

Spurgeon on 2 Corinthians Pt1

2 CORINTHIANS SERMONS BY C H SPURGEON

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2 Corinthians 4:3 Why The Gospel Is Hidden

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DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON, ON LORD'S-DAY EVENING, FEB., 11TH, 1866.

“But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost.” — 2 Corinthians 4:3 (see commentary).

In this verse and the following one we have a very brief yet very full description of what every minister of the gospel ought to preach. In the first place, he is to preach the gospel, — not metaphysics, not politics, not mere morality, not simply doctrines as such. He is to preach the gospel, which signifies good news, something new, and something good, so good that nothing else can equal it, — the glad tidings of mercy for the guilty, the blessed tidings of God coming down to man that man may go up to God, the welcome tidings of atonement made for human guilt. It is also new as well as good; it comes as a strange novelty to the attentive ear. Mythology never dreamed it, human wit could never have invented it, even angelic intellect could not have devised a scheme —

“So just to God, so safe for man.”

The business of the Christian minister is to preach this good news, to publish to the sinners the glad tidings that there is a Saviour, to point the guilty to Christ, and to be constantly saying to each individual sinner, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” I care not what may be the learning or eloquence of the minister, though he may speak with the tongue of men and angles, if he does not preach Christ, and bid sinners trust in him, he has mistaken his mission, and missed the grand object for which he was sent.

This gospel is called in the text “our gospel.” By this expression I understand that the minister must accept it for himself before he can hold it out to others. I am myself to look to Jesus as my own personal Saviour, and then I am to cry to others, “Look unto him, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth.” I must be able to say, —

**“I came to Jesus, and I drank
Of that life-giving stream;”-**

and then, but not till then, I am to cry, “Ho, every one, that thirsteth, come ye to the waters.” What a miserable wretch must he be who preaches to others a gospel in which he has himself no share! He spreads the table, and invites others to come to the feast, while he himself is starving. He is like a plague-stricken physician who knows the remedy for the disease, and sees others cured by it, yet dies with the remedy in his hand. Ah, me of all the portions that must be most dreadful in the world to come, as well as most uncomfortable in this present life, surely it must be the portion of the man who preaches to others what he has never experienced in his own soul. Paul might well call it “our gospel”, for it had saved him, the chief of sinners, and made him a beloved apostle of Jesus Christ. He might well call it “our gospel” for he had held it fast in time of persecution, and amid all the perils to which he had been exposed, and he was at last to give his life as a sacrifice for it; and it must be “our gospel” too, “to have and to hold,” or else we cannot preach it with any power.

In the verse following our text, something more is said about the gospel; it is there called “the glorious gospel.” There was something in it that aroused and inflamed the apostle’s noblest thoughts. Paul was no boaster. “God forbid that I should glory,” said he; but there was one exception, “save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.” He did not stand up as a mere apologist for the gospel, or say, “I can defend it against all comers, and maintain that it is reasonable;” but he gloried in it as the best and highest truth, as wiser than all the Stoic’s, wisdom, and more full of joy than all the Epicurean’s pleasure. He gloried in that gospel which brings full and free forgiveness to the penitent, that gospel which takes the meanest and basest of mankind, and makes them princes in the court of the King of kings, that gospel which comes to men in poverty, in slavery, in the degradation of superstition, idolatry, and crime, and lifts them up out of the horrible pit and the miry clay, sets their feet upon the Rock of ages, cleanses them, clothes them, puts a new song into their mouth, preserves them from falling, and at last brings them where they shall see the face of God, and dwell for ever in his presence. It is indeed a glorious gospel which can do all this; yet, alas! the most of men are like the cock on the dunghill, who,

when he found a pearl, said that he would sooner have found a grain of barley; they think more of their corn and their wine, their feasts and their mirth, than they do of the inexpressibly glorious things of the kingdom of heaven. Oh, that they were wise enough to perceive the glories of this glorious gospel!

Paul further calls it "the glorious gospel of Christ." And well he might, for it is all about Christ from beginning to end. Give me a true preacher of the glorious gospel of Christ, and I will gladly listen to him. I would like him to be an educated minister if that is possible, for there is no need for my ear to be tortured by mistakes in grammar, but I do not care so much about that as about the other matter. I would sooner hear Christ's gospel preached ungrammatically than I would hear the best philosophy set forth in the most orderly sentences, but with the gospel of Christ left out. When the table is spread for dinner, it is well to have a clean damask cloth, and the china, and glass, and cutlery all of the right sort and in their proper places; but if there is no food on the dishes, all those other things are a mere mockery to the hungry ones who are waiting to be fed. Sooner by far would I go to a bare table, and eat from a wooden porringer something that would appease my appetite, than I would go to a well-spread table on which there was nothing to eat. Yes, it is Christ, Christ, Christ whom we have to preach; and if we leave him out, we leave out the very soul of the gospel. Christless sermons make merriment for hell. Christless preachers, Christless Sunday-school teachers, Christless class-leaders, Christless tract-distributors, -what are all these doing? They are simply setting the mill to grind without putting any grist into the hopper, all their labour is in vain. If you leave Jesus Christ out, you are simply beating the air, or going to war without any weapon with which you can smite the foe.

Dear friend, if thou art unconverted, let me pause here for a few moments to remind thee that this is not a gospel of self, nor a gospel of works, nor a gospel of baptism, nor a gospel of priests, nor a gospel of ministers, but it is "the glorious gospel of Christ." Forget the men who preach it if thou wilt, but, oh! forget not the bleeding, dying Saviour to whom they bid thee look. Thy hope must be in him, and in him alone. To him would we affectionately point thee, and we pray the Holy Spirit to shut thine eyes to everything but him whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation for sin.

"There is life for a look at the Crucified One;
There is life at this moment for thee
Then look, sinner, — look unto him, and be saved, —
Unto him who was nail'd to the tree.

"It is not the tears of repentance or prayers, But the blood that atones for the soul: On him, then, who shed it believing at once Thy weight of iniquities roll.

"We are heal'd by his stripes:-wouldst thou add to the word? And he is our righteousness made: The best robe of heaven he bids thee put on: Oh ! couldst thou be better array'd?

"Then doubt not thy welcome, since God has declared
There remaineth no more to be done;
That once in the end of the world he appeared;
And completed the work he begun."

With this rather long introduction, I now come to the three points upon which I am going to speak briefly, but very solemnly, for I think they concern many of you who are here tonight. So, firstly, I ask, why is this gospel hidden from some people? Secondly, what is the state of those from whom it is hidden? And, thirdly, what is to be feared concerning them in the future?

I. First, then Why Is This Gospel Hidden From Some People?

It is evident that there are some persons in the world what do not understand the gospel, and I will venture to say that the gospel is never understood until it is received. You might have thought that men could very readily understand anything so simple, as "Believe, and live," yet those of us who have been converted must confess that we did not understand the gospel until we received it. I am, sure that I never fully comprehended the plan of salvation until I did believe in the Lord Jesus Christ; and when I did believe, the whole matter seemed simple that I wondered why I had not understood it before. You notice that the apostle decreed that it was not his fault that the gospel was hidden from some people; and although we would not put ourselves on a level with any apostle, we are as clear upon this point of plain speaking as any apostle who ever lived. If "our gospel" be hidden from any of our hearers, it is not because of the first language that we use. We do fear that there are some who, in preaching the gospel, indulge in such eloquent oratory that their gospel is hidden from their hearers, but this is not a sin which can be laid at our door. We use what Whitefield called "market language." We use a great many more Saxon words than Latin words. If we had to find out the gospel through the types and symbols of the law, we might have a difficulty in understanding it; but the gospel we have to preach is simply this, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved. Trust in him as suffering as a Substitute in thy stead, and thou shalt be saved." Can anything be more simple than that ? We try to use the plainest similitudes so as to bring the truth within the

comprehension of the weakest of our hearers; we make it a matter of conscience, as in the sight of God, to speak to men very simply so that each one, after he has heard the message, is compelled to admit that it has been delivered to him very plainly. How is it, then, that you do not understand it?

Certainly, it is not because we hide the gospel in a long roll of ceremonies. We have never said to you, "You must be christened in your infancy, you must have sponsors to promise all sorts of things in your name; and then, as you grow up, you must be confirmed, and must take the responsibility upon yourselves." Oh, no; we have never talked like that; we point you to the divinely-inspired Bible, and tell you that all you need to know is plainly recorded there; we point you to the Eternal Word who became incarnate, and we say, with all the emphasis of which we are capable, —

"None but Jesus
Can do helpless sinners good."

We bid you not to trust in forms and ceremonies, but to look alone to Jesus Christ and him crucified, so that it cannot be for want of plainness that the gospel is not understood.

And, again, it cannot be because of any obscurity in the gospel itself. I will venture to say that there is no proposition in the world more simple than the one which the gospel sets before us. The formula "Twice two are four," is so simple that a child's mind can understand it; and the degree of intellect which can comprehend that is sufficient — so far as intellect is concerned, — to comprehend Paul's declaration, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners;" or John's, "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life." To trust Jesus Christ, so far as it is an intellectual act, is a matter that does not require the slightest education; there is no need to sit down, and calculate. Here is Jesus Christ standing in the sinner's stead, God punished the sinner's guilt upon Christ instead of upon the sinner, all that the sinner is bidden to do is to trust Christ to save him; and, as soon as he does that, he is saved. What could be simpler than that? I grant you that, as the gospel is sometimes preached, there is obscurity in it, but there is no obscurity in the gospel itself. Well then, if it so, and it is, why is it that the gospel is hidden from some people? And the answer is, that "the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not." Let us see how this is.

First of all, the gospel is hidden from some men because they have never felt sin to be an evil. "Why," say they, "do you talk to us about the punishment of sin? Why do you tell us that God punished his own Son in the place of sinners? We believe in the universal fatherhood of God, so we have no need of any doctrine of substitution." So you think that it is a small thing to offend the Most High God, but he thinks it is a very great thing. You consider that sin is a mere trifle, scarcely worth thinking about; but God regards it as exceeding sinful, an evil and an accursed thing which he will by no means pardon except in them who trust his Son, the divinely appointed Substitute and Saviour. If you realized what sin is, you would soon understand the gospel. If the Holy Spirit shall teach you that sin is the most deadly and most damnable being of which you can conceive, you will at once understand the glory of the gospel that shows how you be completely delivered from its curse, and penalty, and power through the mercy of God in giving his only-begotten Son to die in your room, and place, and stead. You love sin, — that is the fact of the matter, — and you suppose that one is no more offensive to God than it is to yourself. Fool that thou art, thou art fascinated by the serpent that has filled thy veins with the venom which shall burn in thee for ever and ever unless thou shalt look by faith to him who was lifted up upon the cross even as Moses lifted up the brazen serpent in the wilderness that all who looked upon it might live. May God give thee grace to see in as it really is in his sight, for then wilt thou realize thy need of a Saviour, and thou wilt give heed to the gospel which bids thee believe in him that thou mayest be saved.

Another reason why men do not understand the gospel is that they do not understand themselves. Some of you who are here to-night think that you can save yourselves. I know what your thoughts are; they are to this effect, — that, if you do your best, if you say your prayers, if you attend church or chapel, if you give some to the poor, then you will go to heaven. You have not yet learned that all you do is tainted with the leprosy of sin, and therefore cannot be acceptable to God. Your best works are bad since you do them with the motive that you may be saved by them; selfishness, therefore, is at the bottom of them all. You are not serving God by your good works, you are all the while trying to serve yourselves. If you knew yourselves better, you would know that all your works are nothing but sin until the Holy Spirit brings you to know your need of Christ, and then to know Christ as the very Saviour you need. If I am not in want, I have no need of the gifts of charity; and if you do not know how needy you are spiritually; you will never apply to Christ for aid. But once let the real needs of your soul stare you in the face, that you realize that you are "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked," then the simple gospel message, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved," will be so welcome to your soul that it will almost leap out of your body to lay hold of it.

Yet another reason why men do not understand the gospel is because their will is unsubdued. "We want to know," say they, "why the requirements of the gospel are so strict." Oh, sirs, that is not the language for you to use to your God !" The message to you is, "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." That hectoring spirit, which says, "Why is this the only way of salvation? Wherefore is this precept enjoined ? Who is the Lord that we should serve him ?" —

that spirit has been the eternal ruin of many. There is no likelihood that you will ever understand the gospel while you are this humour. Come down, man, come down, there is no blessing for thee whilst thou setteth thyself up high. May the Lord make thee know the corruptions and abominations which dwell in thy heart that, in the presence of the thrice-holy God thou mayest demean thyself after another and a humbler fashion ! But while that wicked will of thine says, "I will not do what God requires," there is no hope whatever that thou wilt be able to understand the gospel.

There are some who cannot understand the gospel because it interferes with their worldly interests. If you take a sovereign out of your pocket, and cover the word "God" in your Bible with it, of course you cannot see the word. There are a great many men who never seem to see anything beyond pounds, shillings, and pence; they never look above their ledgers; they never rise to anything that is Godlike and divine; they have no mere spirituality than so many pigs at a trough. They say they cannot understand the gospel; but how can they when their understanding has been eaten through and through with the canker of their gold? There are many here to whom I am a stranger, but I should like to put this question to any of you who do not understand the gospel, — Is there not in your hearts a desire not to understand it? Is it not a sorrowful fact that many of you do not comprehend gospel preachers because you do not want to trouble yourselves by comprehending them or have an uneasy consciousness that gospel truth and your pleasures will not agree. You are like men who are on the way to bankruptcy, but who dare not examine their books to see how they stand; yet did you ever know a man retrieve his position by refusing to look his difficulties in the face? Is it not the most sensible plan to know the worst of your case, and to know it at once? I have known some who did not want to understand the gospel because they were engaged in a business which would not bear examination. There are others who are hindered by their besetting sins. If the Lord Jesus Christ would grant pardons, and yet allow men to keep their sins, what a host of disciples of that sort he might have ! But he says that, though sin is as dear to us as our right arm, it is to be cut off; and though it is as precious as our right eye, it is to be plucked out; yet many will not agree to these conditions, and therefore the gospel is hidden from them.

II. Now I must try very briefly to answer the second question, What Is The State Of Those From Whom The Gospel Is Hidden ?

Paul says that they are lost: "If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost." But, Paul, are you not very uncharitable in saying that men are lost? Preachers nowadays tell them that they will all get to heaven at last. Ah, beloved, the apostles knew nothing of this modern, maudlin "charity." They said, as their Master said before them, "He that believeth not shall be damned." Our Lord Jesus Christ knew that there was no alternative between believing and being lost. But in what sense are they lost from whom the gospel is hidden?

Well, first, they are lost to the church. You may be a subscriber to the funds of the church, you may attend the service of the church, you may even be an ardent admirer of the preacher, and find a certain measure of interest in listening to his discourses; but if the gospel is still hidden from you, if you do not understand it, and believe on the Christ of whom it speaks, you are lost to the church of which many around you are members, and if you remain as you are, you will be lost to the one great Church of the firstborn, and will never form a part of the general assembly of the redeemed around the throne of God above.

It is a dreadful thing for anyone to be lost; I do not know if there is a more dreadful word in the English language than that word "lost." Do you recollect, my friend, when you came home from work one night, and your wife met you with the sad news that your little Mary was lost, how you hurried from one police station to another, and your poor distracted wife went tearing up and down one street after another seeking for tidings of your lost child? It was her misfortune to be lost in that sense, but I hope you may never have a child lost in a sense in which it shall be her crime, when the mother night after night searches the cold streets for any trace of her poor lost daughter. Ah, sinner, you are lost to God in that sense. You have turned away from him who made you, you have despised the love that he has lavished upon you, you have forgotten all the care that he has taken of you. I am quite sure that you are not happy while you are thus lost, how can you be happy? You are not at rest, your soul is like a ship drifting in a storm and with neither a rudder to guide her nor an anchor to hold her, and unless the Lord shall mercifully interpose to save you, you will be lost forever.

