

Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth by Spurgeon

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RIGHTLY DIVIDING THE WORD OF TRUTH

By C H Spurgeon

2 Timothy 2:15

Timothy was to divide rightly the word of God. This every Christian minister must do if he would make full proof of his ministry, and if he would be clear of the blood of his hearers at the last great day. Of the whole twenty years of my printed sermons, I can honestly say that this has been my aim — rightly to divide the word of truth. Wherein I have succeeded I magnify the name of the Lord, wherein I have failed I lament my faultiness. And now once more we will try again, and may God the Holy Spirit, without whose power nothing can be done aright, help us rightly to divide the word of truth.

The expression is a very remarkable one, because it bears so many phases of meaning. I do not think that any one of the figures by which I shall illustrate it will be at all strained, for they have been drawn from the text by most eminent expositors, and may fairly be taken as honest comments, even when they might be challenged as correct interpretations of the text. "Rightly dividing the word of truth" is our authorized version, but we leave it for a little to consider other renderings. Timothy was neither to mutilate, nor twist, nor torture, nor break in pieces the word, nor keep on the outside of it, as those do who never touch the soul of a text, but rightly to divide it, as one taught of God to teach others.

I. The Vulgate version translates it — and with a considerable degree of accuracy — "Rightly Handling the word of truth."

What is the right way, then, to handle the word of truth? It is like a sword, and it was not meant to be played with. That is not rightly to handle the gospel. It must be used in earnest and pushed home. Are you converted, my friends? Do you believe in Jesus Christ? Are you saved, or not? Swords are meant to cut and hack, and wound, and kill with, and the word of truth is for pricking men in the heart and killing their sins. The word of God is not committed to God's ministers to amuse men with its glitter, nor to charm them with the jewels in its hilt, but to conquer their souls for Jesus. Remember, dear hearers, if the preacher does not push you to this — that you shall be converted, or he will know the reason why; if he does not drive you to this — that you shall either wilfully reject, or cheerfully accept Christ, he has not yet known how rightly to handle the great "sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." Now, then, where are you personally at this moment? Are you unbelievers, upon whom the wrath of God abideth, or are you believers, who may lay claim to that gracious word, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believeth in me hath everlasting life." Oh that the Lord would make his all-discerning word go round this place and strike at every conscience and lay bare every heart with its mighty power.

He that rightly handles the word of God will never use it to defend men in their sins, but to slay their sins. If there be a professing Christian here who is living in known sin, shame upon him; and if there be a non-Christian man who is living in sin, let his conscience upbraid him. What will he do in that day when Christ comes to judge the hearts of men, and the books shall be opened, and every thought shall be read out before an assembled universe? I desire to handle the word of God so that no man may ever find an excuse in my ministry for his living without Christ, and living in sin, but may know clearly that sin is a deadly evil, and unbelief the sure destroyer of the soul. He has indeed been made to handle the word aright who plunges it like a two-edged sword into the very bowels of sin.

The gospel ought never to be used for frightening sinners from Christ. I believe it is so handled sometimes. Sublime doctrines are

rolled like rocks in the sinner's way, and dark experiences set up as a standard of horror which must be reached before a man may believe in Jesus: but rightly to handle the word of life is to frighten men to Christ rather than from him, yea, to woo them to him by the sweet assurance that he will cast out none that come, that he asks no preparations of them, but if they come at once as they are he will assuredly receive them. Have I not handled the word of truth in this way hundreds of times in this house? Has it not been a great magnet attracting sinners? As a magnet has two poles, and with one pole it repels, so, no doubt, the truth of God repels the prejudiced, rebellious heart, and thus it is a savor of death unto death; but our object is so to handle it that the attractive pole may come into operation through the power of the Spirit of God, and men may be drawn to Christ.

Moreover, if we rightly handle the word of God we shall not preach it so as to send Christians into a sleepy state. That is easily done. We may preach the consolations of the gospel till each professor feels "I am safe enough; there is no need to watch, no need to fight, no need for any exertion whatever. My battle is fought, my victory is won, I have only to fold my arms and go to sleep." No, no, men, this is not how we handle the word of God, but our cry is, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure. Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation. Reckon not yourselves to have attained unto perfection, but forget the things that are behind, and reach forward to that which is before, overlooking unto Jesus." This is rightly to handle the word of God.

And, oh, beloved, there is one thing; that I dread above all others lest I should ever handle the word of God so as to persuade some of you that you are saved when you are not. To collect a large number of professors together is one thing; but to have a large number of true saints built together in Christ is quite another thing. To get up a whirl of excitement, and to have people influenced by that excitement, so that they think full surely that they are converted, has been done a great many times; but the bubble has, by-and-by, vanished. The balloon has been filled until it has burst. God save us from that. We want sure work lasting work, a work of divine grace in the heart. If you are not converted, pray do not pretend that you are. If you have not known what it is to be brought down to see your own nothingness, and then to be built up by the power of the Spirit upon Christ as the only foundation, oh, remember that whatever is built upon the quicksand will fall with a crash in the hour of trial. Do not be satisfied with anything short of a deep foundation, cut in the solid rock of the work of Jesus Christ. Ask for real vital godliness, for nothing else will serve your turn at the leer great day. Now, this is rightly to handle the word of God; to use it to push truth home upon men for their present conversion, to use it for the striking down of their sins, to use it to draw men to Christ, to use it to arouse sinners, and to use it to produce, not mere profession, but a real work of grace in the hearts of men. May the Holy Ghost teach all the ministers of Christ after this fashion to handle the two-edged sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

II. But now, secondly, my text has another meaning. It has an idea in it which I can only express by a figure.

"Rightly dividing, or Straight Cutting. A ploughman stands here with his plough, and he ploughs right along from this end of the field to the other, making a straight furrow. And so Paul would have Timothy make a straight furrow right through the word of truth. I believe there is no preaching that God will ever accept but that which goes decidedly through the whole line of truth from end to end, and is always thorough, honest, and downright. As truth is a straight line, so must our handling of the truth be straightforward and honest, without shifts or tricks. There are two or three furrows which I have labored hard to plough. One is the furrow of free grace. "Salvation is of the Lord," — he begins it, he carries it on, he completes it. Salvation is not of man, neither by man, but of grace alone. Grace in election, grace in redemption, grace in effectual calling, grace in final perseverance, grace in conferring the perfection of glory; it is all grace from beginning to end. If we say at any time anything which is really contrary to this distinct testimony that salvation is of grace, believe us not. This furrow must be ploughed fairly, plainly, and beyond all mistake. Sinner, you cannot be saved by any merit, penance, preparation, or feeling of your own. The Lord alone must save you as a work of gratis mercy, not because you deserve it, but because he wills to do it to magnify his abundant love. That is the straight furrow of the Word.

We endeavor always to make a straight furrow upon the matter of human depravity — to preach that man is fallen, that every part and passion of his nature is perverted, that he has gone astray altogether, is sick from the crown of his head to the sole of his foot, yea, is dead in trespasses and sins, and corrupt before God. "There is none that doeth good, no, not one." I have noticed some preachers ploughing this furrow very crookedly, for they say, "There are some very fine points about man still, and many good things in him which only need developing and educating." You may have read in the history of Mr. Whitfield's time what a howl was made at him because he once said that man was half beast and half devil. I do not think he ever got nearer the truth than when he said that; only I would beg the beast's pardon, for a beast would scarcely become so evil and vile as human nature becomes when it is left alone fully to develop itself. O pride of human nature, we plough right over thee! The hemlock stands in thy field, and must be cut up by the roots. Thy weeds smile like fair flowers, but the ploughshare must go right through them all till all human beauty is shown to be a painted Jezebel, and all human glorying a bursting bubble. God is everything, man is nothing. God in his grace saves man, but man by his sin utterly ruins himself until God's grace interposes. I like to plough a straight furrow here.

Another straight furrow is that of faith. We are sent to tell men that he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, and our duty is to put it so. "Salvation is not of works," that is not the furrow: not of prayers, that is not the furrow: not of feelings — that is not the

gospel Arrow: not of preparations and amendments and reforms; but by faith in Jesus Christ. He that believeth on him is not condemned. As we begin the new life by faith, we must abide in it by faith. We are not to be saved by faith up to a certain point, and then to rely upon ourselves. Having begun in the gospel we are not to be perfected by the law. "The just shall live by faith." We live by faith at the wicket-gate, and we live by faith until we enter into our eternal rest. Believe! — that is the grand gospel precept, and we trust we have never gone out of this furrow, but have tried to plough right across the gospel field from end to end, crying, "Look unto me and be ye saved, all ye ends of the earth, for Jehovah is God, and beside him there is none else."

