification the more will he prize his calling, and the more earnestly will he seek to make it sure by perfecting his separation from the world and his conformity to his Lord. Am I a justified man? Then will I not go back to that bondage in which I once was held. Am I now accepted of God through faith? Then will I live no longer by sight, as I once did as a carnal man, when I understood not the power of trusting in the unseen God. One Christian grace helps another, and one act of divine grace casts a refulgence upon another. Calling gleams with double glory side by side with the twin star of justification.

Justifying faith receives more vividly the promises. "I have brought thee," said the Lord, "into this land to inherit it." He was reminded again of the promise God made him years before. Beloved, no man reads the promises of God with such delight and with such a clear understanding as the man who is justified by faith in Christ Jesus. "For now," saith he, "this promise is mine, and made to me. I have the pledge of its fulfillment in the fact that I walk in the favour of God. I am no longer obnoxious to his wrath; none can lay anything to my charge, for I am absolved through Jesus Christ; and, therefore, if when I was a sinner he justified me, much more, being justified, will he keep his promise to me. If when I was a rebel condemned, he nevertheless in his eternal mercy called me and brought me into this state of acceptance, much more will he preserve me from all my enemies, and give me the heritage which he has promised by his covenant of grace. A clear view of justification helps you much in grasping the promise, therefore seek it earnestly for your soul's comfort.

Abram, after being justified by faith, was *led more distinctly to behold the power of sacrifice*. By God's command he killed three bullocks, three goats, three sheep, with turtle doves and pigeons, being all the creatures ordained for sacrifice. The patriarch's hands are stained with blood; he handles the butcher's knife, he divides the beasts, he kills the birds he places them in an order revealed to him by God's Spirit at the time; there they are. Abram learns that there is no meeting with God except through sacrifice. God has shut every door except that over which the blood is

sprinkled. All acceptable approaches to God must be through an atoning sacrifice, and Abram sees this. While the promise is still in his ears, while the ink is yet wet in the pen of the Holy Spirit, writing him down as justified, he must see a sacrifice, and see it, too, in emblems which comprehend all the revelation of sacrifice made to Aaron. So, brethren, it is a blessed thing when your faith justifies you, if it helps you to obtain more complete and vivid views of the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The purest and most bracing air for faith to breathe is on Calvary. I do not wonder that your faith grows weak when you fail to consider well the tremendous sacrifice which Jesus made for his people. Turn to the annals of the Redeemer's sufferings given us in the Evangelists; bow yourself in prayer before the Lamb of God, blush to think you should have forgotten his death, which is the centre of all history; contemplate the wondrous transaction of substitution once again, and you will find your faith revived. It is not the study of theology, it is not reading books upon points of controversy, it is not searching into mysterious prophecy which will bless your soul, it is looking to Jesus crucified. That is the essential nutriment of the life of faith, and mind that you keep to it. As a man already justified, Abram looked at the sacrifice, all day long and till the sun went down, chasing away the birds of prey as you must drive off all disturbing thoughts. So must you also study the Lord Jesus, and view him in all his characters and offices, be not satisfied except you grow in grace and in the knowledge of your Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Perhaps even more important was the next lesson which Abram had to learn. He was led to behold *the covenant*. I suppose that these pieces of the bullock, the lamb, the ram, and the goat, were so placed that Abram stood in the midst with a part on this side and a part on that. So he stood as a worshipper all through the day, and towards nightfall, when a horror of great darkness came over him, he fell into a deep sleep. Who would not feel a horror passing over him as he sees the great sacrifice for sin, and sees himself involved therein? There in the midst of the sacrifice he saw, moving with solemn motion, a smoking furnace and a burning lamp, answering to the pillar of cloud and fire, which manifested the presence in later days to Israel in the wilderness. In these emblems the Lord passed between the pieces of the sacrifice to meet his servant, and enter into covenant with him. This has always been the most solemn of all modes of covenanting; and has even been adopted in heathen nations on occasions of unusual solemnity. The sacrifice is divided and the covenanting parties meet between the divided pieces. The profane interpretation was, that they imprecated upon each other the curse that if they broke the covenant they might be cut in pieces as these beasts had been; but this is not the interpretation which our hearts delight in. It is this. It is only in the midst of the sacrifice that God can enter into a covenant relationship with sinful man. God cometh in his glory like a flame of fire, but subdued and tempered to us as with a cloud of smoke in the person of Jesus Christ; and he comes through the bloody sacrifice which has been offered once for all through Jesus Christ on the tree. Man meets with God in the midst of the sacrifice of Christ. Now, beloved, you who are justified, try this morning to reach this privilege which particularly belongs to you at this juncture of your spiritual history. Know and understand that God is in covenant bonds with you. He has made a covenant of grace with you which never can be broken: the sure mercies of David are your portion. After this sort does that covenant run, "A new heart also will I give them, and a right spirit will I put within them. They shall be my people, and I will be their God." That covenant is made with you over the slaughtered body of the Son of God. God and you cross hands over him who sweat, as it were, great drops of blood falling to the ground. The Lord accepts us, and we enter with him into sacred league and amity, over the victim whose wounds and death ratify the compact. Can God forget a covenant with such sanctions? Can

such a federal bond so solemnly sealed be ever broken? Impossible. Man is sometimes faithful to his oath, but God is always so; and when that oath is confirmed for the strengthening of our faith by the blood of the Only-begotten, to doubt is treason and blasphemy. God help us, being justified, to have faith in the covenant which is sealed and ratified with blood.