What a mercy it is, sinner, that you are not yet "lost" in the full meaning of that term, as you soon must be if you do not repent of sin, and turn unto the Lord! But it is a terrible thing to be lost in any sense even now; and if you are not saved, you are lost; you must be either the one or the other, you cannot be partly saved and partly lost. I will ask every one of you again tonight to do what I asked my congregation once before to do; you are either lost or saved, so will you definitely decide which word applies to your case, and write it down, and sign your name to it? I remember that, on the previous occasion when I made this request, there was one brother who, after sincere heart searching, felt that he was lost, so he wrote down that word, and signed his name below it. When he had done so, and looked at the word "Lost" written with his own hand, and with his signature appended to it, and felt that it might be brought forward as evidence against him at the last great day, it broke the heart that had never been broken before, and brought him as a true penitent to the Saviour's feet, so that before that night passed away he could write himself down as "Saved" just as truthfully as he had before acknowledged that he was lost. I pray that this brother's experience may be repeated in many of you here. Do not

hesitate to look thoroughly into your own case; if you are saved, it is not difficult for you to know that you are; and if you are not saved, it is well that you should know it at once. If you think you are saved when you are not, your ruin will be all the more terrible because you had not the courage to find out the truth. If there is any doubt about the matter, let it be cleared up at once. Go to Jesus Christ this very moment, confess your sin to him, and trust to his precious blood to wash it all away, and then you will be no longer lost, but shall be saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation.

III. Now, in a few closing sentences, let me answer the third question, What Is To Be Feared Concerning Those From Whom The Gospel Is Hidden?

It is to be feared that, in addition to their natural blindness, a second film has been cast over their eyes by "the god of this world." That is a very remarkable expression, "the god of this world." Does this world, then, really worship the devil? There are devil-worshippers in certain far-off lands, and we hold up our hands in horror, and say, "What shockingly bad people!" Yet there are many devil-worshippers in this land also. The lover of pleasure — what is he better than a devil-worshipper? It is the devil in his best suit of clothes whom some people worship, but it is the devil. So worship the devil with the golden hoofs, but it is the same devil all the while. If I were to be lost, it would make little difference to me whether I was lost in a gold mine, or in a coal mine. I were to break my neck on a slab of gold, it would be no better for me than breaking it upon a slab of stone. So, if you are lost, you will find little comfort in the thought that you are lost in a more respectable way than others are.

When "the god of this world" comes to a man who is already blind by nature, he seeks to "make assurance doubly sure" by bandaging his eyes so securely that the light of the gospel shall be still more completely hidden from him. If such a man attends a place of worship, the devil persuades him that he is not a sinner, so that he need not take to him the preacher's warnings and exhortations. Another says, "I don't intend to trouble about any of these things, my one aim is to get on in the world." Yes, just so, "the god of this world" has blinded his eyes. So effectually does Satan blind the man that he cannot see his own depravity. O soul, what shall it profit thee if thou shalt gain the whole world, and yet be lost for ever? What if thou shalt die upon a bed of down, and wake up among the lost in hell? May God give all of us the grace to look upon the two worlds in their proper light! If the next world is only a trifle, trifle with it. If his world is everything, make everything of it. As you possess an immortal spirit, think well where that spirit is to spend eternity. As all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God, you are a sinner, and you need salvation, so do, I entreat you, trust in him who alone can save the guilty, "for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved," but the name of Jesus; and he is able to save unto the uttermost all who come unto God by him. I said just now that I do entreat you to trust in him, and so I do, yet this is not half so much my business as it is yours. The preacher of the gospel ought to be in earnest, but when he has faithfully delivered his message, the responsibility is transferred to his hearers. As the Lord liveth, I will take no responsibility of yours upon myself; to our own Master you and I must stand or fall; but, as your fellow-man, as one who devoutly desires that you should not be lost, I do beseech you to seek from God grace to get rid of the scales from your eyes so that you may see sin, and salvation, and everything else as they are in his sight, and may look to Jesus, and find eternal life in him.

Some of you young men are perhaps going to Oxford or Cambridge. Well, study hard, be senior wranglers if you can; but, with all the knowledge that you may acquire, do get a clear understanding of eternal things, and seek the wisdom that cometh from above. When you wear the degrees which earthly knowledge will procure for you, may you also wear the higher degree which God shall confer upon you as the children of the kingdom, children of God by faith in Christ Jesus! Sit at the feet of divines and philosophers if you will, but do also sit at the feet of Jesus, and learn of him, for so shall you have honour and glory that shall last for ever. Do seek after the honour which cometh from God, which can only be found by believing in Jesus, and seeking to please him in all things. My time has gone, and your time for repentance and faith is almost gone. May the realities of eternity be deeply impressed upon us all, and may we be prepared, when death shall summon us to stand before God, to prove that the gospel was not hidden from us, that so we may not be among "them that are lost." May God save us, by his grace, for Jesus' sake! Amen.

2 Corinthians 4:17 Our Light Affliction

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"Our light affliction."-2 Corinthians 4:17 (see commentary).

Perhaps someone here thoughtlessly says, "Well, whoever calls affliction 'light' must have been a person who knew very little about what affliction really is. If he had suffered as I have done, he would not have written about 'our light affliction.'" He must have been in robust health, and known nothing of sickness and pain." "Just so," says another, "and if he had been as poor as I am, and had to work as hard as I do to maintain a sickly wife, and a large family, he would not have written, about 'our light affliction.' I expect the

gentleman who used that expression lived very much at his ease, and had all that his heart could wish." "Ay," says another, "and if he had stood by an open grave, and had to lament the loss of loved ones, as I have done, and if he had known what it was to be desolate and forsaken, as I have known it, he would not have written about our light affliction."

Now, if you do talk like that, you are all of you mistaken, for the man who wrote these words was probably affliction more than any of us have ever been. The list of his afflictions that he gives us is perfectly appalling: "in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeyings often, in perils of waters in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness." Is there anyone here who could truthfully make out such a catalogue of personal afflictions as the apostle Paul endured?

"Well then," says one, "he must have been so hardened that he took no notice of it, like the Red Indian who will endure terrible torture without a groan, or like the Stoic philosopher who concealed his inward feelings beneath an unmoved countenance." No; you also are mistaken. If you read Paul's letters to his private friends and to the churches, you will see that they bear abundant evidences that he was a man of great tenderness of spirit and of intense emotion, one who could suffer and who did suffer most acutely. His education and training had fitted him far a life amongst the most learned and refined of his countrymen, yet he had so sure of himself by laboring as a tent-maker, and to journey hither and thither in peril and privation; and though he endured all this in absolute submission to the will of God, yet there was robbing stoical about his resignation.

"Well then," says another, "he must have been one of those careless, light-hearted people who never trouble about anything that happens, and whose motto is, 'Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die.'" Oh, no! the apostle Paul was not at all that kind of man.

He was the most thoughtful, logical, careful, considerate man of whom I have ever read. He knew what it was to be joyful, yet there was never any sign of levity about him. He had a grandly buoyant spirit which lifted him above waves of sorrow in which most men would have sunk, yet he was never frivolous. He wrote of "our light affliction" even when he was heavily afflicted, and while he acutely felt that affliction. The sailor forgot the storm when he is again safely on shore, and we are all apt to think less of our sickness when we have been restored from it; but, Paul was in the midst of affliction when he called it "light." He felt the weight of it, and was fully conscious of the pressure of it upon his spirit; but the elastic spring of faith within his skull was so vigorously in action that he was enabled at that very time to call it "our light affliction."

We must not forget that Paul had afflictions which were peculiarly his own. There are afflictions, which Christians have because they are Christians, and which those who are not Christians do not have; and Paul, as an apostle of Jesus Christ, had sufferings which were peculiarly his because he was an apostle. Because he was specially called to be the apostle of the Gentiles, because he was chosen to carry the gospel to many nations, because he was called to stand even before the cruel Emperor Nero,-for that very reason, he who was peculiarly gifted especially chosen as altogether to do most arduous and onerous work was also called to endure unusual trial. He had spelt out the word "AFFLICTION" as perhaps no other mere man had done, he had seen it written in capital letters across his whole life; so he could speak, not as a novice, but as one who had graduated in the school of affliction, and yet he wrote concerning "our light affliction." Before I have finished my discourse, I hope that most if not all here will agree with the apostle, and say, "We also call our affliction light."

I. I am going to speak, first, specially To Christian Workers; and to them I would say,-Dear brethren and sisters in Christ, our affliction is light compared with the objects we have in view.

Much of the affliction that the apostle had to endure came upon him because he was seeking the conversion of the heathen and the ingathering of the elect into the kingdom of Christ. If this is the object you also have in view, my dear friend, and you are made to suffer through your sedulous and faithful pursuit of it, I think you may truly call anything you have to endure a light affliction. If you have ever seen a mother sit up night after night with her sick child, you must have sometimes wondered that her eyes did not close in slumber. You were amazed that she did not permit someone else to share her task, but she seemed to think nothing of the cost to herself if she might only be the means of saving her little one's life. True love that made her labor light, and he who truly loves the souls of sinners will willingly bear any affliction for their sakes if he may but bring them to the Savior. Yes, and he will also patiently endure affliction from them as he remembers how, in his own wilfulness and waywardness, he caused his Savior to suffer on his behalf. If a man could know that, all through his life, he would have to wear a threadbare garment and exist upon very scanty fare; if he were sure that, throughout his life, he would meat with but little kindness from Christians, and with nothing but persecution from worldlings; and if, at the close of his career, he could only expect to be devoured by dogs or his body to be cast to the carrion crows, yet might he think all this to be but a light affliction if he might but win one soul from the unquenchable flame. Such trials as these are, happily, not necessary; but if they were, we might count them as nothing in comparison with the bliss of bringing up from the depths of sin the precious pearls that are forever to adorn the crown of the Redeemer.

Still speaking to Christian workers, I have next to say that our affliction is light compared with our great motive.

What should be the great motive of all who seek to spread the gospel, and to win sinners for Christ? Surely there is no motive comparable to that of seeking to bring glory to God by gathering into the kingdom of Christ those for whom he shed his precious blood. Ever keep in memory, beloved, what Jesus has done for us. He left his radiant throne in glory, and condescended to take upon himself our nature, and also our sin,-

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

Saved by his almighty grace, cleansed by his ever-precious blood, living because we have been made partners of his life, how can we help loving him who has made us what we are! What’s that sacred passion burns vehemently within our hearts, we feel that any affliction that we have to endure in order to glorify Christ is too light to be even worth mentioning. O ye devoted lovers of the Savior, have ye not known hours when ye have envied like martyrs, and wished that ye too might be allowed to wear the ruby crown? When you have read about how they had to lie for years in cold, damp dungeons, and then at last were dragged forth to die at the block, the stake, or the scaffold, have you not felt that your lives were poor and mean compared with theirs, and that you would gladly sacrifice a the comfort you now enjoy if you might be permitted to die for Christ as they did? I hope that many of you could truthfully say to your dear Lord and Savior,-

“Would not my ardent spirit vie
With angels round the throne,
To execute thy sacred will,
And make thy glory known?”

“Would not my heart pour forth its blood
In honor of thy name,
And challenge the old hand of death
To damp the immortal flame?”

It was such a spirit as this that must have possessed the apostle Paul when he wrote concerning “our light affliction.” Let us also, as workers for Christ, reckon as light affliction anything we have to endure by which we may glorify him who bore such a terrible weight of suffering and sorrow for us.

II. Now, secondly, I am going to speak To Those Who Complain Of The Weight Of Their Affliction.

Dear brethren and sisters, let me remind you that your affliction is light compared with that of many others. Think of the horrors of a battlefield, and of the armies of the poor wounded men who have to lie there so long untended. Living in peace in our happy island home, it is difficult for us to realize, the misery and wretchedness that are being endured in Paris even while I am preaching to you. It will be Seen, from the date at the head of the Sermon, that it was preached during the Franco-Prussian War. Some of you complain of shortness of breath, but you have not to offer the pangs of hunger as so many of the inhabitants of the French capital are at this moment suffering. There are some who are vulnerable as soon as any little ache or pain seizes them, yet their affliction is very light compared with that of many who never know what it is to be well and strong. Even if we are called to suffer pain, let us thank God that we have not been deprived of our reason. If we could secondly through the wards of Bethlehem Hospital, not far away from us, and see the many forms of madness represented, I think each one of us would be moved to, say, “My God, I thank thee that, however poor or sick I am, thou hast preserved me from such mental affliction as many have to bear.” How thankful we all ought to be that we are not in prison! Does it seem improbable, that such good people as we are could ever be numbered amongst, the law-breakers of the land? You know how Hazael said to Elisha, “Is thy servant, a dog, that, he should do this great, thing?” yet he did all that the prophet foretold; and but for the restraining grace of God, you and I, dear friends, might have been suffering the agony and remorse that many are tonight enduring in the prisons of this and other lands. I need not go on multiplying instances of those who, are suffering in various ways in mind or body or estate; but I think I have said sufficient to convince you that our affliction, whatever form, it may assume, is light compared with that of many others.

Next, our affliction is light compared with our deserts. We can truly say, with the psalmist. “He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.” If the Lord had not dealt with us in mercy and in grace, we might have been at this moment beyond the reach of hope, like that rich man who in vain begged “Father Abraham” to send Lazarus to dip his finger in water to cool his parched tongue. Yes, ungodly one, you might have been in hell tonight, in that outer darkness where there is weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth. Let the goodness of God in preserving you alive until now lead you to repent of your sin, and to trust in the Savior. Thank God, you are still out of the pit; the iron gate has not yet been opened to admit you, and then been

closed upon you for ever. Yet remember that you are, as it were, standing upon a narrow neck of land between two unbounded seas, and that the waves are every moment washing away the sand from, beneath your feet, and rest nor longer upon such an unsafe footing, lest it should give way altogether, and you should sink down into the fathomless abyss. As for any affliction that you ever can have to endure on earth, it is not merely light, it is absolutely unworthy of mention in comparison with the eternal woe that is the portion of the lost. Be thankful that, up to the present moment, this has not been your portion; and lest it should be, flee as once for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before you in the gospel.

Then next, our affliction is very light compared with that of our Lord. Do you, dear friend, murmur at the bitterness of the draught in the cup which is put into your hand? But what heart can conceive of the bitterness of that cup of which Jesus drank? Yet he said, "The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" Is the disciple to be above his Master, and the servant above his Lord? Did Christ have to swim through stormy seas, and-

"Must you be carried to the skies On flowery beds of ease?"

I think there is no consolation for an afflicted child of God so rich as that which arises from the contemplation of the sufferings of Jesus. The remembrance of the agony and bloody sweat of Gethsemane has often dried up the sweat of terror upon the anguished brow of the believer. The stripes of Jesus have often brought healing to his wounded followers. The thirst, the desertion, and the death on Golgotha-all the incidents of our Savior's suffering, and the terrible climax of it all,-have been most helpful in assuaging the sorrows of stricken saints. Brethren and sisters in Christ, your sufferings are not worth a moment's thought when compared with the immeasurable agonies of Jesus your Redeemer. My soul would prostrate herself at his dear pierced feet, and say, "I have never seen any other affliction like thine affliction. I have beheld and seen, but I have never seen any sorrow like unto thy sorrow. Thou art indeed the incomparable Monarch of misery, the unapproachable King of the whole realm of grief. Of old, thou wert the 'Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief,' and no man has ever been able to rob thee of thy peculiar title." I think that such reflections as these will help us to, realize that, however heavy our affliction appears to us to be, it is very light compared with that of our dear Lord and Master.