Another furrow which some do not much like to plough, but which must be distinctly marked if a man is an honest ploughman for God, is that of repentance. Sinner, you and your sins must part. You have been married long, and you have had a merry time of it perhaps; but you must part. You and your sins must separate, or you and your God will never come together. Not one sin may you keep. They must all be given up: they must be brought out like the Canaanitish kings from the cave, and hanged up before the sun. Not one darling must he spared. You must forsake them, loathe them, abhor them, and ask the Lord to overcome them. Do you not know that the furrow of repentance runs right through the Christian's life? He sins, and as long as he sins he repents of his sin. The child of God cannot love sin: he must loathe it as long as he sees any of it in existence.

There is the furrow of holiness, that is the next turn the ploughman takes "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord." We have preached salvation by grace, but we do not preach salvation to those who still continue in sin. The children of God are a holy people, washed, purged, sanctified, and made zealous for good works; he who talks about faith, and has no works to prove that his faith is a living faith, lies to himself and lies before God. It is faith that saves us, not works, but the faith that saves us always produces works: it renews the heart, changes the character, influences the motives, and is the means in the hand of God of making the man a new creature in Christ Jesus. No nonsense about it, sirs: you may be baptized and re-baptised, you may attend to sacraments, or you may believe in an orthodox creed; but you will be damned if you live in sin. You may become a deacon, or an elder, or a minister, if you dare; but there is no salvation for any man who still harbours his sins. "The wages of sin is death " — death to professors as well as to non-professors. If they hug their sins in secret God will reveal those sins in public, and condemn them according to the strict justice of his law. These are the furrows we have tried to plough — deep, sharp cut, and straight. Oh, that God might plough them himself in all your hearts that you may know experimentally how the truth is rightly divided.

III. There is a third meaning to the text.

"Rightly dividing the word of truth" is, as some think, an expression taken from the priests dividing the sacrifices. When they had a lamb or a sheep, a ram or a bullock to offer, after they had killed it, it was cut in pieces, carefully and properly; and it requires no little skill to find out where the joints are, so as to cut up an animal discreetly. Now, the word of truth has to be taken to pieces wisely; it is not to be hacked or torn as by a wild beast, but rightly divided. There has to be Discrimination And Dissection. It is a great part of a minister's duty to be able to dissect the gospel — to lay one piece there, and another there, and preach with clearness, distinction, and discrimination.

Every gospel minister must divide between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. It is a very nice point that, and many fail to discern it well; but it must always be kept clear, or great mischief will be done. Confusion worse confounded follows upon confusing grace and law. There is the covenant of works — "This do, and thou shalt live," but its voice is not that of the covenant of grace which says, "Hear and your soul shall live." "You shall, for I will :—" that is the covenant of grace. It is a covenant of pure promise unalloyed by terms and conditions. I have heard people put it thus — "Believers will be saved if from this time forth they are faithful to grace given." That savours of the covenant of works. "God will love you " — says another, — "if you — ." Ah, the moment you get an "if" in it, it is the covenant of works, and the gospel has evaporated. Oil and water will sooner mix than merit and grace. When you find the covenant of works anywhere, what are you to do with it? Why, do what Abraham did, and what Sarah demanded, "cast out the bond-woman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac." If you are a child of the free-grace promise, do not suffer the Hagar and Ishmael of legal bondage and carnal hope to live in your house. Out with them; you have nought to do with them. Let law and gospel keep their proper places. The law is master to bring us to Christ, but when we have come to Christ we are no longer under a schoolmaster. Let the law principle go its way to work conviction in sinners, and destroy their ill-grounded hopes, but do you abide in Christ Jesus even as you have received him. If you are to be saved by works then it is not of grace, otherwise work is no more work; and if saved by grace then it is not of human merit, otherwise grace is no more grace. To keep clear here is of the first importance, for on the rocks of legality many a soul has been cast away.

We need also to keep up a clear distinction between the efforts of nature and the work of grace. It is commendable for men to do all they can to improve themselves, and everything by which people are made more sober, more honest, more frugal, better citizens, better husbands, better wives, is a good thing; but that is nature and not grace. Reformation is not regeneration. "Ye must be born again" still stands for the good as well as for the bad. To be made a new creature in Christ Jesus is as necessary for the moral as for the debauched; for when flesh has done its best, "that which is born of the flesh is flesh;" and men must be born of the Spirit, or they cannot understand spiritual things, or enter into heaven. I have always tried to keep up this distinction, and I trust

none of you will ever mistake the efforts of nature for the works of divine grace. Do what you can for human reformation, for whatsoever things are honest and of good repute you are to foster; but, still, never put the most philanthropic plan, or the most elevating system in the place of the work of sovereign grace, for, if you do, you will do ten times as much mischief as you can possibly do good. We must rightly divide the word of truth.

It is always well, too, for Christian men to be able to distinguish one truth from another. Let the knife penetrate between the joints of the work of Christ for us, and the work of the Holy Spirit in us. Justification, by which the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us, is one blessing; sanctification, by which we ourselves are made personally righteous, is another blessing. I have known some describe sanctification as a sort of foundation, or at least a buttress for the work of justification. Now, no man is justified because he is sanctified: he is justified because he believeth in him that justifieth the ungodly. Sanctification follows justification. It is the work of the Spirit of God in the soul of a believer, who first of all was justified by believing in Jesus while as yet he was unsanctified. Give Jesus Christ all the glory for his great and perfect work, and remember that you are perfect in Christ Jesus and accepted in the Beloved, but, at the same time, give glory to the Holy Spirit, and remember that you are not yet perfect in holiness, but that the Spirit's work is to be carried on and will be carried on all the days of your life.

One other point of rightly dividing should never be forgotten, we must always distinguish between the root and the fruit. He is a very poor botanist who does not know a bulb from a bud, but I believe that there are some Londoners who do not know which are roots and which are fruits, so little have they seen of anything growing; and I am sure there are some theologians who hardly know which is the cause and which is the effect in spiritual things. Putting the cart before the horse is a very absurd thing, but many do it. Hear how people will say — "If I could feel joy in the Lord I would believe." Yes, that is the cart before the horse, for joy is the result of faith, not the reason for it. "But I want to feel a great change of heart, and then I will believe." Just so; you wish to make the fruit the root. "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ," that is the root of the matter; change of life and joy in the Lord will spring up as gracious fruits of faith, and not otherwise. When will you discriminate?

Thus I have given you three versions of my text — rightly handling, straightly furrowing, and wisely discriminating.

IV. The next interpretation of the apostle's expression is, practically Cutting Out the word for holy uses.

This is the sense given by Chrysostom. I will show you what I mean here. Suppose I have a skin of leather before me, and I want to make a saddle. I take a knife, and begin cutting out the shape. I do not want those parts which are dropping off on the right, and round this corner; they are very good leather, but I cannot just now make use of them. I have to cut out my saddle, and I make that my one concern. Or, suppose I have to make a pair of reins out of the leather. I must take my knife round, and work away with one object, keeping clearly before me what I am aiming at. The preacher, to be successful, must also have his wits about him, and when he has the Bible before him he must use those portions which will have a bearing upon his grand aim. He must make use of the material laid ready to his hand in the Bible. Every portion of the word of God is very blessed, and exceedingly profitable, but it may not happen to be connected with the preacher's immediate subject, and therefore he leaves it to be considered another time, and, though some will upbraid him for it, he is much too sensible to feel bound to preach all the doctrines of the Bible in each sermon. He wants to have souls saved and Christians Quickened, and therefore he does not for ever pour out the vials, and blow the trumpets of prophecy. Some hearers are crazy after the mysteries of the future. Well, there are two or three brethren in London who are always trumpeting and vialing. Go and hear them if you want it, I have something else to do. I confess I am not sent to decipher the Apocalyptic symbols, my errand is humbler but equally useful, I am sent to bring souls to Jesus Christ. There are preachers who are always dealing with the deep things, the very deep things. For them the coral caves of mystery, and the far descending shafts of metaphysics have a mighty charm. I have no quarrel with their tastes, but I do not think the word of God was given us to be a riddle-book. To me the plain gospel is the part which I cut out, and rightly cut out of the word of God. There is a soul that wants to know how to find peace with God. Some other brother can tell him where predestination falls in with free agency, I do not pretend to know, but I do know that faith in Jesus brings peace to the heart. My business is to bring forth that which will save souls, build up saints and set Christians to work for Christ. I leave the mysteries, not because I despise them; but because the times demand that we first, and above all other things, seek the souls of men. Some truths press to be heard; they must be heard now, or men will be lost. The other truths they can hear to-morrow, or by-and-by, but now escape from hell and fitness for heaven are their immediate business. Fancy the angels sitting down with Lot and his daughters inside Sodom, and discussing predestination with them, or explaining the limits of free agency. No, no, they cry, "Come along," and they take them by the arm and lead them out, saying, "Flee, flee, flee, for fire is coming down from heaven, and this city is to be destroyed." This is what the preacher has to do; leaving certain parts of truth for other times, he is now rightly dividing the word of truth when he brings out that which is of pressing importance. In the Bible there are some things that are essential, without which a man cannot be saved at all: there are other things which are important, but still men are saved, notwithstanding their ignorance of those things; is it not clear that the essentials must have prominence? Every truth ought to be preached in its turn and place, but we must never give the first place to a second truth, or push that to the front which was meant to be in the background of the picture. "We preach Christ," said the apostle, "Christ and him crucified," and I believe that if the preacher is rightly to divide the word, he will say to the sinner, "Sinner, Christ died, Christ rose again, Christ intercedes; look to him. As for the difficult questions and nice points, leave them for awhile.

