

# Backsliding and Restoration

W.T.P. Wolston

## BACKSLIDING IN HEART

### Jeremiah 2; 3; 4

In the fourteenth chapter of Proverbs, I read, "The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways" (Prov. 14: 14). I have very, very much laid on my mind, I trust by the Lord, the subject of backsliding. You do not find the word in the New Testament, but you find the thing. And I suppose we have not, any of us, very far to look to find the thing in our own history.

The scriptures referred to at the head of this chapter give a beautiful unfolding of the deep distress it is to the Lord if His people are not near Him. And this is always true as a principle. Ah, beloved, nothing can satisfy the heart of Jesus but having you and me near Him. And nothing can satisfy our hearts but being near Him, for "the backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways." It does not say the backslider *outwardly*, but the backslider *in heart*.

How wise is God to say, "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life" (Prov. 4: 23). Again, as a man "thinketh *in his heart*, so is he" (Prov. 23: 7). It is not what I do, or what I say with my lips: but what I really am, is what my heart is, what the affections are occupied with. I believe we are in a day when intelligence goes very far ahead of the heart. I shall not be speaking too plainly if I say, the secret of the want of a great deal of spiritual power is pride of heart. Hence would I say before God, let us beware of backsliding in heart. God must have reality.

Now look at these three exceedingly interesting chapters. They show you, that in days gone by, God had a people whom He loved with a very deep love — a love He was continually expressing. They show also the beautiful way in which He seeks to win His people back to Himself, after they had wandered. Nothing could be more touching. Look at the deeptoned affection of God for His people! In the people themselves, too, we may see the picture of what our own hearts are: and the only way, when we have wandered from God, of getting back.

Now God's way of dealing with a backslider is surely not our way. God's way is beautiful and perfect. There had been a great outward revival in the days of Josiah the king (2 Chr. 24-25). But God looked underneath, and He saw that it was only feigned. "Judah hath not turned unto me with her *whole heart*, but resignedly, saith the Lord" (Jer. 3: 10). The revival was not genuine. And therefore Jeremiah is selected to bring this word to them.

"Moreover, the word of the Lord came to me, saying, Go and cry in the ears of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith the Lord, I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown. Israel was holiness unto the Lord, and the first-fruits of his increase: all that devour him shall offend; evil shall come upon them, saith the Lord" (Jer. 2: 1-3). Eight hundred and fifty years had rolled by, since that people, in obedience to God, had turned their back upon Egypt and its flesh-pots, and had come out to the Lord. They were holiness to the Lord then. They were then a separate people for the Lord, the third verse tells us. I love to see the affection of soul, and the energy, and fervency that mark a young convert. Why, you old, cold, critical Christian, do you think your heart is as fresh as

it was the first fortnight you were saved? Oh, you say, I know a great deal more now. Is the simple love of Jesus, the delight in Jesus, the practical holiness, and the desire to be anything, and everything, for Jesus, the same as it was then? You may have forgotten that early thrill of affection, but God has not forgotten. He says I have not forgotten their early love. "I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me." Where? Into a wilderness! When they crossed the Red Sea they were in a desert. What was in the desert? Only two things! What were they? God, the sand and nothing else. There was not a blade of grass, there was no water, and nothing to eat. They had only God and the sand.

I think the second chapter of Jeremiah is very like the second chapter of Revelation. The Lord there says to the Church of Ephesus, "I have against thee, that thou hast *left* thy first love" ([Rev. 2: 4](#)). It is not, "*lost* thy first love." I do not think that is a scriptural thought. It is, "*left* thy first love." Something has come in, says that blessed lover in Revelation 2, that has eclipsed Me, and all your affection for Me, and interest in Me has gone, and you can get on without Me now, but there was a time when you could not Ah, beloved brethren and sisters, where are our souls, as regards Christ? Well, if conscience smites, and the heart is sensible of a bit of declension, it is a grand thing for us to know it.

The great sin of Israel was that decay existed, but they knew it not. God had already years before addressed them by another prophet, Hosea, saying, "Ephraim, he hath mixed himself among the people. Ephraim is a cake not turned. Strangers have devoured his strength and he *knoweth it not*; yea, grey hairs are here and there upon him, *yet he knoweth not*" ([Hosea 7: 8, 9](#)). When a man sees grey hairs in his head, he is conscious that old age in that sense is betting in. Israel, *i.e.*, the ten tribes (called in the prophets Ephraim) had already grievously declined, but knew it not.

Let me implore you, specially my young hearers, to beware of backsliding. The first movement towards it is that something comes in to intercept the enjoyment of the love of Christ, and your heart loses its sweet apprehension of His love and grace. You have forgotten Him, but He has not forgotten you. I think Paul brings the same thought before us when he says, "I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ, but I fear, lest *by any means*, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ" ([2 Cor. 11: 2, 3](#)). It was a great exercise to the beloved apostle that day, lest anything should come in to make Christ less precious to them. To the Thessalonians also he says, "Now we live, if ye *stand fast* in the Lord" ([1 Thess. 3: 8](#)). You turn back, says Paul, and I shall die of grief.

Are these lines in the hand of a backslider? Do I hear you saying, I have got away from the Lord? It is good that you know it. We do not always know it. The Lord knows it, and ever seeks to bring us back. To affect this, does He chide? No. He may have to rebuke and chasten. But that which restores is His Word. I do not forget your devotedness; you may have forgotten it, but it was sweet to Me, says the Lord, so I have never forgotten the hour when you came to Me, and I was everything to you. By a word like this He sought to recover Israel, and, beloved friend, it is the same with the Lord today! He is yesterday, today, and for ever the same!

When Israel emerged from Egypt they had a deep sense of the Lord's care and protection. "Thus saith the Lord, What iniquity have your fathers found in me, that they are gone far from me, and have walked after vanity, and are become vain? Neither said they, Where is the Lord that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, that led us through the wilderness; through a land of deserts, and

of pits; through a land of drought, and of the shadow of death; through a land that no man passed through, and where no man dwelt?" (Jer. 2: 5, 6) What a touching plea for the Lord to bring before His people. Had He altered since that day? Ah no, there was no change on His side. They had lost His presence, and they were insensible of the loss. "Neither said they, Where is the Lord that brought us up out of the land of Egypt?" They had alike forgotten the grace of the Lord, and the kindness of the Lord.

Now comes God's arraignment. "And I brought you into a plentiful country, to eat the fruit thereof, and the goodness thereof: but when ye entered, ye defiled my land, and made mine heritage an abomination" (Jer. 2: 7). He had brought them out of Egypt, and He had brought them into Canaan, but somehow or other they had lost all touch with God, and had fallen into gross idolatry. "The priests said not, *Where* is the Lord? and they that handle the law *knew* me not: the pastors also transgressed against me, and the prophets prophesied by Baal, and walked after things that do not profit" (Jer. 2: 8). Such was the low state in Israel. Priests, pastors, prophets, and people had alike forgotten the Lord. We have here what you may call downright backsliding in heart. There are many believers in such a state today, alas!

If the joy of the love of Christ has passed away, my dear friend, you are very miserable in your soul. Things are in a very, very sad state. Yes, but stop, the Lord wants you to be right, just as you will see He sought to put Israel right.

And now He says, "Wherefore I will yet plead with you, saith the Lord, and with your children's children will I plead. For pass over the isles of Chittim, and see; and send unto Kedar, and consider diligently, and see if there be such a thing. Hath a nation changed their gods, which are yet no gods? but my people have changed their glory for that which doth not profit. Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid, be ye very desolate, saith the Lord. For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water" (Jer. 2: 9-13). This is His plea. Did ever the nations — the heathen — do what My people have done? My people have changed their glory for that which *doth not profit*. You will find all through Scripture that that which *profits* is the great point. If there has been departure from God, has it profited you?

The things of time and sense, the business, the duties, and even the cares of life we have to face, but if they eclipse Christ, is it profitable? Ask your own heart. It will say, No! emphatically. That is a striking word — "He gave them their request, but sent leanness into their soul" (Ps. 106: 15). Do you want the world? You shall have it. God never demands devotedness. The two going to Emmaus had to *constrain* the Lord to come in. Christ will never force His company. They constrained Him to come in, "and he went in to *tarry with them*" (see Luke 24: 13-32). True, the love of Christ constrains us first, but He loves to be valued.

My friend, there is no food for the soul, no peace, no rest away from Christ. You may have got on in the world; you may have secured the things you put out your hands for, but what have you paid for them? What about the Lord, the love of the Lord, the company and fellowship of the Lord, and 'the sense in your soul, I am just in this scene for Him? If you have lost that, there is no profit. Is it not an extraordinary thing that God calls on the heavens to gaze on a backsliding people? (Jer. 2: 12). "They have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters." Ah, what a lovely title, "fountain of *living waters*." What a wonderful thing to be in touch with the fountain of living waters. How God brings Himself before us in all the freshness of His grace, and the living energy of His love. "And hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water" (Jer. 2: 13). *Broken cisterns!* It

does not matter whether they be big or small. The point is if my cistern be not Christ it is a *broken* cistern. Alas! how many saints today are trying to drink at broken cisterns. A broken cistern cannot hold water. Anything short of Christ will fail to satisfy my thirst.

This indictment is followed by a touching query. "Is Israel a servant? Is he a home-born slave? why is he spoiled?" ([Jer. 2: 14](#)). How can this be? "Out of Egypt have I called *my son*," was God's word long before ([Ex. 4: 23](#); [Hosea 11: 1](#)). He had been a slave, and God had set him free. "Why is he spoiled?" Is the one who is free, and in the sense of God's love, is that soul to go back to bondage?

It was so in Israel's case, and trouble and sorrow came on them in retributive judgment. It was all their own doing. God keep us from backsliding. Whoever you are, be set for Christ, I beseech you, and let nothing come in to divert your heart from Him.

Read this second chapter carefully. Follow it out for yourself, and note how God seeks to get at the conscience as well as the heart. "Hast thou not procured this unto thyself, in that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God, when he led thee by the way?" ([ver. 17](#)). All that came upon them was the fruit of their own doing. "Be not deceived: God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting" ([Gal. 6: 7, 8](#)). We cannot sow a handful of seed without the necessary crop which that seed produces coming up. If sorrow and trial come, what is it? It is the fruit of some seed that we have sown, years and years ago, when we were away from the Lord. If I have returned to Him now, I may be wondering what harvest I am reaping, but I must not forget that I have sown the seed.

"What hast thou to do in the way of Egypt, to drink the waters of Sihor? or what hast thou to do in the way of Assyria, to drink the waters of the river?" ([Jer. 2: 18](#)). After their redemption neither Egypt nor Assyria had ought to do with Israel till they got away from God. But their hearts, away from God, yearned for evil association, and received their due reward. Most truly does God say, "Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy *backslidings* shall reprove thee: know therefore, and see, that it is an evil thing and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God, and that my fear is not in thee, saith the Lord God of hosts" ([Jer. 2: 19](#)). Now here is the first time we get the word "backsliding." Then in the [6th, 8th, 11th, 12th, 14th, and 22nd verses of Jeremiah 3](#) you get the expression. It is the characteristic word in the early part of Jeremiah. But then it supposes recovery, and that the heart will be turned back again to God, because that is what the Lord wants. He longs to have us very near Him. And do not our hearts love to be near Him? But if I am away from Him, and His hand is on me, I cannot blame Him. Is the blame His? Ah no, I know Him too well to say that.

If there has been departure of heart from the Lord, "My fear is not in thee" ([Jer. 2: 19](#)) is true of that heart. I think that is the first step of departure; the sense of the fear of the Lord somehow dies out in the soul, and then declension begins.

But it is of no use for a backslider to try and put things right outwardly. That is the next point. External washing will not do. It is the inside — the heart — that must be put right. "For though thou wash thee with nitre, and take thee much soap, yet thine iniquity is marked before me, saith the Lord," ([Jer. 2: 22](#)). Then He turns to show how they were like the wild ass" ([Jer. 2: 24](#)), and, like the "thief found out" ([Jer. 2: 26](#)) they were "ashamed" because they had got into downright idolatry ([Jer. 2: 27](#)). How God knows what our hearts are! If we get never so far away from the

Lord, should trouble and sorrow come, what should we do? The Lord tells us, "In the time of their trouble they will say, Arise, and save us" (Jer. 2: 27). Well may He reply, "But where are thy gods that thou hast made thee? Let them arise, if they can save thee in the time of thy trouble" (Jer. 2: 28). Let the thing that you have been occupied with deliver you. That cannot be.

Nothing could be more touching than God's next query here, "Have I been a wilderness unto Israel?" (Jer. 2: 31). Was I barren? Was there barrenness in my land? Is there barrenness in heavenly things. What a striking expression for God to use to His people? But that is what it is. If the heart loses the sense of grace, it loses its delight in Christ, and "Our soul loatheth this light bread" (Num. 21: 5), is the sure result.

Then He adds, "Can a maid forget her ornaments, or a bride her attire? yet my people have forgotten. me days without number" (Jer. 2: 32). What had He done every day? Watched over and cared for them. Yes, blessed be His name, He had continually thought of them. We have forgotten *Him*, perhaps, but He *has* never forgotten us. We are graven on the very *palms* of His hands, and the one thing He has before His *mind* is to have the backsliders brought back.

In **Jeremiah 3** the Lord takes a different figure, and likens the sin of His people to harlotry. Even although their sin was as deep as that, we read, "Yet return again unto me, saith the Lord" (Jer. 3: 1). So deep was His desire for their restoration.