"Sons of God, in tribulation,
Let your eyes the Savior view,
He's the rock of our salvation,
He was tried and tempted too;

All to succor
Every tempted, burden'd son."

And further, beloved, our affliction is very light compared with the blessing which we enjoy. Many of us have had our sins forgiven, for Christ's sake, and the blessing of full and free forgiveness must far outweigh any affliction that we ever have to endure. When we were lying in the gloomy dungeon of conviction, and had not a single ray of hope to lighten the darkness, we thought that, even though we had to be kept in prison all our days, and to be fed only upon bread and water, we could be quite joyous if we could but be assured that. God's righteous anger was turned away from us, and that our sins and iniquities he would remember against us no more far ever. Well, that is just what many of us have experienced; our transgressions have been forgiven, and our sin has been covered by the great atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. Then let us rejoice and be glad all our days. But this is not all the blessing that we have received, for we have been clothed in the righteousness of Christ, and adapted into the family of God. Now we are heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ. We share even now in all the privileges of the children of God, and there are still greater favors and honors reserved for us in the future, as the apostle John saith, "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it cloth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." We already have a foretaste of the bliss that is laid up in store for us, for-

"The men of grace have found
Glory begun below
Celestial fruits on earthly ground
From faith and hope do grow."

So it is quite true that, in comparison with our blessings and privileges, our affliction is indeed light.

And, dear friends, we specially realize that our affliction is light as we prove the power of the Lord's sustaining grace. Some of you have never personally proved its power, but many of you do know by practical experience what I mean. There are times when, through acute physical pain or great mental anguish, the soul is at first utterly prostrate; but at last it falls back, in sheer helplessness, upon the bosom of Jesus, gives up struggling, and resigns itself absolutely to his will; and then-I speak what I do know, and testify what I have felt, there comes into the soul a great calm, a quiet joy so deep and so pure as never is experienced at any other time. I have sometimes looked back upon nights of pain,-pain so excruciating that it has forced the tears from my eyes,-

and I have almost asked to have such suffering repeated if I might but have a repetition of the seraphic bliss that I have often enjoyed under such circumstances. I made a mistake when I said "seraphic" bliss, for seraphs have not the capacity for suffering that we have, and therefore they can never experience that deep, intense, indescribable bliss that is our portion when, by grace, we are enabled to glorify God even in the furnace of affliction.

"Let me but hear my Savior say,
'Strength shall be equal to thy day!'
Then I rejoice in deep distress,
Leaning on all-sufficient grace.

"I can do all things, or can bear
All sufferings, if my Lord he there:
Sweet pleasures mingle with the pains,
While his left hand my head sustains."

We may well say that no affliction weighs more than a gnat resting upon an elephant when the Lord's upholding grace is sweetly manifested to our soul in times of perplexity, anxiety, and pain. It is just then that Jesus often so graciously reveals himself to us that we even come to love the cross that brings him specially near to us. I can understand that strange speech of Rutherford, as some have needed it, when he said that he sometimes feared lest he should make his cross into an idol by loving affliction too much because of the blessed results that flowed from it. The bark of the tree of affliction may be bitter as gall; but if you get to the pith of it, you will find that it is as sweet as honey.

Once more, affliction-sanctified affliction becomes very light when we see to what it leads. Sin is our great curse, and anything that can help to deliver us from the dominion of sin is a blessing to us. It seems that, in the constitution of our nature, and in the divine discipline under which we are being trained, our growth in grace is greatly assisted by affliction and trial. There are certain propensities to evil that can only be removed in the furnace, as the dross is burnt away from the pure metal; and surely, brethren, you who know the exceeding sinfulness of sin would not think any affliction too severe that should humble your pride, or subdue your passions, or slay your sloth, or overcome any other sin that so easily besets you. You will not merely acquiesce in the Lord's dealings with you, but you will devoutly thank him for using the sharp knife of affliction to separate you from your sin. A wise patient will gratefully thank the surgeon who cuts his flesh, and makes it bleed, and who will not allow it to heal up too quickly; and when God, by his gracious Spirit's operation, uses the stern surgery of trial to eradicate the propensity to sin, we do well to kiss the hand that holds the knife, and to say with cheerfulness as well as with resignation, "The will of the Lord be done."

"It needs our hearts be wean'd from earth,
It needs that we be driven,
By loss of every earthly stay,
To seek our joys in heaven."

Now, lastly, our affliction is light compared with the glory which is too soon to be revealed to us and in us. Some of us are much nearer to our heavenly home than we have ever imagined. Possibly, we are reckoning upon another twenty or own forty years service, yet the shallows of our life's day are already lengthening although we are unaware that it is so. Perhaps we are anticipating long periods of fightings without and fears within, but those anticipations will never be realized, for the day of our final victory is close at hand, and there doubts and fears shall never gain be able to assail our spirits. In this house tonight there may be some who are sitting on the very banks of the Jordan, and just across; the river lies the land that floweth with milk and honey, the land which is reserved as the inheritance of the true children of God. Their eyes are so dimmed with tears that they cannot see-

"Canaan's fair and happy land,
Where their possessions lie."

They even imagine that they are captives by the waters of Babylon, and they hang their harps upon the willows, for they for there are many years of banishment still before them. Yet the King's messenger is already on the way with the summons to bid them to appear before him very soon. Even if the call does not come to some of us at once, if the Master has need of us in this world a little longer, how soon our mortal life must end! What is our life? "It is even a vapor, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away." "As for man, his days are as grass; as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth. For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more." But does the brevity of life cause us any anxiety? Oh, no! "For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens;" and when once we reach that blest abode of all the saints, and look back upon your only experiences, we shall feel that any affliction we had to endure was light, indeed compared with the unutterable bliss that shall then be our eternal portion. We are pilgrims to Zion's city bound, and we necessarily have certain privations and difficulties; but when our journey is at an end,-

"One hour with our God
Will make up for it all."

If we have not this good hope through grace, we may well say that our affliction is not light. I cannot imagine how any of you, my hearers, can go on living without a Savior;-you poor people, you hard-working people, you sickly, consumptive people, how can you live without a, Savior? I wonder how those who are rich, and who have an abundance of earthly comforts, can live on year after year without any hope (except a false one) of comfort and blessing in the life that is to come. But as for you who have so few earthly comforts, you whose life is one long struggle for bare existence, you who scarcely know what it is to, have a day without pain, how can you live without a Savior? Remember that "godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." So "seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him, while he is near: let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." May the Lord give you the grace to come unto him this very moment, and to him shall be all the glory for ever, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

2 Corinthians 5:5. Preparation for Heaven

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"Now he that hath wrought us for the self-same thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit." — 2 Corinthians 5:5. (see commentary).

HOW very confidently Paul contemplates the prospect of death! He betrays no trembling apprehensions. With the calmness and serenity, not merely of resignation and submission, but of assurance, and courage, he appears joyous and gladsome, and even charmed with the hope of having his body dissolved, and being girt about with the new body which God hath prepared for his saints. He that can talk of the grave and of the hereafter with such intelligence, thoughtfulness, faith, and strong desire as Paul did, is a man to be envied. Princes might well part with their crown for such a sure and certain hope of immortality. Could emperors exchange their treasures, their honors, and their dominions, to stand side by side with the humble tent-maker in his poverty, they would be great gainers. Were they but able to say with him, "We are always confident, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord," they might well barter earthly rank for such a requital. This side heaven, what can be more heavenly shall to be thoroughly prepared to pass through the river of death? On the other hand, what a dreary and dreadful state of mind must they be in who, with nothing before them but to die, have no hope and see no outlet the pall and the shroud their last adorning; the grave and the sod their destination. Without hope of rising again in a better future or realising a better heritage than that which should know us no more ere long; no prospects of seeing God face to face with rejoicing; well may men dislike any reference to death. So they shrink from the thought of it; far less can they tolerate its being talked of in common conversation. No marvel that they recoil from the shade of mortality when they are so ill-prepared to face the reality of the soul's departure. But, dear friends, since it is so desirable to be ready to depart, it cannot be inexpedient sometimes to talk about it; and on my part the more so, because there is a proneness in all our minds to start aside from that grave topic which, as God shall help us, shall be our subject this evening-preparation for the great hereafter. "For," saith the Apostle, "God hath wrought us for this self-same thing"; he has prepared us for the dropping of the present body, and the putting on of the next, and he has given us the earnest of his Spirit."

Our three departments of meditation will be — the work of preparation itself, the Author of it; and the seal which he sets to it, the possession of which may resolve all scruples as to whether we are prepared or not.

I. The Work Of Preparation stands first.

Is it not almost universally admitted that some preparation is absolutely essential? Whenever the death of a friend or comrade is announced, you will hear the worst-instructed say, I hope poor man, he was prepared." It may be but a passing reflection or a common saying. Yet everybody will give expression to it, I hope he was ready. Whether the words be well understood or not, I do not know; but the currency given to them proves a unanimous conviction that some preparation is necessary for the next world. And, in truth, this doctrine is in accordance with the most elementary facts of our holy religion. Men by nature need something to be done for them before they can enter heaven, and something to be done in them. something to be done with them, for by nature they are enemies to God. Dispute it as ye will, God knows best. He declares that we are enemies to him, and alienated in our hearts. We need, therefore, that some ambassador should come to us with terms of peace, and reconcile us to God. We are debtors as well as enemies to our Creator — debtors to his law. We owe him what we cannot pay, and what he cannot pardon. He must exact obedience, and we cannot render it. He must, as God, demand perfection of us, and we, as men, cannot bring him that perfection.

Some mediator, then, must come in to pay the debt for us, for we cannot pay it. neither can we be exempted from it. There must be a substitute who shall stand between us and God, one who shall undertake all our liabilities and discharge them, and so set us free, that the mercy of God may be extended to us. In addition to this, we are all criminals. Having violated the law of God. we are condemned already. We are not, as some vainly pretend, introduced to this world on probation; but our probation is over; we have forfeited all hope; we have broken the law and the sentence is gone, out against us, and we stand by nature as condemned criminals, tenants of this world during the reprieve of God's mercy, in fear of a certain and terrible execution, unless someone come in between us and that punishment; unless some gracious hand bring us a free pardon; unless some voice divine plead and prevail for us that we may be acquitted. If this be not done for us, it is impossible that we should entertain any well-grounded hope of entering heaven. Say, then, brethren and sisters, has this been done for you? I know that many of you can answer, "Blessed be God, I have been reconciled to him through the death of his Son; God is no enemy of mine, nor I of his; there is no distance now between me and God, I am brought near to him, and made to feel that he is near to me and that I am dear to him." Full many here present can add, "My debts to God are paid; I have looked to Christ, my Substitute; I have seen him enter into suretyship engagements for me, and I am persuaded that he has discharged all my liabilities, I am clean before God's bar; faith tells me I am clean." And, brethren, you know that you are no longer condemned. You have looked to him who bore your condemnation, and you have drunk in the spirit of that verse, "There is, therefore, now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." Surely this is a preparation for heaven. How could we enter there if our debts were not discharged? How could we obtain the divine favor eternally if we were still condemned criminals? how could we dwell for ever in the presence of God if we were still his enemies? Come. let us rejoice in this. that he hath wrought us for this self-same thing having championed our cause from the cradle to the grave.

Preparation for Leaven consists still further in something that must be wrought in us, for observe, brethren, that if the Lord were to blot out all our sins we should still be quite incapable of entering heaven unless there was a change wrought in our natures. According to this Book. we are dead by nature in trespasses and sins — not some of us, but all of us; the best as well as the worst; we are all dead in trespasses and sins. Shall dead men sit at the feasts of the Eternal God? Shall there be corpses at the celestial banquets? Shall the pure air of the New Jerusalem be defiled with the putrefaction of iniquity? It must not, it cannot be. We must be quickened; we must be taken from the corruption of our old nature into the incorruption of the new nature, receiving the incorruptible seed which liveth and abideth for ever. Only the living children can inherit the promises of the living God, for he is not the God of the dead, but of the living; we must be made living creatures by the new — creating power of grace, or else we cannot be made meet for glory. By nature we are all worldly. Our thoughts go after earthly things. We "mind earthly things," as the Apostle says. We seek after the world's joys; the world's maxims govern us; the world's fears alarm us; the world's hopes and ambitions excite us. We are of the earth earthy, for we bear the image of the first Adam. But, brethren, we cannot go to heaven as worldly men; for there would be nothing there to gratify us. The gold of heaven is not for barter to use, nor for covetousness to hoard. The rivers of heaven are not for commerce, neither are they to be defiled by men. The joys and glories of heaven are all spiritual, all celestial.

"Pure are the joys above the skies
And all the region peace."

Such peace is of a heavenly kind, and for heavenly minds. Carnal spirits, greedy, envious spirits — what would they do in heaven? If they were in the place called heaven, they could not be in the state called heaven, and heaven is more a state than a place. Though it is probably both, yet it is mainly the former, a state of happiness, a state of holiness, a state of spirituality, which it would not be possible for the worldly to reach. The incongruity of such a thing is palpable. Therefore, you see, brethren, the Holy Spirit must come and give us new affections. We must have a fresh object set before us. In fact, instead of minding the things that are seen, we must come to love and to aspire to the things that are not seen. Our affections, instead of going downwards to things of earth, must be allured by things that are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God. In addition to our spiritual death and worldliness, we are all unholy by nature. Not one of us is pure in the sight of God. We are all defiled and all defiling, but in heaven they are "without fault before the throne of God. "No sin is tolerated there; no sin of thought, or word, or deed. Angels and glorified spirits delight to do God's will without hesitation, without demur, without omission; and we, like them, must be holy, or we cannot enter into their sacred fellowship.

"Those holy gates for ever bar
Pollution, sin, and shame
None shall obtain admission there
But followers of the Lamb."

But what a change must come over the carnal man to make him holy! Through what washings he must pass! What can wash him white, indeed, but that far-famed blood of the Son of God? Through purification he must pass! What, indeed, can purify him at all but the refining energy of God the Holy Ghost? He alone can make us what God would have us to be, renewed in his image in holiness and righteousness.

That a great change must be wrought in us, even ungodly men will confess, since the idea of the heaven of the Scriptures has always been repulsive, never agreeable, to unconverted men and women. When Mahomet would charm the world into the belief that he was the prophet of God, the heaven he pictured was not at all the heaven of holiness and spirituality. His was a heaven of unbridled sensualism, where all the passions were to be enjoyed without let or hindrance for endless years. Such the heaven that sinful men would like; therefore, such the heaven that Mahomet painted for them, and promised to them. Men in general, be they courtly, or be they coarse in their habits, when they read of heaven in the Scriptures with any understanding of what they read, curl their lips and ask contemptuously, Who wants to be everlastingly psalm singing? Who could wish to be always sitting down with these saints talking about the mighty acts of the Lord and the glorious majesty of his kingdom? Such people cannot go to heaven, it is clear; they have not character or capacity to enter into its enjoyment. I think Whitefield was right. Could a wicked man be admitted into heaven, he would be wretched there; being unholy, he must be unhappy. From sheer distaste for the society of heaven, he might fly to hell for shelter. With the tumult of evil passions in his breast, he could not brook the triumph of righteousness in the city of the blest. There is no heaven for him who has not been prepared for it by a work of grace in his soul. So necessary is this preparation — a preparation for us, and a preparation in us. And if we ever have such a preparation, beyond all question we must have it on this side of our death. It can only be obtained in this world. The moment one breathes his last, it is all fixed and settled. As the tree falleth, so it must lie. While the nature is soft and supple it is susceptible of impression, stamp what seal you may upon it; once let it grow cold and hard, fixed and frigid, you can do so no more, it is proof against any change. While the iron is flowing into the mould you can fashion it into what implement you please; let it grow cold, in vain you strive to alter its form. With pen of liquid ink in your hand you write what you will on the paper, but the ink dries, the impress remains, and where is the treachery that shall tamper with it? Such is this life of yours. It is over, all over with you for eternity, beyond alteration or emendation, when the breath has gone from the body. Your ever lasting state is fixed then.

