

## Vile Ingratitude!

A Sermon

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At New Park Street Chapel, Southwark.

“Again the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, cause Jerusalem to know her abominations.”—[Ezekiel 16:1-2](#).

AND HOW THINK YOU did the prophet proceed in order to accomplish the solemn commission which had been thus intrusted to him? Did he begin by reminding the people of the law which was delivered to Moses on the top of Sinai? Did he picture to them the exceeding fearfulness and quaking of the leader of Israel’s host when he received that stony law in the midst of thunders and lightnings? Or did he, do you think, proceed to point out to them the doom which must inevitably befall them, because they had broken the divine law, and violated God’s holy statutes? No, my brethren; if he had been about to show to the then unprivileged gentiles their iniquity, he might have proceeded on legal grounds; he was now however about to deal with Jerusalem, the highly-favoured city, and here he does not bring to their mind the law; he does not begin dealing out law-thunders to them at all; he fetches obligations as his arguments to convince them of sin from the *grace* of God, rather than from the *law* of God. And, my brethren, as I am about this evening to address you who profess to be followers of the Son of God, and who by faith have “fled for refuge to the hope set before you in the gospel,”—as my business is to convince you of sin, I shall not begin by taking you to Sinai,—I shall not attempt to show you what the law is, and what that penalty is which devolves upon every man that breaks it; but, feeling that you are not under the law, but under grace, I shall draw arguments from the grace of God, from his gospel, from the favour which he has shown to you—arguments more powerful than any which can be fetched from the law, to show you the greatness of your sin, and the abomination of any iniquity which you have committed against the Lord your God. I shall take Ezekiel’s method as my model, and proceed to copy it thus:—First, let us consider the abomination of our sin, aggravated as it is by the remembrance of *what we were when the Lord first looked upon us*; secondly, let us see our sins in another light—in the light of *what the Lord has made us since those happy days*; and then, let us proceed to notice *what our sins have themselves been*; and we shall have, I think, three great lamps which may cast a terrible light on the great wickedness of our sins.

I. First, then, let us consider our iniquities—I mean those committed since conversion, those committed yesterday, and the day before, and to-day—and let us see their sinfulness in the light of what we were when the Lord first looked upon us. In the words of the

prophet Ezekiel, observe what was our “birth and our nativity.” He says of us, “Thy birth and thy nativity is of the land of Canaan. Thy father was an Amorite, and thy mother an Hittite.” Now, Canaan, as you know, was a cursed one, and the land of Canaan here meant, refers to the cursed people whom God utterly gave up to be destroyed with the sword, that not one of them might escape. Mark it, our nativity and our birth were of the land of the curse. “Thy father was an Amorite, and thy mother an Hittite.” Though when the Lord is speaking of his people as they are in covenant with him, he tells them that their father was Abraham, whom he did choose, and their mother was Sarah whom he loved; yet when he speaks of their natural estate, he compares their parentage to that mixed offspring of an Amorite father and a Hittite mother. Ay, and what was our parentage, men and brethren? Let us look back and wonder. Surely our father Adam’s wickedness was in us. Our early childhood began to discover the latent sparks of our sin. Scarcely do we remember the time when they were sparks, so early were they fanned into a flame. When any of you look back to your father’s house, to the place from which God called you, you may be constrained to wonder, for I know there are many members of this church here present who are the only ones out of a family who were ever called to know the Lord. Your father, perhaps, lived and died a drunkard. You can look back to the two or three that you remember of your ancestors, and they have been “without God and without hope, strangers to the commonwealth of Israel.” Then what was there in you or in your father’s house that God should set his love on you? Indeed, as for those of us who have been blessed with pious parents, we have nothing to boast of our ancestry, for we all were “born in sin and shapen in iniquity.”

Hath the Lord loved us, though there was nothing in our birth or parentage to invite regard or merit esteem? Then surely every sin that we commit now, is aggravated by that sovereign choice, that infinite compassion that doated upon us, though our birth was vile, and our original base. Didst thou take me from the dunghill, O my God, and do I sin against thee? Didst thou take the beggar in his rags and lift him up to make him sit among thy sons and daughters, the very blood-royal of heaven? And has that beggar afterwards become a rebel against thee? Oh sin, thou art an accursed thing indeed! When I think of that grace which has thus honored the dishonorable, exalted the mean things of this world, and saved creatures that were the offscouring of creation, how I blush for the ingratitude that can forget such tender obligations, and do despite to such extraordinary unmerited goodness!