Following on this the action of Israel and Judah is contrasted. "The Lord said also unto me in the days of Josiah the king, Hast thou seen that which backsliding Israel hath done? she is gone up upon every high mountain, and under every green tree, and there hath played the harlot. And I said, after she had done all these things, Turn thou unto me: but she returned not. And her treacherous sister Judah saw it. And I saw, when for all the causes whereby backsliding Israel committed adultery, I had put her away and given her a bill of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah feared not, but went and played the harlot also. And it came to pass, through the lightness of her whoredom, that she defiled the land, and committed adultery with stones and with stocks. And yet for all this her treacherous sister Judah hath not turned unto me with her whole heart, but *feignedly*, saith the Lord" (Jer. 3: 6-10). God would rather have reality even though our souls be in distance, than unreality, and professed nearness, when we are not in it. There was *open* backsliding and rebellion on the part of the ten tribes. But what did Judah do? "Judah feared not" (Jer. 3: 8). "Judah hath not turned unto me with her whole heart, but *feignedly*, saith the Lord" (Jer. 3: 10). We get a great lesson there, beloved brethren. The Lord will not have anything but what is real. In King Josiah's day there had been a revival, as we have seen. You would think that they had really turned to the Lord, but it was simply the effect of Josiah's influence. It was only feigned. The Lord help us to avoid what He comments on here.

Now observe how beautifully He labours with these backsliding ten tribes to bring them back. "And the Lord said unto me, the backsliding Israel hath justified herself more than treacherous Judah. Go and proclaim these words toward the north, and say, return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the Lord, and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you: for I am merciful, saith the Lord, and I will not keep anger for ever. Only acknowledge thine iniquity, that thou hast transgressed against the Lord thy God, and hast scattered thy ways to the strangers under every green tree, and ye have not obeyed my voice, saith the Lord. Turn, O backsliding children, saith the Lord, for I am married unto you: and I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion: and I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding" (Jer. 3: 11-15). Backslider! He then called them, and bid them come back.

Now He calls you back. You might ask, how can I get back? You say, I feel God has spoken to my soul through His Word, I am drinking at broken cisterns, how am I to get back? Listen. "Only acknowledge thine iniquity" (Jer. 3: 13). There is only one way back, and what is it? Confession. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1: 9). How touchingly tender is the call. "Turn, O backsliding children, saith the Lord, for I am married unto you" (Jer. 3: 14). There was no break of relationship on God's part. See, too, how He encourages the heart in Jer. 3: 15. It is really lovely, beloved, the way in which the Lord seeks to recover and link the soul with Himself.

From the sixteenth verse to the twentieth, we are shown how God will, by-and-by, recover and restore Israel. Jer. 3: 21 shows the moral state that precedes restoration, *i.e.*, weeping and prayer. Then comes another loving call. "Return, ye *backsliding* children, and I will heal your *backslidings*." Who could withstand such an appeal? Many a time a poor soul says, how can I get back, what must I go through to get back? Look at this verse, "Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings," and note the result of the call, "Behold, we *come unto thee*; for thou art the Lord our God" (Jer. 3: 22). Behold, we come. It is done. The soul that heeds the call to return says, "We come to thee; thou art the Lord our God."

If that blessed response to the call does not take place, do you know what will follow? Things will get worse. If we do not heed the recalling word, we shall reach the sixth verse of Jeremiah 5. I think God graphically describes to us, in this book, what is bound to follow if backsliding is not checked. "Their *transgressions* are many, and their backslidings are increased" (Jer. 5: 6). How solemn!

Nor indeed is this all, for unjudged sin leads to graver evil. Pass on to the eighth chapter, where the Lord inquires, "Why then is this people of Jerusalem slidden back by a *perpetual backsliding*? they hold fast deceit, they refuse to return" (Jer. 8: 5). If I do not heed His word and return, I shall get into this awful condition of perpetual backsliding. Well may we heed the word, "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God . . . lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin" (Heb. 3: 12, 13).

There is only one way of deliverance from this terrible downgrade path of the backslider. It is by honest acknowledgement of the state, and by simply looking to God for deliverance. It is thus voiced: "O Lord, though our iniquities testify against us, do thou it for thy name's sake: for our backslidings are many; we have sinned against thee" (Jer. 14: 7). I do not think that the soul is actually restored there, but there is what you may call the exercise that leads to restoration.

I will now ask you to read the closing chapter of Hosea, because I think God gives us there, in other words, the way the soul gets back to the Lord. "O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity" (Hosea 14: 1). There is God's call again, "Take with you words, and turn to the Lord: say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously: so will we render the calves of our lips" (Hosea 14: 2). That is the returning soul's response and language, coupled with the sense of His grace. "Asshur shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses; neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, Ye are our gods: for in thee the fatherless findeth mercy" (Hosea 14: 3). The two things that always lead the soul back to God are the sense of His grace and His mercy. And now, what is God's answer? "*I will heal their backsliding*, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him" (Hosea 14: 4). What could be more blessed than this? What could more encourage a returning back slider? It is love's victory over the lack of it.

Then follow the effects of recovery and restoration. I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon. His branches shall spread, and his beauty shall be as the olive tree, and his smell as Lebanon. They that dwell under his shadow shall return; they shall revive as the corn, and grow as the vine: the scent thereof shall be as the wine of Lebanon. Ephraim shall say, what have I to do any more with idols? I have heard him, and observed him: I am like a green fir tree. From me is thy fruit found" ([Hosea 14: 5-8](#)). Do not suppose, my dear friend, that if there has been distance and departure from the Lord, that it is all over with you, and that you cannot be restored. Oh, no, there are brighter and better days in store for you, if you return. I believe God brings us back to something far better than that we lost by slipping away. We get into deeper and fuller communion with the Lord. I think His grace brings us into the enjoyment of a deeper, fuller, and more blessed place in His affections than we ever had been in before. "They shall revive as the corn, and grow as the vine: the scent thereof shall be as the wine of Lebanon," are wonderful figures of the brightness and freshness of a restored soul. When restored, that soul says, like Ephraim, "What have I to do any more with idols?" To this God rejoins, "I have heard him and observed him." Then says Ephraim "I am like a green fir tree." A fir tree is one of the finest things you ever saw. It is green all the year round. It is the soul in the sense that it is in all the favour of God, and the love of the Lord is prized beyond everything.

But God says, "From me is thy fruit found." You see that in [Hosea 14: 8](#) you have a dialogue. There is repentance and a conscious sense of blessing all flowing from God ([Hosea 14: 9](#)).

Well may Hosea close his wondrous book in these words: "Who is wise, and he shall understand these things? prudent, and he shall know them? for the ways of the Lord are right, and the just shall walk in them: but the transgressors shall fall therein" ([ver. 9](#)). God give us each to heed His word, and note how tender are His ways, particularly with backsliders. Friend, if you are one, be as hard as you like on yourself, but remember God's heart is full of the tenderest love towards you, and only seeks your restoration to Himself.

Come, Thou fount of every blessing,  
Tune my heart to sing Thy grace;  
Streams of mercy, never ceasing,  
Call for ceaseless songs of praise.  
Jesus sought me when a stranger,  
Wandering from the fold of God;  
He, to rescue me from danger,  
Interposed His precious blood.  
Oh, to grace how great a debtor  
Daily I'm constrained to be!

Let that grace, Lord, like a fetter,  
Bind my wandering heart to Thee.  
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it  
Prone to leave the God I love  
Yet Thou, Lord, hast deigned to seal it,  
With Thy Spirit from above.  
Rescued thus from sin and danger,  
Purchased by the Saviour's blood,  
May I walk on earth a stranger,  
As a son and heir of God.

## **BACKSLIDING IN WAYS**

### **Luke 22: 31-62**

We do not find the word "backsliding" in the New Testament, but we find the thing. Now, it is a certainty that no backslider is happy. What the Lord wants above all things for our hearts is that we should be profoundly happy. If you are not happy, you are not right. There is a screw loose somewhere, and the sooner that screw is tightened up the better. You know what that screw is, and you also know the danger of continuing in a wrong state. It gets worse and worse if not rectified, hence the importance to a backslider's soul of learning the way of restoration.

I do not know a heart that does not say, when it hears about backsliding, "God keep me from it." It is pretty easy to get away a very long distance without knowing it. Declension of heart does not come all of a sudden. It came gradually in Samson's history (see Judges 13 - 16). He was a wonderful man, nobody like him in the Old Testament in a certain sense. But look at his history. He was a Nazarite, a separate person for God. There was no feat of strength he could not quite easily perform. What was the secret of it? He was sustained of God, and as long as he was separate, he was kept of God. But by-and-by his affections were drawn away from Jehovah; a woman meets his eye, and she became his wife. Eventually she betrays him. What was his first downward step? You know the story. He lost his separation. He ceased to be a separate person. The thing the devil desires above all things it, to get you to hobnob with the world. He says you must not be too separate. Yes, I know that is exactly what the devil says. He has said it to me, as well as to you. He said it to Peter. But then I think what an old Scotch woman said about Peter was quite right. She said, "He had nae business down among the lackeys." He was warming himself by the world's fire. The same was illustrated in Samson's history. The moment you and I cease to be separate from the world and its ways, we are in for declension of soul. I need not deceive myself. I am in for it as sure as the sun is in the heavens.

This woman whom Samson took tried to get the secret of his strength out of him. She wept for seven days. At length he told her that the secret of his strength was connected with his hair. He was a Nazarite. "And it came to pass, when she pressed him daily with her words, and urged him, so that his soul was vexed unto death, that he told her all his heart, and said unto her, There hath not come a razor upon mine head; for I have been a Nazarite unto God from my mother's womb: if I be shaven, then my strength will go from me, and I shall become weak, and be like any other man. And when Delilah saw that he had told her all his heart, she sent and called for the lords of the Philistines, saying, Come up this once, for he hath showed me all his heart. Then the lords of the Philistines came up unto her, and brought money in their hand. And she made him sleep upon her knees: and she called for a man, and she caused him to shave off the seven locks of his head; and she began to afflict him, and his strength went from him. And she said, The Philistines be upon thee, Samson. And he awoke out of his sleep, and said, I will go out, as at other times before, and shake myself. And he wist not that the Lord was departed from him. But the Philistines took him, and put out his eyes, and brought him down to Gaza, and bound him with fetters of brass; and he did grind in the prison house" (Judges 16: 16-21).

The Philistines sent Delilah money, and what was the next thing? Off came Samson's hair. The first thing he lost was his separation. And the next thing he lost was his strength. And then he lost his liberty. He was really captured that time. Had not they bound him before? Yes, they had bound him with new ropes, but they were like cobwebs to him. He had lost his separation, and



now that his strength was gone he lost his liberty, next he lost his eyes, and finally he lost his life. Lose your separation, and your strength, your liberty, your eyesight, and your life all follow. Samson is the awful figure of a man who went right down from the top to the bottom. He is the picture of a Christian who has got into the world, and been utterly spoiled for the service of Christ. Oh, brethren, God keep us! Samson's history is a very solemn one.

But I come to Peter now. I think it is beautiful to see the way he is recovered. Now the twenty-second chapter of Luke, that I have read, gives you the moment when he fell outwardly. There are four salient points I wish to draw your attention to in Peter's history; his conversion, consecration, fall, and restoration. Have you ever studied Peter's life? I would advise you to do so. You pick out the life of Peter, and put it together. I have written a book myself on his life, and very happy I was when doing it. But I don't ask you to read my book, read God's Book. It is wonderful to see the place that dear man had. He was a big-hearted man. I know he stumbled, but he even walked on water! Oh you say, he sank. I know he did, but he walked before he sank. Now mark, the great point is not that he sank, but that he walked. It was affection for Christ that drew him out of the boat on to the water, but even affection for Christ does not make us safe unless we keep our eye on Christ, which is of the last importance.

We have Peter's conversion recorded in the first chapter of John, when he met Jesus. The Lord changed his name. "And when Jesus beheld him, he said, Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone" (John 1: 42). He was converted then, but not consecrated to Christ. You, too, are converted, and can say, I am a believer, and I know I am saved. Yes, but, beloved, have you really set out to follow Christ? If not, you are very like Peter between the first chapter of John and the fifth chapter of Luke. There the Lord wanted a pulpit, and He took Peter's boat for that purpose. The Lord was the best preacher that ever was, I need not say, and a most practical preacher too, for "he opened his mouth and taught them" (Matt. 5: 2), and the people heard Him. The point is, if you are addressing people, be sure that they hear you. He addressed the people on the shore, and speaking as He was from the boat, they could both see and hear Him.

On that occasion He gave them the lovely story of the sower and the seed. The truth went right down into Peter's heart that day. Oh, it must have been a wonderful scene. See Simon sitting in his boat, and listening to all this wonderful ministry. He belonged to Christ, but up to this point he has never followed Him. And now, when the sermon is over, the Lord, who will be no man's debtor, as it were, says, I am going to pay you for your boat, Peter. His words were, "Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught. And Simon, answering, said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net" (Luke 5: 4, 5). They caught so many fish that the net broke, and they had to get their neighbours to come and help them. "And they came, and filled both the ships, so that they began to sink." Peter had never had such a catch in all his life, and when he saw it, "he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me: for I am a sinful man, O Lord."

