

Preparation Necessary for the Communion

(No. 2647)

A SERMON INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, NOVEMBER 5, 1899.

DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT NEW PARK STREET CHAPEL, SOUTHWARK, ON A LORD'S-DAY EVENING
IN THE AUTUMN OF 1857.

"Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread, and drink of the cup." [1 Corinthians 11:28](#).

WE do not hold it right to admit all persons indiscriminately to the Lord's Supper—we believe the Lord's Table is the place of communion—and we would have none there with whom we cannot have true Christian fellowship. We can commune with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ, however different may be their views upon some points of doctrine. So long as we find it possible to have fellowship with them, we believe it to be our duty to welcome them to the Supper of our Lord. When, through unholiness of life, lack of piety, or unsoundness in the fundamental Truths of the Gospel on the part of those who apply to us to be received as communicants, we feel that we cannot commune with them, we hold it to be our bounden duty, as God has given us authority in His Church, to prevent those from drawing near unto the Table who would but commune unworthily and so eat and drink unto themselves judgment—as the Word in the 29th verse should be translated. Among our Baptist Churches, fashioned, we trust, somewhat nearer to the Scriptural order than certain others we know of, we do exercise at least some measure of discipline. We require from those who are members of the Church and who are, by reason of that membership, entitled to commune, that they should, at their reception, give us what we consider satisfactory proofs of their conversion. And we require of them, afterwards, that their conduct should be consistent with the Law of Christ. Otherwise, we would not, in the first place, receive them, or, having received them, we would not be long before, by the Scriptural process of excommunication, we would remove from our midst those members whose lives and conversation were not in accordance with the Gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

But, my Brothers and Sisters, do what we may—though we fence the table with the utmost diligence—and though we continually warn you not to deceive us. And not to deceive yourselves, seeing that you cannot deceive God—yet are we perfectly aware that the greater part of the guarding of the Table must rest with yourselves. We believe it to be our bounden duty, as God shall give us Grace, to take care, so far as we can, that unworthy persons are not received at the Lord's Table. Yet man being mortal, is fallible and erring, so we cannot judge you and we must leave the greater part of your examination, before you come to the sacred Table of the Master, with yourselves. Remember, dear Friends, that no recognition by the minister, no reception by the deacons or elders of a Church will excuse you for

coming to the Lord's Table if, when you come, you are not a really converted person. It is true that you cannot come there unless the Church, itself, consents to your coming—but the Church takes upon itself none of the responsibility of your fitness. It says to you, "You may come to the Communion Table, but if you have deceived us, on your own head is the sin! And if you are not what you profess to be—true believers in Christ—your unlawful observance of the ordinance must be accounted for, at the Last Great Day, among the rest of your transgressions."

And I do now, most solemnly and earnestly, as the Pastor of this Church, in the name and on behalf of this Church, warn all men and women now about to draw near unto this Table that if they are not God's children and have no faith in Christ, they stop before they, with sacrilegious hands, touch the elements of this sacred Supper! We would have them know that it can be of no service to them, but will increase their sin and add to their guilt if they, after such a warning as this, come to the Master's Table without having examined themselves and without being thoroughly persuaded in their hearts that they have been born of God—let that thought have due weight with all intending communicants—and if some of them even withdraw from the Table as the result of this fencing of it, I shall rejoice that they have had the honesty to do what is right.

I. Now, Beloved, turning from that point for a little while, I would remind you that THERE IS A PREPARATION NECESSARY FOR RECEIVING THE LORD'S SUPPER ARIGHT.

In certain churches, among persons who are only nominally religious—mere formalists and ceremonialists—it has been customary to set apart a whole week for preparation. And you may remember how Mr. Rowland Hill, in his *Village Dialogues*, tells of Mistress Too-Good, who, after spending a whole week in preparation for the Lord's Supper, found that it was not to be administered till the next Sabbath—whereupon she fell into a great passion and cursed and swore because she said that she had wasted a week! I doubt not that there have been some who have made a kind of hypocritical preparation which would have been better omitted. I do not exhort you to do any such thing! But if a right thing is abused, that is no reason why we should not use it properly. Everyone of us, before we come to the Supper of the Lord, ought to have prepared our hearts, under the help of the Holy Spirit, for a right participation. We are not to rush to our Master's Table as a horse runs into the battle, not knowing where it is going! We are not to come to this sacred Feast as we go to a meal in our own houses. We are not to partake of the emblems of the body and blood of Christ as we would sit down at our common tables to eat and drink.

