

Scripture Studies

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

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Old Testament Study: Jonah 1:2

A Study by John King (1594)

Jonah 1:2, pt. 2 – The City of Nineveh

[This continues a study taken from a series of lectures given in 1594 by John King, who was to become the Bishop of London in 1611.]

1 Now the word of the Lord came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, **2** “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me.” (KJV).

[Dr. King, in the previous study, laid out three sections upon which he would speak, about the command to Jonah to go to Nineveh: 1. The place which Jonah was sent unto; 2. His business there; 3. The cause. Dr. King continues here with section 2. His business there.]

2. And so I come to the second general part, wherein we are to consider what Jonah was to do at Nineveh. It is manifested in the words following, **“Cry against it”**. Lay not thine hand upon thy mouth, neither draw in thy breath to thyself, when the cause of thy master must be dealt in. Silence can never break the dead sleep of Nineveh; softness of voice cannot pierce her heavy ears; ordinary speaking hath no proportion with extraordinary transgression; speak, and speak to be heard, so that when she heareth of her fall, she may be wounded with it.

It was not now appropriate that Jonah should go to Nineveh, as God came to Elijah, in 1 Kings 19:11-12, in a **“still and soft voice,”** but rather as a **“mighty strong wind, rending the mountains, and breaking the rocks,”** abasing the highest looks in Nineveh, and tearing the hardest heart in pieces; as an

“earthquake and fire,” consuming all her dross, and making her quake with the fear of the judgments of God, like the trees of the forest. Jericho must be overthrown with trumpets and a shout, and Nineveh will not yield but to a vehement outcry. A prophet must arm himself, I say not with the spear, but with the zeal of Phinehas, when sin is impudent and cannot blush (see Num. 25:7). God cannot endure dallying and trifling in weighty matters. The gentle spirit of Eli is not sufficient to amend children past grace, and a passive prophet doth but bolster a sinner in his froward ways.

God chargeth his messenger otherwise in the prophecy of Isaiah: **“Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, shew my people their transgressions, and to the house of Jacob their sins”** (Isa. 58:1). Much less can God abide flattery and guilefulness in his business, for **“cursed be he that doth the work of the Lord negligently”** (Jer. 48:10), or rather, as the word importeth, *with deceit*. **“Woe unto them that sow pillows under men’s arm-holes”** (Ezek. 13:18), when it is more time to prick them up with goads, **“that sell the cause of the Lord for handfuls of barley, and pieces of bread,”** for favour, for fear, for lucre, or any the like worldly respects. And when the people committed unto them shall **“say unto their seers, ‘See not,’ and to their prophets, ‘Prophecy not right things,”** who speak pleasings, and prophecy errors (Isa. 30:10), they are easily drawn to betray the will of their Lord, and to satisfy their humours. God hath disclosed his mind in this treachery, **“Behold, I will come against the prophets that steal my word from their neighbours. Behold, I will come against the prophets that have sweet tongues, that cause my people to err by their lies and flatteries”** (Jer. 23:30-31). For then is the word of the Lord stolen and purloined from our brethren, when we **“justify the wicked, and give life to the souls that should not live;”** when we **“heal the hurts of Israel with sweet words,”** when we anoint the heads of sinners with precious balms, whose hearts we should rather break with sharp corrosives; when we put honey into the

sacrifice instead of salt; when we should frame our song of judgment, and we turn it into a song of mercy; when we should mourn to make men lament, and we pipe to make them dance, putting the evil day far from them, and hunting for their praise and acceptance of us with pleasing discourses, affected eloquence, histrionical jests, rather than grave and divine sentences. Jerome gave an exhortation to Nepotian, "Let the tears of thy auditors be thy praises." And Augustine had a stranger opinion of these applauses and acclamations of men: "These praises of yours" (saith he to his hearers) "do rather offend and endanger me."

We suffer them, indeed, but we tremble when we hear them. We cannot promise you such deceitful handling and battering of the word of God, for whether you hear or hear not the prophecy that is brought unto you, yet you shall know that there have been prophets amongst you. We will not suffer your sins to sleep quietly in your bosoms, as Jonah slept in the sides of the ship, but we will rouse them up. If we see your pride, your usury, your adulteries, your oppressions, we will not only cry them, but cry against them, lest they cry against us. We will set up a banner in the name of the Lord of hosts, and proclaim them in your hearing; and if our cry will not help, we will leave you to that cry at midnight, when your bodies that sleep in the dust of the earth, and your sins that sleep with your bodies, both shall be awaked, and receive their due at God's hands. We will charm your deafness with the greatest cunning we have. If our charming cannot move you, we will send you to the judgment-seat of God with this writing upon your foreheads, *They would not be charmed.*

3. The reason of Jonah's crying against Nineveh is this, "**For their wickedness is come up before me.**"

They that are skillful in the original, observe that the name of *wickedness*, here used, importeth the greatest extremity that can be, and is not restrained to this or that sin, one of a thousand, but is a most absolute and all-sufficient term, for "**three transgressions, and for four,**" as it is in Amos; that is, for

seven; that is, for infinite corruption. Whatsoever exceedeth modesty, and is most contrary to the will of God, beyond all right or reason, settled into dregs, frozen like ice, given over, sold to the will of Satan, is here meant. Where every person in the commonwealth is degenerated, **“there is none good, no, not one,”** (Ps. 14). And every part in the body and soul of man doth his part to lift up the head of sin: **“The throat an open sepulchre, the tongue used to deceit, the poison of asps under the lips, the mouth full of cursing and bitterness, the feet swift to shed blood, destruction and calamity in all their ways, no knowledge of the way of peace, no fear of God before their eyes.”**

And whether the word hath that power, yea or no, it takes not much skill to dispute, for the words adjoined in the text make it plain without further amplification. First, it is *wickedness*; secondly, it *ascendeth*; thirdly, into the *presence of God himself*. Whereby you may perceive, that the wickedness of Nineveh was not base and shamefaced, fearful to advance itself, but a high kind of wickedness, swelling like Jordan above his banks. It lay not close in the bottom of the sea, nor in the holes of rocks, nor in the covert and secrecy of private chambers; it hath **“an whorish forehead, and could not be ashamed”** (Jer. 3:3); they **“declared their sins as Sodom, they hid them not”** (Isa. 3:9), and as a fountain casteth out waters, so they their malice.

(1.) The phrase here used noteth a great aggravation of the thing intended. So in the sixth of Genesis it is said, that **“the earth was corrupt before the Lord;”** and in the tenth of that book, **“Nimrod was a mighty hunter before the Lord;”** that is, the corruptions of the world, and the violence of Nimrod, were so gross, that the Lord could not choose but take knowledge of them. So it is here said, **“Their wickedness is come up before me.”** It knoweth no end, it climbeth like the sun in the morning, and passeth the bounds of all moderation; it is not enough that the brunt and fame thereof is blown into the ears of men, but it hath filled the earth, possesseth the air, lifteth itself above the stars amongst the angels of God, offereth

her filthiness and impurity before the throne of his majesty, and if there were farther to go, such is her boldness and shamelessness, she would forbear no place.

What! Are there seasons and times when the Lord beholdeth sin and wickedness, and when he beholdeth it not? **“He that made the eye, doth he not see?”** (Ps. 94:9). Doth he slumber or sleep that keepeth Israel? Or hath he not torches and cresset light at all times to descry the deeds of Babylon? Or is he subject to that scoff which Elijah gave Baal **“It may be he sleepeth, and must be awaked”** (1 Kings 18:27)? Or what else is the meaning of that phrase, **“Their wickedness is come up before me”**? As if there were some wickedness which came not to his notice. Surely, besides the increase and propagation of their wickedness (for there is difference betwixt creeping and climbing), it noteth some order in the actions of God. He saw their sins in the book of eternity, before their hearts did ever conceive them; he saw them in their breasts, before their hands committed them; he saw their infancy and their full strength, their thirst and drunkenness, their beginning and proceeding. But then he saw them indeed and to purpose, when he saw them perfected and fulfilled; and having winked as it were before, and in patience forborne them, now beheld them with fiery eyes, and his heart unremoveably bent to take vengeance. **“The wild ass used to the wilderness, snuffeth up wind at her pleasure; who can turn her back? They that seek after her, will not weary themselves, but will find her in her month”** (Jer. 2:24). God seeth and observeth at all times the untamed madness of the wicked, wearying themselves like the wild ass, or the dromedary, in a race of abominations; but he will take them in their month, and turn them back when their sins are ripe and his wrath thoroughly incensed.

(2.) Their wickedness is come up before me. The phrase doth minister a further instruction unto us. Sin, in the eyes of some men, seemeth not sin. Lactantius writeth of those who were not ashamed of their faults, but rather sought out patronage and defence for them, that at the least they might seem to sin

honestly. Jeremiah speaketh of the Jews in the same manner, **“Were they ashamed when they had committed abominations? nay, they were not ashamed, neither could they have shame”** (Jer. 6:15). He smiteth them afterward in chap. 11 of his prophecy, with a sharper reproof, that **“when they did evil, they rejoiced at it”** (Jer. 11:15). And it is the fashion of us all, to bolster and bear out the vices of our friends, changing sour into sweet, and evil into good, even for their friendship’s sake. Alceus took a mole on the body for a grace, yet was it a blemish. One mule nibbeth another; a hypocrite liketh an hypocrite, because he is like unto him; a drunkard, a drunkard; an usurer, him that practiseth the same trade; he that transformed himself into an angel of light, being a fiend of darkness, hath taught a harlot to clothe herself like an honest matron, and vices to disguise themselves under the habit of virtues. But howsoever the eyes of men are blinded with partiality, yet **“the eyelids of the Lord shall try the children of men”** (Ps. 11:4); his righteous and flaming countenance shall soundly examine their actions, uncover the faces of their iniquities, and call them rightly and truly by their proper names.

(3.) But whatsoever we find else in the riches and store of these words, this we may gather from the nature of them, that there are some sins winged, of a high elevation, ascending above the top of Carmel, aspiring and pressing before the majesty of God’s own throne. The speech is but altered in other scriptures, the substance and signification all one, where it is said that some sins cry in the ears of God; that which is the wings or chariot unto them in this place, to make them mount so high, is their cry in those others: in this I mean, their outrage and enormity. Cain’s sin cried unto the Lord, Gen. 4. And in the 18th of Genesis, **“Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great,”** which is expounded in the next words, **“and because their sin is exceeding grievous, I will now go down, saith the Lord, and see whether they have done altogether according to that cry which is come up unto me”** (Gen. 18:20-21). **“Behold, the hire of the labourers which have**

reaped the fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of hosts” (James 5:4). Answerable to that part of Job, his apology, which he presenteth unto his judge, in the 31st of his book, **“If my land cry against me, or if the furrows of my field complain... let thistles grow instead of wheat, and cockle instead of barley”** (Job 31:38-40). Oppression is threatened by the like terms, in the second of Habakkuk, **“The stone shall cry out of the wall, and the beam out of the timber shall answer it. Woe unto him that buildeth a town with blood, and erecteth a city with iniquity!”** (Hab. 2:11-12). All which sentences of Scripture, expressing the loudness and vocality of sin, are of the same force, as before I said, with those that declare the sublimity and reach of it.

God speaketh to Sennacherib in another manner of speech, but the matter and purpose is not different from this, 2 Kings xix. 28, **“Because thou ragest against me, and thy tumult is come up to mine ears, I will put my hook in thy nostrils”** etc. (2 Kings 19:28). Likewise the prophet telleth the children of Israel in the second of Chronicles, chap. 28:3, that because the Lord God was wroth with Judah, he had delivered them into the Israelites’ hands, and they had slain them in a rage, that reached up to heaven. By these and the like conferences, a man may determine the nature, and set down a catalogue in some sort of crying sins. Bloodshed is a crying sin, but (I say) not all kinds of bloodshed; for the speech of God to Cain hath *bloods*, not blood, which denoteth an insatiable appetite, wherewith he was so dry, that if his brother had possessed a thousand times as much blood, he would have spilt it all; and though he took away his life, yet he took not leave of his own malicious thirst of blood. Blasphemy and rage against God is a crying sin; oppression, extortion, fraud against poor labourers, against right-owners, is a crying sin; and sin with outrageousness and impudency, in any way, public, infamous, enormous sin, contemning the judgment of God and censures of men,

committed with greediness, drawn with cart-ropes, gloried in, where men even sell themselves to work wickedness, is a crying sin.

Such immoderate and proud humour of viciousness is notably expressed in the sixth of Genesis, where it is alleged, that **“when the Lord saw the wickedness of man was great upon the earth, and all the imaginations of the thoughts of his heart were only evil continually, then it repented the Lord that he had made man, and he was sorry in his heart”** (Gen. 6:5-6). 1. It was wickedness; 2. great; 3. evident, for the Lord saw it; 4. their hearts were evil; 5. every thought of their heart; 6. every imagination of thought; 7. only evil; 8. continually, or day by day, there was no hope of amendment. Equal hereunto is that general and unbridled corruption, which David setteth down in the 14th Psalm, where they begin with a most damnable principle of atheism, the gate and highway into all iniquity, **“The fool saith in his heart. There is no God.”** And then is the sink or channel opened to all dissolution of life: **“They are corrupted, and do abominably, there is none that doth good. The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that would understand, and seek after God; but they were all gone out of the way,”** &c. When this canker of impiety hath so overspread and eaten into the manners of people, then is fulfilled that which Isaiah putteth down for a sound position: **“Let mercy be shewed to the wicked, yet he will not learn righteousness ; in the land of uprightness will he do wickedly, and will not behold the majesty of the Lord”** (Isa. 26:10). If neither the mercy nor the majesty of God, nor the company of the righteous, can reform him, then is his bettering despaired and past hope. I need no farther examine this part.