What brought up this question of his sin? As he got a revelation to his soul of the glory of the Person of his Master, that He was God as well as Man, I judge he was thoroughly ashamed as he thought what his own pathway in relation to Him had been. Peter learned his lesson that day. The light of God fell on his soul, and, although he says, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord," the moment he comes to land he turns his back upon everything, and follows Jesus. He is consecrated to Him now, and begins to follow the Lord. I have known many a man turn to the

Lord when earthly things had all failed — very likely, the bank had broken, and everything had been swept away. In such circumstances a soul will often say, No\* I think I will devote myself to Him. But when the day was brightest, and his business most successful, Peter left all, and began to follow the Lord. Christ filled his heart, and the glory of His Person eclipsing everything here, he left all, and followed Jesus. Now was there ever a moment in your heart or mine like that? Is there anything as fine in the history of your soul or mine? That is the real question for us.

It is very interesting to see how Peter comes to the front everywhere in the Gospels, just from the affection of his soul to the Lord — affection coupled with energy that often led him astray because of his self-confidence.

But now the close has come. In the chapter I have read — Luke 22 — the Lord has been betrayed, and He knows He is going to die. So when He had gathered His disciples together in the upper room, and had given to them the expression of His love in the breaking of bread, He told them that one of them should betray Him. Peter did not know who it was, and he beckoned to John to ask who it was. And John leaning on the Lord's bosom put the question. You know, beloved friends, it is a great thing to be near Christ. You cannot be too intimate with the Lord. There is nothing He loves so much as to have you near Him. There was not a cloud between John and Jesus, and John put the question, "Lord, who is it?"

After supper was over, "the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not. and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren" (Luke 22: 31, 32). That is a very striking word. I think, beloved, it is a great thing for our souls to bear in mind that the enemy is always on our track.

The way the Lord warns Peter is very striking. He says, "Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat." Observe, it is wheat. Perhaps you may say, I have had a good bit of sifting. Well, there is one thing clear, if you had not been wheat, you would not have been sifted. If you had been mere chaff, the devil would have left you alone. He never worries his own subjects, he keeps them in peace. Saints he always attacks. Sin in a sinner is bad, but sin in a saint is ten times worse, because we sin against Christ and light. Therefore sin is infinitely worse in my life, as a saint, than it was when I was a poor lost sinner. Do not, however, he in despair if Satan does sift you. Self-confidence was the secret of Peter's fall, and usually of all our falls; and it is a great thing, beloved, when the spring of self-confidence in us gets broken up. God allows it to be.

What is the next word? "But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not." That is beautiful. We should pray for God's servants too. Pray for those who are in the forefront of the battle. The devil is ever ready to trip them up. Before Peter was tempted, Jesus had prayed. "I have prayed for thee." Charming words! The Lord's intercession for us is a wonderful thing, and may well cheer our hearts, but, on the other hand, we must be careful, and prayerful also.

In that prayer, commonly called "The Lord's Prayer" — in reality the disciples' prayer — occur the words, "Lead us not into temptation." We should often pray that, I think. When our Lord was in presence of difficulty, He always prayed. You will find Him in prayer on seven separate occasions in the Gospel of Luke. Trace them out, and their occasion. In our chapter He is found in prayer (Luke 22: 41). The hour of His sorrow and rejection had come, and as Messiah He was being cast out. Hence He could say, — "This is your hour, and the power of darkness" (Luke 22: 53). The more need, therefore, for tenacious clinging to God. He was praying for Himself, but first said

to His feeble follower, "I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not; and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren." Faith is very apt to fail, and, no doubt, when Peter woke up, and discovered what he had done, he broke down. But love had prayed for him, and he was kept from remorse and suicide like Judas. The Lord on high is there always in intercession for us. He died to make us clean, and He lives to keep us clean. He does not say we shall not be tempted, but He does say — "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall. There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (1 Cor. 10: 12, 13).

Sometimes one hears this question — If I go to such a place, or such a scene, shall I not be kept? I know I ought not to go, but, if I go, will God keep me? If you go against the warnings of God's Word and your own conscience, you will surely fall. Would not the Lord keep me? No, not a bit of it. Do you think God is going to keep any one who is in a path of disobedience? If Peter had only heeded the word of the Lord he would have escaped the fall.

Now look at Peter's answer, and his fall. Would not you have thought that you would have found Peter trembling? Look at the thirty-third verse. "Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison and to death." What an answer! Beloved, that man had fallen! His fall did not occur when he really denied the Lord. Here is where he fell. He is occupied with his own affection. He did love the Lord, undoubtedly, but instead of being simply occupied with Christ, and clinging to Christ with this sense, Lord, if Thou dost not keep me I shall fall, he was self-confident. The Lord warns, him, and us through him. "And he said, I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me" (Luke 22: 34).

But the history passes on. Let us follow the Lord to the Mount of Olives. We go into the garden, and there is the blessed Lord praying. He says to the disciples, "Pray that ye enter not into temptation." (Luke 22: 40), and again, "Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder" (Matt. 26: 36). When He comes back He finds them sleeping. When they should have been praying, they were sleeping. How much do I pray? How much do you pray? Prayer is the secret of the soul's success. "Watch ye, and pray" (Mark 14: 38), He also says. Here instead of praying they were sleeping. It only shows what the weakness of the flesh is. They see His sorrow, and yet they can sleep. Such hearts as we have! We can sleep in the presence of His glory (see Luke 9: 32), and we can sleep, too, in the presence of His sorrow. "The spirit truly is ready, but the flesh is weak" (Mark 14: 38), is the Lord's tender comment thereon.

The temptation was now come as the multitude, headed by Judas, appeared. "And while he yet spake, behold a multitude, and he that was called Judas, one of the twelve, went before them, and drew near unto Jesus to kiss him. But Jesus said unto him, Judas, betrayest thou the Son of Man with a kiss? When they which were about him saw what would follow, they said unto him, Lord, shall we smite with the sword? And one of them smote the servant of the high priest and cut off his right ear. And Jesus answered and said, Suffer ye thus far. And he touched his ear, and healed him." (Luke 22: 47-51).

They said unto Him, "Lord, shall we smite with the sword?" and without waiting for His reply, one of them smote the servant of the high priest. It was Peter who did it, and that was the very action that detected him. "And Simon Peter stood and warmed himself. They said therefore unto him, Art not thou also one of his disciples? He denied it, and said, I am not. One of the servants of the high priest, being his kinsman whose ear Peter cut off, saith, Did not I see thee in the garden with

him? Peter then denied again: and immediately the cock crew" (John 18: 25-27). When he got into the high priest's hall, the wounded man's relation recognised the man that used the sword. Possibly Peter thought he was very devoted, and that he was doing a fine thing. Ah, beloved brethren what we need is to get the word from the Lord. Mark Jesus' answer here: "Suffer ye thus far. And he touched his ear, and healed him" (Luke 22: 51).

The next thing was they took Him and bound Him. Do you know the last thing the Lord did before they bound Him? He healed that ear. Blessed Lord, the last movement of His hand was to heal the bleeding ear that His poor servant had cut off "Then took they him, and led him, and brought him into the high priest's house. *And Peter followed afar off*" (ver. 54). Poor Peter, when he should have been distrustful, he was self-confident; when he should have been praying, he was sleeping; when he should have been quiet, he was using an unbidden sword; when he should have been separate, he was sitting down at the fire among the worldly; when he should have been near Christ, he was following afar off; and, as a legitimate consequence, when he should have witnessed for his Lord, he denied Him. Poor Peter! How like us too!

Where was John all this time? Another scripture tells us that John went in with Jesus. At first "all the disciples forsook him and fled" (Matt. 26: 56). He is left alone. By-and-by John picks up courage, and comes back. Peter followed afar off. Ah, brethren, are we following the Lord afar off? If so, we shall not be kept. What about John? Nobody challenged him. No. He was very near Christ. The man that follows afar off is bound to be found out and tripped up.

"And when they had kindled a fire in the midst of the hall, and were set down together, *Peter sat down among them*" (Luke 22: 55). Three times over thereafter he denies his Lord, as forewarned by Him, and energetically refuted of Peter. And when he had done it the three times, "the Lord turned, and *looked upon Peter*: and Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And Peter went out and wept bitterly" (Luke 22: 61, 62). How does the Lord recover our hearts? By a look sometimes. He turned and looked on Peter. What kind of a look was it? Was it a look of anger and reproach? Is that the kind of look it was? No, no, I think it was a look of brokenhearted, disappointed love. It said, You do not know Me, but I know and love thee. Nothing has changed My love to thee. That look broke poor Peter's heart, and he "went out, and *wept bitterly*."

I think when Peter found that his Lord was crucified, it must have been a terrible moment in his history. What could sustain that man's heart? I believe Christ's prayer, and Christ's look sustained him. If he had not had the word, "I have prayed for thee," and the look, I believe he would have gone, and followed Judas. Judas went and hanged himself. Remorse puts you into Satan's hands, but repentance leads to real breaking down before God. There never will be recovery without repentance. Peter had the sense that the Lord loved him. He knew that the Lord loved him. Judas never knew that. If he had known the love of Christ, he would not have hanged himself.

Some one may say: "This is very like my life and my history. Years ago I was a bright happy Christian, but somehow I got away from the Lord, slipped into the world, lost my joy and peace, and I have got so down in my soul, that my whole pathway has been a dishonour to Christ." My dear friend, go and weep alone; weep bitterly, and your tears will be dried some day. Oh, if you only get the sense in your soul, He has loved me, and He loves me still, all will come right. God's word to Israel, "I remember thee, and the kindness of thy youth," is equally true of you. Though eight hundred and fifty years of backsliding had rolled by, God had not forgotten the moment

when they loved Him, and He was everything to them (Jer. 2: 2). They had long forgotten it, but He had never forgotten it. Ah, is there a backsliding heart here? My dear friend, do not remain such, but come back to the Lord. Do not lose another hour. Peter had to wait three days for his restoration. It was what the Lord had said to him, and the look of the Lord, that wrought in his heart. He remembered that He had prayed for him, and the last look He gave him was a look of such love and pardon, such infinite grace, that it broke his heart.

You will find that Peter has a private restoration, and a public restoration. The private restoration is referred to in Luke 24: 34, and you get his public restoration in the twenty-first of John. The evidence of his restoration is manifest in the second of Acts. The Lord met him privately. What took place at the meeting nobody knows. The Spirit of God has thrown a veil over it. Shall I tell you why? It would not do you the slightest bit of good to know how the Lord dealt with me when my soul had backslidden, and it would not do me any good to know how he dealt with you. No, no, because the way He deals with you would not suit me. A veil is flung over the scene. But we know this, he was beautifully restored to the Lord. How do we know this? John 21 supplies the answer. His brethren were slower than Peter in reaching the Lord on that occasion. He did not wait till the boat got to the shore; he cast himself into the sea in his hurry to get near the Lord. He says, You can have the fish, let me get to the blessed Lord. I know the man was restored by this action.

But then, of course, the Lord gave him a public restoration. I think, beloved friends, you will never find a saint doing any real good until he is completely rid of self-confidence, and broken down before the Lord, and hence really right with the Lord. He is then in a condition for the Lord to use him. We see Peter restored to the fellowship and company of the apostles in John 21, and then we see him in the second of Acts preaching the Word and mightily used of the Lord. I have said many a time, I believe when the devil saw Peter preaching in the second of Acts, he wished he had left him alone in the high priest's palace. Why? Because the breaking of him was the making of him, and in the first half of the Acts of the Apostles we hear a great deal more about Peter than any other servant. I repeat, the breaking of him was the making of him. He was picked up and restored. Ah yes, there is nothing like grace. Grace saved us as sinners, and grace has kept us as saints. And when we get to glory, what shall we say? It was grace all along the line. And therefore the deeper in our souls there is a sense of the Lord's grace, the more our hearts will rejoice in Him.

## CONFESSION AND CLEANSING

Numbers 19: 1-22.

It is very interesting to see in Scripture, especially a type like this, how God provides for anything that might come in to interfere with the communion of His people with Himself. He loves to have us in His presence, and He loves to have us there happily, that we might be there able to commune with Him. And, if there intervene anything, that puts us out of communion, it is blessed to see the way the Lord comes in to remove the hindrance.

I am going to connect this chapter with that which was before us last viz., Peter's fall. We will see presently how the Lord restores him. But I turn to this scripture because it gives you a figure of that which meets every kind of interception of communion, produced by things other than gross failure or sin.

Genesis is the book of creation. Exodus is the book of redemption. Leviticus is the book of approach to God. And then Numbers presents to you the people passing through the wilderness where things come in to hinder communion. It gives the passage of the people through the wilderness, where they might be defiled, and where the enemy ever beset them.

Our chapter shows how a soul that has, got in any sense defiled is restored. Sin is always the working of the will of the creature. If the will has wrought, sin has come into activity, communion with God is destroyed, and then there is distance. A red heifer was to be taken, and it was to be one in whom there was no blemish, and upon which never came yoke. You have Christ brought before you immediately. The yoke of sin was never on Christ. Alas! we have had the yoke of sin upon us.

The perfection of the sacrifice is the first thing here. "And ye shall give her unto Eleazar the priest, that he may bring her forth without the camp, and one shall slay her before his face" (Num. 19: 3). The red heifer is the type of Christ, who is also the priest, hence he does not slay. Death, however, comes in. The only way I can get back to God, if I have slipped away from Him, is by the application to my soul, in the power of the Holy Ghost, of the wonderful truth of the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. The heifer is slain, and then the priest sprinkles the blood before the tabernacle of the congregation seven times (Num. 19: 4). You are here reminded of the great thought of atonement. First of all, you see, if it be a question of my sins being put away, or access to God, it is always by blood. And then here, where you have the basis of restoration of a saint, who has gone aside from the Lord, the striking thing you meet with again is the blood.

