

Scripture Studies

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“Come now, let us reason together,’ says the Lord...” *Isaiah 1:18*

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For readability's sake, some of the classic articles have been lightly edited, so that they follow modern English usage for certain words. Very occasionally, they are edited in other ways, also. Every attempt is made to maintain the author's original meaning and wording. If such editing irks you, I apologize.

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Old Testament Study: Jonah: Introduction

A Study by John King (1594)

Jonah – Introduction

[This study is taken from a series of lectures given in 1594 by John King, who later became the Bishop of London from 1611 to 1621.]

- ¹ The word of the Lord came to Jonah son of Amittai:
² “Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me” (KJV).

COMPARISONS betwixt scripture and scripture are both odious and dangerous. In other sorts of things, whatsoever is commendable may either be matched or preferred according to the worth of them. I will not make myself so skillful in the orders of heaven, as to advance angel above angel, but I am sure **“one star differeth from another in glory”** (1 Cor. 15:41); and God has given the rule of the day to the sun, of the night to the moon, because they differ in beauty. The captains of the sons of Gad, without offense, might bear an unequal report: **“One of the least could resist an hundred, and the greatest a thousand”** (1 Chron. 12:14), because their prowess and acts were not equal. There was no wrong done in the anthem which the women sung from all the cities of Israel, **“Saul hath slain his thousand, and David his ten thousand”** (1 Sam. 18:7). The unlike deserts of these two princes might justly admit an unlike commendation. One Cato may be of more price than hundred thousands of vulgar men, and Plato may stand for all. Our Saviour, in the Gospel, in

Luke 5:39, prefers old wine before new. But **“the whole scripture is given by inspiration of God”** (II Tim. 3:16), neither in his great house of written counsels is there any vessel more or less in honour than the rest are. Moses is no better than Samuel; Samuel than David; David a king than Amos a herdsman; John the Baptist more than a prophet, not more than a prophet in his authority; Peter or Andrew, the first that was chosen, not better than Paul, who was born out of due time. The four beasts in Revelation, chap 4, have eyes alike, **“before and behind”**; and the apostles’ names are evenly placed in the writings of the holy foundation (see Rev. 21:12). Solomon, the wisest king that ever was in Jerusalem, perceived right well that wheresoever the uncreated wisdom of God spoke, it spoke of **“excellent things, even things seemly for princes”** (Prov. 8); David, his princely father before him, had so high a conceit of these ordinances of the Most High, that where he defines anything, he esteems them, for value, above great spoils, and thousands of gold and silver, yea, all manner of riches; and for sweetness, above the honey, and the honeycomb (Ps. 19); and where he leaves to define, he breaks off with admiration: **“Wonderful are thy testimonies”**; I have seen an end of all perfection, but the commandment is exceeding broad, meaning thereby, not less than infinite.

The Jews acknowledge the Old Testament, abhor the New; the Turks disclaim; Julian, atheists, and scorners deride; Grecians have stumbled at both Old and New; papists enlarge the Old with apocryphal writings; some of the ancient heretics renounce some prophets, others added to the number of evangelists; but, as the disciples of Christ had but **“one Master,”** or teacher in heaven, **“and they were all brethren”** (Matt. 23), so one was the author of these holy writs in heaven, and they are all sisters and companions; and with an impartial respect have the children of Christ’s family from time to time received, revered, and embraced the whole and entire volume of them. They know that one Lord was the original

fountain of them all, who being supremely good, wrought and spake perfect goodness.

One word and wisdom of God revealed these words to the sons of men, himself the subject and scope of them; one Holy Ghost composed them; one blood of the Lamb sealed and confirmed the contents of them; one measure of inspiration was given to the penmen and actuaries that set them down; one spouse and beloved of Christ, as gages of his eternal love, has received them all in keeping. And surely, she has kept them as the apple of her eye; and rather than any maim or rent should be made in their sacred body, she has sent her children into heaven maimed in their own bodies, and spoiled of their dearest blood they had, thinking it a crown of joy unto them to lay down their lives in the cause of truth.

And therefore, as branches of the same vine that bore our predecessors, to whom by devolution these sacred statutes are come, we esteem them all for God's most royal and celestial testament, the oracles of his heavenly sanctuary, the only key unto us of his revealed counsels, milk from his sacred breasts, the earnest and pledge of his favour to his church, the light of our feet, joy of our hearts, breath of our nostrils, pillar of our faith, anchor of our hope, ground of our love, evidences and deeds of our future blessedness; pronouncing of the whole book, with every schedule and scroll therein contained, as he did of a book that Sextius wrote, but upon far better grounds, "It is a book of life, a book of livelihood, a book indeed, savouring of more than the wit of man."

Notwithstanding, as the parcels of this book were published and delivered by divers notaries, the instruments of God's own lips, in divers ages, divers places, upon divers occasions, and neither the argument nor the style, nor the end and purpose the same in them all; some recounting things in the past; some foreseeing things to come; some singing of mercy; some of judgment; some shallow for the lamb to wade in; some deep enough to bear and drown the elephant; some meat that must be broken and chewed with painful exposition;

some drink that at the first sight may be supped and swallowed down; somewhat in some or other part that may please all humours, as the Jews imagine of their manna, that it relished not to all alike, but to every man seemed to taste accordingly as his heart lusted; so, though they were all written for our learning and comfort, yet some may accord at times, and lend application unto us for their matter and use, more than others.

Of all the fowls of the air, I mean the prophets of the Lord, flying from heaven with the wings of divine inspiration, I have chosen the dove (for so the name of Jonah imports, and Jerome so renders it to Paulinus) to be the subject of my labour and travel undertaken amongst you; who, under the type of his shipwreck and escape, figuring the passion and resurrection of the Son of God, and coming from the sea of Tarshish, as that dove of Noah's ark came from the waters of the flood, with an olive branch in his lips in a sign of peace, preaches to Nineveh, to the Gentiles, to the whole world, the unreserved goodness of God towards repentant sinners.

For if you will know in brief what the argument of this prophet is, it is abridged in that sentence of the psalm: "**The LORD is merciful and gracious, of longsuffering, and of great goodness**" (Ps. 145). He is *merciful*, in the first part of the prophecy, to the mariners; *gracious*, in the second, to Jonah; *longsuffering*, in the third, to the Ninevites; and of *great goodness*, in the fourth, in pleading the rightfulness of his mercy, and yielding a reason of his fact to him which had no reason to demand it. So, from the four chapters of Jonah, as from the four winds, is sent a comfortable breath and gale of most abundant mercies. And as the four streams in paradise, flowing from one head, were the same water in four divisions, so the four chapters or sections of this treatise are but quadruple mercy, or mercy in four parts; and so much the rather to be hearkened unto, as an action of mercy is more grateful unto us than the contemplation, the use than the knowledge, the example than the promise; and it is sweeter to

our taste, being experienced by proof, than when it is but taught and discoursed. You hear the principal matter of the prophecy; but if you would know besides what riches it offers to you, it is a spiritual library, as Cassiodore noted of the psalms, of most kinds of doctrine fit for meditation; or as Isidore spoke of the Lord's prayer and the creed, *the whole breadth of Scripture may hither be reduced*. Here you have Genesis, in the sudden and miraculous creation of a gourd, Moses and the Law in denunciation of judgment, Chronicles in the relation of a history, prophecy in prefiguring the resurrection of Christ, psalmody in the song that Jonah composed, and finally, gospel in the remission of sin mightily and effectually demonstrated.



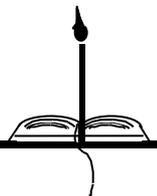
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A Classic Study: Job 1:18-19



[Here we continue a reprint of a small portion of Joseph Caryl's study in Job. Mr. Caryl wrote twelve volumes on the book of Job. His study is a great example of how deep one can dig into the truths of the Bible.]

A Study by Joseph Caryl (1644)

Job 1:18-19 - The Death of Job's Children

¹⁸ While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, Thy sons and thy daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother's house: ¹⁹ And, behold, there came a great wind from the wilderness, and smote the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young men, and they are dead; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee. (KJV).

THIS WAS, as the fourth and last, so the greatest of all Satan's assaults, the most fierce and terrible charge that Job had all the day, and Satan reserves this until the evening, till Job was spent and spiritless as he hoped. I shall note this in general from it:

That Satan usually keeps his greatest strength and most violent temptations to the last. When he thinks we are at the weakest, then he comes with his strongest assaults. If Satan had sent Job word of the death of his children first, all the rest would have been as nothing to him. He would not have regarded the loss of his cattle when he heard that all his children were crushed to death by the fall of the house. As someone great

evil falling upon us, takes the heart off from having any sense or joy in a lesser good. So, one great evil swallows up the sense and feeling of a lesser evil. That great evil which fell upon the wife of Phineas, when she heard that *the Ark of God was taken*, afflicted her so extremely, that she could not at all rejoice in the birth of her son. She had no sense of that. Here was therefore the cunning of Satan, lest Job should have lost the smart of the lesser afflictions. Lest they should have been all swallowed up in the greater, he brings them out in order: the least first, the greatest is reserved for the last. We observe in war, that when once the great ordinance are discharged, the soldiers are not afraid of the musket; so when a great battery is made by some thundering terrible judgment upon the soul or upon the body or estate of any man, the noise and fears of lesser evils are drowned and abated. Therefore, Satan keeps his greatest shot to the last, that the small might be heard and felt, and that the last coming in greater strength might find the least strength to resist it.

And that this was a greater affliction than any of, or than all the former, is so clear that I shall not need to stay long in the confirming of it, only to quicken the point a little, take notice of the greatness of it in five respects:

First, it appears without controversy to be the greatest of all, because it was upon his children. A man's children are more than all that he had in the world; a man's children are himself; every child is the father multiplied. A son is the father's bowels, and therefore when Paul wrote to Philemon concerning Onesimus, "**whom**" (he said) "**I have begotten in my bonds**" (i.e., to the faith of Christ). "**Receive him who is mine own bowels**". A spiritual son is the very bowels of a minister. He does but allude to a natural son; a son is the very bowels of the father. This affliction reached into the very bowels of Job himself. Satan had no leave to afflict the body of Job, and yet you see he afflicts him in his very bowels.

Secondly, the greatness of it is seen in this, his children were all taken away. To lose all our children is as grievous as to lose

an only child. Now that is made a cause of the highest sorrows: **“They shall mourn for him, as one that mourneth for an only son”** (Zech. 12:10); that is, they shall mourn most bitterly. Now, as the measure of mercies may be taken by the comforts which they produce, so we may take the measure of an affliction by the sorrow which it produces. And the loss of a child is the greatest affliction which causes the greatest sorrow.

Thirdly, it was a further greatening of the affliction, that they were all taken away suddenly. Had death sent them summons, by its usual messenger sickness, but a day before to prepare themselves, it had much sweetened the bitterness of this cup; but to hear they were dead before he knew they were sick; yea when he thought they were merry and rejoicing, how sad was this.

Fourthly, that they died a violent death, by a mighty wind casting the house down upon them. Had they died in their beds (though suddenly) it had been some ease to the fathers heart. Violent death has an impression of wrath upon it, and men can hardly judge well of those who fall by such judgments. Suspicion will arise, if censure pass not, from better men than Barbarians, if they see a viper on the hand of a Paul (see Acts 28). It is more than probable from our Savior’s question, that those eighteen upon whom the Tower in Siloe fell, and slew them, were commonly supposed greater sinners, or sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem (see Luke 18:4).