You shall discuss them by-and-by, so far as they are profitable to you, but just now believing in the Lord Jesus Christ is the main matter." The preacher must thus separate the vital from the secondary, the practical from the speculative, and the pressing and immediate from that which may be lawfully delayed; and in that sense he will rightly divide the word of truth.

V. I have given you four meanings.

Now I will give you another, leaving out some I might have mentioned. One thing the preacher has to do is to Allot To Each One His Portion; and here the figure changes. According to Calvin, the intention of the Spirit here is to represent one who is the steward of the house, and has to apportion food to the different members of the family. He has rightly to divide the loaves so as not to give the little children and the babes all the crust; rightly to supply each one's necessities, not giving the strong men milk, nor the babes hard diet; not casting the children's bread to the dogs, nor giving the swine's husks to the children, but placing before each his own portion. Let me try and do it.

Child of God, your portion is the whole word of God. Every promise in it is yours. Take it: feed on it. Christ is yours; God is yours; the Holy Spirit is yours; this world is yours, and worlds to come. Time is yours; eternity is yours; life is yours; death is yours; everlasting glory is yours. There is your portion. It is very sweet to give you your royal meat. The Lord give you a good appetite. Feed on it; feed on it. Sinner, you who believe not in Jesus, none of this is yours. While you remain as you are the threatenings are yours. If you refuse to believe in Jesus, neither this life nor the next is yours, nor time, nor eternity. You have nothing good. Oh, how dreadful is your portion now, for the wrath of God abideth on you. Oh, that you were wise, that your character might be changed, for until it is, we dare not flatter you, there is not a promise for you, nor a single approving sentence. You get your food to eat and your raiment to put on; but even that is given to you by the abounding longsuffering of God, and it may become a curse to you unless you repent. I am sorry to bring you such a portion but I must be honest with you. That is all that I can give you. God has said it — it is an awful sentence — "I will curse their blessings." Oh, sinner, the curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked.

We have also to divide a portion to the mourners, and oh, how sweet a task that is, to say to those that mourn in Zion that the Lord will give them beauty for ashes. "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted." The Lord will restore peace unto his mourners. Fear not, neither be dismayed, for the Lord will help you. But when we have given the mourners their sweet meats we have to turn round upon the hypocrites and say to them, "You may hang your heads like bulrushes, you may rend your garments and pretend to last, but the Lord, who knows your heart, will suddenly come and unmask you, and if you are not sincere before him, if you are weighed in the balances and found wanting, he will deal out the gall of bitterness to you for ever. For his mourners there is mercy, but for the deceiver and the hypocrite there is judgment without mercy." It is a very pleasant thing, moreover, to deal out a portion to the seeker — when we say, "He that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden," saith Christ, "for I will give you rest." Take your portion and be glad.

We have to turn round, and say to others who think they are seekers, but who are delaying, "How long halt ye between two opinions?" How is it that you continually hesitate and refuse to believe in Jesus, and stay in the condition of unbelief, when the gospel mandate is, "Believe — believe now and live!" So we have to give to one comfort, to another counsel; to one reproof, to another encouragement; to one the invitation, to another the warning; and this is rightly to divide the word of truth.

Yes, and sometimes God enables his servants to give the word very remarkably to some men. I believe that if I were to tell a few of the things which have happened to me during the last one-and-twenty years they would not be believed, or if I were to tell you of passages of history which are known to me that have occurred in this Tabernacle to people who have come here, and to whom I have spoken the exact word, not knowing them for a moment, the facts would sound like fictions. I will give you one instance. Some of you will remember my preaching from the text, "What if thy father answer thee roughly?" There came into the vestry after that sermon a venerable Christian gentleman, bringing with him a young foreigner whom he was anxious to satisfy upon one point. He said, "Sir, I want you kindly to answer this question — have you seen me concerning this young gentlemen?" "No, sir, certainly not," I said; and assuredly, though I knew the gentleman who addressed me, he had never spoken to me about the foreign stranger whose very existence was up to that moment unknown to me. Said he, "This young gentleman is almost persuaded to be a Christian. His father is of quite another faith, and worships other gods, and our young friend knows that if he becomes a Christian he will lose his father's love. I said to him, when he conversed with me, come down and hear Mr. Spurgeon this morning. Here he came, and your text was, 'What if thy father answer thee roughly?' Now, have you ever heard a word from me about this young gentleman?" "No, never," I said. "Well," said the young man, "it is the most extraordinary thing I ever heard in my life." I could only say, "I trust it is the voice of God to your soul. God knows how to guide his servants to utter the word most fitted to bless men."

Some time ago a town missionary had in his district a man who never would suffer any Christian person to come into his house. The missionary was warned by many that he would get a broken head if he ventured on a visit. He therefore kept from the house, though it troubled his conscience to pass it by. He made a matter of prayer of it, and one morning he boldly ventured into the lion's den, and the man said, "What have you come here for?" "Well, sir," he said, "I have been conversing with people in all the houses along here, and I have passed you by because I heard you objected to it; but somehow I thought it looked cowardly to avoid you,

and therefore I have called." "Come in," the man said; "sit down, sit down. Now, you are going to talk to me about the Bible. Perhaps you do not know much about it yourself. I am going to ask you a question, and if you can answer me you shall come again. If you do not answer it, I will bundle you downstairs. Now," said he, "do you take me?" "Yes," said the other, "I do take you." "Well, then," said he, "this is the question — where do you find the word 'girl' in the Bible, and how many times do you find it?" The city missionary said, "The word 'girl' occurs only once in the Bible, and that is in the Book of Joel, the third chapter and the third verse. 'They sold a girl for wine.'" "You are right," said he, "but I would not have believed you knew it, or else I would have asked you some other question. You may come again." "But," said the missionary, "I should like you to know how I came to know it. This very morning I was praying for direction from God, and when I was reading my morning chapter I came upon this passage, 'And they sold a girl for wine;' and I took down my concordance to see whether the word 'girl' was to be found anywhere else. I found that the word 'girls' occurs in the passage, 'There shall be girls and boys playing in the streets of Jerusalem,' but the word did not occur as 'girl' anywhere but in Joel." The result, however, of that story, however odd it seems, was that the missionary was permitted to call, and the man took an interest in his visits, and the whole family were the better; the man, and his wife, and one of his children becoming members of a Christian church some time afterwards. What an extraordinary thing it seems; yet, I can assure you that such extraordinary things are as commonplaces in my experience. God does help his servants rightly to divide the word, that is to say, to allot a special portion to each special case, so that it comes as pat upon the man as if everything about him was known. Before I came to London, a man met me one Sunday, in a dreadful state of rage. He vowed he would horsewhip me for bullying him from the pulpit. What had I said, I asked. "What have you said? You looked me in the face, and said, 'What more can God do for you? Shall he give you a good wife? You have had one: you have killed her by bad treatment: you have just got another, and you are likely to do the same by her.'" "Well," I said, "did you kill your first wife by your bad treatment?" "They say so; but I was married on Saturday," said he. "Did you not know it?" "No, I did not, I assure you," I replied; "I have no knowledge whatever of your family matters, and I am sure I wish you joy of your new wife." He cooled down a great deal; but I believe that I had struck the nail on the head that time — that he had killed his wife with his unkindness, and he scarcely liked to bring his new wife to the place of worship to be told of it. The cap fitted him; and if any cap fit you, I pray you wear it, for so far from shrinking from being personal, I do assure you I try to be as personal as ever I can, for I long to see the word go home to every man's conscience, and convict him and make him tremble before God and confess his sin and forsake it.

VI. You must give me a few more minutes while I take the last point, which is this.

Rightly to divide the word of truth means to

Tell Each Man What His Lot And Heritage Will Be In Eternity.