But here, you must observe, the blood is not *for you*. There can never be any re-application of the blood of Christ. The blood here is sprinkled, not on the defiled person, but before the tabernacle of the congregation seven times. That is, it is to be *under the eye of God*. He ever remembers the value of the atoning death of His beloved Son.

Now, when you and I have taken our own way, and the conscience has got defiled, what is the way back? Oh, you say, I will go back as a poor sinner, and be again washed in the blood of Christ. You will never get back that way, for it is not God's way, and not seeing this has kept many an erring child a long time out of restoring grace. How must you come back? You will have to come back as a saint, as a naughty child who has been doing his own will, and you will have to come back in God's way. "And Eleazar the priest shall take of her blood with his finger, and sprinkle of her blood directly before the tabernacle of the congregation seven times: and one shall

burn the heifer in his sight, her skin, and her flesh, and her blood, with her dung, shall he burn" (Num. 19: 4, 5). It is not a pleasant way I admit. But still it is God's way.

Note the ritual here, for it is full of instruction. The whole thing was consumed. All goes in the fire of judgment. The priest shall take cedar wood, and hyssop, and scarlet, and cast it into the midst of the burning heifer. Here is this victim slain, and then burnt to ashes. It is a striking figure of all that the blessed Lord Jesus Christ passed through when on the cross, where He was made sin. He was made sin for us, who knew no sin. The heifer burnt to ashes is the striking figure of what the first man deserved, and received in the Person of Christ when on the cross: all was consumed there in death. All that I am disappears from God's eye in death! With the heifer is burned also the cedar tree, which is always the figure, in Scripture, of what is lofty, and noble, and grand.

And the hyssop, what is that? A little bit of a shrub. It is the other end of the vegetable kingdom, it is insignificant. Solomon "spake of trees, from the cedar tree that is in Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall" (1 Kings 4: 33). I do not deny that there is something noble in man, and, of course, you will admit there is something nasty in man. We all of us have grand eyes for that. You can see a mote in my eye? Yes, but you do not see the beam in your own eye? We can all see faults in each other, that is very easy. What do I learn here? Whether it be lofty and great, or ignoble and useless, it all has to go, in the burning of the heifer.

Hyssop has a large place in Scripture. A bunch of hyssop was dipped in the blood, and put on the lintel and the two side posts of the door on the passover day (Ex. 12: 22). Hyssop was plunged in the running water when the leper was cleansed (Lev. 14: 4-6). Hyssop was burned here. David in agony of soul says, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean" (Ps. 51: 7). Again: "They filled a sponge with vinegar, and put it upon hyssop, and put it to his mouth" (John 19: 29), in the moment of our blessed Lord's dying agonies on the cross. It has a wonderful meaning in Scripture, connected with man's littleness, while the scarlet indicates the glory of man.

So that whether I think of what is ignoble, or great, or of all that man can glory in, thank God, all goes. There is only one Man who will do for God, and that is the Man who is in the glory of God. The first man with all his glories, and all his insignificance is removed in judgment. I do not deny there are qualities in man that are beautiful in themselves, but they will not do for God. The first man is absolutely set aside.

It is a great point to apprehend this intelligently, and to say with Paul, "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing" (Rom. 7: 18), and then, as taught by grace, to learn, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me" (Gal. 2: 20). If I look back at the cross, I see the man who did the sin gone there. It is immense gain to see that all goes in the burning of the heifer.

Then the next thing is, the priest must wash his clothes, as well as he who burnt her (Num. 19: 7, 8). And then, "A man that is clean shall gather up the ashes of the heifer, and lay them up without the camp in a clean place, and it shall be kept for the congregation of the children of Israel for a water of separation: it is a purification for sin" (Num. 19: 9). The ashes of the heifer simply but surely bring to your memory what has taken place. They are all that is left of that wonderful victim. There is nothing left but the ashes. All else has been consumed in the fire of judgment. By these ashes, as a figure, the Spirit of God brings to the memory of the soul, in certain circumstances,

what it cost Christ to make us clean, and apart there from we shall not know, after failure, what purification really is.

You cannot touch anything connected with the first man without being defiled, hence we read, "He that toucheth the dead body of any man shall be unclean seven days" (Num. 19: 11). Well, you might say, in the ordinary course of my daily duty I come in contact with many things that are apt to defile me. That is what is supposed here. "He shall purify himself with it on the third day, and on the seventh day he shall be clean: but if he purify not himself the third day, then the seventh day he shall not be clean" (Num. 19: 12). But God does not let us make light of sin. The defiled man was to purify himself on the third day, and on the seventh day, and so be clean. The double purification shows that restoration does not take place in a moment. If my soul has got away from the Lord, it does not get back just in a moment. God gives me time to ponder what my folly has been.

"Whosoever toucheth the dead body of any man that is dead, and purifieth not himself, defileth the tabernacle of the Lord; and that soul shall be cut off from Israel: because the water of separation was not sprinkled upon him, he shall be unclean; his uncleanness is yet upon him" (Num. 19: 13). If I get into evil, and do not judge and get rid of it, I am hurting other people. A heedless man then "defiled the tabernacle of the Lord," and if I am going on with what is wrong I am thereby contaminating my brethren. I am one of the congregation, do you not see? How careful, therefore, ought to be our walk for the sake of others. But verse 13 goes further. "That soul shall be cut off from Israel, because the water of separation was not sprinkled on him." He died. For us it is not death, but the unclean saint is out of communion. He does not get the joy that belongs to the company. He is outside morally, and practically. Why? Because there was a way of putting himself right, and he did not avail himself of it. He was careless.

"This is the law, when a man dieth in a tent: all that come into the tent, and all that is in the tent, shall be unclean seven days. And every open vessel, which hath no covering bound upon it, is unclean. And whosoever toucheth one that is slain with a sword in the open fields, or a dead body, or a bone of a man, or a grave, shall be unclean seven days" (Num. 19: 14-16). Contact with evil in any form affects us, and hinders communion. It is a great thing to keep the covering on the open vessel. What is the meaning of that? There must be reserve. If you go and walk, and talk with the careless, and the godless, you will very soon find yourself out of communion. God bids us keep the cover bound on the open vessel. This world has a dirty atmosphere, and if it be not covered it becomes defiled. We want Christ to cover our eyes, and fill our hearts every hour of the day (Num. 19: 16). You cannot even go to help a person who has fallen into sin without toning down a little bit yourself. Having to hear of evil, even in the way of judgment, affects us, just as he who touched a bone of a man, or a grave, was unclean seven days.

"And for an unclean person they shall take of the ashes of the burnt heifer of purification for sin, and running water shall be put thereto in a vessel; and a clean person shall take hyssop, and dip it in the water, and sprinkle it upon the tent, and upon all the vessels, and upon the persons that were there, and upon him that touched a bone, or one slain, or one dead, or a grave: and the clean person shall sprinkle upon the unclean on the third day, and on the seventh day; and on the seventh day he shall purify himself, and wash his clothes, and bathe himself in water, and shall be clean at even. But the man that shall be unclean, and shall not purify himself, that soul shall be cut Off from among the congregation, because he hath defiled the sanctuary of the Lord: the water of separation hath not been sprinkled upon him; he is unclean" (Num. 19: 17-20). Observe,



a clean person was to sprinkle upon the unclean, on the third day, and on the seventh day. What is the meaning of that? Each sets forth a different stage in the process of soul-restoration. On the third day I have brought home to me that I have been taking my pleasure in the things that cost Christ the agonies, and the unspeakable sufferings of the cross. This will be accompanied by honest and full confession of the sin to God. There comes into the soul then a very deep sense of sorrow for the sin, whatever it may have been. The soul is filled with horror as it says, I have been sinning against grace; but, along with this, there comes a feeling of deep bitterness, because after all I shall not suffer for it, nor will it be imputed to me, since Christ has already suffered for it. I have been taking my pleasure in all that cost Him the agonies of the cross. He has taken the sin, and borne it and its consequences. And the soul passes through deep, deep exercise — the deeper the better.

It is not the first day after the sin that all this is learned. No, God gives me three days in which to contemplate what the effect on my soul has been of my taking my own way. The ashes is the death of Christ, and the running water is the energy of the Holy Spirit of God bringing to my soul what Christ passed through. He says, Christ has died for you, and He has borne the judgment of God for you, and this very sin that you found pleasure in, drew from His soul that agonising cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" And in my soul is wrought the deep sense of what a wretch I am, for I have been finding pleasure in what cost Him pain.

Then comes the seventh day, and now there is the sense in the soul of grace abounding over sin. The Lord has forgiven me? Yes! And there is immediately a sense of joy to think that I am perfectly clean through the work that Jesus in His love to me has wrought, and that the grace that met me as a sinner has met me as a saint. Now the sprinkling has taken place on the third day, and on the seventh day, and the soul is declared clean, and is consciously clean.

Then a practical change takes place likewise in the soul. Not only can it say, I am perfectly clean, but my sin has not altered His heart. He loves me still! His death is still efficacious to cleanse! It is dreadful to lose the enjoyment of His love, and the comfort that the Holy Ghost would give. We pay a terrible price for our own pleasure. But oh, the joy of restoration! Who does not covet it? The sense of the horror of sinning against grace would seem to be the first part of the cleansing on the third day. On the seventh day perfect restoration occurs as the mind is quite cleared of all soil of sin by the abounding of grace over sin. I first of all get the sense of sorrow, that I have sinned against grace, and then I get the sense, I am forgiven because His grace has not changed (Rom. 6).

It is a great thing for the soul to get hold of this — if I have grieved His love, His love is there to be grieved. But then I lose the enjoyment of that love in my soul until the day comes when I judge myself and repent. That is what Peter did, I have no doubt. I think I see Peter on the third day in Mark 16: 7, where a servant, who failed as such (Acts 13: 13, Acts 15: 37-39), alone records the words sent to Peter, and again in Luke 24 when the Lord meets him privately. We find him on the seventh day, in John 21: 15-19, fully at rest in his Lord's love, and trusted by Him.

Notice that the cleansed man washes his clothes. What is that? He changes his ways altogether, and gets rid of the thing that was the hindrance. He is practically washed by the Word.

Now come to New Testament scriptures to connect them with this type. "If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: but if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son

cleanseth us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us" (1 John 1: 6-10). Understand, young Christian, although you are converted, and although the blood of Christ has washed all your sins away, still the truth remains that sin is still in you. The flesh is in us. "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves." If I were to say, I have no sins that may be quite true. But if I say, I have no sin, I deceive myself That is what a perfectionist has been often led to say. It is nothing in the world but a positive delusion.

On the other hand, am I to be ever burdened with the sense of what my sins are? God thus replies: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1: 9). You are thus practically purged, do you not see, but it is always through confession to God, not to man, I need scarcely say. If there be anything burdening your soul, you must go and confess it. You will never be right till you have made a clean breast of it. "God knows all about it," you say. That is quite true, but you will never be right till you have confessed it to Him. Then comes the sense of what grace is, but you will never be right till you have told the Lord everything.

I know that many go on for years, wretched and miserable, and, oh, what lack there is of joy and testimony. That soul is not right with God. My friend, let me implore you, do not you sleep till you have made a clean breast of it all to God. If you are going to be happy and useful, there must be no reserve. There have been no reserves on His side, let there be none on our side.

"My little children, these things I write unto you, that ye sin not," we now read. Do I suppose that a Christian ought to be sinning? No. "But if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John. 2: 1). Beautiful words! The Advocate is Jesus; He restores me to the Father. If I have sinned and got away, I cannot come back to God as a sinner. I must come back to the Father as a child, a naughty child it may be, but a child. It is a blessed thing to see, that before Peter fell, Christ, the Advocate with the Father, had prayed for him. Ah, beloved, how He loves us. You get that deep down into your heart, and you will be all right.

"And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the whole world" (1 John. 2: 2). There we really have the ashes of the heifer. If I sin, He will pray for me, and then the Spirit of God will make me feel it. It is He, the other Comforter, that, in faithful love to my soul, has brought in the cloud. When you see what it was that produced the cloud, you judge it, and you confess it. And when you confess it, He forgives it. And then you say, Blessed Lord, how Thou lovest me! The effect always is, that you get nearer to Him than ever you were before. Such is His grace.

Of course, if I have done wrong to my brother or my neighbour, I must go and own it. I shall never get right till I have put things right there. Not only must I get right with God, but with my neighbour if I have trespassed against him, because God desires to cleanse from all unrighteousness. Now mark, if we have fallen out with a brother or a sister, our Lord's injunctions for you and me in this respect are plain (see Lev. 5, 6; Matt 18). The whole point is this, Christ always loves for us to do the right thing. I know in my heart that I shall never get on spiritually unless I am honest and clear with God on the one hand, and with my brethren on the other hand. How splendid is Paul's testimony. "Herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men" (Acts 24: 16).

We will now turn to Peter's restoration for a moment or two. I believe in Luke 24 you get the third day. I find that on the third day, the resurrection day, the Lord overtook the two disciples going to Emmaus, and He went with them. It is very interesting to see the way in which the Lord makes Himself known to, His own in resurrection. The first heart that He met, and filled, was Mary's, and then her companions. Mary's was a heart that delighted in Him profoundly, and missed Him unspeakably. The next heart He looked after was one that had got away from Him — Peter's. The two going to Emmaus seem to come next They said, "Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the Scriptures" (Luke 24: 32). They had never heard such a discourse in all their lives, as He gave them in that eight-mile walk. Why, our hearts glow, and are almost fit to burst, when a dear servant of the Lord, in the power of the Holy Ghost, is opening up the Scriptures to us. But fancy hearing the Lord "expounding unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24: 27). No wonder their hearts burned within them.