Fifthly, they were all taken away when they were feasting; and this did exceedingly aggravate the affliction upon Job, that his children were all destroyed feasting; for you know what the thoughts of Job were concerning his children at their feasting; after they had done, he offered burnt-offerings according to the number of them all, for he said, **“It may be my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts”** (Job 1:5). Now, at this time, when Satan knew that Job was most solicitous lest his children should sin, at that time does he

destroy them; that so their father might be afflicted with the thought that his children died unreconciled to God, that they died with sin upon them unrepented of: That they died a double death, death at once seizing upon both soul and body. This then was a further degree of Satan's malice, to wound, vex, and grieve the spirit of Job unto the utmost. How sadly and passionately did David lament Absalom's death? Some conceive this was the head of the arrow that pierced him, because he feared his son died in a sinful condition, he was suddenly taken away in his rebellion, unreconciled either to God or man. Such a thought might fall upon Job's heart; my children are suddenly dead, and dead feasting, and cursed God in their hearts. Alas my children died before they could so much as think of death. I fear they are gone rejoicing to hell, where they shall weep for evermore. Doubtless Satan did or might fasten such a temptation upon his heart who was so tender of his children's souls, and so fearful of their sinning in feasting. So then, it is clear from all these particular considerations, that this was the greatest affliction.

Be prepared then, not only to receive another affliction, but to receive a greater affliction, and have thoughts of receiving the greatest affliction at the last. Satan will come with his strongest assaults when you are weakest. At the time of death, when he sees he can do no more, but that he must then do it, or never do it, then you will be sure to have the strongest temptations.

It should therefore stir up the people of God, still to look for more and more strength to bear afflictions and temptations, and to beg from Christ the greatest strength at last, because they may justly fear the greatest temptations at last. If as Satan greatens his temptations, Christ greatens his assistance, we shall be able to bear them and be more than conquerors over them.

So much of this fourth charge in the general, I shall now open the words more particularly. (For those in the 18th verse, I shall not need to say anything of them, they have been

handled before at the 13th verse, which runs thus, **“And there was a day when his sons and his daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother’s house”**). The 19th verse describes the manner of this trial, **“And behold there come a great wind from the wilderness,”** etc.

“And behold...” – Behold, in Scripture, ever notes more than ordinary matter following. 1. Great things call for attention; 2. That which is sudden and unexpected, calls us to behold; 3. Rare things, things seldom seen invite all to see and wonder at them. Here is the matter of admiration. What God threatens in the Law, he seems to fulfill upon Job, **“I will make their plagues wonderful”** (Deut. 28:59). There is no **“Behold”** prefixed to any of the former three afflictions; but this as being the most strange and terrible, comes with a **“Behold”**: **“And behold...”**

“There came a great wind...” – It was a wind, and a great wind that came. The wind is elegantly said to come (as the sun) out of his chamber, and rejoicing as a strong man to run a race (see Ps. 19:5). Hence the word which the Latins use for the wind is derived from a word that signifies *to come*, because the wind comes with force and violence. The wind (in the nature of it) is an exhalation arising from the earth, drawn upwards by the power of the sun and other heavenly bodies: but meeting and conflicting a while with the cold of the middle region of the air, is beaten back again. And being so light that naturally it cannot descend, and so resisted that it cannot peaceably ascend. It takes a course between both, slanting with mighty violence through the air. Thus Philosophers teach. This wind is said to have been a *great wind*, great in quantity, much wind, a large wind, great also in quality, a vehement, boisterous, angry wind.

Further, this wind is described by the coast or quarter from which it breathed:

“...from the wilderness...” – Or as the Hebrew is, *from beyond the wilderness*, from the other side of the wilderness this wind came. Winds are differenced by the quarters or points of the Heavens out of which they blow. This wind is described by the place from whence it came, from the coast out of which it was raised, it was from beyond the wilderness.

There were many wildernesses. Here wilderness is set down indefinitely. There was the wilderness of Maon, and the wilderness of Ziph, and many other wildernesses spoken of in Scripture. What wilderness was this? It is conceived, that this was either the wilderness of Idumea, or Edom, spoken of in II Kings 3:8, or else it was Arabia the Desert, which is by way of eminency called *The Wilderness*. It came from the wilderness, that is, it came over that part which is called *Arabia Desert*, or *Arabia the wild*.

When it is said, this wind came from *the wilderness*, the coast is cleared, but the cause and stirrer up of this wind is concealed. A wind came from the wilderness; but how this wind was raised, and this storm was blown up, there is no mention. We must charge it on him who was the contriver and director of all this mischief. Satan, prince of the air, raised up this mighty wind.

Winds are said sometimes to come from God, as in Exodus 10:13: **“The LORD brought an east-wind upon the Land of Egypt that it was covered with locusts”** (one of the plagues of Egypt). And verse 19: **“The Lord turned a mighty west-wind which took away the locusts.”** And in Num. 11:31: **“There went forth a wind from the Lord, and brought quails from the sea.”** And in Jonah 1:4: **“The Lord sent out a great wind into the sea.”** The heathens (who divided the world among sundry gods) gave the winds to Aeolus, whom they supposed to have them all shut up and locked close in his lodge, till he gave them command to fly abroad. It is an argument of a divine power to rule the winds. Who is this, say those seamen in Matt. 8:27, that even *the winds and the sea obey him*. As God only causes the sun to shine, and

the rain to fall, so the winds to blow. The wind is originally in the hand of God. **“He gathers the wind in his fists”** (said Agur of God), **“and sendeth it which way he pleaseth”** (Prov. 30:4). But the winds were put for that present into the hand of Satan, and he had leave to raise a storm for this special purpose. So then, **“There came a great wind from beyond the wilderness”**, that is, Satan stirred up a mighty wind in those parts and quarters, *which came...*

“...and smote the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young men, and they are dead” – Here we see what was the work of this wind. As it is described by the region from whence the wind came, so by the effects which it wrought being come, **“It smote the four corners of the house.”** The Hebrew word is the same used in verse 11, **“Touch all that he hath.”** According to Satan’s sense, this wind *touched the four corners of the house*. The corners of the house are the strength of the house, and the four corners are all the strength. Christ is called the *corner stone*, because he is the strength and binding of the Church; he holds all together. This wind smote the four corners at once. It may seem very strange, that one wind, a wind described to come out of one quarter, a southern wind, as this is conceived to have been, coming from the wilderness, that this one wind should strike all the four parts of the house together. Must it not be a wind from the four quarters of heaven which strikes the four corners of a house? I answer, this was extraordinary wind; there was a wonder carried on the wings of this wind, therefore you have a *behold* of admiration, a *behold* set in the beginning of this relation. This wind did not work according to the ordinary rate of winds. Or we may say, it was a whirlwind, that tempestuous whirlwind, which philosophers call *typhoon*. Such a wind, as whirls about in a circle, and so it might fetch in or assault all the parts and corners of the house with one blast. Further, we must take notice, that Satan was in this wind. He acted and wrought mightily with it for the sure and sudden

effecting of this dreadful overthrow; the devil spirited this wind. The wind (though for the quickness and power of it, called a spirit) is a dull and weak thing compared to a spirit.

“And, behold, there came a great wind from the wilderness, and smote the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young men, and they are dead” (vs. 19)

But what became of his three daughters? Did they escape? They are not named, but they also were involved. It is usual in Scripture, under one sex, the superior sex to comprise both. All Job’s children perished under the ruins of that falling house. Hence observe,

First, *That Satan being left at his own disposal, can raise and enrage storms and tempests.* It is said, that **“storms, winds and tempests fulfill the will of God”** (Ps. 148:8). The winds go often on God’s errand; but, as often as the Lord gives leave, these stormy winds and tempests fulfill Satan’s will; not his alone, much less against the will of God. Satan cannot raise so much wind by his own power as will wave a feather, but when God says go *do such and such things*, then the winds likewise fulfill his will. Then also, he can raise wind enough to move mountains, and raze the foundations of the proudest and strongest buildings. It is reported that some wicked wretches trade with watches for wind; they buy winds of the devil; a most abominable merchandise. And the Lord answers them justly, to let them have what they pay for, winds of the devil; as he speaks in the prophet, **“I also will choose their delusion”** (Isa. 66:4), when men will be deluded, and go down to hell for help. God will choose their delusions, saying in his wrath: *You that think the devil can give you a wind, the devil shall give you a wind: A wind by which you shall say at once to the port of your hope, and to the pit of desperation. A wind which (unless you repent) will carry you into that lake wherein there is no water, a lake*

burning forever. **“And the breath of the Lord like a stream of brimstone kindling it”** (Isa. 30:33).

Secondly, observe here, from the effect of this wind,

That a violent and sudden death is no argument of God’s anger or disfavor. Here all Job’s children were destroyed suddenly and violently, yet it was not in wrath towards the children, but for a trial unto the father. When they told Christ of some, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. **“Think not”** (said he) **“that either these or those upon whom the Tower of Shiloh fell and slew them, were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem, I tell you except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish”** (Luke 13:1). As there is no judging of the sins of men, by such kind of exigents and events, so neither of the wrath of God; yet how many by such appearances judge unrighteous judgments, being as barbarous, as those Barbarians of Malta, who seeing a viper coming out of the heat and fastening on Paul’s hand, they (concluding he must die presently) censured him to be a murderer, whom though he had escaped the sea, yet vengeance followed on shore, and would not suffer to live. *We must not ground our judgment upon the works of God, but upon His Word.* In externals, there is the same event to all (see Eccl. 9). Men cannot be distinguished for eternity by what they suffer, but by what they do not by the manner of their death, but by the tenor of their lives. This is a certain truth, *that man can never die an evil death, who hath led a good life.* There is nothing makes death evil, but the evil which follows death, or the evil that goes before death.

Thirdly, here was death, a strange and sudden death surprised the children of Job, and this when they were feasting, when they were *eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother’s house.* We may observe from that also by way of admonition. *Christians had need to take heed, and be holy in feasting.* While we are eating and drinking, we may be dying; therefore eating and drinking, we had need be holy. **“Take heed to yourselves”** (said Christ) **“lest at any time your hearts be overcharged**

with surfeiting and drunkenness; take heed lest at any time, because at any time the day may come upon you unawares” (Luke 21:34). *That day*, whether it be a day of general calamity or personal, may come upon you unawares. It becomes us to be holy in all manner of conversation, though we had an assurance of our lives. But seeing in what manner of conversing so ever we be, death may surprise us, and we have no assurance of our lives in our greatest joys, how holy should we be? **“Whether you eat or drink”** (said the Apostle) **“or whatsoever you do, do all to the glory of God”** (I Cor. 10:31). Have God in your eye, let him be your aim. It is prophesied concerning latter times, **“That every pot in Jerusalem and Judah shall be holiness unto the Lord”** (Zech. 14:21). The very pots in Jerusalem shall be holy, that is, men at their pots shall be holy, to note that they should be holy in their eatings, in their drinkings: not holy only when they were praying, and holy when they were hearing, but holy in those ordinary natural actions of eating and drinking; holy at their tables, and in all their refreshings with the creature. Then indeed, there is holiness in the heart, when there is holiness at the pot; and *'tis but need, there should be holiness in the pot, when there may be death in the pot.*

We may observe somewhat more generally from all these four sore afflictions considered together. As first, *we see how quickly the beauty of all worldly blessings may be blasted.* Job in the morning had an estate, as great and as good as his heart could desire in worldly things, there was luster and strength in and upon all he had, but before night he had nothing but sorrow to sup upon. He had no retinue of servants left, but four, reserved only to report his losses. In one day all's gone. It is added as an aggravation of Babylon's downfall, that **“her judgements shall come upon her in one day”** (Rev. 18:8). **“Therefore shall her plagues come in one day, death and mourning and famine, and she shall be utterly burnt with fire, for strong is the Lord God who judgeth her.”** In one day, all the beauty of Babylon shall be blasted. We need not

now trouble ourselves to think Babylon is in a great deal of strength and beauty and glory; surely there must be a long time spent in contriving and acting the destruction of Babylon; no, the Lord can blast her beauty and destroy her power in a day; and the text says, he will do so, *in one day all her plagues shall come upon her*. That which Babylon has been gathering many years shall be scattered in a moment. She thinks that by her wisdom and policy she laid such a foundation of her own greatness as shall never be shaken; and therefore concludes, *I fit a Queen and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow*. Yet all her strength shall not hold out one day, when God in his displeasure shall lay siege against her walls. So when you look upon other great and mighty, prosperous and flourishing enemies, such as *flourish like green by trees*, remember the Lord in one day can wither their branches and kill their roots, you root them up. Certainly the strength of the Lord is as mighty for the destroying of his enemies, as it is for the afflicting of his own people. If he sometimes gives commission to take away all their comforts in a day, when their estates are highest and strongest built. Surely he will at last give commissions for as speedy a dispatch against the estates of his greatest enemies.