Just as when Canaan was conquered, it was divided by lot among the tribes, so the preacher has to tell of Canaan, that happy land, and he has to tell of the land of darkness and of death-shade, and to let each man know where his last abode will be. You do know it; you who come here do know it. Need I repeat a story that we have gone over and over a thousand times? As many as believe in Jesus' and are renewed in heart, and are kept by the grace of God through faith unto salvation, shall inherit eternal life; but as for those who believe not on God, who reject his Son, who abide in their sine, there remaineth nothing for them but "a fearful looking for of judgment and of fiery indignation." "The wicked shall be turned into hell with all the nations that forget God." "These shall go away into everlasting punishment; but the righteous into life eternal." "Beware," saith God, — "Beware, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces and there be none to deliver." Oh, the wrath to come! the wrath to come!

Believer, there is your portion — in the blessed land. Sinner, except you repent, there is your portion — in the land of darkness and of weeping, and of wailing, and of gnashing of teeth. I take a religious newspaper from America, and the last copy I had of it bore on it these words at the end, in good large type, printed in a practical, business-like, American way: "If you do not want to have this paper, discontinue it now. If you wish to have it for the year 1875, send your subscription now. If you have any complaint against it, send your complaint Now. If you have removed, send a notice of your change of residence Now." There was a big "NOW" at the end of every sentence. As I read it I thought, well, that is right: that is common sense. And it struck me that I would say to you on this last night of the year, if you wish to forsake your sins, forsake them now. If you would have mercy from God through Jesus Christ, believe on him NOW. What fitter time than ere the dying year is gone — now, now, now? In that very paper I read a story concerning Messrs. Moody and Sankey to the same point. The story is that, while they were preaching in Edinburgh, there was a man sitting opposite to them who was very deeply interested, and was drinking it all in. There was a pause in the service, and the man went out with his friend; but when he reached the door he stopped, and his friend said, "Come away, Jamie." "No," he said, "I will go back. I came here to get good to my soul, and I have not taken it all in yet, I must go back again." He went back, and sat in his old place, and listened again. The Lord blessed him. He found Christ, and so found salvation. Being a miner, he went down the pit the next day to his work, and a mass of rock fell on him. He was taken out; but he could not recover. He said to the man who was helping him out, "Oh, Andrew, I am so glad it was all settled last night. Oh, mon," said he, "it was all settled last night." Now, I hope those people who were killed in the railway accident on Christmas Eve could say — "It was all settled the night before." What a blessed thing it will be for you, if you should meet with an accident to-morrow, to say, "Blessed be God, it was all settled last night. I gave any heart to Jesus, I yielded myself to his divine love and mercy, and I am saved." O Holy Spirit, grant it may be so,

and those shalt have the praise. Amen and amen.

ETERNAL FAITHFULNESS UNAFFECTED BY HUMAN UNBELIEF

By C H Spurgeon
2 Timothy 2:13

“If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself.” — 2 Timothy 2:13.

This is one of the five faithful sayings which the apostle mentions. All those faithful sayings are weighty and important. I suppose that they may have come into the possession of the church by having been uttered by some of those prophets who were raised up to cherish the infancy of the church, such as Agabus, and the daughters of Philip, and others. These may have been some of their more remarkable sayings which laid hold upon the minds of good men, were quoted by the preachers and teachers, and so became current throughout the church. Such golden sayings were minted into proverbs, and passed from hand to hand, enriching all who received them: to the saints they became “familiar in their mouths as household words,” and were specially named faithful or true sayings. No doubt the apostle Paul gave his endorsement to many of these holy proverbs, but five of them he has encased in the amber of inspiration, and handed down for our special note. Perhaps it may interest you to notice them as they occur. The first one, the best one, probably, is in the First Epistle of Timothy, first chapter, and the fifteenth verse,

“This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.”

I can suppose that the good news was frequently conveyed by humble-minded Christians to the outside world in that short and compact form — “Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners,” so that it was commonly known to be a saying among Christians. It was the way in which those who could not preach a sermon, and, perhaps, could scarcely compose a sentence for themselves, learned the pith and marrow of the gospel, and had it by them in a concise and simple form for instructing others. Converts were in the habit of telling this to their heathen friends and acquaintances wherever they went, that so they might know what Jesus Christ had come to do, and might be led to believe on his name. The next faithful or true saying is in the First Epistle of Timothy, the third chapter, and the first verse.

“This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work.”

Any man who desireth to oversee the church of God, and to be in the midst of the people as a shepherd, desireth a good work. He will bring himself great anxiety labor and, travail, but the work is honorable, and has so large a spiritual reward that a man is wise to choose it, and to give his whole life to it. Another of these faithful sayings will be found in the First Epistle of Timothy, the fourth chapter, and the eighth verse, for so the words run,

“For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come. This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation. For therefore we both labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, specially of those that believe.”

Godliness hath the profit of this life and the next, and therefore godly men are content to suffer, because they expect and do receive an abundant blessing as the result thereof at the hand of God. Such a proverb as this was greatly needed in persecuting times, and it is valuable still in these greedy days, when men find godliness a hindrance to their hasty snatching at wealth, and therefore turn aside unto ways of dishonesty and falsehood. The next is the one which constitutes Our text. We will not, therefore, read it again till we come to handle it. But the fifth is in Titus, the third chapter, and the eighth verse:

“This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men.”

That those who believe in Jesus should manifest the holy character of their faith by their lives is another one of these faithful sayings, which comes with all the greater force from Paul because he above all men was free from any suspicion of legality, or the putting of human merit into the place of the grace of God which is received by faith.

And now; coming to the faithful saying before us, it may not strike you at first, but scholarly men have observed that the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth verses assume the form of a hymn. The Hebrew hymns were written in parallelisms, not, of course, in rhymes; and these three verses are thought to have been one of the oldest of Christian hymns

“It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: If we deny him, he also will deny us: If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: He cannot deny

himself.”

This is a miniature psalm — one of those psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with which the saints of God were wont to edify one another.

I am sure this last part of this brief hymn is well worthy to be regarded as a faithful saying among ourselves. Brethren, we may often mention it; we may frequently quote it; we may roll it under our tongue as a sweet morsel; we may pass it from one to another as a classic saying of Christian wisdom —

“If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself.”

In handling it at this time I would divide it into two folded parts. The first double portion is, the sad possibility, with the consoling assurance. “If we believe not,” — sad possibility: “yet he abideth faithful,” — consoling assurance. The second part of our subject is the glorious impossibility, and the sweet inference that we may draw from it. The glorious impossibility is, — “He cannot deny himself,” and the inference we draw from it is the obverse or converse of our text — If we believe, he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself.

I. To begin, then, with The Sad Possibility, And The Consoling Assurance — If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful.”

I must take the sad possibility first, — “if we believe not,” and I shall read this expression as though, first of all, it concerned the world in general, for I think it may so be fairly read. If we believe not — if mankind believe not, if the race believe not, if the various classes of men believe not — yet he abideth faithful. The rulers believe not, and there are some that make this very great point. They said concerning Jesus, “Have any of the rulers believed on him?” If Lord So-and-so hears the preacher there must be something in what he says. Englishmen are wonderfully impressed with the judgment of a duke or an earl, and even with that of titled folk of lower degree. If any of the rulers believe in him, who among worshippers of rank would raise a question? Is it published under authority? Do the great ones subscribe to it? “Oh, then,” says one, “it must be good, and it must be true.” Now, I venture to say that all history proves that the truth has very seldom been accepted by the rulers of this world, and that for the most part the poorest, of the poor have been more able to perceive the truth than the greatest of the great have ever been. There would have been no Christianity in the world at the present moment if it had not found a shelter in workshops and in cottages. It has flourished amongst the despised poor when it has been scouted by the great ones of the earth. Well, sirs, if we believe not — that is, if our greatest men, if our senators and magistrates, princes and potentates, believe not — it does not affect the truth of God in the smallest conceivable degree — “yet he abideth faithful.”

