

Christ—The Power and Wisdom of God

A Sermon

(No. 132)

Delivered on Sabbath Morning, May 17, 1857, by the

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at the Music Hall, Royal Surrey Gardens.

“Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.”—1 Corinthians 1:24.

UNBELIEF toward the gospel of Christ is the most unreasonable thing in all the world, because the reason which the unbeliever gives for his unbelief is fairly met by the character and constitution of the gospel of Christ. Notice that before this verse we read—“The Jews required a sign, the Greeks seek after wisdom.” If you met the Jew who believed not on Christ in the apostle’s day, he said, “I can not believe, because I want a sign;” and if you met the Greek, he said, “I can not believe, because I want a philosophic system, one that is full of wisdom.” “Now,” says the apostle, “both these objections are untenable and unreasonable. If you suppose that the Jew requires a sign, that sign is given him: Christ is the power of God. The miracles that Christ wrought upon earth were signs more than sufficiently abundant; and if the Jewish people had but the will to believe, they would have found abundant signs and reasons for believing in the personal acts of Christ and his apostles.” And let the Greeks say, “I can not believe, because I require a wise system: O Greek, Christ is the wisdom of God. If thou wouldst but investigate the subject, thou wouldst find in it profoundness of wisdom—a depth where the most gigantic intellect might be drowned. It is no shallow gospel, but a deep, and a great deep too, a deep which passeth understanding. Thine objection is ill-founded; for Christ is the wisdom of God, and his gospel is the highest of all sciences. If thou wishest to find wisdom, thou must find it in the word of revelation.”

Now, this morning, we shall try to bring out these two thoughts of the gospel; and it may be that God shall bless what we shall say to the removing of the objection of either Jew or Greek; that the one requiring a sign may see it in the *power* of God in Christ, and that he who requireth wisdom may behold it in the *wisdom* of God in Christ. We shall understand our text in a threefold manner: Christ, that is, *Christ personally*, is “the power of God and the wisdom of God;” Christ, that is, *Christ’s gospel*, is “the power of God and the wisdom of God;” Christ, that is, *Christ in the heart—true religion*, is “the power of God and the wisdom of God.”

I. First, to begin, then, with CHRIST PERSONALLY. Christ considered as God and man, the Son of God equal with his Father, and yet the man, born of the Virgin Mary. Christ, in his complex person, is “the power of God and the wisdom of God.” *He is the power of God from all eternity*. “By his word were the heavens made, and all the host of them.” “The Word was God, and the Word was with God.” “All things were made by him, and without

him was not any thing made that was made.” The pillars of the earth were placed in their everlasting sockets by the omnipotent right hand of Christ; the curtains of the heavens were drawn upon their rings of starry light by him who was from everlasting the All-glorious Son of God. The orbs that float aloft in ether, those ponderous planets, and those mighty stars, were placed in their positions or sent rolling through space by the eternal strength of him who is “the first and the last.” “the Prince of the kings of the earth.” Christ is the power of God, for he is the Creator of all things, and by him all things exist.

But *when he came to earth*, took upon himself the fashion of a man, tabernacled in the inn, and slept in the manger, he still gave proof that he was the Son of God; not so much so when, as an infant of a span long, the immortal was the mortal and the infinite became a babe; not so much so in his youth, but afterward when he began his public ministry, he gave abundant proofs of his power and Godhead. The winds hushed by his finger uplifted, the waves calmed by his voice, so that they became solid as marble beneath his tread; the tempest, cowering at his feet, as before a conqueror whom it knew and obeyed; these things, these stormy elements, the wind, the tempest, and the water, gave full proof of his abundant power. The lame man leaping, the deaf man hearing, the dumb man singing, the dead rising, these, again, were proofs that he was, the “power of God.” When the voice of Jesus startled the shades of Hades, and rent the bonds of death, with “Lazarus, come forth!” and when the carcass rotten in the tomb woke up to life, there was proof of his divine power and Godhead. A thousand other proofs he afforded; but we need not stay to mention them to you who have Bibles in your houses, and who can read them every day. At last he yielded up his life, and was buried in the tomb. Not long, however, did he sleep; for he gave another proof of his divine power and Godhead, when starting from his slumber, he affrighted the guards with the majesty of his grandeur, not being holden by the bonds of death, they being like green withes before our conquering Samson, who had meanwhile pulled up the gates of hell, and carried them on his shoulders far away.