Immediately after, God made to Abram (and here the analogy still holds) *a discovery*, that all the blessing that was promised, though it was surely his, would not come without an interval of trouble. "Thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years." When a man is first of all brought to Christ he often is so ignorant as to think, "Now my troubles are all over; I have come to Christ and I am saved: from this day forward I shall have nothing to do but to sing the praises of God." Alas! A conflict remains. We must know of a surety that the battle now begins. How often does it happen that the Lord, in order to educate his child for future trouble, makes the occasion when his justification is most clear to him the season of informing him that he may expect to meet with trouble! I was struck with that fact when I was reading for my own comfort the other night the fifth chapter of Romans; it runs thus— "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God." See how softly it flows, a justification sheds the oil of joy upon the believer's head. But what is the next verse— "and not only so, but we glory in tribulation also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience," and so on. Justification ensures tribulation. Oh! Yes, the covenant is yours; you shall possess the goodly land and Lebanon, but, like all the seed of Abraham, you must go down into Egypt and groan, being burdened. All the saints must smart before they sing; they must carry the cross before they wear the crown. You are a justified man, but you are not freed from trouble. Your sins were laid on Christ, but you still have Christ's cross to carry. The Lord has exempted you from the curse, but he has not exempted you from the chastisement. Learn that you enter on the children's discipline on the very day in which you enter upon their accepted condition.

To close the whole, the Lord gave to Abram *an assurance of ultimate success*. He would bring his seed into the promised land, and the people who had oppressed them he would judge. So let it come as a sweet revelation to every believing man this morning, that at the end he shall triumph, and those evils which now oppress him shall be cast beneath his feet. The Lord shall bruise Satan under our feet shortly. We may be slaves in Egypt for awhile, but we shall come up out of it with great abundance of true riches, better than silver or gold. We shall be prospered by our tribulations, and enriched by our trials. Therefore, let us be of good cheer. If sin be pardoned, we may well bear affliction. "Strike, Lord," said Luther, "now my sins are gone; strike as hard as thou wilt if transgression be covered." These light afflictions which are but for a moment, are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. Let us make it the first point of our care to be justified with Abraham's seed, and then whether we sojourn in Egypt or enjoy the peace of Canaan, it little matters: we are all safe if we are only justified by faith which is in Christ Jesus. Dear friends, this last word, and I send you home. Have you believed in God? Have you trusted Christ? O that you would do so today! To believe that God speaks truth ought not to be hard; and if we were not very wicked this would never need to be urged upon us, we should do it naturally. To believe that Christ is able to save us seems to me to be easy enough, and it would be if our hearts were not so hard. Believe thy God, man, and think it no little thing to do so. May the Holy Ghost lead thee to a true trust. This is the work of God, that ye believe on Jesus Christ, whom he hath sent. Believe that the Son of God can save, and confide thyself alone in him, and he will save thee.

He asks nothing but faith, and even this he gives thee; and if thou hast it, all thy doubts and sins, thy trials and troubles put together, shall not shut thee out of heaven. God shall fulfil his promise, and surely bring thee in to possess the land which floweth with milk and honey.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Genesis 15 and Romans 4.

## Consecration to God—Illustrated by Abraham's Circumcision

A Sermon

(No. 845)

Delivered on Lord's-Day Morning, December 13th, 1868, by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle,

“And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect. And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly.”—Genesis 17:1-2.

WE COMMENCED our exposition of the life of Abram with his calling, when he was brought out of Ur of the Chaldees, and separated unto the Lord in Canaan. We then passed on to his justification, when he believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness; and now you will bear with us if we continue to the same subject to a further stage, and attempt to describe the fuller development of Abram's vital godliness in the open and clear revelation of his consecration to God. In the chapter before us we see his sanctification unto the Lord, his ordination to service, and purification as a vessel fitted for the Master's use. All the called are justified, and all the justified are by a work of the Holy Ghost sanctified, and made meet to be afterwards glorified with Christ Jesus.