Many, however, think it more important to know on which side the leaders of thought me enlisted, and there are certain persons who are not elected to that particular office by popular vote, who nevertheless take it upon themselves to consider that they are dictators in the republic of opinion. They are advanced men and far ahead of the old school of divines. Some of us think that they are advancing in the direction of going backwards, and that they are putting ignorant guess-work into the room of proved doctrine and solid, experimental, Scriptural teaching. Still, as in their own opinion they are our superiors, and pioneer the way of progress, we will for a moment think of them as such. Now, in our Lord’s day, the advanced thinkers were not on his side at all; they were all against him, and after he had departed, the gravest peril of the church of God arose from the advanced thought of the period. The Gnostics and other Grecian thinkers, came forward, and they threw their philosophical mud into the pure stream of the gospel till there was no plain statement; which was not rendered mythical, mystical, confused, add clouded, so that only the initiated could possibly understand’ it. The gospel of Jesus Christ was meant to be the plainest truth that ever shone upon the sons of men. It was meant to be legible in its own light by the young, the unlearned, and the simple; but the advanced thinkers took the gospel, and twisted it, coloured it, adorned it, and bedaubed it till by the time it came through their various processes you would not have known it to be the same thing at all; and, in fact, Paul said that it was not the same thing, for he called it “another gospel,” and then he corrected himself, and said it was not another: “But there be some,” said he, “that trouble you.” However, we need not care because of these wise men, for if they believe not, but becloud the gospel, yet God abideth faithful. If over there in the groves where Socrates and Plato gathered disciples by their philosophy, if over there, I say, there should not be found a single philosopher who believes in God, so much the worse for the philosophers, but it does, not affect the gospel or our faith in it: if they believe not, he abideth faithful. If Paul at the Areopagus gets no sympathy except from two or three, and in fact they have only asked him there to “hear what this babbler saith,” and though they all as they go home say that Paul is beside himself, and mad, and a setter forth of strange gods, yet Paul is right, and the Lord abideth faithful.

Yes, and I venture to enlarge this thought a little more. If the rulers do not believe, and if the philosophical minds do not. believe, and if in addition to this public opinion, so called, rejects it, yet the gospel is still the same eternal truth. Public opinion is not the test and gauge of truth, for it has continually altered, and it will continue to alter. The aggregate thinking of fallible men is less than nothing when set against the one solitary mind of God, who is infallible, as he reveals it to us by the Rely Ghost in the words of truth in the Scriptures. But some think that the old gospel cannot be right, because, you see, everybody says that it is out of date and wrong. That is one reason for being the more sure that it is right, for the world lieth in the wicked one, and its judgment is under

his sway. What are multitudes when they are all under the influence of the father of lies? The grandest majority in the world is a minority of one when that man is on God's side. Count heads, do you? Well, count by the millions, if you like, but I shall rather weigh than count; and if I speak the truth of God, I have more weight on my side than can be found in a million who believe not. I wish we all partook of the spirit of Athanasius when he said, defending the deity of his great Master, "I, Athanasius, against the world." You must learn to stand alone. When you know that you have a grip of revealed truth you may not set all the judgments of men in comparison with the eternal and infallible judgment of the mighty God. No, though we believe not, that is, the mass of us and nations of us, "yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself."

I want to ask your thoughtful attention to one consideration here. Have you not often heard it said that ministers ought to be abreast of the times, that theology should be always toned and varied so as to suit the advanced thought of the wonderful period in which we live? And as this is a time when infidelity appears to be in the very air, we are told that we ought to sympathize with it very earnestly and heartily, for it is a form of struggling for the light which we ought to encourage. Now, this is another sort of talk from what I hear from the apostle Paul. He has no sympathy with it. He put his foot on it. "Let God be true and every man a liar" — that is the style in which he speaks. As to going in to study the philosophies in order to tune the gospel to their note, he says, "I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified." When he finds that this style of doctrine does not please the Jew, and that it is to him a stumbling-block, and that it does not please the Greek, but makes him sneer and call it foolishness, does the apostle, therefore, say, "Come hither, dear Jewish friend. I have a way of putting this which will show you that I do not quite mean what you thought; I did. I used the word "cross" in a certain sense not at all objectionable to Judaism"? Does he gently whisper, "Come to me, my learned Greek friend, and I will show you that your philosophers and I mean the same thing"? Not a bit of it; but he stands fast and firm to Christ crucified and salvation by his blood, as, by God's grace, I trust we are resolved to do. Though we believe not, — that is, though the whole world believe not — yet God's gospel is not to be altered to suit human whims and fancies, but in all its angularity and singularity, in all its divine authority, unpaved, uncut, wrought out as a whole, it is still to be proclaimed, for "he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself."

Now, having spoken of our text as referring to the world in general, it is, perhaps, a more sorrowful business to look at it as referring to the visible church in particular. The apostle says, "Though we believe not," and surely he must mean the visible church of God.

And does the church of God ever fall into such a state that we may say of it, "It believes not"? Yes, the visible church has many and many a time fear fitly turned aside. Go back for a type of it to the wilderness. The children of Israel were brought up out of Egypt with a high hand and an outstretched arm, and they were fed in the wilderness with angels' food, and made to drink of water from the rock; but they were continually doubting their God.

"Now they believe his word
While rocks with rivers flow;
Anon with sin they grieve the Lord,
And judgments lay them low."

But what happened? Did God depart from his purpose to give the land that flowed with milk and honey to the seed of Abraham? Did he break up the covenant and grow weary of it? No; but Abraham's seed inherited the land, and they dwelt therein every man under his own vine and fig-tree. Though the visible people of God rejected him full often, so that for their unbelief they died in the wilderness, yet he remained faithful: he did not, he could not, deny himself. Well, now, it comes to pass sometimes, according to this type, that the visible church of God apostatizes from the truth of God. The doctrines of grace, the truths, of the gospel are obscured, beclouded, scarcely preached, preached with gaudy words, or hid behind ceremonies and rites, and all sorts of things. And what happens? Are the foundation truths removed? Is the eternal verity reversed? Has God recalled his promise? Oh no. "He abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself."

Alas! the church of God seems to lose sometimes her faith in prayer. Her pleading assemblies become scant. Her prayer for men's conversion is scarcely raised. Few come together to supplicate the Lord and besiege the mercy-seat. But what then? Does God change? Does he forsake his cause? Oh, no: "He abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself." At such times the church almost loses her faith in the Holy Spirit and looks upon preaching as, perhaps, a necessary evil to be borne with, but not as the vehicle by which the Holy Ghost saves men. They have small confidence in God's word that "by the foolishness of preaching" he will "save them that believe." They do not expect the kingdom of Christ to be predominant, but they say, "Since the fathers fell asleep what long ages have dragged along, and what slow progress Christianity has made. It is a hopeless cause. Let us be content to let the heathen world alone." At such time they lose all heart and all faith in God. Have we not seen large portions of the visible church of God decline into such a state as this till we have been ready to say with our Master, "When the Son of man cometh shall he find faith on the earth?" But, what then, my brethren? Suppose we should live to see everywhere a degenerate church? Suppose it should become like Laodicea, till the Lord should seem to spew the visible church out of his mouth, because she has become neither hot nor cold? Suppose he should say of the professing church of to-day as he did of Shiloh of old — "Go now to Shiloh where my place was at the first, and see if there be one stone left upon another that is not cast down"? He took the candlestick away from Rome,

and he may take that candlestick away from other churches too. But would that prove that God was unfaithful, or that he had denied himself? No, beloved; no. His faithfulness would be seen then in the judgment with which he would visit an unfaithful church. Ay, and it is seen to-day. You shall see a church which does not believe in the simple gospel grow few and feeble. According as the churches cease to be evangelical they are minished and brought low. A church that neglects prayer becomes disunited, scattered, lethargic, all but dead. A church that has no faith in the Holy Ghost may carry on her ordinances, but it will be with barren formality and without power from on high: all of which proves the faithfulness of him who said, "If ye walk contrary to me, I will walk contrary to you." If they cast away from them that which is their strength, it is but faithfulness on God's part that they should become weak. All the history of the church, if you read it, from the days of Christ till now, will go to show that he deals with his church in such a way as to make her see that he is faithful, whatever she may be. He will help her when she turns to him, he will bless her when she trusts him, he will crown her when she exalts him, but he will bring her low and chasten her when she turns in any measure aside from the simplicity of her faith. Thus does he prove that he still is faithful.

Once more, my brethren, I will read the text in a somewhat narrower circle. "If we believe not" — that is to say, if the choicest teachers, and preachers, and writers believe not, yet he abideth faithful.