“There are no acts of pardon passed
In the cold grave to which we haste;
But darkness, death, and long despair
Reign in eternal silence there.”

We have no intimation in the Word of God that any soul dying in unbelief will afterwards be converted to the faith. Nor have we the slightest reason to believe that our prayers in this world can at all affect those who have departed this life. The masses of priests are fictions, without the shadow of divine authority. Purgatory, or “Pick-purse,” as old Latimer used to call it, is an invention for making fat larders for priests and monks, but the Scriptures of truth give it no countenance. The Word of God says, “He that is holy, let him be holy still; he that is filthy, let him be filthy still.” Such as you are when death comes to you, such will judgment find you, and such will the eternal reward or the eternal punishment leave you, world without end. Preparation is needed, and the preparation must be found before we die.

Moreover, we ought to know — for it is possible for a man to whether he is thoroughly prepared. Some have said not, but they have usually been persons very little acquainted with the matter. The writings of those grand old divines of the Puritan period abundantly prove how thoroughly they enjoyed the assurance of faith. They did not hesitate to express themselves in such language as the Apostle used: “We know that if this earthly house of our tabernacle be dissolved, we have a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.” They were wont to speak as Job doth when he saith, “I know that my Redeemer liveth.” And indeed, many of the children of God among us at this present time are favored with a confident, unstaggering confidence that, let their last hour come when it may, or let the Lord himself descend from heaven with a shout, there will be nothing but joy and peace for them — no cause of trembling, nothing that can give them dismay. Why, some of us live from year to year in constant assurance of our preparation for the bliss that awaiteth and the rest that remaineth for God’s people. Beloved, God has not so left us in such a dubious case that we always need to be enquiring, “Am I his, or am I not?” He has given us good substantial grounds to go upon to make sure work of it. He tells us that “he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved”; if we have been obedient to these two commands, we shall be saved, for our God keepeth his word. He tells us that such believers, patiently continuing in well-doing, inherit eternal life. If we are kept by his grace, walking in his fear, we may rest assured that we shall come to the ultimate end of such a life, namely, the glory which abideth for the faithful. We need not harbour endless questionings. What miserable work it is to stand in any doubt on this matter. Let us not be satisfied till we are sure and confident that heaven will be ours. Alas! how many put off all thoughts of being prepared to die! They are prepared for almost anything except the one thing for which it is most needful to be ready. If the summons should come to some of you at this moment, how dread it would be! Were we to see an angel hovering in the air, and should we have intelligence by a message from the clouds that someone of us must, on a sudden, leave his body behind him and appear before God, what cowering down, what trembling, what muttering of forgotten prayers there would be with some of you! You are not ready. You never will be ready, I fear. The carelessness in which you have lived so long has become habitual. One would think you had resolved to die in your sins. Have you never heard the story of Archæus, the Grecian despot, who was going to a feast, and on the way a messenger brought him a letter, and seriously importuned him to read it? It contained tidings of a conspiracy that had been formed against him, that he should be killed at the feast. He took the letter, and put it into his pocket. In vain the messenger

urged that it was concerning serious matters. "Serious matters to-morrow," said Archaeus, "feasting to-night." That night the dagger reached his heart while he had about him the warning which, had he heeded it, would have averted the peril. Alas! too many men say, "Serious things to-morrow!" They have no misgiving that, when their sport is over, they will have alike the leisure and the leanings for these weighty matters. Were it not wiser, sirs, to let these grave affairs come, first? Might ye not, then, find some better sport of nobler character than all the froth and frivolity to which fashion leads on? a holy merriment and a sacred feasting that well become immortal spirits. How vain and grovelling the mirth which reduces men to children, pleased with a rattle, tickled with a straw; then brings them down to drivelling fools, and degrades them often till they become worse than brutes. I wish I could imprint a solemn thought on the mind of some careless individuals. Reck ye not that time is short, that life is precarious, that opportunities cross your path at lightning speed, that hope flatters those on whom the fangs of death are fixed; that there is no vestibule in which to fit your frame of mind, that the shack will always come sudden at last. What sentence more trite; what sentiment more prevalent; yet what solemnity more neglected than this, "Prepare to meet your God"! Propound it, profess it, preach it as we may, the most of men are unprepared. They know the inevitable plight, they see the necessity of preparation, but they postpone and procrastinate, instead of preparing. God grant you may not trifle, any of you, until your trembling souls are launched into that sphere unknown, but not unfeared, and read your doom in hell. Now: —

II. As To The Author Of This Preparation For Death, the text saith, "He that hath wrought us for the self-same thing is God."

It is God alone, then, who makes men fit for heaven. He works them to the self-same purpose. Who made Adam fit for Paradise but God? And who must make us fit for the better Paradise above but God? That we cannot do it ourselves is evident. According to the Scriptures, we are dead in trespasses and sins. Can the dead start from the grave of their own accord? Do ye think to see coffins opened and grave-stones uplifted by the natural energy of corpses? Such things were never dreamed of. The dead shall surely rise, but they shall rise because God raises them. They cannot vitalise their inert frames, neither can the dead in sin quicken themselves and make themselves fit for the presence of God. Conversion, which prepares us for heaven, is a new creation. That word "creation" puts all the counsel, the conceit, and the contrivance of man into the background. If anyone saith that he can make a new heart, let him first go and make a fly. Not until he has created such a winged insect let him presume to tell us that he can make a man a new creature in Christ Jesus. And yet to make a fly would not demonstrate that a fly could make itself, and it would offer but a feeble pretext for that wonderful creation which is supposed in a man's making himself a new heart. The original creation was the work of God, and the new creation must likewise be of God. To take away a heart of stone and give a heart of flesh is a miracle. Man cannot do it; if he attempts it, it shall be to his own shame and confusion. The Lord must make us anew. Have not we, who know something of the Lord's working in us, this self-same thing, been made to feel that it is all of his grace? What first made us think about eternal things? Did we, the stray sheep, come back to the fold of our own accord? No; far from it.

"Jesus sought me when a stranger,
Wandering from the fold of God."

And ever since we have been living men in Christ Jesus. To whom must we ascribe our preservation and our progress? Must we not attribute every victory over sin, and every advance in the spiritual life, to the operation of God, and nothing at all to ourselves? A poor simpleton once said, "Twas God and I did the work." "Well, but, Charlie, what part did you take in it?" "Sure, then," said he, "I did all I could to stop the Lord, and he beat me." I suppose, did we tell the simple truth, we should say much the same. In the matter of our salvation we do all we can to, oppose it — our old nature does — and he overcomes our evil propensities. From first to last, Jesus Christ has to be the Author and the Finisher of our salvation, or it never would have been begun, and it never would have been completed.

Think, beloved, of what fitness for heaven is. To be fit for heaven a man must be perfect. Go, you who think you can prepare yourselves, be perfect for a day. The vanity of your own mind, the provocation of this treacherous world, and the subtle temptation of the devil, would make short work of your empty pretensions. You would be blown about like chaff. Creature perfection, indeed! Was ever anything so absurd? Men have boasted of attaining it, but their very boastings have proved that they possessed it not. He that gets nearest to perfection is the very man who sighs and cries over the abiding infirmities of his flesh. No, if perfection is to be reached — and it must be, or we shall not be fit for heaven — by the operation of God it must be wrought. Man's work is never perfect; it is always marred on the wheel. His best machinery may still be improved upon; his finest productions of art might still be excelled. God alone is perfect, and he alone is the Perfecter. Blessed be God, we can heartily subscribe to this truth, "He that hath wrought us for the self-same, thing is God."

But what shall I say to those of you, my friends, who have no acquaintance with God? You certainly cannot be fitted for heaven Your cause is not committed to him. He is doing nothing for you. He has not begun the good work in you. You live in this world as if there were no God. The thought, the stupendous thought of his "Being" does not affect you. You would not act any differently if there were twenty Gods or if there were no God. You utterly ignore his claims on your allegiance, and your responsibility to his law. Virtually in

thought and deed you are without God in the world. Poor forlorn creature, thou hast forgotten thy Creator. Poor wandering soul, thou hast fallen out of gear with the universe; thou hast become alienated from the great Father who is in heaven. I tremble at the thought. To be on the wide sea without rudder or compass; to be lost in the wilderness, where there is no way! Cheerless as thy condition is, remember this: Though thou seest not God, God sees thee. God sees thee now; he hears thee now. If thou breathe but a desire towards him, that desire shall be accepted and fulfilled. He will yet begin to work in thee that gracious preparation which shall make thee meet to be a partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light. And now, thirdly: —

III. Let The Seal Of This Preparation be briefly, but attentively considered.

The Apostle says, "He that hath wrought us for the self-same thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit." Masters frequently pay during the week a part of the wages which will be due on Saturday night. God gives his Holy Spirit, as it were, to be a part of the reward which he intends to give to his people, when, like hirelings, they have fulfilled their day. Our country friends just before harvest go out into the fields, and they pick half a dozen ears that are ripe, braid the ends, and hang them up over the mantleshelf as a kind of earnest of the harvest. So God gives us his Holy Spirit to be in our hearts as an earnest of heaven; and as the ears of wheat are of the same quality and character as the harvest, so the gift of the Holy Spirit is the antepast of heaven. When you have him, you have a plain indication to your soul of what heaven will be. You have a part of heaven — "a young heaven," as Dr. Watts somewhere calls it, within you. Ask yourself, then, dear hearer, this question, "Have I received the earnest of the Spirit?" If so, you have the preparation for heaven; if not, you are still a stranger to divine things, and you have no reason to believe that the heaven of the saints will be your heritage. Come, now, have you received the Holy Spirit? Do, you reply "How may I know?" Wherever the Holy Spirit is, he works certain graces in the soul—repentance, to wit. Hast thou ever repented of sin? I mean, dost thou hate it? Dost thou shun it? Dost thou grieve to think thou shouldst once have loved it? Is thy mind altogether changed with regard to sin, so that what once seemed pleasure now is pain, and all the sweetness of sin is poison to thy taste? Where the Holy Spirit is, repentance is followed by the whole train of graces, all in a measure, not any in perfection, for there is always room to grow in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ. Such is patience, which submits to the Lord's will; such, too, the gracious disposition of forgiveness, which enables us to bear injuries and to forgive those that vex us; such, likewise, that holy courage which is not ashamed to own our Lord, or to defend his cause. In fact, where the Holy Ghost is bestowed, all the graces of the Spirit will be communicated in some degree. Though they will all need to grow, yet there will be the seeds of them all. Where the Holy Spirit is, there will be the joy. No delight can be more animating or more elevating than that which springs from the indwelling of God in the soul. Think of God coming to abide in this poor bosom! Why, were a cross of diamonds or pearls glittering on your breast, some might envy you the possession of such a treasure; but to have, God within your breast is infinitely better. God dwelleth in us, and we in him. Oh! sacred mystery! Oh! birth of joy unspeakable! Oh! well of bliss divine that maketh earth like heaven! Hast thou ever had this joy — the joy of knowing that thou art pardoned; the joy of being sure that thou art a child of God; the joy of being certain that all things work together for thy good; the joy of expecting that ere long, and the sooner the better, thou shalt be for ever beyond gunshot of fear, and care, and pain, and want? Where the Spirit of God is, there is more or less of this joy, which is the earnest of heaven.

This gift, moreover, will be conspicuously evidenced by a living faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The Holy Ghost is not in you if you rely on anything but Jesus; but if, as a poor guilty sinner, you have come to him, partaken of his gracious pardon, kissed his blessed feet, and are now depending upon him alone, you have received the Holy Ghost, and you have got the antepast of heaven.

Brethren and sisters, it is intensely desirable that we should seek more to be consciously filled with the Holy Spirit. We get easily contented with a little spiritual blessedness. Let us grow more covetous of the best gifts. Let us crave to be endued with the Holy Spirit, and to be baptized in the Holy Ghost and in fire. The more we get of him the more assurance we shall have of heaven for our peace, the more foretastes of heaven for our happiness, and the more preparation for heaven in lively hope.

Thus have I shown you the need of preparation, the Author of preparation, and the great seal which proves the verity of that preparation. If your honest conscience allows your humble claim to have received this sacred token of salvation, how happy you would be! Do not be afraid to be happy. Some Christians seem to court the gloom of despondency as if they dared not bask in the sunshine of heaven. I have sometimes heard people say that they have not enjoyed themselves. No, dear friends; pity, methinks, if any of us ever should. It would be a poor kind of enjoyment if we merely enjoyed ourselves. But, oh! it is delightful when you can enjoy your God, and when you can enjoy the mercies that are in him, and the promises that are in him, and the blessings which, through him come to you. When you gather round the table of the Lord's love, do not be afraid to partake of the feast. There is nothing put there to be looked at. There is no confectionery spread out for show. If you dare conclude that you are living in Christ, and living on Christ, do not be afraid to sing as you go home: —

"Now I can read my title clear
To mansions in the skies

I bid farewell to every fear,
And wipe my weeping eyes.”

It will be a blessing to your family for you to be happy. You may find that something has gone wrong while you have been away. Go home as happy as you can be, and you will be better able to bear the cares and vexations that must and will befall you. Keep your spirit well worked up to the fear of the Lord, and the enjoyment of his presence. Then, if some little cross matter should come to disquiet you, you can say, “Who am I that I should be vexed and chafed, or lose my temper, or be cast down about such a matter as this? This is not my sphere of well-being; this is not my heaven; this is not my God.”

“If thou shouldst take them all away,
Yet should I not repine;
Before they were possess’d by me
They were entirely shine.

“Nor would I speak a murmuring word,
Though the whole world were gone,
But seek enduring happiness
In thee, and thee alone.”

But, oh! suppose you feel persuaded and honestly admit that you are not prepared to die, not made meet for heaven. Do not utterly despair, but be grateful that you live where the gospel is preached.

“Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.” Be much in hearing the Word, and be much in earnest prayer that the hearing may be blessed to your soul. Above all, give diligence to that divine command which bids thee trust in Jesus Christ, whom he hath sent. Eternal life lies in the nutshell of that one sentence, “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. and thou shalt be saved.” All that is asked of you — and even that grace, gives you — is simply to trust in him who, as Son of God, died for the sins of men. God give you that faith, and then may you meet death with joy, or look forward to the coming of the Lord with peace. whichever may be your lot. Amen.

2 Corinthians 5:20 Christ's Ambassadors

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“Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God.” — 2 Corinthians 5:20. (see commentary).

So, then, there is war between man and God. It seems preposterous that man should be in arms against his God, but it is all too sadly true. Shall the gnat contend with the flame? Shall an insect fight against an angel? Even this would not be so absurd as for man, who is utterly insignificant, to make war with God who is infinite; man, who is but as the ephemera of an hour, to enter into the lists against the dread, eternal, and almighty God. Accursed was that hour in which our first mother put forth her hand to take the forbidden fruit. From that moment war began between man and his Maker; and from the Garden of Eden right on until now man has been an enemy of God: and although God has constantly returned good for evil, and is still the God of love and condescension, yet has man continued to fight against him, and there still its war between heaven and earth. Otherwise, there would be no need for ambassadors between God and men. This would be proof enough that a state of war prevails. But, alas! in our own hearts we bear, each one of us, sad proofs of the enmity of man and God: and we see, besides, in our fellow-men, ten thousand sorrowful instances which prove that they have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God, and are not the friends of the great Friend of man.