And this may be unto us all, a matter of admonition, to prepare for changes, to esteem creatures as they are, *perishing substance*. Whoever had an estate better gotten, better bottomed, or better managed than Job? Yet all was overthrown and swept away in a moment. *We can never expect too much from God, nor too little from the creature*.

Lastly, we may learn from the foregoing story of these afflictions, considering that Satan was the contriver and engineer who set all a-work:

That Satan is mighty both in power and policy for the effecting of his designs, if God give him liberty and leave. You see he does not fail or miss in the least, he brings every affliction upon Job in the perfection of it, and he does not bungle at it, or do his work by halves; but he is quick and speedy, both in laying the plot and executing it. There is nothing in this inferior world able

to stand before him, no creature, no man, if God let him alone. The good angels can match, yea and master devils, there is no doubt of that: but if God stop his angels and withdraw his hand, the devil would quickly overrun all the world. **“We wrestle not with flesh and blood, but with principalities and powers”** (Eph. 6:12). Evil spirits are called powers in the abstract, they have not only a power, they are not only powerful (hence called *principalities*, such as have great authority and sovereignty, as it were, over others), but they are called *powers*. It is not an empty title or a naked name that is given them, but they are filled and clothed with strength proportional. Satan is a mighty prince commanding in the spirits of wicked men. He can kindle their lusts and enflame their spirits, set them on fire from hell, and then cause them to go on with *a rage* (in doing mischief) *as high as heaven*. He can lead men *captive at his will*, though not against their own will: Yet to show the efficacy of this actings, he is said to lead them *captive at his will*, to do his will and execute his *devilships designs*. It is admirable what Satan can do upon wicked men, who are his willing vassals and bond-slaves; if he speak the word, they go; if he suggest, they submit; if he move, they obey. And likewise, we see what a mighty prince he is in the air, all the elements and the meteors stoop to his direction. He cannot only command men who have reason, but he can command the fire, the water, the winds, the thunders, therefore he is called *the prince of the power of the air*; those powers that are in the air, he can command. For though it be a truth that Satan of himself cannot make one spark of fire, or so much as one breath of wind, yet if he be let loose and unchained, he can go to God’s storehouse of wind and fire, he can go to God’s magazine of thunder, storms and tempests; he can fetch out such store of all these, and so enrage them, that no man is able to withstand their violence.

The apostle taxes all natural men, *that they live without God in the world*, that is, they live without a sensible apprehension of the majesty, of the power, and holiness of God; they are

not affected with God in the world. I may say, in a sense to many godly men (and it may be a reproof to them) *that they live without the devil in the world*, that is, they have not such apprehensions of the power and policy and sleights of Satan, as they ought to have. We do not know, or apprehend as we ought, and as we might, who the devil is, or what his power is. I do not speak this as if I would have any meditate and pore on the power of Satan, so as to be afraid of him; that's no part of my intent. But it is for this end, that our hearts might be raised up to bless God, who binds up such an enemy, and bounds such a power; who if he were let alone would do us mischief a hundred times a day. Nay he would unquiet and unsettle the whole world. This is the reason why we should consider the power and policy of Satan: to bless God, who stops the mouth of this lion, so that he cannot stir to do that mischief, unto which his nature does at once incline and enable him.



This article is taken from: Caryl, Joseph. *An Exposition with Practical Observations upon the Book of Job*. London: G. Miller, 1644. A PDF file of this book can be downloaded, free of charge, at

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New Testament Study: Romans 2:6-16

A Study by Scott Sperling

Romans 2:6-16 – God's Judgment

⁶ God "will repay each person according to what they have done." ⁷ To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. ⁸ But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. ⁹ There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; ¹⁰ but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. ¹¹ For God does not show favoritism.

¹² All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law. ¹³ For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous. ¹⁴ (Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law. ¹⁵ They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them.) ¹⁶ This will take place on the day when God judges people's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares.

TOWARDS THE END of the chapter 1, Paul spoke of the condemnation of non-Jews and non-Christians, those who did not have direct exposure to the Law of God. In the first five verses of chapter 2, Paul spoke of the condemnation of those who do know the law of God, and who are so quick to condemn others for their disobedience to the Law. In these verses, starting in verse 6, Paul teaches that, with regard to judgment, God will be fair and just to everyone, whether they explicitly know God's law from the Bible, or only know the law of God which is written on their hearts.

Note that, in the discourse that began in Rom. 1:18 and continues here, Paul is not yet speaking of the grace and salvation that comes through Christ. Paul is speaking of Jews (under the Law) and Gentiles (apart from the Law), both of whom do not have the revelation of salvation by faith through Christ (Paul will teach on the gospel of Christ a bit later in this Epistle). So, Paul is here teaching us how those without Christ will be judged, whether Jew or Gentile, whether living now without knowledge of Christ, or in the past, before the revelation of salvation through Christ was introduced to the world. "The apostle is not here teaching the method of justification, but is laying down those general principles of justice, according to which, irrespective of the gospel, all men are to be judged. He is expounding the law, not the gospel. And as the law not only says that death is the wages of sin, but also that those who keep its precepts shall live by them, so the apostle says, that God will punish the wicked and reward the righteous" [Hodge, 50]. "The Apostle is here speaking *generally*, of the general system of God in governing the world,—the judging according to each man's works—punishing the evil, and rewarding the righteous. No question *at present* arises, *how* this righteousness in God's sight *is to be obtained*—but the truth is only stated broadly at present, to be further specified by-and-by, when it is clearly shown that by *works* no flesh can be justified before God" [Alford, 329].

Paul summarizes judgment according to the Law by citing Old Testament scripture from Psalm 62:13 and/or Prov. 34:12 (both verses are very similar): **“God ‘will repay each person according to what they have done’”** (vs. 6). It’s important to emphasize here that **“each person”** will face judgment. *“To each person* makes this personal; recompense is an individual matter, not a collective punishment” [Morris, 147]. *“The judgment will be particular to every individual; everyone will have to answer for himself”* [Haldane, 81]. The Jews of the time, Paul’s primary audience in this section, thought essentially that they were exempt from judgment by virtue of being a Jew. They also thought that Gentiles were condemned to judgment by virtue of not having the revelation of God’s law. Paul refutes both of these ideas. *“He will judge men neither according to their professions nor their relations, but according to their works. The question at his bar will be, not whether a man is a Jew or a Gentile, whether he belongs to the chosen people or to the heathen world, but whether he has obeyed the law”* [Hodge, 49]. *“The object of the apostle here is to show that national, ecclesiastical, or hereditary relations will save no man; that the wicked will surely be lost, because they are wicked; and that the righteous will be saved, because they are righteous. And no man can prove that he is righteous but by holy living. The meritorious ground of a sinner’s salvation is the righteousness of Christ”* [Plumer, 91].

Paul expands on the basis of God’s judgment: **“To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For God does not show favoritism”** (vss. 7-11). Put simply, Paul teaches that on the day of God’s judgment, there are two outcomes: **“eternal life”**, or **“wrath and**

anger". These outcomes are based on whether the person being judged has done **"good"**, or has done **"evil"**. There is one judgment day, and on that day, everyone will be judged by the same standard. There is not a separate judgment day, or a separate standard, for Jews versus Gentiles; nor is there a separate judgment day, or a separate standard, for Christians versus non-Christians; nor is there a separate judgment day, or a separate standard, for those who lived in the 21st century versus those who lived in the 4th century B.C. There is one judgment day, and one standard for judgment: **"good"** versus **"evil"**.

A Christian might say, "But surely, I believe in Christ, I don't have to face a judgment day!" But the Bible testifies, even in the New Testament, that every human being, yes, even you as a Christian, must stand in judgment on the day of God's judgment. Paul teaches elsewhere, speaking to Christians in Corinth: **"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad"** (2 Cor. 5:10). And our Lord Jesus Himself said: **"For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man. Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned"** (John 5:26-29). (See also, Matt. 7:21-24; Matt. 12:26; Rom. 14:10; Heb. 9:27). The Christian will then ask: "But what about John 3:16, where I am promised eternal life through faith in Christ? What about the promise of the forgiveness of my sins?" The answer to this is, yes, in Christ your sins are forgiven, through His sin offering, but you still must face the judgment day, and face the appearance of God's anger for your sins, even though, through Christ, and clothed

in Christ's righteousness, you will not have to bear the punishment for your sins.

But we are getting ahead of ourselves. Paul will speak of the grace of God, and the forgiveness available through Christ later. Paul here is focusing on the judgment, as it relates to the non-Christian Gentile, and non-Christian Jew. "But it is pertinent to remark, that the Apostle is not here teaching the method of justification, but is laying down those general principles of justice, according to which, irrespective of the gospel, all men are to be judged. He is expounding the law, not the gospel. And as the law not only says that death is the wages of sin, but also that, those who keep its precepts shall live by them, so the Apostle says, that God will punish the wicked and reward the righteous. This is perfectly consistent with what he afterwards teaches, that there are none righteous: that there are none who so obey the law as to be entitled to the life which it promises; and that for such the gospel provides a plan of justification without works, a plan for saving those whom the law condemns" [Hodge, in Lange's, 97].

And so, let us here, return to Paul's context, and view these verses as they relate to the non-Christian: **"To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger"** (vss. 7-8). This is the summary of the end-of-times judgment. There will be those who were **"persistent in doing good"**, that is, *persistently*, and against all obstacles, sought to do the will of their Creator. For them, there is **"eternal life"**.

One might ask, "Isn't eternal life only to be had through Christ?" The answer is, an unqualified "Yes!". Jesus taught: **"I am the way the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me"** (John 14:6). And so, we can infer that those who are **"persistent in doing good"** will accept Christ when presented with the Gospel. You might ask,

“What if they are never presented with the Gospel?” Nowhere in the Bible is anyone condemned for knowledge that they do not have, and frankly, such condemnation would contradict Biblical teaching about God’s righteous nature and perfect justice. If someone is not presented with the Gospel message while living on earth, there are teachings in the Bible that imply that they will be presented with the Gospel after their life on earth. We are taught by Peter that the Gospel will be preached to those who are dead (presumably, those who were not adequately exposed to the Gospel when they were alive), in order that all might be judged by the same standard. Specifically, Peter taught: **“For this is the reason the gospel was preached even to those who are now dead, so that they might be judged according to human standards in regard to the body, but live according to God in regard to the spirit”** (1 Peter 4:6). God honors those who seek him, no matter their human situation. He promised through Christ, **“Seek and you will find”** (Matt. 7:7). In the book of Hebrews, we are told that God is a **“rewarder of those who seek Him”** (Heb. 11:6). Peter realized this when the Roman centurion Cornelius came to faith in Christ: **“I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right”** (Acts 10:34-35). And so, this **“persistence in doing good by seeking glory, honor and immortality”** is, in effect, “the acceptance of the Gospel by anticipation” [Godet, 198]. “What can the apostle mean by his breathtaking assertion about attaining eternal life? At the very least, it is safe to say that he is not contradicting what he says later about the impossibility of having salvation by means of the works of the law (see Rom. 3:20)... Paul is simply portraying the motivation and the tenor of the life that will culminate in eternal fellowship with God. As applied to the **‘seeker’** (cf. Acts 17:27), the principle commits God to honor the moral aim and provide *the means* for making a decision, as we see in the case of the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8) and

Cornelius (Acts 10). Both were *seekers* making use of the light they had” [Harrison]. I believe it’s a misrepresentation of God’s righteousness to declare that anyone who has not heard the Gospel message will be blindly condemned to hell. There are good people in the world, outside the realm of Christendom. They will be judged justly, and, I believe, will have the opportunity to respond to the Gospel message, if not in this life, then in the next. God is gracious and merciful. His grace and mercy are not confined to those who, say, live in Western Europe or the United States. Certainly his grace and mercy are bountiful enough to extend to all of his creatures, no matter where they live, or how they were raised. Let God be God, and man be man. Let the Christian man be the Christian man and focus on declaring the gospel, and making disciples of all nations, of bringing those in the darkness into the light.