When "they drew nigh unto the village whither they went, he made as though he would have gone further, but they constrained him, saying, Abide with us" (Luke 24: 29). He does not force His company. But when they got to their house, and the Lord moved to go on, they said, "Abide with us." They constrained Him. They brought to bear upon Him the pressure that love always exercises. They had so enjoyed His ministry that they could not do without it. They did not know who He was, but they had found out that He knew more about the One whom they loved than any one they had met before, so they constrained Him to stay. Well, He goes inside, breaks the bread, and thus He is made known to them in that way. They now know who He is, and then He vanishes.

"And they rose up the same hour, and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven gathered together, and them that were with them, saying, The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon" (Luke 24: 33, 34). Back they march to Jerusalem. just before it was too late to go any farther; now, filled with joy, it was not too late for them to go all the way back. They had walked eight miles out, and it was nothing at all to go the eight miles back again, to carry the tidings of their interview with Jesus, and to share the news. When they got there, they found the eleven gathered, and them that were with them. It was not an apostolic company. It was the company of the disciples generally. "The Lord is risen indeed," they said, "and hath appeared to Simon." Mark you, it was the third day, and I do not doubt that Peter had begun to taste the value of the ashes and the running water in that unique interview. Here I think we only get his private restoration. What the Lord said to Peter, I do not know, but this I know, Peter was restored.

He had met the Lord, and he had heard words from the Lord. God has flung a veil over the scene. I have no doubt at all, it was the Lord that sought Peter. You will find in the twelfth verse of this same chapter that Peter had departed, "wondering in himself at that which was come to pass." I will guarantee, before the day was out, that he wondered very much more, as he found that his blessed Lord had come after him, and that everything was forgiven, and that he was restored to the affections of his Lord. In spite of all his sin there was nothing in the heart of his blessed Lord but deep, deep affection for him.

When you come to carefully read Peter's epistles you will find there is scarcely a verse in which he does not allude, in some way or other, openly, or tacitly, to the fact of his fall. For instance, "For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your

souls" (1 Peter 2: 25). Had not he been a sheep astray? He had, beloved, but Jesus, the Shepherd and Bishop of his soul, had restored him.

I will take up what I call Peter's public restoration another time, and we shall see the way in which the Lord re-establishes His dear servant, and tenderly commissions him. It is a pattern of the way He restores the hearts that may have slipped away from Him. But unless there has been a personal meeting with Him, there is nothing effected. You may hear as much about the Lord's grace, and the Lord's love as you like, but there will never be anything in your soul of real restoration till you and He get all alone, and have it out together. May the Lord indeed make His love more and more precious to all our souls for His name's sake.

O Lamb of God, still keep me	Thine arm the victory gaineth
Close to Thy wounded side;	O'er every hateful foe,
'Tis only there in safety	Thy love my heart sustaineth
And peace I can abide.	In all its care and woe.
When foes and snares surround me,	Soon shall my eyes behold Thee,
When lusts and fears within!	With rapture, face to face!
The grace that sought and found me	One-half hath not been told me
Alone can keep me clean.	Of all Thy power and grace.
'Tis only in Thee hiding	Thy beauty, Lord, and glory,
I feel my life secure,	The wonders of Thy love,
Only in Thee abiding	Shall be the endless story
The conflict can endure:	Of all Thy saints above.

## RESTORATIVE, MINISTRY

John 21: 1-25.

We looked in our last chapter at the occasion when the Lord met Peter after He had risen from the dead. The record is very simple. And what we have had is only told us in Luke 24. When the two disciples from Emmaus entered the room, where the apostles and others of the Lord's disciples were gathered together, they were met by this assurance and confirmation of that which their own souls had witnessed and tasted, "The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon." Where the interview took place, when, how, or in what circumstances, we are not told. God has been pleased to fling a veil over that remarkable scene, when a Master, inimitable in grace, restores the heart of His failing servant to Himself — a servant who had, in a moment of weakness, grieved that Master, and wounded His love as only love can be wounded; but we are sure that Peter's heart was thoroughly restored to the Lord.

Evidently a few days had rolled by between the scene recorded in Luke 24 and those described in John 21, because it says in this chapter, "This is now the third time that Jesus showed himself to his disciples, after that he was risen from the dead" (John 21: 14). It is said to be the third time, but, historically, it is undoubtedly the seventh time. He was seen five times on the resurrection day, the Lord's Day. First of all by Mary Magdalene (Mark 14: 9; John 20: 1-18), then by her Galilean friends (Matt. 28: 1-10), then by Peter (Luke 24: 34), then by the two that went to Emmaus (Luke 24: 13-34), and then by the company who were in the room at Jerusalem, "the eleven, and them that were with them" (Luke 24: 33; John 20: 19), which of course takes the company out of merely an apostolic category. There were a good many of the disciples gathered together with the apostles on that interesting occasion, when Thomas was not with them. That was the fifth time. The next Lord's Day the Lord appeared again, and Thomas was then with them (John 20: 26-29). And now we have come to the seventh time historically.

In the first of the three appearances recorded in John 20, 21, you have that which is specially connected with the Church. Closed doors, a company inside, and the Lord in the midst. In plain language, you get the commission of the assembly to be in this scene, like Him, and for Him.

The next week, when Thomas was with them, the Lord appeared again. There you have really the blessing of the Jew prefigured. Thomas would not believe till He saw the Lord. The Jews will not believe in Him till He is seen coming in glory by-and-by. Then the third scene (John 21: 1-11) gives us pictorially the ingathering of the Gentiles. It is a figure of the millennial scene. Thus we have in these three scenes, the Church of God, the Jews, and the Gentiles.

This seventh appearing becomes the beautiful occasion of the Lord's restoring Peter publicly. Christ not only restores the heart that has slipped away privately to Himself, but, if that servant has had a place for Him, He restores him publicly.

Now you will remember that before the Lord was seen of the company of the disciples, the angel had by the women sent them these words, "Behold, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him: lo, I have told you" (Matt. 28: 7). Hastening to carry their message, the women were met by the Lord Himself, who says to them, "Be not afraid: go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me" (Matt. 28: 10). His disciples were to leave Jerusalem, the spot of ordered religion, and they were to go down to Galilee, a despised place, outside Judea.

And now, in obedience to the Lord's command, they find themselves down in Galilee, and they also find themselves in old historical scenes, with the old boats, and the old nets (see Mark 1: 16-20; Luke 5: 1-11). And what are they doing there? They are waiting for their Lord to come, and while they are waiting for Him, see what they do. Friends, nothing tests us like waiting. The greatest test of the state of our hearts is time. Nothing tests us like time. Now what were these men doing? Waiting? No! Fishing! And Simon was the ringleader. They thought they would fill up the time. "I go a-fishing," says Simon. "We also go with thee," say the others. It is astonishing how one saint can lead others. It is a great thing to see the way in Scripture in which unconscious influence is described. We all of us affect each other, either for good or evil. You do not need to speak. I will tell you something far more powerful than your speech. It is your life. The spirit of a man is infinitely more important than his communications.

"I go a-fishing," carried the whole seven from shore to sea, but "that night they caught nothing" (John 21: 3). In Mark 1: 17, the Lord had said, "Come ye after me, and I will make you to become *fishers of men*. And straightway they forsook their nets, and followed him." They had then turned their back on their boats and nets; they had left all to follow Jesus. Now, when the morning had come, the Lord stands on the shore (John 21: 4), but they did not know Him. Why? Because, beloved friends, a very little bit of distance from Christ, a little working of the will, will render the sight so feeble that I do not know the Lord, even when He comes near me. They were but two hundred cubits from Christ. They were only one hundred yards from the shore, and yet they did not know who He was. I think that is why the Lord tells us the distance. Ah, my dear friends, if I am going to be useful to the Lord, I shall need to be nearer to Him than that. "I will instruct thee, and teach thee, in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye" (Ps. 32: 8), is God's way of guidance. You could not see the turn of my eye at the end of the hall. You could see it if you were near me. "I will guide thee with mine eye" is a most touching way of the Lord's saying, *Keep near me*. However, John knows Him by His word.

Then Jesus saith unto them, "Children, have ye any meat? They answered him, No" (John 21: 5). All they gave Him was a cold, No! Oh, the coarse, rough, cold answer, that comes from a saint's lips sometimes. Yes, brethren, we get coarse away from Christ. Oh, you say, they did not know it was the Lord. That is no excuse. It was not even, No, Sir! This lack of courtesy does not affect Him, as He says: "Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find. They cast therefore, and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes" (John 21: 6).

John immediately gets his eyes opened, and says: "It is the Lord. Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he girt his fisher's coat unto him, (for he was naked,) and did cast himself into the sea" (John 21: 7). He made for the shore as fast as ever he could. He wanted to get near the Lord. He had once, when called (see Matt. 14: 28-32), stepped out on the water to meet the Lord. This time he does not wait for an invitation. He seems to say, "I know He would like to have me near Him." And in a minute he is near the Lord. If he had not been all right in his conscience, as well as in his affections, he would have kept away a little bit. This action shows me here that he was all right. All had been forgiven, and the Lord had spoken peace to his troubled heart. And now when he is alive to the fact that it was the Lord, he says, I will get near Him.

"And the other disciples came in a little ship; (for they were not far from land, but as it were two hundred cubits,) dragging the net with fishes. As soon then as they were come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid thereon, and bread" (John 21: 8, 9). I have no doubt that that fire of coals spoke to Peter's conscience, because it must have brought to his memory the fire of

coals in the high priest's hall, when he denied the Lord. He was then warming himself by the world's fire, and of course he got his fingers burned. And, beloved, if you and I are hail-fellow-well-met with the world, there must come sorrow and distress.

And now the Lord bids them bring of the fish which they had caught, so "Simon Peter went up, and drew the net to land full of great fishes, an hundred and fifty and three; and for all there were so many, yet was not the net broken" (John 21: 11). I do not doubt, I may say in passing, that this is just a beautiful sort of figurative illustration of what will be in the millennial day. In Luke 5 the net broke. Here the net does not break. It is the perfection of all that Christ will bring in by-and-by.

And now, when they have brought the fish to land, the next word is, "Come and dine." The Lord prepared that which was necessary for the body, a figure surely of what He gives for the soul. He has the necessary food, and ministers just what we want. And look at the lovely invitation: "Come and dine! And none of the disciples durst ask him, Who art thou? knowing that it was the Lord" (John 21: 12). Now why do you think the Spirit of God put that in? Because I believe every one of them. was longing for an assurance that it really was their Lord. I cannot get away from Christ without there coming an indescribable effect on the soul. Things become misty in the soul's apprehension, and clear spiritual vision is lost

"Jesus then cometh, and taketh bread, and giveth them, and fish likewise" (John 21: 13). He is the Master of the feast. He is the Host. With His own peculiar grace He makes them eat. He puts all His guests at perfect ease. When He gave a feast once before, that none might be missed over, He made His guests sit down in ranks of fifty on the green grass (Mark 6: 39, 40), and the record is "there was much grass in the place" (John 6: 10). Christ's way of meeting the soul is always perfect in tenderness and careful consideration. There is nothing lacking in it.

When they had dined, the Lord deals with Peter. It was not when he was cold and hungry. He will feed and warm you first, if He have to correct you after. "Come and dine," He. says to them. They were near a warm fire now, but they had been out in the cold all night, and doubtless were hungry and cold. The cure for hunger and cold, is food and warmth. That is the nature of divine ministry, — the ministry of love. Hence we read, "No man ever yet hated his own flesh, but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as Christ the Church" (Eph. 5: 29). We are nourished by food, and cherished by warmth. Both are in view by the Sea of Galilee.

Now if I have got away from the Lord, it is when He has got me back to His side, and I have known the restorative effect of His ministry that breaks the heart by its grace, it is then that He can ask me any question He likes, and the heart responds. And now all needed in Peter's case comes out.

"So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, *lovest* thou me *more* than these?" Peter had boldly said long ago, "Though all shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended" (Matt. 26: 33). He now answers, "Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I am *attached* to thee." It was quite true, and the Lord accepted it. The fruit of His blessed grace was perfectly clear to His eye, and "He saith unto him, *Feed* my lambs."

Then a second time, He said, "Simon, son of Jonas, *lovest* thou me?" You will observe the question is different in each case, and so is the commission. The first question is, "Lovest thou me more than these?" The next is, "*Lovest* thou me?" Do you *love* Me? Again Peter replies, "Yea, Lord, thou knowest that I am attached to thee." Then the Lord saith unto him, "*Shepherd* my *sheep*." He was going away, and He puts into Peter's care those that were dearest to Him. It

shows the confidence of Christ in this now broken-down man. "He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? and he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, *Feed my sheep*" (John 21: 17).

Here you observe the Lord changes His query by changing the word which expresses love. In the first two questions He had said, *agapas me*. Peter, on each occasion, replies, *philo se*. The Lord's word for "love" is that used for divine love, which never fails; Peter's, that which expresses brotherly affection — which often fails, as in his own case towards the Lord. On the third occasion the Lord comes down to Peter's word, and says, *pheileis me, i.e., Are you attached to Me?*" Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, "Are you attached to me?" And now, as it were, he flings open the doors of his heart. He says, "As I look back at what my path has been, others might well doubt, but "Thou *knowest* all things, thou knowest that I love thee." He, so to speak, opens the doors of his heart, that Christ may look down into the deep recesses of that heart. He acknowledges that it required divine penetration to discover that he, who had boasted of *more* love than any for Christ, had *any* love at all.