That he is the *power* of God *now*, Scripture very positively affirmeth; for it is written, “he sitteth at the right hand of God.” He hath the reins of Providence gathered in his hands; the fleet coursers of Time are driven by him who sits in the chariot of the world, and bids its wheels run round; and he shall bid them stay when it shall please him. He is the great umpire of all disputes, the great Sovereign Head of the church, the Lord of heaven, and death, and hell; and by-and-by we shall know that he shall come,

“On fiery clouds and wings of wind,
Appointed Judge of all mankind;”

and then the quickened dead, the startled myriads, the divided firmaments, the “Depart, ye cursed,” and the “Come, ye blessed,” shall proclaim him to be the power of God, who hath power over all flesh, to save or to condemn, as it pleaseth him.

But he is equally “the *wisdom* of God.” The great things that he did *before all worlds* were proofs of his wisdom. He planned the way of salvation; he devised the system of atonement and substitution; he laid the foundations of the great plan of salvation. There was wisdom. But he built the heavens by wisdom, and he laid the pillars of light, whereon the firmament is balanced, by his skill and wisdom. Mark the world; and learn, as ye see all its multitudinous proofs of the wisdom of God, and there you have the wisdom of Christ; for he was the creator of it. And *when he became a man*, he gave proofs enough of wisdom. Even in childhood, when he made the doctors sit abashed by the questions that he asked, he showed that he was more than mortal. And when the Pharisee and Sadducee and Herodian were all at last defeated, and their nets were broken, he proved again the superlative wisdom of the Son of God. And when those who came to take him, stood enchained by his eloquence, spell-bound by his marvelous oratory, there was again a proof that he was the wisdom of God, who could so enchain the minds of men. And now that he intercedeth before the throne of God, now that he is our Advocate before the throne, the pledge and surety for the blessed, now that the reins of government are in his hands, and are ever wisely directed, we have abundant proofs that the wisdom of God is in Christ, as well as the power of God. Bow before him, ye that love him; bow before him, ye that desire him! Crown him, crown him, crown him! He is worthy of it, unto him is everlasting might; unto him is unswerving wisdom: bless his name; exalt him; clap your wings, ye seraphs; cry aloud, ye cherubim; shout, shout, shout, to his praise, ye ransomed host above. And ye, O men that know his grace, extol him in your songs for ever; for he is Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God.

II. But now Christ, that is, CHRIST’S GOSPEL, is the power and the wisdom of God.

1. Christ’s gospel is *a thing of divine power*. Do you want proofs of it? Ye shall not go far. How could Christ’s gospel have been established in this world as it was, if it had not in itself intrinsic might? By whom was it spread? By mitred prelates, by learned doctors, by fierce warriors, by caliphs, by prophets? No; by fishermen, untaught, unlettered; save as the Spirit gave them utterance, not knowing how to preach or speak. How did they spread it? By the bayonet, by their swords, by the keen metal of their blades? Did they drive their gospel into men at the point of the lance, and with the cimeter? Say, did myriads rush to battle, as they did when they followed the crescent of Mohammed, and did they convert men by force, by law, by might? Ah I no. Nothing but their simple words, their unvarnished eloquence, their rough declamation, their unhewn oratory; these it was, which, by the blessing of God’s Spirit, carried the gospel round the world within a century after the death of its founder.

But what was this gospel which achieved so much? Was it a thing palatable to human nature? Did it offer a paradise of present happiness? Did it offer delight to the flesh and to the senses? Did it give charming prospects of wealth? Did it give licentious ideas to men?

No; it was a gospel of morality most strict, it was a gospel with delights entirely spiritual—a gospel which abjured the flesh, which, unlike the coarse delusion of Joe Smith, cut off every prospect from men of delighting themselves with the joys of lust. It was a gospel holy, spotless, clean as the breath of heaven; it was pure as the wing of angel; not like that which spread of old, in the days of Mohammed, a gospel of lust, of vice, and wickedness, but pure, and consequently not palatable to human nature. And yet it spread. Why? My friends, I think the only answer I can give you is, because it has in it the power of God.