Further, the prophet goes on to say that not only their parentage was base, but their condition was dangerous in the extreme. That which was absolutely necessary for the life of an infant had in this case been utterly neglected. The babe had been cast away as though it were useless, and its life unworthy of preservation. Offspring deserted, having none to tend it or care for its welfare, may perhaps awaken the lowest, the most contemptuous kind of pity. Was not that just our condition when the Lord looked upon us? We had not been severed from the old natural stock of Adam; there had been no water used to wash us from

our natural pollution, or to make our conscience supple, our neck pliant, or our knees bend before the power of grace. We had not been swaddled or cared for. There was everything in our condition that would tend to destruction, but nothing in us that would tend upwards towards God. Yet there we were, dying, nay dead, rotten, corrupted, so abominable that it might well be said, “Bury this dead one out, of my sight,” when Jehovah passed by and he said unto us, “live.” Oh! some of you can remember how you were steeped up to the very neck in lust. Pardon me, brethren, when I allude to these things that you may be led to see your present sins in the light of the mercy which has blotted out your past iniquities. It is not long since with some of you that oaths larded your conversation daily, you could scarcely speak without blasphemy; as for others of us who were preserved from open sin, how base were we! The recollection of our youthful iniquity crushes us to the very earth. When we think how we despised the training we received, could laugh at a mother’s prayers and contemn all the earnest tender exhortations which a godly parent’s heart afforded to us, we could hide ourselves in dust and ashes and never indulge another thought of self-satisfaction. Yet though sovereign mercy has put all these sins away; though love has covered all these iniquities, and though everlasting kindness has washed away all this filth, we have gone on to sin. We have gone on to sin—thank God not to sin as we did before, not so greedily, not as the ox drinketh down water;—still we *have* transgressed, and that in the light of mercy, which has “blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins. Our sins, since redemption was revealed to our souls, are abominations indeed! If I had known, O my brethren, in that hour when Christ took away my sin—if I had known what an unto-ward disposition I had then to show, and what broken vows I should have now to reflect upon, I do not think I could have borne the revelation. If some of us who are here present, rejoicing in covenant love and mercy, could have a clear view of all the sins we have committed since conversion, of all the sins we shall commit till we land in heaven, I question whether our senses might not reel under the terrible discovery of what base things we are. I am sure if any man had told me that my heart would ever grow cold, that I should ever forget my Lord and Master, and get worldly—if an angel from heaven had told me these things, in the day when I first saw his face and looked and loved and lived, I should have said, “Is thy servant a dog that I should do this thing?” When I sat down and viewed the flowing of his precious blood and knew that my sins were put away, I thought I should never sin against him any more. I dreamed, and was it only a dream, that I should spend and be spent in his service; that no toil would be too hard, no sacrifice too great. And here we find ourselves flinching, and drawing back, and finding excuses for leaving his service; nay, worse than that, smiting the face of our best Friend and grieving his Holy Spirit, and often causing him to hide his face from us by reason of our sin. Well might Moses say, “I beseech thee, O Lord, show me not my wretchedness.”