Now, **“persistence in doing good”** implies a *patient continuance*, that is in “opposition to the idea of *intermittent moral efforts*” [Godet, 197]. Giving large gifts to charity, while living ungodly in one’s day-to-day life, is not a **“persistence in doing good.”** This **“persistence”** is not satisfied by occasionally doing good works. It is a frame of mind that one lives every second, not just occasionally, to please God. “The reward of eternal life, then, is promised to those who do not regard their good works as an end in themselves, but see them as marks not of human achievement but of hope in God. Their trust is not in their good works, but in God, the only source of glory, honour, and incorruption” [Barrett, in Morris, 148]. “The goodness which the Scriptures approve consists, in a great degree, in the pursuit of heavenly things: it is a seeking after glory, honour and immortality, by a persevering continuance in well-doing. It is the pursuit of the true end of our being, by the proper means” [Hodge, 58].

This is contrasted with those who are **“self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil”** (vs. 8). They seek self, reject truth, and follow evil. They live a *self-centered* life, rather

than a *God-centered* life. “Unrighteousness, which he contrasts with truth (exactly as Jesus does in John 7:18), denotes the selfish passions, vain ambitions, and unrighteous prejudices, which lead a man to close his eyes to the light when it presents itself, and thus produce unbelief. Unrighteousness leads to this result as certainly as moral integrity leads to faith” [Godet, 199].

For *self-seekers* there will be **“wrath and anger”** (vs. 8). “No terms can adequately set forth the terribleness of the final doom of the wicked. Here we have indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish (see vss. 8, 9). But who knows the torment of a future world, where remorse, despair, and all the evil passions furnish elements on which the fierceness of the wrath of God kindles forever?” [Plumer, 93]. “There are two treasures, which Paul opposes to each other,—that of goodness, of forbearance, and long-suffering,—and that of wrath; and the one may be compared to the other. The one provides and amasses blessings for the creature, the other punishments; the one invites to heaven, the other precipitates to hell; the one looks on sin to pardon it on repentance, the other regards obstinate continuance to punish it, and avenge favours that are despised. God alone prepares the first, but man himself the second; and on this account the Apostle says, **‘Thou treasurest up unto thyself wrath’** (vs. 5)” [Haldane, 80].

Next, Paul, in order to emphasize what he has just written, recapitulates: **“There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For God does not show favoritism”** (vss. 9-11). Paul gives special prominence to the universality of the principles of God’s judgment [Meyer, 112], by saying **“first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.”** “You, therefore, who are first in privileges, will be first in punishment” [Wordsworth, 212]. The Jews had the great advantage of being given God’s written revelation of the

law, so that they knew exactly how to please God, the judgment for disobeying that law falls pre-eminently on them. “The Jews, as the people of God, in possession of the revelation with its promises and threatenings, are therefore necessarily also those upon whom the retribution of judgment—not the reward merely, but also the punishment—has to find in the first instance its execution. In both aspects they have the priority based on their position in the history of salvation as *the* theocratic people” [Meyer, 112-113]. Many Jews thought that they had the special privilege of being exempt from the judgment that unbelieving Gentiles would face. In this, they were wrong. “The Gentile, so most Jews maintained, could experience God’s favor only by taking on **‘the yoke of the law.’** [They believe that,] outside Israel, the sphere of the law, there is no salvation” [Moo, 146].

Paul sums up the principle of a universal standard of justice: **“For God does not show favoritism”** (vs. 11). “There are many exhortations to just judgment in the Old Testament; for example, **‘Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great, but judge your neighbor fairly’** (Lev. 19:15). It is this kind of even-handed justice that Paul ascribes to God. He will not weight things in favor of the rich or the poor. Nor will he favor any one nation, be that nation Jew or Greek. In the end we can rely on the fact that justice will be done” [Morris, 152]. “To have respect to the appearance of persons, or to accept of persons, is the vice of an iniquitous judge, who in some way violates justice; but the Divine judgment cannot commit such a fault” [Haldane, 87].

Paul expands on this: **“All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law. For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God’s sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous”** (vss. 12-13). Even those who do not have God’s written law, those who **“sin apart from the law”**, will be judged fairly.

“In the preceding verse it was stated that God is just and impartial in all his judgments. This is confirmed not only by the previous assertion, that he will judge every man according to his works, but also by the exhibition of that important principle contained in this verse. Men are to be judged by the light they have severally enjoyed. The ground of judgment is their works; the rule of judgment is their knowledge” [Hodge, 53]. “People will be condemned, not because they have the law or do not have the law, but because they have sinned” [Morris, 154]. “Their perdition, if it ensues, will not be due to transgression of a code they had not, but to sin against such light as they had” [Pulpit, 53].

Paul expands on this by speaking of the law obeyed by those that don't have God's written law: **“Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them”** (vss. 14-15). Given that God has made sure that all of us have a law **“written on our hearts”**, it follows that none will have an excuse for violating that law. “Not all human beings are crooks, blackguards, thieves, adulterers, and murderers. On the contrary, some honor their parents, recognize the sanctity of human life, are loyal to their spouses, practice honesty, speak the truth and cultivate contentment, just as the last six of the ten commandments require’ (Stott). In this sense the Gentiles become a law for themselves, that is, they possess a God-given form of the divine law, a form that is in keeping with the Mosaic law” [Osbourne]. “Men generally, not some men, but *all* men, show by their acts that they have a knowledge of right and wrong” [Hodge, 54-55]. “The great principles of this law were communicated to man in his creation, and much of it remains with him in his fallen state. This natural light of the

understanding is called the law written in the heart, because it is imprinted on the mind by the Author of creation, and is God's work as much as the writing on the tables of stone" [Haldane, 91]. "Despite the great differences in laws and customs among peoples around the world, what unites them in a common humanity is the recognition that some things are right and others are wrong" [Harrison].

The fact that this law is **"written"** on our hearts, implies a permanency: this law is always known to us. Our **"consciences bear witness"** to this law, at times **"accusing"** us, and at times even **"defending"** us. "This supposes a standard of reference,—a knowledge of right and wrong. No man could accuse and condemn another, if there were not some standard of right and wrong; and no man could defend an action without a similar standard" [Haldane, 91]. "So it can be maintained that the function of conscience in the Gentile is parallel to the function of the law for the Jew. The way conscience operates is described as a process of accusation or defense by the thoughts of a man, the inner life being pictured as a kind of debating forum, so that at times he finds himself exonerated at the bar of conscience, at other times convicted of wrong" [Harrison]. "Paul is simply pointing out that those who have no law nevertheless have convictions about what they do. Their thoughts about their actions sometimes take the form of severe accusation and sometimes of acquittal. The Gentile, though he lacks the divinely given law that was so important for the Jew, is not without guidance" [Morris, 159].

The work of the conscience in accusing/defending our conduct looks forward to the final judgment day, when all our acts will be examined: **"This will take place on the day when God judges people's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares"** (vs. 16). "The excusing and accusing testimony of the thoughts within each person's conscience portends the verdict of the one who will bring every thought to light" [Moo, 153]. "Paul describes the moral process which takes place in the heart of man after a good or bad act; the

conscience sits in judgment, and pronounces the sentence in God's name according to the law; the *thoughts* are the several moral reflections and reasonings which appear as witnesses testifying and pleading in this court of conscience, and are often conflicting, since the sinful inclinations and passions interfere and bribe the witnesses; the object of the *accusing*, or *excusing*, is the moral action which is brought before the tribunal of the conscience... This judicial process, which takes place here in every man's heart, is a forerunner of the great judgment at the end of the world" [Lange's, 102]. On the judgment day, our own consciences will be a witness for and against us. "Conscience, which exercises a judicial office in the present life, will exercise it in a special and solemn manner at the Great Day. It will be the accuser of the evil, the acquitter of the good" [Wordsworth, 214]. "What now takes place inwardly, will then be manifested openly" [Tholuck, 73]. Paul teaches elsewhere that, on that day, God **"will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of the heart"** (I Cor. 4:5).

Note well, it is not only the external actions that will be judged, but also the **"secrets"** of the heart. "Note, with what exactness the judgment will proceed, since it takes account of things the most secret and the most concealed. It will not resemble the judgment of men, which cannot fathom the hearts and thoughts. God will not only take cognizance of external, but also of internal actions, and will discover even the inmost thoughts of men... If men can conceal their evil deeds, they are safe from human judgment. Not so with respect to the Judge at the great day. The most secret sins will then be manifested and punished" [Haldane, 93].

The judgment will take place **"through Jesus Christ"**, as declared by the **"gospel"**. Judgment is every part of the gospel as salvation. There is no "good news" of the gospel, without the specter of judgment due to rejection the gospel message. "The gospel Paul preached includes the prospect of

judgment and that it will be conducted through the mediation of Christ” [Harrison].

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A Study in History: The Reformation

Introduction to the Protestant Reformation, pt. 2, by Philip Schaff

**“Now the Lord is the Spirit:
and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.”
(II Cor. 3:17, NKJV)**

SECTION 3. *Necessity of a Reformation*

THE CORRUPTION AND ABUSES of the Latin church had long been the complaint of the best men, and even of general councils. A reformation of the head and the members was the watchword at Pisa, Constance, and Basel, but remained a *pium desiderium* (wishful thinking) for a whole century.

Let us briefly review the dark side in the condition of the church at the beginning of the sixteenth century.

The papacy was secularized, and changed into a selfish tyranny whose yoke became more and more unbearable. The scandal of the papal schism had indeed been removed, but papal morals, after a temporary improvement, became worse than ever during the years 1492 to 1521. Alexander VI was a monster of iniquity; Julius II was a politician and warrior rather than a chief shepherd of souls; and Leo X took far more interest in the revival of heathen literature and art than in religion, and is said to have even doubted the truth of the gospel history.

No wonder that many cardinals and priests followed the scandalous example of the popes, and weakened the respect

of the laity for the clergy. The writings of contemporary scholars, preachers and satirists are full of complaints and exposures of the ignorance, vulgarity and immorality of priests and monks. Simony and nepotism were shamefully practiced. Celibacy was a foul fountain of unchastity and uncleanness. The bishoprics were monopolized by the youngest sons of princes and nobles without regard to qualification. Geiler of Kaisersberg, a stern preacher of moral reform at Strassburg (d. 1510), charges all Germany with promoting ignorant and worldly men to the chief dignities, simply on account of their high connections. Thomas Murner complains that the devil had introduced the nobility into the clergy, and monopolized for them the bishoprics. Plurality of office and absence from the diocese were common. Archbishop Albrecht of Mainz was at the same time archbishop of Magdeburg and bishop of Halberstadt. Cardinal Wolsey was archbishop of York while chancellor of England, received stipends from the kings of France and Spain and the doge of Venice, and had a train of five hundred servants. James V of Scotland (1528-1542) provided for his illegitimate children by making them abbots of Holyrood House, Kelso, Melrose, Coldingham and St. Andrews, and entrusted royal favorites with bishoprics.