We are to come here with devout solemnity and due preparation. Nor may we expect to receive a blessing, in the reception of the Supper, unless we have properly prepared ourselves for it before we come here. Alas, this is too much for-gotten—and men think they may draw near to God without making any preparation whatever! Not so was it with the

ancient saints. When Jacob was going to build an altar and to sacrifice to the Lord at Bethel, he felt it necessary to bid his family to put away all their strange gods from among them. When God was about to appear on Sinai, He commanded the people to purify themselves because He was coming near to them. And not only was it so in olden times, but it should be so now. We should not draw near unto God with hasty and careless steps, but we must remember and obey Solomon's injunction—"Keep your foot when you go to the House of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools, for they consider not that they do evil." As Moses took his shoes off because the place whereon he stood was holy ground, so ought we, my Brothers and Sisters, to put away all carnal thoughts and all worldly things when we approach this most sacred circle—a circle even more hallowed than that which surrounded the burning bush, for this surrounds the cross of Calvary, the death place of our Lord and Master—

"Sweet the moments, rich in blessing,
Which before the Cross I spend,
Life, and health, and peace possessing,
From the Sinner's dying Friend!
Here I'll sit forever viewing
Mercy's streams in streams of blood!
Precious drops my soul bedewing,
Plead and claim my peace with God!
Truly blessed is this station,
Low before His Cross to lie
While I see Divine compassion
Floating in His languid eyes!
Here it is I find my Heaven,
While upon the Cross I gaze.
Love I much? I've more forgiven—
I'm a miracle of Grace!
May I still enjoy this feeling,
In all need to Jesus go
Prove His wounds each day more healing,

And Himself more fully know." Let me press upon your consideration two or three thoughts with regard to what is necessary in a proper preparation for the Lord's Supper. First, I think, before coming to the Lord's Table, every professing Christian should occupy himself, in some measure, in contemplation and meditation. We ought not to come here without due consideration of what we are about to do. We ought to consider, in the first place, that we are coming into the more immediate Presence of God. It is true that during Divine service in the House of God we are especially in the Presence of the Most High, but

when, at eventide, we eat and drink the Supper of the Master, we get nearer to Him than we do in any of our other religious exercises, with the solitary exception of the ordinance of Believers' Baptism. This Communion service has about it something so humbling, so tender, so full of fellowship—bringing us so near to Christ—while Christ is so near to us, that we ought not to come to it without feeling that we are entering into the immediate courts of the Most High! And, surely, if the contemplation of God makes the angels veil their faces with their wings, it should make us come to this Table with great reverence and solemnity of spirit.

We ought, in the next place, before we come here, contemplate the authority upon which we celebrate this ordinance. If any of you come to this Table because I administer the ordinance, or because your parents partake of it, or because, according to the old orthodox doctrine of the Baptist Churches, this is regarded as being a Divine ordinance, you have made a mistake! It is your duty, in the reception of the Lord's Supper, or the observance of the ordinance of Baptism, to consider the authority by which you do it and to be certain that, in coming here, you are doing God's will and that you are performing that which God has commanded you. If you come not to the Communion as to a Divine ordinance, you come not to it aright. If you merely partake of it as a matter of form, instead of knowing that God has commanded the form and that His Son, Jesus Christ, is embodied in it, you have not the preparation which you ought to have in coming here.

Again, before coming to the Communion, it behooves you to consider the great distance there is between you and God. Even though you now have very blessed and hallowed fellowship with the Lord Jesus, remember that in this Supper, there is a memorial of your guilt. It is true that you see here how your sins were taken away by the broken body and the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, but let the very bath in which you were cleansed remind you of your sinfulness! And, oh, my Brothers and Sisters, when we sit here, let us not eat and drink in a showy manner, as if we were doing some praiseworthy act, but let us do it as if we felt that we were not fit to sit on the lowest seat of the Church of Christ. God grant that this may be a time when we shall humble ourselves and cast ourselves in the very dust before Him! We might, instead of being at the Table of the Lord, have been sitting on the ale-bench. We might have been drinking the cup of devils and holding communion with Belial—but Grace, Free Grace, has brought us here! Let us abase ourselves in the Presence of God. Let us humble ourselves before Him and, while we feed, by faith, on our Master's body, let us feel as if our own proud flesh were cut away and humbled by the very communion we hold with Christ, our Redeemer.