One of the most shocking trials to young Christians is the fall of an eminent teacher. I have known some that have been almost ready to give up their faith when some one who appeared to be very earnest and faithful has suddenly apostatized. Such things have happened in our memory, to our intense grief; and I want, therefore, to put it very, very plainly. If it should come to pass that any one whom you revere as having been best to your soul — whom you because you have received from him the word of life — if such a one upon whom you may perhaps have learned too much should in the future turn out not to be true and faithful, and should not believe, do not follow his unbelief, for "if we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself." Peter denies his Master: do not follow Peter when he is doing that, for he will have to come back weeping, and you will hear him preaching his Master again. Worse still, Judas sells his Master: do not follow Judas, for Judas will die a wretched death, and his destruction shall be a warning to others to cling more closely to the kith. You may see the man who stood like a cedar in Lebanon fall by one stroke of the devil's axe, but do not, therefore, think that the trees of the Lord, which are full of sap, will fall too. He will keep his own, for he knows them that are his. Pin not your faith to any man's sleeve. Let not your confidence rest on any arm of flesh, neither say "I believe because of the testimony of such a one, and I hold to the form of sound words because my minister has held it"; for all such props may be smitten; away and on a sudden may fail you. Do let me put this very, very plainly, — if we believe not — if those that seem to be the choice teachers of the age, if those that have been the most successful evangelists of the period, if those who stand high in the esteem of God's people, should, in an evil hour, forsake the eternal verities and begin to preach to you some other gospel which is not the gospel of Jesus Christ, I beseech you follow us not whoever we may be or whatever we may be. Suffer no teachers however great they may be, to lead you to doubt for God abideth faithful. Keep you to the revealed will and mind of God — for "he cannot deny himself.

Here, then is the fearful possibility; and side by side with it rims this most blessedly consoling assurance — "He abideth faithful." Jesus Christ abideth: there are no shifts and changes in him. He is a rock, and not a quicksand. He is the Savior whether the rulers and the philosophers believe in him or refuse him, whether the church and her ministers are true to him or desert him. He is the same Savior, God-man, sitting supreme upon the throne. "Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against his anointed. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision. Yet," saith he, "have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion." They cannot affect the imperial throne of our immortal Lord. He still is "the blessed and only Potentate," and so he must be, let them say what they will.

And as Christ remains the same Savior, so we have the same gospel. They have improved upon it, they tell us! Well, well, I feel so satisfied with the gospel as I get it from Paul and the inspired apostles that I would rather not have this improved gospel if they will allow me to keep to the old original. But so it is, like babies pleased with new toys they cry their "modern thought," and culture and advanced ideas. He that has once tasted the old wines does not desire the new, because he saith, "The old is better." Our Savior and his gospel abide the same. The gospel of Paul, the gospel of Augustine, the gospel of Calvin, the gospel of Whitefield, the gospel of any succession of faithful men you like to strike out abundantly suffices us. He abideth faithful.

And as the gospel is the same, so does Christ remain faithful to his engagements to his Father. He has promised to keep those whom the Father gave him, and he will keep them even to the end; and when the sheep shall pass again under the hand of him that telleth them he will say, "Of all whom thou gavest me I have lost none." "He abideth faithful": to sinners all over the world he says that if they come to him he will not cast them out, and he is faithful to that. He graciously promises that "whosoever calleth upon the name of the Lord shall be saved"; and he will be faithful to that. He is also faithful to his saints. He has promised to preserve them to his eternal kingdom and glory, and he will preserve them. He says, "I give unto my sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hands" — and he, has held them in his loving grasp, and he will hold them even to the end; and all this, though all the unbelief in the world should rise against him. He will stand to every word he has spoken, and carry out every promise he has declared, though all should distrust and deny. "Yea and amen in Christ Jesus" are all the

promises, henceforth and for ever, and we shall find it so.

II. And now we have but a little time to spend upon the second very important part of our text, which is A Glorious Impossibility With A Sweet Inference That May Be Drawn From It. "He cannot deny himself."

Three things God cannot do. **He cannot die, he cannot lie, and he cannot be deceived** These three impossibilities do not limit his power, but they magnify his majesty; for these would be infirmities, and infirmity can have no place in the infinite and ever blessed God.

Here is one of the things impossible with God — "he cannot deny himself." What is meant by that? It is meant, first, that the Lord Jesus Christ cannot change as to his nature and character towards us, the sons of men, for if he were to change he could only change from one state to another — from a better to a worse or from a worse to a better. If from a better to a worse, that were to deny himself indeed by ceasing to be as good as he is by nature; and if from a worse to a better, that were to deny himself by proving that he was not before so good as he might have been. In no one point can Jesus Christ be changed, for he is "Jesus; Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." If in any point he changed, he would, in that point, deny himself: but he cannot do this, for being God he changeth not.

His word cannot alter. I want you to notice this, because his word is so conspicuously himself. His name shall be called the Word of God; yea, he is himself the Logos, the eternal Word; and that Word cannot change. "The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away, but the word of the Lord endureth for ever, and this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you." O servant of the Lord, the assurance which Paul and Peter gave you may give. That same word of mercy which those first messengers of heaven went forth to declare you may declare, for it still stands the same. He cannot deny his word, since that word is himself, and he cannot deny himself.

He cannot, beloved friends, withdraw the salvation which he has presented to the sons of men, for that salvation is indeed himself. Jesus is the salvation of Israel. If a sinner wants to know where salvation lies, we point him to the Christ of God. He is not only a Savior, but he is salvation itself; and his salvation cannot be changed, for if it were changed he would be himself changed or denied, and he cannot deny himself. There is still the same pardon for the chief of sinners, still the same renewing for the hardest hearts, still the same generous response to those who have strayed most, still the same adoption into the family for aliens and foreigners. His salvation, as Peter preached it at Pentecost, is the salvation which we preach to sinners now. "He cannot deny himself."

And then the atonement is still the same, for that, too, is himself: he has by himself purged our sins. He himself is the sacrifice. Well did the poet say, —

"Dear dying Lamb, thy precious blood
Shall ever lose its power."

Because it is his blood it must be unchanged in efficacy. He cleanses away our sins by himself. His blood is his life, and he ever liveth, and since he ever liveth he is "able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by him." Blessed be his name, the droning sacrifice has not, even in the smallest degree, lost its efficacy. It is just as mighty as when it washed the dying thief from the foulness of hell into the purity of heaven, and carried him from a gibbet to a throne. Oh, how blessed must its power be to have cleansed so foul a wretch, and to have placed him with the Master himself in paradise the self-same day. The atonement cannot change, for that would involve that Jesus had denied himself.

And the mercy-seat, the place of prayer, still remains; for if that were altered he would have denied himself, for what was the mercy-seat, or propitiatory, that golden lid upon the covenant ark? What was it but Christ himself, who is our propitiatory, the true mercy-seat? You may always pray, brethren, for if prayer were denied its efficacy, God would have denied himself. This is his memorial, "The God that heareth prayer"; and if he does not hear prayer he has denied himself and ceased to be what he was. Jehovah will never so deny himself as to become like Baal, a deaf god; to imagine it would be blasphemy.

And here is another sweet thought: Christ's love to his church, and his purpose towards her cannot change, because he cannot deny himself, and his church is himself. I mean not that visible church of which I spoke just now, which is a mixed multitude, but I mean that invisible church, that spiritual people, that bride of Christ, which no man seeth, for she is prepared in darkness, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth; and her Lord himself will never see her actually till she is perfected, even as Adam never saw Eve, but slept until the great God had finished his bride, and presented her in all her matchless beauty to be his sister and spouse. The day comes when the Lord Jesus Christ shall thus receive his perfected bride, and meanwhile he cannot change towards her, but his espousals shall be confirmed. She was taken out of his side when in deep sleep of death he lay and she is fashioned to be like to him, so that when in joy he shall behold her his joy and her joy shall be full. No, he will never, never deny her, for he cannot deny himself. His plan of love shall be carried out and all his thoughts of grace fulfilled.

Nor will any one of his offices towards his church and people ever fail. The prophet shall be prophet for ever, — “He cannot deny himself.” The priest shall be a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedeck, and will never refuse to offer our prayers and praises, and to cleanse our souls, for he cannot deny himself. The king will never cease to reign, or doff his crown, or lay down his scepter, for he cannot deny himself. The shepherd will for ever keep the flock. The friend will eternally stick closer than a brother. The husband will still love his spouse. All that he is in relation to his people shall continue and abide, for he abideth faithful. “He cannot deny himself.”

Now, my last word is about an inference. The text says, “If we believe, not, yet he abideth faithful:” it runs on that supposition. Now, brethren, take the other supposition: — Suppose we do believe. Will he not be faithful in that case? And will it not be true that he cannot deny himself?

I will suppose that a sinner is at this moment saying, “I believe that Christ can save me: I will go and ask him, I will go and trust him.” Ah, he will not deny himself by rejecting your cry. I tell you, if he were to shut you out, dear soul, whoever you may be, if you go to him, he would deny himself. He never did deny himself yet. Whenever a sinner comes to him he becomes his Savior. Whenever he meets a sick soul he acts as his physician. Now, I have heard of persons who have been physicians, who were ill, or weary and wanted rest: an accident has happened, and they have felt inclined to get out of the way if they could, because they were very hard-worked and worn out. They have told their servant to say, “My master is not at home!” but my Master never denied himself. He will never get out of the way of a sinner. If you go to him you will find him at home and on the look-out for you: he will be more glad to receive you than you will be to be received, for he “waiteth to be gracious.” As Matthew sat at the receipt of custom, waiting for the people to pay their dues, so does Christ sit at the receipt of sinners waiting for them to mention their wants. He is watching for you. I tell you again that he cannot reject you: that would be to alter his whole character and un-Christ himself. To spurn a coming sinner would un-Jesus him, and make him to be somebody else, and not himself any longer. “He cannot deny himself.” Go and try him: go and try him. I wish some trembling soul would at this moment go and cast himself upon Christ, and then report to us the result. Come, poor quivering seekers, sing in your heart, unbelieving as you are, that hymn of ours-

“I can but perish if I go, I am resolved to try;
For if I stay away, I know I must for ever die.”