Discipline was nearly ruined. Whole monastic establishments and orders had become nurseries of ignorance and superstition, idleness and dissipation, and were the objects of contempt and ridicule, as may be seen from the controversy of Reuchlin with the Dominicans, the writings of Erasmus, and the *Epistolae Virorum Obscurorum*.

Theology was a maze of scholastic subtleties, Aristotelian dialectics and idle speculations, but ignored the great doctrines of the gospel. Carlstadt, the older colleague of Luther, confessed that he had been doctor of divinity before he had seen a complete copy of the Bible. Education was confined to priests and nobles. The mass of the laity could neither read nor write, and had no access to the word of God

except the Scripture lessons from the pulpit.

The priest's chief duty was to perform, by his magic words, the miracle of transubstantiation, and to offer the sacrifice of the mass for the living and the dead in a foreign tongue. Many did it mechanically, or with a skeptical reservation, especially in Italy. Preaching was neglected, and bad reference, mostly, to indulgences, alms, pilgrimages and processions. The churches were overloaded with good and bad pictures, with real and fictitious relics. Saint-worship and image-worship, superstitious rites and ceremonies obstructed the direct worship of God in spirit and in truth.

Piety which should proceed from a living union of the soul with Christ and a consecration of character, was turned outward and reduced to a round of mechanical performances such as the recital of Paternosters and Avemarias, fasting, alms-giving, confession to the priest, and pilgrimage to a holy shrine. Good works were measured by the quantity rather than the quality, and vitiated by the principle of meritoriousness which appealed to the selfish motive of reward. Remission of sin could be bought with money; a shameful traffic in indulgences was carried on under the Pope's sanction for filthy lucre as well as for the building of St. Peter's Dome, and caused that outburst of moral indignation which was the beginning of the Reformation and of the fearful judgment on the Church of Rome.

This is a one-sided, but not an exaggerated description. It is true as far as it goes, and needs only to be supplemented by the bright side which we shall present in the next section.

Honest Roman Catholic scholars, while maintaining the infallibility and consequent doctrinal irreformability of their church, admit in strong terms the decay of discipline and the necessity of a moral reform in the sixteenth century.

The best proof is furnished by a pope of exceptional integrity, Adrian VI, who made an extraordinary confession of the papal and clerical corruption to the Diet of Nurnberg in 1522, and tried earnestly, though in vain, to reform his

court. The Council of Trent was called not only for the extirpation of heresy, but in part also “for the reformation of the clergy and Christian people;” and Pope Pius IV, in the bull of confirmation, likewise declares that one of the objects of the Council was “the correction of morals and the restoration of ecclesiastical discipline.”

On the other hand, it must be admitted that the church was more than once in a far worse condition, during the papal schism in the fourteenth, and especially in the tenth and eleventh centuries; and yet she was reformed by Pope Hildebrand and his successors without a split and without an alteration of the Catholic Creed.

Why could not the same be done in the sixteenth century? Because the Roman church in the critical moment resisted reform with all her might, and forced the issue: either no reformation at all, or a reformation in opposition to Rome.

The guilt of the western schism is divided between the two parties, as the guilt of the eastern schism is; although no human tribunal can measure the share of responsibility. Much is due, no doubt, to the violence and extravagance of the Protestant opposition, but still more to the intolerance and stubbornness of the Roman resistance. The papal court used against the Reformation for a long time only the carnal weapons of political influence, diplomatic intrigue, secular wealth, haughty pride, scholastic philosophy, crushing authority, and bloody persecution. It repeated the course of the Jewish hierarchy, which crucified the Messiah and cast the apostles out of the synagogue.

But we must look beyond this partial justification, and view the matter in the light of the results of the Reformation.

It was evidently the design of Providence to develop a new type of Christianity outside of the restraints of the papacy, and the history of three centuries is the best explanation and vindication of that design. Every movement in history must be judged by its fruits.

The elements of such an advance movement were all at

work before Luther and Zwingli protested against papal indulgences.

SECTION 4.

The Preparations for the Reformation

Judaism before Christ was sadly degenerated, and those who sat in Moses' seat had become blind leaders of the blind. Yet "salvation is of the Jews;" and out of this people arose John the Baptist, the Virgin Mary, the Messiah, and the Apostles. Jerusalem, which stoned the prophets and crucified the Lord, witnessed also the pentecostal miracle and became the mother church of Christendom. So the Catholic church in the sixteenth century, though corrupt in its head and its members, was still the church of the living God and gave birth to the Reformation, which removed the rubbish of human traditions and reopened the pure fountain of the gospel of Christ.

The Reformers, it should not be forgotten, were all born, baptized, confirmed, and educated in the Roman Catholic Church, and most of them had served as priests at her altars with the solemn vow of obedience to the pope on their conscience. They stood as closely related to the papal church, as the Apostles and Evangelists to the Synagogue and the Temple; and for reasons of similar urgency, they were justified to leave the communion of their fathers; or rather, they did not leave it, but were cast out by the ruling hierarchy.

The Reformation went back to first principles in order to go forward. It struck its roots deep in the past and bore rich fruits for the future. It sprang forth almost simultaneously from different parts of Europe and was enthusiastically hailed by the leading minds of the age in church and state. No great movement in history—except Christianity itself—was so widely and thoroughly prepared as the Protestant Reformation.

The reformatory councils of Pisa, Constance, and Basel; the conflict of the Emperors with the Popes; the contemplative piety of the mystics with their thirst after direct communion with God; the revival of classical literature; the general intellectual awakening; the biblical studies of Reuchlin, and Erasmus; the rising spirit of national independence; Wiclif, and the Lollards in England; Hus, and the Hussites in Bohemia; John von Goch, John von Wesel, and Johann Wessel in Germany and the Netherlands; Savonarola in Italy; the Brethren of the Common Life, the Waldenses, the Friends of God,—contributed their share towards the great change and paved the way for a new era of Christianity. The innermost life of the church was pressing forward to a new era. There is scarcely a principle or doctrine of the Reformation which was not anticipated and advocated in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Luther made the remark, that his opponents might charge him with having borrowed everything from John Wessel if he had known his writings earlier. The fuel was abundant all over Europe, but it required the spark which would set it ablaze.

Violent passions, political intrigues, the ambition and avarice of princes, and all sorts of selfish and worldly motives were mixed up with the war against the papacy. But they were at work likewise in the introduction of Christianity among the heathen barbarians. “Wherever God builds a church, the devil builds a chapel close by.” Human nature is terribly corrupt and leaves its stains on the noblest movements in history.

But, after all, the religious leaders of the Reformation, while not free from faults, were men of the purest motives and highest aims, and there is no nation which has not been benefited by the change they introduced.

This study is taken from: Schaff, Philip. *History of the Christian Church*, Vol. VI. A PDF file of this book can be downloaded, free of charge, at:

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A Study in Wisdom: Psalm 79

A Study by Scott Sperling

Psalm 79

Vss. 1-7 -

The Destruction of Jerusalem

A Psalm of Asaph

- ¹ O God, the nations have invaded your inheritance;
they have defiled your holy temple,
they have reduced Jerusalem to rubble.
- ² They have left the dead bodies of your servants
as food for the birds of the sky,
the flesh of your own people
for the animals of the wild.
- ³ They have poured out blood like water
all around Jerusalem,
and there is no one to bury the dead.
- ⁴ We are objects of contempt to our neighbors,
of scorn and derision to those around us.
- ⁵ How long, LORD? Will you be angry forever?
How long will your jealousy burn like fire?
- ⁶ Pour out your wrath on the nations
that do not acknowledge you,
on the kingdoms that do not call on your name;
- ⁷ for they have devoured Jacob
and devastated his homeland.

As the inscription denotes, this is **“A psalm of Asaph.”** This is the seventh of eleven straight Psalms which are attributed to **“Asaph”**. The man Asaph was a Levite who lived during the time of David (see I Chron. 15:16-19). When a psalm is specified to be **“of Asaph”**, it is one which either Asaph himself wrote, or that one of the so-called “sons of Asaph” wrote. These were spiritual descendants of Asaph, who “presided over the music in the sanctuary” [Barnes, 309]. Since this psalm speaks of the destruction of Jerusalem, we can infer that one of the sons of Asaph wrote, and not Asaph himself.

Most commentators believe that the occasion of which the psalm speaks is the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar and the Chaldeans (in 587 BC), after which the people of Israel were exiled to Babylon. In addition, the psalm may also point with a prophetic eye to later events. “The *language* might indeed be applicable to the desolation of the city by Antiochus Epiphanes (ca. 168 BC), and also to its destruction by the Romans (70 AD)” [Barnes, 310].

This psalm is closely related to Psalm 74, which also speaks of the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem. “The Psalm before us proceeds on the supposition that the seventy-fourth had been previously composed, and *supplements* it” [Hengstenberg, 1]. The juxtaposition of the end of the previous psalm and this psalm presents a stark contrast. Psalm 78:69 speaks of the building of the Temple, and then speaks of the triumphant reign of David. Psalm 79 speaks of the destruction of the Temple, amidst the continued sin of the people of God.

The psalmist begins: **“O God, the nations have invaded your inheritance; they have defiled your holy temple, they have reduced Jerusalem to rubble”** (vs. 1). The psalmist speaks of the attack on Jerusalem as an attack on God Himself. The nations have invaded **“your”** inheritance; they have defiled **“your”** holy temple. It was a purposeful

attack on the True and Living God. “Desecration was the first and chief affliction” [Cowles, 332]. “It is, as it were, ‘an inversion of the order of nature’ (Calvin) when God’s inheritance falls into the power of the heathen, and when men who know not God, nor honor His name, tread underfoot the sanctuary devoted to His worship and profane it, make the city of God a heap of stones, and give over to dishonor and death its inhabitants, who have been called to life and to a participation in the Divine glory” [Lange’s, 444].

It was also an attack on God’s people: **“They have left the dead bodies of your servants as food for the birds of the sky, the flesh of your own people for the animals of the wild. They have poured out blood like water all around Jerusalem, and there is no one to bury the dead. We are objects of contempt to our neighbors, of scorn and derision to those around us”** (vss. 2-4). It is not unusual for God’s people to suffer calamity. “Learn, in general, the Church of God may be brought low... Heavy and fearful are the judgments temporal, which may come upon God’s people” [Dickson, 224, 227].

This destruction was explicitly prophesied by Jeremiah: **“And the people they are prophesying to will be thrown out into the streets of Jerusalem because of the famine and sword. There will be no one to bury them, their wives, their sons and their daughters. I will pour out on them the calamity they deserve”** (Jer. 14:6).

The psalmist understands that the affliction of God’s people was a result of the sin of God’s people: **“How long, Lord? Will you be angry forever? How long will your jealousy burn like fire?”** (vs. 5). “Parched and exhausted, amidst the flames of persecution, we behold Sion panting for the comforts of redemption” [Horne, 288].

The psalmist asks, **“How long, LORD?”** “God’s delays in sending relief often seem long and even tedious. But let us remember that such delays are doubtless needful, that God’s honor is of more importance than our ease, that God always

sees in us just cause for every stroke he inflicts, that the wicked can go no further than infinite wisdom permits, that the least sin is a greater evil than any merely temporal calamity, and that one design of all our chastisements is to cure our foolish impatience” [Plumer, 766].