The cause why Jonah cried against Nineveh, was the cry of their sins. Their regions were white to harvest, their iniquities ripe, and looked for a sickle from heaven to cut them down. The sufficiency of which cause to derive the judgments of God upon us, Jeremiah layeth down in his prophecy: **“Many nations**

shall pass by the city” (meaning of Jerusalem), **“and shall say every man to his neighbour, Wherefore hath the Lord done thus to this great city? Then shall they answer. Because they have forsaken the covenant of the Lord then God,”** &c. (Jer. 22:8-9). For the judgment of the Lord, pronounced by David, shall stand longer than the stars in the firmament: **“Him that loveth iniquity, doth his soul hate. Upon the wicked he shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, and stormy tempests: this is the portion of their cup”** (Ps. 11:6). And in the first Psalm, it is a singular opposition that is made between the just and the wicked, **“the wicked are not so”** (Ps. 1:4). That thou mayest unmoveably believe how unmoveably God is bent to deny the wicked his grace: he strengtheneth the negative by doubling it. Therefore **“the wicked shall not stand in judgment”** (Ps. 1:5), for they are fallen before their judgment cometh. What! Shall they not rise again? Surely yes; but in judgment, saith Jerome, for they are already judged.

The wickedness of our land, what it is, and in what elevation of height, whether modest or impudent, private or public, whether it speaketh or crieth, standeth or goeth, lieth like an asp in her hole, or flieth like a fiery serpent into the presence of God, yourselves be judges. Write my words in tables, that they may be monuments for latter days; for when your children’s children shall hear them hereafter, they will scarcely believe them. The months of the year have not yet gone about, wherein the Lord hath bowled the heavens, and come down amongst us with more tokens and earnest of his wrath intended, than the oldest man of our land is able to recount of so small a time. For say if ever the winds, since they blew one against the other, have been more common, and more tempestuous, as if the four ends of heaven had conspired to turn the foundations of the earth upside down; thunders and lightnings, neither seasonable for the time, and withal most terrible, with such effects brought forth, that the children unborn shall speak of it. The anger of the clouds hath been poured down upon our heads, both with abundance, and (saving to those that felt it) with incredible

violence; the air threatened our miseries with a blazing star; the pillars of the earth tottered in many whole countries and tracts of our island; the arrows of a woeful pestilence have been cast abroad at large in all the quarters of our realm, even to the emptying and dispeopling of some parts thereof; treasons against our queen and country, we have known many and mighty, monstrous to be imagined, from a number of lions' whelps, lurking in their dens, and watching their hour to undo us; our expectation and comfort so failed us in France, as if our right arms had been pulled from our shoulders. We have not altered the colour of the hair of our heads, nor added one inch to our stature, since all these things have been accomplished amongst us. Consider then well, and think it the highest time to forsake your highest wickedness. I call it highest wickedness, for if we knew how to add anything, in our several veins and dispositions, to those idols of sin which we serve, some to our covetousness, some to our pride, some to our unchasteness; some to our malice, and such like, we would break our sleep, nay, we would compass sea and land to increase it. Yet, howsoever it fareth with the multitude, let there be a seed and remnant among us, left to entreat for peace. Ten righteous persons would have saved Sodom, and it may so stand with the goodness of God, that a few innocent fools shall preserve the island, as Job speaketh, in chap, 22:30. Let us thankfully embrace the long sufferance of our God forepast, leading us as by a hand of friendship to repentance; and let us redeem with newness of life our days and years formerly misspent, lest by impenitent transgressions against the law of our Maker, we fall upon his sentence of wrath, irrevocably passed and resolved by him, **“I have thought it, and will not repent, neither will I turn back from it”** (Jer. 4:28).

This article is taken from: King, John (Bishop of London). *Lectures Upon Jonah*. Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1864 (originally published c. 1600). A PDF file of this book can be downloaded, free of charge, at: <http://www.ClassicChristianLibrary.com>



A Classic Study: Job 1:21-22, pt. 2

[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 1:21-22, pt. 2 -

The LORD Gave, the LORD Hath Taken Away

**²¹ Naked came I out of my mother's womb,
and naked shall I return thither:
The LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away;
blessed be the name of the LORD.**

**²² In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God
foolishly. (KJV).**

Job said: **“The LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away”** (vs. 21). This is the second argument which Job uses to both the former purposes; and it is a more spiritual and sublime argument than the former [**“Naked came I... and naked return.”**]. A man who has nothing in him but nature, may say as much as Job did before, though he could never say it with Job's spirit; for though godly persons use natural arguments and common reasons, yet being concocted in their spirits, they become heavenly and spiritual. Natural men (I say) or heathens have taken up such an argument as that, as when word was brought to a heathen philosopher, that his son was dead, “I knew” (said he), “that I begot a son mortal, and subject to death”; he did but look back to the common condition of man and supported himself. But now I say this

second argument is higher; it is not an argument bottomed upon the frailty of nature, but upon the sovereignty of God. This argument is grounded upon the equity of divine providence and dispensations. **“The LORD”** (said Job) **“hath given and the LORD hath taken away.”**

“The LORD hath given”

“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above” (James 1:17). What gifts doth Job here mean? He means good and perfect gifts in their kind; but not the best and most perfect kind of gifts. The Lord once gave me those oxen, those sheep, all these outward things that now I am stripped of, **“The LORD hath given.”** A gift is any good freely bestowed; when we receive a thing, which another was not engaged to bestow, that is a gift. Now God does not only give us those transcendentals, grace and glory, faith in Christ here and for fruition of Christ here after: not only are these gifts, I say, sent in from God and undeserved by us; but outward things, riches and honor, children and servants, houses and lands, these are the gifts of God likewise; we have not the least creature-comfort of our own, we have nothing of our own but sin. *What hast thou, that thou hast not received?* is a truth concerning everything; we have even to a hoof or a shoe-latchet. We are indebted unto God for our spirituals, for our temporals, for all. We must say of all little or much, great or small, *The Lord hath given.*

How did the Lord give Job all his riches and estate?

The Lord gives either immediately or mediately. When Job said, *The Lord hath given*, we are not to understand it, as if the Lord had brought such a present to him and said, *here, take this estate, take these cattle, these servants.* But God gave them mediately by blessing the labors of Job. So when the Lord prospers us in our honest endeavors and labors and callings, then that is how the Lord gives us outward things.

The Lord hath given. Job does not say, by my strength and diligence, my policy and prudence, I have got this estate; as the Assyrian said: **“By the strength of my hand have I done this, and by my wisdom, for I am prudent”** (Isa. 10:13). Job takes no notice of himself; he was not idle, yet he speaks as if he had done nothing, *The Lord hath given.*

This should teach us in the first place to acknowledge the Lord as the fountain and donor of all our outward comforts. When you get wealth, do not say, this I have gotten (such language is barbarous in divinity), but say, this *the Lord hath given.* We find an express caution to this purpose, given by Moses from God, not only against the former language of the tongue, but of the heart, when the Jews should come to Canaan and should grow rich and great there: **“When thou hast eaten and art full, then thou shalt bless the Lord. Beware thou forget not the Lord thy God for the good land which he hath given thee... And say in thy heart, my power and the might of my hand hath gotten me this wealth, but thou shalt remember the Lord thy God, for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth: It is he that giveth thee power”** (Deut. 8:10-11,17-18).

Many who are persuaded that God gives them grace, that God gives heaven and salvation, are hardly persuaded, or at least do not so well consider it, that God gives riches, etc. Their hearts are yet ready to say, that they have gotten this wealth, they have gotten this honor. It is a sweet thing, when a man looks upward for these lower things, and can say on good grounds that his earth has dropped down to him from heaven. *The Lord hath given.*

Further, when Job said, *The Lord hath given,* it is an argument of his own justice and equity in getting. Job did not enrich himself by wrong, by *grinding the faces of the poor.* If he had done so, he could not have said, *The Lord hath given.* So much as we get honestly, we may look upon as a fruit of God's bounty. Look into your estates and whatsoever you have got by wrong dealing, take heed of saying, this is of God's giving,

for so you make God himself a partner in your sins. God sometimes gives when we use no means, but he never gives when we use unlawful means. What God said concerning the setting-up of those kings: **“They have set up kings, but not by me”** (Hos. 8:4). He says of all who enrich themselves by wrong, *They have gotten riches, but not by me*. When men leave the rule of justice, God leaves them. And though unlawful acts are under the eye of God’s providence, yet they are not under the influence of his blessing. Wicked men thrive often, but they are never blessed. Their prosperity is their own.

Thirdly, it is observable, that when Job would support himself in the loss of his estate, he calls to mind how he came by his estate; and finding it all given in by the blessing of God upon his honest labors and endeavors, he is satisfied. Note: *What we get honestly, that we can part with contentedly*. He that has gotten his estate by injustice, can never leave it with patience. Honesty in getting causes quietness of spirit in losing outward things. Keep a good conscience in getting the world, and you shall have peace when you cannot keep the world. Whereas, a wrongdoer and a wrong-dealer is in such a day under a double affliction: he is afflicted with his present loss, and he ought to be afflicted for his former gain.

Fourthly, the words, *The Lord hath given*, being rightly handled, will be as a sword to cut off four monsters or monstrous lusts, which annoy all the world, or as a medicine to cure four diseases about worldly things. Two of these lusts are strongest in the rich, and the other pair assault the poor. The poor pine either with discontent, because they have so little; or with envy, because others have so much. The rich swell with pride, because they have abundance, or they are filled with contempt of those that are in want. Let the rich seriously weigh this speech, it will cure them of pride. **“Charge them that are rich that they be not high-minded”** (1 Tim. 6:17). You see how subject rich men are to this inflammation of pride. But with what does he prick this bladder? It is with this thought that God gives all riches, *Let*

them trust in the living God, who giveth us all things richly to enjoy. That argument is of the Apostle, in 1 Cor. 4:7. *If thou hast received it, why dost thou boast?* This applies as strong and as true in regard of temporals, as of spirituals. Consider seriously that your estates are the gift of God, and drown false pride. If you come honestly by them, they are the gifts of God. If you come dishonestly by them, they are the gifts of Satan, and you ought to be ashamed of them and restore them, not to boast or be proud of them.

Then secondly, it will cure the rich of all contempt of others; what the Apostle James observed and censured in the rich people of those times, is found by too much experience among the rich at this day, **“You have despised the poor”** (James 2:6). Consider it is the Lord who gave, and he gave as a Lord freely, he might have given your estate to that poor man, and have left you in that condition, which you so despise in your brother. God gave him as much as his wisdom through fit; and it seems he had given you more than you are fit for. In despising him, you cast aspersions on the dispensation of God, and while you wound him in his poverty, you wound God in his providence. Consider it is the Lord that gives, and then be unconvinced, if you can, that while you treat with contempt a man in his wants, you also question God in his wisdom. Busy yourself hereafter in praising him who gives all, and leave despising him, who has received less.

Then likewise let the poor look upon this text, and it will cure them of two diseases into which they often fall, and by which they are much endangered, even in the vitals of grace: discontent and envy. *It is the Lord that giveth*, that shapes and cuts out your condition, why then should you not be contented with his allowance, and be thankful in your lot? If your estates be proportioned from above, you ought to be content with your portion. Ignorance or inadvertency from whom we receive, causes murmuring at what we have. Do not think you have love from God, because you have a less allowance from God. The power of God is as much acted in

making a fly, as in making an elephant; and his love may be as much, and is often more acted in giving a penny, than in giving a talent. Know this, you who is a child of God, if your portion be but a penny, it has upon it the image and superscription of a father's love, which is better than life.

This also will cure the poor of envy; many times the poor have an evil eye of envy at the rich; they cannot bear it that others have so much and they so little. Consider that it is *the Lord that giveth*. This argument Christ uses in Matt. 15:20, to him who was angry that they who came at the latter end of the day had as much as he: **“May not I do with mine own what I will? Is thine eye evil, because mine is good?”** The envious eye is an evil eye; envy is a disease of the eyes. This text is one of the best medicines that ever was prescribed. Will you be sick because another is in health, and make your brother's happiness the ground of your misery? Do not think that all is lost which is not cast into your lap; or that your estate is less or worse, because you see one having a greater or a better. Must God ask you leave, or ask your council, how and in what measure to distribute his favors. Were all but well catechised in this one principle, that *God gives all*, it would soon dispel this malignant vapor, and all would rest satisfied, not because they or others have received thus or thus; but because God has thus *disposed to all*.