Our text tells us that the ministers of Christ, the apostles and all others who are sent of God to preach the gospel, are “ambassadors for Christ.” In speaking upon that matter, we must make some references to ourselves, and I especially shall have to ask the earnest prayers of the congregation for myself. I feel that I may well do so, for if apostles said, “Brethren, pray for us,” how much more may we, who are not worthy to be numbered amongst the least of our Master’s servants, urge the same plea!

In our text, I think I see, first, a great mercy implied: secondly, a great office mentioned; and, thirdly, a great duty involved.

I. First, here is A Great Mercy Implied: “We are ambassadors for Christ.”

Well, then, it is clear that there is some hope of peace. When an ambassador comes upon the stage of action, it is evident that war is not to be waged to the bitter end. But observe that the ambassador is not an ambassador from man to God, but an ambassador from God to man. "We are ambassadors" — not for you, but "for Christ."

I learn, then, from this that the peace proposed is one quite unsought by man. Man revolted against his Maker, and was determined to continue in revolt. He was evil, and would have remained evil if God had not interposed. Men go astray from God by nature, but they only return to God through grace. Further, and yet further, and yet further still will they go away from God; deeper and yet deeper will they plunge into the abyss of sin. It is easy for humanity to descend into Avernus, but for it to retrace its steps, "this is the work, this is the difficulty;" and until God himself comes in, man is as unwilling as he is unable and as unable as he is unwilling to make peace with his God. We might have thought, if we had not known the dread nature of sin, that the first thing Adam, and Eve would have done, after they had transgressed their Maker's law, would have been to cast themselves down at his feet, and say, "We have taken of the fruit of the tree whereof thou hast said that we must not eat." But instead of doing so, they ran away to try to hide themselves from his eye; and when his voice was heard in the garden, and they were obliged to face him, instead of frankly confessing their sin, the evil juice of that forbidden fruit had so poisoned their nature that they both began to make excuses. The man said, "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat;" and the woman would not bear the blame herself, but cast it upon the serpent. There was clear evidence there that man, though he had become a rebel against his God, would not turn unto his God, confess that he had done wrong, and sue for mercy. Never did a prodigal son, "I will arise and go to my Father," until the grace of God had put that resolve into the prodigal's heart. The centripetal force, the force which makes us seek the center, is not in us; ours is centrifugal force, which drives us further and yet further away from the great center of all light, and truth, and peace, and purity. When God draws us, we shall run after him; but until he does so, we shall still remain afar off from him. So the sending of an ambassador from God shows clearly that it is not man who seeks peace.

But then, on the other hand, it shows that God himself is desirous of peace; yet not because it can make any difference to him whether man is his enemy or not. It may make some difference to the candle if the moth flies into it; the moth will certainly be destroyed by the candle, yet the candle will still shine on, though its light may be in some measure diminished. But what difference can poor creatures such as we are make to God? The blasphemer curses God, yet the sun is just as bright as ever, and the dewdrops of the morning are quite as sparkling as ever, and the rivers still run on to the sea, and ocean remains the same as before; and as for God himself, his glory continues undiminished, and his holiness is untarnished. And though all men should be leagued together in one great conspiracy, and should say concerning Jehovah and Christ, his Anointed, "Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us," what will come of their evil confederacy? "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision." His glory will be just as great even if they determine to be damned; if they will go down to hell, his justice will be honored, for they richly deserve their doom. There is no reason, except in God's grace, why he should send to man an embassy of peace. Generally, in war, it is the less who sends to the greater to entreat for peace. 'Tis seldom that the victorious, while still they bear their banners on high, suddenly pause amid the battle, and send an embassy to say to the vanquished, "Let there be peace between us." The conquerors usually wait till the beaten ones know that they are beaten, and sue for terms; and they count it gracious on their part to be willing, in the full expectation of yet further victories, to pause awhile, to discuss terms of peace. When the commander-in-chief has half won the campaign, and sees with absolute certainty that he could utterly destroy his enemy, he does not hasten to put back his sword into its scabbard. But God does this; — just as though he had been defeated, or as though he was the weaker of the two combatants, or as though it would be to his interest, he stops in the midst of the battle, and sends to man an embassy of peace; and we, his servants, are sent forth as "ambassadors for Christ" because God desireth to be at peace, with men.

Why is this? Certainly not because he fears man, nor because he cannot do without man, nor because he cannot crush him as an adversary; but simply because he is very tender, and pitiful and full of compassion. "As I live, saith the Lord God," (and that is his own oath) "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live." He is a God who is terrible in his justice, but "he delighteth in mercy." To bless men, and make them happy, is his continual joy, but judgement is "his strange work." It is, as it were, his left-handed work, — not that which he delights to do. Even when justice compels him to smite and to slay, he says but little about it, and he usually does away with the very instruments that he has used for this purpose. Great armies and great nations have been raised up to be the scourges of God, but they have not been heard of afterwards, as though God were so loathe to smite that, when he does so, he burns the rod directly he has done with it, not caring to have it any longer in his sight. But when he comes to men in mercy, God is, as we say, "all there." He puts forth his omnipotence in his works of love; he brings out his omniscience, he employs all his attributes when he comes to bless men. Oh, yes! God delighteth, in grace and mercy, but he, loves not wrath; and it is for that reason, because he is a God full of tenderness, compassion, and pity, that he sendeth an embassy to men, and makes his servants to be "ambassadors for Christ."

And then, mark you, this also shows us that, as God desires peace, peace is possible. Sin has made a very great breach between God and man. God has been insulted to his face, and that not merely once, nor twice, but thousands and millions of times. The sin of men would, if it could, become a deicide, and kill God himself; and this, indeed, it did when it slew the Son of God on Calvary.

Every sinner is guilty of high treason against the majesty of heaven, for he does, as far as he can, snatch from God's hand the scepter of sovereignty, and pluck from his brow the crown of universal dominion. Sin is not a thing at which God can wink. We sometimes hear persons talk as though God could forgive sin without Christ's atonement, and without exacting any penalty for it; but that cannot be. Everyone who rules over men, though it be but over a petty nation or a small parish, knows that, if the law has no penalties attached to it, it ceases to have any power. It would be a dreadful thing to live in any State where there were no punishments for law-breakers. I read the other day, that perhaps it would be better to live where everyone was subject even to tyrannical law than to live where there was no law. It would be truly terrible to live in any place where good and bad would fare precisely alike, — where there would be no prison, — where the thief and the murderer and the drunkard should be let alone, — where all should be regarded as on an equal footing, let them do what they might. Laws must be respected, and the breakers of them must be, punished. Now, if it is so in our imperfect civil communities, it must be much more so in God's government of the entire universe. It is not merely men with whom God has to deal, though they are to be counted by thousands of millions; but he has to deal with angels, good and bad, and we know not how many — perhaps innumerable races of beings, possibly very different from ourselves, yet like us in this respect, that they are under law, and under God's government. It may be that every starry world teems with myriads of intelligent inhabitants; it is much more likely that it should be so than that it should not be so, seeing that God is not in the habit of creating anything in vain, and we can scarcely imagine that he has made all those mighty orbs to circle around his throne without suitable inhabitants to render due homage to him. It becomes incumbent, then, on God — I say this with the utmost reverence for his sacred majesty, that, as he is the Judge of the whole universe, he must do right. If one of our judges should say, "I never can pronounce a sentence of death upon a murderer; my heart is too tender for me ever to order the lash for the garrotter, or to send the wife-beater to prison;" what should we say to him? Why, we should say, "Then, sir, if your heart is so tender towards the bad, you are so cruel to the good that you must retire from the bench, for you are unfit to be a judge if you do not punish the guilty." We remember Abraham's question, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" We also read that "every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward." As long as God is God, he cannot trifle with sin. You may trifle with it if you will, O foolish sinner, but it will be at your own imminent peril; but God, the omnipotent King, the Maker and Judge of all, will not trifle with it. He must crush rebellion; he must punish iniquity.

"But," perhaps you say, "you started by telling us that there was hope of peace; but how can that be if the law's sentence must be carried out?" I answer that this is the reason for our embassy; this is the great object for which we are ambassadors for Christ, — to say that, in Christ, God is able, without, the violation of any demand of justice, to show the fullest mercy to sinners. Through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ, God's justice will suffer no blot, no slur, if you, coming to him, and confessing your iniquities, and believing in his Son, shall be completely pardoned and accepted. Salvation by substitution was the grand invention of omniscience, — that Christ should bear, — "That we might never bear His Father's righteous ire," — that on his back should fall the stripes that were due to us, — that in his heart should be sheathed the fiery sword that ought to have been sheathed in our hearts. It was most just that Christ should stand in our stead. If I am asked how his substitution for us is consistent with justice, I reply, — the first sin, by which we were ruined, was not committed by us personally, but it was committed by Adam, our representative. It is therefore perfectly consistent with the highest justice that, as we fell representatively, we should be lifted up representatively. We died through Adam's sin: we live again through Christ's life and death; and every soul that believeth in Jesus may know that Christ, was punished in his stead. Christ, as his Representative, bore his griefs, and carried his sorrows; Christ was wounded for his transgressions, and bruised for his iniquities; and now all the sins of every such person are blotted out, and for ever cease to be, because Jesus Christ bore the full penalty for them. The believer's debt is paid, so it cannot again be demanded of any soul for whom Jesus died.

These are the terms of peace, then, and this is the blessed gospel of peace: "To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation." This is the gospel that we preach, — that whosoever believeth in Jesus Christ is reconciled to God through the death of his Son. Peace is possible. O blessed news! Blessed are the people that know this joyful sound! Bright should be the eyes of those who see the feet of the messengers that bring the glad tidings of peace possible between man and God.

"How beauteous are their feet
Who stand on Zion's hill!
Who bring salvation on their tongues,
And words of peace reveal!"

Let me add to this the comforting assurance that peace has been effectually made already in tens of thousands of instances. There are many of us, now present, who are enjoying the peace that Christ has made on our behalf. Having looked, by faith, to his sacrifice on Calvary, our sins have gone for ever. Having rested where God has rested, even in Jesus, for Jesus is to God a sacrifice of rest, we now feel perfect peace toward God, we are no longer his enemies, but love him, and desire to obey him perfectly; and though we do still err, and mourn a thousand imperfections, yet we can truly say that we do love him, and that we long to be like him. Whatever he commands, we at least desire to do, and by his grace we are helped to do it; and whatever he forbids, we desire to abhor, and to flee from it as from a poisonous serpent. Blessed be the name of God, we can speak to him now, without being afraid that he will

destroy us, but saying, "Our Father, who art in heaven, the Spirit of adoption in our hearts makes us say unto thee, 'Abba, Father, we love thee, and adore thee, oh, for grace to love thee more!'"

Thus much, then, upon the great mercy that is implied in the apostles declaration that we are "ambassadors for Christ."

II. Now, secondly, we have here A Great Office Mentioned: "We are ambassadors for Christ."

Why did God send ambassadors to men? He might have made peace without doing so, but he has chosen to put honor upon instrumentality and he has dealt with us as with reasonable beings. Further, why did God send men as his ambassadors? Would not angels have been better messengers? The probability is that an angel would have been quite unfit for such work as this. When a man, a sinful man who has himself been forgiven, talks to other sinners, he talks very tenderly and sympathetically; — at least, he ought to do so; — and when he meets with any distressed souls, he recollects the time when he was in distress; and when he hears about their doubts and fears, he remembers his own; and when he mourns over their rebellions, he recollects what a rebel he used to be; and therefore he is gentle with them, and longs that, if possible, peace may be made between the rebel and his God. But if an angel had been Christ's ambassador, after he had preached most earnestly, you would always be able to make this excuse to him, "Ah, you cannot enter into our feelings, for you have never had our temptations and trials." As you went home, you would say to one another, "That was a grand oration that the angel gave us, but it did not help us much. It was all very well for him to talk as he did, but he has not a wife and children to provide for, he has no poverty to bear, he has not to feel the cold, he has not to suffer through being tempted, as we are, by evil passions and the like." Possibly, if an angel were to take my place here next Lord's day, there would be many of you who would be very pleased with the change; but, I think, by the time two or three Sabbaths had passed, you would want your old friend back again, because you would feel that there was, after all, a warmth of brotherhood within the human being's breast which you could never expect to find in cherubim or seraphim. When we, who once were enemies to God, tell you, who are still at enmity against him, about our own rebellion, and how it was ended by divine love, how the Lord melted us down by his infinite pity and abounding condescension, — you will say to one another, "Let us also go unto Jesus; peradventure we shall find him equally kind to us." You will be, thus graciously drawn to the Savior by the example of another who was in a similar case to your own. And if we tell you what a loving Lord we have proved him to be, how easy his yoke has been, and how light his burden, peradventure some, who are laboring and heavy laden, will say, "We also will accept his gracious invitation which saith, 'Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden,' and he will give rest to us even as he has given it to these his messengers." It was wise and kind, on God's part, to send men to be "ambassadors for Christ."

That word "ambassadors" suggests to us a few reflections. First, every true minister of Christ is engaged upon royal business. He is doing business for the King of kings, the great Lord of all. He does not come in his own name, nor in the name of any Church nor in the name of any earthly potentate; but he comes in the name of him who made heaven and earth, and who governs all things by the word of his power. I will, therefore, listen to him, even though he may be an illiterate man, for he is the servant of God. If it was really the gospel of Jesus Christ that I heard, little would it signify to me whether the lips that uttered it spoke in such tones as the golden-mouthed Chrysostom used of old, or in plain and rugged language like that of Simon Peter. It was his Master who sent him, and it was his Master's business to choose whom he would as his ambassador; therefore let me see the Master in the man, and hear the Master's voice in the gospel which his servant preaches; and let me bless God both for the gospel and for the man who preaches it, and let me pray that, since he has royal business to do, he may have grace to do it rightly.

For, as it is royal business, it is important business. I know there are some who fancy that, to some of us, who have preached so long, it is easy work to deliver a sermon. Now, Martin Luther used to say that he never went into his pulpit without having his knees knocking together through fear, although he was a man of dauntless courage: and I can assure you that I never address you without feeling that it would be better for me to engage in breaking stones on the road, or in any handicraft however hard it might be, than to have to preach the gospel, because, if I am unfaithful to the many souls committed to my charge, what must be my portion at the last? Whether you think so or not, to me it seems that every sermon involves me in most dire peril unless divine grace makes me faithful. I have not, like a banker, to deal with gold and silver, but with immortal souls, which are far more precious; — not with the interests of a State, in which my mistake might be rectified by some abler statesman; but I am concerned about souls which, if once lost, are lost for ever. Since God has warned his watchmen against unfaithfulness, he may require the blood of souls at our hands if we warn them not, and he will call us to account if we have kept back any truth that he has taught us. Sometimes, when we speak faithfully concerning error, people ask, "What need is there of such preaching as that? What have you to do with other people's religion?" Why, some of us were sent into the world for this very purpose, that we might have to do with other people's religion. No man under heaven shall be able to say that, we knew that he was believing a lie, and yet did not tell him that it was a lie. Not our business to interfere with others when we were sent here on purpose to interfere? If Christ's ambassador sees others attempting to keep up the war between his King and the rebellious subjects in his kingdom, it is his business to speak sternly of those enemies of God and man, and to plead with all his soul with the offending subjects to be at peace with his great King and Lord. So, as "ambassadors for Christ," we have royal business, and we have important business.

"Tis not a cause of small import
The pastor's care demands;
But what might fill an angel's heart,
And fill'd a Savior's hands."