Let me remind you of the order in which these blessings come. If we should speak of sanctification or consecration, it is not as a first thing, but as an elevation to be reached only by preceding stepping-stones. In vain do men pretend to be consecrated to God before they are called of God's Spirit; such have yet to be taught that no strength of nature can suffice to serve the Lord aright. They must learn what this meaneth, “Ye must be born again,” for assuredly until men are brought into spiritual life by effectual calling of the Holy Spirit, all their talk about serving God may be answered in the words of Joshua, “Ye cannot serve the Lord.” I speak of consecration, but it is not as a first thing, nor even as a second thing, for a man must be justified by faith which is in Christ Jesus, or he will not possess the grace which is the root of all true sanctity; for sanctification grows out of faith in Jesus Christ. Remember holiness is a flower, not a root; it is not sanctification that saves, but salvation that sanctifies. A man is not saved by his holiness, but he becomes holy because he is already saved. Being justified by faith, and having peace with God, he walks no longer after the flesh, but after the Spirit, and in the power of the blessing which he has received by grace he dedicates himself to the service of his gracious God. Not then the due order of heavenly benefits, consecration to God follows calling and justification.

Recalling your minds to Abram's history, let me remind you that thirteen years had elapsed after the time in which God had said that Abram's faith was counted to him for righteousness, and those thirteen years, so far as we can gather from Scripture, were not at all so full of brave faith and noble deeds as we might have expected them to have been. How sure is that truth that the best of men are but men at the best, for that very man who had accepted God's promise and had not staggered at it through unbelief, within a few months afterwards, or perhaps a few days, was taken with a fit of unbelief, and at the instigation of his wife, adopted means which were not justifiable, in order that he might obtain the promised heir. He used means which may not be so vicious to

him, as they would be in men of modern times, but which were suggested by an unbelieving policy, and were fraught with evil. He takes Hagar to wife. He could not leave it to God to give him the promised seed; he could not leave it with God to fulfil his promise in his own time, but justifies himself in turning aside from the narrow path of faith to accomplish by doubtful methods the end which God himself had promised and undertaken to accomplish.

How shorn of splendour is Abram seen when we read of him, “and Abram hearkened unto the voice of Sarai!” That business of Hagar is to the patriarch’s deep discredit, and reflects no honour at all upon either him or his faith. Look at the consequences of his unbelieving procedure! Misery soon followed. Hagar despises her mistress; Sarai throws all the blame on her husband; the poor bond-woman is so hardly dealt with that she flees from the household. How much of real cruelty may be meant by the term “dealing hardly,” I cannot tell, but one marvels that such a man as Abram allowed one who had been brought into such a relationship with him, to be heedlessly chased from his house while in a condition requiring care and kindness. We admire the truthfulness of the Holy Ghost that he has been pleased to record the faults of the saints without extenuating them. Biographies of good men in Scripture are written with unflinching integrity, their evil recorded as well as their good. These faults are not written that we may say, “Abraham did so-and-so, therefore we may do it.” No, brethren, the lives of these good men are warnings to us as well as examples, and we are to judge them as we should judge ourselves, by the laws of right and wrong. Abram did wrong both in taking Hagar to wife and in allowing her to be badly used.

In after years the child of the bond-woman mocked the child of the free-woman, and an expulsion of both mother and child was needful. There was deep sorrow in Abram’s heart, a bitterness not to be told. Polygamy, though tolerated under the Old Testament, was never approved; it was only endured because of the hardness of men’s hearts. It is evil, only evil, and that continually. In the family relationship there can be opened no more abundant and fruitful source of misery to the sons of men than want of chastity to the marriage-bond made with one wife. Disguise that unchastity by what name you will. All these thirteen years, so far as Scripture informs us, Abram had not a single visit from his God. We do not find any record of his either doing anything memorable or having so much as a single audience with the Most High. Learn from this, that if we once forsake the track of simple faith, once cease to walk according to the purity which faith approves, we strew our path with thorns, cause God to withhold the light of his countenance from us, and pierce ourselves through with many sorrows.

But mark, beloved, the exceeding grace of God. The way to recover Abram from his backsliding was that the Lord should appear to him; and, consequently, we read in our text that at ninety-nine years of age Abram was favoured with a further visit from the Most High. This brings to my remembrance the words in the book of Revelation, concerning the church in Laodicea: “Though art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth”—a very solemn declaration; but what follows? “Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me,” which means just this, that for recovery out of a horrible state of languishing and lukewarmness there is no remedy but the coming of Jesus Christ to the soul in near and dear intercourse. Truly it was so with Abram. The Lord would bring him out of his state of distrust and distance into one of high dignity and sanctity, and he does it by manifesting himself to him, for the Lord talked with Abram.

“Midst darkest shades, if he appear,

My dawning is begun;  
 He is my soul's bright morning star,  
 And he my rising sun."