Then, Christian, this should be a further subject of contemplation before you come here—you should have a right idea of the Savior, whose body and blood are here typified to you. I think we should not come to this ordinance unless we have, for some time at least, devoutly considered the broken body, the shed blood, the sufferings, the agonies, the death

and the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us all, before we sit at this Table, remember whose death it is we commemorate here. We should view the Savior as the Son of God and then as the Son of Man, born of the Virgin Mary. We should view Him as He walks along His way of sorrow. We should seek, by earnest contemplation, to view Him prostrate in the Garden, to see Him plowed with bloody furrows at Gabbatha and to behold Him dying amid terrible tortures upon the hill of Calvary. Unless, my Brothers and Sisters, we have done this, or are enabled by God's Spirit in a special manner to do this, now, we must not expect to derive any benefit from the mere eating of the bread and drinking of the wine. You might eat your bread and drink your wine at home. You might be taking your ordinary suppers. You might break your crusts and drink from your cups in your own houses. But of what use would all of this be? They would not be the Lord's Supper and neither shall this be the Lord's Supper to you unless your hearts are occupied with a devout contemplation of the Presence of God, of your own nothingness before Him and of the glorious Sacrifice and Atonement of Jesus Christ evidently set forth before you.

In the next place, not only contemplation, but supplication should form a part of our preparation for this Supper. If we acted aright, we would never come, even to the hearing of a sermon, without prayer! Were our hearts in a proper spiritual condition, we would never leave our houses to go to the House of Prayer without first supplicating God to help the minister and to help us! We would never leave the tents of Jacob without asking that the pillar of cloud might be manifestly seen resting upon the tabernacle of Israel. We would, when we come up to God's sanctuary, breathe a prayer the moment we enter it, crying out for the Holy Spirit to rest upon us during this day. And certainly, if we ever neglect prayer before holy duties, it should never be omitted before this sacred Supper! O my Brothers and Sisters, I fear that many of us have lost the sweetness of this ordinance because we have forgotten to pray for a blessing upon it! It was but this very day that I found myself preparing to come to this place without having, first of all, sought fellowship with Jesus—and I felt grieved and vexed within my spirit that I should have been so guilty as to have forgotten the solemnities to which I was about to attend! And, by His Grace, I sought at once to spend some time in silent meditation and prayer to God. So should every Church member do likewise.

Oh, what blessed communion services would we have then! We would not go away from the Table of the Lord barren and cold, as we often have done, blaming the minister because we think he has not spoken with sufficiently affecting words and has not distributed the sacred elements in a profitable manner. Whereas the fault has been in ourselves and not in the minister—and we have been eating and drinking unworthily. And, as the judgment upon that wrong state of heart, we have found the Lord's Table, itself, to be barren instead of proving it to be the King's banqueting house and a feast of fat things to our souls!

II. Now, Beloved, I ask you to notice that MY TEXT GIVES US THE BEST PART OF PREPARATION, WHICH IS SELF-EXAMINATION. "Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread, and drink of the cup."

How many of us have thus examined ourselves? I fear many of us have come here without any self-examination whatever. Well, then, let us begin at once to examine ourselves and, during the little interval between this service and the time of the administration of the Supper, perhaps it might not be amiss if you were to read over the hymn which we sometimes sing, from which you can see what are the questions incumbent upon you to ask yourselves in self-examination and what are the marks of those who have the right to sit down at the Table of the Lord—

"The sacred Word declares them such,
Whose hearts are changed by Sovereign Grace,
Who place their confidence and hope
In Jesus' blood and righteousness.
Who know the Truth and in the ways
Of holiness direct their feet.
Who love communion with the saints
And shun the place where scorners meet.
With past attainments not content,
Increasing purity they seek.
By whom uprightness is maintained
In all they do, and all they speak.
These are the men whom God invites,
For them the Church sets wide her door,
Whatever their birth or rank may be,

The bond, the free, the rich, the poor!" This hymn suggests some solemn questions which none of us ought to have ventured here without having answered. And I think many of us can easily answer them. My Brothers and Sisters, have we not been changed by Sovereign Grace? Can we not, each one, say, "By the Grace of God I am what I am and I am not, now, what I was once"? Can we not, unless we are awfully deceived, say, with unfaltering lips, "We know whom we have believed and we are persuaded that we have been born again"? If we cannot say so—O my Friends, if any one of you cannot say so, I charge you, before God, before Jesus Christ and the elect angels—if you cannot say that you believe and know that you have been born again, do not come and profane this Table of the Master by daring to sit with the saints while you are unrenewed and not begotten again unto a lively hope by the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead! How many of you are among those whom the hymn next describes?—

"Who place their confidence and hope

In Jesus' blood and righteousness." I know that, by God's Grace, it is so with many of us. I have no other hope! No rock, no refuge for my weary spirit is there beside the Atonement of Jesus Christ. I trust you can say so, too, my dear Friends. But if you cannot. If you are resting anywhere else but in Jesus. If you have any dependence upon rites or ceremonies or good works, I again solemnly command you by the Judge of the quick and the dead—venture not to this Table to receive the Lord's Supper—for, in so doing, you would but eat and drink unworthily, not having faith in Jesus and confidence in His precious blood.