Observe one thing more,

If the Lord gives us all, then we should be willing to give back somewhat unto the Lord again. And this consideration that God gives us will make us willing to give unto God. What is the reason that many are so unwilling to give somewhat unto God? It is because they will not understand that they are beholden to God for all. If they were persuaded of their receipts from him, a little oratory might persuade a gift from them, in the cause of God, especially when God entreats them, who may of right command them.

God himself, who fills and enjoys all things, has sometimes (in a sense) need of your estates. Christ who is

Lord of Heaven and Earth is sometimes in want of a penny. Christ tells you of his wants and poverty (see Matt. 25), and shows how and when he is relieved. And as Christ wants in a member, some particular believer, so he often wants in his whole body, which is the Church and whole company of believers. If you have any spiritual wisdom to discern times and season, you may know, that now Christ has want of money (as I have explained). Now God (in his cause) has need. He goes about (in those who solicit his cause) and asks a relief at every one of your doors. Now then do but consider, when anything is asked for the Lord's sake, that *the Lord gave all*; this will be a key to unlock your chests; this will at once untie your hearts and your purses.

Will you let Christ want, shall the cause of God want, while you have it, whereas what you have, *God gave*? It is expressed concerning Nabal, that this was the reason why he would not part with a loaf of bread to relieve David and his army: **“Shall I take my bread and my water, and my flesh that I have killed for my shearers, and send them to a fellow I know not who?”** (1 Sam. 25:11). You see the man was all in his possessives, *my bread*, and *my water*, and *my flesh*; he never thought that God had any share or interest in his estate, that God gave it, therefore he would not give to a servant of God.

You shall see on the other hand, how David's munificence and that of the nobles with him (in 2 Chron. 29) sprung from this root, the acknowledgement that nothing was their own; it came in all from God, when they had offered so willingly and bountifully towards the building of the Temple. David shows the mine which yielded so much treasure, even which they dug in all this while, **“All things come of thee, and of thine own we have given thee”** (2 Chron. 29:15). They confessed that all came of God; they were but stewards; he was the owner, and his own they could not withhold from him. God gives us the use of the creature, but he keeps the right to them in his own hand, when we have the possession of them, he

has the property. Wherefore let the consideration that God gives all to make us ready and open handed to give unto God, when he calls and requires it at our hands.

“And the LORD hath taken away.”

When God gives it is an act of bounty, and when he takes it is an act of justice, for he is Lord, sovereign Lord in both. But why does Job here charge this upon God, *The Lord hath taken*? Was it not told him by the messengers, that the Chaldeans and Sabeans came and took away his cattle, plundered and pillaged his estate? They told him that *the fire consumed his sheep*, and the *wind blew down the house upon his children*: Why does Job say, *The Lord hath taken*? What? Will Job charge all those robberies upon God himself? Does not this look like the blasphemy that the devil hoped would come out of Job’s mouth?

I answer, when Job said, *The Lord hath taken*, it does but set forth the supreme power and sovereignty of God in ordering all things; and (as we opened before) we know that God gave the commission to Satan, or leave to spoil Job, or else Satan could not have touched one of the dogs of his flock. Job knew that God had all men and devils, fire and wind, all creatures in his hand. He said, *The Lord hath taken*, because none could take but by the will of God, and he was satisfied, that God willed that in righteousness and in judgment, which they acted with so much cruelty and injustice. **“Is there any evil in the city, and the Lord hath not done it?”** (Amos 3:6). Every evil of affliction or of trouble is said to be the Lord’s doing, because it cannot be done without the Lord. Wicked men in all their plots, and in all their successes, are either the rod of God, to chasten his people for their sins, or else they are as God’s furnace to try his people’s graces, and purge them from their sins. Thus the hand of the Lord is in all our sorrows, *The Lord, said Job, hath taken away*.

We should from hence learn:

In all our afflictions to look beyond the creature. In all the evils we either feel or fear, let our hearts be carried up unto God. As then we rightly enjoy outward blessings, when those blessings carry us up unto God, when upon creatures our hearts are raised up to heaven: So then we make a right use of afflictions, of crosses and troubles, when we are led by crosses (in our meditations) unto God. Job does not say, *The Lord hath given and the Chaldeans have taken away; the Lord hath enriched me, and Satan hath robbed me*, but as if he had never heard any mention of Satan or Chaldeans, of fire or wind, he said, *The Lord hath given and the Lord hath taken*. He does not fall out with man or complain of the devil; he is not angry with chance or fortune, with stars or constellations. Many in the troublesome evils which they suffer are apt to fly out upon all creatures and upon all causes, rather than to cast an eye upon God: whereas indeed we should not take either good or evil out of the hand of any creature.

There were some of old, Marcion and his followers, who could not relish this doctrine, nor endure that we should carry our evils, and lay them before God's door, and say, *The Lord hath done this*. Therefore they found out two beginnings, that is two Gods rather than they would make the same God the author of such extremes (as they thought) of good and evil. They said, *There was one God that was a good God, and another an evil God; the one a giving God, the other a taking God; the one a loving God, a merciful God, the other an angry God, a severe God*. Many of the heathen taught better divinity than those heretics. For they feigned that their Jupiter had two great vessels, placed at the entrance of his palace, whereof the one was filled with *good*, and the other with *evil*. These he dispensed according to the dictate of his own will among the sons of men. And they painted *fortune* in two forms, with two faces of contrary colors, the foremost *white*, the hindermost *black*, to signify that *good* and *evil*, which they shadowed under *white* and *black*, came both from *goddess fortune*. This comes near that language in Isaiah:

“I form the light and create darkness, I make peace and create evil” (Isa. 45:7). And we are taught to look upon the same God, as the spring and fountain of all good, and of all this sort of evil. Though it be a truth (as the Apostle speaks) that *the same fountain cannot send forth bitter water and sweet*, taken in a natural or moral sense; yet the same *fountain* may send forth *bitter* and *sweet*, taken in a civil sense; that is, the same may be the author of outward *corrections* and of outward *favours*. God is not the fountain of *good* and of *evil* in a moral sense, so nothing but good flows from him: but we must take it in a civil sense, and so both *good* and *evil*, *bitter* and *sweet* come from the same fountain.

Consider the words as they are an argument, and then see their strength to the purposes, for which Job does especially here apply them. First, the acquitting or justifying of God. Second, the supporting and comforting of himself. And so we may note from them:

First, *That the absolute sovereignty of the Lord over us is enough to acquit him from doing us any wrong, whatsoever he does with us.* Job said only this: *The Lord hath given and the Lord hath taken.* He is the sovereign Lord, therefore I have no reason to complain. He does it upon whom I have laid no engagement, upon whom I have no tie at all, to do this or that for me. He does it who may resolve the reason of all his actions into his own will: *He is the Lord.* God cannot injure his creature; therefore the Apostle had recourse to that only in Rom. 9 for the answer of all cavils and objections against God’s dealing with man, **“Hath not the potter power over the clay?”** (Rom. 9:21). The sovereignty and supremacy of the Lord is enough to bear him out whatsoever he does with, or to his creatures. **“O man, who art thou that replieth against God?”** (Rom. 9:20).

Then again, it is as strong for the second end, for the support of the soul in bearing evil, consider that it is *the Lord that giveth and the Lord that takes.* The thought of God’s sovereignty over us and over ours, may quiet our spirits in all that he does unto us or ours. As it does justify God, so it

should quiet us. Hear David, in Ps. 39:9: **“I was dumb,”** said he, **“and opened not my mouth, because thou didst it.”** He did not say, *I was contented because you dealt thus and thus with me*, but **“I was dumb, I opened not my mouth, because thou didst it,”** that it was the act of God, the sovereign Lord satisfied him; he had not a word to say, because God did it. So Job here, *The Lord hath taken away*, is as if he had said, I could not have borne this at the hands of any creature, but at the hands of my sovereign Lord that may dispose of me and mine, and do what he pleases, at this hands I not only bear it, but take it well.

Joseph had not a word of discontent to vent against his brothers, being thus resolve: **“It was not you that sent me hither here but God”** (Gen. 45:8). And David lays aside all revenge against railing Shimei on this ground: **“So let him curse, because the Lord hath said unto him, ‘Curse David,’”** (2 Sam. 16:10). A godly man cannot be angry at the doing or speaking of that which pleases God, that it should be done or spoken. And it takes away all complaining, *that the Lord hath taken away*.

“Blessed be the name of the LORD.”

The Septuagint, and so the vulgar from them insert here another sentence between these two; *the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord*, reading it thus, *The Lord hath given and the Lord hath taken away, as it pleaseth the Lord, so commeth things to pass, blessed be the name of the Lord*; but we have no more in the Hebrew, than our own translation gives us.

“Blessed be the name of the LORD.”

This is the triumphant conclusion which flows from the former propositions; this is the issue and result of them both.

A conclusion as opposite to Satan's design as the two *poles* of the heavens are one against the other. Satan waited to hear Job conclude with *blaspheming the name of the Lord*, and now he hears Job conclude with *blessing the name of the Lord*. How did this vex and sting Satan? This one word of Job did wound Satan more than all the afflictions which Satan procured wounded Job. *Though I return naked, though all be taken from me, yet blessed be the name of the Lord.*

“Blessed be the Name of the Lord” – The name of God in Scripture is taken:

First, for God himself. The name of a thing it is put for the thing named: **“Through thee will we push down our enemies, through thy name we will tread them down that rise up against us”** (Ps. 44:5). Through thy *name*, that is, *through thee*. *Through thee* and *through thy name* are the same. **“According to thy name so is thy praise”** (Ps. 48:10), that is, *Thou art or ought to be praised by thy people*: The name is put for the person. You have it clearly: **“The number of names together were about a hundred and twenty”** (Acts 1:15), that is, the number of persons, so many persons, because numbered by their names.

Secondly, the name of God is often in scripture put for the attributes of God.

Thirdly, the name of God is put for his ordinances or worship: **“Go ye now to my place which was in Shiloh, where I set my name at the first”** (Jer. 7:12), that is, where I first set up my public worship; because as a man is known by his proper name, so is God by his proper worship. And therefore, false worship is the setting up of a *strange god*. When we mistake the name, we mistake the person.

Fourthly, the name of God is that reverence, esteem and honor, which angels and men give unto God. As we know amongst us, that the report and reputation that a man has among men is a man's name. When men speak of a man, that is his name. *So-and-so* has a good name, we say; *so-and-so* has an ill name; that is, men speak or think well or ill of such persons.

So in Gen. 6:4, when Moses describes the giants, he said, **“They were men of renown.”** The Hebrew is, *They were men of name*, because the name of a man is the opinion he had amongst men; as a man is esteemed, so his name is carried, and himself is accepted in the world. So the name of God is that high esteem, those honorable apprehensions, which angels and men have of God. Just as the thoughts and speeches of men are for the celebration of God’s glory and praise, such is his name in the world, *Blessed be the name of the Lord.*

By blessing God, we are to understand first what we express in word concerning God. God is blessed by his creatures, when his goodness, and greatness, and mercy, and bounty, and faithfulness, and justice are published with thanksgiving and praise. Or God is blessed likewise, when we have high and great and glorious thoughts of God: when we inwardly fear and reverence, and love, and honor God, then we bless God. The one is to bless with the tongue; the other to bless with the heart. The tongue blessing without the heart is but a *tinkling cymbal*. The heart blessing without the tongue makes *sweet*, but *still music*, both in concert make that harmony which fills and delights heaven and earth. When Job said here, *Blessed be the name of the Lord*, we are to understand it both ways, that Job speaks out the blessing of God with his mouth, and likewise he had high and reverent thoughts of God. His heart and tongue met at this work and word.



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New Testament Study: *Romans 4:1-3*



A Study by Scott Sperling

Romans 4:1-3 – Abraham's Righteousness, pt. 1

¹ What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, discovered in this matter? ² If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about – but not before God. ³ What does Scripture say?

“Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”

TOWARDS THE END of chapter 3, specifically in Rom. 3:21-26, Paul gave his *grand statement of the Gospel*—the fact that we are *justified by the grace of God, through faith in Christ*. Paul tells us that our salvation from the punishment due for our sins comes entirely from the righteousness of Christ, through our faith in His redemption for us, and it in no way comes from any good works that we do. That's Paul's message to us from Romans 3.

Here in chapter 4, Paul shows us that this is the way that it has always been. Justification (that is, the forgiveness of sins) came through faith, not through works, even in the Old Testament times. To show this, Paul gives us two examples, that of Abraham and that of David. In doing so, Paul is pointing out that Christianity is not a doing-away-with Judaism and the Old Testament teachings, rather, it's a continuation of the Old Testament teachings. The writings

and teachings of the New Testament are a further revelation of the writings and teachings of the Old Testament. In fact, the revelation of Christ to the world is actually a revelation that shines light on the Old Testament, because, only through Christ, can we truly understand what the Old Testament is saying.