Breathe a prayer, my brethren and sisters. "Lord, reveal thyself to my poor backsliding, languishing spirit. Revive me, O Lord, for one smile from thee can make my wilderness blossom as the rose."

On the occasion of this gracious manifestation, God was pleased to do for Abram what I think is to us an admirable and instructive illustration of the consecration of our redeemed spirits entirely to his service. I shall, this morning, as God may help me, first lead you to observe *the model of the consecrated life*; secondly, *the nature of the higher life*; and, thirdly, *its results*.

I. First, then, let us notice in the words of God to Abram, **THE MODEL OF THE SANCTIFIED OR CONSECRATED LIFE**.

Here it is: "I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect." For a man to be thoroughly sanctified to the Master's service, he must first *realise the almightiness and all-sufficiency and glory of God*. Brethren, the God whom we serve filleth all things, and hath all power and all riches. If we think little of him we shall render little trust to him, and consequently little obedience, but if we have grand conceptions of the glory of God, we shall learn to confide in him most thoroughly, we shall receive mercies from him most plentifully, and we shall be moved to serve him most consistently. Sin at the bottom of it very frequently has its origin in low thoughts of God. Take Abram's sin; he could not see how God could make him the father of many nations when Sarai was old and barren. Hence his error with Hagar. But if he had remembered what God now brings to his recollection, that God is El Shaddai, the all-sufficient One, he would have said, "No, I will remain true to Sarai, for God can effect his own purposes without my taking tortuous means to accomplish them. He is all-sufficient in himself, and not dependent upon creature strength. I will patiently hope, and quietly wait, to see the fulfilment of the Master's promises." Now, as with Abram, so with you, my brethren and sisters. When a man is in business difficulties, if he believes that God is all-sufficient to carry him through them, he will not practise any of the common tricks of trade, nor degenerate into that shiftiness which is so usual among commercial men. If a man believes, being poor, that God is sufficient portion for him, he will not grow envious of the rich or discontented with his condition. The man who feels that God is an all-sufficient portion for his spirit, will not look for pleasure in the pursuits of vanity; he will not go with the giddy multitude after their vain mirth. "No," saith he, "God hath appeared unto me as God all-sufficient for my comfort and my joy. I am content so long as God is mine. Let others drink of broken cisterns if they will, I dwell by the overflowing fountain, and am perfectly content." O beloved, what glorious names our Lord deservedly wears! Whichever of his names you choose to dwell upon for a moment, what a mine of wealth and meaning it opens up to you! Here is this name, "El Shaddai;" "El," that is, "the strong one," for infinite power dwells in Jehovah. How readily may we who are weak become mighty if we draw upon him! And then, "Shaddai," that is to say, "the unchangeable, the invincible." What a God we have then, who knows no variableness, neither shadow of turning, against whom none can stand! "El," strong; "Shaddai," unchangeable in his strength; always therefore strong in every time of need, ready to defend his people, and able to preserve them from all their foes. Come, Christian, with such a God as this why needest thou abase thyself to win the good word of the wicked man? Why gaddest thou abroad to find earthly pleasures where the roses are always mixed with thorns? Why needest thou to put thy confidence in gold and silver, or

in the strength of thy body, or in aught that is beneath the moon? Thou hast El Shaddai to be thine. Thy power to be holy will much depend upon thy grasping with all the intensity of thy faith the cheering fact that this God is thy God for ever and ever, thy daily portion, thine all-sufficient consolation. Thou dares not, canst not, wilt not, wander into the ways of sin when thou knowest that such a God is thy shepherd and guide.

Following up this model of the consecrated life, notice the next words—“*walk before me.*” This is the style of life which characterises true holiness; it is a walking before God. Ah! Brethren, Abram had walked before Sarai; he had paid undue respect to her views and wishes; he had walked, too, in the sight of his own eyes and the inclinations of his own heart when he was allied to Hagar; but now the Lord gently rebukes him with the exhortation, “Walk before me.” It is remarkable that on the former divine visit to the patriarch (which we tried to interpret last Lord’s-day), the Lord’s message was “Fear not.” He was then, as it were, but a child in spiritual things, and the Lord gave him comfort, for he needed it. He is now grown into a man, and the exhortation is practical and full of activity—“walk.” The Christian man is to put out and use the strength and grace which he hath received. The pith of the exhortation lies in the last words, “Walk *before me,*” by which I understand an habitual sense of the presence of God, or doing the right thing and shunning the wrong, out of respect to the will of God; a consideration of God in all actions, public and private. Brethren, I deeply regret when I see Christian men, even in religious societies, in their calculations leaving out the greatest item in the whole calculation—namely, the divine element, the divine power and faithfulness. Of the most of mankind I may say, without being censorious, that if there were no God their course of action would not be different from what it is, for they do not feel themselves either restrained or constrained by any sense of the divine presence. “The transgression of the wicked saith within my heart, that there is no fear of God before his eyes.” But this is the mark of the truly sanctified man of God, that he lives in every place as standing in the presence chamber of the divine Majesty; he acts as knowing that the eye which never sleeps is always fixed on him. His heart’s desire is that he may never do the wrong thing, because he has respect to worldly greatness, and may never forget the right thing because he is in evil company, but may reckon that God being everywhere, he is always in company where it would be impudent rebellion to sin. The saint feels that he must not, dare not, transgress, because he is before the very face of God. This is the model of the sanctified character, for a man to realise what the Lord is, and then to act as in the immediate presence of a holy and jealous God.