Can you say, also, as the hymn does, that you know the Truth and that in the ways of holiness you direct your feet? I fear we must all confess that we cannot say this as much as we would desire. Let us, however, still make it a point of self-examination. Come, Friend, it is now a month since the last time you sat down at this Table—what have you done during this time? How have your steps been directed? How has your speech been ordered? What about your acts towards God? Towards man? Make this a time of turning over the pages of your diary for the last month. Come, Brothers and Sisters, let us examine ourselves and so let us eat of this bread, and drink of this cup. It cannot be an unprofitable exercise which is commanded in our text, so let us obey it! Let us now question ourselves. Are we truly the Lord's? If He should say to us, as He said to His disciples, "One of you shall betray Me," what would we say? Let us, each one, ask the question now, "Lord, is it I?" Have we, like Judas, been plotting against the Master? Have we been robbing the Lord's treasury, depriving Him of what we promised in our vows? Not giving Him the time and service which we solemnly pledged to give

Him?

Let us look again at our hymn. Have we broken the communion of saints during the last months? Have we not, by anger and wrath and bitterness, injured our own spirituality when we have been talking against the children of God? Have we not felt that we have broken the sacred link which united us with them? Have we washed the saints' feet this month? Have we not rather bemired and befouled them by going astray, ourselves, and leading them astray, too? Have we humbled ourselves during the last month? Have we taken the towel and girded ourselves, as Jesus did, to do menial work for the Church? Has there not been too much pride creeping into all our services? Has it not marred all our deeds and spoiled our best endeavor? And how about prayer? Have we not been sadly negligent in that holy exercise? And with regard to love to our Master, have not our hearts been too often cold towards Him, who had His heart set open for us, that all the blood therein might be spilt in one great torrent for our sakes?

Friends, I cannot suggest all the questions that you have need to ask yourselves in such an examination as our text enjoins! Begin from the last Communion evening and go through the Sundays, through the Mondays, and Tuesdays, and Wednesdays, and all through the weeks—and then surely both you and I will have work enough to do, during the next hour,

to examine ourselves! Ah, we ought to have done it before, that we might be able, now, to apply ourselves more solemnly to Communion rather than to self-examination. But now I entreat you once again, as I am bound to do, to be faithful to my God—if you are lovers of our Lord Jesus Christ. If you are faithful to the Truth of God. If you have been really converted—if you have partaken of the Holy Spirit—I invite you to the Master's Table and may the Spirit of God rest on you! But, as an honest minister, I warn you who are not what you should be from coming to this Table. Oh, if any of you have been mere professors and hypocrites, I charge you not to come here! As in your dying day you shall remember your deeds of formality and hypocrisy, I beseech you, do not dare to touch that bread with unhallowed lips, nor sip that wine! Do not take them unless you feel that you have God's Spirit within you and are really united to the Lamb!

I fear there are some of you who have, for many months received these emblems, who would this night, for the first time, leave them untasted if you really knew yourselves! There are some in this Church, I grieve to say, with whom I can hold but very little fellowship by reason of the hard words they sometimes utter against certain of us because of some little difference of opinion. And there are many others with whom we can have no communion at all because their lives are so unholy and their conduct is so un-Christian that, though they are sound enough in the faith, we can but wonder that they know so much of the Truth and yet have so little of the spirit of Christ in them. Ah, dear Friends, it is not all gold that glitters, and all professors are not possessors! There are some in Christ's Church everywhere and God forbid that I should flatter this Church—there are some even here—who are enough to tear the church in two by their bitterness, and wrath, and evil speaking! There are others who are enough to bring down God's rod upon us for their unholy living— yes, and the very best of us, the Johns and the Enochs—have they not cause to humble themselves on account of their manifold shortcomings and misdoings? Let all professors of religion examine themselves lest it should be found that they have been deceiving themselves and others—have trusted in themselves that they were righteous when they had not passed from death unto life!