Oh, but if you were to perish at his feet, you would be the first that ever did so out of all those who have ever come to him; and that first man has never been seen yet. Go and try my Lord and see for yourselves.

Well now, you Christian people, I want you to come also. If you believe your Lord he will be faithful to you. Suppose it is a time of trouble with you: he will be faithful to you; go and cast your burden upon him. Suppose at this time you, are much exercised with spiritual distress: go to the-Lord as you did at first, as poor, guilty, rebellious sinners, and cast yourself upon him, and you will find him faithful. “He cannot deny himself.” If my Lord were not kind to me to-night when I go to him with my burden I should think that I had knocked at the wrong door; because the Lord has been so good and so faithful to me hitherto that it would take my breath away if I found him changed. Oh, how good, how exceeding good is my Lord! Did not we sing just now

“He by my side has always stood:
His lovingkindness, oh, how good!”

I could sing that with all my heart, and I hope many of you could earnestly join with me. You have a dear mother, or a fond wife, or a choice friend, and none of them has ever spoken anything but kindness to you; and therefore if in some dark hour you were to go to them, and instead of showing sympathy they gave you sharp words, and you could evidently see that they did not love you, how surprised you would be! So should I be if I were to meet anything but love from my dear Lord after all these years of tenderness, There is no fear of it, for “he cannot deny himself.”

So I finish by saying that we shall find it so in connection with the things of his kingdom and the concerns of his truth. There is a great uproar just now about the God of providence, and they call me I know not by what names for speaking the truth for my Master, Well, what comes of it? Shall we, therefore, be afraid? No; but if we believe we shall find him faithful. He will not deny himself. Is the good old cause really in danger from skepticism and superstition? Speaking after the manner of men, it may seem so; but it never really is so. Even if it were tottering we must not put our hand upon the ark of the Lord to steady it. God’s cause is always safe. I do not know whether we may live to see it, but as surely as the Lord lives the truth will be triumphant in England yet. They may tell us that Puritanism is thrust to the wall, but it will take the crown of the causeway yet. The old cause goes back a little to take breath, but she will make such a leap in this land as shall utterly surprise the soothsayers; for the Lord will make the diviners mad, and they that count the towers and say that Zion is utterly fallen shall not know where to hide their heads. The devil once flew all over Europe, and said, “It is all mine. Here they are selling indulgences, and the Pope and I are master of it all.” But there was a poor monk who had not himself seen the light any long time, who nailed his theses on the door of a church, and from that hour the light began to spread all over Europe. And do you think the Lord is short of Luthers? Do you imagine that he has no sword or spear left in his armory? I tell you he has as many instruments within reach as there are stars in the sky. When the

influence of the gospel appears to recede it is like the tide when it is ebbing out. Steadily it goes back, and if we did not know better we should begin to think that the silver waves would all give place to mire and shingle: yet when the hour comes, at the very minute, the waters pause and remain at one point awhile. Then up comes the first wave of the wash, and another, and another, and another, and another, rising, advancing, conquering the shore, till the set; has come to her fullness again. So must it be, and so shall it be with the ocean of truth; only let us have faith, and we shall see the gospel at the flood again, and old England covered with it. Doubt what you like, brethren, but do not doubt divine truth or doubt God. Hold on to the side that is most disgraced and dishonored that has the worst word from men; for Christ and his church usually have the bleak side of the hill. Be content to breast the stream with courage learned from your Redeemer and Lord, for the day comes when to have stood with the truth and with the Son of the Highest will be the grandest honor that a creature can have worn.

May that honor be ours, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

A FAITHFUL GOD

By Alexander Maclaren

'He abideth faithful: He cannot deny Himself.' — 2 Timothy 2:13.

I HAVE chosen this text, not as intending to deal with it only, so much as with the great thought to which it gives such emphatic expression. The faithfulness of God is a familiar enough phrase, but I suspect that the depth and scope of the thought are not as familiar as the words. It is employed in Scripture in many ways, and with many different applications of exhortation and encouragement. Like a prism held at right angles to the light, the thought flashes out different tints according as the rays impinge upon it. It is a favourite with Paul He speaks it in his very first letter, and here, in his last, after a lifetime spent in testing God, he comes back to it. He had proved it in a thousand dangers and struggles, and now, when he has all but done with earth, he sets to his seal that God is true. But all the other New Testament writers employ the expression likewise, and I have thought that it may be profitable to gather together the various aspects and applications of this great truth in Scripture, and so to draw out, if we may, some of the lofty thoughts and treasures of strength and hope which are shrouded in it.

I. Let me ask the question what the faithfulness of God means.

Now when we speak of one another as 'faithful,' we mean that we adhere to our word; that we keep faith with men, that we discharge the obligations of our office or position, and that so we are trustworthy. We mean just the same things when we speak about the faithful God.

I suppose that the first thought that occurs to most of us when God is called faithful is that it means that He keeps His promise. That, of course, is included in the idea, but it is very noteworthy that this, which to most of us is the only meaning of the expression, is rarely its meaning in the New Testament. Out of all the cases in which the phrase occurs it only twice has reference to God's fulfilment of His spoken words; and these two instances both occur in the Epistle to the Hebrews, where we read: 'He is faithful that promised,' and 'She judged Him faithful that promised.' Now it is a great truth that out of the darkness God has spoken; that, like some constitutional monarch, He has declared the principles of His government, and so has bound Himself by articulate expressions to follow out these in His dealings. He is not a despot; He is a King who has laid down the law to which He Himself will adhere. His promises hang out over the troubled stream of life, like boughs from the trees on the bank, for His half-drowned children to grasp at and to hold by.

But great as that thought of our God's fulfilment of His every word is, it does not go half way down to the depths of meaning in the New Testament use of the expression 'the faithful God.' For my text witnesses to a deeper meaning. He cannot deny Himself.' That is Paul's notion of the faithfulness of God; that His nature and character constitute for Him, if I may so say, a solemn obligation; that He is His own law; that He is bound by what He is, and that He never can be, in the smallest degree, anything contradictory to, or falling beneath, the level of His own equable, consistent, and uniform Self. As God, He must be true to the character of goodness and wisdom which the very name of God brings with it. We drop below our best selves; contradictory impulses and thoughts fight in our nature; the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh. No man is always himself; God is always Himself. We are like the little brooks that are dried in drought and swelled in spate, are parched in summer and frozen in winter, but this great river is always bank-full, and always clear and always flowing. This ocean is tideless and has no ebb or flood; and you can look down into its deepest depths, and as far as the vision of the eye can go, all is clear and pure, and where vision fails, it is not that the ocean is dark but that the sense is limited. So John says, in his infantile-angelic way, with a simplicity that is sublime, 'God is Light, and in Him is no darkness at all.' The sun has spots; it has, as astronomers tell us, a photosphere, an envelope that gives light, but possibly its core is black and dark. But that is not so with the true Light. 'God is faithful; He cannot deny Himself.'

Then there is another deep thought in the word which is recurrent in the various applications of the expression throughout the New Testament — that God's faithfulness implies that He is true, not only to His words, not only to Himself, but also to the trend and drift,

so to speak, of His past acts. That thought is applied in the New Testament in two different ways. Peter says to the troubled disciples to whom he was writing, 'Commit the keeping of your souls to Him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator.' The fact of having made creatures binds God to certain obligations in regard to them, and He will discharge them. The other application of the idea of God's faithfulness is in reference to His past acts bearing on man's redemption. We find verses like these: 'Faithful is He that calleth you';

'God is faithful by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of His Son; The thought there is that, by the fact of His redeeming work, God has come under certain obligations to the persons who yield to the invitation that is wrapped up in the message and gifts of Christ and of Christ's Spirit, and that He will faithfully discharge these.

II. Now, then, carry these three simple thoughts with you — faithful to His word, faithful to Himself, faithful to His past-and let us ask, in the second place, what does this faithfulness guarantee?

What does His faithfulness as Creator guarantee to the creature whom He has made?