But, next, all ambassadors have to act in accordance with their commission. An ambassador must never go beyond his commission; his power comes from, his king, he has no power of his own. And if a man, who professes to be Christ's ambassador, puts on the airs of priestcraft, and says that he has authority in himself, believe him not. I have all needful authority! I speak according to this blessed Book; but I have none at all if I wander from it. Regard not a single syllable that any man, or even an angel from heaven may say to you if it be not, according to Scripture; but when the humblest of us speak according to God's Word, woe be to those who reject the truth! The gospel hath such majesty in it that it demands acceptance from, all who hear it.

Again, an ambassador has no power to make terms with men on his own account, and the "ambassadors for Christ" have simply to declare God's terms of peace. How pleased some people would be if we could alter this truth a little, and take the corners off that, if this doctrine were not so strict and if that precept were not so severe; but what have we to do with that. I have often said, when I have preached what I believed to be the truth, and men have found fault with me for doing so, "the fault is none of mine." If I send my servant to the door with a message, and she delivers the message, saying word for word what I told her to say, and if the man at the door should be angry with her because of the terms of the message, it would be most absurd and wrong; let him be angry with her master who sent her with the message. And if I speak God's Word, and you object to it, your objection should be against my Master, not against me. I have nothing to do and no minister under heaven has anything to do — but to preach that which, is here in this Book, and to explain that in the simplest language possible, and to enforce it in the most earnest manner that he can; and so long as he does that, he speaks with authority; but if he getteth away from, that, his word is of no more account than the songs that men sing in the street, and deserves to have no respect from any man.

Let it be remembered, too, that, the ambassador will have to give an account of how he does his business, and hence it is that I appeal to my beloved friends, the members of the church, that we may always have, their prayers. We shall have to report to our Master how men treated our message, and whether they would have peace or not. Sometimes, while preaching, I have felt as if I could imitate that Roman ambassador who met a certain king, and told him that the Romans forbade him to advance further. The king somewhat jested at the stern command of the Roman, but the ambassador stooped down, and with, his stick drew a ring in the dust round the king, and said, "You must give your answer before you come out of that circle; For if you step over that line, the Romans will accept it as a signal of war." I have sometimes felt, when preaching to this great congregation, as if there were some who had to decide for God or for the world ere they stepped out of this place, for God's ambassador had, as it were, drawn a line all round them, and said to them, "choose ye this day whom ye will serve. If Jehovah be God, serve him: or if Baal be God, serve him." As we have gone to our home, we have prayed, "O Lord, we have again told the people thy message! We have: not told it with the brokenness of heart that we wanted to feel; but we have truly told it as far as the matter of it is concerned, though we have failed in the spirit of our telling it. Now, O Lord, make the people willing, in the day of thy power, to accept the peace that Christ has made: for, unless thou dost thus work in them by thy gracious Spirit, we shall have to cry, "Who hath believed our report, and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?; for they will reject the Savior, and refuse his peace, and remain thine enemies even to the end of their lives." The "ambassadors for Christ" must give to their King an account of how they have done their work. May we be able to do it with joy, and not with grief!

So, then, you see that the ambassador needs to be careful at all points, and he needs to be very faithful. If he should be unfaithful, surely it must be woe, woe, woe! to him for ever. the murderer of men used to be hung in chains as a terror to other evil-doers, but what shall be done to the man who is the murderer of souls by his unfaithfulness? As for anyone who buys "the cure of souls" in the market, so mercenary a beginning, so like to the proposal of Simon Magus, looks as though he who acted thus would prove to be like Simon, "in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity." "Ambassadors for Christ" must start right, with clean hands; there must be no bribing in order to get into the ambassadorial office. And they must go on right; no frowns must ever make them turn aside from the truth, and no smiles must ever make them soften their speech so as to please the ungodly. If there be any place where the thunderbolts of divine wrath fall most heavily, it must be the head and heart of the man whose ministry was an unfaithful one, and who went down to hell with the blood of souls upon his skirts. Brethren and sisters in Christ, pray for us; pray for us; PRAY FOR US who are called to be ambassadors for Christ." The choice even of a hymn has often been the means of the conversion of a soul. A sympathetic expression in prayer has given great comfort to mourners. Our very look has sometimes carries conviction to a hearer, though we did not know the person at whom we were looking; and our mode of speech, and even our pronunciation has, under God, had some gracious results when he has willed to make it so. Pray for us, then, that we may be always so guided and directed by God that peace may be made between him and thousands of immortal souls through our instrumentality.

III. I will not detain you many minutes while I speak upon the last point, which is, A Great Duty Involved.

And, first, to all to whom the “ambassadors for Christ” may come, let me say, give us a hearing. “Now then we are “ambassadors for Christ,” so give us a hearing that we may deliver our message. Do not say “We will not hear it.” Shall we tell our great King that, although he sent us as messengers of peace, the reply of the rebels was, “We do not even want to hear what the king has to say?” Even if you object to us, do not object to our message. Is there something objectionable about ourselves? We are sorry if it is so; but a sensible man, when he knows himself to be in danger, will be glad to accept help even from one whom he does not in all things admire. If you find fault with our tones, and censure our manners, and bespatter our persons, do give good heed to our message. When Caesar swam across the river, he held up his Commentaries, so that they should not be injured by getting wet; surely, if we had to swim through a sea of persecution, we would hold up the gospel, and pray that it might not be carried down by the flood. Strike us if you will, but hear our message; yea, “hear, and your soul shall live.” If it really is a message from God, hear it. Perhaps some of you say that you do not believe that it is God’s message; but suppose it is, God grant that you may never know, by sad experience, what will follow the rejection of God’s Word of reconciliation!

A gentleman from London one day met a poor countryman. It was a Sabbath day, and the person from London had come down for a holiday. When he met the countryman, thinking himself to be a very wise man, he said to him, “Well, Hodge, I suppose you have been taking a walk through the fields.” No, Sir,” replied the man, I don’t, waste my time on the Lord’s day in that way. I have been worshipping him, and listening to his Word.” “So you shut yourself up in a stuffy building for a couple of hours, and listen to somebody talking, all because you believe the Bible! Don’t you know that it is a pack of nonsense? The learned men have proved that it is so, and everyone who believes it is a fool.” “Yes,” said Hodge, “very likely we are great fools; but yet, after all, we country people do know one, or two things.” What do you know?” asked the gentleman. “Well, we know that it is a good thing to have two strings to your bow.” “What do you mean, my good man?” Well, I mean that I have got two strings to my bow. If this Book should not prove to be true, it has given me a deal of comfort, and made me a deal better man than I was before I learned to value it. So that is one good thing; and if it should prove to be true, that is the second string to my bow, and what a blessed thing it will be to me that, I have received it, and have enjoyed it! But look you here, sir,” said he, “you have not one string to your bow. If the Bible is not, true, I am as well off as you are; and I think I am happier, on the whole, than you are whoever you may be; but if it should prove to be true, what will become of you, sir?” That is the question that I should like to put to anyone who says that the Bible is not true. Suppose it should be true, friend, what will become of you? We who know it is true ask you to listen to the Word.

The next thing is, embrace the message. It does seem to me to be a most blessed message that I have to bring to everyone here; it is this, —

“There is life for a look at the Crucified One
There is life at this moment for thee.”

Whoever trusts Jesus Christ is at once forgiven and accepted. The war is over, and peace is proclaimed, the moment that the soul repents of sin, and believes in Jesus Christ. There cannot be a simpler, sweeter, and safer gospel than that. Dr. Watts truly wrote, —

“Let everlasting glories crown
Thy head, my Savior and my Lord,
Thy hands have brought salvation down,
And writ the blessings in thy Word!

What if we trace the globe around, And search from Britain to Japan There shall be no religion found So just to God, so safe for man.”

So, embrace the message, we pray you, as you love your souls, and would not destroy yourselves. Accept the peace which the gospel brings to you.

And then, lastly, I say again to you who have embraced it, and who rejoice in it, pray for us, pray for us. I mean not for me only, but for all who preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, or who teach it in any form or shape. I sometimes think that, if all our friends knew our many anxieties, and cares, and heartbreakings, they would never forget to pray for us. I thank God that many of you do remember us in your prayers; but there are some, perhaps, who forget that we are always in need of prayer; and if there is one person in this world who needs your prayers beyond all others, I am sure that I am that one. Think of the thousands of souls that, gather here from Sabbath to Sabbath, drinking in every syllable that falls from our lips. Have you ever calculated how many thousands of persons pass through this place in one year? And then, week by week, the printed sermon goes over nearly the whole earth, not only in the English language, but in the language of all civilised men almost without exception, so that, no man knoweth where he may not find the sermon that was preached here. We constantly have information from persons who, for instance, have been lying dying of the yellow fever in the hospital of Havanah, or have been in Rio Janeiro, or in Australia, or have wandered into the vast prairies, and have come across a log cabin, and have found there that same word that was preached here within a short space of time after it dropped from our lips. Pray for us that all this may not be in vain.

And then, beloved, this church has sent out hundreds of ministers, who are now located in all parts of the world, and, almost without exception, preaching that selfsame gospel that we have declared unto you. Think also of the thousands of members in this church, — some very good people, and some very queer ones, — many sick, some dying, and always some needing counsel, or warning, or exhortation that requires all our wit and wisdom, and a great deal more, to say the right word at the right time. Then there is that which cometh upon us daily, the care of scores and hundreds of churches, which, if they have any trouble, resort to us, and bring their burdens to one who is burdened enough already. We are wretched to the last degree if we have not your prayers; but if you pray for us, nothing can stagger us. If you uphold us by your prayers, God will make us strong; but if you leave us, we shall be weakness itself. Pray for us, for “we are ambassadors for Christ.”

There are strangers here, to whom this part, of my discourse may seem egotistic. I cannot help its seeming so to you; but I am speaking to my own friends here about what they do know, but of which they need sometimes to be reminded; and if they will pray for me as the result of it, I shall not feel very much troubled in my conscience for having seemed to be egotistic to those who do not know. After all, our reliance is not even upon the prayers of the saints. God is our Helper, and we have done his work in reliance upon his grace; but we shall be unfaithful tomorrow unless he shall guide, and teach, and uphold us. Therefore, again we say, Brethren, pray for us! By the love you bear to Christ, pray for us! Amen

2 Corinthians 5:21 Christ Made Sin

NO. 3203 A SERMON PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY, JUNE 23RD, 1910,
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“For he hath made him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” — 2 Corinthians 5:21 (see commentary).

I Daresay I have preached from this text several times in your hearing. If my life be spared, I hope to preach from it twice as many more. The doctrine it teaches, like salt upon the table, must never be left out; or like bread, which is the staff of life, it is proper at every meal.

See ye here the foundation-truth of Christianity, the rock on which our hopes are built. It is the only hope of a sinner, and the only true joy of the Christian, — the great transaction, the great substitution, the great lifting of sin from the sinner to the sinner's Surety; the punishment of the Surety instead of the sinner, the pouring out of the vials of wrath, which were due to the transgressor, upon the head of his Substitute; the grandest transaction which ever took place on earth; the most wonderful sight that even hell ever beheld, and the most stupendous marvel that heaven itself ever executed, — Jesus Christ, made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him!

You scarcely need that I should explain the words when the sense is so plain. A spotless Savior stands in the room of guilty sinners. God lays upon the spotless Savior the sin of the guilty, so that he becomes, in the expressive language of the text, sin. Then he takes off from the innocent Savior his righteousness, and puts that to the account of the once-guilty sinners, so that the sinners become righteousness, — righteousness of the highest and divinest source — the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus.

Of this transaction I would have you think to-night. Think of it adoringly, think of it lovingly; think of it joyfully.

I. When you look at the great doctrine of substitution, you especially who are concerned in it, and can see your sins laid upon Christ, I want you to Look At It With Devout Adoration.

Lowly and reverently adore the justice of God. God set his heart upon saving your souls, but he would not be unjust, even to indulge his favourite attribute of mercy. He had purposed that you should be his; he had set his love upon you, unworthy as you are, before the foundation of the world. Yet, to save you, he would not tarnish his justice. He had said, “The soul that sinneth it shall die;” and he would not recall the word, because it was not too severe, but simply a just and righteous threatening. Sooner than he would tarnish his justice, he bound his only-begotten Son to the pillar, and scourged and bruised him. Sooner than sin should go unpunished, he put that sin upon Christ, and punished it, — oh, how tremendously, and with what terrific strokes! Christ can tell you, but probably, if he did tell you, you could not understand all that God thinks about sin, for God hates it, and loathes it, and must and will punish it; and upon his Son he laid a weight tremendous, incomprehensible, till the griefs of the dying Redeemer utterly surpassed all our imagination or comprehension. Adore, then, the justice of God, and think how you might have had to adore it, not at the foot of the cross, but in the depths of hell! O my soul, if thou hadst had thy deserts, thou wouldst, have been driven from the presence of God! Instead of looking into those languid eyes which wept for thee, thou wouldst have had to look into his face whose eyes are as a flame of fire. Instead of hearing him say, “I have blotted out thy sins,” I might have heard him say, “Depart, thou cursed one, into everlasting fire.” Will you not pay as much reverence to the justice of God exhibited on the cross as exhibited in hell? Let your

reverence be deeper. It will not be that of a slave, or even of a servant; but let it be quite as humble. Bow low, bless the justice of God, marvel at its severity, adore its unlimited holiness, join with seraphs, who surely at the foot of the cross may sing, as well as before the throne, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts."

While you admire the justice, admire also the wisdom of God. We ought to adore God's wisdom in everything we see in creation. The physician with his scalpel should adore the wisdom of God in the anatomical skill by which the human body is formed and fashioned. The traveler, as he passes through the wonders of nature, should adore the wisdom of God in the creation of the world, with its towering mountains and with its depths unknown. Every student of the works of God should account the universe as a temple in which the gorgeous outline does not excel the beauty and the holiness of all its fittings, for in the temple everything speaks of Jehovah's glory. But, ah! at the foot of the cross, wisdom is concentrated; all its rays are concentrated there as with a burning-glass. We see God there reconciling contrary attributes as they appear to us. We see God there "glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders," and yet "forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin." He smites as though he were cruel; he forgives as though he were not just; he is as generous in passing by sin as if he were not the Judge of all the earth; he is as severe to punish sin as if he were not the tender Father who can press the prodigal to his bosom. Here you see love and justice embrace each other in such a wondrous way that I ask you to imitate the seraphs who, now that they see what they once desired to look into, veil their faces with their wings, adoring the only wise God.

Further, beloved, when you have thus thought of his justice and of his wisdom, bow your head again in reverence as you contemplate the grace of God. For what reason did God give his only-begotten Son to bleed instead of us? We were worms for insignificance, we were vipers for iniquity; if he saved us, were we worth the saving? We were such infamous traitors that, if he doomed us to the eternal fire, we might have been terrible examples of his wrath; but heaven's darling bleeds that earth's traitors may not bleed. Tell it; tell it in heaven, and publish it in all the golden streets every hour of every glorious day, that such is the grace of God "that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

And here, while I ask you to adore, I feel inclined to close the sermon, and to bow myself in silence before the grace of God in Christ Jesus. "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us!" Behold it in the sweat of blood which stained Gethsemane! Behold it in the scourging which has made the name of Gabbatha a terror! Behold it in "the pains, and groans, and dying strife" of Calvary! Bow, did I say? Prostrate your spirits now! Lift up your sweetest music, but let your soul feel the deepest abasement as you see this super abounding grace of God in the person of the only-begotten of the Father, making him, to be sin for us who knew no sin!