The psalmist points out that the source of God’s anger is his **“jealousy”**. This suggests that the affliction was a punishment for idolatry by God’s people. They turned to other, false gods, thus provoking the jealousy and wrath of the True and Living God.

The psalmist prays that the wrath of God be turned against those who never acknowledged him as God: **“Pour out your wrath on the nations that do not acknowledge you, on the kingdoms that do not call on your name; for they have devoured Jacob and devastated his homeland”** (vs. 6-7). “We, it is true, have been unfaithful; but they never knew thy name, and are totally abandoned to idolatry” [Clarke, 472].

The psalmist here is using Jeremiah’s words of prophecy about this event: **“Discipline me, Lord, but only in due measure—not in your anger, or you will reduce me to nothing. Pour out your wrath on the nations that do not acknowledge you, on the peoples who do not call on your name. For they have devoured Jacob; they have devoured him completely and destroyed his homeland”** (Jer. 10:25).

Vss. 8-13 - Appeal to God for Mercy

- ⁸ O God, Do not hold against us
 the sins of past generations;
 may your mercy come quickly to meet us,
 for we are in desperate need.
- ⁹ Help us, God our Savior,
 for the glory of your name;
 deliver us and forgive our sins
 for your name’s sake.

- ¹⁰ Why should the nations say,
“Where is their God?”
Before our eyes, make known among the nations
that you avenge the outpoured blood
of your servants.**
- ¹¹ May the groans of the prisoners come before you;
with your strong arm
preserve those condemned to die.**
- ¹² Pay back into the laps of our neighbors seven times
the contempt they have hurled at you, Lord.**
- ¹³ Then we your people, the sheep of your pasture,
will praise you forever;
from generation to generation
we will proclaim your praise.**

Affliction inspires reflection. The psalmist, by reflection, recognizes the sins of the people of Israel to be the ultimate cause of the affliction: **“O God, Do not hold against us the sins of past generations; may your mercy come quickly to meet us, for we are in desperate need”** (vs. 8). “Affliction hath then wrought its intended effect, when it hath convinced us of sin, and led us to repentance” [Horne, 288].

Note, the psalmist asks for deliverance, not on the basis of his own righteousness, but on basis of God’s mercy, and on the basis that God’s name be glorified. This is how we all must stand before God: we are sinners; anything good that we receive is received based on God’s mercy. God had delivered the children of Israel from danger, many times in the past, not because they deserved deliverance, but because God was merciful to his people. However, there comes a time when God’s mercy is no longer available, when our sins reach a breaking point. We know from history, that in this particular case, God did not deliver the children of Israel. Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem, and forced the children of Israel into exile in Babylon. Dear reader, seek God’s mercy while it may be found. Turn from your sins before they reach their end.

The psalmist next seeks deliverance, in order that God's name may be glorified: **“Help us, God our Savior, for the glory of your name; deliver us and forgive our sins for your name's sake”** (vs. 9). The work of God was so connected with the children of Israel that any harm that came to Israel detracted from God's glory. In the same way, people of the world see the children of God as a sort of reflection of who God is. If we are upright, merciful, and charitable, this reflects well on God; His glory is enhanced in the sight of non-believers. On the other hand, if we sin openly, are backbiting and evil toward others, this reflects on God's glory, and His name is dragged through the mud. “When God has so intertwined his name with that of his people, and his own honour so intimately interwoven with the history of his people, as in the case of Israel, does it not follow, that the destiny of his nation affects the honour of his name?” [Tholuck, 337].

The psalmist next appeals to God on the basis of the sins of the oppressors: **“Why should the nations say, ‘Where is their God?’ Before our eyes, make known among the nations that you avenge the outpoured blood of your servants. May the groans of the prisoners come before you; with your strong arm preserve those condemned to die. Pay back into the laps of our neighbors seven times the contempt they have hurled at you, Lord”** (vss. 10-12). “The poet wishes in company with his contemporaries, as eye-witnesses, to experience what God has promised in the early times, viz. that He will avenge the blood of His servants” [Delitzsch, 380]. However, this time, due to the accumulated sin of the children of Israel, their blood will not be avenged. Rather, the ungodly oppressors were, in this case, being used by God to punish the children of Israel.

The psalmist promises praise and honor to God, if He would deliver them: **“Then we your people, the sheep of your pasture, will praise you forever; from generation to generation we will proclaim your praise”** (vs. 13). If only

the children of Israel had honored God “**from generation to generation**” before this judgment came upon them, they could have avoided it. It is often the unbeliever’s way to make promises to God when he encounters affliction. We should rather praise and honor Him in times of peace, when there is no need for His deliverance. And even when affliction comes, we should praise God and rest in Him as we go through it. Our love for God should not be contingent on miraculous deliverances, but should rather be a day-by-day, even minute-by-minute, honoring of God in our lives.



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A Sermon: Frost and Thaw

A Sermon by the Rev. Charles H. Spurgeon

Sermon No. 670 –

Frost and Thaw – Psalm 147:16-18

(Preached at the Metropolitan Tabernacle,
London, December 24th, 1865)

“He gives snow like wool: He scatters the frost like ashes. He casts out His hail like morsels; who can stand before His cold? He sends out His word, and melts them: He causes His wind to blow, and the waters flow.”
(Psalm 147:16-18, NKJV)

LOOKING OUT of our window one morning we saw the earth robed in a white mantle. In a few short hours the earth had been covered to a considerable depth with snow. We looked out again in a few hours and saw the fields as green as ever, and the plowed fields as bare as if no single flake had fallen. We do not often witness so heavy a descent of snow followed by a so rapid thaw.

These interesting changes were worked by God, not only with a purpose toward the outward world, but with some design toward the spiritual realm. God is always a teacher. In every action that He performs He is instructing His own children, and opening up to them the road to inner mysteries. The mind aspiring after knowledge finds pleasure in every phenomenon of nature; the naturalist is not abroad a single hour without hearing the voice of wisdom revealing natural things—but when a renewed mind is worshipping in nature’s temple, then the spirit finds a secret wrapped up in the

innermost folds of God's works. Happy are those spirits who know how to get at the inward through the outward, and to find food for their heaven-born spirits, as well as for their mental powers, in the doings of the Lord in the works of His hand.

I shall ask your attention, first, *to the operations of nature spoken of in the text*; and, secondly, *to those operations of divine grace of which they are the most fitting symbols.*

I. Consider first, **THE OPERATIONS OF NATURE.** We shall not think a few minutes wasted if we call your attention to the hand of God in frost and thaw, even upon natural grounds.

1. Observe the *directness* of the Lord's work under our notice. I rejoice as I read these words, to find how present our God is in the world. It is not written, "The laws of nature produce snow," but, "HE *gives snow*," as if every flake came directly from the palm of His hand, wherein it had been hidden as in a treasury. We are not told that certain providential regulations form moisture into frost; no, but as Moses took ashes and scattered them upon Egypt, so it is said of the Lord, "HE *scatters the frost like ashes.*" It is not said that the Eternal has set the world going, and by the operation of its machinery ice is produced. Oh no, but every single granule of ice descending in the hail is from God; "HE *casts out His hail like morsels.*" Even as the slinger distinctly sends the stone out of his sling, so the path of every hailstone is marked by the divine wisdom, and it derives its impetus from the divine power. The hail is called, you observe, "*His hail*," and in the next sentence we read of *His cold*. These words make nature strangely magnificent. When we can look upon every hailstone as God's hail, how precious the watery diamonds become! When we feel the cold nipping our limbs and penetrating through every garment, it somewhat consoles us to remember that it is *His cold*. When the thaw comes, see how the text speaks of it—"He *sends out His word.*" He does not leave it to certain forces of nature, but like a king, "He

sends out His word and melts them; He causes HIS wind to blow.” He has a special property in every wind; whether it comes from the north to freeze, or from the south to melt, it is *HIS* wind. Behold, my brothers and sisters, how in God’s temple everything speaks of His glory. Learn to see the Lord in all scenes of the visible universe, for truly He works all things.

This thought of the directness of the Divine operations in nature must be carried into providence. It will greatly comfort you if you can see God’s hand in your losses and crosses. Surely you will not murmur against the direct agency of your God. This will put an extraordinary sweetness into daily mercies; this will make the comforts of life more comfortable still, because they are from a Father’s hand; and if your table is scantily furnished it shall suffice for your contented heart, when you know that your Father spread it for you in His wisdom and love. This shall bless your bread and your water; this shall make the bare walls of an ill-furnished room as resplendent as a palace, and turn a hard bed into a couch of down—my Father does it all. We see His smile of love even when others see nothing but the black hand of Death smiting our best beloved. We see a Father’s hand when the pestilence lays our cattle dead upon the plain. We see God at work in mercy when we ourselves are stretched upon the bed of languishing. It is always our Father’s act and deed. Do not let us get beyond this; but rather let us enlarge our view of this truth of God, and remember that this is true of the little as well as of the great. Let the lines of a true poet strike you—

“If pestilence stalks through the land,
 you say the Lord has done it—
Has He not done it when
 an aphid creeps upon the rosebud?
If an avalanche tumbles from its Alp,
 you tremble at the will of providence—
Is not that will as much concerned
 when the dry leaves fall from the poplar?”

Let your hearts sing of everything—*Jehovah-Shammah*—The Lord is there.

2. Next, I beg you to observe with thanksgiving the *ease* of God's working. These verses read as if the making of frost and snow were the simplest matter in the world. A man puts his hand into a woolpack and throws out the wool; God gives snow as easily as that. "He gives snow like wool." A man takes up a handful of ashes and throws them into the air, and they fall around. "He scatters the frost like ashes." Frost and snow are marvels of nature! Those who have observed the extraordinary beauty of the ice crystals have been enraptured, and yet, He casts forth His ice like morsels—just as easily as we cast crumbs of bread outside the window to the robins during wintry days. When the rivers are frozen hard, and the earth is held in iron chains, then the melting of the whole—how is that done? Not by kindling innumerable fires, nor by sending electric shocks from huge batteries through the interior of the earth— no; "He sends forth His word and melts them; He causes His wind to blow, and the waters flow." The whole matter is accomplished with a word and a breath. If you and I had any great thing to do, what puffing and panting, what straining and tugging there would be; and even the great engineers who perform marvels by machinery, make much noise and stir about it. It is not so with the Almighty One. Our globe spins round in 24 hours, and yet it does not make as much noise as a humming top, and yonder ponderous worlds rolling in space track their way in silence. If I enter a factory I hear a deafening din, or if I stand near the village mill, turned by water dropping over a wheel, there is a never ceasing click-clack, or an undying hum; but God's great wheels revolve without noise or friction; all the Divine works are simply, easily, and beautifully managed. This case is seen in providence as well as in nature. Your heavenly Father is as able to deliver you as He is to melt the snow, and He will deliver you in as simple a manner if you rest upon Him. He opens His hand and supplies the needs of every living thing

as readily as He works in nature. Mark the ease of God's working—He does but open His hand.

3. Notice in the next place the *variety* of the divine operations in nature. When the Lord is at work with frost as His tool, He creates snow, a wonderful production—every crystal being a marvel of art; but then He is not content with snow—from the same water He makes another form of beauty which we call frost, and yet a third lustrous sparkling substance, namely glittering ice, and all these by the one agency of *cold*. What a marvelous variety the educated eye can detect in the several forms of frozen water! The same God who solidified the flood with cold soon melts it with warmth. But even in thaw there is no monotony of manner—at one time the joyous streams rush with such impetuosity from their imprisonment that rivers are swollen and floods cover the plains. At another time, by slow degrees, in scanty dribblets, the drops regain their freedom. The same variety is seen in every department of nature. So in providence the Lord has a thousand forms of frosty trials with which to try His people, and He has ten thousand beams of mercy with which to cheer and comfort them! He can afflict you with the snow trial, or with the frost trial, or with the ice trial if He wills; and another time He can, with His word, relax the bonds of adversity, and that in countless ways. Whereas men are tied to two or three methods in accomplishing *their* will, God is infinite in understanding, and works as He wills by ways unknown to mortal minds.