Given what we know about Christ, and the mission of Christ, and the ministry of Christ, and the teachings of Christ, and the Gospel of Christ, we read the Old Testament in a whole new light. We start to see Christ everywhere in the Old Testament. For instance, we see Christ as the seed of the woman after the fall of man (see Gen. 3:15); we see Christ in the sacrifice of Isaac, on the very same mountain where Christ was sacrificed (see Gen. 22); we see that it is Christ of whom it was written by Isaiah: **“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of His government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David’s throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this”** (Isa. 9:6-7); we see it was Christ, who cried out: **“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”** (Ps. 22:1); we see that it was Christ, risen from the dead, of whom Job proclaimed: **“I know that my redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand on the earth”** (Job 19:25). Yes, we see Christ everywhere, and in every way, in the Old Testament, on nearly every single page, if we truly had eyes to see Him.

And so, it’s no wonder that, just as the New Testament teaches the grace of God, and God’s desire that everyone be reconciled to Him, so also does the Old Testament teaches us these things. This reconciliation with God comes through God crediting us with righteousness, and this crediting of righteousness to us, comes by faith, whether one was living in

the Old Testament times or in the New Testament times. Having said this, though, we, who live here and now, do have a special blessing, in that we live after the time of Christ. We have the clear and true light of the Gospel, and the light of the teachings of Christ, and so for us, the administration of God's grace is clear: we have a clear, true and sure way to salvation.

Paul's message here in Romans 4 is that he is not giving us some new teaching when he teaches the doctrine of *justification through faith*, rather, he is giving us a teaching that was always in the Old Testament. As Paul wrote near the end of the previous chapter: **“Is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too, since there is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith”** (Rom. 3:29-30). There is one God, not two Gods. There is not a God of the Old Testament, and a separate God of the New Testament. There is one God, who justifies by faith now, just as He justified by faith then. In the New Testament times, it is faith in the truth of the Gospel message, faith that Christ died for our sins in order to reconcile us to God. In the Old Testament times, it was faith in the promises of God, which looked ahead to the salvation that would come through Christ. And so, all salvation comes through faith, and all salvation comes through Christ, just as Jesus said: **“I am the way and the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father, except through me”** (John 14:6).

Paul, here in Romans 4, gives us a couple examples of this Old Testament faith. The first is the example of Abraham. Paul writes: **“What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, discovered in this matter? If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about—but not before God”** (Rom. 4:1-2). Paul knew that the Jews would have a great difficulty accepting the grand statement of the gospel that he gave in chapter 3, and so, to help convince the Jews of the

truth of the gospel, he brings up the example of Abraham. Paul's aim is to show the Jews, and everyone, that Abraham also was justified by faith, just as Christians are. This would go a long way to convince the Jews of the truth of the gospel, because Abraham is the father of Judaism; he is their forefather in the faith; he is to them *Father Abraham*; all Jews could trace their lineage through the twelve tribes of Israel, back to father Abraham.

The children of Israel looked back at Abraham as the perfect example of a pious Jew. He was the paragon of the perfect Jew. He was the supreme example of what a Jew should be, and the very father of the faithful. So then, if Abraham, who was so renowned for his holiness and obedience – if he was justified by faith, and not works, then maybe (as far as the Jews were concerned), this Christian gospel is not so far-fetched. So this is the great question that Paul set out to answer: Was Abraham justified by works, or by faith? As Paul wrote in verse 2: **“If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about...”**

Given the greatness of Abraham's life, one might certainly think that he was justified by works, and that he had lots of things he could boast about. However, if you examine closely the great works of Abraham's life, you find that they were all driven by faith in the promises of God. Let's look at the three great works of Abraham, and see what we find.

The first of the great works of Abraham was when he left Haran (where his father had settled), and took his household to Canaan, to the promised land, to modern-day Israel. This is documented in Genesis 12:

The Lord had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”

So Abram went, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Haran. He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there. (Gen. 12:1-5).

Note here that there was apparently no social or economic reason for Abram (as Abraham was known at that time) to leave Haran. He wasn't under attack from anyone, or anything like that. He was quite successful where he was, and had accumulated many possessions so, financially, he was doing well in Haran. There was no worldly reason for Abram to leave Haran. So really, it made no sense for Abram to pull up roots and to go to Canaan, to go to the promised land, except that God had promised to make him a great nation in Canaan.

So, Abram responded to the promise, and uprooted his whole life, at age of 75, and went to Canaan. Abram responded to the promise of God, by faith. He ripped up his comfortable and safe life in Haran, because God promised something greater for him. Make no mistake: This was an act of faith by Abraham, faith in the promises of God.

By the way, aren't we told to do the same thing? We Christians are called to leave this comfortable life that we have in the world, and to follow where God calls us to go. When Jesus called each of His disciples, what did He say but, **"Follow me"**? And they, as an example to us, dropped their nets where they were, or dropped whatever they were doing, and followed Him. This is the example of the disciples to us, and this is the example of Abraham to all God's people. God says to us, "I promise you a better life." We need to believe in the promises of God, just as Abraham did.

The second of the great works of Abraham occurred when God established the covenant of circumcision. This happened when Abram was 99 years old. At that time, God promised him that he and his wife Sarah would have a son,

and from that son, Abram would become the father of many nations. We find this in Genesis 17: **“Abram fell facedown, and God said to him, ‘As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham...”** [meaning, “father of many”] **“for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you”** (Gen. 17:3-6). And then, a bit later in the same chapter, God lays out the covenant: **“Then God said to Abraham, ‘As for you, you must keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you for the generations to come. This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you”** (Gen. 17:9-11). Then, God defined the promise related to the covenant with Abraham, a promise through Sarah: **“God also said to Abraham, ‘As for Sarai your wife, you are no longer to call her Sarai; her name will be Sarah. I will bless her and will surely give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she will be the mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her.’ Abraham fell facedown; he laughed and said to himself, ‘Will a son be born to a man a hundred years old? Will Sarah bear a child at the age of ninety?’”** (Gen. 17:15-17). Despite Abraham’s incredulity, we see that Abraham responded to the covenant promise with obedience: **“On that very day Abraham took his son Ishmael and all those born in his household or bought with his money, every male in his household, and circumcised them, as God told him. Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised”** (Gen. 17:23-24).

Abraham heard the promise that he would be the father of many nations through a son that Sarah would bear, and Abraham did everything that God told him to do, through

faith in that promise. And certainly, to circumcise himself was an act of faith. Frankly speaking (at the risk of being indelicate, but it's important to the story), the circumcision was certainly an act of faith, because Abraham was harming the instrument by which he could possibly have children. By being circumcised, Abraham, by faith, was putting his full confidence in God and in the promises of God, and literally putting no confidence in his own flesh.

And we Christians are called to do the same thing, but not through physical circumcision; rather, we are called to do this by spiritual circumcision of the heart. We are to excise anything that prevents us from putting full confidence in God, and in the promises of God. Paul elsewhere wrote, speaking of this true circumcision which Christians should have, **“For it is we who are the circumcision, we who serve God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh.”** (Phil. 3:2). When we have this true circumcision of the heart, then and only then are we able to fully love God. Moses taught us this in Deuteronomy: **“The Lord your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live”** (Deut. 30:6). So, we are called to circumcise our hearts, to put no confidence in ourselves, just as Abraham was called to circumcision. And Abraham's obedience to God was proof that Abraham believed what God had promised.

The third great work of Abraham was when he, in obedience to God, offered his son Isaac up to be sacrificed. He did this in obedience to God, who said to him: **“Then God said, ‘Take your son, your only son, whom you love—Isaac—and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you.’”** (Gen. 22:2). And Abraham did take Isaac up on the mountain, and was about to sacrifice him, but the Angel of the Lord stopped him, just as the sword was coming down.

We learn from the book of Hebrews that Abraham's offering of his son to be sacrificed was an act of faith by Abraham: **"By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had embraced the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God had said to him, 'It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.' Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the dead, and so in a manner of speaking he did receive Isaac back from death"** (Heb. 11:17-19). And so, the whole act of sacrificing Isaac was an act of great faith on Abraham's part: faith even that God could raise the dead; faith in the promises that God had given him many times over the years that, through Isaac, Abraham would be the father of many nations.

Now, we will never be called by God to lay a child of ours on the altar, and sacrifice him. In fact, that's one of the points of the story. Unlike the false gods of the religions surrounding Abraham at the time, the True and Living God does not ask for human sacrifices. The only human sacrifice to death sanctioned by God was Christ's sacrifice, once for all, for all of us. But we are asked to be *living* sacrifices in service to God, and to the things of God. In fact, this is our proper worship of God: to be a living sacrifice for Him. Paul teaches us this later in the book of Romans: **"Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship"** (Rom. 12:1). And so, we as Christians aren't to offer up animal sacrifices in worship to God, nor especially, are we to offer human sacrifices to the death, as pagan religions did. No, more difficultly, we are to be *living* sacrifices in service to God, and as living sacrifices, we are to offer ourselves over and over as acts of worship to God.

And so, we have these great works of Abraham, but as we have seen, all these works sprung from Abraham's faith in the promises of God. These so-called works, were actually acts of

faith. They were acts that flowed from Abraham's faith; they were fruit of the faith that Abraham had in the promises of God; they flowed as a natural outpouring of Abraham's faith in the promises of God. The works were proofs of Abraham's faith. They were undeniable confirmations that Abraham believed in the promises of God. And note here that, if Abraham did not have the faith, he never would have performed the works. The faith came first, and out of the faith, sprang the works.



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Many of these books (those in the public domain) can be downloaded free of charge from:

<http://www.ClassicChristianLibrary.com>

A Study in History: The Reformation



Introduction to the Protestant Reformation, pt. 6, by Philip Schaff

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

[Here, we continue with a reprint of Philip Schaff's introduction to the history of the Reformation, from volume six of his excellent work, HISTORY OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH. We are picking up in the middle of section 9, which discusses the relationship between the Reformation and the rise of philosophical Rationalism. For his first point, Dr. Schaff considered “the relation of the Reformation to the use of reason as a general principle.” Here we continue with his second point.]

SECTION 9 (CONT.). *The Reformation and Rationalism*

2. Let us now consider the application of the principle of free inquiry to the Bible.

The Bible, its origin, genuineness, integrity, aim, and all its circumstances and surroundings are proper subjects of investigation; for it is a human as well as a divine book, and has a history, like other literary productions. The extent of the Bible, moreover, or the canon, is not determined by the Bible itself or by inspiration, but by church authority or tradition, and was not fully agreed upon until the close of the fourth century, and even then only by provincial synods, not by any of the seven ecumenical councils. It was therefore justly open

to reinvestigation.

The Church of Rome, at the Council of Trent, settled the canon, including the Apocrypha, but without any critical inquiry or definite theological principle; it simply confirmed the traditional usage, and pronounced an anathema on every one who does not receive all the books contained in the Latin Vulgate. She also checked the freedom of investigation by requiring conformity to a defective version and a unanimous consensus of the fathers, although such an exegetical consensus does not exist except in certain fundamental doctrines.

The Reformers re-opened the question of the extent of the canon, as they had a right to do, but without any idea of sweeping away the traditional belief or undermining the authority of the Word of God. On the contrary, from the fulness of their faith in the inspired Word, as contained in the Scriptures, they questioned the canonicity of a few books which seem to be lacking in sufficient evidence to entitle them to a place in the Bible. They simply revived, in a new shape and on doctrinal rather than historical grounds, the distinction made by the Hebrews and the ancient fathers between the canonical and apocryphal books of the Old Testament, and the Eusebian distinction between the *Homologumena* and *Antilegomena* of the New Testament, and claimed in both respects the freedom of the ante-Nicene church.

They added, moreover, to the external evidence, the more important internal evidence on the intrinsic excellency of the Scripture, as the true ground on which its authority and claim to obedience rests; and they established a firm criterion of canonicity, namely, the purity and force of teaching Christ and his gospel of salvation. They did not reject the testimonies of the fathers, but they placed over them what Paul calls the **“demonstration of the Spirit and of power”** (1 Cor. 2: 4).

Luther was the bold pioneer of a higher criticism, which was indeed subjective and arbitrary, but, after all, a criticism of faith. He made his central doctrine of justification by faith

the criterion of canonicity. He thus placed the material or subjective principle of Protestantism above the formal or objective principle, the truth above the witness of the truth, the doctrine of the gospel above the written Gospel, Christ above the Bible. Romanism, on the contrary, places the church above the Bible. But we must remember that Luther first learnt Christ from the Bible, and especially from the Epistles of Paul, which furnished him the key for the understanding of the scheme of salvation.

He made a distinction, moreover, between the more important and the less important books of the New Testament, according to the extent of their evangelic purity and force, and put Hebrews, James, Jude, and Revelation at the end of the German Bible.

He states his reason in the Preface to the Hebrews as follows: "Hitherto we have had the right and genuine books of the New Testament. The four that follow have been differently esteemed in olden times." He therefore appeals to the ante-Nicene tradition, but his chief objection was to the contents.

He disliked, most of all, the Epistle of James because he could not harmonize it with Paul's teaching on justification by faith *without* works, and he called it an epistle of straw as compared with the genuine apostolic writings.