One thing else appears designed to represent our sins as blacker still. It appears from the fifth verse, that this child, this Jewish nation, when God loved it had none other to love it. "None eye pitied thee, to do any of these unto thee, to have compassion on thee; but thou wast cast out in the open field to the loathing of thy person in the day that thou wast born." Do any of you know what it is to be cast out to the loathing of your person? We will not say that our character had become such that we were loathed by others, but well we remember the time when we loathed ourselves; when we could say with John Banyan that we wished we had been a dog or a toad sooner than have been a man, because we felt ourselves so vile in having sinned against God. Oh! I can recollect the season when my fondest wish was that I had never been born, because I so sinned against God. The sight of my iniquity was such, that horror took hold of me and amazement of soul overwhelmed me. I was indeed cast out to my own loathing if not to the loathing of others; and indeed it is no wonder if a man, when he has his eyes opened, loathes himself, for there is nothing so loathsome as an unregenerate heart—a heart that is like a den of unclean birds full of all manner of filthiness and ravenousness. The greatest abomination that ever existed physically is not to be compared with the moral abominations that dwell in the unrenewed heart. It is a miniature hell, it is pandemonium in embryo; you have but to let it grow, and the vileness which is in the human heart by nature would soon make a hell if there were no hell; and yet, my brethren, when we were loathed, when even our person was loathed, he loved us. Great God I how couldst thou love that which we ourselves hated? Oh! 'tis grace, 'tis grace, 'tis grace indeed! Where is free-will, my brethren; where is free-will? There is no such thing. "*Nomen est sine re,*" said Martin Luther, it is a name for nothing. When we think of what we were; the thought of merit vanishes; it at once refutes itself the moment we look it in the face. It was grace—free, rich, unconstrained, sovereign grace which looked on us. I am sure if there be any who think there was some good thing in them that invited God's attention, or led him to look upon them, I can only say I know there was nothing of the sort in me; there was everything to hate, nothing to desire; everything to detest, nothing to delight in; much that he might spend his hatred on, but nothing which could command his affection or his love; still he loved us, still he loved us, and yet—O ye heavens be astonished—yet we have sinned against him since then, we have forgotten him, we have doubted him, we have grown cold towards him; we have loved self at times better than we have loved our Redeemer, and have sacrificed to our own idols and made gods of our own flesh and self-conceit, instead of giving him all the glory and the honor for ever and for ever.

This is putting sin in a gospel light. I pray you, brethren, if my speech be feeble and I cannot make the light shine on these things, spend a little season, as you can, in retirement when you are at home, look at your sins in the light of the mercy which looked on you when you were thus dead, and lost, and hopelessly ruined. And surely the blush will mantle on your cheek, and you will bow your knee with many a tear, and cry, "Lord have mercy upon

me! O, my, Father cast not away thy child! forgive a child that spurned his Father's love! forgive a wife who has played the harlot against a divine husband! pardon a soul that has been traitorous to its own Lord,—to him who is its life, its joy, its all! ”

II. We must now pass on to another point. We have to think of what the Lord has done for us since the time he first loved us. I have made a mistake, brethren; I have made a mistake. “The time when he first loved us,” did I say! Why, before all time, when there was no day but the unrisun setting day of eternity, a beginning that knew no beginning, years that had no date. He loved his people then. I meant to refer rather to THE TIME WHEN HE BEGAN TO MANIFEST HIS LOVE TO US PERSONALLY AND INDIVIDUALLY. Well then, observe, that one of the chief things he did to us was to spread his skirt over us, and cover our nakedness. He washed us with the water of regeneration, yea, and truly washed away the stain of our natural sanguinity. Oh, that day, that day of days, as the days of heaven upon earth, when our eyes looked to Christ and were lightened, when the burden rolled from off our back! Oh, that hour, that earliest of all our gracious remembrances, that first of all dates, when we began to live, when we stepped down into that bath of atoning blood and came out of it fairer than any queen, more glorious than the daughters of men, white as alabaster, pure as crystal, like the driven snow without spot or blemish! That day we never can forget, for it always rises to our recollection the moment we begin to speak about pardon—the day of our own pardon, of our own forgiveness. The galley-slave may forget the hour when he ceased to tug the oar. The poor chattel of his master may forget the time when he escaped from the accursed slave-holder's grasp, and became a freeman. The sick man may forget the day when, after being long worn with pain till he was emaciated and at the gates of death, the blood began to leap in his veins, and the glow of health began to invigorate his frame. The culprit who lay shivering beneath the heads-man's axe may forget the hour when suddenly his pardon was granted and his life was spared. But if all these should consign to oblivion their surprising joys, the pardoned soul can never, never, never forget. Unless reason should lose her seat, the quickened soul can never cease to remember the time when, Jesus said to it, “Live.” Oh! and has Jesus pardoned all our sins and have we sinned still? Has he washed me, and have I defiled myself again? Did he shed his blood to cleanse me and have I returned again to my natural depravity? Oh, these are abominations indeed! I have heard some say that the sins of believers are but trifles. Ah! my brethren, I do think if there be any difference, the sins of disciples of Christ are a thousand times worse than the sins of unbelievers, because they sin against a gospel of love, a covenant of mercy; against sweet experience and against precious promises. The sinner may kick against the pricks, that is bad enough; but to kick against the wounds of Christ, is worse still. Yet that is what you and I have done. We have sinned since the dear hour that cleansed our guilt away.