4. I shall ask you, also, to consider the works of God in nature in their *swiftness*. It was thought a wonderful thing in the days of Ahasuerus that letters were sent by post upon swift horses. In our country we thought we had arrived at the age of miracles when the axles of our wagons glowed with speed, and now that the telegraph is at work, we stretch out our hands into infinity! But what is our speed compared with that of God's operations? Well does the text say, "He sends forth His commandment upon earth: His word runs very swiftly."

Forth went the word, "Open the treasures of snow," and the flakes descended in innumerable multitudes; and then it was said, "Let them be closed," and not another snowflake was seen. Then spoke the Master, "Let the south wind blow and the snow be melted," and it disappeared at the voice of His word. Believer, you cannot tell how soon God may come to your help. "He rode upon a cherub and did fly," says David, "Yes; He did fly upon the wings of the wind." He will come from above to rescue His beloved; He will rend the heavens and come down; with such speed will He descend that He will not stay to draw the curtains of heaven, but He will rend them in His haste, and make the mountains flow down at His feet—that He may deliver those who cry unto Him in the hour of trouble. That mighty God who can melt the ice so speedily can take to Himself the same eagle wings and hasten to your deliverance. Arise, O God! And let Your children be helped, and that right quickly!

5. One other thought. Consider the *goodness* of God in all the operations of nature and providence. Think of that goodness negatively. "Who can stand before His cold?" You cannot help thinking of the poor in a hard winter—only a hard heart can forget them when you see the snow lying deep. But suppose that snow continued to fall! What is there to hinder it? The same God who sends us snow for one day could do the like for 50 days if He pleased. Why not? And when the frost pinches us so severely, why should it not be continued month after month? We can only thank the goodness which does not send "His cold" to such an extent that our spirits expire. Travelers towards the North Pole tremble as they think of this question, "Who can stand before His cold?" For the agency of cold has a degree of omnipotence in it when God is pleased to let it loose; let us thank God for the restraining mercy by which He holds the cold in check.

Not only negatively, but positively there is mercy in the snow. Is not that a suggestive metaphor? "He gives snow like

wool.” The snow is said to warm the earth; it protects those little plants which have just begun to peep above ground and might otherwise be frostbitten; as with a garment of down the snow protects them from the extreme severity of cold. Watts sings, in his version of the 147th Psalm—

“His flakes of snow like wool He sends,
And thus the springing corn defends.”

It was an idea of the ancients that snow warmed the heart of the soil, gave it fertility, and therefore they praised God for it. Certainly there is much mercy in the frost, for pestilence might run a far longer race if it were not that the frost cries to it, “Up to here shall you come, but no farther.” Noxious insects would multiply until they devoured the precious fruits of the earth if sharp nights did not destroy millions of them so that these pests are swept from off the earth. Though man may think himself a loser by the cold, he is a great ultimate gainer by the decree of providence which ordains winter! The quaint saying of one of the old writers that, “snow is wool, and frost is fire, and ice is bread, and rain is drink,” is true, though it sounds like a paradox. There is no doubt that frost, in breaking up the soil, promotes fruitfulness, and so the ice becomes bread. Thus those agencies which for the moment deprive our workers of their means of sustenance are the means by which God supplies every living thing. Mark, then, God’s goodness as clearly in the snow and frost as in the thaw which clears the winter’s works away.

Christian, remember the goodness of God in the frost of adversity, which you felt this morning. Rest assured that when God is pleased to send out the biting winds of affliction, He is in them, and He is always *love*—as much love in sorrow as when He breathes upon you the soft south wind of joy. See the loving-kindness of God in every work of His hand; praise Him, He makes summer and winter; let your song go round the year! Praise Him—He gives day and sends night—thank

Him at all hours! Cast not away your confidence, it has great recompense of reward. As David wove the snow, and rain, and stormy wind into a song, even so combine your trials, your tribulations, your difficulties, and adversities into a sweet Psalm of praise, and say perpetually—

“Let us, with a gladsome mind,
Praise the Lord, for He is kind.”

Thus much upon the operations of nature; it is a very tempting theme, but other fields invite the reaper.

II. I would address you very earnestly and solemnly upon THOSE OPERATIONS OF GRACE OF WHICH FROST AND THAW ARE THE OUTWARD SYMBOLS.

There is a period with God's own people when He comes to deal with them by the *frost of the law*. The law is to the soul as the cutting north wind. Faith can see love in it, but the carnal eye of sense cannot. It is a cold, terrible, comfortless blast. To be exposed to the full force of the law of God would be to be frostbitten with everlasting destruction; even to feel it for a season would congeal the marrow of one's bones, and make one's whole being stiff with fear. “Who can stand before His cold?” When the law comes forth thundering from its treasuries, who can stand before it? The effect of law-work upon the soul is to bind up the rivers of human delight. No man can rejoice when the terrors of conscience are upon him; when the law of God is sweeping through the soul, music and dancing lose their joy—the bowl forgets its power to cheer—and the enchantments of earth are broken. The rivers of pleasure freeze to icy despondency; the buds of hope are suddenly nipped, and the soul finds no comfort. It was satisfied once to grow rich, but rust and canker are now upon all gold and silver. Every promising hope is frostbitten, and the spirit is winter-bound in despair. This cold makes the sinner feel how ragged his garments are; he could strut about when it was summer weather and think his rags right royal

robes—but now the cold frost finds out every tear in his garments, and in the hands of the terrible law he shivers like the leaves upon the aspen. The north wind of judgment searches the man through and through; he did not know what was in him, but now he sees his inward parts to be filled with corruption and rottenness. These are some of the terrors of the wintry breath of the law.

All the while, however, this frost of law and terrors only tends to harden. Nothing splits the rock or makes the cliff tumble like frost when succeeded by thaw, but frost alone makes the earth like a mass of iron breaking the plowshare which would seek to pierce it. A sinner under the influence of the law of God, apart from the gospel, is hardened by despair, and cries, “There is no hope, and therefore I will go after my lusts; whereas there is no heaven for me after this life, I will make a heaven out of this earth; and since hell awaits me, I will at least enjoy such sweets as sin may afford me here.” This is not the fault of the law—the blame lies with the corrupt heart which is hardened by it. Nevertheless, such is its effect.

When the Lord has worked by the frost of the law, He sends the thaw of the gospel. When the south wind blows from the land of promise bringing precious remembrances of God’s fatherly pity and tender loving-kindness, then straightway the heart begins to soften, and a sense of blood-bought pardon speedily dissolves it. The eyes fill with tears; the heart melts in tenderness, rivers of pleasure flow freely, and buds of hope open in the cheerful air! A heavenly spring whispers to the flowers that were sleeping in the cold earth—they hear its voice, and lift up their heads, for “the rain is over and gone. The flowers appear on the earth, the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land.” God sends His Word, saying, “Your warfare is accomplished, and your sin is pardoned.” And when that blessedly cheering Word comes with power to the soul, and the sweet breath of the Holy Spirit acts like the warm south wind upon the heart, then the waters flow and the mind is

filled with holy joy, and light, and liberty, for God is there!—

“The legal wintry state is gone,
The frosts are fled, the spring comes on,
The sacred turtledove we hear
Proclaims the new, the joyful year.”

Having shown you that there is a parallel between frost and thaw in nature, and law and gospel in grace, I would utter the same thoughts concerning grace which I gave you concerning nature.

1. We began with the *directness of God's works in nature*. Now, beloved friends, mark the *directness of God's works in grace*. When the heart is truly affected by the law of God; when sin is made to appear exceedingly sinful; when carnal hopes are frozen to death by the law; when the soul is made to feel its barrenness and utter death and ruin—this is the finger of God. Do not speak of it as the finger of the *minister*. It was well that he preached earnestly—God has used him as an instrument, but God works all. When the thaw of divine grace comes, I pray you will discern the distinct hand of God in every beam of comfort which gladdens the troubled conscience, for it is the Lord, alone, who binds up the broken in heart, and heals all their wounds! We are far too apt to stop in instrumentalities. Folly makes men look to sacraments for heart-breaking or heart-healing, but sacraments all say, “It is not in us.” Some of you look to the preaching of the Word, and look no higher, but all true preachers will tell you, “It is not in us.” Eloquence and earnestness at their highest pitch can neither break nor heal a heart. This is *God's work*, yes, and not God's *secondary work* in the sense in which the philosopher admits that God is in the laws of nature, but God's *personal* and *immediate work*. He puts forth His own hand when the conscience is humbled, and it is by His own right hand that the conscience is eased and cleansed. I desire that this thought may abide upon your minds, for you will not praise God otherwise, nor will you be

sound in doctrine.

All departures from sound doctrine on the point of conversion arise from forgetfulness that it is a *divine Work* from first to last—that the faintest *desire* after Christ is as much the Work of God as the gift of His dear Son—and that our whole spiritual history through, from the Alpha to the Omega, the Holy Spirit works in us to will and to do of His own good pleasure. As you have evidently seen the finger of God in casting forth His ice, and in sending thaw, so I pray you recognize the handiwork of God in giving you a sense of sin and in bringing you to the Savior's feet. Join together in heartily praising the wonder-working God who does all things according to the counsel of His will—

“Our seeking Your face
Was all of Your grace!
Your mercy demands, and shall have all the praise:
No sinner can be
Beforehand with Thee,
Your grace is preventing, almighty and free.”

2. The second thought upon nature was the *ease* with which the Lord worked. There was no effort or disturbance. Transfer that to the work of divine grace. How easy it is for God to send law-work into the soul! You stubborn sinner, you cannot touch him! And even providence has failed to awaken him, he is dead—altogether dead in trespasses and sins, but if the glorious Lord will graciously send forth the wind of His Spirit, that will melt him. The swearing reprobate, whose mouth is blackened with profanity—if the Lord does but look upon him, and make bare His arm of irresistible grace—he shall yet praise God and bless His name! And he will live to His honor. Do not limit the Holy One of Israel. Persecuting *Saul* became loving *Paul*, and why should not that person be saved of whose case you almost despair? Your husband may have many points which make his case difficult, but no case

is desperate with God; your son may have offended both against heaven and against you, but God can save the most hardened. The sharpest frost of obstinate sin must yield to the thaw of divine grace—even huge icebergs of crime must melt in the Gulf Stream of infinite love.

Poor sinner, I cannot leave this point without a word to you. Perhaps the Master has sent the frost to you, and you think it will never end. Let me encourage you to hope, and yet more, to *pray* for gracious visitations. Miss Steele's verses will just suit your mournful, yet hopeful state—

“Stern winter throws his icy chains,
Encircling nature round—
How bleak, how comfortless the plains,
Late with bright verdure crowned!
The sun withdraws his vital beams,
And light and warmth depart.
And, drooping lifeless, nature seems
An emblem of my heart—
My heart, where mental winter reigns
In night's dark mantle clad,
Confined in cold, inactive chains!
How desolate and sad!
Return, O blissful sun, and bring
Your soul-reviving ray—
This mental winter shall be spring,
This darkness cheerful day.”

It is easy for God to deliver you. He says, “I have blotted out like a thick cloud your transgressions.” I stood the other evening looking up at a black cloud which was covering all the heavens, and I thought it would surely rain. I entered the house, and when I came out again the sky was all blue—the wind had driven the clouds away. So may it be with your soul; it is an easy thing for the Lord to put away sin from repenting sinners. All obstacles which hindered our pardon were

removed by Jesus when He died upon the cross, and if you believe in Him, you will find that He has cast your sins into the depths of the sea! If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes.