He objected to the Epistle to the Hebrews because it seems to deny (in chaps. 6, 10 and 12) the possibility of repentance after baptism, contrary to the Gospels and to Paul, and betrays in Heb. 2:3, a post-apostolic origin. He ascribed the authorship to Apollos by an ingenious guess, which, though not supported by ancient tradition, has found great favor with modern commentators and critics, chiefly because the authorship of any other possible writer (Paul, Barnabas, Luke, Clement) seems to offer insuperable difficulties, while the description of Apollos in Acts 18:24-28, compared with the allusions in 1 Cor. 1:12; 3:6; 4:6; 16:12, seems to fit exactly the author of this anonymous Epistle.

He called the Epistle of Jude an “unnecessary epistle,” a mere extract from Second Peter and post-apostolic, filled with apocryphal matter, and hence rejected by the ancient fathers.

He could at first find no sense in the mysteries of the Apocalypse and declared it to be “neither apostolic nor prophetic,” because it deals only with images and visions, and yet, notwithstanding its obscurity, it adds threats and promises, “though nobody knows what it means”; but afterwards he modified his judgment when the Lutheran divines found in it welcome weapons against the church of Rome.

The clearest utterance on this subject is found at the close of his preface to the first edition of his German version of the New Testament (1522), but it was suppressed in later editions.

Luther’s view of inspiration was both strong and free. With the profoundest conviction of the divine contents of the Bible, he distinguished between the revealed truth itself and the human wording and reasoning of the writers. He says of one of the rabbinical arguments of his favorite apostle: “My dear brother Paul, this argument won’t stick.”

Luther was, however, fully aware of the subjective and conjectural character of these opinions, and had no intention of obtruding them on the church: hence he modified his prefaces in later editions. He judged the Scriptures from an exclusively dogmatic, and one-sidedly Pauline standpoint, and did not consider their gradual historical growth.

A few Lutheran divines followed him in assigning a subordinate position to the seven Antilegomena of the New Testament; but the Lutheran church, with a sound instinct, accepted for popular use the traditional catholic canon (not even expressly excluding the Jewish Apocrypha), yet retained his arrangement of the books of the New Testament. The Rationalists, of course, revived, intensified, and carried to excess the bold opinions of Luther, but in a spirit against which he would himself raise the strongest protest.

The Reformed divines were more conservative than Luther in accepting the canonical books, but more decided in

rejecting the Apocrypha of the Old Testament. The Reformed Confessions usually enumerate the canonical books.

Zwingli objected only to the Apocalypse and made no doctrinal use of it, because he did not deem it an inspired book, written by the same John who wrote the fourth Gospel. In this view he has many followers, but the severest critical school of our days (that of Tübingen) assigns it to the Apostle John. Wolfgang Musculus mentions the seven Antilegomena, but includes them in the general catalogue of the New Testament; and Oecolampadius speaks of six Antilegomena (omitting the Hebrews), as holding an inferior rank, but nevertheless appeals to their testimony.

Calvin had no fault to find with James and Jude, and often quotes Hebrews and Revelation as canonical books, though he wrote no commentary on Revelation, probably because he felt himself incompetent for the task. He is silent about Second and Third John. He denies, decidedly, the Pauline authorship, but not the canonicity, of Hebrews. He is disposed to assign Second Peter to a pupil of Peter, who wrote under the auspices and by direction of the Apostle; but he guards in this case, also, against unfavorable inferences from the uncertainty of origin.

Calvin clearly saw the inconsistency of giving the Church the right of determining the canon after denying her right of making an article of faith. He therefore placed the canon on the authority of God who bears testimony to it through the voice of the Spirit in the hearts of the believer. The eternal and inviolable truth of God, he says, is not founded on the pleasure and judgment of men, and can be as easily distinguished as light from darkness, and white from black. In the same line, Peter Vermilius denies that "the Scriptures take their authority from the Church. Their certitude is derived from God. The Word is older than the Church. The Spirit of God wrought in the hearts of the hearers and readers of the Word so that they recognized it to be truly divine." This view is clearly set forth in several Calvinistic Confessions. In its

exclusive form it is diametrically opposed to the maxim of Augustin, otherwise so highly esteemed by the Reformers: "I should not believe the gospel except as moved by the authority of the Church." But the two kinds of evidence supplement each other. The human authority of tradition though not the final ground of belief, is indispensable as an historical witness of the genuineness and canonicity, and is of great weight in conflict with Rationalism. There is no essential antagonism between the Bible and the Church in the proper sense of the term. They are inseparable. The Church was founded by Christ and the apostles through the preaching of the *living* Word of God, and the founders of the Church are also the authors of the *written* Word, which continues to be the shining and guiding light of the Church; while the Church in turn is the guardian, preserver, translator, propagator, and expounder of the Bible.

3. *The liberal views of the Reformers on inspiration and the canon were abandoned after the middle of the sixteenth century, and were succeeded by compact and consolidated systems of theology.* The evangelical scholasticism of the seventeenth century strongly resembles, both in its virtues and defects, the catholic scholasticism of the Middle Ages which systematized and contracted the patristic theology, except that the former was based on the Bible, the latter on church tradition. In the conflict with Romanism, the Lutheran and Calvinistic scholastics elaborated a stiff, mechanical theory of inspiration in order to set an infallible book against an infallible pope. The Bible was identified with the Word of God, dictated to the sacred writers as the penmen of the Holy Ghost. Even the classical purity of style and the integrity of the traditional text, including the Massoretic punctuation, were asserted in the face of stubborn facts, which came to light as the study of the origin and history of the text advanced. The divine side of the Scriptures was exclusively dwelled upon, and the human and literary side was ignored or virtually denied. Hence the exegetical poverty of the period of Protestant scholasticism.

The Bible was used as a repository of proof texts for previously conceived dogmas, without regard to the context, the difference between the Old and New Testaments, and the gradual development of the divine revelation in accordance with the needs and capacities of men.

4. *It was against this Protestant bibliolatry and symbolatry that Rationalism arose as a legitimate protest.* It pulled down one dogma after another, and subjected the Bible and the canon to a searching criticism. It denies the divine inspiration of the Scriptures, except in a wider sense which applies to all works of genius, and treats them simply as a gradual evolution of the religious spirit of Israel and the primitive Christian Church. It charges them with errors of fact and errors of doctrine, and resolves the miracles into legends and myths. It questions the Mosaic origin of the Pentateuch, the genuineness of the Davidic Psalms, the Solomonic writings, the prophecies of Deutero-Isaiah and Daniel, and other books of the Old Testament. It assigns not only the Eusebian Antilegomena, but even the Gospels, Acts, the Catholic Epistles, and several Pauline Epistles to the post-apostolic age, from A.D. 70 to 150.

In its later developments, however, Rationalism has been obliged to retreat and make several concessions to orthodoxy. The canonical Gospels and Acts have gained by further investigation and discovery; and the apostolic authorship of the four great Epistles of Paul to the Romans, Corinthians, and Galatians and the Apocalypse of John is fully admitted by the severest school of criticism (that of Tübingen). A most important admission: for these five books teach or imply all the leading facts and truths of the gospel, and overthrow the very foundations of Rationalism. With the Christ of the Gospels, and the Apostle Paul of his acknowledged Epistles, Christianity is safe.

Rationalism was a radical revolution which swept like a flood over the Continent of Europe. But it is not negative and destructive only. It has made and is still making valuable

contributions to biblical philology, textual criticism, and grammatico-historical exegesis. It enlarges the knowledge of the conditions and environments of the Bible, and of all that belongs to the human and temporal side of Christ and Christianity. It cultivates with special zeal and learning the sciences of Critical Introduction, Biblical Theology, the Life of Christ, the Apostolic and post-Apostolic Ages.

5. *These acquisitions to exegetical and historical theology are a permanent gain, and are incorporated in the new evangelical theology, which arose in conflict with Rationalism and in defense of the positive Christian faith in the divine facts of revelation and the doctrines of salvation. The conflict is still going on with increasing strength, but with the sure prospect of the triumph of truth. Christianity is independent of all critical questions on the canon, and of human theories of inspiration; else Christ would himself have written the Gospels, or commanded the Apostles to do so, and provided for the miraculous preservation and inspired translation of the text. His **“words are spirit, and are life”** (John 6:63). **“The flesh profiteth nothing.”** Criticism and speculation may for a while wander away from Christ, but will ultimately return to Him who furnishes the only key for the solution of the problems of history and human life. “No matter,” says the world-poet Goethe in one of his last utterances, “how much the human mind may progress in intellectual culture, in the science of nature, in ever-expanding breadth and depth: it will never be able to rise above the elevation and moral culture which shines in the Gospels.”*

[This study will continue in the next issue.]

*Old Testament Study:
The Old Testament for Christians*



The Old Testament for Christians, pt. 3
by Scott Sperling

[Here we continue an intermittent series that deals with references to Christ, to the Christian life, to Christian doctrine, etc., as found in the Old Testament writings. A goal of these studies is to convince ourselves that the Bible is one unified book: a single book, with unified themes, and a consistent Theology.]

The Temptation and Sin of Adam and Eve –
Gen. 3:1-6

¹ Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?" ² The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, ³ but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'"

⁴ "You will not certainly die," the serpent said to the woman. ⁵ "For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

⁶ When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.

In this study, we will look at the Fall of Adam and Eve, the event that brought sin into the world, as Paul points out in Rom. 5:12: **“...sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way, death came to all people, because all sinned...”** And so, the Fall, through sin, clearly affects us all, because sin brought death.

If we study the Fall, then we must also study sin. The topic of sin, is not a comfortable one. It's not a topic that, say, you look forward to hearing about. In fact, quite possibly, as you read this, and see that I am going to write about sin, you may be tempted to skip this study altogether. It's not a topic that we are normally gung-ho to hear about, or read about. On the contrary, we would like to avoid the topic, as much as possible.

In fact, there are many Christian churches that do their best to avoid the topic, because the demographics show that people just don't like to hear about sin. But this is a wrong thing to do. It is absolutely wrong for a Christian Church to avoid the topic of sin, because we cannot understand the Gospel of Christ, without understanding the seriousness of sin. In a Christian church, the topic of sin should be a familiar one. We should know about sin. We should be reminded that we are sinners. We should be reminded that we live in a sinful, fallen world.

Why must this be taught? Because, as Christians, we are to proclaim the Gospel – that is, “The Good News.” But there is no “Good News”, if there's not also Bad News. How can you understand the “Good News” of the Gospel, and how the Gospel can positively affect your life and fate, if you don't also fully understand the “Bad News” of the punishment that you deserve for your sin? To fully appreciate the Gospel, to fully appreciate the great gift that we have been given through Christ's sacrifice for us, we must know and understand the dire punishment we face, the dire punishment we deserve, because we have sinned. And so, on Sunday mornings, we must, at times, speak of sin.

We must speak also of the righteousness demanded by a holy and perfectly Righteous God. We must understand the hatred that God has for sin, and that we, as sinners, face the punishment of God because of our sin. Passages about God's righteousness, holiness, and hatred of sin are ubiquitous in the Word of God. The Psalmist announces the vastness and far-reaching nature of God's righteousness: **"Your righteousness God reaches to the heavens"** (Ps. 71:19). The Psalmist also teaches us that **"righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne"** (Ps. 97:2). In other words, God reigns because of His righteous nature. The Psalmist teaches of the eternity of God's righteousness: **"Great are the works of the LORD; they are pondered by all who delight in them. Glorious and majestic are his deeds, and His righteousness endures forever"** (Ps. 111:2-3). Some erroneously believe that God's hatred of sin has diminished in the New Testament times, that somehow God is more tolerant of sin. This is absolutely wrong, for **"God's righteousness endures forever."**

God's perfect righteousness extends to and permeates all His actions: **"He is the Rock, His works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he"** (Deut. 32:4). God's righteousness is inseparable from His love: **"The LORD loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of his unfailing love"** (Psalms 33:5). There is nothing of unrighteousness in God: **"God is light; in him there is no darkness at all"** (1 John 1:5). And we could go on and on...

And so, it is established, throughout the Bible, the importance of righteousness to God. In fact, the major theme of the Bible is wrapped up with God's righteousness: God is righteous; man is sinful; how can they be reconciled? This is the story arc of the Bible: man sins; man wanders; man is reconciled to God through the sacrifice of Christ.

This, in fact, is story arc of every human life. We fall, we sin, early and often, destroying our fellowship with God. We

walk in the wilderness, in our sin, just like the children of Israel walked in the wilderness. We wrestle with God, like Jacob wrestled with God in the wilderness. We rebel against God, over and over again, like the children of Israel rebelled against God, over and over. Then, at some point in our lives, we come to a crossroads where we must make a decision: We can choose to be reconciled to God through Christ, or we can choose to continue in our way of sin. We can choose to live our lives following God's precepts, or we can choose to invent our own "right" way of living (right only in our own eyes). We can choose to accept the great gift of life, and the gift of reconciliation to God, offered through Christ's sacrifice, or we can choose to seek salvation in our own ways, a salvation of our own invention (which will ultimately fail to live up to the exacting standards of God's righteousness).

And so, the Bible has this story arc, human history has this story arc, and every human life has this same story arc: Sin, Struggle, then either Doom or Salvation.