The other apostles might have thought he was a hypocrite. But he was not. Self-confidence was the root of his failure, and the Lord here reaches the root. He speaks not of his fault, but of what produced it, and He did not leave his conscience alone till Peter had really judged the root himself. Self-confidence in Simon Peter was completely broken, but in order to this God let him have such a fall that he never forgot it.

There is scarcely a verse in either of his epistles that has not an allusion to his fall, while "Kept by the power of God through faith" (1 Peter 1: 5), seems to be his motto ever afterwards. Go through his epistles, and you will find in nearly every verse a sort of allusion to this sad episode in his history. His self-confidence was utterly broken up, and in place of it there sprang up a simple confidence in Christ, a confidence that the Lord saw and delighted in. When Peter says, "Thou knowest all things," then Jesus replies, "Feed my sheep." He says, "I am going away, Peter, but I will now put into your hands that which is most precious to my heart. Here the Lord shows His deep affection for, and confidence in Peter, as He says, "Feed my lambs — shepherd my sheep — feed my sheep." He was restored fully to the Lord, in every sense of the word, and I judge also sweetly reinstated in the confidence of his brethren. I have no doubt that on the day when Peter denied the Lord, and ran away, there sprang up a feeling in the rest of the disciples' hearts, He has disgraced the whole company. I am afraid we are sometimes not a little hurt at the tumble of a brother, because *we* are disgraced. But have we the sense in our souls that it is the Lord who has been dishonoured? That is far more important for us to feel. But the Lord here restores Peter fully, and he is then commissioned to care for those who are so dear to the heart of Christ, during His absence.

And now there is yet deeper grace on the Lord's part to His dear servant. Peter had had a wonderful chance of witnessing for Christ, but he had missed it. He had saved his life at the expense of denying the One he really loved. And now he might feel poignant sorrow at having missed that opportunity at a great crisis. The Lord seems to say to him, "You had a chance before, Peter, but you lost it; I am going to give you another opportunity of witnessing for me, and more than that, you shall not turn aside. "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not.



This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when he had spoken this, he saith unto him, Follow me" (John 21: 18, 19). He would give him an opportunity of again being a witness for Him, and this time His grace would sustain him. What he had failed to do by his own will, he was yet to do by the will of God. He had said he was ready to die for his Lord in his own strength. In a day to come he should die for his Lord, energized and sustained of God thereto.

Beloved, there is nothing like the grace of Christ. Get your hearts strengthened in the unfailing grace of Christ. Indeed, "it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace" (Heb. 13: 9). Well might Paul say to his son in the faith, "Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 2: 1). There is nothing so blessed as the grace of Christ. And although we may have often grieved that grace, thank God the grace is there still.

It is important to notice that these words of the Lord to Peter were spoken in the presence of his brethren. He was restored publicly. Whatever they may have thought about him, it was manifest that the Lord thought a great deal of him. We are slow — too slow — to trust a saint who has fallen. Not so Christ. If a servant fall, we say, I can never trust him again. "Never trust a horse with broken knees" is an old saying in the world, and oftentimes saints act on it with a failing brother. Why? Because we have so little of the sense, in our own souls, of what grace is. On the other hand, God cannot trust us till we are broken.

If you study Peter's history, you will see that the breaking of that man was the making of him. God has to bring many a saint down to the very gutter, to break the springs of selfconfidence that are there, for He will have reality, and always exposes the reverse, sooner or later. Then He lifts them up, and carries them on, and makes them the vessels of His grace as they never were before.

This charming scene concludes by the Lord saying to Peter, "Follow me" (John 21: 20). Precious words of gracious encouragement! "Then Peter, turning about, seeth the disciple whom Jesus loved following; which also leaned on his breast at supper, and said, Lord, which is he that betrayeth thee? Peter seeing him saith to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do? Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me" (John 21: 20-22). John was doing what Peter was told to do. The latter, curious as to his companion's future, inquires, "Lord, and what shall this man do?" How apt we are to be heedless of our own command, and be occupied with that of others — their service and their ways. You had better leave your brother alone, was the Lord's rejoinder. "Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? *follow thou me.*" Follow Me, and let your brother alone, says Christ. I believe it is a great principle. That is the last word He said to this dear man in the Gospels.

The Lord help us each one to get the sense of the immensity of the grace of Christ. And if there is a fallen brother, may we have grace to help him. And then if the Lord pick up and restore that soul, He can make him a most useful vessel. One cannot but be struck with how remarkably Peter ranks in the Acts of the Apostles. As a servant he was really sustained by grace. The bitter, terrible fall that he had was the means of making him follow quietly and simply after the Lord. May we know what it is to keep near Him, because if we follow Him we are safe.

And let me, in conclusion, quote to you young Christians a few words of this beloved and restored servant: "Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: but as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am

holy. And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear" (1 Peter 1: 13-17).

The day that I fall is always the day that I cease to fear to fall. As long as I am fearing I never shall fall. May the Lord keep each one of us, with fear in our hearts, and following Him simply, for His name's sake

O Lord, Thy love's unbounded,  
So sweet, so full, so free:  
My soul is all transported  
Whene'er I think on Thee!  
Yet, Lord, alas, what weakness  
Within myself I find;  
No infant's changing pleasure  
Is like my wandering mind.  
And yet Thy love's unchanging,  
And doth recall my heart  
To joy in all its brightness,  
The peace its beams impart.  
Yet sure, if in Thy presence  
My soul still constant were,  
Mine eye would, more familiar,  
Its brighter glories bear.

And thus Thy deep perfections  
Much better should I know,  
And with adoring fervour  
In this Thy nature grow.  
Still sweet 'tis to discover,  
If clouds have dimmed my sight,  
When passed, Eternal Lover,  
Towards me, as e'er, Thou'rt bright.  
O guard my soul, then, Jesus, biding still with Thee;  
And if I wander, teach me  
Soon back to Thee to flee.  
That all Thy gracious favour  
May to my soul be known,  
And, versed in this Thy goodness,  
My hopes Thyself shalt crown.

## PREVENTATIVE MINISTRY

John 13.

There are two points, beloved friends, in this chapter that I want to speak of this evening, in connection with other scriptures — of the deepest importance for our souls to be clear about, for I believe there are no two truths that we, as children of God, know less about than those taught by the basin and the bosom. The basin is the expression of the ministry which puts the heart at rest with the Lord Jesus, and then as a fruit of that the soul takes its place, as John here, and puts its head on the Lord's bosom.

Now I ask you, and I ask myself too: Do we know something in our souls' history as children of God that corresponds with that — a nearness to Christ expressed by having the head on His bosom? It will never be a real practical thing unless what precedes it is understood — the perfectness of the Lord's love for you, and everything else clean out of sight! Your love to Him will never lead to it. It is only as we learn what He is to us that it can in any measure be reached.

We have already contemplated the Lord's *restorative* ministry. What the thirteenth of John unfolds is really of a *preventative* nature. If I truly apprehend how *near* the Lord loves to have, and keep me, I shall not get far away, and backsliding will be unknown.

This chapter opens with Jesus' love — "Having loved *his own*." Those two little words are very blessed. They do not often occur, but there is nothing of deeper sweetness than to cultivate the thought, I am His own — of value to Him; He has something in a world where He had no place, where there is no room for Him — something here that He loves.

In order to better understand this ministry of Christ it may be divided into three parts — past, present, and future. We get it thus presented very clearly in Ephesians 5: 25-27: "Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it (that is past), that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word (that is His present activity), that he might present it to himself a glorious church not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing (that is the future)."

There are three scriptures in the Old Testament that connect themselves in a lovely way with this ministry of Christ. It is wondrous to think that He became a servant "He came not to be ministered unto but to minister." He was here to serve; as He said to the disciples, "I am among you as he that serveth" (Luke 22: 27).

Now see the way in which He serves us. Go back to Psalm 40 for a moment. There you read, "Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire; mine ears hast thou opened (or 'dugged' the margin gives): burnt offering and sin offering hast thou not required. Then said I, Lo, I come . . . I delight to do thy will, O my God" (Ps. 40: 6, 7). Perhaps some of your Bibles have a reference to Exodus 21: 6. Score that out. It has no reference to that whatever. That reference has led many astray. Exodus 21 speaks of His death. Psalm 40 of His birth. What do you understand by the "digging" of the ears? It is perfectly simple. Suppose I go out yonder and dig a pit, there is no pit there till I dig it. So He had no ears till they were "dugged" — He had never been a listener before! He had created, commanded, governed, and legislated, but had not listened.

There is a beautiful interpretation of this Oriental trope in Hebrews 10, which makes the meaning of it quite clear. "Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me" (Heb. 10: 5). As the apostle goes on to quote the end of the verse, I daresay you have observed that he does not quote it as written in the psalm. Some have been troubled about this, and infidels

have not been slow to take it up, and say, "Look at your great apostle Paul, he cannot even quote Scripture correctly." But there is no mistake. It is simply this, that the quotation is taken from the Greek, and not the Hebrew version of the Old Testament Scriptures.

About two hundred years before the birth of the Lord Jesus, the Old Testament Scriptures were translated into Greek (just as we have had a revised version lately), and when the translators came to Psalm 40 they evidently pulled up, to inquire what was meant by "digging" the ears, and God, by His Spirit, gave them to see that the One spoken of there had never had ears, had never had a body before, but was yet to assume one — i.e., to become incarnate — and they rendered it very freely, and said, "A body hast thou prepared me." When writing to the Hebrews, God, by His Spirit, led the apostle to quote from the Greek, rather than the Hebrew, that we might understand that He now had a body, and was a listener. What is the value of the ear? It does not see, act, or think, it only receives communications from without. "Lo, I come," He says to God, "a body hast thou prepared me;" and, in that body, the eternal Son of the Father came to do what no one had ever done — to listen to the behests of God, and to do His will.

Take another scripture, Isaiah 50, a further step on in the blessed history of this perfect Servant. He was a Divine Person, the One who had all power in His hand, yea "Upholding all things by the word of his power," and is heard saying here, "I clothe the heavens with blackness, and I make sackcloth their covering" (Isa. 50: 3). There we get His deity brought out, while the next verse presents Him as a dependant man. "The Lord God hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary: he wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned" (or "learner" it should be) (Isa. 50: 4). It is the same thing — one who listens. No one but Jehovah ever wakened Jesus, except the disciples once rudely, when they ought not to have done so (see Mark 4: 38).

The Father's well-known voice wakened Him, and He received His daily directions. We get His life here in Isaiah, whereas Psalm 40 gives us His birth. He got early communications from God of what the pathway would be, and when He knew all, He had a full and perfect sense of the absolute perfection of God's way with Him, and He did not turn back. The verses following reveal His perfect subjection, and His resources in a path of unspeakable trial. "The Lord God hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back. I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting. For the Lord God will help me; therefore shall I not be confounded. therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed. He is near that justifieth me; who will contend with me? let us stand together: who is mine adversary? let him come near to me. Behold, the Lord God will help me; who is he that shall condemn me? lo, they all shall wax old as a garment; the moth shall eat them up" (Isa. 50: 5-9).

If the history of our souls were honestly told out, one-half, yea, three-fourths of the trouble, exercises, difficulties, and distresses we pass through are the anticipation of sorrows that never come upon us. The Lord Jesus saw the whole way, and He went straight on. How often we have been rebellious, and turned back from what we saw looming in the distance. It is so unlike what we find here. Again, when we have sought to serve Him, how many times we have been humbled because we could not. Perhaps we have got hold of people, and sought to help them, saints or sinners, and then found that we could not help their souls. Why? Simply because we were not near enough to the Lord. Why could Jesus always help souls? Because He was always near His Father, the words He spoke came from the Father. In all the history of Christ, perfect, absolute

dependence marked Him. He always had the "word in season" — the right word for every soul He met, and God was *always* glorified, because the needed word was rightly spoken.

Perfect dependence, and waiting on God for guidance are markedly seen in the touching scenes in John 11, when the sisters, Martha and Mary, sent to Jesus to come to their dying brother, feeling sure that the words "He whom thou lovest is sick," would bring Him at once. Supposing a messenger were to come to your house, when you get home tonight, to tell you that some one you love very much is sick, what would you do? Go off as soon as you could, wouldn't you? You would take the first train, or tram, or walk as quickly as you could to get there. Of course you would. But the Lord did not do that. Love always does the *best* for its object. We do not sometimes. I am free to admit to you that oftentimes we do not know enough of the Lord's mind to act in the best way. When the Lord "tarried two days still in the same place where he was" (John 11: 6), what did the disciples think? They were, doubtless, surprised at the way He acted. They had thought He was very much attached to that family of Bethany, but His action would suggest that He did not seem to be. They did not understand what He said, and they misunderstood what He did, and they thought it very strange that He did not go at once. What did the sisters think? "The moment He hears of Lazarus being so ill He will be sure to come at once." They waited and watched, and He did not come. Have we not often waited, and watched for an answer to a message we have sent to Him? What did they each say when He arrived? "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died" — if Your feet had only been a little quicker, if You had not been so tardy, this would not have happened. So speaks blind unbelief.