3. The next thought concerning the Lord's work in nature was the *variety* of it. Frost produces a sort of trinity in unity—snow, frost, ice—and when the thaw comes its ways are many. So is it with the work of God in the heart. Conviction comes not alike to all. Some convictions fall as the snow from heaven—you never hear the flakes descend. They alight so gently, one upon the other. There are softly coming convictions—they are felt, but we can scarcely tell when we began to feel them. A true work of repentance may be of the gentlest kind. On the other hand, the Lord casts forth His ice like morsels—the hailstones rattle against the window, and you think they will surely force their way into the room! And to many persons, convictions come beating down till they remind you of hailstones. There is variety. It is as true a frost which produces the noiseless snow as that which brings forth the terrible hail. Why should you want hailstones of terror? Be thankful that God has visited you, but do not dictate to Him the way of His working. With regard to the gospel thaw; if you may but be pardoned by Jesus, do not stipulate as to the manner of His grace. Thaw is universal and gradual, but its commencement is not always discernible. The chains of winter are unloosed by degrees—the surface ice and snow melt—and by-and-by the warmth permeates the entire mass till every rock of ice gives way. But while thaw is universal and visible in its *effects*, you cannot see the mighty power which is doing all this. Even so you must not expect to discern the Spirit of God. You will find Him gradually operating upon the entire man, enlightening the understanding, freeing the will, delivering the heart from fear, inspiring hope, waking up the whole spirit, gradually and universally working upon the mind, and producing the manifest effects of comfort, and hope, and peace. But you can no more *see* the Spirit of God than you can

see the south wind! The effect of His power is to be *felt*, and when you feel it, do not marvel if it is somewhat different from what others have experienced. After all, there is a singular likeness in snow and frost and ice, and so there is a remarkable sameness in the experience of all God's children; but there is still a great variety in the inward operations of divine grace.

4. We must next notice the *rapidity* of God's works. "His word runs very swiftly." It did not take many days to get rid of the last snow. A contractor would take many a day to cart it away, but God sends forth His word, and the snow and ice disappear at once. So is it with the soul—the Lord often works rapidly when He cheers the heart; you may have been a long time under the operation of His frosty law, but there is no reason why you should be another hour under it—if the Spirit enables you to trust in the finished work of Christ, you may go out of this house rejoicing that every sin is forgiven. Poor soul, do not think that the way from the horrible pit is to climb, step by step, to the top! Oh, no! Jesus can set your feet upon a rock before the clock shall have gone round the dial; He can, in an instant, bring you from death to life, from condemnation to justification. "Today shall you be with Me in Paradise," was spoken to a dying thief, black and defiled with sin. Only believe in the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved!

5. Our last thought upon the operation of God was *His goodness* in it all. What a blessing that God did not send us more law-work than He did. "Who can stand before His cold?" Oh, beloved, when God has taken away from man natural comfort, and made him feel divine Wrath in his soul, it is an awful thing! Speak of a haunted man—no man need be haunted with a worse ghost than the remembrance of his old sins. The childish tale of the sailor with the old man of the mountain on his back, who pressed him more and more heavily, is more than realized in the history of the troubled conscience. If one sin does but leap on a man's back, it will sink the sinner

through every standing place that he can possibly mount upon; he will go down, down, under its weight, till he sinks to the lowest depths of hell. There is no place where sin can be borne till you get upon the Rock of Ages—and even there the joy is not that you bear it—but that Jesus has borne it all *for* you! The spirit would utterly fail before the law if it had full sway. Thank God, “He stays His rough wind in the day of His east wind.” At the same time, how thankful we may be that we ever felt the law frost in our soul. The folly of self-righteousness is killed by the winter of conviction; we would have been a thousand times more proud, and foolish, and worldly than we are, if it had not been for the sharp frost with which the Lord nipped the growths of the flesh.

But how shall we thank Him sufficiently for the thaw of His loving-kindness? How great the change which His mercy made in us as soon as its beams had reached our soul. Hardness vanished, cold departed, warmth and love abounded, and the life-floods leaped in their channels. The Lord visited us, and we rose from our grave of despair even as the seeds arise from the earth; as the bulb of the crocus holds up its golden cup to be filled with sunshine, so did our new-born faith open itself to the glory of the Lord! As the primrose peeps up from the sod to gaze upon the sun, so did our hope look forth for the promise, and delight itself in the Lord. Thank God that spring tide has with many of us matured into summer, and winter has gone, never to return. We praise the Lord for this every day of our lives, and we will praise Him when time shall be no more in that sunny land—

“Where everlasting spring abides,
And never withering flowers.
A thread-like stream alone divides
That heavenly land from ours.”

Believe in the Lord, you who shiver in the frost of the law, and the law of love shall soon bring you warm days of joy and peace. So be it. Amen



This sermon can be found in the book *Spurgeon's Sermons*, Vol. XII (The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit). A PDF eBook of this volume is available free of charge at:

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A Meditation: The Spiritual Chemist

A Meditation Upon Natural Heat and Radical Moisture, by William Spurstowe (1666)

There is a regiment of health in the soul, as well as in the body; in the inward man as well as in the outward man; they being both subjects incident to distempers, and that from a defect, or excess in those qualities, which when duly regulated are the principle, and basis of life and strength. What preserves and maintains the natural life, but the just temperament of the *radical moisture*, and the *innate heat*? And what again endangers and destroys it, but the heat devouring the moisture, or the moisture impairing the heat? When either of these prevail against each other, diseases do suddenly follow. And is it not thus in the soul, and inward man? In it those two signal graces of *faith* and *repentance*, do keep up and cherish the spiritual life of a Christian; faith being like the natural heat, and repentance like the radical moisture.

If then any by believing should exercise repentance less, or in repenting should lessen their believing, they would soon fall into one of those most dangerous extremes, either to be swallowed up of sorrow and despair, or else to be puffed up with security and presumption. Is it not then a matter of complaint that these two *evangelical duties* (as some divines have called them) which in the practice of Christians should never be separated, should be looked upon by many to oppose, rather than to promote each other in their operations: Some, out of weakness, cannot apprehend what consistency there can be between *faith* and *repentance*, whose effects seem to be

contrary, the one working peace and joy, the other trouble and sorrow; the one confidence, the other fear; the one shame, the other boldness.

Now, such as these, when touched with the *sense of their sin*, judge it their duty rather to mourn, than to believe, and to feel the bitterness of sin, than to taste the sweetness of a promise, and put away comfort from them, lest it should check and abate the over-flowings of their sorrow. Others again, whether out of heedlessness, or willfulness, I will not determine, when they behold the fulness of *grace* in the blotting out of sin, the freeness of *grace* in the blotting out of sin, the freeness of *grace* in the healing of backslidings, they see so little necessity of *repentance*, as they think it below (as they so speak) a Gospel Spirit to be troubled for that which Christ has satisfied for. It is not *repentance* that they should now exercise, but *faith*; sorrow seems interpretatively to be a jealous of the truth of God's promise in forgiving, and of the sufficiency of Christ's discharge, who was the surety, who has not left one single mite of the *debt* for believers to pay. Sorrow therefore seems to them as unseasonable, as it would be for a prisoner to mourn, when the prison door is opened, and himself set free from debt and bondage.

Thus, this pair of graces and duties, concerning which I may say as God did of Adam, it is not good that either of them should be alone: are yet divided often time in the *practice*, though indissolubly linked together in the precept. Fain would I therefore evidence to the *weak* the *concord* of these two graces, in respect of *comfort*: and to the *willful* the necessity of them both, in order unto pardon.

Unto the *weak*, therefore, I say, that the agreement between faith and repentance, does not lie in the immediate impressions, which they make upon the soul, which are in some respects opposite to each other; but in the *principle* from which they arise, which is the same, the grace of Christ; and in the end which is the same, the salvation of man, and in *habitude* and subordination that they have one to another; for

repentance is never more kindly than when it disposes us to the exercise and actings of faith; whose comforts of joy, peace and serenity of heart, are as *gold* which is best laid upon sad and dark colors; or as the polished *diamond*, that receives an addition of luster from the watering of it. God's promise is, that the believing Jews, who look upon Christ by an eye of faith, shall be also great mourners, **"They shall mourn for him as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his first born"** (Zech. 12:10).

Unto the *careless*, or *willful*, I also say, that God never forgives sin, but where also he gives a penitent and relenting heart. So that, though faith has a peculiar nature in the receiving of pardon, applying it by way of instrument which no other grace does; yet repentance is the *express formal* qualification that fits for pardon, not by way of *causality* or *merit*, but by way of *means*, as well as of *command*, which arises from a *condecency* both to God himself, who is a holy God, and to the nature of the mercy, which is the taking and removing of sin away.

Never dream then of such free grace, or Gospel mercy, as does supersede a broken and a contrite heart, or take off the necessity of sorrowing for sin. For Christ did never undertake to satisfy God's wrath in an *absolute* and *unlimited* manner, but in a well *ordered* and *meet* way, viz., the way of *faith* and *repentance*. How else should we ever come to taste the bitterness of sin, or the sweetness of grace? How to prize and esteem the physician if not sensible of our disease? How to adore the love of Christ, who redeemed us from the curse of the Law, by being made a curse for us, if not burdened with the weight of our iniquities? Yea, how should we ever give God the glory of his justice in acknowledging ourselves worthy of death, if we do not in a way of repentance judge ourselves, as the Apostle bids us?

Was not this what David did in that solemn confession of his? In which he cries out, **"Against thee, thee only have I**

sinned, and done this evil in thy sight, that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and clear when thou judgest” (Ps. 51:4). Can I therefore wish a better wish to such who are insensible of their sins, than Bernard did, to him whom he thought not heedful enough about the judgments of God, who writing to him, instead of the common salutation, wishing him *much health* said, *much fear*; that so their confidence may have an allay of trembling? Sure I am that it is a mercy that I had need to pray for on my own behalf, and I do, Lord, make it my request, that my faith for the pardon of sin may be accompanied with my sorrow for sin, and that I may have a *weeping eye*, as well as a *believing heart*, that I may mourn for the evils that I have done against my Savior, as well as rejoice in the fullness of mercy that he has showed to me in a glorious salvation.



This article is taken from: Spurstowe, William. *The Spiritual Chymist: or, Six Decads of Divine Meditations on Several Subjects*. London: Philip Chetwind, 1666. A PDF file of this book can be downloaded, free of charge, at <http://www.ClassicChristianLibrary.com>



Postscript

The Undying Faith

“Christianity has thus passed through many stages of its earthly life, and yet has hardly reached the period of full manhood in Christ Jesus. During this long succession of centuries it has outlived the destruction of Jerusalem, the dissolution of the Roman empire, fierce persecutions from without, and heretical corruptions from within, the barbarian invasion, the confusion of the dark ages, the papal tyranny, the shock of infidelity, the ravages of revolution, the attacks of enemies and the errors of friends, the rise and fall of proud kingdoms, empires, and republics, philosophical systems, and social organizations without number. And, behold, it still lives, and lives in greater strength and wider extent than ever; controlling the progress of civilization, and the destinies of the world; marching over the ruins of human wisdom and folly, ever forward and onward; spreading silently its heavenly blessings from generation to generation, and from country to country, to the ends of the earth. It can never die; it will never see the decrepitude of old age; but, like its divine founder, it will live in the unfading freshness of self-renewing youth and the unbroken vigor of manhood to the end of time, and will outlive time itself.”

-- *Philip Schaff (1819-1893)*

Related Bible Verse:

“And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20)

Note: The work from which the above quote was taken, *The History of the Christian Church*, vol. I, by Philip Schaff, is available as a PDF eBook at the Classic Christian Library, free of charge at:

<http://www.ClassicChristianLibrary.com>

