

HOMILETICS 'B'



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A Puritan Prayer

MY MASTER GOD, I am desired to preach today,
but go weak and needy to my task;

Yet I long that people might be edified with divine truth,
that an honest testimony might be borne for thee;

Give me assistance in preaching and prayer,
with heart uplifted for grace and unction.

Present to my view things pertinent to my subject,
with fullness of matter and clarity of thought,
proper expressions, fluency, fervency,
a feeling sense of the things I preach,
and grace to apply them to men's consciences.

Keep me conscious all the while of my defects,
and let me not gloat in pride over my performance.

Help me to offer a testimony for thyself,
and to leave sinners inexcusable in neglecting thy mercy.

Give me freedom to open the sorrows of thy people,
and to set before them comforting considerations.

Attend with power the truth preached,
and awaken the attention of my slothful audience.

May thy people be refreshed, melted, convicted, comforted,
and help me to use the strongest arguments
drawn from Christ's incarnation and sufferings,
that men might be made holy.

I myself need thy support, comfort, strength, holiness,
that I might be a pure channel of thy grace,
and be able to do something for thee;

Give me then refreshment among thy people,
and help me not to treat excellent matter in a defective way,
or bear broken testimony to so worthy a redeemer,
or be harsh in treating of Christ's death, its design and end,
from lack of warmth and fervency.

And keep me in tune with thee as I do this work.

(Source: The Founder's Journal)

How to Read the Scriptures

Putting passion into the pages of scripture
An interview with **Reg Grant**

Preaching Today: Reg, how did you become interested in making the most of your Scripture reading while preaching?

Reg: My father was a devout Christian, and he loved reading to me not only from the Bible but from everything else he considered good literature. Daddy would read in a way that made you want to open the book for yourself. In fact, the Lord planted me in a family of storytellers. So I learned it growing up.

People often zone out when the Scripture is read. That seems tragic. What beliefs need to under-gird us as we think about reading the Scripture well?

The old saying, *familiarity breeds contempt* is sadly true as we approach the Scriptures. But we forget that the Word of God is eternally fresh. We should want to rediscover that freshness in our own lives and then communicate it to those who are listening.

Paul's admonition in 1 Timothy 4:13 is still relevant: "Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture to exhortation and teaching." He says, first of all give careful attention to the public reading of Scripture. We need to communicate the freshness and vitality of God's Word on a regular basis, so that people might be encouraged to open the Scriptures for themselves.

Should we give our reading of Scripture a conversational style? Or should we try to be more dramatic if we're trying to convey the feeling of the text?

I think you should try to do both. The communicator often thinks of acting or performance as bad. The negative aspect of acting is assigned to Scripture when we believe that dramatization of Scripture is fake. That's bad dramatization. Good dramatization has a conversational quality about it that's honest and pure.

Our goal in communicating the Scriptures is life change. We want to communicate accurately, clearly, interestingly, and relevantly. Analyze your Scripture reading according to those four categories. Am I accurately revealing the Word of God? Am I clearly getting my point across? I can be accurate and clear and still not get my point across if I'm reading in a monotone. I need to read in a way that's interesting to my people. Also, I want to communicate the implicit as well as the explicit message of the Scripture. I can't do that if I don't understand the text.

Therefore, I would not ask my faithful deacon at the last minute to read the Scripture because the guy that was supposed to read it got sick. He may not even be familiar with the particular text. I, on the other hand, have studied it, so I can do an adequate job of reading it in an accurate, relevant way.

Give us some guidelines for reading Scripture; strategies that engage listeners.

Here are three rules for the approach or introduction. First, walk confidently to the platform carrying a closed Bible relatively close to the body. Number two, look at the audience. Make eye contact and smile warmly. Third, open the Bible.

Be aware that every single thing you do, both physical and vocal, communicates something. So eliminate things that distract from accurate, clear, interesting, and relevant communication such as arranging notes or avoiding eye contact.

After the approach, there are some rules for the reading or body itself. First, unless you are reading from the law or epistolary, there will be some kind of action happening. Imagine a window at the back of the auditorium and all of the action happening through that window. Resist the temptation to bring the action up on stage with you. If you do that, you'll wind up looking at characters that don't exist right beside you. However, if you see it through the imaginary window at the back of the auditorium, chances are your audience is going to see that scene as well.

Second, most of the characters in the reading are going to have a specific place on the back wall through that window. Keep the characters separated, and let them exist about six inches above the heads of the people in the back row.

Third, when you are quoting someone, always look at the person to whom you are speaking. For example, if David is speaking to Saul and I'm reading David's line, then look at Saul near the center of the back wall about six inches above the heads of the people on the back row.

Fourth, maintain as much audience eye contact as possible. It might sound like we would constantly be looking at the scene we're creating. But that's not the case. At every opportunity I'm going to come back to my audience and engage them in eye contact. The strongest communication tools you have at your disposal are your eyes.

There are particular times we want to look at the audience: during the introduction, during shifts between scenes, and when we read important lines. If there is a line that says, "These things were written to you that you might know that Jesus is the Christ," I want to look right into the eyes of the audience. A fourth time to look at your audience is when you want to associate them with good people during the reading. If I have a chance to associate my audience with those to whom Paul is writing in a positive vein, then I will do that.

Are there times when we want to be sure we are looking through this *window* at the image?

Yes. There are four scenarios when you want to look at the image about which the scripture is speaking. First, look at the character being addressed when one is talking to another. If I am David addressing Saul, I'm going to look at Saul.

Second, look at the image you are creating when there is intense action. If you're reading from Ezekiel 1, describing wheels within wheels, then you want to focus on that image. It will help them if they see us see something specific on that back wall. That's the power of imaginative connectedness.

The third time to look at the image through the window is when the Word is describing a

wonderful vision. In Isaiah 6, when I'm looking at the Lord in prayer, I want to make sure that I am addressing God. Now, there is a place to address God that's not too high and not too low in terms of where our gaze is fixed. The usual place in an auditorium is where the ceiling meets the wall. If you go higher than that, then the audience will be looking up your nostrils. We want to look at a place on the wall where they can still see our facial response and respond in an appropriate way.

The fourth time to look at the image is when there is an evil influence or a crowd that I don't want to associate with my audience. I'm going to place those negative influences on the left side of the scene through the window. If I don't, and I look at some one in the audience, that person may feel that the pastor is associating the evil character with him.

Now, we're ready to return to the fifth rule of communication. Try not to look at the text as you're reading it aloud; you will virtually have the text memorized, after all. The only time we should look down is for a strategic reason. You want to give the people a little break, a little time to reflect, or you want to shift images. When you glance down you can grab the next block of text just by looking at the first word in that block.

Sixth, before you read any passage in public, read it through about 30 times, both silently and aloud. By this time, you will have virtually memorized most of the passages.

Number seven. Read as if you were reading to an individual, and not a whole group. When the Scriptures are read to a group, no one in the audience feels as if you are reading to them personally. However, if I pick out a person in the audience and maintain eye contact with that individual, then everybody else in the audience will feel as if they are being addressed individually.

Number eight. Speak as naturally as you can. You need not change your voice dramatically to portray a character that is foreign to you. What's important is that you interpret what you read in your natural voice in a way that's going to be clear, interesting, accurate and relevant.

Number nine. Concentrate on your images. If you see them, chances are your audience is going to them. If you don't see the images, they won't either. Anybody can stand in front of an audience and articulate words on a page. But everybody has the discipline to look at the words on the page, create the image in their own mind and relate that image to people. The only way to do that is to concentrate on the image that you have created in rehearsal.

Number ten. Take your time. Don't rush the words. Give us time to see the images. Give us time to hear the words. Let it soak in. Don't rush through God's Word.

Number eleven. See the image. Here's the principle. See it before you say it. Hear it before you report it. If there is a loud sound, you the reader hear it first, and then you tell the audience what you're seeing as you look at it. Once you've established the image, then come back through that window and look at the audience telling them the wonderful or horrific image you have just perceived.

Those are some great principles for the introduction and the body of the reading. What about the close?

There are three short rules for dealing with the close. On the last verse slow your pace down and put a cap on the reading. That communicates that we're near the end of the reading and getting ready to stop. Watch how news anchors end stories. They gradually slow down, coasting to a stop so the ending doesn't feel abrupt.

Number two. If you are the assigned reader and someone else is preaching, try closing the Bible at the same time as you look at your audience. Closing the Bible puts a visual cap on the reading, so people know that now the reading is done. Don't rush off the stage once you've closed the Bible.

Number three. Confidently stride back to your seat carrying the Bible close to the body. Be sure to turn around and face the audience prior to seating yourself.

That's excellent, Reg. You talked about rehearsal and personal groundwork. What else can we do to prepare ourselves emotionally?

The first and most important thing is prayer. Prayer is going to prepare me spiritually and emotionally. This is not the preacher's show. It is about attracting attention to Jesus Christ, the living Word of God, through the written Word of God.

The second thing you can do to prepare yourself emotionally is to bracket out the text. Just put little pencil brackets to the left of the text and identify the major emotion that's prevalent in the section you're reading. If the emotion is fear, then jot fear out in the margin and bracket that part of the text. I need to make sure that I have identified as accurately as possible the emotions, the passions as well as the intellectual components of the text so that I can relate to the whole individual when I read.

You talked about marking up the text. Do you do any other marking?

If I'm presenting multiple characters, Judas, for example, might be highlighted in green, and Matthew might be highlighted in yellow. As I glance down at the text during those pauses we spoke of earlier, my eyes immediately go to the first word in the highlighted section, and I remember the emotion required for that portion of the text.

Besides highlighting characters and bracketing emotional units, you might consider bracketing the thought units. Sometimes these overlap. The thought units identify what the author is talking about. But you may have an overlapping emotion carried over from one pericopy to the next. That's where bracketing off the emotional units can come in handy.

So you can imagine that this page of scripture would be getting pretty full of notes and highlights. But that's the nature of taking apart a good reading.

What do you do with your hands during the reading?

I like to keep my hands on my Bible. If you're a right-handed person, use your right hand to follow along in the text while your left hand is underneath the Bible. The beauty of this approach is two fold. First, as you rehearse this reading many times, your hand goes on automatic pilot. Your finger is serving as a secondary pointer to the text. The second main advantage is that you

can use the Bible to help paint the scene. One of the differences between acting and public reading of Scripture is that during acting the audience forgets that Shakespeare is the ultimate authority source behind the words spoken by Hamlet. When I'm engaged in oral interpretation of Scripture, the visual representation of the authority source is right there in my hand.

I could also suggest the location of a new character or geographical area mentioned in the Scripture by subtly pointing with the Bible. This suggestive movement of the text subconsciously highlights characters, events, and even emotions.

What parts of Scripture are hardest to read? How do you adapt to these sections?

Different parts of Scripture are difficult for different reasons. Some parts are difficult because there's not much action involved. Others provide challenges in terms of linkage. For example, if you're doing multiple Proverbs, how do you link those individual ones emotionally?

Another problem lies in the fact that some texts portray images so other-worldly that we don't know how to picture them. How in the world will a reader picture wheels spinning within wheels and the creatures described in Ezekiel or Revelation for example?

You can overcome these challenges by taking your time during the reading. Describe it in bits and pieces, allowing each part of the image to soak into the minds of the audience members.

Each genre of biblical literature presents its unique challenges. With care, attention and submission to the Spirit in developing the reading, you will communicate the passion of God for his people. They will know that God cares for them. They will know you care for them. Finally, they will be able to relate the passion and compassion of the Lord in the reading.

Reg Grant is professor of pastoral ministries at Dallas Theological Seminary. He writes and produces for radio, film and video. He is the author of Telling Stories to Touch the Heart.

This interview is a workshop transcript from the [Preaching Today Audio Series](#).

Communication: Six Laws of Dynamic Bible Teaching

NOTE: The contents of this outline are distilled from the tape entitled "Seven Laws of Dynamic Bible Teaching," by Bruce Wilkinson.

1. LEARNER-ORIENTED

- It is your responsibility to cause the audience to learn--not theirs. You must be willing to do whatever it takes to accomplish this.
- Be a servant of your audience. Focus on meeting their needs to grow, not on your need to be admired as a teacher.

2. EXPECTATION-ORIENTED

- Your opinion of and your belief in your audience (whether stated or not) will radically affect their response.
- Believe in your audience and express that belief.

3. APPLICATION-ORIENTED

- Explanation without application is truncation of truth. Explanation should be seen as the proper means to application.
- What is your audience going to leave the room convinced of, motivated, and determined to do?

4. RETENTION-ORIENTED

- Distill your material to a form that can be easily remembered.
- Make use of simple charts, illustrations and key words.

5. NEED-ORIENTED

- No matter how well presented your teaching was, if it didn't meet your audience's needs, it was a failure.
- Your content does not have a "need to be taught." Rather, your audience has needs to be met. Your job is not to impress your audience with how much you know. It's to discover what their needs are and gear your material to meet them. On the other hand, one need shared by all is the need to understand biblical theology and worldview.

6. EQUIPPING-ORIENTED

- The final test of your teaching is not what takes place *during* the meeting--it's what takes place *after* the meeting.
- Your teaching should bear observable fruit in the their lives and in the lives of the people with whom they are working.

John Stott on Preparing Sermons



NOTE: This outline is condensed from John R. W. Stott, *Between Two Worlds* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1982), pp. 211-216.

I. Choose your text

A. It is best to rely on expository book studies for the steady diet of your people, because this ensures they will get "the whole counsel of God."

B. However, the following may be occasions for special sermons:

1. Special calendar occasions: Christmas, Easter, etc.
2. Special external circumstances which are in the public mind.
3. Special needs discerned by the preacher or others.
4. Truths which have specially inspired the preacher.

C. Keep a notebook to scribble down ideas for sermons, insights, burdens, illustrations, etc. Record them immediately wherever they come to mind, because you will usually forget them later.

II. Meditate on the text

A. Whenever possible, plan out texts weeks or months in advance. This gives the benefit of "subconscious incubation".

B. Concentrated "incubation" should begin at least one week before preaching. It should involve the following:

1. Read, re-read, and re-re-read the text.
2. Be sure you understand what it means. Do your own interpretive work. Don't use commentaries until you have formulated specific interpretive questions which you have been unable to answer, or until you have completed your interpretive work.
3. Brood longer over how it applies to your people, to the culture, to you, etc.
4. Pray for God to illuminate the text, especially its application.
5. Scribble down notes of thoughts, ideas, etc.
6. Solicit the insights of others through tapes, talking with other preachers, etc.

III. Isolate the dominant thought

(This is the purpose of section II.)

A. Your sermon should convey only one major message. All of the details of your sermon should be marshaled to help your people grasp that message and feel its power.

B. You should be able to express the dominant thought in one short, clear, vivid sentence.

IV. Arrange your material to serve the dominant thought

A. Chisel and shape your material. Ruthlessly discard all material which is irrelevant to the dominant thought. Subordinate the remaining material to the dominant thought by using that material to *illuminate* and *reinforce* the dominant thought.

B. Your sermon structure should be suited to the text, not artificially imposed. Avoid structure which is too clever, prominent or complex.

C. Decide on your method of preaching for this text: argumentation, faceting, categorizing, analogy, etc.

D. Carefully choose words that are precise, simple, clear, vivid and honest. Write out the key sections, phrases, and sentences to help you in your word choice. Stick to short declarative and interrogative sentences with few, if any, subordinate clauses.

E. Come up with illustrations and examples which will explain and convict. Employ a wide variety: figures of speech, images, retelling biblical stories in contemporary language, inventing fresh parables, retelling true historical and/or biographical events, etc. Keep a file of these, especially if they do not come easily to you. Avoid making illustrations and examples so prominent that they detract from the dominant thought. Also, avoid applying them inappropriately or overusing them.

V. Add the introduction and conclusion

A. The introduction should not be elaborate, but enough to arouse their curiosity, wet their appetites and introduce the dominant thought. This can be done by a variety of means: explaining the setting of the passage, story, current event or issue, etc.

B. The conclusion should not merely recapitulate your sermon--it should apply it. Obviously, you should be applying all along, but you should keep something for the end which will prevail upon your people to take action. "No summons, no sermon." Preach though the head to the heart (i.e. the will). The goal of the sermon should be to "storm the citadel of the will and capture it for Jesus Christ." What do you want them to *do*? Employ a variety of methods to do this:

1. *Argument*: anticipate objections and refute them
2. *Admonition*: warn of the consequences of disobedience
3. *Indirect Conviction*: arouse moral indignation and then turn it on them (Nathan with David)
4. *Pleading*: apply the gentle pressure of God's love, concern for their well-being, and the needs of others

5. *Vision*: paint a picture of what is possible through obedience to God in this area

VI. Write down and pray over your message

A. Writing out your sermon forces you to think straight and sufficiently. It exposes lazy thinking and cures it. After you are thoroughly familiar with your outline, reduce it to small notes.

B. Pray the God will enable you to "so possess the message that the message possesses you."

Preaching is much more than just giving a sermon

Stephen Olford says

by Doy Cave



NEW ORLEANS (BP)--Renowned evangelist Stephen Olford says preaching is not just about a good sermon, and if preachers want to see the power of God in their ministries, they will have to not only be passionate and certain about the message, but also live a life of holiness to God.

Olford was the guest speaker at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary's annual Stanfield Preaching Lectures, held Tuesday-Thursday, Sept. 12-15 on the NOBTS campus. Speaking to a large group of prospective ministers each day, Olford outlined the aspects of what he called an "incarnational preaching" ministry, in which preachers are not only to preach the Word of God, but to live it as well.

Olford was particularly concerned with overwhelming statistics which indicate pastors are becoming more and more susceptible to worldliness. Citing Chuck Colson's book, *The Body*, Olford noted the fact that pastors have the largest divorce rate among any other vocation, one in 10 pastors have had affairs with members of their congregation, and 25 percent of pastors have been engaged in illicit affairs. He also noted that the rise of the Internet has led countless pastors down the road of addiction to pornography, and cybersex has torn down many a family once grounded in the Word. This worldliness, he said, is draining the pulpit of God's supernatural power to change lives.

"Beloved, if you stand behind this holy desk and you're life isn't pure; if you're life isn't absolutely holy as far as you know it; if are not walking under an unclouded sky with the ungrieved, unquenched Holy Spirit in your life; then, my friend, you've absolutely blocked the message from any authority whatsoever," he said.

In the three consecutive days of the lecture series, Olford addressed the "posture of preaching," the "purity of preaching," and the "power of preaching." If the preacher cannot understand God's view of these things, he said, their ministry will not have the power of the Holy Spirit, which is the only being that can draw people to God.

Addressing the "posture of preaching," Olford described an unmoved confidence in God that would serve as a constant hope to the preacher through any circumstance. Exploring the text in I Peter 3:13-17, he focused upon God's command to "always be prepared to give an answer to anyone who asks." In order to accomplish this task, Olford said the preacher must have Jesus as the undisputed spokesman in his life, and in order to do that, the preacher must spend time in devotion.

Confronting the large group of students in attendance, Olford said, "May I ask you a simple question? Did you have your quiet time this morning?"

The evangelist noted that Jesus himself was accustomed to having a daily quiet time with God and was recorded as having that time every day. Olford recalled his time in seminary training, during one day of

which he had asked his professor about a daily quiet time, wondering what to do when he didn't feel like spending that time with God.

"He looked directly at me, his eyes narrowing, and said, 'Pray when you feel like it. Pray when you don't feel like it. Pray until you feel like it.'

"It's not a matter of feeling. It's a matter of obedience," he added.

In addition to the question of the preacher's walk with God, Olford also addressed the question of purity for preaching.

Exploring I Peter 1:13-21, Olford noted God's command for His people to "be holy, because I am holy." This command, he said, "does not leave any loopholes."

"There is no comfort zone there," he added. "Failure to obey is sin, and sin is opposed to holiness."

Olford said preachers should be determined to be holy, that it should be an act of will to be in obedience to God. Noting Saul's disobedience in II Kings, Olford reminded students that nothing pleases God as much as obedience. He compared the preacher's willful holiness to that of the Levite priests of the Old Testament, who were not allowed into God's presence unless they were clean. If they failed to do so, they died.

"Do you know any Levites to have entered the temple without washing his hands and washing his feet?," he asked. "How can I take the Bible into my hand; how can I take the posture to preach without purity?"

Living in obedience to God is our command, but does not come without blessing. Olford said preachers should finally understand the "power for preaching," which is embodied in the work of the Holy Spirit.

Olford, exploring Luke 24: 44-53, noted Jesus last words to His disciples in which he promised them the power of the Holy Spirit in their lives. Olford said this power was a "paternal promise," coming directly from God the Father. This power, he said, was absolutely essential to preaching God's Word.

"You cannot preach a supernatural savior without a supernatural power," he said. "Don't speak until you are endued with power from on high."

Olford also noted the purpose of the Spirit's power, which is not only necessary for both Christians and the lost to come to repentance, but is also necessary to both "open the scriptures," and "untangle the minds" of those who hear it.

"Until he returns, our task is always to open the scriptures to minds untangled by the Holy Spirit," he said. "Paul knew nothing of Thessalonica, but he took the Bible and took the Holy Spirit in his heart, and in three weeks a church emerged."

Olford said the reason so many churches are declining through what he called "shallow discipleship" is due to the fact that preachers are not preaching the authority of Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. "Without that anointing, there is no purpose, no power, and no authority."

After the final sermon, Olford asked students to commit themselves to walking closely with God in the power of the Spirit, committing themselves to holiness. Students flooded the aisles in confession and repentance, praying for renewal in their ministry.

The V.L. Stanfield Preaching Lectures are an annual series of lectures at NOBTS that were established in honor of former preaching professor Dr. V.L. Stanfield, who described preaching as "giving the Bible a voice."

Application Without Moralism

*How to show the relevance of the text.
An article by Bryan Chapell.*

We're facing huge questions about why people are not applying what we tell them. Gallup did a survey that tells us when people claim to be born again, their good behavior actually degenerates. Those who claim to be born again have a higher incidence of drunken driving and divorce than the rest of culture. The incidence of abortion and drug use is not different from the rest of culture among those who claim to be evangelical. So people who say they believe the Scriptures have great difficulties, apparently, applying them.

We need to do application for the sake of our own credibility

One reason we need to be doing application in preaching is for our own personal ethos. You know these terms: ethos, logos, pathos. Ethos is the perceived character of the speaker. Logos is the logical content, the verbal content. And pathos is the emotive content. What would Aristotle say was the most powerful of these three? Ethos. If somebody speaks simply but you believe them to be a person of good character, you listen to them more than to somebody who is eloquent but whom you don't trust. Ethos is more powerful.

The two things that most make up ethos are credibility and compassion. People rate us in terms of our ethos based upon their perception of our credibility and compassion.

Credibility is determined by knowledge and realism. We expect pastors to know facts, but we also expect wisdom and realism. If I as a preacher say, "If you're going to be able to walk with God, you need to learn some Hebrew," I might as well have thrown the sermon out the window, because the average person thinks that would be nice, but it's unrealistic. So we may be intelligent, but we need to base ethos upon knowledge as well as realism. Much of what happens in application is saying, "I'm not just knowledgeable about exegesis. I know the world you live in. I am able to be realistic."

Ethos is not just based upon credibility but also compassion. The perceived character of the speaker is based upon a perception of altruism, that you care for people other than yourself. If the perception of the person preaching is, He wants to make an impression, rather than, He's caring for the people to whom he speaks, people will listen. Often they will listen in droves. But they will not trust him. They will find it entertaining, but they will not trust him until they perceive that he cares more about the listener than himself.

What communicates that? What says, "You care about me; you take it out of the ethereal world that makes you impressive, and you put it in my world, where I can do something with it"? Ethos is tied to the ability to do application, first of all, that is realistic, and second, that is courageous.

It surprises me how much the people of God truly want to be challenged in their Christian walk. We get scared as speakers. We think, I can't talk about that, because there are people I know who are struggling with that. Yet the heart in which the Spirit lives desires to walk with God, desires to be challenged. I don't mean people want to be beaten over the head or dealt with tactlessly or angrily, but they desire to be challenged. And when the preacher is willing to say things everyone knows are difficult for him to say, they trust him more, because they know he put himself at risk for them.

Think how we joke about pastors who always play it safe: "He's always going to word it politically. He's never going to say anything that upsets anyone." And think how little respect we have for

them. So the willingness to say things that put us at risk by doing application that comes into people's real existence, though it is scary, is necessary in terms of being able to have a hearing long term.

One reason we're troubled about application is what I just mentioned ?the courage required to be specific. If you look at traditional messages, they move from explanation to illustration to application: here's the truth; here's the truth demonstrated; now here's the truth applied. But how do people listen to a message? Typically, if it doesn't go on too long and isn't too dense, people listen to explanation. Then they wake up again when you do illustration.

Then, when you go to application, this is the breaking point. This is where people often cut it off, because the preacher has now stopped preaching and has gone to meddling. Again, in the hearts of the redeemed there is often a desire for this. But it is also the place that is most risky, because you may say things that are foolish; you may say things that are wise but highly disagreed with; you may simply say things people aren't ready to hear.

Another thing that troubles us about application is the hermeneutics required to be specific: How do I move from that biblical principle to a present imperative? We say things like, " Paul was a missionary, and therefore you should reach out to your neighbors. " And " Jesus wore sandals, so you should " What do we say? Where are the exemplars truly instructive and where are they culturally bound? The people in the Acts 2 and 4 passages held all things in common. Are we supposed to do that in our churches? And where does the Bible talk about cloning? We struggle with the hermeneutics required to be specific, even though we talk about the importance of it.

A final thing that troubles us about application is the grace denied, or at least presumed to be denied, by requiring specific duties. I have a number of people who have come out of " grace circles " ?the " gracers, " as they are sometimes identified today, who don't even let you use the word duty. They say it's not biblical to talk about grace and obligation in the same sentence.

We can talk about duty with grace

Is it ungracious to talk about duty?

Number one, to redeem from an empty way of life is gracious. First Peter 1 Peter 1:18 says that God has redeemed us from an empty way of life. The apostle is saying there are pursuits ?in that particular context, ceremonial and religious pursuits ?that are wrong, vain, or empty, and to let people continue to go down that path is not a gracious thing. God has redeemed us from an empty way of life.

Number two, to teach people to say no to ungodliness is gracious. There are real consequences, harm, danger, and personal hurt in doing what God does not allow. Therefore Paul says in Titus 2:11-12 that it's the grace of God that teaches us to say no to ungodliness and worldly passion.

We also need to recognize that to lead to the blessings of obedience is gracious. Psalm 1 tells us, " Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked. " It would be ungracious to deny people God's blessings by not saying what God requires.

Number four, to teach that there is discipline for disobedience is gracious. It is a gracious thing to say, " God disciplines sin, and I want you to know that, because God disciplines those he loves. " In Hebrews 12:10 we are told that " God disciplines for our good, that we may share in his holiness. " So not to teach about God's discipline is actually to deny people the good he wants to share with them.

These are all reasons that we teach duty and consider it gracious to do so. Where do we cross the line? Where does teaching duty become ungracious?

Number one, to teach that there is merit in obedience is ungracious. To say that to walk in God's ways will make him love you more is an abomination to God. And yet we often, by implication if not by direct statement, imply as much. To imply there is merit in moral behavior is against the Scriptures. Luke 17:10 says that when we have done all we should do, we are still unworthy or unprofitable servants.

Number two, to teach that God rejects for disobedience is ungracious. After all, the father ran to the son while he was still a long way off and when it was apparent to all the state in which he had lived.

To teach that God does not require godliness is ungracious. There are consequences to ungodliness. Micah 6:8 asks the question, "What does God require of you?" There are requirements. They do not merit us to God, but they are still required.

And number four, to teach the law apart from grace is ungracious. Simply to teach the imperatives is ungracious because of the impression it leaves. You may say, "I know you have to have grace in the context of the imperatives of Scripture, but do you have to make sure the gospel is there in every sermon?" If you push me to absolute principles, I'll say you don't if the people in the context understand the gospel. But I don't think most people do get the context. Even when we preach grace, people hear law. It's the human reflex.

It is good exegesis to identify a text in its context. Therefore, in my regular preaching and not just occasionally, I make sure the gospel is present. Ultimately, the motive and exegesis determine proper application. We have to make sure the motive is in place at the same time that we're telling people to do or not do something.

So, how do we do this? We properly apply duty with a grace perspective by regular use of four standard questions of application: what, where, why, and how. You have to anchor all four questions to have done an adequate job of exegesis. It's not enough to say what to do if people don't know why. And if you don't say how, you lead them to despair. You have to say what to do, where to do it, why to do it, and how to do it.

Apply duty with grace by answering what

The what question is instructional specificity? the specific instructions derived from and proven by the exposition's concepts and terminology.

Use consistent terminology. One of the reasons people stop listening to us is that we have become essay writers rather than preachers. When I write an essay, I think of my seventh-grade English teacher saying, "Use a different word. Don't be redundant." But we're not writing essays. We're talking to listeners. Therefore, if in my exposition I speak about what it means to be one who loves God, and then in application I use the terminology "we have to show affection for the divine," it's a great essay. It's a terrible message, though, because I've abandoned the terminology I used in the exposition.