The disciples did not understand it when He did go. "Then after that saith he to his disciples, Let us go into Judea again. His disciples say unto him, Master, the Jews of late sought to stone thee; and goest thou thither again? Jesus answered, Are there not twelve hours in the day? If any man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world. But if a man walk in the night, he stumbleth, because there is no light in him. These things said he: and after that he saith unto them, Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep" (John 11: 7-11). What do verses 9, 10, mean? Apply them to Christ, and to our own path too. He saw the light, and He walked in it. Supposing He had gone off two days before, He would have been walking in the night, because He had not the word for it. That were an impossibility with Him! When He went, He had the word, He walked in the light, and *never* stumbled. It is what I covet for my own heart, and for all saints — this nearness to the Lord — that we may be walking so close to Him, that if we have to go to a certain place, we might put our hand in His that we might not go by the wrong street. There is always a right street, and a wrong one, in every travel. Let us not forget this.

What was brought out through Christ staying in the same place for those two days? Martha learned that her brother would rise again. We get those two little words which have cheered so many hearts at an open grave, "Jesus wept." God's glory was brought out, and Christ's power over death was manifested. He was a perfect servant, and never moved without the word for it. What is the use of a servant running round the house all day long? The duty of a servant is to wait till the bell rings, then to get to know what his master wants, and to do it. It was always so with the Lord Jesus. He was a *perfect* servant.

Now turn to Exodus 21: 2-6. I have no doubt the death of Christ is brought out here, but we get also what blessedly marked Him through the whole of His pathway, absolute, complete subjection. He loved His Master, Jehovah; He loved His wife — those in corporate relationship,

linked with Himself; and He loved His children, and would not go out free. Christ loved the Church. It is very blessed to know this, because it forms the soul, and attaches the heart to the Lord. Responsive affection to Him is of the last importance. You may be a first-rate churchman (I have no objection to your being a good churchman), but without this affection, be you ever so good a churchman, you will be a *very poor* Christian. You may be as *clear* as a great big block of ice, *and as cold*. Do you understand?

Intelligence is made a great deal of nowadays, but I tell you what I think, and that is, that we are all uncommonly ignorant. We are all apt to fancy we know a great deal more than we do. And another thing too, we all give each other credit for knowing a great deal more than we do. And then when troubles come upon us, or questions of doctrine, we are surprised to find how easily saints are affected. What will keep a soul? Intelligence? *No!* Affection! His love to you! Apart from this the profession of Christ is a most miserable thing. You are wretched if your heart is not in the enjoyment of His love.

The Hebrew servant loved his master — figure of Christ's affection to God; his wife, illustrative of the Church, and his children, and would not be parted from them. The boring of the ear indicated this, and is the figure of Christ's death. Thus in connection with the ear — love's service, Psalm 40 gives me *His birth*, Isaiah 50. *His life*, Exodus 21 *His death*.

Carry this thought in your soul, that the Lord does not want yourself and Him to be parted, not only in eternity, but *now*; so He is going to take away every particle of earth's dust, and every grain of moral grit, that would separate your soul from Himself, and thus put you so close to Him that you would not be happy to be one hair's breadth away. That is John 13. A person said to me the other day, "Doctor, what is your standing?" "Christ," I replied. "No more?" "*No more, and no less* — that is where I begin, continue, and never end."

Christianity starts with a new man in a new place, — in the glory, — not the first man in innocency, or in guilt, or sins, or death, or anything — that man is gone, and now I am "in Christ," in a new state, never known before, and that is where I begin, taken clean out of myself, out of everything I was in before. Are you in real liberty of soul? People often say, "Oh, I am in a great deal of trouble about *myself*, I am so disappointed in *myself*." There you are — self — it is all self. Why is the man in Romans 7 so wretched? Because he talks forty times about himself, and never once about Christ. Had he not well earned his wretchedness? I think so. Look at Christ; see what He is to God. Where is the Christian? There, in Christ, before God, every rag and vestige of that old self gone. Now, do not give that up if you have it. And do not be content if you have it not, till you get it. If you have not that wrought into your soul by the Holy Ghost, you have not begun to be a Christian.

Man has now a wonderful place of favour in Christ before God, in Him who is our life, our wisdom, our righteousness, our everything. There was no real link with the Lord till He had died, and was risen; not till He rose could our place be spoken of. You study John's Gospel with this thought, and you will see that in John 1 - 12 He speaks of "my Father," in John 13 - 19 "the Father," and in John 20 "your Father." It is the Father's gospel from end to end. In chapter 13 He is, so to say, breaking the ice, and leading them on in a transitional state. In chapter 20 the full truth comes out, as He says, "My Father and your Father, my God and your God." He indissolubly connects us with Himself in the place He has taken.

As in Genesis 2: 7, God breathed on man, and he became a living soul, so, in John 20: 22, the Lord breathed on His disciples His own life and nature, as one alive from the dead. "Because I live, ye shall live also" (John 14: 19). How comes a soul to be in Christ? Clearly by the Holy Ghost. Life is the basis. He is there by the Holy Ghost, but he is in Christ by life, as well as by the Holy Ghost. I am there before God "in Christ," who is my life, and the Holy Ghost comes, and dwells in me, to make all good and true in my soul, for the "Spirit is truth" (1 John 5: 6), just as it is also stated that "the Spirit is life" (Rom. 8: 10).

The first thing the ministry of Christ does for me is, not only to sweep away, root and branch, all that I was, but it puts me in the place He is in. It first sets me down in the place that is His own (Christ's place before God is our place) and next labours to bring my heart intelligently into the enjoyment of it. John 13 unfolds what love does for its object.

It is exceedingly interesting, in connection with the Lord's Supper, to see that in Matthew (Matt. 26: 17) the disciples come to the Lord to know *where* to prepare the paschal supper, but we are not told who did it. Mark (Mark 14: 13) says it was two disciples. Luke (Luke 22: 8) tells us that these two disciples were Peter and John. John, with his accustomed retiredness, says not a word as to who prepared it, but, when all was ready for them to sit down to supper, he says, "He washed our feet and made us fit to enjoy it "and then, emboldened by the knowledge of such love, he lays his head on the Lord's bosom.

John 13 illustrates the difference between the priesthood and advocacy of Christ. Priesthood maintains us before God, as God. Advocacy has to do with the Father and the children. Priesthood has to do with God, and maintains me before God in all the value and efficacy of the sacrifice, in virtue of which I am brought to God. Advocacy comes in when priesthood fails. Priesthood is preventative — advocacy, restorative, there is the difference. It is all perfect love.

In this thirteenth of John Christ in grace goes down, humbles Himself, and proposes to wash the feet of His loved ones. Peter could not think of His Master going down so low, and says, "Thou shalt never wash my feet" (John 13: 8). The Lord says, You can have no apprehension, and no enjoyment, unless you suffer Me to do as I like, and My heart to travel out to you as I wish. "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me." Then says Peter, "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head." No, that will not do. "He that is bathed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit," is love's reply. He would not have a spot on the one He loves. Have you ever heard an old saying, "Love never sees a spot on its object"? That does not mean that love is blind. No, love is not blind, it is intensely acute of vision, nothing more so. It sees the spots, and labours to remove them. It is the sweetest thing possible to think of His love in cleansing our feet.

Perhaps you have sometimes heard a person say, "I got a lovely word, and so much help to my soul, through So-and-so." Where was it from? It was from the Lord in glory, using, so to speak, the basin and the water. The channel it came through is unimportant. It is not a bit of odds what kind of pipe water comes through, whether lead, or clay, or terracotta, so long as it reaches you, in its cleansing and refreshing power. If you get a little lift tonight, where is it from? From His heart in the glory.

Perhaps there may be one here who is a backslider, it is quite possible. What does He do with backsliders? You go and read Jeremiah 2 - 4 before you go to bed tonight, and you will see what He does. Israel forgot Him, but He never forgot Israel. "Ah," you may say, "it is many a month since I thought much of Him, and many a bitter thing has happened since then." Yes, and *He*

*knows* all about it. When you come to Jeremiah 4 you will see that the heart is recovered through perfect grace. Backslider! you have been crooked, wayward, stupid, and wilful, but be you what you may, He loves you. Now, can you look Him in the face, and say, "I'll take my own way"? No, I am sure you cannot. You will say, "If He loves me after that sort, I will cleave to Him, and seek to be to Him what He would like me to be." That is right. The Lord help you.

There is another point of great importance in John 13. The way to be intelligent and know the Lord's mind is to be near Him. John, as it were, by his action, says, "I will show you the way." No one, save Judas, knew who was going to betray the Lord, and when He said, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me. Then the disciples looked *one on another*, doubting of whom he spake" (John 13: 22). How like ourselves, when things are low, flat, and consciously wrong in an assembly, how we look at one another. Are things very cold, dull, and flat where you live, and are you looking at one another? Do not do it. There is nothing like the Lord's Table for bringing out where people are. Do you want to come to the Lord's Table? Do not take that serious step unless you really want to walk with the Lord. *All* is brought out there, you will have everything exposed. People talk glibly, and say, "What a blessed thing to come to the Lord's Table." It is an awful thing unless you really want to be for the Lord. Everything comes out, because He is there.

After the disciples had looked one at the other, their consciences began to work, and they looked at themselves, and then each one asked, "Lord, is it I?" (Matt. 26: 22; Mark 14: 19). But this did not bring the answer. Peter, though a hearty man, was not intelligent. He longed to know who was the traitor, but could not frame the suited query. Why did he not ask the Lord Himself who should betray Him? Because he felt and knew, in the presence of the Lord, what we have often felt, that another was nearer to Him than himself. Peter had not freedom and liberty. So he beckoned to another to ask. Who was that other? "Now there was *leaning on Jesus' bosom* one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved. Simon Peter therefore beckoned to him, that he should ask who it should be of whom he spake. He then *lying on Jesus' breast* saith unto him, Lord, who is it?" (John 13: 23-25). Intimacy is the outcome of affection, and the source of real intelligence.

Peter was not in the intimacy of divine affection as was the one lying on His bosom. There can be little doubt that this was John, for he uniformly speaks of himself as "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (John 19: 26, John 20: 2, John 21: 7, 20, 24). Could you point out in this room tonight the disciple whom Jesus loves? "Oh," said one to me when I asked that question, "are you going to specify it in that way, perhaps you think it is yourself?" "Yes, thank God it is, and I would not lose it for anything. I know the disciple in Edinburgh whom Jesus loves, when I am there, but I would not take it from you. Each one may know 'the disciple whom Jesus loves.'" People sometimes say, "Was there not something peculiar about John?" Yes, he was a very simple man, believed in the Lord's love to him, enjoyed it, revelled in it, and always kept near its source. I think I hear him saying, "I know He loves me, and I know He likes His love to be appreciated, and nothing pleases Him better than my being as near to Him as I can be. He liked me to lay my head on His bosom, and I did so."

Do you know how I gauge my friends? My friends like my company. John acted on this principle in regard of the Lord; and, my beloved friends, I would say — specially to the young ones here tonight — Cultivate nearness to Christ." Cultivate in your souls the sense that if you wander the least bit from His side, He misses you, and would fain have you back again.

But the blessed Lord's ministry of love does not cease with what John 13 brings out. It will go on for ever, right on to the end. Will you now turn to Luke 12. In that lovely chapter, which is



occupied first with fears and cares (and there are no two greater troublers in the Church of God and in the heart), we get the third aspect of Christ's ministry. How does He cast out the fear of man? By a greater fear, the fear of God — and He casts out care by the care of God — and now He says, "You are free to think of Me." Everything down here fails (Luke 12: 33). Moth, rust, and thief spoil all. If you go to the woman's side of the house the moth is her pest; go to the man's side, and it is rust that troubles him. If a man say, "I have that which neither moth nor rust can touch," — that is the world — the thief will come and steal it from you, or you from it.

Have you a treasure in the heavens? Perhaps you may say, "I have been trying to make Christ my treasure." Did you ever find out that Christ had a priceless treasure here on earth? If you had gone to John and asked him, "Who is Christ's treasure?" he would have said, "I know, I know, I do not want to tell you his name, but I know who it is. It is the disciple He loves." The moment you find out that He has a treasure on earth, and that you are that treasure, you will be able to say truly, He is my treasure in heaven. It is the reciprocity of love. You cannot help it.

As the sense of His love and what He has suffered for you comes before you, your heart will be fairly captured. Your heart, however, will never be fairly captured till you find that you are His treasure, and then you will make Him yours. There will be no effort. And if He be your treasure, would you not like to see Him? Surely, you reply. But when would you like the Lord to come? Tonight. *Really* now, would you? Are you ready, and watching for Him? Ready to "open unto him immediately"?

I sometimes go to a house, ring, and yet have to wait a long time to get in. My patients know my knock and ring, for I generally let them understand pretty well that I have no time to waste, and want, without delay, to get in. Still I am kept waiting. Why? Was not the ring heard? Yes, but a common Scotch expression explains what they are doing while I am kept waiting. They are just "redding up a little bit" inside, putting things in shape and order, just putting the patient's room a little bit tidy. Have you some "redding up" to do ere He comes, or are you ready for Him to come just now? Could you open to Him immediately?

With fears gone, cares cast out, and the heart above, we are left to be lights for Him in this dark world. I was going along a lane in Somerset a few days ago, and as I saw the glow-worms shining out in the dark night, I said, "That is what we ought to be — glow-worms in the night, shining for Him." Are you a glow-worm in your business, in your house, in your neighbourhood — a heavenly glow-worm in this dark, sin-stained earth, waiting for the Lord?

Are you looking up tonight, watching for Him, waiting, longing to welcome Him back? "Oh yes," you say, "I hold the Lord's coming." Let me ask you a little question. "Does the Lord's coming *hold you*?" If so, you will be not only waiting, but watching.