But do you want another proof? How has it been maintained since then? No easy path has the gospel had. The good bark of the church has had to plow her way through seas of blood, and those who have manned her have been bespattered with the bloody spray; yea, they have had to man her and keep her in motion, by laying down their lives unto the death. Mark the bitter persecution of the church of Christ from the time of Nero to the days of Mary, and further on, through the days of Charles the Second, and of those kings of unhappy memory, who had not as yet learned how to spell “toleration.” From the dragoons of Claverhouse, right straight away to the gladiatorial shows of Rome, what a long series of persecutions has the gospel had! But, as the old divines used to say, “The blood of the martyrs” has been “the seed of the church.” It has been, as the old herbalists had it, like the herb camomile, the more it is trodden on, the more it grows; and the more the church has been ill-treated, the more it has prospered. Behold the mountains where the Albigenses walk in their white garments; see the stakes of smithfield, not yet forgotten; behold ye the fields among the towering hills, where brave hands kept themselves free from despotic tyranny. Mark ye the Pilgrim Fathers, driven by a government of persecution across the briny deep. See what vitality the gospel has. Plunge her under the wave, and she rises, the purer for her washing; thrust her in the fire, and she comes out, the more bright for her burning; cut her in sunder, and each piece shall make another church; behead her, and like the hydra of old, she shall have a hundred heads for every one you cut away. She can not die, she must live; for she has the power of God within her.

Do you want another proof? I give you a better one than the last. I do not wonder that the church has outlived persecution so much as I wonder she has outlived the unfaithfulness of her professed teachers. Never was church so abused as the church of Christ has been, all through her history; from the days of Diotrefes, who sought to have the pre-eminence, even to these later times, we can read of proud, arrogant prelates, and supercilious, haughty lords over God’s inheritance. Bonners, Dunstons, and men of all sorts, have come into her ranks, and done all they could to kill her; and with their lordly priestcraft they have tried to turn her aside. And what shall we say to that huge apostacy of Rome? A thousand miracles that ever the church outlived that! When her pretended head became apostate, and all her bishops disciples of hell, and she had gone far away, wonder of wonders, that she should come out, in the days of the glorious Reformation, and should still live. And, even now,

when I mark the supineness of many of my brethren in the ministry—when I mark their utter and entire inefficiency of doing aught for God—when I see their waste of time, preaching now and then on the Sunday, instead of going to the highways and hedges and preaching the gospel everywhere to the poor—when I see the want of unction in the church itself, the want of prayerfulness—when I see wars and fightings, factions and disunions—when I see hot blood and pride, even in the meetings of the saints; I say it is a thousand thousand miracles that the church of God should be alive at all, after the unfaithfulness of her members, her ministers, and her bishops. She has the power of God within her, or else she would have been destroyed; for she has got enough within her own loins to work her destruction.

“But,” says one, “you have not yet proved it is the power of God to my understanding.” Sir, I will give you another proof There are not a few of you, who are now present, who would be ready, I know, if it were necessary, to rise in your seats and bear me witness that I speak the truth. There are some who, not many months ago, were drunkards; some who were loose livers; men who were unfaithful to every vow which should keep man to truth, and right, and chastity, and honesty, and integrity. Yes, I repeat, I have some here who look back to a life of detestable sin. You tell me, some of you, that for thirty years even (there is one such present now) you never listened to a gospel ministry, nor ever entered the house of God at all; you despised the Sabbath, you spent it in all kinds of evil pleasures, you plunged headlong into sin and vice, and your only wonder is, that God has not out you off long ago, as cumberers of the ground; and now you are here, as different as light from darkness. I know your characters, and have watched you with a father’s love; for, child though I am, I am the spiritual father of some here whose years outcount mine by four times the number; and I have seen you honest who were thieves, and you sober who were drunkards. I have seen the wife’s glad eye sparkling with happiness; and many a woman has grasped me by the hand, shed her tears upon me, and said, “I bless God; I am a happy woman now; my husband is reclaimed, my house is blessed; our children are brought up in the fear of the Lord.” Not one or two, but scores of such are here. And, my friends, if these be not proofs that the gospel is the power of God, I say there is no proof of any thing to be had in the world, and every thing must be conjecture. Yes, and there worships with you this day (and if there be a secularist here, my friend will pardon me for alluding to him for a moment), there is in the house of God this day one who was a leader in your ranks, one who despised God, and ran very far away from right. And here he is! It is his honor this day to own himself a Christian; and I hope, when this sermon is ended, to grasp him by the hand, for he has done a valiant deed; he has bravely burned his papers in the sight of all the people, and has turned to God with full purpose of heart. I could give you proofs enough, if proofs were wanted, that the gospel has been to men the power of God and the wisdom of God. More proofs I could give, yea, thousands, one upon the other.