Nor did the gracious things we have mentioned exhaust the lovingkindness of the Lord. When he had washed us, according to the ninth verse, he anointed us with oil. Yes, and that has been repeated many and many a time. "Thou hast anointed my head with oil." He gave us the oil of his grace; our faces were like priests, and we went up to his tabernacle rejoicing. Have ye received the Spirit, my brethren? Oh, think how great an honour that God should dwell in man. The centurion said he was not worthy that Christ should come under the roof of his house, and yet the Holy Spirit has not merely come under your roof but has come into your heart; there he dwells and there he reigns. Yet, my dear brethren, yet you have sinned. With God's oil on your head you have sinned. With the Holy Ghost in your heart you have sinned. Ah! if any man carried God within him, would he go and sin? Shall the body that is the temple of the Holy Ghost be desecrated? Yet that has been the case with us. We have had God within us, and yet we have sinned. Marvel of marvels! He that would defile the house in which the king lived, would certainly be guilty of high insult; but he who defiles the temple in which the Holy Ghost resides—what shall be said of him? This is what we have done. O Lord, have mercy upon thy people! Now we see our abomination in this clear light, we beseech thee pardon it, for Jesu's sake!

But further, we find that he not only washed us, he not only anointed us with oil; but he clothed us, and clothed us sumptuously. The rich man in the parable of Jesus was clothed in scarlet, but we are better robed than he, for we are clothed in brodered-work. "Jesus spent his life to work my robe of righteousness." His sufferings were so many stitches when he made the brodered-work of my righteousness. "I clothed thee also with brodered work, and shod thee with badgers' skin." Our shoes have been as iron and brass, and as our day, so has our strength been. We have had always grace hitherto sufficient for us. "And I girded thee about with fine linen,"—the righteousness of saints. He has given to us the virtues of the Holy Spirit, the robe of sanctification; and then he has covered us with silk, even with that all-glorious robe of righteousness "woven from the top throughout without seam," in which all his people stand arrayed. There never was any one dressed so well as God's people. Outwardly they may wear fustian and calico; they may come up to the house of God dressed in the garb of poverty, but they have robes which men cannot see, though such as angels can see and admire. A saint's wardrobe would be a matchless thing to look at if we could but see it with the eyes of our understanding illuminated. Have you ever been taken to see the wardrobes of some great personages,—their multiplied garments—the robes which they wore in state? You have wondered at their lavish expenditure; but see your own, see those shoes, that girding of fine linen, and that covering of silk. Why, all the wealth of mankind could not buy an ell of that stuff; they could not procure a hem, much less the entire robe with which the righteous are adorned and made glorious. And yet they have turned aside and sinned. What should you think of a bishop in his lawn sleeves defiling himself with outcasts in the street? What would think you of a king with a crown on his head going to

break the laws of his kingdom? What would you think if a monarch should invest us with all the insignia of nobility, and we should afterwards violate the high orders conferred upon us while adorned with the robes of state? This is just what you and I have done. We have had all these costly robes and glorious garments, and then we have gone and sinned against our God. O ingratitude of the vilest sort! Where are there words to denounce it? What language can fully express it?