Notice the 37th verse: "Blessed are those servants, whom the Lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them." (Luke 12: 37) What is the meaning of those words, "He will come forth and serve them"? When He has taken us to glory He will never cease to be the One that ministers to us. He will serve us for ever. What love! He has assumed manhood that He might serve us, and He will never cease to be a man. Thus we shall ever know Him in glory. What a Saviour!

"Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me," was part of His prayer (John 17: 24). There is

something deeper than the glory — the love that brings us there. We are not in the glory yet, but we are in the love that will bring us there. "Keep yourselves in the love of God," is therefore the Spirit's exhortation (Jude 21). "That ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge" (Eph. 3: 17-19), was the apostle's fervent prayer to the saints. The Lord give us to know what it is to be in the abiding enjoyment of that love for His name's sake. Amen.

## **THORNS AND BRIARS; OR, FALLING AWAY**

Hebrews 6.

This chapter is one of three passages in the New Testament which Satan has most incessantly used to torture and distress the souls of the children of God. One of three, I say; the other two being John 15 and Hebrews 10.

It describes the condition of a soul who has apostatized and given up all truth. It does not describe a backslider. If you be a child of God you are such, whether in a good state or a bad one. If in a good state, you enjoy communion with God; if in a bad or backsliding state, you have lost that, but are still a child, although a naughty one. Those described in the chapter under consideration were never born of God at all.

I want you to notice that it comes in here as a kind of parenthesis, and this parenthesis commences at Hebrews 5: 11; and then in Hebrews 7 Paul goes on with his subject, "For this Melchizedek," etc. You must connect, therefore, the last four verses of chapter 5 with chapter 6 in order rightly to understand it. The apostle is writing to Jewish professors of Christianity. Although there were among them a great many real, bright Christians, he is writing to those who had been brought up with the traditional religion of Judaism. And now Christianity had come in; and what is Christianity? Christianity is not outward forms, and ceremonies, and ordinances; but the knowledge of the Son of God — a living Man at the right hand of God — and faith addressing itself to this living One — Christ Jesus the Lord — and finding its all for time and for eternity in Him through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Christianity, therefore, is a heavenly system, for it has to do with heaven. Judaism was for earth; it was an earthly system. Satan always delights in drawing people down to earth; it is what he is busy about at this present time; he would have the heart occupied with anything short of a living Christ in the glory of God. The object of the Holy Ghost, on the contrary, is to attract the heart, and therefore the hearts of these to whom he is writing, to this living Man, this Christ of God in the glory, and thereby to detach them from all that was earthly and carnal.

The danger of these Jewish converts was, because of persecution, to give up a heavenly Christ, and to turn back again to the earthly ritual which God had set aside. Judaism had received its death-blow in the cross of Christ. It came to an end there, and was as a dead thing in God's sight. And what does God do? He sends Titus and Trajan to sweep away the dead body, and bury it entirely from off the scene. The day has gone by of external ceremonies, and the Spirit of God is drawing the hearts of God's ancient people to the Person of Christ in glory. In chapter 5 Paul reproaches them with being babes, when they ought to have been full-grown men. In 1 Corinthians 3, where he is writing to the philosophizing Greeks, he says, "I have fed you with milk and not with meat, for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able, for ye are yet carnal" (1 Cor. 3: 3). That which hindered the Corinthians' growing was philosophy, that which hindered the Hebrews was traditional religion; and how much of traditional religion there is in our days you yourselves know, and if God has gathered us out around the Person of His Son, and in His name, and has shown us what the thought of His heart is as to the Church of God, in measure at any rate, it is only His own grace that has done it.

Strong meat belongs to full-grown men. Now, you will find, he contrasts Christianity, as a spiritual and a heavenly thing, with Judaism as an earthly, and now a carnal system. Judaism though originally set up by God Himself, had become this, because Christ had come and been rejected;

and therefore all that He had to say to man in the flesh was now over, and everything was to be heavenly, connected with the Man at God's right hand. A babe, therefore, in this epistle, is one who is still associated with that which simply appeals to the senses, and who is not simply and only connected with a living Christ where He is.

Therefore laying aside the word of the beginning of Christ, let us go on to perfection" (Heb. 6: 1). I have no doubt the apostle's expression "the beginning of Christ" alludes to Judaism as divinely set up, and Christ as the Messiah, the head and centre of it all; but Messiah, the head and centre, had been slain, and so Judaism was all over before God; and therefore he says you must leave the earthly thing, and go on to perfection, and by perfection in Hebrews he means Christ in heavenly glory. "Perfect" is used in several different ways in Scripture, and you must know the scope of the passage to understand how it is used in each one. Abraham, for example, is told to walk before God and be perfect, and his perfection was to be in absolute dependence on the God who had called him out to be a pilgrim. Israel's perfection again was to have nothing to do with idols — they were not perfect, they fell into idolatry. Our perfection in one way is to be always like our Father, always to show grace; for He makes His sun to rise upon the evil and upon the good (Matt. 5). Then in Philippians 3 we get perfect twice spoken of: first in verse 12, Paul says, "Not as though . . . I were already perfect," because perfect there means to be like Christ in glory, and Paul says, I am not there yet; but a few verses lower down, in verse 15, he says, "Let us therefore, as many as be perfect," there being perfect is as to the object, having the soul lifted to Christ where He now is in heaven; taken quite off from earth, and linked with Him where He is, and going on to conformity with Him there.

All that you have in the first two verses of Hebrews 6 was common to Judaism and known quite well by the Jew. There must be "repentance from dead works," and a few certainly knew "faith towards God." Then as to "baptisms," here I apprehend the word means simply washings, of which we know there were many under the Jewish ritual; the priests had to wash their hands and their feet, the victims had to be washed ere they were offered, the defiled had to wash their clothes as well as their persons, etc. Then again as to the "laying on of hands," there was in Judaism the laying on of the priest's hands, and the laying on of the worshipper's hands on the head of the victim. "Resurrection of the dead," too, was perfectly well known among the Jews. Resurrection *out from among* the dead was what was not known to the Jew, but is the doctrine of Christianity. In Judaism there was a measure of light; but the veil was not rent, Christ had not died, and man had not been looked upon as utterly ruined; but now Christ has come, has gone into death, and has been raised out from among the dead, and the heart is linked with Him where He is in heavenly glory; and the next thing it awaits is the moment when He shall return and take out from among the dead His own people, His resurrection being the pattern and assurance of theirs.

"Well," Paul says, "laying aside all these beginnings of things," "eternal judgment" too, for every Jew believed that, let us go on to perfection. He says, you are not to stop at these things now, but to pass on, and learn that the judgment, the eternal judgment you deserved, was borne by Another, and having been borne by Him, you can never come into it, you have passed to the other side of death and judgment.

Hebrews 6: 1 and 2 belong then to Judaism and verses 4 and 5 belong to professing Christianity. I say *professing*. Christianity, for, there are two things awaiting which are the very kernels of *vital* Christianity. I mean, there is no mention of divine life here, and there is no mention of the

*possession*, as a seal from God, of the Holy Ghost. But you say, Were they not "once enlightened," what does that mean? surely that must mean converted. Not at all. In John 1: 9, it is said of the Lord Jesus, "That was the true light, which coming into the world shineth upon every man." Is every man therefore converted? Not so; but every man coming into the world is brought into the place where the light is shining. But does every man avail himself of the light though it is there? You know it is not so. The sun shines upon this earth day by day, and sheds its light around. Is a blind man conscious of it? No. Is therefore the sun less shining? The being enlightened is the coming to a man of the light — the good tidings of the gospel, without at all necessitating his receiving them, or being converted by them. Such a one is not left in darkness whether he avail himself of the light or not.

"And have tasted of the heavenly gift" (Heb. 6: 4). Surely that must mean really converted? No, not necessarily. They may have been moved and touched after a carnal sort. How many a one has come into a gospel preaching, heard of Christ, been deeply impressed for the moment, thought it a wonderful thing, meant to be a Christian; and gone away unsaved, for there has been no work in his conscience. Like the stony-ground hearers, such receive the word with joy, and give it up for a little trouble. And yet they *tasted* the joy of it, they felt it was a wonderful thing that God could love such as they, and for a moment were touched, but nothing more. They leave the spot where they were thus impressed for the moment, and give it all up — give it up after tasting the joy of it.

"And were made partakers (companions) of the Holy Ghost" (ver. 4). What is a partaker of the Holy Ghost? The Holy Ghost has come down consequent on the death, resurrection, and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ, and is on this earth dwelling in each believer; but dwelling also in what professes the name of the Lord down here, viz., in the house of God; therefore, if I am in the sphere where He is acting, I am in that sense a partaker of the Holy Ghost. In the early days of Christianity, when Paul is writing, people gathered in the name of the Lord, and with the Spirit of God in their midst; and they were very conscious of the presence of the Holy Ghost too in their midst, and also of His miraculous powers. Look at the gift of tongues, for example. The Holy Ghost was on earth giving a testimony to the hearts of God's people, and to the world also; and He was present in such power, that a stranger coming in became conscious that God was there. There was an atmosphere of love as well as of power that could not but be felt. If, then, a stranger came in and took his place there, he was with an assembly of people of whom the Holy Ghost made one, and in this sense was a partaker — a companion — of the Holy Ghost. If the Holy Ghost were acting in power, and a man were in the place where He was acting, he was a partaker of that power — felt its influence.

"And have tasted the good word of God." This even does not necessarily imply divine life in the soul. I ask you, Cannot an unconverted man admire Scripture? You know he can. He may admire it, feel its beauty and its depth, and yet his conscience not be reached by it. The Word of God may be brought to him, and he may see its preciousness, but it may leave him as lifeless as before; he may not be quickened by its means.

"And the powers of the world to come." "The world to come" is not eternity, but the future habitable earth, under the millennial reign of the Lord Jesus Christ, during which time the power of Christ will be put forth, and Satan's power will be removed from this scene, for he himself will be bound in the bottomless pit. When that time comes, and the Messiah is reigning, the lame shall walk, the deaf hear, the blind see, and the sick be healed; but there were beautiful little

foretastes of the power of that coming kingdom seen in those early apostolic days. Did not the lame man walk and leap at the gate of the temple (Acts 4), and the palsied man arise and make his bed? And did not Dorcas, who was dead, come to life again? Do we not read, too, of their bringing out the sick on beds and couches, that the very shadow of Peter might rest on them, and of their being all healed? and also that handkerchiefs and aprons were taken from Paul's body to the sick, and that their diseases departed from them, and that the evil spirits went out of them? These are the "powers of the world to come," and the Holy Ghost says all this may be known, and yet a person not be converted at all — not have a spark of divine life in him. When the disciples were casting out devils, Judas, no doubt, cast them out also; for we find from 1 Corinthians 13 a person may have faith enough to remove mountains, and yet not have divine life at all; and Judas doubtless believed in the power of his Master, though there was no life in his soul.

In Hebrews 6: 6 the apostle says, if persons who have had all these privileges, and have been brought under all this power of the Holy Ghost, give it all up, "It is impossible . . . to renew them again unto repentance, seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame." What had the nation done? It had crucified the Son of God. What were these people doing? The same as their fathers did. If you give up Christianity, and give up this heavenly Christ — God says He has nothing else left — all His resources have been employed without effect.

Why does he speak of it being impossible to renew them again to repentance? Because repentance is always produced in the soul by the Word of God, and is the effect of the received testimony of the Spirit of God. God had no further witness to give. When God sent His Son into this world, what did man do? He spat upon Him, and slew Him. What did God do? Did He draw the sword of judgment? No; He took Him up to heaven, and from heaven sent the Holy Ghost to say to man, "You would not have My Son as an earthly Christ, now will you have Him as a heavenly Christ?" If man refuses this — rejects a heavenly Christ — God, as it were, declares that there is no other means of producing repentance towards Himself, and faith towards the Lord Jesus Christ. As another has said:\* "After having been the subject of this influence of the presence of the Holy Ghost, after having tasted the revelation thus made of the goodness of God, and experienced the proofs of His power, if any one then forsook Christ, there remained no other means for restoring the soul, for leading it to repentance. The heavenly treasures were already expended; he had given them up as worthless; he had rejected the full revelation of grace and power, after having known it. What means could now be used? To return to Judaism and the first principles of the doctrine of Christ in it, when the truth had been revealed, was impossible, and the new light had been known and rejected. In a case like this there was only the flesh; there was no new life. Thorns and briars were being produced as before. There was no real change in the man's state.

\*Synopsis of the Books of the Bible, vol. 5.

"When once we have understood that this passage is a comparison of the power of the spiritual system with Judaism and that it speaks of giving up the former, after having known it, its difficulty disappears. The possession of life is not supposed, nor is that question touched. The passage speaks not of life, but of the Holy Ghost as a power present in Christianity. To 'taste the good word' is to have understood how precious that word is, and not the having been quickened by its means. Hence in speaking to the Jewish Christians he hopes better things, and things which accompany salvation, so that all these things could be there, and yet no salvation. Fruit there

could not be. That supposes life. The apostle does not, however, apply what he says to the Hebrew Christians, for, however low their state might be, there had been fruits, proofs of *life*, which in itself no mere power is; and he continues his discourse by giving them encouragement and motives for perseverance.

"It will be observed, then, that this passage is a comparison between that which was possessed before and after Christ was glorified, the state and privileges of professors at these two periods, without any question as to personal conversion. When the power of the Holy Ghost was present, and there was the full revelation of grace, if any forsook the assembly, fell away from Christ, and turned back again, there was no means of renewing them to repentance. The inspired writer, therefore, would not again lay the foundation of former things with regard to Christ — things already grown old — but would go on for the profit of those who remained steadfast in the faith."