But we must notice the other points. Christ's gospel is the *wisdom* of God. Look at the gospel itself and you will see it to be wisdom. The man who scoffs and sneers at the gospel does so for no other reason but because he does not understand it. We have two of the richest books of theology extant that were written by professed infidels—by men that were so, I mean, before they wrote the books. You may have heard the story of Lord Lyttleton and West. I believe they determined to refute Christianity; one of them took up the subject of Paul's conversion, and the other, the subject of the resurrection; they sat down, both of them, to write books to ridicule those two events, and the effect was, that in studying the subject, they, both of them, became Christians, and wrote books which are now bulwarks to the church they hoped to have overthrown. Every man who looks the gospel fairly in the face, and gives it the study it ought to have, will discover that it is no false gospel, but a gospel that is replete with wisdom, and full of the knowledge of Christ. If any man will cavil at the Bible, he must cavil. There are some men who can find no wisdom anywhere, except in their own heads. Such men, however, are no judges of wisdom. We should not set a mouse to explain the phenomena of astronomy, nor should we set a man who is so foolish as to do nothing but cavil to understand the wisdom of the gospel. It needs that a man should at least be honest, and have some share of sense, or we can not dispute with him at all. Christ's gospel, to any man who believes it, is the wisdom of God.

Allow me just to hint that to be a believer in the gospel is no dishonor to a man's intellect. While the gospel can be understood by the poorest and the most illiterate, while there are shallows in it where a lamb may wade, there are depths where leviathan may swim. The intellect of Locke found ample space in the gospel; the mind of Newton submitted to receive the truth of inspiration as a little child, and found a something in its majestic being higher than itself, unto which it could not attain. The rudest and most untaught have been enabled, by the study of the holy Scripture of God's truth to enter the kingdom; and the most erudite have said of the gospel, it surpasses thought. I was thinking the other day what a vast amount of literature must be lost if the gospel be not true. No book was ever so suggestive as the Bible. Large tomes we have in our libraries which it takes all our strength to lift, all upon holy Scripture; myriads upon myriads of smaller volumes, tens of thousands of every shape and size, all written upon the Bible; and I have thought that the very suggestiveness of Scripture, the supernatural suggestiveness of holy Writ, may be in itself a proof of its divine wisdom, since no man has ever been able to write a book which could have so many commentators and so many writers upon its text as the Bible has received, by so much as one millionth part.

III. CHRIST IN A MAN THE GOSPEL IN THE SOUL, is the power of God and the wisdom of God. We will picture the Christian from his beginning to his end. We will give a short map of his history. He begins there, in that prison-house, with huge iron bars, which he can not file; in that dark, damp cell, where pestilence and death are bred. There, in poverty