The next words are, “*and be thou perfect.*” Brethren, does this mean absolute perfection? I shall not controvert the belief of some, that we may be absolutely perfect on earth. Freely do I admit that the model of sanctification is perfection. It were inconsistent with the character of God for him to give us any other than a perfect command, and a perfect standard. No law but that of absolute perfection could come from a perfect God, and to give us a model that were not absolutely perfect, were to ensure to us superabundant imperfections, and to give us an excuse for them. God sets before his servants no rule of this kind, “Be as good as you can,” but this, “Be you perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.” Hath any man ever attained to it? Truly we have not, but for all that, every Christian man aims at it. I would far rather my child had a perfect copy to write by, though he might never write equal to it, than that he should have an imperfect copy set before him, because then he would never make a good writer at all. Our heavenly Father has given us the perfect image of Christ to be our example, his perfect law to be our rule, and it is for us to aim at this perfection in the power of the Holy Spirit, and, like Abram, to fall upon our faces in

shame and confusion of face, when we recollect how far we have come short of it. Perfection is what we wish for, pant after, and shall at the last obtain. We do not want to have the law toned down to our weakness. Blessed be God, we delight in the perfection of that law. We say with Paul, "The law is holy, and just, and good, but I am carnal, sold under sin." The will of God is that which we would be conformed unto; and if we who are believers had but one wish, and it could be granted to us at once, it should be this, to make us perfect in every good work to do his will, working in us that which is well-pleasing in his sight. However, the word "perfect," as I have said, bears commonly the meaning of "upright," or "sincere"—"walk before me, and be thou sincere." No double dealing must the Christian man have, no playing fast and loose with God or man; no hypocritical professions, or false principles. He must be as transparent as glass; he must be a man in whom there is no guile, a man who has cast aside deceit in every shape, who hates it, and loathes it, and walks before God, who sees all things with absolute sincerity, earnestly desiring in all things, both great and small, to commend himself to the conscience of others as in the sight of the Most High.

Brethren, here is the model of the consecrated life. Do you not long to attain to it? I am sure every soul that is moved by God's grace will do so. But if your feeling about it is like mine, it will be just that of Abram in the text, "Abram fell on his face before the Lord." For oh, how far short we have come of this! We have not always thought of God as all-sufficient; we have been unbelieving. We have doubted him here, and doubted him there. We have not gone to work in this world as if we believed the promise, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." We have not been satisfied to suffer, or to be poor, and we have not been content to do his will without asking questions. We might often have had addressed to us the rebuke, "Is the Lord's hand waxed short? Is his arm shortened at all? Is his ear heavy, that he cannot hear?" Brethren, we have not always walked before the Lord. If one may speak for the rest, we do not always feel the presence of God as a check to us. There are angry words perhaps at the table; there is wrong-doing in the place of business; there are carelessness, worldliness, pride, and I know not what beside of evil to mar the day's labour; and when we come back at night we have to confess, "I have gone astray like a lost sheep, I have forgotten my Shepherd's presence. I have not always spoken and acted as if I felt that thou wast always looking upon me." Thus it has come to pass that we have not been perfect. I feel ready to laugh, not the laugh of Abram, but that of thorough ridicule, when I hear people talk about their being absolutely perfect. They must be of very different flesh and blood from us, or rather they must be great fools, full of conceit, and utterly ignorant of themselves; for if they did but look at a single action, they would find specks in it; and if they examined but one single day, they would perceive something in which they fell short, if there were nothing in which they had transgressed. You see your model, brethren, study it in the life of Christ, and then press forward to it with the zeal of the apostle who said, "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

II. Secondly, THE NATURE OF THIS CONSECRATION as illustrated in this chapter. On each point briefly.

*Genuine spiritual consecration begins with communion with God.* Note the third verse:—"Abram fell on his face, and God talked with him." By looking at Christ Jesus, his image is photographed upon our mind, and we are changed from glory to glory, as by the presence of the Lord. Distance

from God's presence always means sin: holy familiarity with God engenders holiness. The more you think of God, the more you meditate upon his works, the more you praise him, the more you pray to him, the more constantly you talk with him, and he with you, by the Holy Ghost, the more surely are you upon the road to thorough consecration to his cause.