It guarantees, first, that the faithful Creator will care for His creature's well-being. Creation is not merely a work of power, nor merely a necessary process, as some people seem to think. It is the outcome of the love of God, and so the wise psalmist says, 'To Him that made great lights; for His mercy endureth for ever.' He came forth, and poured Himself, as it were, into beings because His name is Love, and having thus created, He recognises the obligations under which He has thereby come. The smallest microscopic animal, because it has the mysterious gift of life, has a claim on God; and He is bound — I was going to say to do His utmost, but all that He does is His utmost — to care for that creature's well-being. The birds lay their eggs, and hatch their young, and then let these go as they will. Men sometimes forget the duties of parents and the responsibilities that are involved therein; but God the Creator lets us plead His faithfulness with Him, and turn round to Him and say, 'Thou hast made me; therefore-I bring in 'my hand Thine own bill, with Thine own name to it. Pay it, O God!' 'Commit the keeping of your souls to Him as to a faithful Creator.'

Especially does this conception of His faithfulness to His past in creation guarantee to us that all desires implanted by Him will be satisfied, and all needs created by Him will be supplied. Our wishes, when they are right, are prophecies of our possessions. God has put no craving in a man's heart which He does not mean to fill. Remember the homely old proverb: 'He never sends mouths but He sends meat to fill them.' And if in thy heart there are longings which thou knowest are not sinful, be sure that these are veiled prophets of a divine gift. All these necessities of ours, all these hungry desires, all these sometimes painful thirsts of the soul that we try to slake at muddy and broken cisterns — all these are meant to take us straight to God. They are like the long indentations of the coast on our

western shores, openings by which the flashing waters may run far inland and bathe the roots of the everlasting hills. So when God gives us a desire, He binds Himself to fulfil it. The world is a bewildering and unanswerable riddle and mystery, and human life is one long misery, unless we believe and know that because He is the faithful Creator no man need hunger with a ravening desire after food that is not provided, nor need any man thirst with a thirst that there is no water anywhere to slake.

Again, his great thought of the divine faithfulness as Creator guarantees that our tasks shall be proportioned to our strength. So Paul uses the thought in one tender sentence, when he says 'God is faithful; who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able.' Or as the psalmist has it in his sweet words, 'He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are dust.' Nothing above our power will ever be laid upon us. Careless and cruel drivers load their horses beyond their strength, and the patient drudge pulls until it drops. Unwise engineers put too much pressure on their boilers, or try to get too much work out of their engine. But God knows how much pressure the hearts that He makes can stand, and what is the utmost weight of the load that we can lift; and He will not be less merciful and faithful to His creatures than is the merciful man to his Beast. He is the faithful Creator who recognises His obligations to care for the works of His own hands, who will satisfy their desires, and supply the needs that He has made, who will shape their burdens according to the strength of their shoulders.

And if we turn to the other side of the thought, and ask what is guaranteed by God's calling of us in Christ Jesus, then we get three answers.

The first thing that is guaranteed is forgiveness. The Apostle John, in words that are often misunderstood, grasps the thought of God's faithfulness in this application when he says, 'He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.' Since Christ has come, and has died in order that men might be pardoned and cleansed, God's faithfulness is implicated in God's pardoning mercy; and He would neither be faithful to His promises, nor to His past act in Christ's mission, nor to the invitation and call that He has sounded in our ears, unless, when we obeyed that call, we entered into the full possession of His pardoning grace. So the gentle, tender attribute of Mercy becomes solemn, and stately, and eternal, when it is regarded as the outcome of His faithfulness. In some tropical forests you will find strong tree-trunks out of which spring the most radiant and ethereal-looking blossoms. So the fair flower of forgiving mercy springs from the steadfast bole of the divine faithfulness. He is 'Just, and the Justifier of him that believeth in Jesus'

Again, God's faithfulness guarantees the progressive perfecting of Christian character. That is the application of the thought which is most frequent in Paul's letters. We find it, for instance, in the passage Where the prayer that the saints in Thessalonica might be 'preserved, body, soul, and spirit, blameless unto the coming of the Lord Jesus,' is, by the Apostle, based on the words 'faithful is He that calleth you, who also will do it.' And a similar collocation of ideas is found in other passages, which I need not quote to you now. The progressive perfecting of the Christian life is guaranteed by the thought of the faithfulness of God. He does not begin a work and then get disgusted with it, or turn to something else, or find that His resources will not avail to work it out to completion- That is how we do. He never stops till He ends. As the prophet says about another matter, 'His hands have laid the foundation of the house; His hands shall also finish

it.'

I remember a place on our coasts where some man, who had not calculated his resources, nor the strength of the ocean, began to build a breakwater' and sea-walls, and to-day the blocks of dislodged concrete are lying in wild confusion on the beach, and the victorious waves break over them at every tide, and laugh at the abortive design. None that look on God's work will ever have the right to say, 'This man began to build, and was not able to finish.' There are no half-completed failures in God's workshop. Only you have to keep yourself under His influences. It is useless to talk about the 'final perseverance of the saints,' unless you remember that only they who continuously yield themselves to God are continuously the subjects of His cleansing and hallowing grace. If they do, the progressive perfecting of those upon whom He has begun to work is sure. Like some patient artist, He lays touch upon touch on the canvas, or smites piece after piece off the marble, till the ideal is realised, and stands there before Him. Like some patient seamstress, He works needful after needful of varying colours of silk on the tapestry, until the whole pattern is accomplished. 'He is faithful; He also will do it.'

But again, that conception of the divine faithfulness guarantees ultimate blessedness. That thought is always taken in connection with the preceding one, in the various passages to which reference has just been made. Paul

says in another place, basing his assurance on the same thought of the divine faithfulness; 'He will confirm you unto the day of the Lord Jesus.' And so we have to think that just because God is faithful, therefore the Christian life here on earth, because it is so much and because it is so little, because of its devotion and because of its selfishness, bears in itself the prophecy of a time when all that is here checked tendency shall become triumphant realisation; and when the plant that here was an exotic, and did put forth buds, though poor and pale compared with what it would give in its natural soil, shall be transplanted into the higher house, and there shall blossom for evermore. God is a liar unless heaven is to complete the experiences of earth. If these poor natures of ours at their best here were all that Christ had won by the travail of His soul, do you think He would be satisfied? Certainly not. We need heaven to vindicate the faithfulness of God.

III. And now one word is all that I can spare on what I meant to make the last point of my sermon, and that is, what attitude in us corresponds to the faithfulness of God?

I need only quote one of the expressions in the Epistle to the Hebrews to give the answer, 'Hold fast the profession of your faith without wavering, for He is faithful that promised.' Our faith corresponds with and is the answer to God's faithfulness. As with two instruments tuned to the same pitch, when a note is struck on the one, the chords of the other vibrate it back again, so God's faithfulness should awake the music of answering faith in our responsive and vibrating hearts. If He is worth trusting let us trust Him.

But, further, unwavering faith is the only thing that truly corresponds to unchanging faithfulness. Build rock upon rock, and since He is faithful, do not answer his steadfast faithfulness with a tremulous and vacillating confidence. What would you think of a man that had given to him some magnificent site on which to rear a fortress; some impregnable crag which he might crown with a sure defence; if, on the top of it, instead of rearing granite walls that might match their foundation, he should run up some hasty shelter of lath and plaster, or of fluttering canvas, and so think that he had adorned, when he had insulted the rock on which he built. Make your faith to match God's faithfulness, and 'commit the keeping of your souls to Him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator, leaving all things in His hands, and trusting them absolutely unto Him.

Imitate the faithfulness in such fashion as you may. Paul in one place says, 'As God is faithful, our word to you was not yea and nay.' It does not become a man who is trusting to the faithful God to be shifty and unreliable in his own utterances and manifestations to men.

Let us turn away from the illusions of vain hope, from all doubtful refuges, from all the fleeting defences and treasures that earth can give. Why should we build upon a sandbank when we can build on the Rock of Ages? Why should we trust mere wealth, creaturely love, success, to do for us what only the faithful God can do? All these deceive or betray or fail or pass. They are unworthy of trust. 'God is faithful'; Christ is 'the faithful and true witness.' 'This is the faithful saying... that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners.' If we will join ourselves to the faithful God and accept the faithful saying of His faithful witness, our hearts will be calm, our

lives will be steadied, we shall be delivered from the misery of leaning on props which, like rotten branches, break beneath our weight. On earth we shall attain growing completeness, and shall pass thence to that per-letting in the day of the Lord Jesus which the faithful God, by His words, by His great redeeming act, and by His present workings on us, has bound Himself to give us. There we may hope to hear the wondrous welcome, which points to our assimilation to Him in whom we trust: 'Well done, good and faithful servant.'