and nakedness, without a pitcher to put to his thirsty lips, without a mouthful even of dry crust to satisfy his hunger, that is where he begins—in the prison chamber of conviction, powerless, lost and ruined. Between the bars I thrust my hand to him, and give to him in God's name the name of Christ to plead. Look at him; he has been filing away at these bars many and many a day, without their yielding an inch; but now he has got the name of Christ upon his lips; he puts his hands upon the bars, and one of them is gone, and another, and another; and he makes a happy escape, crying, "I am free, I am free, I am free! Christ has been the power of God to me, in bringing me out of my trouble." No sooner is he free, however, than a thousand doubts meet him. This one cries, "You are not elect;" another cries, "You are not redeemed;" another says, "You are not called;" another says, "You are not converted." "Avaunt," says he, "avaunt! Christ died;" and he just pleads the name of Christ as the power of God, and the doubts flee apace, and he walks straight on. He comes soon into the furnace of trouble; he is thrust into the innermost prison, and his feet are made fast in the stocks. God has put his hand upon him. He is in deep trouble; at midnight he begins to sing of Christ; and lo! the walls begin to totter, and the foundation of the prison to shake; and the man's chains are taken off, and he comes out free; for Christ hath delivered him from trouble. Here is a hill to climb, on the road to heaven. Wearily he pants up the side of that hill, and thinks he must die ere he can reach the summit. The name of Jesus is whispered in his ear; he leaps to his feet, and pursues his way, with fresh courage, until the summit is gained, when he cries, "Jesus Christ is the strength of my song; he also hath become my salvation." See him again. He is on a sudden beset by many enemies; how shall he resist them? With this true sword, this true Jerusalem blade, Christ, and him crucified. With this he keeps the devil at arm's length; with this he fights against temptation, and against lust, against spiritual wickedness in high places, and with this he resists. Now, he has come to his last struggle; the river Death rolls black and sullen before him; dark shapes rise upward from the flood, and howl and fright him. How shall he cross the stream? How shall he find a landing place on the other side? Dread thoughts perplex him for a moment; he is alarmed; but he remembers, Jesus died; and catching up that watchword he ventures to the flood. Before his feet the Jordan flies apace; like Israel of old, he walks through, dry shod, singing as he goes to heaven, "Christ is with me, Christ is with me, passing through the stream ! Victory, victory, victory, to him that loveth me!"

To the Christian in his own experience Christ is ever the power of God. As for temptation he can meet that with Christ; as for trouble he can endure that through Christ who strengthens him, yea, he can say with Paul, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." Have you never seen a Christian in trouble, a true Christian? I have read a story of a man who was converted to God by seeing the conduct of his wife in the hour of trouble. They had a lovely child, their only offspring. The father's heart doted on it perpetually, and the mother's soul was knit up in the heart of the little one. It lay sick upon its bed,

and the parents watched it night and day. At last it died. The father had no God: he rent his hair, he rolled upon the floor in misery, wallowed upon the earth, cursing his being, and defying God in the utter casting down of his agony. There sat his wife, as fond of the child as ever he could be; and though tears would come, she gently said “The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.” “What,” said he, starting to his feet, “you love that child? I thought that when that child died you would break your heart. Here am I, a strong man. I am mad: here are you, a weak woman, and yet you are strong and bold; tell me what it is possesses you?” Said she, “Christ is my Lord, I trust in him; surely I can give this child to him who gave himself for me.” From that instant the man became a believer. “There must,” said he, “be some truth and some power in the gospel, which could lead you to believe in such a manner, under such a trial.” Christians! try to exhibit that spirit wherever you are, and prove to the worldling that in your experience at least “Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God.”

And now the last point. In the *Christian's experience*, Christ is wisdom, as well as power. If you want to be a thoroughly learned man the best place to begin, is to begin at the Bible, to begin at Christ. It is said that even children learn to read more quickly from the Bible than from any other book; and this I am sure of, that we, who are but grown-up children, will learn better and learn faster by beginning with Christ than we could by beginning with any thing else. I remember saying once, and as I can not say it better I will repeat it, that before I knew the gospel I gathered up a heterogeneous mass of all kinds of knowledge from here, there, and everywhere; a bit of chemistry, a bit of botany, a bit of astronomy, and a bit of this, that, and the other. I put them altogether, in one great confused chaos. When I learned the gospel, I got a shelf in my head to put every thing away upon just where it should be. It seemed to me as if, when I had discovered Christ and him crucified, I had got the center of the system, so that I could see every other science revolving around in order. From the earth, you know, the planets appear to move in a very irregular manner—they are progressive, retro grade, stationary; but if you could get upon the sun, you would see them marching round in their constant, uniform, circular motion. So with knowledge. Begin with any other science you like, and truth will seem to be awry. Begin with the science of Christ crucified, and you will begin with the sun, you will see every other science moving round it in complete harmony. The greatest mind in the world will be evolved by beginning at the right end. The old saying is, “Go from nature up to nature's God;” but it is hard work going up hill. The best thing is to go from nature's God down to nature; and if you once get to nature's God, and believe him and love him, it is surprising how easy it is to hear music in the waves, and songs in the wild whisperings of the winds; to see God everywhere, in the stones, in the rocks, in the rippling brooks, and hear him everywhere, in the lowing of cattle, in the rolling of thunder, and in the fury of tempests. Get Christ first, put him in the right place, and you will find him to be the wisdom of God in your own experience.