The next point in the nature of this consecration is that *it is fostered by enlarged views of the covenant of grace*. Read on: "As for me, behold my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations." This is said to help Abram to walk before God and to be perfect; from which we conclude that to grow in sanctification a man should increase in knowledge, and also in the tenacity of the faith which grasps the covenant which God has made with Christ for his people, which is "Ordered in all things and sure." With your Bibles open, notice attentively that Abram was refreshed as to *his own personal interest in the covenant*. Note the second personal pronoun, how it is repeated: "As for me, behold, my covenant is with *thee*, and *thou* shalt be a father of many nations." Take the sixth verse, "I will make *thee* exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of *thee*, and kings shall come out of *thee*. And I will establish my covenant between me and *thee*, and thy seed after *thee* . . . to be a God unto *thee*, and to thy seed after *thee*." Thus Abram has the covenant brought home to himself; he is made to feel that he has a part and a lot therein. If you are ever to be sanctified unto God's service, you must get a full assurance of your interest in all the covenant provisions. Doubts are like wild boars of the wood, which tear up the flowers of sanctification in the garden of the heart; but when you have in your soul a God-given assurance of your interest in the precious blood of Jesus Christ, then shall the foxes which spoil the vines be hunted to death, and your tender grapes shall give a good smell. Cry to God, beloved brethren and sisters, for strong faith to "Read your title clear to mansions in the skies." Great holiness must spring from great faith. Faith is the root, obedience the branch; and if the root decays the branch cannot flourish. Ask to know that Christ is yours, and that you are his; for here you will find a fountain to water your consecration and make it yield fruit to Christ's service. Some professors act as if this were not the case. They foment their doubts and fears in order to perfect holiness. I have known Christians, when they are conscious that they have not lived as they ought to live, begin to doubt their interest in Christ, and, as they say, humble themselves in order to reach after fuller sanctification of life. That is to say, they starve themselves in order to grow strong; they throw their gold out of window in order to become rich; they pull up the very foundation-stone of their house to make it stand secure. Beloved believer, sinner as thou art, backslider as thou art, still believe in Jesus, let not a sense of sin weaken thy faith in him. He died for sinners, "in due time Christ died for the ungodly." Cling to that cross still: the more furious the storm the more need of the life-buoy—never leave it, but make your hold the firmer. Confide alone in the virtue of that precious blood, for thus only will you slay your sins and advance in holiness. If you say within your heart, "Jesus cannot save such a one as I am; if I had marks and evidences of being God's child, I could then trust in compense of reward; you have cast away your shield, and the darts of the tempter will wound you terribly. Cling to Jesus even when it is a question whether you have a grain of grace in your hearts. Believe that he died for you, not because you are consecrated or sanctified, but died for you as sinners, and saves you as sinners. Never lose your simple trust in the Crucified, for only by the blood of the Lamb can you overcome sin and be made fit for the Lord's work.

Note, in reading these words, how this covenant is revealed to Abram peculiarly as *a work of divine power*. Note the run of the passage, "*I will* make my covenant between me and thee." "*I will* make thee fruitful." "*I will* establish my covenant." "*I will* give unto thee." "*I will* be thy God,"

and so on. Oh! those glorious “wills” and “shalls.” Brethren, ye cannot serve the Lord with a perfect heart until first your faith gets a grip of the divine “will” and “shall.” If my salvation rests upon this poor, puny arm, upon my resolves, my integrity, and my faithfulness, it is shipwrecked for ever; but if my eternal salvation rests upon the great arm which bears up the universe, if my soul’s safety is altogether in that hand that wheels the stars along, then blessed be his name, it is safe and well; and now out of love to such a Saviour I will serve him with all my heart. I will spend and be spent for him who has thus graciously undertaken for me. Mark this, brethren, be very clear about it, and ask to have the divine working made apparent to your soul, for that will help you to be consecrated to God.

Further, Abraham had a view of the covenant *in its everlastingness*. I do not remember that the word “everlasting” had been used before in reference to that covenant, but in this chapter we have it over and over again. “I will establish my covenant for an everlasting covenant.” Here is one of those grand truths which many of the babes in grace have not as yet learned, namely, that the blessings of grace are blessings not given to-day to be taken back to-morrow, but eternal blessings. The salvation which is in Christ Jesus is not a salvation which will belong to us for a few hours, while we are faithful to it, and will then be taken away, so that we shall be left to perish. God forbid, “He is not a man that he should lie, nor the son of man that he should repent.” “I am God,” saith he, “I change not: therefore, ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.” When we put ourselves into the hands of Christ, we do not confide in a Saviour who might suffer us to be destroyed, but we rest in one who hath said, “I give unto my sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand.” Instead of the doctrine of the security of the saints leading to negligence of life, you will find that, on the contrary, where it is thoroughly well received in the heart by the power of the Holy Ghost, it begets such a holy confidence in God, such a flaming gratitude to him, that it is one of the best incentives to consecration. Treasure up these thoughts, dear brethren, and if you would grow in grace and in conformity to Christ, endeavour to perceive your personal interest in the covenant, the divine power which guarantees its fulfilment, and the everlastingness of its character.