One of the most powerful rhetorical tools a preacher has is repetition. When I spend time developing a term and then exchange it for another term, people don't necessarily know I'm talking about the same thing. I'm thinking it's conceptually the same thing, but by changing the term, the listener doesn't hear it as the same thing. So make sure the terms used in explanation are the same terms used in application. This establishes your scriptural rationale and maintains your scriptural authority.

Establish a concept before writing your sermon. I usually encourage students to make application the beginning of sermon writing. Once you've researched the passage, but before you start

writing your sermon, you need to know what you're going to tell people to do, so you have a target and you know how to form the message of your sermon.

Apply duty with grace by answering where

In application we also need to provide situational specificity. The what question was instructional. The where question is situational. That is, identify where in real life this concept applies.

When I started preaching, I thought I had to come up with new lists of things people should do every week: you need to go to the bookstore and buy this book; you need to treat your neighbor this way. Even before that sermon I hadn't thought of those things to do. But I thought I had to come up with things for people to do, so I'd come up with these lists.

Situational specificity will make you take the principle of application "we have to be hospitable, we have to be sexually pure, whatever it is" and go to the areas of life in which people are struggling. Instead of saying, "Here's a list of things to do," say, "How does that principle deal with your life?"

That makes people think, You know where I live. You know what I'm going through. You're actually dealing with the areas of struggle in my life. I see how the Bible applies to my life, not how the Bible gives me a new laundry list of things to do this week that I'm not going to remember 30 seconds after you're done.

When you think of application, think of it in terms of personal struggle. Think of people you know who are struggling, and take the truth to that area. Be concrete. Deal with these real situations in life.

You can be concrete by going in through the who door.

If your principle is, be confident because God knows tomorrow, think about who in your congregation needs to hear that. The students deciding where they're going to go to college next year? The guy who has been laid off from work? The couple who got the bad medical report? They need to know that God knows tomorrow.

When you go in through the who door, you get to the where. You think of the people, and you get to their situation.

There's a danger of fencing in the application by mentioning one situation. We need to spotlight one situation and then quickly unroll to others. Identify other situations people face where the exposition applies, because you don't want to fence it in.

With the first example, you're establishing the reality of this instruction coming into real life. It's like those flashlights that you tighten the lid to focus the beam. You're saying, "Here's the light of truth. To focus that truth I want to show its application to one situation (the person who's struggling with job insecurity)." Now that you've focused the beam so they see what that looks like in real life, you say, "But it's not just job security. There are those of you who have medical issues. There are some of you wondering where you're going to go to school next year." You're trying to keep from fencing in the application.

When you started going to seminary, you thought the hard work was going to be the exegesis, right? In my mind, the exposition is provided to us; the application comes from us, because we have to exegete not the Word but our people. We have to be involved in their lives. We have to know what they're doing. I can't sit in my study 20 or 40 hours a week and think I'm going to be a great preacher in the pulpit. I can't do application that way. I have to be involved with people, or I can't bring the truth to bear upon their lives.

Apply duty with grace by answering why

The next question is the why question ?providing biblical motive. We want to give love over fear as motive; that is, taking away self-protection as the primary reason people are doing something. Also, gratitude over gain as motive. Since we are saved by grace without any merit of our own, why should we do good works? So with our whole lives we may show ourselves grateful to God and give him praise. Not for our gain, but out of love for God.

To answer, Why should I do what God requires? the mode of hierarchy is this: The first reason is love for God, because of the mercy of his Son. Secondly, love for others. We tell people to do things because God loves other people, and if you love God, you'll love those he loves. The last reason is love of self. We're children of the king. We've been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. We're valuable. Recognize the beauty of a proper love of self, and teach people that beating on themselves is not holiness. There is a motivation that comes from the joy of proper self-love, and that joy should be part of our lives.

Christ-centered, grace-oriented preaching teaches the reason for doing what you're doing is because you are loved. You will not be loved more, but you'll never be loved less. You're responding to the God who gave his Son for you. Your life is not your own. You were purchased with a price, the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. We're responding to the great love he has given.

Apply duty with grace by answering how

Finally, provide biblical enablement. This is answering the how question. The Bible provides means. Some of those means are knowing the do's and the don'ts. We teach people what God says to do, and we teach what God says don't do. The disciplines, the means of grace, are also part of the way we teach what God requires. Prayer, reading of Scripture, fellowship among God's people, and the sacraments are ways God gives us for running the race of holiness.

The chief means to do what God requires is consistent adulation of the mercy of God in Christ. People say, " How do I do that? " They're looking for me to say, " First you put something on your refrigerator door so you can see it. Then you put it on your mirror so when you're shaving you can read it. " Those are good aspects of suggestion, but the most powerful means is to have our hearts penetrated with the amazing mercy of God. That is the most transforming thing, and nothing is more powerful than that. Our greatest way of enabling the people God puts in our lives is to adore the mercy of God before them, so they're constantly getting the message of how wondrous and beautiful his love is. Their primary power is the faith God has put in them.

Faith is confidence that I am a new creature in Christ Jesus. My identity is that of a child of God. I have that privilege now. I am a fundamentally different creature. By faith I apprehend that knowledge that I don't have to listen to the lie of Satan that says I can't change.

The message of Scripture, by faith received, is that you can change. God has provided the means. It's teaching people that they are new creatures in Christ Jesus; by virtue of their union with him they have power to do what God requires.

Sermon Outline Examples

(FROM DR. STEPHEN OLFORD- ENCOUNTER MINISTRIES- USA)

SERIES: WORDS FROM THE CROSS (#1)

SUBJECT: The Word of the Cross

READING: 1 Corinthians 1:18-25

TEXT: "...the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God" (1:18).

Introduction

The phrase that sums up Paul's concept of the gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is "the word of the cross." Three aspects of the word come to us from the cross of Christ:

I. The Revelation of God to Man (1:18)

- 1) The Revelation of the Power of God (1:24)
- 2) The Revelation of the Wisdom of God (1:24)

II. The Proclamation of God to Man (1:18)

- 1) Is Sometimes Offensive (1:23)
- 2) Is All Times Decisive (1:18)
- 3) Is Ofttimes Redemptive (1:24)

III. The Invitation of God to Man (1:18)

- 1) God's Pleasure (1:21)
- 2) God's Purpose (1:18)
- 3) God's Process (1:21, 24)

Conclusion

The invitation of God to man demands a verdict. If man believes, he is saved; if he rejects, he perishes.

SERIES: WORDS FROM THE CROSS (#2)

SUBJECT: The Word of Forgiveness

READING: Luke 23:33-38

TEXT: "...Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do..." (23:34).

Introduction:

The words of the Lord Jesus as He hung upon the cross are precious. Spikes had been hammered through His quivering flesh; the instrument of torture had been raised and allowed to fall into its receptacle with such a jolt that all His bones were out of joint; He had been spat upon; His body had been lacerated with Roman whips; yet in excruciating pain the first words that fell from his lips were those of forgiveness-"...Father, forgive them..." (23:34). Here we see:

I. The Prayer of Forgiving Love (23:34)

- 1) The Submissiveness of His Petition (23:34)
- 2) The Inclusiveness of His Intention (23:34)
- 3) The Redemptiveness of His Contention (23:34)

II. The Power of Forgiving Love (23:34)

- 1) It Is Magnetic (23:40-43, 47)
- 2) It Is Dynamic (23:43-43)

III. The Pattern of Forgiving Love (23:34)

- 1) There Is a Cross that We Must Bear (23:34)
- 2) There Is a Christ that We Must Share (23:34)

Conclusion:

Peter tells us, "Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example..." (1 Pet. 2:21). He is the Pattern of forgiving love. May we exemplify that power by forgiving others in love.

SERIES: WORDS FROM THE CROSS (#3)

SUBJECT: The Word of Assurance

READING: Luke 23:39-43

TEXT: "...today thou shalt be with Me in Paradise" (23:43).

Introduction:

This second "word from the cross" might be called "The Response of the Savior to the Request of the Sinner." Jesus was crucified between two malefactors.

One was saved, the other was lost. Let us focus our attention on the dialogue between the Savior and the sinner who was saved.

I. The Sinner's Request (23:42)

1) A Distressing Fate (23:32)

2) A Disturbing Fear (23:40)

a) Incriminating Deeds (23:40-41)

b) Impending Doom (23:40)

3) A Dawning Faith (23:42)

a) The Divine Savior (23:42)

b) The Divine Sovereign (23:42)

II. The Savior's Response (23:43)

1) Immediate Salvation (23:43)

2) Infinite Satisfaction (23:43)

Conclusion:

The Savior's response to the sinner's request is as relevant today as it was two thousand years ago; there is no time dimension with God. The cross was in the heart of God long before it was on Mount Calvary. It is a redemptive event for all time and eternity. That is why you must cry, "Lord, remember me." If you do, you will hear his voice, "...today...with Me."

SERIES: WORDS FROM THE CROSS (#4)

SUBJECT: The Word of Affection

READING: John 19:25-27

TEXT: "...Jesus. . .said to His mother, 'Woman behold thy son!' Then He said to the disciple, 'Behold your mother!'" (19:26-27).

Introduction

This third word from the cross conjures up one of the tenderest scenes to be witnessed on that all-eventful day. Four women and one man stood stunned, brokenhearted, helpless, listening, watching. Would the Master speak again? When He did His words of affection were expressing:

I. The Son's Confidence in His Mother (19:26)

- 1) A Sacrificing Love (Luke 2:7)
- 2) A Sheltering Love (Ma ft. 2:13-15)
- 3) A Succoring Love (Luke 2:51)
- 4) A Submitting Love (John 2:4)
- 5) A Suffering Love (19:25)

II. The Son's Courtesy to His Mother (19:26)

- 1) The Courtesy of an Approved Son (Luke 2:49)
- 2) The Courtesy of an Anointed Servant (John 2:4)
- 3) The Courtesy of an Appointed Savior (19:26-27)

III. The Son's Care of His Mother (19:26-27)

- 1) The Selflessness of the Son 's Care of His Mother (19:26)
- 2) The Thoughtfulness of the Son 's Care of His Mother (19:26)
- 3) The Costliness of the Son 's Care of His Mother (19:26)

Conclusion

Only when our relationships converge at the cross are they sanctified, surrendered, and truly satisfied.

SERIES: WORDS FROM THE CROSS (#5)

SUBJECT: The Word of Anguish

READINGS: Matt. 27:33-50; 2 Cor. 5:17-21

TEXT: "...My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken Me?" (Matt. 27:46).

Introduction:

It is now midday. For three hours the body of Jesus has been exposed to the burning rays of the sun. The divine Sufferer has almost reached the point of exhaustion when a supernatural phenomenon takes place: darkness falls over the whole earth, and a cry is heard. .."My God, My God, why has thou forsaken Me?" (Matt. 27:46). This cry of anguish expresses:

I. The Faithfulness of the Son of God (Matt. 27:46)

- 1) The Faithfulness of His Reciprocal Love (John 10:17)
- 2) The Faithfulness of His Responsive Trust (Matt.27:46).

II. The Forsakenness of the Son of God (Matt. 27:46)

- 1) The Reality of Sin (2 Cor. 5:21)
- 2) The Totality of Sin (Isa. 53:6)
- 3) The Fatality of Sin (Ezek. 18:4; Rom. 6:26)

III. The Fulfillment of the Son of God (Matt. 27:46)

- 1) We Might Be Reinstated (2 Cor. 5:19)
- 2) We Might Be Recreated (2 Cor. 5:17)

Conclusion:

There can be only one reply to this word of anguish and that is to gladly surrender our lives for His service (see Romans 12:1-2).

SERIES: WORDS FROM THE CROSS (#6)

SUBJECT: The Word of Agony

READINGS: John 19:28-30; Psalm 69

TEXT: "...Jesus...said, 'I thirst!'"(John 19:28).

Introduction

Jesus has hung some six hours on the cross. His blood vessels are almost dried up, a dreadful fever rages through His frame, His tongue is parched, His lips swollen. The spiritual desolation through which He has passed has practically exhausted any remaining strength. With bleeding mouth, bulging eyes, hoarseness and unutterable agony He formulates the words "I thirst."

This word of agony reveals:

I. The Reality of the Savior's Humanity (John 19:28)

- 1) He Thirsted in Life (John 4:6-7)
- 2) He Thirsted in Death (John 19:28)

II. The Extremity of the Savior's Humiliation(John 19:28)

- 1) The Humiliation of the Creator's Thirst (John 19:28)
- 2) The Humiliation of the Redeemer's Thirst (John 19:28)

III. The Avidity of the Savior's Hopefulness (John 19:28)

- 1) The Father's Commendation of His Redemptive Work (John 12:28)
- 2) The Sinner's Recognition of His Redemptive Work (John 4:7)

Conclusion:

Jesus is thirsting still. What have you given Him to drink? Is it the sour wine of pity and mockery, or the sweet wine of unreserved love, devotion and full surrender? Only as we satisfy His heart will we know the satisfaction of our own hearts.

SERIES: WORDS FROM THE CROSS (#7)

SUBJECT: The Word of Triumph

READING: John 19:28-30

TEXT: "...It is finished!..." (19:30).

Introduction

From the moistened lips of Jesus, who has been treated to a sip of vinegar, administered on hyssop, comes the greatest word of triumph man will ever hear:

"Finished!" or "Accomplished!" (John 19:30). In this cry of triumph we have:

I. The Word of Completion (19:30)

- 1) The Fulfilled Word of God (19:28, 30)
- 2) The Finished Work of God (19:28)

II. The Word of Conquest (19:30)

- 1) Triumph Over the World (John 16:33)
- 2) Triumph Over the Flesh (Rom. 6:6)
- 3) Triumph Over the Devil (John 12:31)

III. The Word of Consecration (19:30)

- 1) The Perfection of the Obedience of Christ (Heb. 5:8-9)
- 2) The Perfection of the Offering of Christ (Heb. 9:14)

IV. The Word of Challenge (19:30)

- 1) The Believer's Certainty in Christ (19:30)
- 2) The Believer's Victory in Christ (19:30)
- 3) The Believer's Ministry in Christ (19:30)

Conclusion:

We have seen the interpretations of this word of triumph. May we so live that in a coming day we can say, "...I have finished my course..." (2 Tim. 4:7).

SERIES: WORDS FROM THE CROSS (#8)

SUBJECT: The Word of Confidence

READING: Luke 23:46-49

TEXT: "...Father, into thy hands I commend My spirit..." (23:46).

Introduction:

As we examine this final utterance of our Lord we find that it is concerned mainly with the affirmation of His Sonship; for if Jesus Christ is not the Son of God then there is no revelation of the love of God and no atonement for sin. Here is affirmed:

I. Christ's Confidence in the Security of His Sonship (23:46)

- 1) The Revelation of the Essence of Sonship (23:46)
- 2) The Restoration of the Enjoyment of Sonship(23:46)

II. Christ's Confidence in the Dependency of His Sonship (23:46)

- 1) In Life He Was Completely Dependent Upon His Father (Ps. 31:5)
- 2) In Death He Was Completely Dependent Upon His Father (23:46)

III. Christ's Confidence in the Authority of His Sonship (23:46)

- 1) On Calvary's Cross Jesus Ordered Death (23:46)
- 2) On Calvary's Cross Jesus Overcame Death (23:46)

Conclusion

May we likewise have such confidence, day by day, as we commit spirit, soul and body into the Father's hands.

May we ever live in the center of His will, walking in the pathway of His choice, serving in the interests of His work-in life, and even in death.

SERMON EVALUATION FORM¹

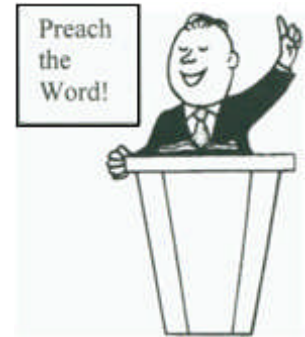
Student Name:

Date Preached:

Title of Sermon:

Text of sermon:

Dear Observer: Each seminary student is evaluated in and out of campus. This becomes an important part of the total evaluation of the student's ministry. Therefore, your candid response is essential. Taking the stance of **speaking the truth in love**, please respond to this person's pulpit ministry in ways that will encourage the student (**what was helpful?**); in ways that will enable the student to grow (**what would have made this sermon more meaningful?**); and in ways that will give mean understanding of style and abilities. We assume that students will grow and develop so that an unfavorable report or weaknesses noted will not be used to hinder a student's final placement for ministry. Thank you!



I. IMPRESSION OF THE STUDENT'S APPEARANCE

Dress:

How did the seminarian seem to feel?

Noticeable mannerisms:

II. CONTENTS OF MESSAGE - Was It Clear?

What was the main thrust or aim?

What biblical text was used?

In your opinion, was the message true to the text? Yes No

Was God glorified? Yes No

How?

Was the Cross Presented? Yes No

How?

Application to Today's Situation:

- Very clear application
- Good application
- Weak application

¹ Adapted from Bethel Seminary San Diego

III. DELIVERY OF MESSAGE

Was It Interesting? Yes No

Use of notes or manuscript? Yes No

Voice (Could you hear the student? Variation in pitch? etc.) Yes No

Was there clear logic and transition in delivery? Yes No

Please explain

Did the seminarian capture and hold your attention? Yes No

Did the student seem to really care about your spiritual development? Yes No

IV. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE MESSAGE

Was It Relevant? Yes No

What spiritual food for thought did you receive?

What will you do that is new or different because of this message? Did it:

Free you? Direct you? Discourage you? Comfort you? Judge you?

V. PLEASE DESCRIBE THE STUDENTS SUITABILITY TO PREACH GOD'S WORD

Your Sense of his Authority? Yes No

Your Sense of his Sincerity? Yes No

Your Sense of his Urgency? Yes No

Your Sense of his Compassion? Yes No

VI. OTHER COMMENTS

BLIND BARTIMEUS

Preached by George Whitefield

"And Jesus said unto him, Go thy way; thy faith hath made thee whole. And immediately he received his sight, and followed Jesus in the way."
— Mark 10:52

When the apostle Peter was recommending Jesus of Nazareth, in one of his sermons to the Jews, he gave him a short, but withal a glorious and exalted character, "That we went about doing good." He went about, he sought occasions of doing good; it was his meat and drink to do the works of him that sent him, whilst the day of his public administration lasted. Justly was he stiled by the prophet, the sun of righteousness. For, as the sun in the natural firmament diffuses his quickening and reviving beams through the universe, so, wherever this sun of righteousness, the blessed Jesus arose, he arose with healing under his wings. He was indeed a prophet like unto Moses, and proved that he was the Messiah which was to come into the world, by the miracles which he wrought; though with this material difference, the miracles of Moses, agreeable to the Old Testament dispensation, were miracles of judgment; the miracles of Jesus, who came to bear our sicknesses and heal our infirmities, were miracles of mercy, and were wrought, not only for the cure of people's bodies, but also for the conversion of their precious and immortal souls. Sometimes, one and the same person was the subject of both these mercies. A glorious proof of this, we have in the miraculous cure wrought upon a poor blind beggar, named Bartimeus, who is to be the subject of the following discourse, and to whom the words of the text refer. "Jesus said unto him, Go thy way, thy faith hath made thee whole. And immediately he received his sight, and followed Jesus in the way."

My design is, **FIRST**, to make some observations on the matter of fact, as recorded by the evangelists. And then,

SECONDLY, To point out the improvement that may be made thereof. May Jesus so bless this following discourse, that every spiritually blind hearer may receive his sight, and, after the example of Bartimeus, "follow Jesus in the way!"

If we would take a view of the whole story, we must go back to the 46th verse of this chapter, "And they (our Lord and his disciples, who, we find by the context, had been conversing together) came to Jericho," a place devoted by Joshua to the curse of God; and yet, even this place yields converts to Jesus; Zaccheus had been called there formerly; and Bartimeus, as we shall hear by-and-by, in all probability, was called now. For some good may come even out of Nazareth. Christ himself was born there, and his sovereign grace can reach and overcome the worst of people, in the very worst of places. Jesus came to Jericho. Let not his ministers, if providence points out their way, shun going to seemingly the most unlikely places to do good, some chosen vessels may be therein. Jesus and his disciples came to Jericho. They were itinerants; and, as I have frequently observed, seldom stayed long in a place; not that this is any argument against the stated settlement of particular pastors over particular parishes. But however, our Lord's practice, in this respect, gives a kind of a sanction to itinerant preaching, when persons are properly called to, and qualified for, such an employ. And I believe we may venture to affirm (though we would by no means prescribe or dictate to the Holy One of Israel) that, whenever there shall be a general revival of religion in any country, itinerant preaching will be more in vogue. And it is to be feared, that those who condemn it now, merely on account of the meanness of its appearances, would have joined with the self-righteous Scribes and Pharisees, in condemning even the Son of God himself, for such a practice.

"And as he went out of Jericho with his disciples, and a great number of people;" o[clou i]kanou' a great number of mob, or rabble, as the High- priests of that generation termed them; for these were the constant followers of Jesus of Nazareth; it was the poor that received his gospel, the common people heard him gladly, and followed him from place to place. Not that all who followed him, were his true disciples. No, some followed him only for his loaves, others out of curiosity; though some undoubtedly followed to hear, and be edified by the gracious words that proceeded out of his mouth. Jesus knew this, and was also sensible how displeasing this crowding after him was to some of the rulers of the Jewish church, who, upon every occasion, were ready to say, "Have any of the Scribes and Pharisees believed on him?" But, notwithstanding, I do not hear of our blessed Lord's sending them home but once; and that was, after they had been with him three days, and had nothing left to eat, he saw they were as sheep having no shepherd, and therefore had compassion on them, and taught them. A sufficient warrant this for gospel-ministers to preach to poor souls that follow to hear the word, whatever principle their coming may proceed from. At the same time, they should caution people against thinking themselves Christians, because they follow Christ's ministers. This our Lord frequently did, For there are many that followed Jesus, and not follow his ministers, and hear them gladly; nay, perhaps do many things, as Herod did, who, it is to be feared, will never follow them into the kingdom of heaven. Much people followed Jesus out of Jericho, but how many of them were offended in him; and afterwards, it may be, cried out, "Crucify him, crucify him." Who would depend on popularity? It is like the morning cloud, or early dew, that passeth away. But what a press, and seemingly continued hurry of business did the blessed Jesus live in! He could not be hid; go where he would, much people followed him. He had scarce time to eat bread. Happy is it for such who are called to act in a public station in the church, and to be more abundant in labors, that their Jesus has trodden in this dangerous path before them. Popularity is a fiery furnace, and no one, but he who kept the three children amidst Nebuchadnezzar's flames, can preserve popular ministers from being hurt by it. But we can do all things through Christ strengthening us. And I have often thought, that there is one consideration sufficient to extinguish, or moderate at least, any excess of joy and self-complacency, which the most popular preacher may feel, when followed even by the greatest multitudes; and that is this, "How many of these hearers will go "away, without receiving any saving benefit by my preaching; nay, how many, it may be, will only have their damnation increased by it!" As we find many will say at the great day, "hast thou not taught in our streets;" to whom Jesus shall answer, "Verily, I know you not."

But to proceed, "As our Lord went out of Jericho with his disciples, and a great number of people, blind Bartimeus, (the son of Timeus) sat by the highway-side begging." It should seem that he was a noted, though by no means what we commonly call, a sturdy beggar; having no other way, as he had lost his sight, to get his bread; his case was still the more pitiable, if he was, as some think the name imports, the blind son of a blind father. It may be, he begged for his father and himself too; and if so, then this may give us light into that passage of Matthew 20:22 where we are told, that "two men spake to Jesus." It might be father and son, though only one is mentioned here, because he only followed Jesus in the way. Thus that holy, judicious, and practical expositor of holy writ, Mr. Henry. But however this be, he is not blamed for begging, neither should we discommend others for so doing, when providence calls to it. It was the unjust steward that said, "To beg I am ashamed." It is our pride that often makes us unwilling to be beholden; Jesus was not thus minded, he lived, as it were, upon alms; the women that followed him, ministered to him of their substance. Bartimeus, not being able to dig, begs for his living; and, in order to make a better trade of it, sat by the highway-side, in all probability, without, or near the gate of the city, where people must necessarily pass in and out. But though he had lost his sight, he had his hearing perfect; and it should comfort us, if we have lost one sense, that we have the use of another, and that we are not deprived of the benefit of all. Happy was it for Bartimeus that he could hear, though not see. For in all probability, upon hearing the noise and

clamor of the much people that followed after our Lord, his curiosity set him upon inquiring into the cause of it, and some one or another told him, "that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by;" Jesus of Nazareth, called so, because he was bred there, or out of contempt; Nazareth being either a very mean, or very wicked place, or both, which made guileless Nathaniel say, "Can any good come out of Nazareth?" And what does Bartimeus do when he hears of Jesus? We are told, ver. 47: "And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out." This plainly denotes, that though the eyes of his body were shut, yet the eyes of his mind were, in some degree, opened, so that he saw, perhaps, more than most of the multitude that followed after Jesus; for, as soon as he heard of him, he began to cry out; which he would not have done, had he not heard of him before, and believed also, that he was both able and willing to restore sight to the blind. "He began to cry out." This implies, that he had a deep sense of his own misery, and the need which he had of a cure; his prayers did not freeze as they went out of his lips; he began to cry out, that Jesus might hear him, notwithstanding the noise of the throng; and he began to cry out, as soon as he heard he was passing by, not knowing whether he might ever enjoy such an opportunity any more. "He began to cry out, Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy upon me." The people called him Jesus of Nazareth. Bartimeus stiles him, "Jesus, thou Son of David." Thereby evidencing, that he believed him to be the Messiah who was to come into the world, unto whom the Lord God was to give the throne of his father David, and of whose kingdom there was to be no end. "Jesus, thou Son of David;" or, as it is in the parallel place of St. Matthew 20:30, "O Lord, thou son of David;" of whom it had been long foretold, Isaiah 35, that when he should come, "the eyes of the blind should be opened." "Have mercy upon me," the natural language of a soul brought to lie down at the feet of a sovereign God. Here is no laying claim to a cure by way of merit; no proud, self-righteous, God I thank thee that I am not as other men are: not bringing in a reckoning of performances, nor any doubting of Jesus' power or willingness to heal him, but out of the abundance of the heart, his mouth speaketh, and, in the language of the poor, broken-hearted publican, he cries out, "Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me." Jesus, thou friend of sinners, thou Savior, who, though thou be the true God, wast pleased to become the Son of David, and to be made man, that thou mightest seek and save those that were lost, have mercy upon me; let thy bowels yearn towards a poor, miserable, blind beggar?