But wisdom is not knowledge; and we must not confound the two. Wisdom is the right use of knowledge; and Christ's gospel helps us, by teaching us the right use of knowledge. It directs us. Yon Christian has lost his way in a dark wood; but God's Word is a compass to him, and a lantern, too: he finds his way by Christ. He comes to a turn in the road. Which is right, and which is wrong? He can not tell. Christ is the great sign-post, telling him which way to go. He sees every day new straits attend; he knows not which way to steer. Christ is the great pilot who puts his hand on the tiller, and makes him wise to steer through the shoals of temptation and the rocks of sin. Get the gospel, and you are a wise man. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and right understanding have they who keep his commandments." Ah! Christian, you have had many doubts, but you have had them all unriddled, when you have come to the cross of Christ. You have had many difficulties; but they have been all explained in the light of Calvary. You have seen mysteries, when you have brought them to the face of Christ, made clear and manifest, which once you never could have known. Allow me to remark here, that some people make use of Christ's gospel to illuminate their heads, instead of making use of it to illuminate their hearts. They are like the farmer Rowland Hill once described. The farmer is sitting, by the fire with his children; the cat is purring on the hearth, and they are all in great comfort. The plowman rushes in and cries, "Thieves! thieves! thieves!" The farmer rises up in a moment, grasps the candle, holds it up to his head, rushes after the thieves, and, says Rowland Hill, "he tumbles over a wheelbarrow, because he holds the light to his head, instead of holding it to his feet." So there are many who just hold religion up to illuminate their intellect, instead of holding it down to illuminate their practice; and so they make a sad tumble of it, and cast themselves into the mire, and do more hurt to their Christian profession in one hour than they will ever be able to retrieve. Take care that you make the wisdom of God, by God's Holy Spirit, a thing of true wisdom, directing your feet into his statutes, and keeping you in his ways.

And now a practical appeal, and we have done. I have been putting my arrow on the string; and if I have used any light similes, I have but done so just as the archer tips his arrow with a feather, to make it fly the better. I know that a rough quaint saying often sticks, when another thing is entirely forgotten. Now let us draw the bow, and send the arrow right at your hearts. Men, brethren, fathers, how many of you have felt in yourselves that Christ is the power of God, and the wisdom of God? Internal evidence is the best evidence in the world for the truth of the gospel. No Paley or Butler can prove the truth of the gospel so well as Mary, the servant girl yonder, that has got the gospel in her heart, and the power of it manifest in her life. Say, has Christ ever broken your bonds and set you free? Has he delivered you from your evil life, and from your sin? Has he given you "a good hope through grace," and can you now say, "On him I lean; on my beloved I stay myself?" If so, go away and rejoice: you are a saint; for the apostle has said, "He is unto us who are saved, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." But if you can not say this, allow me affectionately

to warn you. If you want not this power of Christ, and this wisdom of Christ now, you will want them in a few short moments, when God shall come to judge the quick and the dead, when you shall stand before his bar, and when all the deeds that you have done shall be read before an assembled world. You will want religion then. O that you had grace to tremble now; grace to “kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little.” Hear ye how to be saved, and I have done. Do you feel that you are a sinner? Are you conscious that you have rebelled against God? Are you willing to acknowledge your transgressions, and do you hate and abhor them, while at the same time you feel you can do nothing to atone for them? Then hear this. Christ died for you; and if he died for you, you can not be lost. Christ died in vain for no man for whom he died. If you are a penitent and a believer, he died for you, and you are safe; go your way: rejoice “with joy unspeakable, and full of glory;” for he who has taught you your need of a Saviour, will give you that Saviour’s blood to be applied to your conscience, and you shall ere long, with yonder blood-washed host, praise God and the Lamb saying, “Hallelujah, for ever, Amen!” Only do you feel that you are a sinner? If not, I have no gospel to preach to you; I can but warn you. But if you feel your lost estate, and come to Christ, come, and welcome, for he will never cast you away.