In considering the nature of this consecration, I would observe next, that *they who are consecrated to God are regarded as new men*. The new manhood is indicated by the change of name—he is called no longer Abram, but Abraham, and his wife is no longer Sarai, but Sarah. Ye, beloved, are new creatures in Christ Jesus. The root and source of all consecration to God lies in regeneration. We are “born again,” a new and incorruptible seed is placed within us which “liveth and abideth for ever.” The name of Christ is named upon us: we are no longer called sinners and unjust, but we become the children of God by faith which is in Christ Jesus.

Note further that *the nature of this consecration was set forth to Abraham by the rite of circumcision*. It would not be at all fitting or decorous for us to enter into any detail as to that mysterious rite, but it will suffice to say that the rite of circumcision signified the taking away of the filthiness of the flesh. We have the apostle Paul’s own interpretation of circumcision in the verses which we read just now in his epistle to the Colossians. Circumcision indicated to the seed of Abraham that there was a defilement of the flesh in man which must for ever be taken away, or man would remain impure, and out of covenant with God. Now, beloved, there must be, in order to our sanctification to Christ, a giving up, a painful relinquishing of things as dear to us as right eyes and right hands. There must be a denying of the flesh with its affections and lusts. We must mortify our members. There must be self-denial if we are to enter upon the service of God. The

Holy Spirit must pass sentence of death and cutting away upon the passions and tendencies of corrupt humanity. Much must perish which nature would cherish, but die it must, because grace abhors it.

Notice, with regard to circumcision, that it was peremptorily ordained that it should be practised on every male of the race of Abraham, and if it were neglected, death followed. So the giving up of sin, the giving up of the body of the filth of the flesh is necessary to every believer. Without holiness no man shall see the Lord. Even the babe in Christ is as much to see death written upon the body of the filth of the flesh as a man who, like Abraham, has reached advanced years and come to maturity in spiritual things. There is not distinction here between the one and the other. "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord;" and where a supposed grace does not take away from us a love of sin, it is not the grace of God at all, but the presumptuous conceit of our own vain natures.

It is often said that the ordinance of baptism is analagous to the ordinance of circumcision. I will not controvert that point, although the statement may be questioned. But supposing it to be, let me urge upon every believer here to see to it that in his own soul he realises the spiritual meaning both of circumcision and baptism, and then consider the outward rites; for the thing signified is vastly more important than the sign. Baptism sets forth far more than circumcision. Circumcision is putting away of the filth of the flesh, but baptism is the burial of the flesh altogether. Baptism does not say, "Here is something to be taken away," but everything is dead, and must be buried with Christ in his tomb, and the man must rise anew with Christ. Baptism teaches us that by death we pass into the new life. As Noah's ark, passing through the death of the old world, emerged into a new world, even so, by a like figure, baptism sets forth our salvation by the resurrection of Christ: a baptism of which Peter says, it is "not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God." In baptism, the man avows to himself and others that he comes by death into newness of life, according to the words of the Holy Spirit, "Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead." The most valuable point is the spiritual meaning, and on that we experience what it is to be dead to the world, to be dead and buried with Christ, and then to be risen with him. Still, brethren, Abraham was not allowed to say, "If I get the spiritual meaning, I can do without the outward rite." He might have objected to that rite on a thousand grounds a great deal more strong than any which the hesitating have urged against baptism, but he first accepted the rite, as well as the thing which it intended, and straightway was circumcised; and so I exhort you, men and brethren, to be obedient to the precept upon baptism, as well as attentive to the truth which it signifies. If you be indeed buried with Christ, and risen with him, despise not the outward and instructive sign by which this is set forth. "Well," saith one, "a difficulty suggests itself as to your views," for an argument is often drawn from this chapter, "that inasmuch as Abraham must circumcise all his seed, we ought to baptise all our children." Now, observe the type and interpret it not according to prejudice, but according to Scripture. In the type the seed of Abraham are circumcised; you draw the inference that all typified by the seed of Abraham ought to be baptised, and I do not cavil at the conclusion; but I ask you, who are the true seed of Abraham? Paul answers in Romans ix. 8, "They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed." As many as believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, whether they be Jews or Gentiles, are Abraham's seed. Whether eight days old in grace, or more or less, every one of Abraham's seed has a right to baptism. But I deny that the unregenerate, whether children or adults, are of the spiritual seed of Abraham. The Lord will, we trust, call many of them by his grace,