One would have thought that such a moving petition as this would have melted the whole multitude, that heard his piteous cry, into compassion, and induced some at least to turn suitors in his behalf, or help to carry him to the blessed Jesus. But instead of that, we are told, ver. 48, that "many charged him." The word in the original seems to imply a charge, attended with threatening, and spoken in an angry manner. They charged him "to hold his peace;" and it may be, threatened to beat him if he did not. They looked upon him beneath the notice of Jesus of Nazareth, and were ready enough to ask, whether he thought Jesus Christ had nothing else to do but to wait upon him. This was, no doubt, very discouraging to blind Bartimeus. For opposition comes closest when it proceeds from those who are esteemed followers of the Lamb. The spouse complains as of something peculiarly afflicting, that her own mother's children were angry with her. But opposition only serves to whet the edge of true devotion, and therefore Bartimeus, instead of being silenced by their charges and threatenings, "cried out the more a great deal, thou Son of David, have mercy on me." Still he breaks out into the same humble language, and, if Jesus, the Son of David, will have mercy on him, he cares not much what some of his peevish followers said of, or did unto him. This was not a vain repetition, but a devout reiteration of his request. We may sometimes repeat the same words, and yet not be guilty of that battaloga, or vain speaking, which our Lord condemns. For our Lord himself prayed in his agony, and said twice the same words; "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me." Thus Bartimeus, "Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy upon me." And how does the Son of David treat him? Does he join issue with the multitude, and charge him to hold his peace? Or does he go on, thinking him beneath his

notice? no; for, says St. Mark, ver 49, "And Jesus stood still," though he was on a journey, and it may be in haste (for it is not losing time to stop now and then on a journey to do a good office by the way) "and commanded him to be called:" why so? To teach us to be condescending and kind even to poor, if real beggars, and tacitly to reprove the blind, misguided zeal of those who had charged him to hold his peace. By this also our Lord prepares the multitude the better to take the more notice of the blind man's faith, and of his own mercy and power exerted in the healing of him. For there are times and seasons when we are called to perform acts of charity in the most public manner, and that too very consistently with the injunction of our Savior, "not to let our right hand know what our left hand doeth." For there is a great deal of difference between giving alms, and exercising acts of charity, that are seen of men, and doing them, that they may be seen; the one is always sinful, the other often becomes our duty. Jesus commanded Bartimeus to be called, "and they called him." Who called him? It may be, those who a little before charged him to hold his peace. For it often happens, that our opposers and discouragers, afterwards become our friends, "When a man's ways please the Lord, he makes his enemies be at peace with him." And it is to be wished, that all who have charged poor souls, that are crying after Jesus, to hold their peace, and to spare themselves, and not be righteous over-much, would imitate the people here, and encourage those they once persecuted and maligned. "They call the blind man, saying unto him, Be of good comfort, rise, he calleth thee." The words, and manner of speaking them, implies haste, and a kind of solicitude for the blind man's relief. O! that we might hereby learn to be patient and long-suffering, towards opposers. For it may be, that many may oppose awakened souls, not out of enmity, but through prejudice and misinformation, through ignorance and unbelief, and a real, though perhaps false, persuasion, that their relations are going in a wrong way. By and by they may be convinced, that Christ is indeed calling them, and then they may become real and open friends to the cause and work of God; if not, it is our duty to behave with meekness towards all, and not to render railing for railing, but contrary-wise blessing, knowing that we are thereunto called, that we may inherit a blessing; Jesus did not break out into harsh language against these opposers, neither did Bartimeus. "Our Lord stood still, and commanded him to be called; and they call the blind man; saying unto him, Be of good comfort, rise, he calleth thee; and he, casting away his garment, rose and came to Jesus." Had Bartimeus not been in earnest when he cried, "Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy upon me," he might have said, why do you mock me? why bid ye me arise; rise indeed I can, but after I am risen, how can I, being blind, find my way unto him? If he will come to me, it is well; if not, all you r calling availeth nothing, it being impossible for me to find my way. Thus thousands now-a-days object to evangelical preachers, saying, Why do you bid us come to, and believe on Jesus Christ, when you tell us it is impossible of ourselves to turn to God, or to do good works; and that no one can come unto him, unless the Father draw him. Is not this like the people's calling upon Bartimeus, to arise and come to Jesus, when he could not possibly see his way before him? true, it is so; and would to God that all who make this objection, would imitate Bartimeus, and put forth the strength they have! What if we do call you to come, and to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, that you may be saved? Does this imply, that you have a power in yourselves to do so? No, in no wise, no more than Jesus saying unto Lazarus' dead and stinking carcass, "Come forth," implied, that Lazarus had a power to raise himself from the grave. We call to you, being commanded to preach the gospel to every creature, hoping and praying, that Christ's power may accompany the word, and make it effectual to the quickening and raising of your dead souls. We also call to you to believe, upon the same account as Jesus said unto the lawyer, "do this, and thou shalt live;" that you seeing your utter inability to come, might thereby be convinced of your unbelief, and be led to ask for faith of him, whose gift it is, and who is therefore in scripture emphatically stiled the Author, as well as Finisher, of our faith. Add to this, that it is your duty to wait at the pool, or to make us of the strength you have, in the earnest and steady performance of all commanded duty. For though you cannot do what is spiritually good, because you want spiritual principles of action, yet ye may do what is morally and materially good, inasmuch as ye are reasonable creatures; and though

doing your duty as you can, no way deserves mercy, or entitles you to it, yet it is the way in which you are required to walk, and the way in which God usually found. While you are attempting to stretch out your withered arm, peradventure it may be restored; and who knows but Jesus may work faith in you, by his almighty power?

Bartimeus has set before such objectors an example; O that they would once submit to be taught by a poor blind beggar! For he, casting away his garment, rose, and blind as he was, came to Jesus; "casting away his garment." This seems to be a large coat or cloak, that he wore to screen himself from the rain and cold; undoubtedly, it was the most necessary and valuable vestment he had, and one would have thought, that he should have taken this along with him; but he knew very well, that if he did so, it might hang about his heels, and thereby his reaching Jesus be retarded at least, if not prevented entirely. Valuable therefore as it was to him, he cast it away. The word implies, that he threw it from off his shoulders, with great precipitancy and resolution, knowing that if he got a cure, which he now hoped for, by Christ's calling him, he should never want his garment again. And thus will all do that are in earnest about coming to Jesus here, or seeing and enjoying him in his kingdom eternally hereafter. They will cut off a right hand, they will pluck out a right eye, they will leave father and mother, husband and wife, yes, and their own lives also, rather than not be his disciples. The apostle Paul, therefore, exhorts Christians, to "lay aside every weight, and the sin that doth most easily beset them," or hang about their heels, as the word in the original imports; alluding to the custom of the Romans, who wore long garments. Such a one was this, which Bartimeus had wrapped round him. But he, to show that he sincerely desired to recover his sight, casting it away, arose and came to Jesus. And what treatment did Jesus give him? did he say, come not nigh me, thou impudent noisy beggar? No, "he answered and said unto him, What wilt thou, that I should do unto thee?" an odd question this, seemingly. For did not our Lord know what he wanted? Yes, he did; but the Lord Jesus dealt with him, as he deals with us. He will make us acknowledge our wants ourselves, that we thereby may confess our dependence upon him, and be made more sensible of the need we stand in, of his divine assistance. The blind man immediately replies, "Lord, (thereby intimating his belief of Christ's divinity) that I might receive my sight." Methinks, I see the poor creature listening to the voice of our Savior, and with looks and gestures bespeaking the inward earnestness of his soul, he cries out, "Lord, that I may receive my sight." As though he had said, I believe thou art that Messiah who was to come into the world. I have heard of thy fame, O Jesus! And hearing the long-wished-for glad tidings of thy coming this way, I cry unto thee, asking not for silver and gold, but what thou, thou alone canst give me, Lord, that I might receive my sight. No sooner does he ask, but he receives. For, verse 52, "Jesus said unto him, Go thy way, thy faith hath made thee whole; and immediately he received his sight." With the word there went a power; and he that spake light out of darkness, saying, "Let there be light, and there was light," commanded light into this poor blind beggar's eyes, and behold there was light. The miracle was instantaneous; immediately he received his sight. And next to a miracle it was, that by breaking into open light all at once, he was not struck blind again: but he that gave the sight, preserved it when given. O! happy Bartimeus! Thy eyes are now opened, and the very first object thou dost behold, is the ever-loving, altogether-lovely Jesus. Methinks I see thee transported with wonder and admiration, and all the disciples, and the multitude, gazing around thee! And now, having received thy sight, why dost thou not obey the Lord's command, and go thy way? Why dost thou not haste to fetch thy garment, that thou just now in a hurry didst cast away? No, no! with his bodily eyes, I believe he received also a fresh addition of spiritual sight, and though others saw no form or comeliness in the blessed Jesus, that they should desire him; yet he by an eye of faith discovered such transcendent excellencies in his royal person, and felt at the same time such a divine attraction towards his all-bountiful benefactor, that instead of going his way to fetch his garment, "he followed Jesus in the way;" and by his actions, says with faithful, honest-hearted Ruth, "entreat me not to leave thee; for whither thou goest, I will go;

where thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people shall be my people; and thy God, my God." He followed Jesus in the way; the narrow way, the way of the cross; and I doubt not but long since he has followed him to his crown, and is at this time sitting with him at the right hand of his Father.

And now, my dear hearers, how find you your hearts affected at the relation of this notable miracle which Jesus wrought? Are you not ready to break out into the language of the song of Moses, and to say, "Who is like unto thee O Lord, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, continually doing wonders!" Marvelous are thy works, O Jesus, and that our souls know right well! But we must not stop here, in admiring what the Lord did for Bartimeus; this, no doubt, as well as other parts of Scripture, was written for our learning, upon whom the ends of the world are come; consequently, as was proposed in the

SECOND place, we should see what spiritual improvement can be made of this history, upon which we have already been making some remarks.

A natural man, indeed, goes no further than the outward court of the Scripture, and reads this, and the other miracles of our blessed Savior, just in the same manner as he reads Homer's battles, or the exploits of Alexander. But God forbid, that we should rest in only hearing this matter of fact. For I tell thee, O man, I tell thee, O woman, whoever thou art, that sittest this day under a preached gospel, that if thou art in a natural state, thou art as blind in thy soul, as Bartimeus was in his body; a blind child of a blind father, even of thy father Adam, who lost his sight when he lost his innocence, and entailed his blindness, justly inflicted, upon thee, and me, and his whole posterity. Some think indeed, that thy see; but alas! such talk only like men in their sleep, like persons beside themselves; the scriptures every where represent fallen man, not only as spiritually blind, but dead also; and we no more know, by nature, savingly the way of salvation by Jesus Christ, than Bartimeus, when he was blind, knew the colors of the rainbow. This, I trust, some of you begin to feel, I see you concerned, I see you weeping, and, was I to ask some of you, what you want to have done unto you? I know your answer would be, that we may receive our sight. And God forbid, that I should charge you to hold your peace, as though Jesus would not regard you! No, your being made sensible of your natural blindness, and crying thus earnestly after Jesus, is a sign at least, that you are awakened by his holy Spirit (though it is possible, that you may cry with an exceeding bitter cry, as Esau did, and be lost at last); however, Christian charity induces me to believe and hope the best; I will therefore, in the language of those who afterwards encouraged Bartimeus, say unto you, Arise, take comfort for, I trust, Jesus is calling you; follow therefore the example of Bartimeus; cast away your garment; lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth most easily beset you, arise, and come to Jesus. He commands me, by his written word, to call to you, and say, "Come unto him, all ye that are weary, and heavy laden, and he will refresh you, he will give you rest." Be not afraid, ye seek Jesus of Nazareth; behold, he comes forth to meet you; ye are now on the highway side, and Jesus, I trust, is passing by; I feel his presence, I hope many of you feel it too; O then, cry mightily to him, who is mighty and willing to save you; lay yourselves at the feet of sovereign grace, say unto him, "Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me," in the same frame as Bartimeus did, and Jesus will answer you, he will not cast out your prayer; according to your faith, so shall it be done unto you. Blind as you are, you shall notwithstanding, receive your sight; Satan, indeed, and unbelief, will suggest many objections to you, your carnal relations will also join issue with them, and charge you to hold your peace; one will tell you, that your blindness is too inveterate to be cured; another, that it is too late; a third, that though Jesus can, yet he will not have mercy upon such poor, blind, despicable beggars, as ye are; but, the more they charge you to hold your peace, do you cry out so much the more a great deal, "Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on us." Jesus, thou Savior, thou friend of sinners, thou Son of David, and therefore a Son of man! Gracious

words! Endearing appellations! Be encouraged by them, to draw nigh unto him. Though David's Lord, yet he is become David's Son, after the flesh, that ye through him may be made the sons of God: no matter what thou art, O woman, what thou art, O man; though thou art literally a poor beggar, think not thy condition too mean for Jesus to take notice of; he came into the highways and hedges, to call such poor beggars in; or, if you are rich, think not yourselves too high to stoop to Jesus; for his is the King of kings; and you never will be truly rich, until you are made rich in Jesus; fear not being despised, or losing a little worldly honor: one sight of Jesus will make amends for all: you will find something so inviting, so attracting, so satisfying, in the altogether lovely Lamb of God, that every sublunary enjoyment will sicken, and die, and vanish before you; and you will no more desire your former vain and trifling amusements, than Bartimeus, after he had received his sight, desired to go back again and fetch his garment. O that there may be many such blind beggars among you this day!

Here is a great multitude of people following me, a poor worm, this day. I rejoice to see the fields thus white, ready unto harvest, and to spread the gospel-net amidst so many; but alas! I shall return home with a heavy heart, unless some of you will arise and come to my Jesus; I desire to preach Him, and not myself; rest not in hearing and following me. Behold, believe on, and follow the Lamb of God, who came to take away the sins of the world. Indeed, I do not despair of any of you, neither am I discouraged, on account of my preaching in the highways and hedges; Jesus called Zaccheus; Jesus called Bartimeus, as he passed through Jericho; that cursed, that devoted place; and why may he not call some of you, out of these despised fields? Is his arm shortened, that he cannot save? Is he not as mighty now, and as willing to save, even to the uttermost, all that come to the father through him, as he was seventeen hundred years ago? Assuredly he is; he hath said, and he also will do it, "Whosoever cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out." In no wise, or by no means. O encouraging words! Sinners, believe ye this? arise then, be of good comfort, for Jesus is indeed calling you. Some of you, I trust, have obeyed this invitation, and have had a sight of him long ago; I know then, you will bless and love him; and if he should say unto you, as he did unto Bartimeus, go you your way; your answer would be, we love our master, and will not go from him. But suffer ye the word of exhortation:

Suffer me to stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance, show that you have indeed seen him, and that you do indeed love him, by following him in the way; I mean, in the way of the cross, the way of his ordinances, and in the way of his holy commandments; for alas! the love of many waxeth cold, and few there are that follow Jesus rightly in the way; few there are that cast away their garments so heartily as they should; some idol or another hangs about us, and hinders us in running the race that is set before us. Awake therefore, ye sleepy, though, it may be, wise virgins. Awake, awake, put on strength; shake yourselves from the dust; arise and follow Jesus more closely in the way, than ever you did yet. Lift up the hands that hang down, and strengthen the feeble knees. Provide right paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way, but rather be ye healed. For though the way be narrow, yet it is not long; "though the gate be straight, (to use the words of pious bishop Beveridge) yet it opens into everlasting life." O that ye may get a fresh sight of him again this day! That would be like oil to the wheels of your graces, and make your souls like the chariots of Aminadab. It is only owing to your losing sight of him, that you go so heavily from day to day. A sight of Jesus, like the sun rising in the morning, dispels the darkness and gloominess that lies upon the soul. Take therefore a fresh view of him, O believers, and never rest until you are translated to see him as he is, and to live with him for evermore, in the kingdom of heaven. Even so, Lord Jesus, Amen and Amen!

SINNERS IN THE HANDS OF AN ANGRY GOD

Preached July 8th, 1741 by Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758)

"In due time their foot will slip"--Deut. 32:35

In this verse the vengeance of God is threatened upon the wicked unbelieving Israelites, who were God's chosen people, and who lived under the means of grace; but who, despite all of God's wonderful works towards them, remained without sense, having no discernment in them (Deut. 32:28). After all the cultivations of Heaven, they brought forth bitter and poisonous fruit; as shown in verses 32 and 33. The verse that I have chosen for my text, "In due time their foot will slide," seems to imply the following things, relating to the punishment and destruction to which these wicked Israelites were exposed.

1. That they were always exposed to "ruin;" as one that stands or walks in slippery places is always exposed to falling. This is implied in the manner of the destruction coming upon them, being represented by their foot sliding. The same is expressed in Psalm 73:18, "Surely you place them on slippery ground; you cast them down to ruin."

2. It implies, they were always exposed to sudden unexpected destruction. As he that walks in slippery places is liable to fall at every moment, he cannot foresee from moment to moment whether he shall stand or fall; and when he does fall, he falls suddenly without warning: which is also expressed in Psalm 73:18-19, "Surely you place them on slippery ground; you cast them down to ruin. How suddenly are they destroyed, completely swept away by terrors!"

3. Another thing that is implied is, that they are liable to fall by "themselves," without being thrown down by the hand of another; as he that stands or walks on slippery ground needs nothing but his own weight to throw him down.

4. That the reason why they have not already fallen, and don't fall now, is only that God's appointed time has not yet come. For it is said that when that appointed time comes, "their foot will slip." Then they shall be left to fall, as they are inclined to do because of their own weight. God will not hold them up in these slippery places any longer, but will let them go; and then, at that very instant, they will fall into ruin; as he that stands in such slippery descending ground, on the edge of a pit, he cannot stand alone, when he is let go of then he immediately falls and is lost.

The observation from the words that I would now insist upon is this. "There is nothing that keeps wicked men at any one moment out of hell but the mere pleasure of God." By the "mere" pleasure of God, I mean His "sovereign" pleasure, His arbitrary will, restrained by no obligation on His part, not hindered by any difficulty. God's will not hindered in the least degree in respect to the preservation of wicked men. The truth of this observation may appear by the following considerations.

1. There is no lack of "power" in God to throw wicked men into hell at any moment. Men's hands cannot be strong when God rises up: the strongest have no power to resist Him, nor can anyone save them from His hands. He is not only able to throw wicked men into hell, but He can do it most easily. Sometimes an earthly prince meets with a great deal of difficulty trying to subdue a rebel, who has found ways to fortify himself, and has made himself strong by the mere numbers of his followers. But it is not so with God. There is no fortress that is any defense from the power of God. Though hand join

in hand, and vast multitudes of God's enemies combine and associate themselves, they are easily broken into pieces. They are like great heaps of light chaff [worthless matter;rubbish] before the whirlwind; or large quantities of dry hay before devouring flames. We find it easy to step on and crush a worm that we see crawling on the earth; likewise it is easy for us to cut a slender thread that anything hangs by: therefore it easy for God, when He pleases, to throw His enemies down into hell. What are we, that we should think that we can stand before Him, at whose rebuke the earth trembles, and before whom the mountains collapse?

2. They "deserve" to be thrown into hell; and divine justice never stands in the way, it makes no objection against God using His power at any moment to destroy them. Yes, on the contrary, justice calls out loud for an infinite punishment of their sins. Divine justice says of the tree that brings forth such grapes of Sodom, "Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?" (Luke 13:7). Every moment the sword of divine justice is waved over their heads, and it is nothing but the hand of arbitrary mercy, and God's mere will, that holds it back.

3. They are already under a sentence of condemnation to hell. They not only justly deserve to be thrown down there, but the sentence of the law of God, that eternal and unchangeable rule of righteousness that God has fixed between Him and mankind, is gone out against them, and stands against them; so that they are already bound over to hell. John 3:18, "Whoever does not believe stands condemned already." So that every unconverted man rightly belongs to hell: that is his place; from there he has his origin, John 8:23, "You are from below," and he is headed for there; it is the place that justice, and God's word, and the sentence of His unchangeable law, assigns to him.

4. They are now the objects of that very same "anger" and wrath of God, that is expressed in the torments of hell. And the reason why they don't go down to hell at each moment is not because God, in whose power they are under, is not exceedingly angry with them, as He is with the many miserable human beings now tormented in hell, and who there feel and bear the fierceness of His wrath. Yes, God is a great deal more angry with the great numbers that are now on earth; yes, doubtless with the many that are now sitting in this congregation, who feel completely at ease, than He is with many of those who are now in the flames of hell. It is not because God is unmindful of their wickedness, and does not resent it, that He does not let loose His hand and cut them off. God is not like them, though they imagine that He is. The wrath of God burns against them, their damnation does not slumber; the pit is prepared, the fire is made ready, the furnace is now hot, ready to receive them; the flames now rage and glow. The glittering sword is sharpened and held over them, and the pit has opened its mouth under them.

5. The "devil" stands ready to overthrow them, and seize them as his own, at whatever moment God shall allow him. They belong to him; he has their souls in his possession, and under his dominion. The Scripture represents them as his goods, Luke 11:21. The devils watch them; they are next to them, at their right hand; they stand waiting for them, like greedy hungry lions that see their prey, and expect to have it, but are for the present kept back. If God should withdraw His hand, by which they are restrained, they would in one moment rush upon their poor souls. The old serpent is gaping for them; hell opens its mouth wide to receive them; and if God should permit it, they would be rapidly swallowed up and lost.

6. There are in the souls of wicked men those hellish principles reigning, that would presently ignite and burst into flames of hell-fire, if it were not for God's restraints. There is laid in the very nature of all unsaved men, a foundation for the torments of hell. There are those corrupt principles, in

reigning power in them, and in full possession of them, that are seeds of hell-fire. These principles are active and powerful, exceedingly violent in their nature, and if it were not for the restraining hand of God upon them, they would soon break out, they would burst into flame after the same manner as the same depravity, the same hatred, does in the hearts of damned souls, and would generate the same torments as they do in them. The souls of the wicked in Scripture are compared to the tossing sea, Isaiah 57:20.

For the present, God restrains their wickedness by His mighty power, as He does the raging waves of the tossing sea, saying, "This far you may come and no farther;" but if God should withdraw that restraining power, it would soon sweep away everything in its path. Sin is the ruin and misery of the soul; it is destructive in its nature; and if God should leave it without restraint, the soul would become perfectly miserable. The corruption of the heart of man is unrestrained and boundless in its fury; and while wicked men live here, it is like fire pent up by God's restraints, whereas if it were let loose, it would set on fire the course of nature; and as the heart is now a basin of sin, so, if sin was not restrained, it would immediately turn the soul into a fiery oven, or a furnace of fire and brimstone.

7. Wicked men cannot find even a moment's security in the fact that death does not appear to be at hand. The unbelieving man has no security in the fact that he is healthy, and that he cannot perceive of any accident taking him out of the world, and that there is no visible danger in any of his circumstances. The diverse and continual experience of the world in all ages shows this is no evidence that a man is not on the very brink of eternity, and that the next step will not be into another world.

The unseen, unthought of ways and means of persons suddenly being taken out of the world are innumerable and inconceivable. Unconverted men walk over the pit of hell on a rotten covering, and there are innumerable places in this covering so weak that they will not bear their weight, and these places are not seen. The arrows of death fly unseen at noonday; the sharpest eyesight cannot discern them. God has so many different unsearchable ways of taking wicked men out of the world and sending them to hell, that there is nothing that indicates that God needs to use a miracle, or go out of the ordinary course of His providence, to destroy any wicked man at any moment. All the options of taking sinners out of the world, are in God's hands, and so universally and absolutely subject to His power and determination, that it depends merely upon the will of God, whether sinners shall at any moment go to hell.

8. Unbeliever's prudence and care taken to preserve their own lives, or the caring concern of others to preserve them, does not give them a moment's security. To this, divine providence and universal experience also bears testimony. There is clear evidence that men's own wisdom is no security to them from death; otherwise we should see some difference between the wise and prudent men of the world, and others, with regard to their vulnerability to an early and unexpected death: but how is it in fact? Eccl. 2:16, "Like the fool, the wise man too must die!"

9. All wicked men's pains and instruments which they use to escape hell, while they continue to reject Christ, and so remain wicked men, does not secure them from hell for one moment. Almost every natural man that hears of hell, flatters himself that he shall escape it; he depends upon himself for his own security; he flatters himself in what he has done, in what he is now doing, or what he intends to do. Every one determines in his own mind how he shall avoid damnation, and flatters himself that his strategies will not fail. They surely hear that only a few are saved, and that the greater part of men that have died have gone into hell; but each one imagines that he has a better plan for his own escape than

others have come up with. He does not intend to come to that place of torment; he says within himself, that he intends to take sufficient care, and to arrange the concerns of his life so that he will not fail.

But the foolish children of men miserably delude themselves in their own schemes, and in the confidence of their own strength and wisdom; they trust in nothing but a shadow. The greater part of those who have lived under the same patient grace of God, and are now dead, and have undoubtedly gone into hell; and it was not because they were not as wise as those who are now alive; it was not because they did not determine for themselves how to secure their own escape. If we could speak with them, and inquire of them, one by one, whether they expected, when alive, when they used to hear about hell, ever to be the subjects of that misery, we, doubtless, should hear one and another reply, "No, I never intended to come here: I had determined otherwise in my mind; I thought I had a good plan for myself: I thought my strategy was good. I intended to take sufficient care; but it came upon me unexpectedly: I didn't expect it at that time, and in that way; it came as a thief: Death outwitted me: God's wrath was too quick for me. O my cursed foolishness! I was flattering myself, and pleasing myself with vain dreams of what I would do after the life on earth; and when I was saying, Peace and safety, then sudden destruction came upon me."

10. God has put Himself under no obligation, has made no promise, to keep any unbelieving man out of hell for one second. God certainly has made no promises either of eternal life, or of any deliverance or preservation from eternal death, but only what are contained in the covenant of grace, the promises that are given in Christ, in whom all the promises are yes and amen. But surely they have no interest in the promises of the covenant of grace who are not the children of the covenant, who do not believe in any of the promises, and have no interest in the Mediator of the covenant.

So that, whatever some have imagined and pretended about promises made to natural men's earnest seeking and knocking, it is plain and manifest, that whatever pains a natural man takes in religion, whatever prayers he makes, till he believes in Christ, God is under no obligation to keep him a moment from eternal destruction.

Therefore natural men are held in the hand of God over the pit of hell; they have deserved the fiery pit, and are already sentenced to it; and God is dreadfully provoked, His anger is as great towards them as to those that are actually suffering the executions of the fierceness of His wrath in hell, and they have done nothing in the least to appease or abate that anger, neither is God in the least bound by any promise to hold them up one moment: the devil is waiting for them, hell is gaping for them, the flames gather and flash about them, and are eager to grab hold of them, and swallow them up; the fire pent up in their own hearts is struggling to break out; and they have no interest in any Mediator, there are no means within reach that can be any security to them. In short, they have no refuge, nothing to take hold of; all that preserves them every moment is the mere arbitrary will, and uncovenanted, unobliged patience, of an incensed God.

APPLICATION

The use of this awful subject may be for awakening unconverted persons in this congregation. This you have heard is the case of every one of you that are without Christ. That world of misery, that lake of burning fire, is stretched out wide under you. There is the dreadful pit of the glowing flames of the wrath of God; there is hell's wide gaping mouth open; and you have nothing to stand upon, nor anything to take hold of; there is nothing between you and hell but the air; it is only the power and mere pleasure of God that holds you up.

You probably are not cognizant of this; you find that you are kept out of hell, but do not see the hand of God in it; but look at other things, like your good health, your care of your own life, and the means you use for your own preservation. But indeed these things are nothing; if God should withdraw His hand, they would no more keep you from falling, than thin air would hold a person up that is suspended in it.

Your wickedness makes you as heavy as lead, and adds a downwards tendency with great weight and pressure towards hell; and if God should let you go, you would immediately sink and swiftly descend and plunge into the bottomless gulf; and your good health, and your own care and prudence, and best plans for salvation, and all your righteousness, would have no more influence to uphold you and keep you out of hell, than a spider's web would have to stop a falling rock. Were it not for the sovereign pleasure of God, the earth would not bear you for one moment; for you are a burden to it: the creation groans with you; the animal is made subject to the bondage of your corruption, not willingly; the sun does not willingly shine upon you to give you light to serve sin and Satan; the earth does not willingly yield her fruits to satisfy your lusts; nor is it willingly a stage for your wickedness to be acted upon; the air does not willingly serve you for breath to maintain the flame of life in your vitals, while you spend your life in the service of God's enemies.

God's animals are good, and were made for men to serve God with and do not willingly serve any other purpose, and groan when they are abused to purposes so directly contrary to their nature and end. And the world would spit you out, were it not for the sovereign hand of Him who has subjected it in hope. There are the black clouds of God's wrath now hanging directly over your heads, full of the dreadful storm, and big with thunder; and were it not for the restraining hand of God, it would immediately burst forth upon you. The sovereign pleasure of God, for the present, halts His destroying wind; otherwise it would come with fury, and your destruction would come like a whirlwind, and you would be like the chaff of the summer.

The wrath of God is like great waters that are dammed for the present; they increase more and more, and rise higher and higher, till an outlet is given; and the longer the stream is stopped, the more rapid and mighty is its course, when it is once let loose. It is true, that judgment against your evil works has not been executed before; the floods of God's vengeance have been withheld; but your guilt in the meantime is constantly increasing, and you are every day storing up more wrath; the waters are constantly rising, and growing more and more mighty; and there is nothing but the mere pleasure of God that holds the waters back, that are unwilling to be stopped, and press hard to go forward. If God should only withdraw His hand from the floodgate, it would immediately fly open, and the fiery floods of the fierceness and wrath of God would rush forth with inconceivable fury, and would come upon you with omnipotent power; and if your strength were ten thousand times greater than it is, yes, ten thousand times greater than the strength of the stoutest, sturdiest devil in hell, it would never be able to withstand or endure it.

The bow of God's wrath is bent, and the arrow made ready on the string, and justice points the arrow at your heart, and strains the bow, and it is nothing but the mere pleasure of God, and that of an angry God, without any promise or obligation at all, that keeps the arrow one second from being made drunk with your blood. Thus all of you that never had the great change of heart, by the mighty power of the Spirit of God upon your souls; all of you that were never born again, and made new creatures, and raised from being dead in sin, to a new state, and never experienced light and life, are in the hands of an angry God.

However, you may have reformed your life in many things, and may have had religious feelings, and may keep up a form of religion in your families and secret prayer closets, and in your churches, it is nothing but His mere pleasure that keeps you from being this moment swallowed up in everlasting destruction. However, you may now be unconvinced of the truth that you now hear, in time you will be fully convinced of it. Those that were in similar circumstances as you are, are now gone and destruction came suddenly upon most of them; when they expected nothing to happen, and while they were saying, Peace and safety: now they see, that those things on which they depended for peace and safety, were nothing but thin air and empty shadows.

The God that holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider, or some detestable insect, over the fire, detests you, and is dreadfully provoked: His wrath towards you burns like fire; He looks upon you as worthy of nothing else, but to be thrown into the fire; His eyes are too pure than to bear to have you in His sight; you are ten thousand times more abominable in His eyes, than the most hateful venomous snake is in ours. You have offended Him infinitely more than ever a stubborn rebel did his prince: and yet, it is nothing but His hand that holds you from falling into the fire every moment. It is to be ascribed to nothing else, that you did not go to hell last night; that you were allowed to awake up again in this world, after you closed your eyes to sleep. And there is no other reason to be given, why you have not dropped into hell since you arose this morning, but that God's hand has held you up. There is no other reason to be given why you have not gone to hell, since you have sat here in this church, provoking His pure eyes by your sinful wicked manner of attending His solemn worship. Yes, there is nothing else that is to be given as a reason why you do not this very moment drop down into hell.