When you have thus thought of his justice, his wisdom, and his grace, like a silver thread running through the whole, I want you once more to adore his sovereignty. What sovereignty is this, that angels who fell should have no Redeemer, but that man, insignificant man, being fallen, should find a Savior in heaven's only-begotten! See this sovereignty, too, that this precious blood should come to some of us, and not to others! Millions in this world have never heard of it. Tens of thousands, who have heard of it, have rejected it. Ay, and in this little section of the world's population encompassed now within these walls, how many there are who have had that precious blood preached in their bearing, and presented to them with loving invitations, only to reject it and despise it! And if you and I have felt the power of it, and can see the blood cleansing us from sin, shall we not admire that discriminating, distinguishing grace which has made us to differ? But the part of sovereignty which astonishes me most is that God should have been pleased to make him to be sin for us who knew no sin," that God should be pleased to ordain salvation by Christ as our Substitute. A great many persons rail at this plan of salvation; but if God has determined it, you and I ought to accept it with delight. "Behold," saith God, "I lay in Zion a chief corner stone, elect, precious." The sovereignty of God has determined that no man should be saved except by the atoning sacrifice of Christ. If any man would be clean, Jehovah declares that he must wash in the fountain which Jesus filled from his veins. If God should put away sin, and accept the sinner, he declares that it should only be through that sinner putting his trust in the sacrifice offered once for all by the Lord Jesus Christ upon the tree. Admire this sovereignty, and adore it by yielding to it. Cavil not at it. Down, rebellious will! Hush, thou naughty reason, that would fain ask, "Why?" and "Wherefore! Is there no other method?" Yield, my heart! "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little." Oh, magnificent love! A way as splendid as the end! A plan as glorious as its design! The design to save is not more resplendent than the method by which men are saved. Justice is magnified, wisdom extolled, grace resplendent, and every attribute of God glorified. Oh, let us, at the very mention of a dying Savior, bow down and adore!

II. Not to change the topic, but to vary the line of thought, let us endeavor to Look Lovingly at Jesus Christ made sin for his people.

Every word here may help our love. That word "him" may remind us of his person: "He hath made him to be sin for us,"-him!-the Son of God, co-equal and co-eternal with the Father, him!-the son of Mary, born at Bethlehem, the spotless "Son of man." "He hath made him to be sin." I am not going to enlarge, I only want to bring his blessed person clearly before your mind. He who trod the billows,

he who healed the sick, he who had compassion upon the multitudes, and fed them, he who ever liveth to make intercession for us — “he hath made him to be sin for us.” Oh, love him, sinner, and let your heart join in the words,-

“His person fixes all my love.”

I do delight to have you get a hold of him as being verily a Person. Do not think of him as a fiction now; ay, and never do so. Do not regard him as a mere historical personage, who walked the stage of history, and now is gone. He is very near to you now. He is living still. We oftentimes sing, —

“Crown him Lord of all.”

Well, this is that self-same glorious One, “He hath made him to be sin for us.” Think of him, and let your love flow out towards him.

Would you further excite your love? Think of his character. He knew no sin there was none within him, for he had none of our sinful desires and evil propensities. “Tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin;” think of that, and then read, “He hath made him to be sin for us.” Do not fritter that away by putting in the word “offering”, and saying “sin-offering.” The word stands in apposition — what if I say opposition? — to the word “righteousness” in the other part of the text. He made him to be as much sin as he makes us to be righteousness; that is to say he makes him to be sin by imputation, as he makes us to be righteousness by imputation. On him, who never was a sinner who never could be a sinner, our sin was laid. Consider how his holy soul must have shrunk back from being made sin, and yet, I pray you, do not fritter away the words of the prophet Isaiah, “The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.” He bore our transgressions, and carried our sins in his own body on the tree. There was before the bar of justice an absolute transfer made of guilt from his elect to himself. There he was made sin for us, though he knew no sin personally, “that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” As you think of his pure, immaculate nature, and perfect life, love him as you see him bearing the burden of sins not his own, for which he came to atone.

Will not your love be excited when you think of the difficulty of this imputation? “He hath made him to be sin.” None but God could have put sin upon Christ. It is well said that there is no lifting of sin from one person to another. There is no such thing as far as we are concerned; but things which are impossible with man are possible with God. Do you know what it means for Christ to be made sin? You do not, but you can form some guess of what it involves; for, when he was made sin, God treated him as if he had been a sinner, which he never was, and never could be. God left him as he would have left a sinner, till he cried out, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” God smote him as he would have smitten a sinner, till his soul was “exceeding sorrowful, even unto death.” That which was due from his people for sin, or an equivalent to that, was literally exacted at the hands of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. He was made a debtor for our debts, and he paid them. You may guess what it was to be a debtor for us by the smart which it cost to discharge our liabilities. He that is a surety shall smart for it, and Jesus found that proverb true. When justice came to smite the sinner, it found him in the sinner’s place, and smote him without relenting, laying to the full the whole weight upon him which had otherwise crushed all mankind for ever into the lowermost hell. Let us love Jesus as we think he endured all this.

Beloved in the Lord, there is one more string of your harp I would like to touch, and it is the thought of what you now are, which the text speaks of. You are made the righteousness of God in Christ. God sees no sin in you, believer. He has put your sin, or that which was yours, to the account of Christ, and you are innocent before him. Moreover, he sees you to be righteous. You are not perfectly righteous; the work of his Spirit in you is incomplete as yet; but he looks upon you, not as you are in yourselves, but as you are in Christ. Jesus, and you are “accepted in the Beloved;” you are in his sight without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing. What Jesus did is set to your account. He sees his Son in you, and then he loves you as he loves his Son. He has put you into union with his Son, and you are now him with Christ in God. I trust you will endeavor to realize this position of yourselves as made the righteousness of God in Christ, and when you do, surely you will love the Savior who has done all this for you, undeserving, helpless, dying, guilty mortals. Oh, that the Lord Jesus would now send fire into all your souls, and make you love him, for, surely, if you have but the sense of what he has done, and how he did it, and what it cost him to do it, and who he is that has done it, and who you were for whom he has done it, you will surely say, “Oh, for a thousand hearts that I may love thee as I would, and a thousand tongues that I may praise thee as I should! “

III. And now, let us View The Glorious Fact Of Substitution Joyfully.

And here I will commence with the observation that, till your sin as a believer is gone, and till, as a believer, Christ’s righteousness is at present your glorious dress, your salvation is in no sense realized by yourselves. It is not dependent upon your frames and feelings. Your sins are not put away through your repentance. That repentance becomes to you the token of the pardon of sin; but the true cleansing is found, not in the eyes of the penitent but in the wounds of Jesus. Your sins were virtually discharged upon the accursed tree. You stand this day accepted, not for anything you are, or can be, or shall be, but entirely and wholly through the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ. He cannot state this truth, it seems to me, too boldly. This is the very doctrine of the Reformation, — justification by faith, or rather the basis doctrine upon which it rests; and I am persuaded the more plainly it is preached the better,

for it is the gospel of salvation to a lost and ruined world.

Beloved, your case is something similar to this. You are in debt, and, according to the old laws, you must be cast into prison. You are brought up before the court; you cannot plead that you are not in debt; you are compelled to stand there, and say, "Each one of these charges I must admit; these liabilities I have incurred and I have not a single penny with which to meet them." A friend in court, wealthy and generous, pays the debt. Now, the only reason why you go out of court clear lies in the payment made by your friend. You do not leave the court because you never incurred the debt; nay, you did incur the debt, and you must admit that you did not leave the court because you pleaded not guilty, or because you promised never to get into debt again. Not so; all that would not have answered your purpose. Your creditor would still have cast you into prison. You did not leave the court because your character is excellent, or you hope to make it so. The only ground of your liberation from your liabilities is found in the fact that another person has discharged them for you, and that will not be affected by any act you may have committed or shall commit. You may have felt ill to-day; you might have labored under twenty diseases, but those diseases will not imprison you, neither will they help to set you free. Your freedom hinges upon the fact that the debt was paid for you by another. Now, Christian, here your hope and comfort hang. This is the diamond rivet which rivets your salvation firmly. Jesus died for you; and those for whom, Jesus died, in the sense in which we now use the language, are and must be saved. Unless eternal justice can punish two persons for one offense; unless eternal justice can demand payment twice for the same debt, — first from the bleeding Surety, and then from those for whom the Surety stood, — they must be clear for whom Jesus died. This is the gospel which we preach. Oh, happy they who have received it, for it is their joy to know it, sinners though they have been, guilty and ruined, and sinners though they are still; yet, since they have believed, Christ is theirs, Christ took their sins, and paid their debts; and God himself can bring no charge against the man who is justified by Christ. "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea, rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us."

Now, Christian, I want you to come to-night, and enjoy this. Why, man, it ought to make your soul dance for joy within you to think that sin is pardoned, and righteousness is imputed to you. This is an unchanging fact, that Christ has saved you. If it was ever a fact, it is always a fact. If it was ever true, it is always true, and always alike true, as true now that you are depressed as yesterday when you were rejoicing. Jesu's blood does not change like your poor heart. It does not go up, and down in value, like the markets, and fluctuate like your faith. If you are saved, you are saved. If you are resting in the blood, you are as safe to-day as you were yesterday, and you are as safe for ever. Remember that this is true of all the saints alike. It is true to great saints, but equally so to little ones. They all stand under this crimson canopy, and are alike protected by its blessed shadow from the beams of divine justice. It is true to you now. O beloved, try to live up to it! Say, "Away, my doubts; away, my fears; I trust a Savior slain, and I am saved! Away, my questionings; away, my carnal reasonings! I hate my sins, but I cannot doubt my Savior. It is true I have not lived as a Christian should live, but I will still cast myself into his arms." It is not faith to trust God as a saint when you feel you are a saint. Faith is to trust. Christ as a sinner, while you are conscious that you are a sinner. To come to Jesus, and to think yourselves pure, is a sorry coming to him; but to come with all your impurity, this is true coming.

I say to you, sinner; I say to you, saint; I say to you all this one thing, and I have done. When your souls are at the blackest seek for nothing but the blood. When your soul saw at the darkest, seek no light anywhere but in the cross. Do not cling to preparations, to humblings, to repentings. All these things are good in their way, but they cannot be a balsam to a wounded conscience. Christ and Christ crucified is what you want. Do not look within; look without. I say, when thou repentest, it is a base repentance that will not let thee trust Christ, for while repentance should have one eye on sin, it should have the other upon the cross. While repentance should make thee lie low, yet it is not repentance, but unbelief, that makes thee doubt the power of Christ to save thee. Christ never came to save the righteous; he came to save sinners. I would have thee magnify the grace of God by believing that, when thy sin stares thee most in the face, when thou art thyself most conscious of it, and it seems to be worse than ever, Christ is the same to thee and for thee, thy glorious Surety and thy blessed satisfaction. Still believe, and still trust, and do not let go thy confidence that Christ is able to save sinner, even the chief, and will save thee without help from thy doings or thy feelings. His own right arm will get to himself the victory, and, having trodden the winepress of divine wrath alone, he will save thee solely by the merit of his life and of his death. Oh, for grace to rest in the Savior, and to know the truth of this text, "He hath made him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him"!

2 Corinthians 8:5 Joining the Church

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"And this they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves unto the Lord, and unto us by the will of God." — 2 Corinthians 8:5 (see commentary).

Some persons are always trying to prove what is customary in the Christian Church. They are always seeking after instances and precedents. The worst of it is that many of these people look for old things that are not old enough — the old things of the Church of Rome, for instance, and mediaeval customs and observances, which are nothing but authentic trumpery. If they want the real old solid things, they should go back to the apostolic times. The best book of Church history from which to gather ritual, true ritual, is the Acts of the Apostles, and when the Christian Church shall go back to that, instead of enquiring about what the primitive Christians did in the second or third century, she will come much nearer to the knowledge of what she ought to do.

Now, our text tells us of one old custom in the apostles' days. Those who became Christians first gave themselves to the Lord, and then they gave themselves to the Church, according to God's will. Let us ponder these things in their order.

Of course, we shall think of the main and most important point first: that action which gives value and beauty to all that follows, and is its fruit: —

I. The Soul's Supreme Gift.

The first thing that the original Christians, the Christians of the old and Holy Ghost times did was, "they gave themselves unto the Lord." This is vital, the one all-important bestowal. Have all of us who are professors that we are Christ's disciples really given ourselves unto the Lord? Are there not in this house of prayer some who have never thought of doing so, and some even who would reject with contempt even the idea of so doing. Oh! my hearers, the day will come when you will look at these matters in a very different light, and in the next world it will be seen that it would have been your highest wisdom to have given yourselves to the Lord, and your supreme folly to have lived unto self.

When these early Christians gave themselves to the Lord, the first thing manifestly was that the giving and the gift were sincere. Should any here present have given themselves to the Lord, let them ask themselves whether their gift was sincere. These primitive believers meant what they said: there was a deep reality about their consecration: they gave themselves over to Jesus Christ to be entirely his. Recollect that in those times this meant very much more than we are ever made to suffer now. A man who gave himself to Christ in those days was put out of the synagogue if he was a Jew; he was cast out of society if he happened to be a heathen. He was dragged up before the tribunals; he was frequently cast in prison; as frequently he was beaten with many stripes, and very often he was put to death by fire, or by the sword. But these early Christians knew what was to happen, and, knowing it, yet deliberately they gave themselves up to the Lord. Oh! dear professors here present, has your gift of yourselves to Christ been as sincere as that, or did you merely come and make a profession because others did, and have you stuck to that profession, lie though it was, because you did not like the shame of confessing that you had made a mistake? Oh! is it sincere, or not? If it is not, God make it so, for it is only that which is of the heart that will stand the last great trial-day. Lord, deliver us from having any religion in which the heart is not found!

Their gift of themselves to the Lord was, in the next place, a willing gift. All the soldiers of Christ are volunteers, and yet they are all pressed men. The grace of God constrains men to become Christians, but yet only constrains them consistently with the laws of their mind. The freedom of the will is as great a truth as is the predestination of God. The grace of God, without violating our wills, makes men willing in the day of God's power, and they give themselves to Jesus Christ. You cannot be a Christian against your will. How could it be? A servant of God against his will! A child of God against his will! Nay, it never was so, and it never shall be so. Here and now, ye Christians, I shall ask you whether you are not cheerfully, gladly, unreservedly the servants of God. I know you are, and that bond you made years ago is not irksome to you now, but if you are genuine saints, you repeat it again tonight, and you hope to repeat it in life and in death, for you are willingly and exultantly the Lord's own.

The gift that these early Christians made was in the next place, an intelligent one. They did not receive into the Church in Paul's days unintelligent people. They knew that no sponsorship could avail here. They knew, as one would think all rational people ought to know, that the religion of Jesus Christ cannot exist where there is no clear apprehension of saving truth.

Only where the understanding was able to grasp the Saviourship of Jesus could there be spiritual life and true conversion. No religious rite, or ceremony, or ordinance could confer this. I have heard ministers tell their congregations, "You were made Christians in your infancy, and you ought to stand to the vows then made for you." Surely every man's conscience tells him there is not shadow of ground for such reasoning. What have I to do with, or what do I care about vows that were made for me when I was a child? Were they bad or were they good, they never consulted me, and I have naught to do with them, nor will I have. Whether they promised that I should serve God, or that I should serve the devil, I equally reject their responsibility and their sponsorship. As an intelligent being, I speak for myself before God, and none shall speak for me. If I had been dedicated to Moloch, should I in my manhood accept the dedication? God forbid! And even if I were dedicated to Christ, I will not accept a dedication which I know Christ never accepted, because he never asked it. He asks my personal dedication; he asks only for intelligent love, intelligent service, and I do trust that many of you came to Christ knowing what you did, knowing what repentance meant, knowing what faith meant, having

counted the cost of what a life of holiness would be, and then deliberately as men of judgment and understanding, you said, "O Prince, we enlist beneath thy banner! O Immanuel, write our names in thy muster-roll, for we will be thy servants henceforth and for ever! "It was a sincere gift, it was a willing gift, and it was an intelligent gift that these first Christians made of themselves to the Lord.