The significance of the Fall cannot be overstated. It has affected all aspects of our lives. In our careers, we toil under the curse of the Fall. As a society, we live in strife, because of the Fall. In our bodies, we suffer pain and sickness, because of the Fall. Even our leisure-time activities are influenced by the Fall: the arts are expressions of man's anguish as a result of man's fallen state; even sports and competitions are the result of the Fall of man, as athletes are driven by man's desire to exalt himself over others. The Fall has seriously affected our ability to relate to one another and to live at peace with one another. Most importantly, the Fall has seriously affected our ability to relate to God and to live at peace with Him.

The history of the Fall, as described in the book of Genesis, begins this way: **"Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals"** (vs. 1). Satan uses a serpent, a pre-cursor of sorts to what we know as the snake, to tempt Eve. We know that it is Satan who is working through the serpent from other places in the Bible. John ties

Satan to the serpent in the book of Revelation: **“...that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the world astray...”** (Rev. 12:9; see also Rev. 20:2). So, presumably, Satan possessed the serpent, and spoke through it, in some way. We know from the New Testament, in the time of Christ, that demons possessed humans, and talked to Christ through them. We know also that they can possess animals. In Matt. 8:28-33, Jesus freed men from demon-possession, and cast the demon spirits into a nearby herd of pigs.

There's no indication in Genesis 3, though, that Eve knew she was speaking to anyone but the serpent (presumably, Eve knew nothing of Satan or demons, and the like). And so, throughout history, and even now, many are tempted by Satan, not knowing who he is, or that he's speaking through others. But that it was Satan, and not just a serpent, did not lessen Eve's guilt. Sin is sin. The strength and cunning of the method of temptation does not in any way excuse us from falling into sin.

The subtlety, the cunning and the guile of Satan is demonstrated in how he tempted Eve: **“He said to the woman, ‘Did God really say, “you must not eat from any tree in the garden?”’”** (vs. 1). Satan did not just say outrightly, “Eve, disobey God.” He drew her in with craftiness, when she was alone and susceptible.

Satan began by *questioning* God's Word: **“Did God really say?...”** Satan well knows that the source of all sin is unbelief, and so right away, he sows seeds of unbelief. “Unbelief is the primitive cause and source of all sin, and whenever the devil can succeed, either in getting away the word from the heart, or in falsifying it, and thus bringing the soul to unbelief, he can easily do in the end what he pleases” [Luther]. If we truly believed God's word, if every minute we truly believed that God is a perfectly righteous, and perfectly holy God, who hates sin, and that each and every sin deserves death, then we

would not sin. But our faith is imperfect. Our faith falters when our personal desire is involved.

The implication of the question of Satan, **“Did God really say?”** was that God was being somewhat unreasonable by commanding that Adam and Eve not eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. The tone of Satan’s question was as if he asked, *Did God really make that unreasonable prohibition?* And so Satan, even here and now, often tempts us in the same way. *Did God really say that you must turn the other cheek? Did God really say that you must not lie? Did God really say that you must not cheat on your taxes? Did God really say that you must not commit adultery? Did God really say that you must not divorce, in this day and age?... etc.*

The world is constantly questioning God’s commands, God’s clearly stated law. We tend to snap at such doubts, just as a cat snaps at a mouse, hoping that the doubts provide an excuse to dive into sin. We must remember that the doubt of God’s word leads to death. So, Satan here, in order to lead up to the temptation of eating of the fruit, tempts Eve first to doubt God’s word, to doubt God’s command, to mistrust God, to weaken the force of the prohibition.

Satan also here is trying to sow the seed of *discontentment* in Eve. Paul wrote to Timothy: **“Godliness with contentment is great gain”** (1 Tim. 6:6). We are much more susceptible to sin, after the seed of *discontentment* has been sown. In a discontented state, we say to ourselves: *I’m not happy. I should be happy. I deserve to be happy...* And then we sin, thinking that sin will bring happiness. We should strive to appreciate all the great things God has given us, rather than being tempted into discontent by focusing on things that we don’t have.

Eve replied to the serpent: **“We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die’”** (vs. 2). Eve here purportedly repeats to the serpent the command that God gave to her concerning eating from the tree. Did she repeat

the command correctly? Let's look at the actual command of God: **"...You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die"** (Gen. 2:16-17). Did Eve get it right? Not quite. She added the words, **"...and you must not touch it..."** Well, so what, you may say. What's wrong with adding prohibitions to God's command (you may ask)? Here's what's wrong with it: it misrepresents God. It makes God out to be more "picky" than He really is. It depicts God as being unreasonable with His command. We can see from Eve's incorrect restatement of the command, that Eve was already succumbing to the temptation of the serpent, because what the serpent said in verse 1 was meant to suggest that God was not being reasonable by commanding them not to eat from the tree.

Now, one might say, "Well, Eve had good intentions by adding to God's command. After all, if she didn't *touch* the fruit, then she couldn't *eat* the fruit." Yes, it's all well and good for Eve to set a boundary on herself, in order to help her carry out the command. However, we are not, under any circumstances, to misrepresent what God said. We are not to take away from God's commands, nor are we to add to them: **"Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the Lord your God that I give you"** (Deut. 4:2). God's law is perfect. It is not for us to subtract from it, nor even to add to it, no matter how well-intentioned we are. Apparently, Eve had convinced herself that God *did* say not to touch it, and the fact that she *added* to God's command was exploited by Satan to get her to doubt the reasonableness of God, as we see in the next verses.

Satan's next assault is in vss. 4 and 5: **"'You will not certainly die,' the serpent said to the woman. 'For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.'"** So here, Satan goes from *sowing doubt* on the reasonableness of God and His command, to direct *denial* of what God said:

“...you will *not* certainly die...” said the serpent. And then to support his contention, Satan impugns God’s motives for making the command. Satan claims that God’s motive for making the command is not for the good of Adam and Eve, but rather that God wants to withhold something from them: **“...for God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”** Satan, in effect, is saying: Look what you’re missing out on! God just doesn’t want you to be happy! God doesn’t want you to have knowledge! God doesn’t want you to reach your full potential! And of course, Satan uses these exact same techniques, these exact same temptations here and now, in this day and age. “Look what you’re missing out on! This won’t really harm you!”

So note the progression: sowing doubt, directly denying what God said, impugning God’s motives, and then Satan just outright *lies*, in saying: **“...you will be like God, knowing good and evil...”** Satan claims that there will be no harm done by eating the fruit. More than that, Satan claims that Eve will actually get a benefit from eating the fruit. He suggests that Eve won’t be “under God” anymore. Eve will be like God, not under God. The suggestion is that Eve would have no more need to listen to God, for she herself will know all about good and evil.

Eve was affected by Satan’s words. They caused her to look at the tree differently, as we see in the first part of verse 6: **“When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it.”** This is a fascinating verse, because it ties to other passages in the Bible, and, in effect, summarizes *the Three Motives for All Sin*. John references these motives for sin in his first epistle, as he warns Christians about living in this fallen world: **“Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the**

pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world” (1 John 2:15-16). John is saying that everything in this fallen world that is not from God, comes from these three things: **“...the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life...”** If you think about it, there are three *motives*, or *root causes*, of all things sinful: **“...the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life...”**

Certainly, we can see that Eve was tempted by all three of these things. From verse 6: **“When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food...”** This is *lust of the flesh*. And then: **“...and pleasing to the eye...”** This is *lust of the eyes*. And finally: **“...and also desirable for gaining wisdom...”** This is *the pride of life*. And then, the result of all this: **“...she took some and ate it.”** She fell into sin, by succumbing to the temptations of the world. This is a solemn warning from the Apostle John to us: **“Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world”** (1 John 2:15-16). The temptations of the world. The allurements of the world. **“...The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life...”** Take care not to succumb to them. They promise far more than they deliver. For Eve, the result was nothing short of the eternal ruination of the human race.



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*A Sermon:
Consolation to Sufferings*



A Sermon by the Rev. Charles H. Spurgeon

Sermon No. 13 –
Consolation to Spiritual Sufferings –
2 Cor. 1:5

(Preached at the Exeter Hall,
London, March 11th, 1855)

“For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ.” (2 Cor. 1:5, KJV)

SEEK YE REST from your distresses ye children of woe and sorrow? This is the place where ye may lighten your burden, and lose your cares. Oh, son of affliction and misery, wouldst thou forget for a time thy pains and griefs? This is the Bethesda, the house of mercy; this is the place where God designs to cheer thee, and to make thy distresses stay their never ceasing course; this is the spot where his children love to be found, because here they find consolation in the midst of tribulation, joy in their sorrows, and comfort in their afflictions. Even worldly men admit that there is something extremely comforting in the sacred Scriptures, and in our holy religion; I have even heard it said of some, that after they had, by their logic, as they thought, annihilated Christianity, and proved it to be untrue, they acknowledged that they had spoilt an excellently comforting delusion, and that they could almost sit down and weep to think it was not a reality. Ay, my friends, if it were not true, ye might weep. If the Bible were not the truth of God—if we could not meet together around his mercy seat, then ye might put your hands upon your loins and

walk about as if ye were in travail. If ye had not something in the world beside your reason, beside the fleeting joys of earth—if ye had not something which God had given to you, some hope beyond the sky, some refuge that should be more than terrestrial, some deliverance which should be more than earthly, then ye might weep;—ah! weep your heart out at your eyes, and let your whole bodies waste away in one perpetual tear. Ye might ask the clouds to rest on your head, the rivers to roll down in streams from both your eyes, for your grief would “have need of all the watery things that nature could produce.” But, blessed be God, we have consolation, we have joy in the Holy Ghost. We find it nowhere else. We have raked the earth through, but we have discovered ne’er a jewel; we have turned this dunghill-world o’er and o’er a thousand times, and we have found nought that is precious; but here, in this Bible, here in the religion of the blessed Jesus we the sons of God, have found comfort and joy; while we can truly say, **“As our afflictions abound, so our consolations also abound by Christ.”**

There are four things in my text to which I invite your attention: the first is the sufferings to be expected—**“The sufferings of Christ abound in us;”** secondly, the distinction to be noticed—they are the sufferings of Christ; thirdly, a proportion to be experienced—as the sufferings of Christ abound, so our consolations abound; and fourthly, the person to be honored—**“So our consolation aboundeth by Christ.”**

I. Our first division then is, **THE SUFFERINGS TO BE EXPECTED.** Our holy Apostle says **“The sufferings of Christ abound in us.”** Before we buckle on the Christian armour we ought to know what that service is which is expected of us. A recruiting serjeant often slips a shilling into the hand of some ignorant youth, and tells him that Her Majesty’s Service is a fine thing, that he has nothing to do but walk about in his flaming colors, that he will have no hard service—in fact, that he has nothing to do but to be a soldier,

and go straight on to glory. But the Christian sergeant when he enlists a soldier of the cross, never deceives him like that. Jesus Christ himself said, **“Count the cost”** (Luke 14:28). He wished to have no disciple who was not prepared to go all the way—**“to bear hardness as a good soldier”** (2 Tim. 2:3). I have sometimes heard religion described in such a way that its high coloring displeases me. It is true **“her ways are ways of pleasantness”** (Prov. 3:17); but it is not true that a Christian never has sorrow or trouble. It is true that light-eyed cheerfulness, and airy-footed love, can go through the world without much depression: and tribulation: but it is not true that Christianity will shield a man from trouble; nor ought it to be so represented. In fact, we ought to speak of it in the other-way. Soldier of Christ, if thou enlisteth, thou wilt have to do hard battle. There is no bed of down for thee; there is no riding to heaven in a chariot; the rough way must be trodden; mountains must be climbed, rivers must be forded, dragons must be fought, giants must be slain, difficulties must be overcome, and great trials must be borne. It is not a smooth road to heaven, believe me; for those who have gone but a very few steps therein have found it to be a rough one. It is a pleasant one; it is the most delightful in all the world, but it is not easy in itself; it is only pleasant because of the company, because of the sweet promises on which we lean, because of our Beloved who walks with us through all the rough and thorny brakes of this vast wilderness.

Christian, expect trouble: **“Count it not strange concerning the fiery trial, and as though some strange thing had happened unto thee”** (1 Peter 4:12), for as truly as thou art a child of God, thy Saviour hath left thee for his legacy,—**“In the world, ye shall have tribulation; in me ye shall have peace”** (John 16:33). If I had no trouble, I would not believe myself one of the family. If I never had a trial, I would not think myself an heir of heaven. Children of God must not, shall not, escape the rod. Earthly parents may spoil their children but the heavenly Father never shall his. **“Whom**

he loveth he chasteneth” (Heb. 12:6), and scourgeth every son whom he hath chosen. His people must suffer; therefore, expect it Christian; if thou art a child of God believe it, look for it, and when it comes, say, “Well suffering, I foresaw thee; thou art no stranger; I have looked for thee continually.” You cannot tell how much it will lighten your trials, if you await them with resignation. In fact, make it a wonder if you get through a day easily. If you remain a week without persecution, think it a remarkable thing; and if you should, perchance, live a month without heaving a sigh from your inmost heart, think it a miracle of miracles. But when the trouble comes, say, “Ah! this is what I looked for; it is marked in the chart to heaven; the rock is put down; I will sail confidently by it; my Master has not deceived me.”

“Why should I complain of want or distress,
Temptation or pain? he told me no less.”