We have but time to notice each one of these briefly; we have not only received *clothing*, but *ornaments*. “I have decked thee also with ornaments, and put bracelets upon thy hands and a chain on thy neck, and I put a jewel on thy forehead and earrings in thy ears, and a beautiful crown upon thy head.” Just like a loving husband, not content with giving his wife an ornament, he gives her many. And the Lord, you see, gives to his Church all the ornaments she can possibly desire. There are ornaments for her ears, a crown for her head, bracelets for her hands, and a chain for her neck. We cannot be more glorious; Christ has given the Church so much, she could not have more. He could not bestow upon her that which is more beautiful, more precious, or more costly. She has all she can receive. The Lord Jesus has bestowed all his wealth, and all heaven’s wealth upon his Church, and you and I are the inheritors and wearers of these precious ornaments. He has given to us jewels in our ears—a hearing ear; he has given us the jewel in our forehead—a holy courage for his name; he has given us a crown upon our head—a garland crown of lovingkindness and tender mercy; he has given us bracelets upon our hands, that whatsoever we touch may be graced, that our conduct may be beautiful and lovely, an ornament to the profession which we have espoused; and he has been pleased to put a chain about our necks, that we may ever be known to be right noble personages—noble of rank, exalted of station. Nevertheless, in the face of all these, we have sinned against him.

Dear friends, it may seem like repetition when I go over the list of these mercies, but I cannot help it. I should like every one of these to be as a trumpet in your ear to wake you up to look at your sins, and as a dagger in the heart of your pride to stab it and make it die. By these mercies of God, I adjure you, do hate your sins; by these lovingkindnesses, these favours, immense, innumerable, unsearchable, by these covenant gifts, every one of them more precious, than a world of diamonds, I beseech you hate the sins that have grieved your gracious Lord; and made his Spirit mourn. To see my sins in the lurid light of Sinai were bad enough, but to see them in the mellow radiance of his countenance and in the light that is shed from the cross of my dying Master, this is to see sin in all its blackness and all its heinousness. Never, dear brethren, tamper with sin; never have anything to do with those who think sin is little because grace is great. Shun, I beseech you, any man who comforts his heart with the hope that the crimes of God’s children are mere trifles. No; though there be precious blood to wash it all away, yet sin is an awful thing. Though there be covenant promises to keep the believer secure, yet sin is a damning thing. Though there be eternal

love which will not execute the divine anger upon us, yet sin is a thrice—cursed thing. In fact, I would strain language to find an epithet for that sin which dares to nestle in the heart of a man whom God has loved and chosen. I know that there is a tendency among some ministers—I will not say to whom I allude; you may readily guess—who preach a gospel which does seem as if it tolerated iniquity. Oh, come not into their secret, I pray you. Better for you, though it were one of the worst things that could be, if you were to endorse Arminianism, rather than Antinomianism. Of the two devils I think the white devil is the least devilish. As Rowland Hill said,—“The one is a white devil and the other a black one.” They are both devils, I doubt not, but still one is more fearful in its character than the other. Have nothing to do with that horrible spirit which has done more to destroy sound doctrine in our churches than anything else. Arguments will never break Antinomianism down. We are not afraid to meet our antagonists in fair and open battle. The ill lives of some who call themselves Calvinists, and are no more Calvinists than they are Jews, have brought that doctrine into great disrepute, and we often have flung in our faces the wickedness of some professors, and the rash, not to say wicked teaching of some of our preachers, as a reason why our brethren should be accounted worthy of all scorn. The more gracious God is, the more holy you should be; the more love he manifests to you, the more love should you reflect to him.

III. And now, I shall close by noticing in the third place, WHAT OUR SINS REALLY HAVE BEEN. We will not enter into particulars, we have each one, a different way. It were idle therefore for me to think of describing the sins of such an assembly as the present. The germs, the vileness, the essence of our own sin, has lain in this—that we have given to sin and to idols things that belong unto God. “Thou hast also taken thy fair jewels of my gold and of my silver, which I had given thee, and madest to thyself images of men, and didst commit whoredom with them, and tookest thy broidered garments and coveredst them, and thou hast set mine oil and mine incense before them. My meat also which I gave thee, fine flour, and oil, and honey, wherewith I fed thee, thou hast even set it before them for a sweet savour.” I have done this—let me make confession for myself, and then I admonish you each one apply the case to yourselves. It has been a happy Sabbath day, my soul has enjoyed personal fellowship with Christ: I have gone up in the pulpit and had liberty of speech, and power has attended the words; there has been manifestly the Holy Spirit in the midst of his Church; I have, gone home, had access to God in prayer, and enjoyed again communion with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. I go forth once more to unfold the things of the gospel, and with delight to my own soul, have I heard afterwards of saints who have been refreshed, and sinners converted. This was like “fine flour, and honey and oil” that God had given to me. What did he give it me for? Why, that I might offer it to him, and give him all the glory. And do you know, I have caught myself saying, “Ah, you have done well to-day; you are growing in grace, and living near to God.” What! am I offering