but as yet they are “heirs of wrath, even as others.” At such time as the Spirit of God shall sow the good seed in their hearts, they are of Abraham’s believing seed, but they are not so while they live in ungodliness and unbelief, or are as yet incapable of faith or repentance. The answering person in type to the seed of Abraham is, by the confession of everybody, the believer; and the believer ought, seeing he is buried with Christ spiritually, to avow that fact, by his public baptism in water, according to the Saviour’s own precept and example. “Thus,” said Christ, “it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness,” as he went down to the river Jordan. At the Jordan was he sprinkled? Why go down to a river to be sprinkled? Why went he *down into the water* to be sprinkled? “Us.” Did he mean babes? Was he a babe? Was not he, when he said “us,” speaking of the faithful who are in him? “And thus it becometh *us* to fulfil all righteousness,” that is, all his saints. But how does baptism fulfil all righteousness? Typically thus:—It is the picture of the whole work of Christ. There is his immersion in suffering; his death and burial; his coming up out of the water represents his resurrection; his coming up the banks of Jordan represents his ascension. It is a typical representation of how he fulfilled all righteousness, and how the saints fulfilled it in him. But, brethren, I did not intend to go so far into the outward sign, because my soul’s deepest desire is this, that like as Abraham by the outward sign was taught that there was a putting away of the filth of flesh, which must be, or death must follow, so are we taught by baptism that there is an actual death to the world, and a resurrection with Christ, which must be to every believer, however old or however young, or he hath not part or lot in the matter of consecration to God, or, indeed, in salvation itself.

III. I have a third head, but my time is gone, and, therefore, just these hints. THE RESULTS OF SUCH A CONSECRATION.

Immediately after God’s appearing to Abraham, his consecration was manifest, first, *in his prayer for his family*. “O that Ishmael might live before thee!” Men of God, if you are indeed the Lord’s, and feel that you are his, begin now to intercede for all who belong to you. Never be satisfied unless they are saved too; and if you have a son, an Ishmael, concerning whom you have many fears and much anxiety, as you are saved yourself, never cease to groan out that cry, “O that Ishmael might live before thee!”

The next result of Abraham’s consecration was, that he *was most hospitable to his fellow men*. Look at the next chapter. He sits at the tent door, and three men come to him. The Christian is the best servant of humanity in a spiritual sense. I mean that for his Master’s sake he endeavours to do good to the sons of men. He is of all men the first to feed the hungry and to clothe the naked, and as much as lieth in him to do good unto all men, especially unto such as be of the household of faith.

The third result was, *Abraham entertained the Lord himself*, for amongst those three angels who came to his house was the King of kings, the infinite One. Every believer who serves his God doth, as it were, give refreshment to the divine mind. I mean this, God took an infinite delight in the work of his dear Son. He said, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased,” and he takes a delight also in the holiness of all his people. Jesus sees of the travail of his soul, and is satisfied by the works of the faithful; and you, brethren, as Abraham entertained the Lord, do entertain the Lord Jesus with your patience and your faith, with your love and your zeal, when you are thoroughly consecrated to him.

Once more, Abraham became *the great intercessor for others*. The next chapter is full of his pleadings for Sodom. He had not been able to plead before, but after circumcision, after consecration,

he becomes the King's remembrancer, he is installed into the office of a priest, and he stands there crying, "Wilt thou not save the city? Wilt thou destroy the righteous with the wicked?" O beloved, if we do but become consecrated to God, thoroughly so, as I have attempted feebly to describe, we shall become mighty with God in our pleadings. I believe one holy man is a greater blessing to a nation than a whole regiment of soldiers. Did not they fear more the prayers of John Knox than the arms of ten thousand men? A man who lives habitually near to God is like a great cloud for ever dropping with fertilising showers. This is the man who can say, "The earth is dissolved, I bear up the pillars thereof." France had never seen so bloody a revolution had there been men of prayer to preserve her. England, amidst the commotions which make her rock to and fro, is held fast because prayer is put up incessantly by the faithful. The flag of old England is nailed to her mast, not by the hands of her sailors, but by the prayers of the people of God. These, as they intercede day and night, and as they go about their spiritual ministry, these are they for whom God spareth nations, for whom he permitteth the earth still to exist; and when their time is over, and they are taken away, the salt being taken from the earth, then shall the elements dissolve with fervent heat, the earth also, and the works that are therein, shall be burnt up; but not until he hath caught away the saints with Christ into the air shall this world pass away. He will spare it for the righteous' sake. Seek after the highest degree of sanctity, my dear brethren and sisters, seek for it, labour for it; and while you rest in faith alone for justification, be not slack concerning growth in grace, that the highest attainments be your ambition, and God grant them to you, for his Son's sake. Amen.

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