But why must the Christian expect trouble? Why must he expect the sufferings of Christ to abound in him? Stand here a moment, my brother, and I will show thee four reasons wherefore thou must endure trial. First look upward, then look downward, then look around thee, and then look within thee; and thou wilt see four reasons why the sufferings of Christ should abound in thee.

Look upward. Dost thou see thy heavenly Father, a pure and holy being, spotless, just, perfect? Dost thou know that thou art one day to be like him? Thinkest thou that thou wilt easily come to be conformed to his image? Wilt thou not require much furnace work, much grinding in the mill of trouble, much breaking with the pestle in the mortar of affliction, much being broken under the wheels of agony? Thinkest thou it will be an easy thing for thy heart to become as pure as God is? Dost thou think thou canst so soon get rid of thy corruptions, and become perfect, even as thy Father which is in heaven is perfect?

Lift up thine eye again; dost thou discern those bright spirits clad in white, purer than alabaster, more chaste, more fair than Parian marble? Behold them as they stand in glory. Ask them whence their victory came. Some of them will tell you they swam through seas of blood. Behold the scars of honor on their brows; see, some of them lift up their hands and tell you they were once consumed in fire; while others were slain by the sword, rent in pieces by wild beasts; were destitute afflicted, tormented. ye noble army of martyrs, ye glorious hosts of the living God. Must ye swim through seas of blood, and shall I hope to ride to heaven wrapped in furs and ermine? Did ye endure suffering, and shall I be pampered with the luxuries of this world? Did ye fight and then reign, and must I reign without a battle. Oh, no. By God's help I will expect that as ye suffered so must I, and as through much tribulation ye entered the kingdom of heaven, so shall I.

Next, Christian, turn thine eyes downward. Dost thou know what foes thou hast beneath thy feet? There are hell and its lions against thee. Thou wast once a servant of Satan and no king will willingly lose his subjects. Dost thou think that Satan be pleased with thee? Why, thou hast changed thy country. Thou wast once a liege servant of Apollyon, but now thou art become a good soldier of Jesus Christ; and dost thou think the devil is pleased with thee? I tell thee nay. If thou hadst seen Satan the moment thou wast converted, thou wouldst have beheld a wondrous scene. As soon as thou gavest thy heart to Christ, Satan spread his bat-like-wings: down he flew into hell, and summoning all his councilors, he said "Sons of the pit, true heirs of darkness; ye who erst were clad in light, but who fell with me from high dignities, another of my servants has forsaken me; I have lost another of my family; he is gone over to the side of the Lord of Hosts. Oh ye, my compeers, ye fellow-helpers of the powers of darkness, leave no stone unturned to destroy him. I bid you all hurl all your fiercest darts at him; plague him; let hell-dogs bark at him; let fiends besiege him; give him no rest, harass him to the

death; let the fumes of our corrupt and burning lake ever rise in his nostrils; persecute him; the man is a traitor; give him no peace; since I cannot have him here to bind him in chains of adamant, since I ne'er can have him here to torment and afflict him, as long as ye can, till his dying day, I bid you howl at him; until he crosses the river, afflict him, grieve him, torment him; for the wretch has turned against me, and become a servant of the Lord." Such may have been the scene in hell, that very day when thou didst love the Lord. And dost thou think Satan loves thee better now? Ah! no. He will always be at thee, for thine enemy, **"like a roaring lion, goeth about seeking whom he may devour"** (1 Peter 5:8). Expect trouble therefore, Christian, when thou lookest beneath thee.

Then, man of God, look around thee. Do not be asleep. Open thine eyes, and look around thee. Where art thou? Is that man a friend next to thee? No; thou art in an enemy's country. This is a wicked world. Half the people, I suppose, profess to be irreligious, and those who profess to be pious, often are not. **"Cursed is he that trusteth in man and maketh flesh his arm... Blessed is he that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is."** (Jer. 17:5). **"As for men of low degree, they are vanity"** (Ps. 62:9). The voice of the crowd is not worth having; and as for "men of high degree, they are a lie," which is worse still. The world is not to be trusted in, not to be relied upon. The true Christian treads it beneath his feet, with "all that earth calls good or great." Look around thee my brother; thou wilt see some good hearts, strong and valiant; thou wilt see some true souls, sincere and honest; thou wilt see some faithful lovers of Christ; but I tell thee O child of light, that where thou meetest one sincere man, thou wilt meet twenty hypocrites; where thou wilt find one that will lead thee to heaven, thou wilt find a score who would push thee to hell. Thou art in a land of enemies, not of friends. Never believe the world is good for much. Many people have burned their fingers by taking hold of it. Many a man has been injured by putting his hand into a

nest of the rattlesnake—the world; thinking that the dazzling hues of the sleeping serpent were securities from harm. O Christian! the world is not thy friend. If it is, then thou art not God's friend; for he who is the friend of the world is the enemy of God; and he who is despised of men, is often loved of Jehovah. Thou art in an enemy's country, man: therefore, expect trouble: expect that the man who "eats thy bread will lift up his heel against thee;" expect that thou shalt be estranged from those that love thee; be assured that since thou art in the land of the foe, thou shalt find foemen everywhere. When thou sleepest, think that thou sleepest on the battle-field; when thou walkest believe that there is an ambush in every hedge. Oh! take heed, take heed: this is no good world to shut thine eyes in. Look around thee, man; and when thou art upon the watch-tower, reckon surely that trouble cometh.

But then, look within thee. There is a little world in here, which is quite enough to give us trouble. A Roman once said he wished he had a window to his heart, that all people might see what was going on there. I am very glad I have not; if I had I would shut it up as closely as Apsley House used to be; I would take care to have all the shutters up. Most of us would have great need of shutters if we had such a window. However, for one moment, peep into the window of thine heart, to observe what is there. Sin is there—original sin and corruption; and what is more, self is still within. Ah! if thou hadst no devil to tempt thee, thou wouldest tempt thyself; if there were no enemies to fight thee, thyself would be thy worst foe; if there were no world, still thy self would be bad enough; for "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." Look within thee, believer; know that thou bearest a cancer in thy very vitals; that thou carriest within thee a bomb-shell, ready to burst at the slightest spark of temptation; know that thou hast inside thy heart an evil thing, a coiled-up viper, ready to sting thee and bring thee into trouble, and pain, and misery unutterable. Take heed of your heart, Christian; and when thou findest sorrow, trouble, and

care, look within and say, “Verily, I may well receive this, considering the evil heart of unbelief which I carry about with me.” Now dost thou see, brother Christian? No hope to escape trouble, is there. What shall we do then? There is no chance for us. We must bear suffering and affliction; therefore, let us endure it cheerfully. Some of us are the officers in God’s regiments, and we are the mark of all the riflemen of the enemy. Standing forward, we have to bear all the shots. What a mercy it is that not one of God’s officers ever fall in battle! God always keeps them. When the arrows fly fast, the shield of faith catches them all; and when the enemy is most angry, God is most pleased. So, for aught we care, the world may go on, the devil may revile, flesh may rise; **“for we are more than conquerors through him that hath loved us”** (Rom. 8:37). Therefore, all honor be unto God alone. Expect suffering—this is our first point.

II. Now, secondly, there is **A DISTINCTION TO BE NOTICED**. Our sufferings are said to be the sufferings of Christ. Now, suffering in itself is not an evidence of Christianity. There are many people who have trials and troubles who are not children of God. I have heard some poor whining people come and say, “I know I am a child of God because I am in debt, because I am in poverty, because I am in trouble.” Do you indeed? I know a great many rascals in the same condition; and I don’t believe you are a child of God any the more because you happen to be in poor circumstances. There are an abundance of people who are in trouble and distress besides God’s children. It is not the peculiar lot of God’s family; and if I had no other ground of my hope as a Christian, except my experience of trials, I should have but very poor ground indeed. But there is a distinction to be noticed. Are these sufferings the sufferings of Christ, or are they not? A man is dishonest, and is put in jail for it; a man is a coward and men hiss at him for it; a man is insincere, and, therefore, persons avoid him. Yet he says he is persecuted. Persecuted! Not at all; it serves him right. He deserves it. But

such persons will comfort themselves with the thought, that they are “the dear people of God,” because other people avoid them; when it so happens that they just deserve it. They do not live as they ought to do; therefore the world’s punishment is their desert. Take heed, beloved, that your sufferings are true sufferings of Christ; be sure they are not your own sufferings; for if they are, you will get no relief. It is only when they are the sufferings of Jesus that we may take comfort.

“Well,” you say, “What is meant by our sufferings being the sufferings of Christ?” You know the word “Christ” in the Bible sometimes means the whole Church with Christ, as in 1 Cor. 12:12, and several other passages which I cannot just now remember; but you will call to mind a scripture where it says, “I fill up that which is behind of the sufferings of Christ, for his body’s sake, which is the Church.” Now, as Christ, the head, had a certain amount of suffering to endure, so the body must also have a certain weight laid upon it. Our afflictions are the sufferings of Christ mystical, the sufferings of Christ’s body, the sufferings of Christ’s church; for you know that if a man could be so tall as to have his head in heaven and his feet at the bottom of the sea, it would be the same body, and the head would feel the sufferings of the feet. So, though my head is in heaven, and I am on earth, my griefs are Christ’s griefs; my trials are Christ’s trials, my afflictions, he suffers.

“I feel at my heart all thy sighs and thy groans,
For thou art most near me, my flesh and my bones;
In all thy distresses, thy Head feels the pain,
Yet all are most needful, not one is in vain.”

The trials of a true Christian are as much the sufferings of Christ, as the agonies of Calvary.

Still you say, “We want to discern whether our troubles are the trials of Christ.” Well, they are the trials of Christ, if you suffer for Christ’s sake. If you are called to endure

hardness for the sake of the truth, then those are the sufferings of Christ. If you suffer for your own sake, it may be a punishment for your own sins; but if you endure for Christ's sake, then they are the trials of Christ. "But," say some, "is there any persecution now-a-days? Do any Christians have to suffer for Christ's sake now?" Suffer, sirs! Yes. "I could a tale unfold" this morning, if I pleased, of bigotry insufferable, of persecution well-nigh as bad as that in the days of Mary; only our foes have not the power and the law on their side. I could tell you of some who, from the simple fact, that they choose to come and hear this despised young man, this ranting fellow, are to be looked upon as the offscouring of all things. Many are the persons who come to me, who have to lead a miserable and unhappy life, simply because from my lips they heard the word of truth. Still, despite of all that is said, they will hear it now. I have, I am sure, many before me, whose eyes would drop with tears, if I were to tell their history—some who have privately sent me word of how they have to suffer for Christ's sake, because they choose to hear whom they please. Why, is it not time that men should choose to do as they like. If I do not care to do just as other ministers do, have not I a right to preach as I please? If I haven't I will—that is all. And have not other parties a right to hear me if they like, without asking the lords and governors of the present day, whether the man is really clerical or not. Liberty! liberty! Let persons do as they please. But liberty—where is it? Ye say it is in Britain. It is, in a measure, but not thoroughly. However, I rejoice that there are some who say, "Well, my soul is profited: and let men say what they will, I will hold hard and fast to truth, and to the place where I hear the word to my soul's edification." So, dear hearts, go on, go on; and if ye suffer for Christ's sake, they are Christ's sufferings. If ye came here simply because ye gained anything by it, then your sufferings would be your own; but since there is nothing to gain but the profit of our own souls, still hold on; and whate'er is said, your persecution will but

win you a brighter crown in glory.

Ah! Christian, this ennobles us. My brethren, this makes us proud and happy to think that our trials are the trials of Jesus. Oh! I think it must have been some honor to the old soldier, who stood by the Iron Duke in his battles, to be able to say, "We fight under the good old Duke, who has won so many battles: and when he wins, part of the honor will be ours." Christian, thou fightest side by side with Jesus; Christ is with thee; every blow is a blow aimed at Christ; every slander is a slander on Christ; the battle is the Lord's; the triumph is the Lord's, therefore, still on to victory! I remember a story of a great commander, who, having won many glorious victories, led his troops into a defile, and when there, a large body of the enemy entirely surrounded him. He knew a battle was inevitable on the morning, he therefore went round to all the tents, to hear in what condition his soldier's minds were—whether they were dispirited or not. He came to one tent, and as he listened, he heard a man say, "There is our general; he is very brave, but he is very unwise this time; he has led us into a place where we are sure to be beaten; there are so many of the enemy's cavalry, so many infantry:" and then the man counted up all the troops on their own side, and made them only so many. Then the commander, after he had heard the tale, gently drew aside a part of the tent, and said, "How many do you count me for? You have counted the infantry and cavalry; but how many do you count me for—me, your mighty captain, who have won so many victories." Now, Christian, I say, how many do you count one? He is not one, nor a thousand: he is the "chief among ten thousand." But he is more than that. Oh! put him down for a high figure; and when thou countest up thine aids and auxiliaries, put down Christ for all in all, for in him victory is certain—the triumph is secure.