God's blessings before the shrine of my abominable pride? Am I making an offering to Moloch, and bringing the very gifts and love-tokens of my Father, to be laid upon the altar of my own pride? This is abominable indeed! This is so vile that no language can execrate it sufficiently. To offer my own work is bad enough, but to offer God's grace to idols, to spend his mercies in the gratification of my flesh—to look upon my own self as having done it, to sacrifice to my own conceit, to make an oblation to self of that which God has given me—this is atrocious enough to make a man fall very humbly before God, to feel the bitterness of his sin, and ask for pardon.

You have transgressed in like manner, I dare say. When you pray at a prayer meeting, the devil insinuates the thought, and you entertain it, "What a fine fellow I am!" You may detect yourself when you are talking to a friend of some good things God has done, or when you go home and tell your wife lovingly the tale of your labour, there is a little demon of pride at the bottom of your heart. You like to take credit to yourself for the good things you have done. I am speaking of you all; there is no exception here. Does not a little bit of the old man creep out, just as when Jehu said, "Come see my zeal for the Lord." Now what is that but taking God's fine meal, and oil, and honey, and offering them to yourselves? It there should be an innocent man, one who pleads "not guilty" upon this matter he can get up and go out if he likes; but I am sure you will all sit still, at least, all who know your own hearts. Your own experience will compel you to say—"I must confess it before God." But have you not noticed that there are other ways besides this? Sometimes a man has another god besides pride. That god may be his sloth. He does not want to do much; he reads in the Bible that there is a finished righteousness, that the covenant of grace is complete. Have you never detected yourself, when inclined to be dilatory in spiritual things, leaning on the oar of the covenant, instead of pulling at it, and saying, "Well, these things are true, but there is no great need for me to stir myself." Ah! you have been quietly nestling down to sleep, even under the influence of the sweet wine of the covenant of grace. It is sad that it should be so. It would be bad enough if we had picked up an excuse from our own logic; but instead of that, we have gone to God's book to feign apologies for our idleness. Was not that taking his mercies and sacrificing them to false deities? Sometimes it is even worse. God gives to his people riches, and they offer them before the shrine of their covetousness. He gives them talent, and they prostitute it to the service of their ambition. He gives them judgment, and they pander to their own advancement, and seek not the interest of his kingdom. He gives them influence; that influence they use for their own aggrandisement, and not for his honour. What is this but parallel to taking his gold, and his jewels, and hanging them upon the neck of Ashtaroth. Ah! let us take care when we think of our sins, that we set them in this light. It is taking God's mercies to lavish them upon his enemies. Now, if you were to make me a present of some token of your regard, I think it would be the meanest and most ungracious thing in the world I could do to take it over to your enemy, and say, "There, I come to pay

my respects.” To pay my respects to your foe with that which had been the token of your favour! There are two kings at enmity with one another—two powers that have been at battle, and one of them has a rebellious subject, who is caught in the very act of treason, and condemned to die. The king very graciously pardons him, and then munificently endows him. “There,” says he, “I give you a thousand crown-pieces;” and that man takes the bounty, and devotes it to increasing the resources of the king’s enemies. Now, that were a treason and baseness too vile to be committed by worldly men. Alas then! that is what you have done. You have bestowed on God’s enemies what God gave to you as a love token. Oh, men and brethren, let us bow ourselves in dust and ashes before God; let us turn pride out to-night if we can; but it will be hard work. Let us try, in the strength of the Spirit, that we may at least put our foot on its neck, and as we come to the Lord’s table, may we have a joy for pardoned guilt, but may we mourn that we have pierced the Lord, and mourn most that we continue to pierce him still, and sometimes put him to an open shame by our disregard for his laws.

The Lord bless this to his people; and as for those who are unconverted, let them recollect that if the righteous have cause to weep, and if the sins of the saint be abominable, what must be the iniquity of that man who goeth on still in his sins and repenteth not! The Lord grant to such, grace to repent, and pardon, for Jesus’ sake.