O sinner! consider the fearful danger you are in: it is a great furnace of wrath, a wide and bottomless pit, full of the fire of wrath, that you are held over in the hand of that God, whose wrath is provoked and incensed as much against you, as against many of the damned in hell. You hang by a slender thread, with the flames of divine wrath flashing about it, and ready every moment to singe it, and burn it apart; and you have no interest in any Mediator, and nothing to lay hold of to save yourself, nothing to keep off the flames of wrath, nothing of your own, nothing that you ever have done, nothing that you can do, to induce God to spare you one moment. And consider here more particularly,

1. "Whose" wrath it is: it is the wrath of the infinite God. If it were only the wrath of man, though it were of the most powerful prince, it would be comparatively little to be regarded. The wrath of kings is very much dreaded, especially of absolute dictators, who have the possessions and lives of their subjects wholly in their power, to be disposed of at their mere will. Prov. 20:2 "A king's wrath is like the roar of a lion; he who angers him forfeits his life." The person that greatly enrages a volatile prince, is liable to suffer the most extreme torments that human art can invent, or human power can inflict. But the greatest earthly kings, in their greatest majesty and strength, and when clothed in their greatest terrors, are but feeble, despicable worms of the dust, in comparison of the great and almighty Creator and King of heaven and earth. They can do little, when most enraged, and when they have exerted the utmost of their fury. All the kings of the earth, before God, are like grasshoppers; they are nothing, and less than nothing: both their love and their hatred is to be despised. The wrath of the great King of kings, is much more terrible than theirs, as His majesty is greater. Luke 12:4-5, "I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear Him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear Him."

2. It is the "fury" of His wrath that you are exposed to. We often read of the fury of God; as in Isa. 59:18, "According to what they have done, so will He repay wrath to His enemies and retribution to His foes." So Isa. 66:15, "See, the LORD is coming with fire, and His chariots are like a whirlwind; He will bring down His anger with fury, and His rebuke with flames of fire." And in many other places. So, Rev. 19:15, we read of "the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty." The words are exceedingly terrible. If it had only been said, "the wrath of God," the words would have implied that which is infinitely dreadful: but it is the "fury of the wrath of God." The fury of God! the fierceness of Jehovah! O how dreadful that must be! Who can utter or conceive what such expressions carry in them?

But it is also "the fury of the wrath of God Almighty." As though there would be a very great manifestation of His almighty power in what the fury of His wrath should inflict; as though omnipotence should be as it were enraged, and exerted, as men exert their strength in the fury of their wrath. Oh! then, what will be the consequence! What will become of the poor man or woman that shall suffer it! Whose hands can be strong? and whose heart can endure? To what a dreadful, inexpressible, inconceivable depth of misery must the poor creature be sunk who shall be the subject of this!

Consider this, you that are here, that yet remain in an unregenerate state. That God will execute the fury of His anger, implies, that He will inflict wrath without any pity. When God looks upon the inexpressible circumstances of your case, and sees your torment to be so vastly disproportioned to your strength, and sees how your poor soul is crushed, and sinks down, as it were, into an infinite gloom; He will have no compassion upon you, He will not withhold the executions of His wrath, or in the least lighten His hand; there shall be no moderation or mercy, nor will God stop His destroying wind; he will have no regard to your welfare, nor be at all careful for fear that you should suffer too much in any other sense, than only that you shall "not suffer beyond what strict justice requires."

Nothing shall be withheld, because it is too intense for you to bear. Ezek. 8:18, "Therefore I will deal with them in anger; I will not look on them with pity or spare them. Although they shout in my ears, I will not listen to them." Now God stands ready to pity you; this is a day of mercy; you may cry now with some encouragement of obtaining mercy. But when the day of mercy is past, your most pitiful and sorrowful cries and shrieks will be in vain; you will be totally lost and thrown away by God, and He will have no regard for your welfare. God will have no other use for you, but for you to suffer misery; you shall for no other purpose; for your body will be a body of wrath designed for destruction; and there will be no other use of your body, but to be filled full of wrath. God will be so far from pitying you when you cry to Him, that it is said He will only "laugh and mock," Prov. 1:25-31,

Since you ignored all my advice and would not accept my rebuke, I in turn will laugh at your disaster; I will mock when calamity overtakes you--when calamity overtakes you like a storm, when disaster sweeps over you like a whirlwind, when distress and trouble overwhelm you. Then they will call to me but I will not answer; they will look for me but will not find me. Since they hated knowledge and did not choose to fear the LORD, since they would not accept my advice and spurned my rebuke, they will eat the fruit of their ways and be filled with the fruit of their schemes.

How awful are those words, Isa. 63:3, which are the words of the great God, "I have trodden the winepress alone; I trampled them in my anger and trod them down in my wrath; their blood spattered my garments, and I stained all my clothing." It is perhaps impossible to conceive of words that carry in them greater manifestations of these three things, viz. contempt, and hatred, and fury of wrath. If you cry to God to pity you, He will be so far from pitying you in your dismal case, or showing you the least regard or favor, that, instead of that, He will only tread you under foot. And though He will know that

you cannot bear the weight of omnipotence treading upon you, yet He will not regard that, but He will crush you under His feet without mercy; He will crush out your blood, and make it fly, and it shall be sprinkled on His garments, so as to stain all His clothes. He will not only hate you, but He will have you in the utmost contempt; no place shall be thought fit for you, but under His feet, to be trodden down as the filth of the back alleys.

3. The misery you are exposed to is that which God will inflict to that end, that He might show what the wrath of Jehovah is. God has had it on His heart to show to angels and men, both how excellent His love is, and also how terrible His wrath is. Sometimes earthly rulers have a mind to show how terrible their wrath is, by the extreme punishments they would execute on those that would provoke them. Nebuchadnezzar, that mighty and arrogant king of the Chaldean empire, was willing to show his wrath when enraged with Shadrach, Meshech, and Abednego; and accordingly gave the order that the burning fiery furnace should be heated seven times hotter than it was before: doubtless, it was raised to the utmost degree of fury that human art could raise it.

But the great God is also willing to show His wrath, and magnify His awful majesty and mighty power, in the extreme sufferings of His enemies. Rom. 9:22, "What if God, choosing to show His wrath and make His power known, bore with great patience the objects of His wrath--prepared for destruction?" And seeing this is His design, and what He has determined, even to show how terrible the unrestrained wrath, the fury and fierceness, of Jehovah is, He will do it to effect. There will be something accomplished and brought to pass that will be a dreadful witness. When the great and angry God has risen up and executed His awful vengeance on the poor sinner, and the wretch is actually suffering the infinite weight and power of His indignation, then will God call upon the whole universe to behold that awful majesty and mighty power that is to be seen in it. Isa. 33:12-13, "The peoples will be burned as if to lime; like cut thornbushes they will be set ablaze. You who are far away, hear what I have done; you who are near, acknowledge my power!"

Thus it will be with you that are in an unconverted state, if you continue in it; the infinite might, and majesty, and terribleness of the omnipotent God shall be magnified upon you, in the inexpressible strength of your torments. You shall be tormented in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb; and when you shall be in this state of suffering, the glorious inhabitants of heaven shall go out and look on the awful spectacle, that they may see what the wrath and fierceness of the Almighty is; and when they have seen it, they will fall down and adore that great power and majesty. Isa. 66:23-24, "'All mankind will come and bow down before me,' says the LORD. And they will go out and look upon the dead bodies of those who rebelled against me; their worm will not die, nor will their fire be quenched, and they will be loathsome to all mankind."

4. It is "everlasting" wrath. It would be dreadful to suffer this fierceness and wrath of Almighty God one second; but you must suffer it for all of eternity. There will be no end to this extreme horrible misery. When you look forward, you shall see a long forever, a boundless duration before you, which will swallow up your thoughts, and amaze your soul; and you will absolutely despair of ever having any deliverance, any end, any mitigation, any rest at all. You will know certainly that you must wear out long ages, millions of millions of ages in wrestling and conflicting with this almighty merciless vengeance; and then when you have so done, when so many ages have actually been spent by you in this manner, you will know that all is but a point to what remains. So that your punishment will indeed be infinite. Oh who can express what the state of a soul in such circumstances is! All that we can possibly say about it, gives but a very feeble, faint representation of it; it is inexpressible and inconceivable: for "who knows the power of God's anger?"

How dreadful is the state of those that are daily and hourly in danger of this great wrath and infinite misery! But this is the dismal case of every soul in this congregation that has not been born again, however moral and strict, sober and religious, they may otherwise be. Oh that you would consider it, whether you be young or old! There is reason to think, that there are many in this congregation now hearing this sermon, that will actually be the subjects of this very misery for all eternity. We do not know who they are, or in what seats they sit, or what thoughts they may now have. It may be they are now at ease, and hear all these things without much conviction, and are now flattering themselves that they are not the persons, promising themselves that they shall escape. If we knew that there was one person, and but one, in the whole congregation, that was to be the subject of this misery, what an awful thing would it be to think of! If we knew who it was, what an awful sight would it be to see such a person! How might all the rest of the congregation lift up a mournful and bitter cry over him! But, alas! instead of one, how many will remember this sermon in hell! And it would be a wonder, if some that are now present should not be in hell in a very short time, even before this year is out. And it would be no wonder if some persons, that now sit here, in some seats of this church, in health, quiet and secure, should be there before tomorrow morning.

Those of you that continue in your unsaved condition, who shall keep out of hell the longest, will eventually be there in a little while! Your damnation does not slumber; it will come swiftly, and, in all probability, very suddenly, upon many of you. You have reason to wonder that you are not already in hell. It is doubtless the case of some whom you have seen and known, that never deserved hell more than you, and that before appeared as likely to have been alive now as you. Their case is past all hope; they are crying in extreme misery and complete despair; but here you are in the land of the living, and in the Church, and have an opportunity to obtain salvation. What would those poor damned, hopeless souls give for one day's opportunity such as you now enjoy!

And now you have an extraordinary opportunity, a day where Christ has thrown the door of mercy wide open, and stands calling, and crying with a loud voice to poor sinners; a day where many are flocking to Him, and pressing into the kingdom of God. Many are daily coming from the east, west, north, and south; many that were very lately in the same miserable condition that you are in, are now in a happy state, with their hearts filled with love to Him who has loved them, and washed them from their sins in His own blood, and rejoicing in hope of the glory of God. How awful it is to be left behind at such a day! To see so many others feasting, while you are suffering grief and perishing! To see so many rejoicing and singing for joy of heart, while you have cause to mourn for sorrow of heart, and cry because of the apprehension of spirit! How can you rest one moment in such a condition? Aren't your souls as precious as the souls of the people in the nearby town where they are flocking from day to day to Christ?

Aren't there many here who have lived a long time in the world, and still are not born again? And so are aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and have done nothing ever since they have lived, but stored up wrath against the day of wrath? Oh, Sirs, your case, in a special way, is extremely dangerous. Your guilt and hardness of heart is extremely great. Don't you see how persons of your years are passed over and left, in the present remarkable and wonderful dispensation of God's mercy? You have need to consider yourselves, and awake thoroughly out of sleep. You cannot bear the fierceness and wrath of the infinite God.

Young men and young women, will you neglect this precious season which you now enjoy, when so many others of your age are renouncing all youthful vanities, and flocking to Christ? You especially have now an extraordinary opportunity; but if you neglect it, it will soon be with you as with those

persons who spent all the precious days of youth in sin, and are now come to such a dreadful gorge in blindness and hardness. And you, children, who are unconverted, do not you know that you are going down to hell, to bear the dreadful wrath of that God, who is now angry with you every day and every night? Will you be content to be the children of the devil, when so many other children in the land are converted, and have become the holy and happy children of the King of kings?

And let every one that is yet without Christ, and hanging over the pit of hell, whether they be old men and women, or middle aged, or young people, or little children, now listen to the loud calls of God's word and providence.

This acceptable year of the Lord, a day of such great favor to some, will doubtless be a day of remarkable vengeance to others. Men's hearts harden, and their guilt increases quickly, on such a day as this, if they neglect their souls; and never was there so great danger of such persons being given up to hardness of heart and blindness of mind. God seems now to be hastily gathering in His elect in all parts of the land; and probably the greater part of adult persons that ever shall be saved, will be brought in now in a little time, and that it will be as it was on the great outpouring of the Spirit upon the Jews in the apostles' days, the election will obtain, and the rest will be blinded. If this should be the case with you, you will eternally curse this day, and will curse the day that ever you were born, to see such a season of the pouring out of God's Spirit, and will wish that you had died and gone to hell before you had seen it. Now undoubtedly it is, as it was in the days of John the Baptist, the axe is laid at the roots of the trees, that every tree which does not bring forth good fruit, may be cut down, and thrown into the fire.

Therefore, let every one that is without Christ, now awake and fly from the wrath to come. The wrath of Almighty God is now undoubtedly hanging over a great part of this congregation. Let every one fly out of Sodom: "Hurry and escape with your lives, don't look behind you. Escape to the mountain, unless you be consumed."

A WOMAN WHICH WAS A SINNER

A Sermon Delivered on Lord's-Day Morning, March 22nd, 1868, by C.H. Spurgeon,
At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington.

"And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment, and stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment."
-- Luke 7:37, 38

THIS is the woman who has been confounded with Mary Magdalene. How the error originated it would not be easy to imagine, but error it certainly is. There is not the slightest shadow of evidence that this woman, who was a sinner, had even the remotest connection with her out of whom Jesus cast seven devils. In delivering you a sermon a few Sabbaths ago, upon the life of Mary of Magdala, I think I showed you that it was hardly possible, and most improbable, that she could have been a sinner in the sense here intended, and now I venture to affirm that there is as much evidence to prove that the woman, in the narrative now before us, was the Queen of Sheba, or the mother of Sisera, as that she was Mary Magdalene: there is not a figment or fraction of evidence to be found. The fact is, there is no connection between the two.

Further, the sinner before us is not Mary of Bethany, with whom so many have confounded her. Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, did anoint our Saviour, but this is a previous anointing, by quite a different person, and the two narratives are altogether distinct. There is a great likeness, certainly, between the two. The principal persons were both women, full of ardent love to Christ; they both anointed the Lord with ointment; the name of Simon is connected with both, and they both wiped the Saviour's feet with their hair. But it ought not to astonish you that there were two persons whose intense affection thus displayed itself; the astonishment should rather be that there were not two hundred who did so, for the anointing of the feet of an honoured friend was by no means so uncommon a token of respect among the Orientals as to be an unprecedented marvel. Loved as Jesus deserved to be, the marvel is that he was not oftener visited with these generous tokens of human love. It is a pity to fuse two occasions into one, as though we grudged a double unction to the Anointed of the Lord. That both events should happen in the houses of persons named Simon is not at all remarkable: be it remembered that the one was Simon the Pharisee, and the other Simon the leper; and that Simon is one of the commonest of Jewish names; and that in our days, a thing having happened in the house of a John, and another thing like it in the house of another John, would not be remarkable, since Johns are exceedingly common amongst us, as were Simons in the days of our Lord. But that the two, or perhaps I should say three, anointings (for I am inclined to think there were three) are not the same is evident from the following reasons: they differ in time; our Lord lived at least six months after his anointing by this woman, and if you follow the narrative, you read in the very next chapter, "And it came to pass afterward, that he went throughout every city and village, preaching and showing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God: and the twelve were with him." But when Mary anointed him at Bethany, he said, "She did it for my burial;" and our Lord was then within a very few days of his crucifixion. The anointing by Mary, the sister of Lazarus, took place at Bethany (Matthew 26:6), but this occurred in Galilee, which is quite another quarter. Moreover, the fact itself was really a very different one, for although both women anoint Christ with ointment, yet there was a peculiar preciousness and power of perfume about the spikenard of the wealthier Mary, which is not mentioned in the ointment of this woman of a lower position in life. Mary, according to John (John 12:3), poured out a whole pound of the costly nard, but such is not said of the humble offering of the woman that was a sinner. Matthew

tells us that a woman poured the ointment on his head, but this poor penitent is only said to have anointed his feet: tears are not mentioned in connection with Mary by either Matthew, Mark, or John, while they make a conspicuous feature in the love of the gracious mourner now before us. After the transaction there was an objection raised in both cases, but mark the great difference! In this case, Simon the Pharisee objected because she, being a sinner, was allowed to have such familiarity with the Lord; in the other case, no such objection was raised to the person, but Judas Iscariot objected to her having been so profuse and extravagant in the abundance and costliness of the anointing, and murmured, saying that this ointment might have been sold for much and given to the poor. If you confound these two occurrences, you not only make an egregious mistake, but you lose a precious lesson. This case now before us is the offering of a poor returning wanderer, who, under a deep sense of gratitude, brings the best she has to her Lord, and is accepted by his grace. In the case of Mary of Bethany, it was an advanced saint, one who had sat at Jesus' feet and heard of him, and had aforetime chosen the good part which should not be taken away from her, and she brings a costly tribute as the offering of her deep, sincere affection, which had grown and deepened by the receipt of many favours from his loving hand. The advanced believer is more bold than the new convert. She anoints his head when the other only anoints his feet, and she is not less loving, for if there be fewer tears there is a more costly spikenard. Jesus defended the penitent, and bade her go in peace; but in Mary's case there was no need to say, "Thy sins are forgiven," for she already possessed that priceless boon; our Lord, instead of merely defending, warmly eulogised her love, and declared, "Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her." Thus much will suffice to show you that "the woman which was a sinner" is neither to be confounded with Mary of Magdala on the one hand, or Mary of Bethany on the other. Let us learn to read our Bibles with our eyes open, to study them as men do the works of great artists, studying each figure, and even each sweet variety of light and shade.

Too long have we been controverting on the threshold of the text, let us now lift the latch. Lo, on the table I see two savoury dishes, let us feed thereon. Here are two silver bells, let us ring them; their first note is Grace, and the second tone is Love.

I. GRACE, the most costly of spikenard: this story literally drips with it, like those Oriental trees which bleed perfume; or as the spouse when she rose up to open to her beloved, and her hands dropped with myrrh, and her fingers with sweet-smelling myrrh upon the handles of the lock. Grace, that gentle dew of heaven, is here plenteously distilled, and falls like small rain upon the tender herb. Grace, sovereign, distinguishing, omnipotent, is exceedingly magnified in this narrative; lo, I see it exalted upon a glorious high throne, with the king's daughter waiting as an honourable woman among its courtiers.

1. First, grace is here glorified in its object. She was "a sinner"--a sinner not in the flippant, unmeaning, every-day sense of the term, but a sinner in the blacker, filthier, and more obnoxious sense. She had forsaken the guide of her youth, and forgotten the covenant of her God; she had sinned against the laws of purity, and had made herself as a defiled thing; she had fallen into that deep ditch concerning which it is written, "The abhorred of the Lord shall fall therein." According to our Lord's parable, she was in comparison with the Pharisee as a five-hundred-pence sinner, while the Pharisee was but as fifty. She was one of the scarlet sinners that we read of in Scripture--she sinned and made others to sin. Hers were offenses which provoke the Lord to jealousy, and stir up his wrath. Yet, oh, miracle of miracles, she was an object of distinguishing grace, ordained unto eternal life! Why was this? On what legal grounds was she selected? For what merit was she chosen? Was this an extraordinary and out-of-the-way instance? By no means, dear friends, for the grace of God has frequently chosen the lowest of the

low, and the vilest of the vile. Recollect how, in the pedigree of our Lord, you find the name of the shameless Tamar, the harlot Rahab, and the unfaithful Bathsheba, as if to indicate that the Saviour of sinners would enter into near relationship with the most degraded and fallen of our race. This is, in fact, one of the dearest titles of our Lord, though it was hissed at him from the lips of contempt, "A friend of publicans and sinners." This is Jesus' character of which he is not ashamed: "This man receiveth sinners and eateth with them." Free grace has made no distinction among men on account of merit, whether false or real, if real there be. The law has concluded us all in unbelief, and then the abounding grace of God looking upon us all as equally cast away and ruined both by Adam's fall and by our own personal transgression, has predestinated and called whomsoever it would. Do you not hear from the throne of mercy the echoes of that sovereign proclamation, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy; I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion"? Grace has pitched upon the most unlikely cases in order to show itself to be grace; it has found a dwelling-place for itself in the most unworthy heart, that its freeness might be the better seen. Do I address one who has greatly fallen? Let this thought comfort thee, if thy heart bewails thy sin--let this give thee hope of mercy, that in the election of grace some of the grossest blasphemers, persecutors, thieves, fornicators, and drunkards, have been included, and in consequence thereof they have been forgiven, renewed, and made to live sober, righteous, and godly lives. Such as these have obtained mercy that in them first God might show forth all longsuffering as a comfort and encouragement to others to cry unto the Lord for mercy.

Grace reigns right majestically in the case before us, in that this particular sinner should be chosen; to choose a sinner was something, but to choose this one individual was even more astonishing. No doubt, she did in spirit ask herself, "Why me, Lord? why me?" Had she been here this morning, she would sing as heartily as any of us--

**"Oh, gift of gifts! Oh, grace of faith!
My God, how can it be
That thou, who has discerning love,
Shouldst give that gift to me!**

**How many hearts thou mightst have had
More innocent than mine!
How many souls more worthy far
Of that pure touch of thine!**

**Ah, Grace! into unlikeliest hearts
It is thy boast to come;
The glory of thy light to find
In darkest spots a home."**

At yonder table sits Simon the Pharisee, a good respectable body as he thinks himself to be, and yet no choice divine has fallen upon him--while this poor harlot is elected by distinguishing grace! How can we account for this? Many there were in the city like to herself, some worse, some better; but grace had marked her as its own. Oh, strange, yet admirable sovereignty! Now, it is possible that you may not be much taken with the glory of grace in selecting her, but I will ask you whether you are not delighted with the grace which separated you to be the Lord's? O brethren, when once a man discovers that God has chosen him, when he feels that grace has broken his heart, has brought him to Christ, and has covered him with a perfect righteousness, then he breaks out in wondering exclamations, "How couldst thou have chosen me? What am I, and what is my father's house, that I should be taken into such royal

favour?" The more a believer looks within, the more he discovers reasons for divine wrath, and the less he believes in his own personal merit. How is the heart of a true believer filled with adoring gratitude that ever the Lord's boundless love should have been pleased to settle and fix itself upon him! This is not so much for me to descant upon as it is for your private meditations. I earnestly commend to you that precious thought, that Jehovah loved you from before the foundations of the world, and chose you when he might have left you, chose you when he passed over thousands of the great and the noble, the wise, and the learned. The doctrine is not a dogma to be fought over, as dogs over a bone, but to be rejoiced in, and turned to practical account as an incentive to reverent wonder and affectionate gratitude. Where sin abounded grace did much more abound, and the "woman which was a sinner," is now before us a weeping penitent; the sinner "of the city," a public sinner, is now openly a follower of the holy One.

2. Grace is greatly magnified in its fruits. Who would have thought that a woman who had yielded her members to be servants of unrighteousness, to her shame and confusion, should have now become, what if I call her a maid of honour to the King of kings?--one of Christ's most favoured servitors? Who offered hospitalities to Jesus which the Pharisee omitted, and offered them in an infinitely better spirit and style than the Pharisee could have done it even had he tried! Let us remark, that the grace of God brought this woman in a way of providence to listen to the Saviour's discourses. In a former part of this chapter it appears he had been preaching the gospel, and more especially preaching it to the poor. Perhaps she stood in the street attracted by the crowd, and, as she listened to our Saviour's talk, it seemed to hold her fast. She had never heard a man speak after that fashion, and when he spoke of abounding mercy, and the willingness of God to accept as many as would come to him, then the tears began to follow each other down her cheek; and when she listened again to that meek and lowly preacher, and heard him tell of the Father in heaven who would receive prodigals and press them to his loving bosom, then her heart was fairly broken, she relinquished her evil traffic, she became a new woman, desirous of better things, anxious to be freed from sin. But she was greatly agitated in her heart with the question, could she, would she, be really forgiven? Would such pardoning love as she had heard of reach even to her? She hoped so, and was in a measure comforted. Her faith grew, and with it an ardent love. The Spirit of God still wrought with her till she enjoyed a feeble hope, a gleam of confidence; she believed that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah, that he had appeared on earth to forgive sins, and she rested on him for the forgiveness of her sins, and longed for an opportunity to do him homage, and if possible to win a word direct from his mouth. The Lord of mercy came to the city where she lived. "Now," she thought, "here is my opportunity; that blessed prophet has come; the man who spake as never man spake is near me, and I have already derived such benefit from him that I love him better than all besides; I love him as my own soul. I will steal into the house of the Pharisee, that I may feast my eyes with the sight of him." Now, when she came to the door, the Saviour was reclining at his meat, according to the Oriental custom, and his feet were towards the door; for the Pharisee had but little respect for Christ, and had not given him the best and innermost place at the feast; but there he lay with his uncovered feet towards the door, and the woman, almost unperceived, came close to him, and, as she looked and saw that the Pharisee had refused him the ordinary courtesy of washing his feet, and that they were all stained and travel-worn with his long journeys of love, she began to weep, and the tears fell in such plenteous showers that they even washed his feet. Here was holy water of a true sort. The crystal of penitence falling in drops, each one as precious as a diamond. Never were feet bedewed with a more precious water than those penitent eyes showered forth. Then, unbinding those luxurious tresses, which had been for her the devil's nets in which to entangle souls, she wiped the sacred feet therewith. Surely she thought that her chief adornment, the crown and glory of her womanhood, was all too worthless a thing to do service to the lowest and meanest part of the Son of God. That which once was her vanity now was humbled and yet exalted to the lowest office; she made

her eyes a ewer and her locks a towel. "Never," says bishop Hall, "was any hair so preferred as this; how I envy those locks that were graced with the touch of those sacred feet."

There a sweet temptation overtook her, "I will even kiss those feet, I will humbly pay reverence to those blessed limbs." She spake not a word, but how eloquent were her actions! better even than psalms and hymns were these acts of devotion. Then she bethought her of that alabaster box containing perfumed oil with which, like most Eastern women, she was wont to anoint herself for the pleasure of the smell and for the increase of her beauty, and now, opening it, she pours out the costliest thing she has upon his blessed feet. Not a word, I say, came from her; and, brethren, we would prefer a single speechless lover of Jesus, who acted as she did, to ten thousand noisy talkers who have no gifts, no heart, no tears. As for the Master, he remained quietly acquiescent, saying nothing, but all the while drinking in her love, and letting his poor weary heart find sweet solace in the gratitude of one who once was a sinner, but who was to be such no more.

Grace, my brethren, deserves our praise, since it does so much for its object. Grace does not choose a man and leave him as he is. My brethren and sisters, men rail at grace sometimes as though it were opposed to morality, whereas it is the great source and cause of all complete morality--indeed, there is no real holiness in the sight of God except that which grace creates, and which grace sustains. This woman, apart from grace, had remained black and defiled still to her dying day, but the grace of God wrought a wondrous transformation, removing the impudence of her face, the flattery from her lips, the finery from her dress, and the lust from her heart. Eyes which were full of adultery, were now fountains of repentance; lips which were doors of lascivious speech, now yield holy kisses--the profligate was a penitent, the castaway a new creature. All the actions which are attributed to this woman illustrate the transforming power of divine grace. She exhibited the deepest repentance. She wept abundantly. She wept out of no mere sentimentalism, but at the remembrance of her many crimes. She wept for sorrow and for shame as she thought over her early childhood, and how she had slighted a mother's training, how she had listened to the tempter's voice, and hurried on from bad to worse. Every part of her life-story would rise before her as a painfully vivid dream. The sight of those blessed feet helped her to remember the dangerous paths into which she had wandered; the sluices of grief were drawn up, and her soul flowed out in tears. O blessed Spirit of grace, we adore thee as we see the rock smitten and the waters gushing. "He causeth his wind to blow and the waters flow."

Note the woman's humility. She had once possessed a brazen face, and knew no bashfulness, but now she stands behind the Saviour. She did not push herself in before his face; she was content to have the meanest standing-place. If she might not venture to anoint his head, yet, if she might do service to his feet, she blushed as she accepted the honour. Those who serve the Lord Jesus truly, have a holy bashfulness, a shrinking sense of their own unworthiness, and are content to fulfil the very lowest office in his household. That is no service for Christ when thou wouldst need ride the king's horse, and wear the king's garment, and have it said, "This is the man whom the king delighteth to honour." That is serving thyself rather than Christ, when thou covetest the chief place in the synagogue, and wouldst have men call thee Rabbi. But that is real service when thou canst care for the poor; when thou canst condescend to men of low estate, and become a teacher of the ignorant and an instructor of babes. He serves well who works behind his master's back, unknown and unperceived--toiling in the dark, unreported, unapplauded, and happy to have it so. See, beloved, how in a woman who was once so shameless, grace plants and makes to flourish the fair and modest flower of true humility.