My brethren and sisters, it was, moreover, a complete surrender which they made. No Christian in the olden times gave himself in part to the Lord, and in part reserved himself for idols, or for himself; and had any attempted to have done so, they would have been spurned, for it is of Christ's rule in the Church that he will have all or none. You must, as a Christian, be all a Christian, or nothing of a Christian. There is no such thing as dividing between God and the devil, between righteousness and sin. The surrender must be without reserve, and without limit. If you have given yourselves truly to the Lord, you have given him your body, no more to be polluted with sin, but to be a temple of the Holy Ghost. You have given him your mind no more to be a free thinker after the boasted free-thought of the slaves of scepticism. You have given up your faculties, to sit with them at the feet of Christ to learn of him, to take his teaching for truth, and his Word the one court of appeal for all questions. You take him to be your teacher beyond all dispute, and his doctrine to be, unsullied truth for you. You have also given up to him your tongue to speak for him, your hands to work for him, your feet to walk or run for him: your every faculty of body and mind in beautiful partnership for his service.

As for your new-born, angelic, spiritual nature, that must be emphatically the Lord's, and will always be the royal and reigning power within. You are to-day in the trinity of your nature — body, soul, and spirit — altogether Christ's, and this includes, if you are a sincere Christian, all that you have — all of talents, all of time, all of property, all of influence, all of relationship, all of opportunity. You count nothing to be your own from this time forth, but you say with the spouse, "I am my Beloved's, and my Beloved is mine."

Again, the surrender which every true Christian makes is a surrender to the Lord. That, my brethren, is where it must begin — with the Lord. We ought not to give ourselves up to the Church until we have given ourselves up to the Lord. And it must never be a giving of ourselves up to priests Oh! scorn that! Of all the wretches that live, the worst are priests. Of all the curses that ever fell upon earth — I will not except even the devil — the worst is priestcraft, I care not whether it wears the garb of the dissenting minister, or the clergyman of the Established Church, or the Roman Catholic, the Mahometan, or the heathen. No man can do your religion for you. If any man pretends that he can, or that he can pardon your sin, or do anything for you before God, put him aside — he is a base impostor. Never surrender your thoughts or your mind to any man. Pin your opinions to no man's coat-sleeves. To the Lord make the surrender complete and ample: to his truth, to his law, to his gospel, make your surrender as complete as if you made yourselves slaves, or a stone to be carved by his hand. You shall rise in dignity as you sink in self-hood. You shall become free in proportion as you wear God's bonds. You shall become great as you become little in yourselves. Give yourselves wholly up to God. Mind it is to him — not to any man, not to any creed, not to any sect, but wholly and entirely to the Lord, who loved you from before the foundation of the world; to the Lord, who bought you with his heart's blood; to the Lord, whose Spirit sealed your adoption within your souls.

Mind this, then: mark it as the first step in all public acts of religion — you must give yourselves first to the Lord. You have no right to talk about joining a Christian Church until you have done that — "first to the Lord." You have no right to be baptized until you have done that — "first to the Lord." You have no right to sit at the Communion-table until you have done that — "first to the Lord." Give yourselves first to the Lord: with unfeigned repentance for sin, and simple and hearty confidence in Jesus, and then, as a complete giving-up of yourselves to the Lord, you may come to every hallowed act of service, to every privilege-feast of love — but not until then. Oh! sirs, your sacraments and your ceremonies, God abhors them until first you have given him your hearts. Vain are your oblations; your incense is an abomination unto him. It is an evil, and worse than an evil; it is a mockery of God, an insult to him, until first your heart surrenders itself to Jesus, and your manhood becomes the rightful property of God by your willing yielding of it to him.

I cannot press this matter by way of questioning everyone present, but still I would like to ask of every conscience especially of every professing Christian, to answer this question, "My soul, hast thou given thyself up, through the grace of God, to belong to the Lord?" Dost thou mean that, or is it a farce? Hast thou made it real, or is it all a sham? Dost thou feel within thy soul to-night a desire to make it more complete a gift? Dost thou pray for grace to make it perfect in the future? Dost thou rest alone upon the precious blood of Jesus? Then dost thou desire to glorify God so long as thou art in this body? Oh! then 'tis well with thee, and thou mayest go with me the next step. If not, hands off all ordinances, hands off all promises! There is naught in the Bible, and there is naught in the Church for thee until first thou be reconciled to God by the death of Jesus Christ. And now let us turn to consider briefly the second giving of the soul: —

II. The Gift That Follows The Supreme One.

I want to know this passage aright. I think I do. "They first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us" — that is, they gave "their own selves" unto us — by the will of God. After a true Christian has given himself or herself to the Lord, the very next act should be to give themselves to the Christian Church; they should at once assay, as Paul did, to be united to the brethren of Christ. Somewhere in the district where he lives, if there be a Christian church, the new-born believer should at once seek fellow ship with

others who love his Lord, because saved by his grace. The right way to do this is to give himself. Not his name, his money, not his mere presence, his sympathy, his active labors: all these are part of the gift, but the soul of it all is, to give himself. In the whole force and weight of his influence personality, and ability, so far as God shall help him, he is to give up to the Church.

What is involved in this giving up of ourselves to the Christian Church? I will repeat it, so as to refresh the memories of many members here who have forgotten it. It is your duty to be united to the Christian Church. What does that mean? What duties spring out of it? There is, first, consistency of character. If you make no profession of religion, and live as you like — you shall answer for that at the last great day. But if you join a Christian Church, take heed how you live, for your actions may become doubly watched, and will be doubly sinful if you fall into inconsistency. You are a servant in the family, and a member of a Christian Church: there must be in you no eye-service; there must be about you nothing which would dishonor a good servant of Jesus Christ. You are a husband: you have no business to be a bad-tempered, domineering tyrant to your wife; if you are, you ought not to be a member of a Christian Church at all. You are a wife: you ought not to be a slatternly, idle, novel-reading woman, neglecting your family duties; if so, I do not care what classes you attend, or what prayer-meetings; you have no business to act like that, and yet profess to be a Christian. You are a Christian, you say, and have joined the Church: then in your trade you have no business to fall into the tricks and knavery that are common on all sides. If you cannot live without being a rogue, do not be a professor of religion; it will be quite as well for you to go to hell at once, as you are, as to go there with a mill-stone about your neck through having made a profession, a base and wicked profession, of godliness, which you did not cry out. No, sirs, if you will not, in the strength and spirit of God's grace, strive after consistency of moral conduct, you have no right to talk about giving yourselves to the Church, which you will disgrace. You will only sin yourselves into a deeper condemnation; therefore, keep away from it.

The next thing that is required of every member of Christ's Church is attendance upon the means of grace. I do not mean Sunday attendance merely. Any hypocrite comes on a Sunday, but they do not, to my knowledge, all of them come on Monday to the prayer-meeting, nor all to the week-night service on a Thursday. I am pretty certain of this, though some of them may. Week-night meetings and services are a powerful test. Many cannot come, I know, and I do not ask that domestic duties should be sacrificed even for public worship; but there are some who ought to be present who are not, and, indeed, all of you so far as opportunity will permit, and if you reside within reasonable distance, should come. Take care that you do not become lax in that respect.

Another duty of all church members is to aid and comfort one another. Just as among Freemasons — give the grip, and you get a kindly word and a brotherly recognition, so should it be among Christians, only in a higher sense. You must comfort those that mourn, help those who are poor, and, in general, we ought to watch for each other's interests, seeing that in the church we are all members of one family. You are to "do good unto all men, especially unto such as are of the household of faith." Let your crumbs be given to the sparrows out of doors, but let your brethren and your sisters have the most and best of what you can give. This is the plain duty of every Christian.

Every church member, too, is to try to give himself to the church in the sense of doing his share in all church work. Shame on the church member who has no post that he can occupy, who is neither liberal with his purse, nor diligent with his hand nor earnest with his heart, nor speaking with his tongue. You cannot all do all, but each must take his place and niche, for everyone who is doing nothing — what is he but a drone in the hive, who will surely be expelled ere long? I hope, my dear friends, I can say that I did this when I joined the Church of Christ. I well remember how I joined it, for I forced myself into the Church of God by telling the minister — who was lax and slow — after I had called four or five times, and could not see him, that I had done my duty, and if he did not see me, I would call a church-meeting myself, and tell them I believed in Christ, and ask them if they would have me. I know when I did it I meant it. I know there was not one amongst them all who more intensely meant it then, and I mean it now. I give myself up to Christ, and to Christ's religion. I do not mind speaking upon politics when they touch upon Christianity; I do not mind helping on the common cause of philanthropy, or any work for the good of my follow-men; but to no work do I give myself with my whole heart and spirit but to that of spreading abroad the knowledge of Christ's name. This, I think, ought to be to the Christian the first and last thing. Does your religion cover your drapery, or your drapery your Christianity — which, sir? You are a politician: right enough; I am glad that there should be an honest man in such a place; does your religion, however, cover your politics, or do your politics devour your religion? You are a working man; well, it is an honorable position, and all honor to the hard-working man; but does your religion permeate and give quality to your hard work? Do you love Christ with it all? Do you feel all the while that, most of all, you must be a Christian? Then I do not care what you are, whether you are a blacksmith or a chimney-sweep, a king or a crossing-sweeper — it is of small account. First and foremost, must you be a Christian, and all else must be subordinated to that, for this the Christian Church has a right to expect.

Now, I know there are some who say "Well, I hope I have given myself to the Lord, but I do not intend to give myself to any church, because "Now, why not?" Because I can be a Christian without it." Now, are you quite clear about that? You can be as good a Christian by disobedience to your Lord's commands as by being obedient? Well, suppose everybody else did the same, suppose all Christians in the world said, "I shall not join the Church." Why there would be no visible Church, there would be no ordinances. That would be a very bad thing, and yet, one doing it — what is right for one is right for all — why should not all of us do it? Then you believe that if you were to do an act which has a tendency to destroy the visible Church of God, you would be as good a Christian as

if you did your best to build up that Church? I do not believe it, sir! nor do you either. You have not any such a belief; it is only a trumpery excuse for something else. There is a brick — a very good one. What is the brick made for? To help to build a house with. It is of no use for that brick to tell you that it is just as good a brick while it is kicking about on the ground as it would be in the house. It is a good-for-nothing brick; until it is built into the wall, it is no good. So you rolling-stone Christians, I do not believe that you are answering your purpose; you are living contrary to the life which Christ would have you live, and you are much to blame for the injury you do.

“Oh!” saith one, “though I hope I love the Lord, yet if I were to join the Church, I should feel it such a bond upon me.” Just what you ought to feel. Ought you not to feel that you are bound to holiness now, and bound to Christ now? Oh! those blessed bonds! If there is anything that could make me feel more bound to holiness than I am, I should like to feel that fetter, for it is only liberty to feel bound to godliness, and uprightness, and carefulness of living.

“Oh!” says another, “if I were to join the Church, I am afraid that I should not be able to hold on.” You expect to hold on, I suppose, out of the Church — that is to say, you feel safer in disobeying Christ than in obeying him! Strange feeling that! Oh! you had better come and say, “My Master, I know thy saints ought to be united together in church-fellowship, for churches were instituted by thine apostles: and I trust I have grace to carry out the obligation: I have no strength of my own my Master, but my strength lies in resting upon thee: I will follow where thou leadest, and leave the rest to thee.”

“Ah! but,” says another, “I cannot join the Church; it is so imperfect.” You, then, are perfect, of course! If so, I advise you to go to heaven, and join the Church there, for certainly you are not fit to join it on earth, and would be quite out of place “Yes,” says another, “but I see so much that is wrong about Christians.” There is nothing wrong in yourself, I suppose! I can only say, my brethren, that if the Church of God is not better than I am, I am sorry for it. I felt, when I joined the Church, that I should be getting a deal more good than I should be likely to bring into it, and with all the faults I have seen in living these twenty years or more in the Christian Church, I can say, as an honest man, that the members of the Church are the excellent of the earth, in whom is all my delight, though they are not perfect, but a long way from it. If, out of heaven, there are to be found any who really live near to God, it is the members of the Church of Christ.

“Ah!” says another, “but there are a rare lot of hypocrites.” You are very sound and sincere yourself, I suppose? I trust you are so, but then you ought to come and join the Church, to add to its soundness by your own. I am sure, my dear friends, none of you will shut up your shops tomorrow morning, or refuse to take a sovereign when a customer comes in, because there happen to be some smashers about who are dealing with bad coins. No, not you, and you do not believe the theory of some, that because some professing Christians are hypocrites, therefore all are, for that would be as though you should say that, because some sovereigns are bad, therefore all are bad, which would be clearly wrong, for if all sovereigns were counterfeits, it would never pay for the counterfeiter to try to pass his counterfeits; it is just the quantity of good metal that passes off the bad. There is a fine good quantity of respectable golden Christians still in the world and still in the Church, rest assured of that.

“Well,” says one, “I do not think — though I hope I am a servant of God — that I can join the Church; you see, it is so looked down upon.” Oh! what a blessed look-down that is! I do think, brethren, there is no honor in the world equal to that of being looked down upon by that which is called “Society” in this country. The most of people are slaves to what they call “respectability.” Respectability! When a man puts on a coat on Sunday that he has paid for, when he worships God by night or by day, whether men see him or not: when he is an honest, straightforward man — I do not care how small his earnings are, he is a respectable man, and he need never bend his neck to the idea of Society or its artificial respectability.

These various kinds of humbug, for they are no other, keep many from joining the Christian Church, because they are afraid of being looked down upon by respectable people in Society I read in a paper only yesterday that it would be no use to create Nonconformist peers, because in the next generation they would cease to be Nonconformist, and become respectable in their religion, and I am afraid it is true! It is outrageous that as soon as some persons rise in social position they renounce the Church to which they gave themselves when they gave themselves to the Lord. The day will come when the poorest Christian will be exalted above the proudest peer that did not fear God: when God will take out of the hovels and cottages of England a peerage of an Imperial race, that will put to the blush all the kings and princes of the world. And these he will set above the seraphim, when others will be cast from his presence. I say to any of you, who will not join this Church, because doing so would lower your respectability — neither do I ask you to join it, nor does Christ either: If these be the gods ye worship — Society and respectability — go to your beggarly gods and worship them, but God will require it of your hands in the day of account. There is nothing better than the service of Christ. For my own part, to be despised, pointed at, hooted in the streets, called by all manner of ill-names — I would accept it all sooner than all the stars of knighthoods and peerages, if the service of Christ necessitated it, for this is the true honor of the Christian when he truly serves his Master. The day is coming when the Lord will divide between those that love him and those that love him not, and every day is getting ready for that last division. This very night the division is being made; in the preaching of the gospel it is being carried out. Let each man take his stand, and ask himself the question: Are you with Christ or with Belial? Are you with God, with Christ, with the precious blood, or do you still rank with sinful pleasures and their delights? As you will have to answer

for it when the skies are on a blaze, and the earth reels, and the judgment trump summons you before the great white throne, so answer for it now! And ye brave spirits, who have loved your Savior, if you have never yet joined his army, come and enlist now. And ye loving spirits, who are tender, and who have shrunk back awhile, come forward now.

“Ye that are men now serve him
Against unnumbered foes
Your courage rise with danger,
and strength to strength oppose.”

Today, stand up for Jesus: to-day be willing to be the off-scouring of all things for his name's sake: and then, when he cometh in the glory, yours shall be the reward, a reward that shall far outweigh any losses that you can sustain today.

“He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.” “He that with his heart believeth and with his mouth maketh confession, shall be saved.” Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and may his blessing rest upon you. Amen.