III. Our third point is, **A PROPORTION TO BE EXPERIENCED.** As the sufferings of Christ abound in us so the consolations of Christ abound. Here is a blessed

proportion. God always keeps a pair of scales—in this side he puts his people's trials and in that he puts their consolations. When the scale of trial is nearly empty, you will always find the scale of consolation in nearly the same condition; and when the scale of trials is full, you will find the scale of consolation just as heavy for as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, even so shall consolation abound by Christ. This is a matter of pure experience. Some of you do not know anything at all about it. You are not Christians, you are not born again, you are not converted; ye are unregenerate, and, therefore, ye have never realized this wonderful proportion between the sufferings and the consolations of a child of God. Oh! it is mysterious that, when the black clouds gather most, the light within us is always the brightest. When the night lowers and the tempest is coming on, the heavenly captain is always closest to his crew. It is a blessed thing, when we are most cast down, then it is that we are most lifted up by the consolations of Christ. Let me show you how.

The first reason is, because trials make more room, for consolation. There is nothing makes a man have a big heart like a great trial. I always find that little, miserable people, whose hearts are about the size of a grain of mustard-seed, never have had much to try them. I have found that those people who have no sympathy for their fellows—who never weep for the sorrows of others—very seldom have had any woes of their own. Great hearts can only be made by great troubles. The spade of trouble digs the reservoir of comfort deeper, and makes more room for consolation. God comes into our heart—he finds it full—he begins to break our comforts and to make it empty; than there is more room for grace. The humbler a man lies, the more comfort he will always have. I recollect walking with a ploughman one day—a man who was deeply taught, although he was a ploughman; and really ploughmen would make a great deal better preachers than many college gentlemen—and he said to me, “Depend upon it, my good brother, if you or I ever get one

inch above the ground, we shall get just that inch too high." I believe it is true; for the lower we lie, the nearer to the ground we are—the more our troubles humble us—the more fit we are to receive comfort; and God always gives us comfort when we are most fit for it. That is one reason why consolations increase in the same ratio as our trials.

Then again, trouble exercises our graces, and the very exercise of our graces tends to make us more comfortable and happy. Where showers fall most, there the grass is greenest. I suppose the fogs and mists of Ireland make it "the Emerald Isle;" and wherever you find great fogs of trouble, and mists of sorrow, you always find emerald green hearts: full of the beautiful verdure of the comfort and love of God. O Christian, do not thou be saying, "Where are the swallows gone? they are gone: they are dead." They are not dead; they have skimmed the purple sea, and gone to a far off land; but they will be back again by-and-by. Child of God, say not the flowers are dead; say not the winter has killed them, and they are gone. Ah! no; though winter hath coated them with the ermine of its snow; they will put up their heads again, and will be alive very soon. Say not, child of God, that the sun is quenched, because the cloud hath hidden it. Ah! no; he is behind there, brewing summer for thee; for when he cometh out again, he will have made the clouds fit to drop in April showers, all of them mothers of the sweet May flowers. And oh! above all, when thy God hides his face, say not, that he has forgotten thee. He is but tarrying a little while to make thee love him better; and when he cometh, thou shalt have joy in the Lord, and shalt rejoice with joy unspeakable. Waiting, exercises our grace; waiting, tries our faith; therefore, wait on in hope; for though the promise tarry, it can never come too late.

Another reason why we are often most happy in our troubles is this—then we have the closest dealing with God. I speak from heart knowledge and real experience. We never have such close dealings with God as when we are in

tribulation. When the barn is full, man can live without God; when the purse is bursting with gold, we somehow can do without so much prayer. But once take your gourds away, you want your God; once cleanse away the idols out of the house, then you must go and honor Jehovah. Some of you do not pray half as much as you ought. If you are the children of God, you will have the whip, and when you have that whip, you will run to your Father. It is a fine day, and the child walks before its father; but there is a lion in the road, now he comes and takes his father's hand. He could run half-a-mile before him when all was fine and fair; but once bring the lion, and it is "father! father!" as close as he can be. It is even so with the Christian. Let all be well, and he forgets God. Jeshurun waxes fat, and he begins to kick against God; but take away his hopes, blast his joys, let the infant lie in the coffin, let the crops be blasted, let the herd be cut off from the stall, let the husband's broad shoulder lie in the grave, let the children be fatherless—then it is that God is a God indeed. Oh, strip me naked; take from me all I have; make me poor, a beggar, penniless, helpless: dash that cistern in pieces; crush that hope; quench the stars; put out the sun; shroud the moon in darkness, and place me all alone in space, without a friend, without a helper; still, "Out of the depths will I cry unto thee, O God." There is no cry so good as that which comes from the bottom of the mountains; no prayer half so hearty as that which comes up from the depths of the soul, through deep trials and afflictions. Hence they bring us to God, and we are happier; for that is the way to be happy—to live near to God. So that while troubles abound, they drive us to God, and then consolations abound.

Some people call troubles weights. Verily they are so. A ship that has large sails and a fair wind, needs ballast. Troubles are the ballast of a believer. The eyes are the pumps which fetch out the bilge-water of his soul, and keep him from sinking. But if trials be weights I will tell you of a happy secret. There is such a thing as making a weight lift you. If I have a

weight chained to me, it keeps me down; but give me pulleys and certain appliances, and I can make it lift me up. Yes, there is such a thing as making troubles raise me towards heaven. A gentleman once asked a friend, concerning a beautiful horse of his, feeding about in the pasture with a clog on its foot, "Why do you clog such a noble animal?" "Sir," said he, "I would a great deal sooner clog him than lose him: he is given to leap hedges." That is why God clogs his people. He would rather clog them than lose them; for if he did not clog them, they would leap the hedges and be gone. They want a tether to prevent their straying, and their God binds them with afflictions, to keep them near to him, to preserve them, and have them in his presence. Blessed fact—as our troubles abound, our consolations also abound.

IV. Now we close up with our last point; and may the Holy Ghost once more strengthen me to speak a word or two to you. **THERE IS A PERSON TO BE HONOURED.** It is a fact that Christians can rejoice in deep distress; it is a truth, that put them in prison, and they still will sing; like many birds, they sing best in their cages. It is true that when waves roll over them, their soul never sinks. It is true they have a buoyancy about them which keeps their heads always above the water, and helps them to sing in the dark, dark night, "God is with me still." But to whom shall we give the honor? To whom shall the glory be given? Oh! to Jesus, to Jesus; for the text says it is all by Jesus. It is not because I am a Christian that I get joy in my trouble—not necessarily so; it is not always the fact that troubles bring their consolations; but it is Christ who comes to me. I am sick in my chamber; Christ cometh up stairs, he sitteth by my bedside, and he talketh sweet words to me. I am dying; the chilly cold waters of Jordan have touched my foot, I feel my blood stagnate and freeze. I must die; Christ puts his arms around me, and says, "Fear not, beloved; to die is to be blessed; the waters of death have their fountain head in heaven; they are not bitter, they are sweet as nectar, for they flow from the throne of God." I wade in the

stream, the billows gather around me, I feel that my heart and flesh fail but there is the same voice in my ears, "Fear not, I am with thee! be not dismayed; I am thy God." Now, I come to the borders of the infinite unknown, that country "from whose bourne no traveller returns;" I stand almost affrighted to enter the realm of shades; but a sweet voice says, "I will be with thee whithersoever thou goest; if thou shouldst make thy bed in Hades I will be with thee;" and I still go on, content to die, for Jesus cheers me; he is my consolation and my hope. Ah! ye who know not that matchless name, Jesus, ye have lost the sweetest note which e'er can give melody. Ah! ye who have never been entranced by the precious sonnet contained in that one word Jesu, ye who know not that Jesu means, I-ES-U, ("I ease you"); ye have lost the joy and comfort of your lives, and ye must live miserable and unhappy. But the Christian can rejoice, since Christ will never forsake him, never leave him, but will be with him.

A word or two to characters—First, I have a word with you who are expecting troubles, and are very sad because you are looking forward to them. Take the advice of the common people, and "never cross a bridge till you get to it." Follow my advice: never bring your troubles nearer than they are, for they will be sure to come down upon you soon enough. I know that many persons fret themselves about their trials before they come. What on earth is the good of it? If you will show me any benefit in it, I will say go on; but to me it seems quite enough for the Father to lay the rod on the child without the child chastising itself. Why should you do so? You, who are afraid of trouble, why should you be so? The trial may never overtake you; and if it does come, strength will come with it. Therefore, up with thee, man, who are sitting down groaning, because of forebodings.

"Religion never was designed
To make our pleasures less."

Out on thee! Up! up! Why wilt thou sit down and be frozen to death? When trouble comes, then fight it; with manful heart and strong, plunge into the stream, accoutred as thou art, and swim it through; but oh! do not fear it before it comes.

Then Christian in trouble, I have a word to say with thee. So my brother, thou art in trouble; thou art come into the waves of affliction, art thou? No strange thing, is it brother? Thou hast been there many times before. "Ah," but sayest thou, "this is the worst I ever had. I have come up here this morning with a millstone round my neck; I have a mine of lead in my heart: I am miserable, I am unhappy, I am cast down exceedingly." Well, but brother, as thy troubles abound, so shall thy consolation. Brother, hast thou hung thy harp upon the willows? I am glad thou hast not broken the harp altogether. Better, to hang it on the willows than to break it; be sure not to break it. Instead of being distressed about thy trouble, rejoice in it; thou wilt then honor God, thou wilt glorify Christ, thou wilt bring sinners to Jesus, if thou wilt sing in the depths of trouble, for then they will say, "There must be something in religion after all, otherwise the man would not be so happy."

Then one word with you who are almost driven to despair. I would stretch my hands out, if I could, this morning—for I believe a preacher ought to be a Briareus, with a thousand hands to fetch out his hearers one by one, and speak to them. There is a man here quite despairing—almost every hope gone. Brother, shall I tell thee what to do? Thou hast fallen off the main deck, thou art in the sea, the floods surround thee; thou seemest to have no hope; thou catchest at straws; what shalt thou do now? Do? why lie upon the sea of trouble, and float upon it; be still, and know that God is God, and thou wilt never perish. All thy kicking and struggling will sink thee deeper; but lie still, for behold the life-boat cometh; Christ is coming to thy help; soon he will deliver thee, and fetch thee out of all thy perplexities.

Lastly, some of you have no interest in this sermon at all. I never try to deceive my hearers by making them believe that all I say belongs to all who hear me. There are different characters in God's word; it is yours to search your own hearts this day, and see whether ye are God's people, or not. As the Lord liveth, before whom I stand, there are two classes here. I do not own the distinction of aristocratic and democratic; in my sight, and in God's sight, every man is alike. We are made of one flesh and blood; we do not have china gentlemen and earthenware poor people; we are all made of the same mould of fashion. There is one distinction, and only one. Ye are all either the children of God, or children of the devil; ye are all either born again, or dead in trespasses and sins. It is yours to let the question ring in your ears: "Where am I? Is yon black tyrant, with his fiery sword, my king; or do I own Jehovah-Jesus as my strength, my shield, my Saviour?" I shall not force you to answer it; I shall not say anything to you about it. Only answer it yourselves; let your hearts speak; let your souls speak. All I can do is to propose the question. God apply it to your souls! I beseech him to send it home! and make the arrow stick fast!

"Is Jesus mine! I am now prepared,
To meet with what I thought most hard;
Yes, let the winds of trouble blow,
And comforts melt away like snow,
No blasted trees, nor failing crops,
Can hinder my eternal hopes;
Tho' creatures change, the Lord's the same;
Then let me triumph in his name."

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

<http://www.ClassicChristianLibrary.com>

A Meditation: The Traveller



A Meditation: On Finding Many Passengers on Shore, by James Meikle (1730-1799)

*[James Meikle was a surgeon's mate on a British Man-o'-War Ship.
These are meditations that he wrote before and during that voyage.]*

BEFORE I CAME from home, I knew not of a single person but myself that was to set out from the same port to the same place; but on my arrival here, I find a great many from every corner of the land, waiting a fair wind to forward them in their intended passage. And may not this call to my mind that, though only now and then, one here, and another there, departs this life; yet on the confines of endless ages, on the borders of the invisible world, what numbers of departing souls are daily passing from every part of the inhabited globe, to appear before the tremendous bar!

If we glance the mortality-bills of well-peopled cities, the numbers that daily die are astonishing. And though nothing be more common than death, yet nothing is more affecting than dissolution.

I have taken one step, which may remind me of another that shall overtake me, and that, being my last translation, shall never be succeeded by a future. Let me not, then, delay any repentance lest, if my delay be perpetuated, my repentance come too late.



Postscript

Test the Bible for Yourself

“[God] has given you a judgment: judge for yourself too. Say, concerning all that you have [learned about the Bible and Christianity], ‘Well, I will not lightly part with this, for it may be sterling gold; but at the same time, I will not blindly hoard it, for it may be counterfeit coin. I will sit down to the study of the Sacred Book, and I will endeavour, as far as I can, to unprejudice myself. I will read the Bible, just as if I had never heard any preacher, or had never been taught by a parent; and I will there endeavour to find out what God saith, and what God saith, be it what it may, I will believe and espouse, hoping that by his grace I may also feel the power of it in my own soul.’”

-- *C. H. Spurgeon (1834-1892)*