Yet was the woman courageous, for she must have needed much courage to enter into a Pharisee's house. The look of a Pharisee to this woman must have been enough to freeze summer into howling

winter. Those Pharisees had an insufferable contempt of everybody who was not of their own clique, who did not fast twice a week, and tithed their mint, anise, and cummin; they said, by every gesture, "Stand by, I am holier than thou." To a person of infamous character, the pompous Pharisee would be doubly contemptuous, and a woman conscious of unworthiness would be sorely wounded by his manners; besides, at a feast, her tears would be much out of place, and therefore she would be the more rudely rebuked; but how fearless she was, and how bravely she held her tongue when Simon railed! What will not men and women do when grace moves them to love, and love prompts them to courage! Ay, into the very jaws of hell the grace of God would make a believer dare to enter, if God commanded him. There is no mountain too high for a believing foot to scale, and no furnace too hot for a believing heart to bear. Let Rome and its amphitheatres, Piedmont and its snow, France and its galleys, Smithfield and its stakes, the Netherlands and their rivers of blood, all speak of what grace can do when once it reigns in the heart, what heroes it can make of the very weakest and most timid of God's children, where it rules supreme.

I have said that in every part of this woman's action grace is honoured, and it is so more especially in this respect, that what she did was practical. Hers was not pretence, but real and expensive service. The religion of some professors stops short at their substance; it costs them nothing, and, I fear, is worth nothing. They appear before the Lord empty. They buy no sweet cane with money, neither does the Lord receive the fat of their sacrifices. I must confess myself utterly at a loss to understand the piety of some people. I thank God I am not bound to understand it, and that I am not sent into the world to be a judge of my fellow creatures, but I do greatly wonder at the religion of many. There are to be found, and I have found them, persons whose love to Christ is of such a sort that they give to his cause the larger proportion of their substance, and do so gladly, thinking it a privilege; yea, I know some who pinch themselves--some of the poor and needy, who stint themselves that they may give to Christ. Such are doubtless blessed in the deed. I do not understand those men who have thousands upon thousands of pounds, perhaps hundreds of thousands, and profess to love Christ, and dole out their gifts to Jesus in miserable fragments. I must leave them to their Master, to be judged at the last, but I confess I do not understand them or admire them. If I did love Christ at all, I would love him so that I would give him all I could, and if I did not do that, I think I would say, "He is not worth it, and I will not be a sham professor. It is rank hypocrisy to profess love and then to act a miserly part. Let those who are guilty of it settle the account between God and their own souls. This woman's alabaster box was given freely, and if she had had more to give, she would have given it, after the spirit of that other woman, that memorable widow, who had two mites, which made a farthing, which were all her living, but she gave it all out of love to God. Grace reigns indeed with high control when it leads men who naturally would be selfish to practice liberality in the cause of the Redeemer. Let these gleanings suffice, the vintage of the fruits of grace is too great for us to gather it all this morning.

3. I would have you remark, in the third place, that grace is seen by attentive eyes in our Lord's acceptance of what this chosen vessel had to bring. Jesus knew her sin. The Pharisee wondered that Jesus did not shrink from contact with her. You and I may wonder too. We sometimes feel it a task to have to commune with persons of a certain character even when they profess to repent: our Lord's sensitiveness of the guilt of sin was much keener than ours, yet he rested still upon the couch, and quietly accepted what she brought, permitted her the fond familiarity of kissing his feet again and again, and to bedew them with her tears--permitted all that, I say, and accepted all that, and herein made his grace to shine most brightly. Oh, that Jesus should ever accept anything of me, that he should be willing to accept my tears, willing to receive my prayers and my praises! We cheerfully accept a little flower from a child, but then the flower is beautiful, and we are not far above the child; but Jesus accepts from us that which is in its nature impure, and upbraids us not. O grace, how condescending

thou art; see, believer, Jesus has heard thy prayers and answered them; he has blessed thy labours, given thee souls as thy reward, and at this moment that which is in thy heart to do for him he receives, and he raises no objection, but takes what thou bringest to him, takes it with joy. O grace, thou art grace indeed, when the offerings of unworthy ones become dear unto Jesus' heart.

4. Further, grace is displayed in this narrative when you see our Lord Jesus Christ become the defender of the penitent. Everywhere grace is the object of human cavil: men snap at it like evening wolves. Some attack it at the fountain head; they cannot endure the doctrine of election. Some professors almost foam at the mouth at the very mention of the word "predestination;" they cannot bear it, and yet it is God's truth, let them say what they will, and there shall it stand, let them kick against the pricks if they dare. "It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy." Would to God men would give up their rebellious questionings and bow before the King of kings. On this occasion, Simon cavilled at grace in that a sinful woman should be allowed to approach the Lord, he would have put her in quarantine at the least, if not in prison. Some object to grace in its perpetuity, they struggle against persevering grace; but others, like this Simon, struggle against the bounty of grace. How could such a woman as she was be permitted to draw so near to Christ? Certain captious spirits will demand, "How should Jesus give to such unworthy ones such acceptance, such manifestations of himself, such privileges?" Our Lord took upon himself to defend her, and therefore she might well afford to hold her tongue. So shall it be with you. If Satan accuse you, and your enemies with loud-mouthed accusations cry out against you, you have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, who will certainly plead your cause and clear you. Jesus by his defensive parable shows that he was justified in letting the woman approach, because great love prompted her. There was no sin in her approach, but much to commend, since her motive was excellent, and the motive is the true measure of a deed. She felt intense love and gratitude towards the person who had forgiven her; therefore, her acts were not to be forbidden, but commended. He justifies her and incidentally justifies himself. Had he not done well in having won a sinner's heart to penitence and love? Was not election justified in having chosen one to such holy devotedness and fervency? At the last great day, the Lord will justify his grace before the eyes of the whole universe, for he will allow the grace-wrought virtues of his chosen ones to be unveiled, and all eyes shall see that grace reigns through righteousness. Then shall they for ever be silenced who accused the grace of God of leading to licentiousness, for they shall see that in every case free forgiveness led to gratitude, and gratitude to holiness. The chosen shall be made choice men. Grace chose them notwithstanding all their deformities; but when it has cast about them a supernal beauty, they shall be the wonder and admiration of the universe, evidently made to be the noblest and best of mankind. Show me where grace ever created sin! You cannot, but lo, in what a manner has grace created holiness! It is not ashamed to let its chosen sheep appear before the great dividing Shepherd's throne, for of them all it shall be said, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink." Grace does not smuggle men into heaven, but brings them up to heaven's requirements through the Spirit and the blood.

5. Once more, my brethren, the grace of God is seen in this narrative in the bestowal of yet richer favours. Great grace saved her, rich grace encouraged her, unbounded grace gave her a divine assurance of forgiveness. It was proved that she was forgiven, for she loved much, but she had never received the full assurance of it. She was a hopeful penitent rather than a confirmed believer. But the Master said, "Thy sins are forgiven thee;" from that moment full assurance of faith must have occupied her soul. And then he gave her that choice dismissary benediction, "Go in peace," by which the peace of God which passeth all understanding henceforth kept her mind, so that even when she had to go out of this world into the unknown realm, she heard in the midst of Jordan's billows, the divine sentence,

"Go in peace." Ah! beloved, you know not what grace can do for you. God is not stinted in his grace. If he has lifted you up out of the miry clay he can do more, he can set your feet upon a rock. If on the rock you already stand, he can do more, he can put a new song into your mouth; and if already you lift the joyous hymn, he can do more yet, he can establish your goings. You do not know the exceeding bounty of your own heavenly Father yet. Unfathomable is his goodness. Arise and enjoy it. Behold the whole land is before you, from Dan unto Beersheba--all the provisions of the covenant of grace belong to you. Have but faith, and you shall yet comprehend with all saints what are the heights and depths, and know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge.

Here, then, was grace in its object, grace in its fruit, grace in the acceptance of that fruit, grace in the defence which Jesus made of the gracious one, and grace in the blessings bestowed upon her. May grace deal thus bountifully with us.

II. We have but two or three moments left for what requires far more space, namely, LOVE. The word blossoms with roses, and suggests the voice of the turtle and the singing of birds. Our time, however, binds us to a narrow path, which we must not leave, although the beds of lilies on either hand invite us.

Love--its source: it bubbles up as a pure rill from the well-head of grace. She loved much, but it was because much had been forgiven. There is no such thing as mere natural love to God. The only true love which can burn in the human breast towards the Lord, is that which the Holy Ghost himself kindles. If thou truly lovest the God who made thee and redeemed thee, thou mayst be well assured that thou art his child, for none but his children have any love to him.

Its secondary cause is faith. The fiftieth verse tells us, "Thy faith hath saved thee." Our souls do not begin with loving Christ, but the first lesson is to trust. Many penitents attempt this difficult task; they aspire to reach the stair-head without treading the steps; they would needs be at the pinnacle of the temple before they have crossed the threshold. First trust Christ for the pardon of thy sin: when thou hast done this, thy sins are forgiven, and then love shall flash to thy heart as the result of gratitude for what the Redeemer has done for thee. Grace is the source of love, but faith is the agent by which love is brought to us.

The food of love is a sense of sin, and a grateful sense of forgiveness. If you and I felt more deeply the guilt of our past lives, we should love Jesus Christ better. If we have but a clearer sense that our sins deserve the deepest hell, that Christ suffered what we ought to have suffered in order to redeem us from our iniquities, we should not be such coldhearted creatures as we are. We are perfectly monstrous in our want of love to Christ, but the true secret of it is a forgetfulness of our ruined and lost natural estate, and a forgetfulness of the sufferings by which we have been redeemed from that condition. O that our love might feed itself this day, and find a renewal of its strength in remembering what sovereign grace has done.

Love in the narrative before us shines in the fact that the service the woman rendered to our Lord was perfectly voluntary. No one suggested it, much less pressed it upon her. It takes the gloss off our service when we need to be dragged to it, or pushed forward by some energetic pleader. Brethren, the anointing was impromptu with her. Christ was there, and it was at her own suggestion that she anointed his feet. Mary of Bethany had not then set the example: the woman who was a sinner was an original in her service. In these days we have many inventors and discoverers for our temporal use and service, why should we not have inventors for Jesus who will bring out new projects of usefulness? We are

most of us content to travel in the old rut, but if we had more love to Jesus we should be more eccentric, and should have a degree of freshness about our service which at present is all too rare. Lord, give us the love which can lead the way!

Her service to Jesus was personal. She did it all herself, and all to him. Do you notice how many times the pronoun occurs in our text? "She stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment." She served Christ himself. It was neither service to Peter, nor James, nor John, nor yet to the poor or sick of the city, but to the Master himself; and, depend upon it, when our love is in active exercise, our piety will be immediately towards Christ--we shall sing to him, pray to him, teach for him, preach for him, live to him. Forgetfulness of the personality of Christ takes away the very vitality of our religion. How much better will you teach, this afternoon, in your Sabbath-school class, if you teach your children for Christ! How much better will you go forth this evening to tell to others the way of salvation, if you go to do it for his sake! Then you court no man's smile--you fear no man's frown. It is enough for you that you have done it for the Master, and if the Master accepts it you have the reward in that very fact.

The woman's service showed her love in that it was fervent. There was so much affection in it--nothing conventional; no following chilly propriety, no hesitating enquiry for precedents. Why did she kiss his feet? Was it not a superfluity? What was the good of it? Did it not look sentimental, affected, sensuous, indelicate? Little did she care how it looked; she knew what she meant. She could not do otherwise. Her whole soul went out in love, she acted naturally as her heart dictated, and, brethren, she acted well. O for more of this guileless piety, which hurls decorum and regulation to the winds. Ah, throw your souls into the service of Christ; let your heart burn in his presence, and let all your soul belong to Jesus. Serve not your Master as though you were half asleep, do not work with drooping hands and half-closed eyes, but wake up the whole of your powers and passions: for such love as he has shown to you, give the most awakened and quickened love in return. O for more of this love! If I might only pray one prayer this morning, I think it should be that the flaming torch of the love of Jesus should be brought into every one of our hearts, and that all our passions should be set ablaze with love to him.

One thought more, and I am done. This woman's love is a lesson to us in the opportunity which she seized. She was evidently but just pardoned: she was rather a weeper than one who had learned to rejoice, and yet for all that, she would serve him at the first dawn of her spiritual life. Now, you young converts, no longer say, "We will do something for Christ in a few years' time, when we have made our calling and election sure; we will wait till we have grown in grace, and then try to do what we can." No, no, but as soon as you are washed, bring your offering to Jesus. The very day of your conversion, enlist in his army, for speedy obedience is beautiful. Perhaps if this woman had lingered, she had never anointed the Lord at all; but in the hot flush of her first love, she did well to perform at once this zealous, fervent act. Young converts maintain, by God's grace, the warmth of the blood which circulates in the church's veins. Old churches generally become diseased churches when they cease to grow. I do not know a church in all England without conversions which is at all in a happy spiritual state. The fact is, the fresh comers stir us all up by their fervour, their simplicity, their childlike confidence. Now, beloved ones, we encourage you to show this. For our sakes, for your own sakes, for Christ's sake, do not hesitate--if there be anything you can do, though you are uneducated in the divine school, do it. Though there may be a dozen blunders in the method, yet do it, for Christ will accept it. The Pharisee may cavil--well, perhaps it may keep his tongue from other mischief--let him cavil, you can bear it, Christ will defend you, Jesus will accept you; and as a reward for doing what you can, he may be pleased to give you grace to do more, and may breathe over you a full assurance of faith, which

had you been idle you might not for years have attained; and he may give you a peace of conscience in serving him which, had you sat still, might never have come to you. I beseech all of you who love Jesus, do not hide the light you have under a bushel, but come out and show it. If you have but a little faith, use it; if you have only a grain of faith, turn it to account. Put the one talent out at interest, and use it for the Master at once, and the Lord bless you in such a work, by increasing your faith and love, and making you to be as this woman was, a highly favoured servant of this blessed Master. May the Lord give every one of you his blessing, for Jesus' sake.

ALL OF GRACE

A Sermon Delivered on Thursday Evening, July 13th, 1871, by C H Spurgeon
at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.” Eph. 2:8

If the things which I have spoken unto you these many years, this is the sum. Within the circle of these words my theology is contained, so far as it refers to the salvation of men. I rejoice also to remember that those of my family who were ministers of Christ before me preached this doctrine, and none other. My father, who is still able to bear his personal testimony for his Lord, knows no other doctrine, neither did his father before him.

I am led to remember this by the fact that a somewhat singular circumstance, recorded in my memory, connects this text with myself and my grandfather. It is now long years ago. I was announced to preach in a certain country town in the Eastern Counties. It does not often happen to me to be behind time, for I feel that punctuality is one of those little virtues which may prevent great sins. But we have no control over railway delays, and breakdowns; and so it happened that I reached the appointed place considerably behind the time. Like sensible people, they had begun their worship, and had proceeded as far as the sermon. As I neared the chapel, I perceived that someone was in the pulpit preaching, and who should the preacher be but my dear and venerable grandfather! He saw me as I came in at the front door and made my way up the aisle, and at once he said, "Here comes my grandson! He may preach the gospel better than I can, but he cannot preach a better gospel; can you, Charles?" As I made my way through the throng, I answered, "You can preach better than I can. Pray go on." But he would not agree to that. I must take the sermon, and so I did, going on with the subject there and then, just where he left off. "There," said he, "I was preaching of 'For by grace are ye saved.' I have been setting forth the source and fountain-head of salvation; and I am now showing them the channel of it, through faith. Now you take it up, and go on." I am so much at home with these glorious truths that I could not feel any difficulty in taking from my grandfather the thread of his discourse, and joining my thread to it, so as to continue without a break. Our agreement in the things of God made it easy for us to be joint-preachers of the same discourse. I went on with "through faith," and then I proceeded to the next point, "and that not of yourselves." Upon this I was explaining the weakness and inability of human nature, and the certainty that salvation could not be of ourselves, when I had my coat-tail pulled, and my well-beloved grandsire took his turn again. "When I spoke of our depraved human nature," the good old man said, "I know most about that, dear friends"; and so he took up the parable, and for the next five minutes set forth a solemn and humbling description of our lost estate, the depravity of our nature, and the spiritual death under which we were found. When he had said his say in a very gracious manner, his grandson was allowed to go on again, to the dear old man's great delight; for now and then he would say, in a gentle tone, "Good! Good!" Once he said, "Tell them that again, Charles," and, of course, I did tell them that again. It was a happy exercise to me to take my share in bearing witness to truths of such vital importance, which are so deeply impressed upon my heart. While announcing this text I seem to hear that dear voice, which has been so long lost to earth, saying to me, "TELL THEM THAT AGAIN." I am not contradicting the testimony of forefathers who are now with God. If my grandfather could return to earth, he would find me where he left me, steadfast in the faith, and true to that form of doctrine which was once delivered to the saints.

I shall handle the text briefly, by way of making a few statements. The first statement is clearly contained in the text:-

I. There Is Present Salvation.

The apostle says, "Ye are saved." Not "ye shall be," or "ye may be"; but "ye are saved." He says not, "Ye are partly saved," nor "in the way to being saved," nor "hopeful of salvation"; but "by grace are ye saved." Let us be as clear on this point as he was, and let us never rest till we know that we are saved. At this moment we are either saved or unsaved. That is clear. To which class do we belong? I hope that, by the witness of the Holy Ghost, we may be so assured of our safety as to sing, "The Lord is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation." Upon this I will not linger, but pass on to note the next point.

II. A Present Salvation Must Be Through Grace.

If we can say of any man, or of any set of people, "Ye are saved," we shall have to preface it with the words "by grace." There is no other present salvation except that which begins and ends with grace. As far as I know, I do not think that anyone in the wide world pretends to preach or to possess a present salvation, except those who believe salvation to be all of grace. No one in the Church of Rome claims to be now saved - completely and eternally saved. Such a profession would be heretical. Some few Catholics may hope to enter heaven when they die, but the most of them have the miserable prospect of purgatory before their eyes. We see constant requests for prayers for departed souls, and this would not be if those souls were saved, and glorified with their Saviour. Masses for the repose of the soul indicate the incompleteness of the salvation Rome has to offer. Well may it be so, since Papal salvation is by works, and even if salvation by good works were possible, no man can ever be sure that he has performed enough of them to secure his salvation.

Among those who dwell around us, we find many who are altogether strangers to the doctrine of grace, and these never dream of present salvation. Possibly they trust that they may be saved when they die; they half hope that, after years of watchful holiness, they may, perhaps, be saved at last; but, to be saved now, and to know that they are saved, is quite beyond them, and they think it presumption.

There can be no present salvation unless it be upon this footing - "By grace are ye saved." It is a very singular thing that no one has risen up to preach a present salvation by works. I suppose it would be too absurd. The works being unfinished, the salvation would be incomplete; or, the salvation being complete, the main motive of the legalist would be gone.

Salvation must be by grace. If man be lost by sin, how can he be saved except through the grace of God? If he has sinned, he is condemned; and how can he, of himself, reverse that condemnation? Suppose that he should keep the law all the rest of his life, he will then only have done what he was always bound to have done, and he will still be an unprofitable servant. What is to become of the past? How can old sins be blotted out? How can the old ruin be retrieved? According to Scripture, and according to common sense, salvation can only be through the free favour of God.

Salvation in the present tense must be by the free favour of God. Persons may contend for salvation by works, but you will not hear anyone support his own argument by saying, "I am myself saved by what I have done." That would be a superfluity of naughtiness to which few men would go. Pride could hardly compass itself about with such extravagant boasting. No, if we are saved, it must be by the free favour of God. No one professes to be an example of the opposite view.

Salvation to be complete must be by free favour. The saints, when they come to die, never conclude their lives by hoping in their good works. Those who have lived the most holy and useful lives invariably look to free grace in their final moments. I never stood by the bedside of a godly man who

reposed any confidence whatever in his own prayers, or repentance, or religiousness. I have heard eminently holy men quoting in death the words, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." In fact, the nearer men come to heaven, and the more prepared they are for it, the more simply is their trust in the merit of the Lord Jesus, and the more intensely do they abhor all trust in themselves. If this be the case in our last moments, when the conflict is almost over, much more ought we to feel it to be so while we are in the thick of the fight. If a man be completely saved in this present time of warfare, how can it be except by grace. While he has to mourn over sin that dwelleth in him, while he has to confess innumerable shortcomings and transgressions, while sin is mixed with all he does, how can he believe that he is completely saved except it be by the free favour of God?

Paul speaks of this salvation as belonging to the Ephesians, "By grace are ye saved." The Ephesians had been given to curious arts and works of divination. They had thus made a covenant with the powers of darkness. Now if such as these were saved, it must be by grace alone. So is it with us also: our original condition and character render it certain that, if saved at all, we must owe it to the free favour of God. I know it is so in my own case; and I believe the same rule holds good in the rest of believers. This is clear enough, and so I advance to the next observation: -

III. Present Salvation by Grace Must Be Through Faith.

A present salvation must be through grace, and salvation by grace must be through faith. You cannot get a hold of salvation by grace by any other means than by faith. This live coal from off the altar needs the golden tongs of faith with which to carry it. I suppose that it might have been possible, if God had so willed it, that salvation might have been through works, and yet by grace; for if Adam had perfectly obeyed the law of God, still he would only have done what he was bound to do; and so, if God should have rewarded him, the reward itself must have been according to grace, since the Creator owes nothing to the creature. This would have been a very difficult system to work, while the object of it was perfect; but in our case it would not work at all. Salvation in our case means deliverance from guilt and ruin, and this could not have been laid hold of by a measure of good works, since we are not in a condition to perform any. Suppose I had to preach that you as sinners must do certain works, and then you would be saved; and suppose that you could perform them; such a salvation would not then have been seen to be altogether of grace; it would have soon appeared to be of debt. Apprehended in such a fashion, it would have come to you in some measure as the reward of work done, and its whole aspect would have been changed. Salvation by grace can only be gripped by the hand of faith: the attempt to lay hold upon it by the doing of certain acts of law would cause the grace to evaporate. "Therefore, it is of faith that it might be by grace." "If by grace, then it is no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then it is no more grace: otherwise work is no more work."

Some try to lay hold upon salvation by grace through the use of ceremonies; but it will not do. You are christened, confirmed, and caused to receive "the holy sacrament" from priestly hands, or you are baptized, join the church, sit at the Lord's table: does this bring you salvation? I ask you, "have you salvation?" "You dare not say." If you did claim salvation of a sort, yet I am sure it would not be in your minds salvation by grace.

Again, you cannot lay hold upon salvation by grace through your feelings. The hand of faith is constructed for the grasping of a present salvation by grace. But feeling is not adapted for that end. If you go about to say, "I must feel that I am saved. I must feel so much sorrow and so much joy or else I will not admit that I am saved," you will find that this method will not answer. As well might you hope to see with your ear, or taste with your eye, or hear with your nose, as to believe by feeling: it is the wrong organ. After you have believed, you can enjoy salvation by feeling its heavenly influences; but to dream of getting a grasp of it by your own feelings is as foolish as to attempt to bear away the

sunlight in the palm of your hand, or the breath of heaven between the lashes of your eyes. There is an essential absurdity in the whole affair.

Moreover, the evidence yielded by feeling is singularly fickle. When your feelings are peaceful and delightful, they are soon broken in upon, and become restless and melancholy. The most fickle of elements, the most feeble of creatures, the most contemptible circumstances, may sink or raise your spirits: experienced men come to think less and less of their present emotions as they reflect upon the little reliance which can be safely placed upon them. Faith receives the statement of God concerning His way of gracious pardon, and thus it brings salvation to the man believing; but feeling, warming under passionate appeals, yielding itself deliriously to a hope which it dares not examine, whirling round and round in a sort of dervish dance of excitement which has become necessary for its own sustaining, is all on a stir, like the troubled sea which cannot rest. From its boilings and ragings, feeling is apt to drop to lukewarmness, despondency, despair and all the kindred evils. Feelings are a set of cloudy, windy phenomena which cannot be trusted in reference to the eternal verities of God. We now go a step further: -

IV. Salvation by Grace, Through Faith, Is Not of Ourselves.

The salvation, and the faith, and the whole gracious work together, are not of ourselves.

First, they are not of our former deservings: they are not the reward of former good endeavours. No unregenerate person has lived so well that God is bound to give him further grace, and to bestow on him eternal life; else it were no longer of grace, but of debt. Salvation is given to us, not earned by us. Our first life is always a wandering away from God, and our new life of return to God is always a work of undeserved mercy, wrought upon those who greatly need, but never deserve it.

It is not of ourselves, in the further sense, that it is not out of our original excellence. Salvation comes from above; it is never evolved from within. Can eternal life be evolved from the bare ribs of death? Some dare to tell us that faith in Christ, and the new birth, are only the development of good things that lay hidden in us by nature; but in this, like their father, they speak of their own. Sirs, if an heir of wrath is left to be developed, he will become more and more fit for the place prepared for the devil and his angels! You may take the unregenerate man, and educate him to the highest; but he remains, and must forever remain, dead in sin, unless a higher power shall come in and save him from himself. Grace brings into the heart an entirely foreign element. It does not improve and perpetuate; it kills and makes alive. There is no continuity between the state of nature and the state of grace: the one is darkness and the other is light; the one is death and the other is life. Grace, when it comes to us, is like a firebrand dropped into the sea, where it would certainly be quenched were it not of such a miraculous quality that it baffles the water-floods, and sets up its reign of fire and light even in the depths.

Salvation by grace, through faith is not of ourselves in the sense of being the result of our own power. We are bound to view salvation as being as surely a divine act as creation, or providence, or resurrection. At every point of the process of salvation this word is appropriate - "not of yourselves." From the first desire after it to the full reception of it by faith, it is evermore of the Lord alone, and not of ourselves. The man believes, but that belief is only one result among many of the implantation of divine life within the man's soul by God Himself.

Even the very will thus to be saved by grace is not of ourselves, but it is the gift of God. There lies the stress of the question. A man ought to believe in Jesus: it is his duty to receive him whom God has set forth to be a propitiation for sins. But man will not believe in Jesus; he prefers anything to faith in his redeemer. Unless the Spirit of God convinces the judgment, and constrains the will, man has no heart to believe in Jesus unto eternal life. I ask any saved man to look back upon his own conversion, and explain how it came about. You turned to Christ, and believed in his name: these were your own acts

and deeds. But what caused you thus to turn? What sacred force was that which turned you from sin to righteousness? Do you attribute this singular renewal to the existence of a something better in you than has been yet discovered in your unconverted neighbour? No, you confess that you might have been what he now is if it had not been that there was a potent something which touched the spring of your will, enlightened your understanding, and guided you to the foot of the cross. Gratefully we confess the fact; it must be so. Salvation by grace, through faith, is not of ourselves, and none of us would dream of taking any honour to ourselves from our conversion, or from any gracious effect which has flowed from the first divine cause. Last of all: -

V. "By Grace Are Ye Saved Through Faith; and That Not of Yourselves: It Is the Gift of God."

Salvation may be called Theodora, or God's gift: and each saved soul may be surnamed Dorothea, which is another form of the same expression. Multiply your phrases, and expand your expositions; but salvation truly traced to its well-head is all contained in the gift unspeakable, the free, unmeasured benison of love.

Salvation is the gift of God, in opposition to a wage. When a man pays another his wage, he does what is right; and no one dreams of belauding him for it. But we praise God for salvation because it is not the payment of debt, but the gift of grace. No man enters eternal life on earth, or in heaven, as his due: it is the gift of God. We say, "nothing is freer than a gift". Salvation is so purely, so absolutely a gift of God, that nothing can be more free. God gives it because he chooses to give it, according to that grand text which has made many a man bite his lip in wrath, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." You are all guilty and condemned, and the great King pardons whom he wills from among you. This is his royal prerogative. He saves in infinite sovereignty of grace.

Salvation is the gift of God: that is to say completely so, in opposition to the notion of growth. Salvation is not a natural production from within: it is brought from a foreign zone, and planted within the heart by heavenly hands. Salvation is in its entirety a gift from God. If thou wilt have it, there it is, complete. Wilt thou have it as a perfect gift? "No; I will produce it in my own workshop." Thou canst not forge a work so rare and costly, upon which even Jesus spent his life's blood. Here is a garment without seam, woven from the top throughout. It will cover thee and make thee glorious. Wilt thou have it? "No; I will sit at the loom, and I will weave a raiment of my own!" Proud fool that thou art! Thou spinnest cobwebs. Thou weavest a dream. Oh! that thou wouldst freely take what Christ upon the cross declared to be finished.

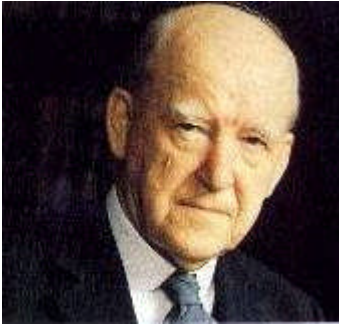
It is the gift of God: that is, it is eternally secure in opposition to the gifts of men, which soon pass away. "Not as the world giveth, give I unto you," says our Lord Jesus. If my Lord Jesus gives you salvation at this moment, you have it, and you have it forever. He will never take it back again; and if he does not take it from you, who can? If he saves you now through faith, you are saved - so saved that you shall never perish, neither shall any pluck you out of his hand. May it be so with every one of us! Amen.

"WHY DO THE HEATHEN RAGE?"

By Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones

Preached at Heath Evangelical Church, Cardiff, United Kingdom

Psalm 2:1



I should like to call your attention this evening to the message of the second Psalm, which begins with these words: "Why do the heathen rage? And the people imagine a vain thing."

Now I can well believe that there are many in this congregation at this moment, who are wondering to themselves as to what this old Psalm, which was probably written nearly three thousand years ago, has to do with us living in the present day.

The vast majority of the people of this country, as we are aware, certainly would take that view. They no longer attend places of worship, because they feel that it is utterly pointless to do so! In our modern world with its teeming problems, its increasing crisis and its dim and dismal outlooks, they feel that this old book has obviously got nothing to say to us, and cannot possibly be of any help or of aid to us.

Well now, I want to deal with that position for I want to show you that not only is the message of this book, which we call The Bible, relevant to the modern man and to the modern problem, but I want to go further and I want to show that nothing else is relevant, that THIS is the only book which throws any light on our problems and our predicament, and the only book that holds out any hope for any one of us in this modern world.

Now this Psalm is a very remarkable one. As I say, it was written very nearly three thousand years ago by David the king of Israel. He was writing primarily for his own age and his own generation, and he was concerned about the situation and about the whole condition of mankind in his time. And he describes it and he deals with it.

But not only was he doing that. Because he was a man of God, he was doing something further. He was describing the whole state and condition of the Human Race, ever since that early point in its long story, when it turned its back on God and began to experience its terrifying problems. This Psalm not only describes what conditions were like in the time of David, it is an equally valid and good description of what times have been like on many a previous occasion, and what they were like on many a subsequent occasion.

We also read that section out of the fourth chapter of the book of the Acts of the Apostles, because you will have noticed that there this Psalm was quoted. That passage was dealing with the early Christian church. She had only just come into being, but she was being persecuted.

Two of the leaders, the Apostles Peter and John, had been arrested. They had been arraigned before a court. They had been condemned. And they had been threatened that 'if they persisted in preaching about this Jesus of Nazareth and His message they would be put to death.' Then they were let loose and they went back to their own company, the members of the church, and reported what had happened to them.

And we are told that the moment that the church heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord and began to pray. Nor had they been praying for long before they began quoting this second Psalm, and what they said was this. "What David said, what was said through the voice of Your servant David, is equally true today. "The heathen are raging, the people are imagining a vain thing. The kings of the earth are setting themselves and the rulers take counsel together." And they added, "It is against You and against Your Christ that they are doing the same thing now."

David was not only describing what was happening in his day, he was giving a valid and an accurate description of what was happening when the Lord Jesus Christ was in this world, the conditions in the first century. And indeed this is a description, I say, of the state of mankind in many another age - and I want to show you that it is a particularly accurate description of the state of affairs obtaining in this country, and in the world at large at this present time.

Now that is the remarkable thing about this book which is called The Bible. It is not only God's book, it is a book of history. It is a book which gives us the story of the human race, explains why it is as it is, and as I say, holds out the only hope of an adequate and a real solution.

Very well. Let us consider what it says. You will notice that the Psalmist starts with what is, in most of our Bibles, put as a question. Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? Well it is a question, but I think that it is MORE than a question. The Psalmist is expressing his horror, his astonishment, his amazement. He says, "Why are things as they are?" And surely this is the question that every thinking person must be asking tonight.

Here we are in this last quarter of the twentieth century and our world is in terrible trouble. We are all aware of this. We have had two world wars already in this century, and they are building and piling up these horrible armaments. Is there going to be another world war? What is it all going to lead to?

We are aware of the industrial strife, the moral strife, the breakdown of law and order . If you read a newspaper or listen to news bulletins, you cannot but be aware of the fact that the world is in terrible trouble and there are mounting problems. We therefore stand back and we ask, "What is the matter?" That is exactly what David said. That is what those people were saying when they were praying in the early church.

But then - he not only asks the question, he goes further, he starts by giving us a description of the conditions prevailing then. And I am here to show you that it is the most perfect and most accurate description of the state of society tonight!

What was the condition? Well here it is. 'Why do the heathen rage?' That is the term used! "Why do they rage?" Now this term, if you like, can be translated as, "Why do they make a tumult?" In other words he says, "What is the matter with people?" "Society", he says, "is like a raging or a roaring sea." That is how affairs were then!

Now this is a very interesting thing in the history of the human race. Mankind is always restless. That is why the Bible in one of its favourite analogies compares the human race to the sea. And as you know, the great characteristic of the sea is that it is always "restless", it is always "moving". Now I know that on some very fine summers day you can look at the sea and you are almost persuaded that it is not moving at all. We say, "It is as calm as a Mill Pond." You cannot see any movement. But there IS movement there! The sea is never quiet. It is always on the move - ebb and flow - backwards and

forwards - almost imperceptible at times, but nevertheless, there is always this characteristic of "movement" and of "restlessness".

Well now, according to the bible that is always true of the human race, at all times! There are times - there have been epochs in the history of mankind when there has been such peace and quiet that some people thought that we really had arrived at Utopia. You will read in your secular history books about the Pax Romana. There was a long period of quiet and of rest and everything seemed to be perfect. The last century was referred to, and is still referred to, as the Pax Britannica. I know that there was an incident like the Crimean War, but roughly speaking there had been no major war after the Napoleonic War, and this country and our might and our power was able to preserve a kind of peace, and the result was that some people really believed that we had arrived in Nirvanah, and Tennyson and others sang about "The Parliament of Men" and "The Federation of the World". The human race seemed to have grown up and we were going to solve all of our problems. There would be no more wars, no more troubles, no more crises, it was to be "perfect peace and rest and calm".

There have been such times, but even then there was always the restlessness. There were troubles and problems a hundred years ago, there was vice, there was crime. You still had a need of a Police Force. Though apparently so quiet - like the sea in summer - there was always the "restlessness". Mankind cannot find rest. Man is always looking for "rest". But as Augustine said so many centuries ago, at the beginning of the Fifth Century, "You have made us for Yourself and our hearts are restless, until they find their rest in You!" Now that is always permanently the condition of mankind.

BUT! And this is the point that is made in this Psalm, and this is the truth about tonight. While there are periods when life seems calm, there are other periods when it is like the raging of the sea. And that is how it was in the time of David! That is how it was at the time before the flood! That is how it was just before these children of Israel were carried to the captivity in Babylon! That is how it was in the first century! That is how it was after the first restoration of Charles the Second in 1660! That is how it was in the Regency Period at the end of the reign of George the Third! And that is how it is tonight!

We are looking tonight, not at a calm quiet, apparently immobile sea. We are looking at a storm! We are looking at a raging sea! A violent sea! We are looking at billows rising up and hurling themselves. We are looking up at a violent churning in the depths in the oceans. Well, the prophet Isaiah, he summed it up in a memorable phrase, he said: But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. (Isaiah 57:20)

I have said that there were sins and there were moral problems a hundred years ago, but it was not like tonight. That was a comparatively halcyon period. What are we confronted by? We are not only confronted by sin - we are confronted by "violent" sin, by "open" sin, by "boastful" sin. We are in an age in which men not only sin, but they are proud of it! And if you do not sin, you are regarded as a "back number" as a "square". We are not living in an age of people just drinking and getting drunk occasionally, we are in the age of "alcoholism", of "violent drunkenness". We are in an age of violence on the streets so that it is no longer safe to walk home at night. We are in an age of "drug addiction". We are in an age of "robbery with violence" and "thuggery". I need not waste your time. You are all aware of this.

In other words you see, we are back again in one of these epochs described here by David in his Psalm. We are witnessing "raging sin". The sanctities are being spat on. Married life and home life breaking down. Morality has vanished. Every man (does) that which is right in his own eyes and violence is

facing us everywhere. Havet you not noticed the loudness of the so called music, and the shouting and the "raving"? Well, is this not a perfect description of our world tonight? Why do the heathen rage? What is the matter with the world? Is it not about time we faced this question?

Well now that is the very question that the Psalmist is asking us at the face! He says here, (verse 10), "Be wise now therefore, and be instructed." This is the whole object of the message of the Bible, to make us think. You know, the people outside, the people who never go to a place of worship, they think that those of us who are Christians are just a pack of unintelligent people, that we never read and that we never think. They imagine that we just meet together in our buildings, pull down the blinds on the problems of life and just sing our hymns and our choruses and work ourselves up into some sort of emotional riot, and are not aware what is happening in the world outside. I am here to remind you that the exact opposite is the truth! It is WE alone who are facing the facts. The newspapers and rest are trying to cover them, I am here to expose them!

The world is raving tonight! It is raging! It is violent! And the turbulent sea is casting up mire and dirt. All the filth of today. The filth on the television and the radio. The filth in the newspapers. The filth on the hoardings. Mire and Dirt!

Well that is part of the description, but it is not the whole of the description. He says, 'Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing?' Probably he was differentiating between pagans and Jews. It does not matter. Taken as a whole it is a description of the world as it then was. The "raging" and the "people imagining a vain thing." Now what does that mean? Well somebody has translated it like this, and I think that it is a better translation. Instead of saying the people imagine a vain thing, the translator says, 'Why are the people devising futile and empty schemes?' That is what it means, 'imagining a vain thing', or 'devising futile and empty schemes'.

Is this Bible not a wonderful book? Do you know of a more perfect description of this world tonight than this? One the one hand you see, you have this raging violence of sin, and at the same time exactly the leaders of society, the politicians, the educationalists, the philosophers, and all the others, what are they doing? They are devising futile and empty schemes!

They have been doing it for the last three weeks in the Annual Congresses and Conferences of the Political Parties. What have they been doing? They have been putting forward schemes to cure the problems of society. They are aware of the problems! And there they have spent their days in putting forward schemes. Each Party has got its scheme and it differs from the other Parties. But the Bible says that they are altogether futile and empty and they lead to nothing.

But this is the perfect description of our world tonight. On the one hand the violent sinning and the noise and the clatter and the confusion and the breakdown of everything that is sacred, and, in the meantime, "mankind" in its confidence putting forward its schemes and its proposals and its ideas, and is confident that it can deal with it.

But the verdict of the Bible on it all is that it is "empty" and "futile" and "will lead to nothing"!

I want to establish this fact. It is about time that we faced the facts my friends. People do not go to churches any longer and listen to the Bible and preaching, because they think that it has got nothing to say. They are turning to these other things. Here are these pundits giving their pompous opinions on the

television and the radio, writing their articles to the Sunday Newspapers. But it is about time that we asked the questions, What of their schemes? What of their ideas? What are they leading to?

Let me ask a still wider question. What has civilisation led to? What has the world and its wisdom produced by tonight? I suggest to you THIS is the only answer! All the schemes have proved to be empty and futile, complete failures.

Now you need not take MY word for this, I can demonstrate it to you. You will remember, some of you, the First World War. I remember it well. You see, before that war our leaders were very confident that we would never have another war. They said, "War is due to ignorance, but now we are educated." "War", they said, "is due to the fact that people do not travel and they do not know one another, so they fight. But now we are able to travel. We have the railways and we can travel, and we can mix, and we are going to banish war." And they really believed that. As I have already quoted Tennyson to you. He talked about the parliament of man, the federation of the world, and that we were entering the century when men were going to turn their swords into ploughshares.

BUT suddenly a world war broke out and they were shaken. "But it is alright," they said "this is the war to end war," and then they concocted the scheme of the League of Nations. This was going to banish war! It was going to "outlaw war", make war impossible. And do you know, I remember the time very well, they really believed it!

Unfortunately many preachers believed it, and there were many preachers who preached the League of Nations instead of the Gospel for a number of years. Poor blinded men! What did the League of Nations lead to? Well we had another war in 1939. But still you know they bring forward their schemes. The United Nations they call it now! It is the same thing and they still put their trust and their faith in it.

So they have trusted to "politics", they have trusted to "education". You see I remember the arguments very well. There are some advantages in being old, you know, and one of them is this, that one can remember the confidence in liberalism (with a small L) before and after the First World War.

I used to get this argument, and I often used to argue with people. There was a problem with juvenile delinquency and robbery and things of that kind. And this was the argument. They said, "This is due entirely to the conditions in which these people are brought up." They said, "What can you expect from a poor boy who is brought up in a slum, has never had enough food, has never had adequate clothing, and whose housing was deplorable?" They said, "While you have got poverty and these conditions, you are bound to get delinquency and crime."

Well now there is a terrible crime problem today. What are they saying now? Well, what I read now is this. "All this crime is due to the fact that the young people have got too much money in their pockets and they do not know what to do with it. It is burning in their pockets so they must be doing something." You see! The exact opposite of what they said before.

But still, they are producing their schemes and their ideas. Education was going to solve the problem. Science likewise. Philosophy. These were the things that were going to introduce paradise. Men and women turned their backs on the churches and the chapels and they followed the political and the philosophical and the sociological and the educational leaders, and they really believed that were going to solve the problems. They put forward their "schemes"

But what of their "schemes"? According to this man, the schemes in his age were empty and futile and vain. And I am here to say the same tonight and you cannot dispute it. All the schemes and the plans are breaking down before our very eyes. We are in terrible trouble! Morally, politically, industrially, economically, socially and in every other respect. The schemes of men are vain and futile and empty.

And of course every really deep thinking man, throughout the centuries, has always come to this conclusion, and has always recognised this, whether Christian or not. You see Shakespeare. Shakespeare was not a Christian in my opinion, but he was a very able and profound thinker and an observer of humanity, and he came to this conclusion. He saw what was happening and he came to this conclusion about life. He said, "Life is a tale told by an idiot. Full of sound and fury - signifying NOTHING!" That was Shakespeare's conclusion.

But take another man. Take the great historian Edward Gibbon who wrote about two hundred years ago. He wrote a famous book called, "The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire". Gibbon was not a Christian, but he was a very able historian and he took a wide view and sweep of the history of the human race. He was an expert, particularly, on the Roman Empire. Do you know what he said history was? This is Gibbon's - not mine, not a Christian's - this is Gibbon's verdict on the history of mankind, the history of civilisation! He said, "History is little more than the register of the crimes, follies, and misfortunes of mankind." That is it! It is a register of the crimes - follies - and misfortunes of mankind!

Is it not true? Come along, let us face the facts! One of the greatest thinkers in Russia in the last century, and they produced some mighty thinkers, was a man called Alexander Ivanovich Herzen. Do you know what he said about history? This is his description of history. He said, "History is the autobiography of a madman." That is history! It is the autobiography of a madman! He said, "The world is mad!"

But come along. Let us come right up to date. I read not so long ago a description of history and of the story of mankind and civilisation by a modern writer, who again is actually opposed to Christianity. Do you know how he described it? He said, "That the state of the world today is nothing but organised insanity." ORGANISED INSANITY! Oh yes, it is very highly organised. But it is insanity! Is it not it insanity to be building these bombs instead of building hospitals? Is it not insanity to be fighting one another and seeing the country go down instead of working together? It is insanity. But it is highly organised, is it not? And that is the man's description, "It is organised insanity."

But let me give you a final quotation. And I turn to this very deliberately. I am going to quote from a man called Marquesa. Some of you may remember that about ten years ago, and a little over, there was a student revolt in America, in Germany and in France. It looked as if we were going to have a revolution. The man who was really behind this was this man Herbert Marquesa. He was the man to whom the students turned. They had long since turned their backs, of course, on Christianity, that was foolish, that was folklore, that was something out of date to be laughed at. They turned to this man Marquesa.

They read his books and they followed his readings, and that attempted revolution by the students was based on the writings of Marquesa. But you know, this is what he wrote. He said, "What precisely has gone wrong with Western Civilisation? It is that at the very height of its 'technological progress', we see the negation of 'human progress', dehumanisation, brutalisation, revival of torture as a normal means of interrogation, the destructive development of nuclear energy, the poisoning of the biosphere and so on." And he ends with the question, "HOW HAS IT HAPPENED?"

What is the matter? Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? Marquesa was anti-Christian and yet he looks at modern civilisation and he says, "What is gone wrong?" Here is Western civilisation at the height its technological progress, but it is the reverse. It is the negation of human progress. We have become dehumanised. We are uncivilised. There is all this torture, there is this poisoning of the biosphere! What has gone wrong? How has this happened?

Well now then my friends, there you are you see. The modern world is back in the condition that prevailed nearly three thousand years ago! David asks this question, 'Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing?' Marquesa asks, "What has happened, what has gone wrong?" That is the world in which you are living! Now then! That is a fact which is incontrovertible, that is the description of the state of affairs.

But wait a minute! We come now to the next and very important question. "Why is this?" I have only been describing it, and I have read to you these quotations from these great men who describe it and simply ask "Why is it? And they cannot answer the question. They have no answer. I defy you to produce an answer from any one of them! Make notes the next time you listen to the 'clever men' on the television in their discussions, and you will never find an answer. They are good at raising problems and analysing the condition, but they cannot tell us why it has happened.

Here is the problem. Why is it in our present day, with all the advantages we have had of education and everything else, why is the world in this critical condition at this hour? AND THERE IS ONLY ONE ANSWER! It is the answer given in this book. These poor men and women who put forward their futile and empty schemes have never really faced the question as to what is the cause of the problem. And there is only ONE answer! The answer that is given in this Psalm. It is man's rebellion against GOD!

There is no other answer! Nothing else explains it. "Man's rebellion against GOD!" And you will notice that the Psalmist tells us that this is true of all kinds. Verse 2. 'The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together.' It is not only Tom, Dick and Harry in the docks in Cardiff or London or wherever who are living this terrible life. The kings and the princes and the philosophers, the scientists, the 'great' men, they are in it. The kings and the rulers, they are all in the same predicament.

The problem of alcoholism is not confined to the 'working' man, it started amongst the aristocracy. Divorce did not start with the 'common' people. It is the aristocrats who started it. The kings, the princes, the rulers, all are involved in the same trouble and in the same predicament. But why is it? And the answer is as I have said, "It is man's rebellion against God!"

'The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against His anointed.' And you see it is something deliberate. We are not merely facing a 'slackness' in mankind. There was a time, two hundred years ago, and more, and even in the last century up to a measure, when men committed sins and did not live a good life, but it was mainly negative and a matter of slackness. It is no longer that! Listen. They set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together - it is deliberate! We are living in an 'Anti-God' age. In an age when men and women have a set purpose, and with pride are turning against God and defying Him and setting themselves deliberately to disobey Him!

Now, then, the question is, "Why do they do this?" The Psalmist tells us. 'They set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against His anointed, saying, 'Let us break their

bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. What does this mean? Well it means this, that mankind in its folly turns against God and rebels against Him because they believe that God is against them! Their view of God is of some tyrant sitting in the heavens keeping us all down, binding us up with bands and bonds and cords.

"Ah!" they say. "Your Ten Commandments and your Sermon on the Mount. That is your Christianity. It is always telling you not to do things. It is always tying you down, standing between you and liberty and freedom, standing between you and what you enjoy and what you like to do and what you have a right to do. It is tying you up with bands and bonds and cords. That is your religion," says the modern man, "And I don't want it!"

That is the attitude towards God. They believe that God is against them, and that His holy laws are inimical to our best interests and to our great advantage.

But that is the whole trouble with the situation and I can prove it to you quite simply. Look at this attitude towards morality, towards law, towards the Ten Commandments in particular. People feel that they are against us, and yet when you come to examine the position you find that God gave these laws, not to hold us down, not to bind us and to bend us, but for our good and for our benefit. Have you ever thought of that? Take the much maligned and criticised Ten Commandments. God tells us to worship Him, not to bow down to images. What is wrong with that? God tells us not to worship idols, not to worship graven images. Is that a scandal? Is that a legalism binding us? Is it wrong to tell a man not to worship a motor car? Is it wrong to tell a man not to worship a footballer or a pop star? Is it wrong to tell a man not to worship his money? That is what the Ten Commandments tells you!

But wait a minute! Come on to the practical details. Exodus 20:13 tells us, 'You shall not kill.' Is that a restraint? Is that a grievous band and bond? Tying you down and standing between you and a glorious life? Is it wrong to ask you not to kill?

Exod 20:15 tells us 'You shall not steal.' Is that some reprehensible prohibition? Telling you just not to steal? Do you want to have liberty to steal?

Exod 20:14 tells us, 'You shall not commit adultery.' What is wrong with that? Why do people hate God for saying: You shall not commit adultery?'

Exod 20:16 tells us, You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour. You must not malign your neighbour's character or say untruths about him.

Exod 20:17 tells us You shall not covet your neighbour's house, you shall not covet your neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is your neighbour's.

Tell me, in the name of God, what is wrong with these ten Commandments? Is it a band and a bond to be told not to do these things? My dear friends, had you ever realised this? If only everybody in the world today kept the Ten Commandments there would be no more drunkenness, no more alcoholism, no more drug addiction, no more war, no more theft, no more robbery. The world would be paradise!

And yet people say that these are bands. "Let us break their bands, let us tear their bonds asunder." "God is against us", they say. But God gave you the Ten Commandments in order to make life possible

- and to make it decent - and to make it good - and the whole tragedy of the world tonight is that it does not keep the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount.

Here is mankind in its enmity against God! That is what it is doing, regarding God as an enemy! The Apostle Paul says in Romans 8:7, 'Because the carnal (the natural) mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.' The world has been trying to get rid of God for a century and laughing at Him and ridiculing Him.

And they do it with confidence! "Let us"....."Let us set ourselves, " they say. "Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us." The fatal confidence of mankind! That it can get rid of God and all His holy laws and commandments. It is madness! As one of the men I have already quoted put it, "It is organised insanity."....."The history of mankind in its rebellion against God is the autobiography of a madman."

But let me turn to that and demonstrate that to you. Let me show you the utter terrible folly of this rebellion against God, and this idea that we can live a happy and a good and a full life without God, and in defiance of His teaching. It is sheer madness. It is lunacy. What is it based on?

It is based says the Psalmist on an ignorance of God. This is the central cause of all our troubles tonight, that we do not know the truth about God. You know our Lord Jesus Christ just before His death, offered up a prayer to His Father. It is recorded in the seventeenth chapter of John's Gospel and we call it The High Priestly Prayer. And at the end of that prayer He said this: 'Oh righteous Father, the world has not known You. But I have known You, and these,' - pointing to the disciples - 'have known that You have sent me.'

Now there He is just before He died on the cross. He said, "The trouble with the world is Father that it does not know You. 'The world has not known You'. And do you know I could prove to you tonight in detail that everyone of our problems is due to the fact that we do not know God. That is why there is no law and order, that is why there is this chaos in every realm and department of life. Every man is out for himself. Every man does that which is right in his own eyes. People say, "I want this, I am going to have it - why shouldn't I?" There is no respect for law because there is no belief in the Supreme Law Giver!

But David says, "GOD IS." This is how he puts it. 'The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers - and all the people - take counsel together, against the LORD, and against His anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us.'

What is the answer? It is found in Psalm 2:4, 'He Who sits in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision.' That is the one you are defying! 'He Who sits in the heavens!' This is not man's world! It is God's world! And God is there! GOD IS! The everlasting Jehovah! Sitting in the heavens above the flux of time. And He looks down on us in our cleverness and in our arrogance - trying to get rid of Him and trying to make a perfect world. 'He Who sits in the heavens shall laugh.'

The Lord looks down on us when we speak like that with unutterable derision. God is God! The everlasting God, Great Jehovah, the I AM, Immortal, Invisible God only Wise. As our hymn puts it, "Wide as the world is Your command." It is vast - it is eternal.

My dear friends we are not dealing with men. The world is as it is because it is defying the Everlasting, Inimitable, Eternal God! And this is amazing - that mankind can be so mad and so foolish as not to believe in Him!

I will show you the ultimate madness of the present race of men. The average man today does not believe in God the Creator any longer. They have long since ceased to believe in that. The Bible starts by saying, in Genesis 1:1, 'In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth' - and the sea and so on. The modern man is too clever to believe in God the Creator. But do you know what he does believe in? He believes in a chemical compound called the DNA molecule. He believes in that!

You go and ask the modern atheist - the man who does not believe in God, and who does not believe that God created the world. Go and ask him how this world came into being. This what he will tell you. He will tell you, "That there was some original undifferentiated protoplasm."

Well you will say, "How has man come out of that. How have all the animals come out of that. Where has poetry come from? Where has love come from? Where has music come from? How has that differentiated matter developed into man with all his greatness and his intellect?" Do know what they will tell you? They will say that, "In the nucleus of every cell there is this chemical molecule called DNA - and this has produced everything, this has determined everything, this guides everything."

Now the DNA molecule has not got a mind, it has not got reason, it has not got understanding, it has not got a will. And yet the modern man who does not believe in God the Creator, the Almighty Creator is prepared to believe in the DNA molecule. If that is not madness, what is? The world is mad, my friends! That learned men should be capable of believing in the determining power of a chemical compound, and yet should reject the Everlasting and Eternal God. But God is God! He Who sits in the heavens shall laugh. He is the Creator of the ends of the earth. He is One who can issue His decrees as David tells us here, And He has Almighty Power.

He does laugh. He can have them in derision. Psalm 2:7 says, 'I will declare the decree' and..... (verse 8) 'Ask of me, and I shall give you the heathen.' God is the God of providence. Read your Old Testament and see the hand of God, guiding the world and all its peoples, picking out a people called The Jews, delivering them when in trouble, giving them conquest of their mighty enemies. The God who sent the flood to destroy that arrogant generation, the God who smashed the tower of Babel when men thought they would build a tower to heaven, as they are still thinking, the God who intervened and sent His Own peoples to captivity in Babylon, the God who destroyed the City of Jerusalem through the Roman power, to punish His Own people, the GOD who is at the back of everything! He is still there, and His power is illimitable.

And if you want a final proof of His power David gives it to us in the verses 5 to 6 of this Psalm. "Then shall He speak to them in His wrath, and vex them in His sore displeasure, saying, "Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion." What is THAT a reference to? That is a reference to the resurrection.

The clever world - the kings and the princes and the rulers conspired against Jesus of Nazareth. They said, "This fellow who says He is the Son of God. Let us get rid of Him." And they joined together - 'they took counsel together' - and they said, "Let us break their bands asunder and cast away their cords from us." So they took Him and they condemned Him and they nailed Him to a tree. They killed Him. They took down His body. They buried it in a grave. They rolled a stone over it and sealed it.

They put soldiers to guard it. They said, "That is the end of Him, we've finished Him!" But the morning of the third day God raised Him from the dead. "Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion."

The resurrection is the final proof of the illimitable power of God. This is the God that the world is defying! But not only His power, but His WRATH. God's wrath is upon sin. "Then shall He speak to them in His wrath, and vex them in His sore displeasure." As certain as we are here tonight, we are under the judgement of God!

But my dear friends I cannot leave you at THAT! If that was all that the Psalmist had to say it would not be worth listening to. If that is all I have got to say, then you have been wasting your time. Let us go on. Here is the final word of the Psalmist. He has described the condition. He has explained to us why it obtains. He has shown us its utter folly, its madness. And then he goes on to show what a terrible tragedy it is.

And this is the real trouble with mankind. For God is not only a God of judgement and a God of wrath, He is a Holy God. "God is light and in Him is no darkness at all." He hates sin! And His wrath is on sin! But it is not only that. They are rising up against not only the Lord, but against His anointed. Against His SON! The One to whom He said, "You are my Son. This day have I begotten you. And this is the amazing thing! And that is why I am here tonight my friends - I am becoming an old man - it is fifty two years since I first preached here. Why have I not retired? I have been ill. Why am I not sitting in the corner at home? Why have I come here again? I have come here for this one reason, that the tragedy of mankind worries me, that men and women do not know what they are doing. They are not only defying the Everlasting God - they are rejecting the love of God! 'The Lord's anointed.'

For this is our message, found in John 3:16. "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." This is the tragedy. That is the tragedy that the men in their prayer in the early church were referring to. That the world rejected Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God! Why did He ever come into the world? He tells us Himself in Luke 19:10. "For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." He said it in Mark 10:45. "For even the Son of man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

And this is the essence of the madness and the tragedy of the world, that God is offering mankind, 'free pardon' 'free forgiveness'. He has laid your sins on His Son. The death of Christ upon the cross of Calvary was not the death of a pacifist! It is the death of the Lamb of God, Who takes away the sin of the world. (John 1:29). God has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. and whatever your sins may have been, however black your life may have been, though you have entered the very jaws of hell, if you but acknowledge it and realise it and ask God for mercy and pardon and forgiveness, He will tell you that He has already given it to you, that He sent His Son into the world to bear your sins in His own body on the tree, that He smote Him instead of you, that He will pardon you - He will forgive you - He will receive you to Himself - He will make you a son - He will adopt you into His family - and He will begin to shower His blessings upon you. THAT IS what this man is saying!

And so he makes his final appeal in Psalm 2.10. "Be wise now therefore, O you kings. Be instructed, you judges of the earth." This is our business, I am here to ask you to be wise my friends. To be instructed. I am not here to entertain you. I am not here to dance before you or to sing to you. There is too much singing today! We need thinking! We need reasoning! We need to be instructed! We need to

be wise! Here is the only message that is asking you to face the facts tonight! There is no other. And these ARE the facts that I have stated before you. And so He urges us to be wise and to be instructed.

And then he tells us the most interesting thing in the last verse, verse 12. "Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and you perish from the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little." Now this to me is a most tremendous thing. "Kiss the Son," He says, "when His wrath is kindled but a little." That is my view of the world tonight. The world tonight is as it is because the wrath of God is kindled but a little.

In our cleverness we have been saying as mankind for a hundred years, "We do not need God. We can make a perfect world without Him. With our education and culture and science and politics we can make a perfect world! We have been telling God this - we do not want Him! We have turned our backs on Him - we are breaking asunder His bands and His bonds. And do you know what is happening? I can tell you! Why have you had the two world wars? Why is there turmoil and raging tonight? Why the breakdown of all our institutions? Here is the answer! God in His wrath is turning to us and saying, "You have said that you can get on without Me - GET ON WITHOUT ME!" He is allowing us to get on without Him. He is withdrawing the restraining influence of His blessed Spirit. He is allowing us to reap the consequences of our own actions.

But THIS is only a little - this is the wrath of God kindled but a little. There is worse to come! Christ said that evil men will wax worse and worse. Christ never promised a perfect world developing as the result of His teaching. He said in Matthew 24:6, "And you shall hear of wars and rumours of wars." If the philosophers and the poets have said that there is going to be an end to war, Christ says that there is going to be trouble and turmoil. It is going to get worse and worse. There will be a great tribulation! UNTIL HE COMES AND GIVES THE ONLY FINAL ANSWER! We are experiencing the wrath but a little!

What of the future? Have you got economic security? Have you got financial security? What is going to happen to this country? What is going to happen to Western Civilisation? What if they let off these bombs? These are the dread possibilities. Is there to be a world famine? Is there to be a world war? Be wise! Consider these things! These are but manifestations of the wrath of God 'BUT A LITTLE'. But a day is coming when this blessed Son of God, this Christ, this Messiah, the Anointed of God, is going to come again into the world riding the clouds of heaven, surrounded by the holy angels. He is coming to Judge the world in Righteousness! And every eye shall see Him!

And according to John in his vision on Patmos, "the kings and the rulers will run and hide themselves under the rocks and under the hills, saying, 'Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him Who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb'." Then the wrath will be poured out on a rebellious humanity, on kings, princes and people who have rebelled against God and cast asunder His holy laws in their arrogance and in their folly. But above all upon those who have refused the gracious offer of God's free pardon and forgiveness by simply acknowledging the sin and believing on The Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed are all they that put their trust in HIM!

My dear friend! Have you been wise? Have you been wise and considered these things? How are you going to live for the rest of your life? You do not know how it is going to be! How are you going to live it? How are you going to die? How are you going to face God? How do you face the unknown future? BE WISE! BE INSTRUCTED! Do what the Psalmist says. "Kiss the Son."

Do you see the picture? You have read, have you not, that when a new Government comes in the various Ministers have to go to Buckingham Palace. There they are given the Seals of Office by the queen. Do you know what they then do? They kneel before her and they kiss her hand. It is called, 'The Kissing of Hands'. They kiss her hands. That is the sign of subjection and she gives them the authority.

That is exactly what David is telling us to do with God. "Kiss the Son." Kneel and bow before Him, kiss His proffered hand, give yourself to Him. See verse 11. "Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling," and you will be blessed, not only while you are left in this world, but you will die a glorious death and you will go on to share the glories of eternity with Father, Son and Holy Spirit, with the spirits of just men made perfect, and withall the holy angels.

Very well that is the message. It is all here, is it not? In words written nearly three thousand years ago. Are you wise? Have you received the instructions? I leave it with you, as you value your eternal destiny and your immortal soul, listen to the appeal of David! **BE WISE!** Kiss the Son! Yield yourself and your life - your future, your everything to the Lord Jesus Christ. For He has said, "I will never leave you, nor forsake you.' (Hebrews 13:5). That is His word and He has never broken it. Be Wise! Trust Him, follow Him, give yourself unreservedly to Him and you will be more than conquerors over everything that can ever come to meet you.

WHO MAY LEAD THE CHURCH?

By Geoff Thomas

1 Timothy 3:1-7 "Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task. Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap."



Some people who find it hard to believe that this chapter in Paul's first letter to Timothy was the most earnestly scrutinised portion of the New Testament about thirty years ago. The reformation of the church was the great theme of that hour. It was linked to the spread of the doctrines of grace and to our concern that God should awaken his sleeping church. Were there areas of our understanding and obedience where we were lacking, and so grieving the Holy Spirit? Then we must deal with them. If the Lord Christ desired his church to be governed in a certain way then we have to comply. If there was to be true New Testament 'renewal' then it had to include this area too, because the Saviour said that the church was his, and he would build it as he saw fit. Most of us believed that the office of elder had become neglected in our congregations.

To reject the New Testament pattern of the two offices of elders and deacons would be either to go on accepting that world of archbishops, diocesan bishops, archdeacons, deans, prebendaries, canons, minor canons, chancellors, curates, vicars-general, parish councils, commissaries, surrogates, proctors, clerks in holy orders and the like with its antiquarian image of Trollop and "Barchester Towers"; or to fall into that other world of worship leaders, song leaders, youth leaders, group leaders, team ministers, counsellors and the like, with its image of 'doing things.' In contrast to all of that Christ's church has a marvellous simplicity, of just two offices, and they are described in this chapter, the elder (or overseer) and the deacon.

I say things hummed thirty years ago about eldership, but perhaps today, while not giving up any of the convictions we learned then, things need to hum about the biblical concept of 'the people of God.' There is an equality between the people and the 'clergy' (I use that word in inverted commas because I am sure that for all of us 'clergy' is an abhorrent word, which Baptists and Presbyterians should never use). But it serves my purpose for the moment. Let me approach the subject like this. All of us in the congregation, in these egalitarian days, are on first name terms. The elders too are 'Geoff', 'Ieuan,' and 'Michael.' We make no attempt to call the elders 'clergy.' We are individuals with names before anything else. We are sinners saved by the grace of God before being men who hold a certain office.

What happened was this, that as the Christian church went into decline way back in the second century, the emphasis within the professing church moved away from the evangelical faith to a participation in the sacraments. People were saved by the sacraments, and these sacraments grew in number and use becoming absolutely central in the activities of the church. As a result, the men who dispensed and administered them (whatever that may mean - it is not a Christian concept) were considered special, and at last were deemed to be priests. It even became a dogma that the sacrament they 'offered' was a

sacrifice, and if people did not believe that they were actually burned alive. So there was this movement away from the office of a pastor-preacher to that of a sacrificing priest, with a special skill that enabled him even to offer again the sacrifice of Christ to God and to the congregation.

In the Bible the phrase 'the people of God' - the laity of God (the word comes from the Greek 'laos') - is a great phrase. It is a privilege to belong to those of whom the covenant-making God says, "I shall be your God and you shall be my people." We elders are first of all laity. You are laity. We are all laity, and it is a glorious privilege to be the people of God. We are not saying that in the Christian church there is no priesthood. There certainly is the costly intercessory priesthood of Christ, and there is also the priesthood of all believers. Every single man and woman who trusts in Christ is a priest. Not just the minister and elders and officers, but the whole church is a laity of priests. They can go into the presence of God and offer themselves and their gifts to Jehovah. Regeneration makes everyone a priest. The new birth brings us into the laity: minister, elders, deacons and congregation are all the people of God. That equality has to be seen to be truly believed by the congregation.

1 The Place of the Eldership.

The apostle turns to this theme of eldership at this juncture because he has been telling Timothy that no woman may exercise the office of ruling and teaching in Christ's church. Here he deals with what people may be eligible. Isn't the subject of as much importance today as it was thirty years ago, or 1900 years ago when Paul writes this letter? The subject is the godly leadership of Christ's church, and is not this one of the greatest blessings God may give a congregation?

The importance of the matter of the leadership of the church is indicated by the prominence it is given in the New Testament. Notice that in our text the subject is introduced by the words, "Here is a trustworthy saying," in other words, this is one of those half a dozen aphorisms quoted by the apostle Paul in the Pastoral Epistles as especially worth remembering. The previous one affirmed no less a theme than that "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (I Tim. 1:15), and in the next breath Paul repeats a current saying of the early church that a man who is setting his heart on being an overseer is desiring a noble task. The godly rule of the church is up there amongst the "trustworthy sayings."

Let's cast our net a little further: when Paul and Barnabas when on their first missionary journey in every single church they helped establish they "appointed elders" (Acts 14:23). They never left a church without a structure of authority. It could not be constituted as a congregation without leadership. The churches who accepted elders were simply recognising that these men were the gifts of the ascended Christ (Eph.4:11). In fact their existence was the result of a Trinitarian donation: Paul tells the Ephesian elders, "the Holy Spirit has made you overseers" (Acts 20:28). When Paul left Titus in Crete is was to "appoint elders in every town" (Tit.1:5), while Timothy is being told in this passage of the qualities which mark out the leaders of the Ephesian congregation. So a New Testament church without the leaders Christ gives is unthinkable, and the leaders he provides are precisely the men described in our passage.

To widen our net a little longer, before returning our focus to this particular passage, we must add that in the New Testament the two titles 'bishop' and 'elder' refer to the same office. We can appeal to an Anglican like John Stott, who would be without bias on this matter, who gives us four reasons to support this. He says, "In New Testament times it is all but certain that 'episkopos' ('overseer', 'bishop') and 'presbyteros' ('presbyter', 'elder') were two titles for the same office. The evidence is compelling.

First, Paul sent for the 'elders' of the Ephesian church, but in addressing them called them 'bishops' (Acts 20: 17&28). Secondly, in the same way Peter appealed to the 'elders' among his readers to serve as 'bishops' of God's flock (I Peter 5:1&2). Thirdly, Paul wrote to the Philippian church 'together with the bishops and deacons' (Phils. 1:1 NIV mg.); he must have omitted to mention the 'elders' - only because they were the 'bishops'. Fourthly, Paul instructed Titus to appoint 'elders,' adding that a 'bishop' [NIV mg.] ... must be blameless' (Tit. 1:5-7) (John Stott, "The Message of Timothy and Titus," IVP, 1996, p.90).

Why then are there two titles for one office? One is Jewish in its origin, that is the word 'presbyter' or 'elder', and such officials were found in every synagogue. The other word 'overseer' is Greek in its origin. Municipal officials in Greek towns, and supervisors of cities had the title 'overseer.' The title 'overseer' denotes the function of the leader. The title 'elder' refers to the dignity of the office - a mature older man. The bishop or overseer reminds us of his function of supervision. That title never belongs to one particular man, it always belongs to a body of elders. The elders have to exercise oversight over the flock of the Lord Jesus Christ. That oversight is in a general sense, but also with a careful eye to detail. An elder is someone in the church who notices things, whose ear is attentive to needs and particular cases, who gives an eye for those who are feeble-minded, and back-slidden, and unable to attend the services. So, we elders are to have a general comprehensive oversight of the church, but with an eye for detail. Individuals with specific problems in the congregation must be known of by the elders. For example, in the last officers' meeting, we went right through the list of members of the congregation for an hour, and discussed the needs of the church, trying to ascertain whether there was anyone slipping through the net of the ministry of the church. It was a helpful exercise.

2. Churches are to be Governed by Elders.

I suppose the most basic fact about the office of the elder is that it is a permanent office. The office of apostle and prophet were foundation offices for the church and so they are no more repeated than a building needs layer after layer after layer of mighty foundations. One foundation for the entire building is all that is needed. There can be no apostolic succession whether an episcopal or a charismatic succession. The relevance of that office was, of course, permanent. It supplies the base and the structure of what we are to believe and how we are to live in every age and generation. The apostolic office, like that of the prophets, was a thoroughly supernatural office. We are still enjoying the ministry of the apostles, not in terms of their personal physical presence or their spoken words but through the Scriptures of the New Testament which they wrote for our sake. God has preserved their writings with this new millennium in mind as much as for the last two millennia. The office of the apostle was temporary and foundational, but the office of the elder was permanent and to be evidenced in every church all through the ages.

The elder was literally to be older man. The word is in fact translated 'old men' in Peter's speech at Pentecost when he quotes Joel speaking about "your old men will dream dreams" (Acts 2:17). There we have the same word 'presbyteros' - 'old man.' That is why Paul says that the elder "must not be a recent convert" (v.6). He is not necessarily to be an aged man, but he must be a mature man, with some experience, whose life people have observed, and who has become venerated for those particular reasons. That is the primary Biblical designation of this office. He rules with the wisdom of the mature man. He restrains with the grace of a man who has experienced common Christian problems. He has thus acquired a fund of common sense, biblical prudence and practical sagacity. That is the fundamental designation and the basic requirements for office: insight into human nature:

understanding of human behaviour: experience of human deviation. Such things, as well as compassion and sympathy, can only come with maturity - this is what an elder must have.

One understands that it is very rare for a preacher to enter the ministry via the eldership. A preacher is taking another route to becoming a herald and a teacher of the World of God. He is on a rapid learning curve, and part of the intense theological training that he gets is to prepare him to work with elders, benefit from their insights, to sift their counsels, and not be intimidated by them. Almost all preachers are elders, but few elders are preachers. In fact the elder whom the preacher will inevitably find most difficulty working with is the failed preacher or the 'wannabe' preacher. The elder will not normally be labouring in the word and teaching. He will not be devoting himself "to preaching and to teaching" as Paul exhorted Timothy (4:13). That will always be the special calling of the preacher. So even when he is a young man in his twenties he will usually be found preaching, called and supported by a congregation. Some of his great sermons may be those he delivered in his first years when he began his ministry. It may even be that that was the time in his entire ministry when he saw most people converted. The congregation freed him from other occupations to give himself to that work. They did not say, "Wait until we appoint you as an elder." He had to be busy preaching: "I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel," he cries with the apostle (I Cor. 9:16).

Where do we find this distinction between being an elder and a preacher? I believe it to be a biblical distinction, part of the development of church government found within the New Testament. In this letter itself one reads, "The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honour, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching" (I Tim.5:17). There are those whose calling is to rule well, and those also whose vocation is preaching and teaching. It is on that distinction that most churches except the Plymouth Brethren see a special office for a pastor-preacher.

Then something must be added about the equality of the preacher and the elders. We are saying that there is a distinction between the functions of the preacher and the elders. But so far as morality, authority, and leadership (as well as the direction of the church is concerned) there is equality between all the elders, of which the minister is just one. This passage of God's word, in all its ethical stringency, must be applied to the preacher as a matter of primary requirement, but also to the elders. If they are not to dominate the flock then every consideration must be paid to the demands of this chapter. That is one reason this section and Titus 1 verse 5 and following are in the New Testament. It is clear from such passages that the elder has no inherent right to have his every command obeyed. The minister too has no authority to expect his every behest fulfilled. If the congregation votes against something that he or the elders would desire then that is not to be elevated to a resignation issue or threatened to be made such. It means they go back to the drawing board and the throne of grace!

The minister chairs members' meetings and does that not mean that he has no vote except a casting vote in the rarity of a deadlock? Does that not mean that he does not vote for the appointing of church officers? The elders and deacons have the same voting rights and numerical value as any church member. Their opinions would be listened to very carefully and it would be rare for their counsels to be rejected, but ultimately there is an equality which every single Christian has.

There is also an equality which every minister has with every other minister. Often older men say that they feel as they did twenty years earlier, and ministers (whom as a class we know the best) frequently make that admission. Yet the behaviour of many older ministers in the presence of younger preachers often speaks to the contrary. They display their rank. They entertain questions, but they seldom ask the younger preachers what are their encouragements, what book of the Bible are they preaching on and

what are they finding helpful and so on. We may not be in an episcopal denomination, and we boast that we have no area superintendents as our overseers, and certainly no holy father - the whole concept is indeed abhorrent to us. Yet do ministers give a recognition and warm affection for every single gospel preacher? Do I show by my genuine interest, that I can learn from a younger man, and I am eagerly sitting at his feet - though I might have been years longer in the ministry than himself?

Elders, bishops (or overseers) and preachers in the New Testament are absolutely identical morally, and in terms of their authority in the congregation. They will be judged by the same royal law outlined here. They are men of the same status and eminence. The standard here is the one God sets for every single Christians. There are no double standards in the kingdom of God. If a man who was an elder in another church should come to live in our town there is no automatic process which elevates him immediately to the eldership in this congregation. He was exactly the leader that that previous church needed, but he may never be appointed an elder in this congregation. Yet his counsels will be sought and respect will be given to him because of the office he held elsewhere. One church calls a man to become its pastor while he is turned down by another church. That is no slight. Churches and their pastors vary like Christian husbands and their wives.

In any human gathering there may be certain men who because of their force of character, strength, intelligence, eloquence, experience, or what have you, may emerge into positions of leadership, and their wisdom is tapped on a national or even an international scale. That may be accidental, and it is not always a good thing, but it seems to be inevitable, and grace will be given to all to handle that too. Be that as it may, there is no such office as the senior elder, or the ruling elder, or the 'pastor at large.' He is either pastor or he is at large. He cannot be both!

3. The Qualifications for the Eldership.

What strikes you immediately in reading this chapter is that Paul tells his readers what elders and deacons are, not what they do. Their own character and godliness is far more important to him than the various tasks they perform. Mary Slessor was the Scottish lass, a factory girl in Dundee, who went out as a missionary to Nigeria. After many years there a young woman joined them from Britain and she quickly felt out of her depth because everyone had a full schedule and were working away busily. This girl was having difficulty adjusting, and she couldn't see anything she could do. She went with her lament to Mary Slessor, "What will I do?" she cried. "Lassie, you're not here to do. You're here to be." Elders are firstly to be the sort of men described here in the New Testament.

Then let me turn this fact in another direction. There is a notable contrast in the description of the men in this chapter with the lives of the false teachers - "hypocritical liars" Paul calls them (I Tim.4:2). If those men are renegade former elders then here is an additional reason why in his description of true elders the apostle emphasises the holy lives they should be living. What struck you first about this deacon or this elder? Many of you would answer that you saw him in church and liked his appearance and manner, that there was something different about him - long before he ever spoke to you

The apostle tells us that it is important for a man to 'set his heart' of being an elder. The office is not something to be dodged as an extra burden, an encroachment upon his 'space', but a duty faithfully discharged to the head of the church who has entrusted him with a gift for this purpose. A man should long to be a preacher. That is one of the marks of a divine call. He gains the most educated understanding that he can of what the work will consist, and then he should know a sustained desire to attain that goal of teaching and leading the church. The line between vice and virtue is always a razor's

edge, and so it is regarding this desire. A man can want to be a leader for many wrong motives. God resists the proud. A man must have a great view of the glory of the Lord, loving Christ's church and longing to see it strong, holy, caring and faithful to the word. A man with that vision must set his heart on being an overseer because appointed to it he could do more to bring about these graces in a congregation. It is a noble task to be in leadership in the kingdom of God. During times of persecution it has a special nobility, but whenever it is, those who serve must always bear in mind that it is God alone they are serving. The aspirant after eldership should be characterised by humble eagerness.

What does characterise the noble task of church overseer? The apostle highlights a number of relationships and exhorts him not to be weak in any of them.

I] The Overseer's Relationship with the Church.

The elder is to 'manage' or 'take care' of the church (v.5). For us there is a great gulf between the manager of an organisation and the caretaker. The latter is a mere janitor, while the manager runs the whole enterprise. He has an allocated space in the car park, while the caretaker has to hustle for a spot like everyone else. But in the Christian church the greatest person is the man who serves. The manager of the church is the one who takes care of the congregation, that is, he pastors them.

Think of that great description of the shepherd in Psalm 23. That man sees that his flock lack for nothing. He leads them to green pastures and still waters, that is, he makes sure that they are fed with the pure milk of the word of God. Then there are times when they get dejected, despondent and begin to wander away. He takes care of them and restores their souls. Then there are desolating experiences that they pass through, even walking through the valley of the shadow of death. They are in different species of anguish or in mental and spiritual agony. At those times he is always there with the members of the flock. The church has a vital ministry of consolation because it always has broken-hearted people. The minister especially takes care of them at those times. He also takes care of the lambs of the flock. "He will gather the lambs in his bosom and lead gently those who are with young". A pastor has a specific deliberate concern for children, that they be taught and encouraged to trust God. When John talks about the Good Shepherd he tells us that he is prepared to give his life for the sheep. What price taking care of the church? What cost managing the congregation? We are being searched as to totality of our own commitment. What am I prepared to endure, and deny myself for in order to fulfil this particular ministry? Will we suffer for the good of a church, to ensure that it is central in our lives? We organise our lives, consecrating our time and talent for the sake of the flock of God.

How then should we live in relationship with the church? Paul's list of necessary qualities is remarkably comprehensive, containing six positive virtues and five negative attitudes.

i] "above reproach": that is where the apostle begins, that he has a blameless reputation, quite irreproachable in his observable conduct. Whatever he may have in terms of management skills and success in his business, or, if he is a preacher, whatever the number of history of redemption insights he may have, and skill in using illustrations, or rhetorical eloquence - if his church has grounds to reproach him in any way for how he lives he is a tinkling bell or a noisy cymbal.

ii] "temperate": he is a sober and clear-headed, characterised by a certain restraint. A man who has a hyena laugh, or who spends hours upon the golf-course, or spends a million on a second home is disqualified from being an elder.

iii] "self-controlled": he is a sensible man, modest in his lifestyle and in the ambitions he creates in his children. After grace the greatest gift a man can have is common sense.

iv] "respectable": that is a poor translation. It suggests that the elder must belong to the bourgeoisie. Men like John the Baptist, John Knox, Billy Bray and W.P.Nicholson could hardly be described as 'respectable' men. The term means working to a consistent Christian pattern. He is an orderly man, though extraordinarily creative and spontaneous in the faith.

v] "hospitable:" one can knock on his door and he has time for you: people are more important to him than books: he is an open and loving man. He seeks out strangers in the congregation and goes up to them and welcomes them. Better to have a reputation for a 'soft touch' than of being a cold fish.

vi] "able to teach:" every elder accepts the Confession of Faith of the church. He must be able to explain it. He must know the truth confessing it as well as defending it. He must be able to convince the modernist, Arminian, Pentecostal, and any gainsayer. It is more important that he be able to resolve the theological and spiritual difficulties of any members of the congregation who come to him with such questions. That is an important part of leadership in the church.

This comprehensive list of great expectations is followed by another list of prohibitions:-

i] "not given to drunkenness": he is not required to be a teetotaler, though there is much that commends that, especially amongst young people. He is required to hate drunkenness as he would hate the AIDS virus. No elder can afford to gain a reputation as a drinker. How could a drinker ever think straight? His faculties of judgment would be blunted. He would be bringing shame upon the temple of the Holy Spirit, which temple is every elder.

ii] "not violent but gentle": he is not a bully - nor his wife! He may never lay a finger on anyone but if his manner is threatening, or if he picks on sections of the congregation from the safety of the pulpit in a quarrelsome way he is guilty of homiletical thuggery. The pulpit is no place for a bully.

iii] "not quarrelsome": the point is important enough for him to return to it. There are some church leaders whose only interest seems to be in the doctrines that men fight over. Let every church leader mortify that attitude. "Be gentle!" cries Paul. He appeals to the Corinthians "by the meekness and gentleness of Christ" (2 Cor.10:1). Though he will often be provoked, like his Master he would never crush bruised reeds or snuff out a smoking flax.

iv] "not a lover of money": students fresh out of seminary are generally free from this sin because they have little money to love. Let them prosper and receive their inheritance and soon all the give-aways of this iniquitous spirit show themselves, the tax dodges, the tours to the holy land, the cultivation of the friendship of the richer members of the congregation, the hinted needs of the Manse or of the family, the abuse of skilled workmen in the congregation. All such and many other attitudes speak of a love of money.

v] "not conceited" (v.6): once a man gains a reputation for being a preacher's preacher then he ceases to attend ministers' conferences simply to listen and learn. He only attends conferences as the invited speaker. "I can teach you," he is saying, "but you have nothing to give to me." The conceited man is always 'busy.' So if any of his flock call him with a query they always feel they must begin with an apology for interrupting his important activities. Where have they learned this from but the leader

himself? Conceit has been the ruin of too many fine Christian preachers of our age, and only a membrane separates it from violence or sensual sin. They have actually believed the effusive thanks of those helped by their sermons.

II] The Overseer's Relationship with his Family. (vv.4&5)

The apostle hints at the importance of this at the beginning of the section when he says that an overseer must be, "the husband of but one wife" (v.2). Then he amplifies that adding, "He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?)" (vv.4-5). The apostle begins by excluding all those guilty of married unfaithfulness. He is promoting the conviction in the congregation that leaders in the church must be men of unquestioned morality, entirely true and faithful to their wives. If he has been converted after a divorce, so that he and his present wife both confess Christ, then he is to remain in the state he was in when Christ saved him. He is not disqualified from Christian work because of marriage in an unconverted state. If a pastor's wife has deserted him and neither he nor his elders could persuade her to return, he is not disqualified from being a blessed gospel minister because of her rejection of Christ. If he remarries, let him be the husband of one wife. If he has been converted in a polygamous marriage, let him walk humbly and quietly and teach his children the Christian view of monogamous marriage. He may have his own personal ministry in the church but he may not become an overseer with a number of wives.

Paul then speaks of an overseer 'managing' a family. It may not be obvious why this theme is introduced. There is a variety of New Testament teaching that compares the people of God to a family. The theme of family relationships is particularly prominent throughout this letter. Paul invokes the analogy of a family in order to enable Timothy better to understand the appropriate order and responsibilities within the Christian church. Dr. Vern Poythress points out that "Paul calls Timothy his 'son', expressing both his affection and the discipling relationship between them (I Timothy 1:2,18). He advises Timothy to treat an older man 'as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters' (I Timothy 5:1-2). If a widow has children or grandchildren, they should look after her (I Timothy 5:4). But if the immediate family is lacking, the larger Christian family should take care of her (I Timothy 5:5, 16). The overseers or elders ought to be respectable family men" (Vern Poythress, "The Church as a Family", Council of Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, P.O.Box 1173, Wheaton, IL 60189).

The principles of good family management apply also to the management of God's church, but the affections that characterise a happy Christian family spill over and are displayed in a congregation. Elders will have wives, children and grandchildren in the congregation. The love which is shown to members of one's own family overflow to the parents and grandparents of one's friends. The dynamics of a gospel congregation are family dynamics. No one can trace the boundary between male leadership in the home and within the church. The two are closely related, each inspiring and feeding upon the other. There is a natural unimposed authority structure within the church which echoes the loving headship of husband, and of parents over children in the home. The mobility of the labour market in our own day along with the few job opportunities have taken so many of our elders' and deacons' children away from our small town and the church fellowship has been impoverished as a result. But wherever a man does not have that affectionate respect and authority from his family, so that his children are loners and strangers to the life of the church - because they are alienated to his God, then such a man cannot take care of God's church (v.5).

III] The Overseer's Relationship with the Watching World. (v.7)

"He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap." These overseers also have social skills; they get on with people; they are interested in people; they are communicative. How tremendously important that is, and yet it is something we commonly depreciate. It is a skill in which some religious people are conspicuously lacking. But the apostle says that it is important that an elder is highly regarded by non-Christians. There is a certain popularity and respect in their places of work - an affability and social ease. They are not like John the Baptist who was stern and forbidding, but who has been set up as a model for religious men, as though we ought to be recluses, living lives apart and isolated from others, quite oblivious to the impression we make upon the world. There are churches all over the land with individuals who know the faith, men discerning in the truth, and yet in some ways they are intimidating people, difficult awkward men, almost cranks, intolerant, forbidding and bigoted. It must not be. That spirit totally disqualifies a man from being an elder because an overseer must have a good reputation with outsiders. Such badly behaved men have fallen into the devil's trap and discredited the gospel.

Of course, there may come times when the world turns on the church, and the kindling wood will be carried to the stake and the instruments of torture will be taken out of the cupboards and the prisons and concentration camps will know an influx of Christians. They are despised and loathed, but that will not be because they have been deficient in humanity and courtesy and good manners, in social graces and kindnesses. They had a good reputation, but they were also faithful to their Master, and they named sin what he first called first. They treaded upon the prejudices of men, exposing and condemning their behaviour, as John the Baptist did, and at that point having a good reputation could not secure them immunity from the barbarians.

Peter exhorts his readers that if men are ill-treating the church then let Christians be sure that it is not because they are being boorish or discourteous or crude or unthinking and unfeeling (I Peter 3:17-20). Let us make sure that an overseer is being persecuted because of righteousness' sake. The writer to the Hebrews puts it like this; "Make every effort to live in peace with all men, and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord" (Hebs.12:14). In other words, be on the best possible terms with your fellow men with this limiting condition - "don't neglect holiness." Do not follow peace beyond the interests of holiness. Do not cultivate the favour of the outsider beyond the point where it compromises you in the estimation of God.

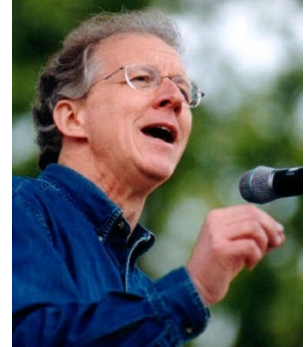
To conclude, these are the basic qualifications God requires for those who would lead his church. So very often it is appointment to the office, and involvement in the work, that matures a man beyond his years and our expectations. Personal difficulty, struggle, loss and sorrow all have their place in preparing a man for gospel leadership. Our frequent lament is that there are not the leaders in the next generation to take our place. Every generation has said the same. One old Scottish minister was taking part in the ordination of elders, and as he looked at the group of men on whom he was about to lay his hands he clearly disdained the lot of them. He said outrageously, "Solomon built the Temple with gold and precious stones, but we are building today with the sods of clay and earth God has given us." Yes, we must build with the provisions that God donates to us now. There is nothing else. Latimer, Bunyan, Whitefield, Spurgeon and Lloyd-Jones no longer walk the lanes of 'England's green and pleasant land.' But we who are called by God to lead his church must seek with all our strength to be the kind of men God would have us be. We owe it to the church and we owe it to him. Then he may entrust greater blessings to us.

The Effect of Hypocrisy: Dishonouring God (Part I)

By John Piper on February 7, 1999

Romans 2:17-24

But if you bear the name "Jew" and rely upon the Law and boast in God, 18 and know His will and approve the things that are essential, being instructed out of the Law, 19 and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, 20 a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of the immature, having in the Law the embodiment of knowledge and of the truth, 21 you, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that one shall not steal, do you steal? 22 You who say that one should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? 23 You who boast in the Law, through your breaking the Law, do you dishonor God? 24 For "THE NAME OF GOD IS BLASPHEMED AMONG THE GENTILES BECAUSE OF YOU," just as it is written.



Warning Against Anti-Semitism

I want to begin this morning with a caution. Anti-Semitism has been a great sin in the world, acted out by Christians and non-Christians throughout the centuries. By this I mean that there has been terrible mistreatment of Jewish people for no reason other than their Jewishness. Just one horrible glimpse from 1919, during the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia:

There were bands of Ukrainian bandits. The most fearsome was under the command of an anarchist and anti-Semite called Makhno. Makhno's men delighted in "drying the herrings," as they called the process of hanging Jews. They would suspend several between posts on a loose rope; as the rope tightened the victims tried to cling on to each other in their death-agonies, the Makhnovtsi sitting around laughing, drinking, and betting on who would survive the longest. (D. M. Thomas, *Alexander Solzhenitsyn: A Century in His Life* [New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998] p. 31)

And in Christian England, the Jews were expelled from the island in 1290 and not allowed to enter England again for 365 years, until Oliver Cromwell gave freedom of religion to the Puritans and other non-conformists in 1655. The story of anti-Semitism is a terrible story and I mention it as a warning.

It is true that God reigns over such terrible things, and even uses them at times to bring about his own judgments (as the prophets make very clear, Deuteronomy 28:20-68; Jeremiah 9:16; 24:10; 25:16; Ezekiel 5:17), but never does that make the hatred or the persecution less sinful. Remember the word of Jesus in Matthew 18:7, "It is inevitable that stumbling blocks come; but woe to that man through whom the stumbling block comes!" In other words, even if there are judgments in the world on Jew and Gentile, woe to Christians (or any others) who presume to usurp the Lord's vengeance (Romans 12:19-20).

I mention the danger of anti-Semitism because Paul is now, in this text, continuing his indictment of the Jewish world as sinners. Verse 17: "But if you bear the name 'Jew' . . ." and so on. How easy it would be to turn this passage into an ethnic slur. It is not that. Paul himself was a Jew, all the apostles were Jews, and Jesus was a

Jew. And in Romans 9:3, Paul was ready to be accursed for his unbelieving Jewish kinsmen. In Romans 10:1 he said, "Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation." Paul loved his Jewish kinsmen who were not Christians, and he risked his life over and over for their salvation.

Both Jews and Gentiles Need the Gospel

The point of these verses is not an ethnic slur, but an argument that Jews -along with the entire Gentile world - are sinners like us, and in need of the gospel, in spite of having so many advantages in the Law. Remember where Paul is coming from and where he is going in this book. He is coming from the great gospel statement of Romans 1:16-17, "The gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith." In other words, the righteousness that God demands from us - but that we do not have and cannot produce in our depravity - he now makes available to us through faith in Christ (see Romans 3:21-24).

Then in Romans 1:18, Paul begins the explanation why this gospel is so desperately needed by both Jew and non-Jew. First he treats the morally corrupt world of the Gentiles in Romans 1:19-32; and then he treats the more moral world of people with higher standards to show that they too are sinners, and Jews are among those with the highest standards of all in the ancient pagan world. So he must show that even they are in need of the gospel of Christ for salvation. He is aiming toward Romans 3:9, "What then? Are we [Jews] better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin."

So the point here is not to isolate the Jews as uniquely defective. The point is that even their higher standards of morality - even their possession of God's Law - does not exclude them from the need to hear and believe the gospel of Christ. They are under the power of sin, just as the rest of the world is. Paul aims to show that all of us - us, not just them - are sinners and in need of salvation that comes through the gospel of Christ alone. This is an act of love toward Jews and Gentiles, even when it is interpreted as arrogant or demeaning.

"Do You Dishonor God?"

What, then, is the specific point of today's text, Romans 2:17-24? The main point is found in verse 23: "You who boast in the Law, through your breaking the Law, do you dishonor God?" The answer to that question is, Yes. We know this because verse 24 assumes a "yes" answer. Paul puts it in a question to help his readers be honest with themselves: You ask and answer this question. You search your own heart. Is this not so?

So verse 23 really means: "You who boast in the Law, through your breaking the Law, you do dishonor God." The main point of this passage is that the Jewish people, along with all the world, dishonor God. I say, "with all the world," because of what we saw back in Romans 1:21 - that all the Gentile world was guilty of the same thing: "For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks."

Jewish people and Gentile God-fearers might have heard that and said, "That's right, those godless, irreligious pagans dishonor God. But Paul has been at pains now, since Romans 2:1, to say, "It isn't any better among the people with high moral standards, even the Jews. They, too, dishonor God.

So the great issue in these chapters is the honor - or the glory - of God. This is crucial to see. If we want to think Biblically - think the way the apostles thought and the way God thinks, we do not merely talk about everybody being a sinner; we get more specific than that and ask, "What is sin?" What is at the heart of our corruption and

our depravity as human beings? What is wrong with us? Why is there so much evil in the world and what is the essence of this?

The Essence of Evil - Dishonoring God

Given what we have seen in Romans 1:21 (pagans dishonor God) and Romans 2:23 (Jews dishonor God), we get the message that the essence of evil is dishonoring God. Evil is the feeling and thinking and acting that treats God as less than infinitely valuable and satisfying. So when we get to Romans 3:23 and Paul gives his own definition of sin, this is what he says: "There is no distinction, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." The essence of sin is falling short of the glory of God, that is, not treating the glory of God for what it really is - the most valuable reality and the most satisfying treasure in the universe.

This is why we all need to be saved. This is why we need a gift of righteousness that is not our own. We have fallen short of God's glory. Or as Romans 1:21 says, we have "not glorified him or thanked him as God." Or as Romans 2:23 says, "Through your breaking the Law, you dishonor God."

O how we need to hear this today, because almost all the forces around us urge us to think of sin - if at all - as an offense against man, not God. Evil is when man is hurt, not when God is dishonored. Evil is when I am abused, not when God is dishonored. Evil is when I am threatened, not when God is dishonored. We need to hear Paul's unrelenting witness to the God-centered understanding of sin and righteousness. Only this will prepare us to understand and receive the gospel of the gift of God's righteousness. And that is Paul's goal in these chapters - to prepare Jew and Gentile to understand and receive the Gospel.

Now we ask, how was God dishonored among the Jewish people? Next week we will answer that question from verses 17-22. We will ask, How can Paul really claim that the Jewish people were thieves and adulterers and temple-plunderers, when this was not their main reputation? We will come back to that.

Ruining God's Reputation

But today we ask: How was God dishonored according to Romans 2:24? Here Paul quotes an Old Testament prophet to explain and support his statement in verse 23 that the Jews "dishonor God." He says, "You who boast in the Law, through your breaking the Law, do you dishonor God? (24) For [and here he quotes Isaiah 52:5] 'THE NAME OF GOD IS BLASPHEMED AMONG THE GENTILES BECAUSE OF YOU,' just as it is written." In other words, the dishonor Paul has in mind is that the reputation of God among the nations is contaminated. The nations look at God's people and think little of their God. The quote from Isaiah referred to the derision that the nations gave Israel when Israel went into captivity. We know it was Israel's sin that brought the captivity on them. So in their breaking the law, as verse 23 says, they dishonored God. They brought contempt on the name of God.

This was exactly the opposite of why God had chosen Israel. "'I made the whole household of Israel . . . cling to Me,' declares the LORD, 'that they might be for Me a people, for renown, for praise and for glory.'" They were created (Isaiah 43:7) and chosen for the honor of God - to display his worth and value and beauty and greatness and trustworthiness and all-satisfying excellence. But instead, they lived as if their God were worthless and the world was valuable instead. And God handed them over to their enemies. The result was that God was ridiculed and his reputation was belittled.

The point of all this is that sin is "falling short of the glory of God" (3:23), and that Jews, as well as Gentiles, are under the power of sin (3:9). Both of them - all of us - dishonor God. That is our situation. That is our danger and liability. That is our curse and our guilt and our bondage. We don't love the glory of God. Or, as Romans 1:23 says, we "exchange the glory of the incorruptible God for images."

The Good News

The Gospel is the good news that God has sent his Son, Jesus, into the world to set this condition right - in three ways. 1) Jesus came to vindicate the worth of God's glory by living for it with all his might (John 17:4) and by dying to show that it is worth the greatest possible sacrifice (John 12:27-28; Romans 3:25-26). 2) Jesus came to rescue us from the wrath of God against all that dishonors his glory. He did this by dying in our place and by becoming for us a righteousness that we could never achieve on our own (Romans 3:24; Philippians 3:9; 2 Corinthians 5:21) - the righteousness that we have in union with Christ by trusting him (Romans 3:21). 3) Jesus came to change us into the kind of people who value the glory of God above all things and who live to show his worth (Matthew 5:16; 1 Corinthians 10:31; 1 Peter 4:11).

For example, turn with me to Romans 15:8-9. Why did Christ come? Why is there a Christian Gospel? Why a book of Romans? Why a Bethlehem Baptist Church? Why a saving of your soul? Here's Paul's answer, and it is in direct response to the problem of God's dishonor in the world and in our lives: "I say that Christ has become a servant to the circumcision [=the Jews] on behalf of the truth of God to confirm the promises given to the fathers, and for the Gentiles to glorify God for His mercy."

So he mentions a purpose of Christ's coming in relation to the Jews and a purpose for Christ's coming in relation to the Gentiles. For the Jews it is to confirm God's trustworthiness. To vindicate his truthfulness. In other words, to confirm and restore God's honor and integrity. And for the Gentiles, verse 9 says, Christ came so that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. In other words, Christ came to reestablish God's honor - God's glory - for Jews and Gentiles, that is, to repair what Romans 1:19-3:20 says was ruined.

All Have Fallen Short

That is where we are this morning. No one in this room loves the glory of God the way he should. We have all fallen short. We have dishonored God. We have exchanged his glory for images. He is not cherished and treasured and admired and loved with a fraction of the fervor that he deserves. So we have fallen short. We are under the power of sin. And we are guilty before God.

Our only hope is that Christ came to change that. To vindicate the God we have belittled. To clothe us with a righteousness that we cannot provide on our own. And to change us into the kind of people who delight in the glory of God and the honor of God above all things.

So I want us to end with a time of prayer that God would come and save us from the unbelief that makes other things look more attractive than God.

The Effect of Hypocrisy: Dishonouring God (Part II)

By John Piper on February 14, 1999

Romans 2:17-24

But if you bear the name "Jew" and rely upon the Law and boast in God, 18 and know His will and approve the things that are essential, being instructed out of the Law, 19 and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, 20 a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of the immature, having in the Law the embodiment of knowledge and of the truth, 21 you, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that one shall not steal, do you steal? 22 You who say that one should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? 23 You who boast in the Law, through your breaking the Law, do you dishonor God? 24 For "THE NAME OF GOD IS BLASPHEMED AMONG THE GENTILES BECAUSE OF YOU," just as it is written.



Why Dwell on Sinfulness?

It may seem strange to us that Paul would devote several chapters to demonstrating the sinfulness of all people. We might think that he should get to the good news and camp there and help people see the good news as really good. That would feel more positive than lingering as long as he does over the sinfulness of Gentiles and Jews - that is, all of us.

But there are probably some very profound reasons for this lingering over the sinfulness of Gentiles and Jews. I think of two at least. One is that the gospel of justification by grace alone through faith alone simply does not land on us as overwhelmingly good news until we have some deeper sense of our sinfulness and hopelessness before God. The other reason Paul may draw out his demonstration of our sinfulness is that we are so resistant to seeing it and feeling it.

I think we can sense this behind today's text. Let me illustrate the point from an article I just read this week about the careless intermingling of a therapeutic worldview with a Biblical worldview. One difference between these worldviews is that one assumes that our problems should be framed mainly in terms of mental health and therapeutic treatment, while the other assumes that our problems should be framed mainly in terms of sin and righteousness and redemption through faith in Christ and his Word. The name of the article is "Faith and Therapy" and it is by William Kilpatrick, a professor in the Education Department at Boston College.

He wrote:

One of the most destructive consequences of carelessly mixing therapy with faith is a diminished sense of sin. The best evidence that this has already happened in the Catholic Church is the tremendous drop-off in the practice of confession of the last thirty years. When we couple this with the nearly 100 percent communion turnout in most parishes, we have to conclude that most parishioners don't have a strong consciousness of sin. They seem to have been so schooled in the gospel of self-acceptance that they can't think of any sins they need to confess.

A colleague at Boston College told me a story that reinforces the point. He once asked members of his philosophy class to write an anonymous essay about a personal struggle over right and wrong, good and evil. Most of the students, however, were unable to complete the assignment. "Why?" he asked. "Well," they said - and apparently this was said without irony - "We haven't done anything wrong." We can see a lot of self-esteem here, but little self-awareness - the absence of a sense of sin seems strange when one considers that most of these students have had years of Catholic schooling. (First Things, Feb. 1999, no. 90, p. 23)

Don't jump to the conclusion that this is an isolated Catholic phenomenon. The article documents the kinds of teaching in both Catholic and Protestant evangelical children's and youth curricula that lead to this kind of thing.

We Are Resistant to Recognizing Our Sin

My point is simply this: one of the reasons Paul dwells on the demonstration of sinfulness in Romans 1-3 is that we are so resistant to seeing it and feeling it. We find ways of avoiding the issue and softening the indictments and escaping the evidences of our sinfulness. And there are endless ways, it seems, to admit to a little bit of it, while not being broken and humbled by it. But brokenness and humility are the gateway to paradise, and indeed they are the road to paradise. In this life, we never outgrow our need for ever-new experiences of brokenness and humility because of our sinfulness.

Now, Paul realizes the resistance and obstacles that he is up against in Romans as he tries to help his readers see the depth and universality of sin. Remember, he is aiming at Romans 3:9, "What then? Are we [Jews] better than they [Gentiles]? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin." This has been his aim in chapters 1 and 2 - to show that both Jews and Gentiles are "under sin." That is, under the dominion of sin, in the grip and power of sin, apart from the gospel of Christ. His aim in all this painful diagnosis of the disease of sin is to make the world aware of its need for the gospel of justification by grace through faith, and the wonderful way it fits our condition and meets our need for forgiveness and righteousness.

In today's text, Paul deals with a form of resistance that is common among those of us who are religious and who believe in the Bible as God's word and who even have responsibilities to preach or teach. The resistance is the assumption that, having so much revelation and so much knowledge and so much truth, our business is to set each other right rather than to repent ourselves. This is a huge danger.

Correcting Others or Repenting?

Let's set it before ourselves the way Paul does. In Romans 2:17-24, he paints a remarkable picture of privileges of the Jewish nation in having the Law of God in their Scriptures. I don't think he is entirely negative here. He is a Jew and counts this a tremendous privilege. You can see this in Romans 3:1-2, "Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the benefit of circumcision? Great in every respect. First of all, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God." This is a great advantage, if the Jews understand these oracles and apply them to their lives and trust in the God they reveal and do them the way God intended. So when we read Romans 2:17ff, we must not think that these are all bad distinctives here.

Notice that after saying that they bear the name "Jew," he gives two lists of four claims that Jewish people were making, and shows after each of these that they are both rooted in the Law. Here's the first list of four: verses 17b-18, (1) "[you] rely upon the Law and (2) boast in God, and (3) know His will and (4) approve the things that

are essential." Then Paul gives the basis of these four claims that they made (verse 18b) - "being instructed out of the Law." In other words, since you are instructed out of the Law, therefore you do these four things: "(1) rely on the Law, (2) boast in God, (3) know his will, and (4) approve the things that are essential." All these are traced back to the privilege of "being instructed in the Law."

These Jews are people of the book. And Paul agrees with that. But there is clearly something wrong. And we, who are Christian people of the book, should be all ears and on the edge of our seats to find out what went wrong, lest we make the same mistake. There is nothing wrong, in themselves, with relying on the trustworthiness of God's law or boasting in God or knowing his will or approving things essential. But evidently there is a way that all that can go wrong. All of that good use of the Law can be a part of what shows a person to be a sinner.

Take the next unit of four claims. Verses 19-20, (1) "[You] are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, (2) a light to those who are in darkness, (3) a corrector of the foolish, (4) a teacher of the immature." Then, again Paul names the basis of these four claims, namely, "having in the Law the embodiment of knowledge and of the truth." In other words, "Because you have in the Law the form or the embodiment of knowledge and truth (which I think Paul would agree with), therefore you claim to be (1) a guide to the blind, (2) a light in the darkness, (3) a corrector the foolish, (4) a teacher of the immature." All this is possible, Paul says, because "you have in the Law the embodiment of knowledge and truth."

Notice the difference between these two groups of four claims. The first group in verses 17-18 simply describes the Jews' own experience with the Law, not how it affects the way they relate to others. They rest in it and boast in God and know his will and recognize excellent things. But in the second group (verses 19-20), the entire focus is on what the Jews do with all this in relation to others: they guide and shine and correct and teach. So the second group goes beyond the first: the first says we have the light; the second says we shine the light.

You Who Teach Others, Don't You Teach Yourselves?

Now that is not bad in itself. If you have light, you ought to shine the light. And the Law was a precious gift from God to Israel and she should have shone the light of it to the nations. If Paul were criticizing that, someone could say, "Well, Paul, you are doing the same thing. You are claiming to know God and have his Word and preach it for others to see and believe." It's not a sinful thing to have the Word of God and be enlightened by the Word of God and teach the Word of God.

So what's the problem? The problem is seen in verse 21a, "You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself?" The "therefore" means, I think, "Now it seems that, given all these amazing advantages you have within the Law of God - it seems that therefore you would teach yourselves. But you don't." His question expects a negative answer. We know that from verses 23 and 24. You have all this revelation and all this light and all this knowledge and all this truth and you don't get it. You teach a form of it to others but you don't go to the heart of it and the root of it. You just don't get what the Law is really about.

I think that's what Paul means in verse 21a: "You, therefore, who teach others, you just don't teach yourselves." And the upshot of this is that the Law itself becomes a means of boasting, not a means of love. Love uses truth

to bless others; but sin uses truth to exalt self. Both use truth, both can use the Bible. But only one is really taught by the truth and taught by the Bible.

Now Paul illustrates this failure to really be taught by the Law. In verses 21b-22, he gives three examples of how their failure to teach themselves expresses itself: "You who preach that one shall not steal, do you steal? You who say that one should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?" Now what would Paul respond if his non-Christian Jewish readers were to say, "No, we don't steal and commit adultery and rob temples. Never have, never will"?

But We Don't Do Those Kinds of Sins, Paul!

I think Paul would - or could - answer at three levels. First, I think he could say, "I know that not every Jewish person does these very acts externally. But some do, even though they have the Law and all the advantages listed. So what I am saying is that merely having the Law and being an instructor of others does not, in itself, spare you from God's judgment if you don't live up to it. Your boast of having the Law and teaching the Law is not enough. There must be a doing of the Law."

Secondly, I think he could say, "Yes, I know that not all Jewish people do these acts externally, but do you do anything like them? These are illustrative of all that the law demands. Do you keep the whole law? Are you without sin? Does not your sin, even if different from these, put you in need of a Savior? Are you not under the power of sin, even though you have the Law and teach others?"

Thirdly, and most importantly, I think Paul could say, "Yes, you really do steal and commit adultery and rob temples." "How so?" you ask. Because you do not understand what the Law most essentially demands, namely, faith. Faith in God for his gracious gift of forgiveness, and a right standing with him, and the enablement to obey his commandments. But instead, you use the law to establish your own righteousness and thus rob God of the most basic thing he demands from you, humble trust in him for his mercy. And what is this but adultery as you give your heart and trust - that belong only to God - to another? And what is this spiritual adultery except the taking of the very idols of the world and making them your own - as if to rob their temples because God himself is not good enough for you. And do not the nations then blaspheme God, if you take their values, but call yourselves the people of God?

Where does this interpretation come from? First, from Romans 9:30-32, "What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, attained righteousness, even the righteousness which is by faith; but Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not arrive at that law. Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as though it were by works." What does this teach? It teaches that Israel, while having the form or embodiment of the Law, and while teaching others, did not teach herself what the Law really meant. They did not get to the heart and essence of the Law. The Law taught faith and a life of faith - deeds done by faith. But Israel did not teach themselves these things. They stayed at the level of external righteousness and did not understand that all the commandments were a call to live by faith in the all-supplying grace of God.

Robbing God

So they robbed God of the one main thing that the Law demanded, faith. The one thing that honors and glorifies God (Romans 4:20), they kept for themselves. They seemed to have knowledge of the Law at one level, but they

did not have knowledge of the Law at the essential level. You see this again in Romans 10:1-3, "Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation. For I testify about them that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge. For not knowing about God's righteousness and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God."

So they knew the Law of righteousness at one level, but not at another. They took the commandments and made them into a means of self-righteousness, instead of seeing them as the description of the life of faith. So they robbed God of the faith and trust that he demands; and in robbing God, they committed adultery by giving their hearts and their faith to another (to themselves or religious ritual or moral striving or the praise of men). And in doing that, they embraced the same idols that the world embraces, and thus plundered the temples of the world.

Now here is the warning and the gospel invitation - mainly for me, but also for you. Let us be careful - O so watchful and careful - all of us lovers of the Bible. Beware lest we rest in the Word and boast in God and know his will and approve what is excellent and guide the blind and correct the foolish and teach the immature, but do not teach ourselves. Beware lest the Word become a formal thing. An external thing.

If it does not break us, if it does not humble us, if it does not lead us to a sweet, childlike trust in free grace - in other words, if it does not lead us to the Gospel of justification by grace, through faith in Christ - then we are not yet taught by the Word of God, and are not fit to teach others. Woe to me and other teachers and preachers - lovers of the Book - who have in the Word of God the embodiment of knowledge and truth, but only know the letter of the Law and not the Spirit - who only know the form of righteousness and not the righteousness that comes by faith.

O that everyone in this room would be taught, even now, by the Spirit, the difference between establishing our own righteousness and receiving the righteousness as a gift through faith in Christ!

I HAVE A DREAM

by Martin Luther King, Jr.

Delivered on the steps at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, DC, on August 28, 1963. The following is the exact text of the spoken speech, transcribed from recordings.

I am happy to join with you today in what will go down in history as the greatest demonstration for freedom in the history of our nation.

Five score years ago, a great American, in whose symbolic shadow we stand today, signed the Emancipation Proclamation. This momentous decree came as a great beacon light of hope to millions of Negro slaves who had been seared in the flames of withering injustice. It came as a joyous daybreak to end the long night of their captivity.



But one hundred years later, the Negro still is not free. One hundred years later, the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination. One hundred years later, the Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity. One hundred years later, the Negro is still languishing in the corners of American society and finds himself an exile in his own land. So we have come here today to dramatize a shameful condition.

In a sense we have come to our nation's capital to cash a check. When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was a promise that all men, yes, black men as well as white men, would be guaranteed the unalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

It is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note insofar as her citizens of color are concerned. Instead of honoring this sacred obligation, America has given the Negro people a bad check, a check which has come back marked "insufficient funds." But we refuse to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt. We refuse to believe that there are insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity of this nation. So we have come to cash this check — a check that will give us upon demand the riches of freedom and the security of justice. We have also come to this hallowed spot to remind America of the fierce urgency of now. This is no time to engage in the luxury of cooling off or to take the tranquilizing drug of gradualism. Now is the time to make real the promises of democracy. Now is the time to rise from the dark and desolate valley of segregation to the sunlit path of racial justice. Now is the time to lift our nation from the quick sands of racial injustice to the solid rock of brotherhood. Now is the time to make justice a reality for all of God's children.

It would be fatal for the nation to overlook the urgency of the moment. This sweltering summer of the Negro's legitimate discontent will not pass until there is an invigorating autumn of freedom and equality. Nineteen sixty-three is not an end, but a beginning. Those who hope that the Negro needed to

blow off steam and will now be content will have a rude awakening if the nation returns to business as usual. There will be neither rest nor tranquility in America until the Negro is granted his citizenship rights. The whirlwinds of revolt will continue to shake the foundations of our nation until the bright day of justice emerges.

But there is something that I must say to my people who stand on the warm threshold which leads into the palace of justice. In the process of gaining our rightful place we must not be guilty of wrongful deeds. Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred.

We must forever conduct our struggle on the high plane of dignity and discipline. We must not allow our creative protest to degenerate into physical violence. Again and again we must rise to the majestic heights of meeting physical force with soul force. The marvelous new militancy which has engulfed the Negro community must not lead us to a distrust of all white people, for many of our white brothers, as evidenced by their presence here today, have come to realize that their destiny is tied up with our destiny. They have come to realize that their freedom is inextricably bound to our freedom. We cannot walk alone.

As we walk, we must make the pledge that we shall always march ahead. We cannot turn back. There are those who are asking the devotees of civil rights, "When will you be satisfied?" We can never be satisfied as long as the Negro is the victim of the unspeakable horrors of police brutality. We can never be satisfied, as long as our bodies, heavy with the fatigue of travel, cannot gain lodging in the motels of the highways and the hotels of the cities. We cannot be satisfied as long as the Negro's basic mobility is from a smaller ghetto to a larger one. We can never be satisfied as long as our children are stripped of their selfhood and robbed of their dignity by signs stating "For Whites Only". We cannot be satisfied as long as a Negro in Mississippi cannot vote and a Negro in New York believes he has nothing for which to vote. No, no, we are not satisfied, and we will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream.

I am not unmindful that some of you have come here out of great trials and tribulations. Some of you have come fresh from narrow jail cells. Some of you have come from areas where your quest for freedom left you battered by the storms of persecution and staggered by the winds of police brutality. You have been the veterans of creative suffering. Continue to work with the faith that unearned suffering is redemptive.

Go back to Mississippi, go back to Alabama, go back to South Carolina, go back to Georgia, go back to Louisiana, go back to the slums and ghettos of our northern cities, knowing that somehow this situation can and will be changed. Let us not wallow in the valley of despair.

I say to you today, my friends, so even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream.

I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal."

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.

I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

I have a dream today.

I have a dream that one day, down in Alabama, with its vicious racists, with its governor having his lips dripping with the words of interposition and nullification; one day right there in Alabama, little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers.

I have a dream today.

I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.

This is our hope. This is the faith that I go back to the South with. With this faith we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. With this faith we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood. With this faith we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day.

This will be the day when all of God's children will be able to sing with a new meaning, "My country, 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing. Land where my fathers died, land of the pilgrim's pride, from every mountainside, let freedom ring."

And if America is to be a great nation this must become true. So let freedom ring from the prodigious hilltops of New Hampshire. Let freedom ring from the mighty mountains of New York. Let freedom ring from the heightening Alleghenies of Pennsylvania!

Let freedom ring from the snowcapped Rockies of Colorado!

Let freedom ring from the curvaceous slopes of California!

But not only that; let freedom ring from Stone Mountain of Georgia!

Let freedom ring from Lookout Mountain of Tennessee!

Let freedom ring from every hill and molehill of Mississippi. From every mountainside, let freedom ring.

And when this happens, when we allow freedom to ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual, "Free at last! free at last! thank God Almighty, we are free at last!"

Homework:

1. **Sermon Outlines:** 4 from the Book of Ephesians, 3 from Old Testament Books.
2. **Develop One Gospel sermon:** The sermons should clearly evidence: passion, persuasion and purpose in calling a sinner to a Saviour.
3. **Gospel Giants Analysis:** Compare and contrast the three Gospel Giants. Your paper is to be entitled, “Gospel Giants: Purpose, Passion, Persuasion, and Power.” What can you glean from the above that will help you preach in a post-modern culture?
Length: Undergraduate 10 pages / Graduate pages 20