Ah, Friends! I cannot speak with the solemnity I would desire to command on such an occasion as this. I cannot bar this table, God forbid that I should do so!—from any one of you—come and welcome all you who love the Lord Jesus!

But although I cannot force back any of you who are not converted. Though I cannot thrust you away if you have the right to come, because you are members of this Church or of some other, I do, as far as human power can have any influence with you, solemnly warn you not to come to the Communion unless you are really regenerated by the Holy Spirit! I would rather have six members in my Church, who are living souls in Zion, than 600 mere professors. O Lord God, sift and fan this Church yet again! If any are only chaff, drive them out of it, or make them Your wheat, that they may be housed in Your barn and not be burned

up with unquenchable fire! O Lord, make each of us sincere! Impress upon our minds the solemnity of this act and when we draw near unto this Table, may it be especially under Your smile and with Your benediction, through Jesus Christ our Lord! To God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, be glory forever and ever! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON: PSALM 116.

I knew a godly woman who, when she was very sick, would always say, "Read me the 116th Psalm." It is deservedly a great favorite with many experienced Christians. May the Holy Spirit apply it to our hearts as we read it!

Verse 1. I love the LORD, because He has heard my voice and my supplications. It is a great condescension on God's part to listen to us. You know what a comfort it is to find a sympathetic listener who will let you tell out your griefs. It is not wise to tell them to everybody, but there are some who have an ear into which it is both pleasant and profitable to pour the story of our woes. Because God had listened to the voice of His servant's supplications, David therefore said, "I love the Lord." Nothing will make us love God better than the assurance that He hears our prayers. We could not love a deaf God, so, when Jehovah does attend to our voice and our supplications, we feel drawn more closely than ever to Him.

2. Because He has inclined His ear unto me, therefore will I call upon Him as long as I live. That same blessed experience which is a reason for love is also an argument for continued prayer. "As He has heard me, He shall still hear me. As He has listened to me, He shall listen to me again—at least, it shall not be for lack of my cries that He does not listen." That expression, "He has inclined His ear unto me," seems to me to mean, "He has stooped down to me to catch my faintest words. He has been favorable to me. He has smiled as He has heard my broken prayers and cries. He has inclined His ear unto me. It was not a mere hearing such as His Omniscience might warrant me to expect—it was such a favorable hearing as only Infinite Love would have given to me and, oh, if He is so favorable as to hear, can I be so ungrateful as not to pray?" Here was the case that David had laid before the Lord.

3. The sorrows of death compassed me. Just as the dogs surround the poor stag and shut him in the fatal circle. 3. And the pains of Hell got hold upon me. They set their teeth into him as the dogs do into the stag.

3. I found trouble and sorrow. He was in a double grief—he had trouble outside and sorrow within—it was troubled sorrow and sorrowful trouble, wormwood mingled with gall.

4. Then called I upon the name of the LORD. That was the very best time to pray. Satan does his utmost to prevent our praying when we are in extremities, but, oh, dear Friends, if Jonah prayed in the whale's belly, where can you and I be where we may not and cannot pray? If we sat down upon the very doorstep of Hell—yes, if the Pit opened her mouth to swallow us up, we might still pray! And the mercy is, that while we are on praying ground

we are also on the ground of Grace where God can meet with us! "Then called I upon the name of the Lord."

4. O LORD, I beseech You, deliver my soul It was a short prayer—an eager, earnest petition—full of passionate importunity. There was no dictating to God how the deliverance should be worked. "I beseech You, deliver my soul. Do it in Your own way. Do it in the way that will bring most glory to You. If You do not deliver my body, yet deliver my soul. If my goods must go. If all I have must melt away, yet, O Jehovah, I beseech You, deliver my soul!" This is one of the best prayers in the whole Bible. It is very much like the publican's prayer, "God be merciful to me a sinner."

5. Gracious is the LORD, and righteous. That is a strange combination which the ungodly cannot understand. It is a riddle never to be read except at the Cross! "Gracious is the Lord, and righteous." That is what every troubled conscience wants to know—how God can be just and yet can pardon sin—but we who have believed in Jesus do know! It is our joy to say, "Gracious is the Lord, and righteous."

5. Yes, our God is merciful I always feel inclined to mispronounce that word, or to divide it into two, and read it, "Our God is mercy full," for so He is—He is brimming over with mercy!

6. The LORD preserves the simple. The sincere—sometimes the ignorant—those who do not pretend to know. Or, the simple, those from whose heart the Lord has driven out all guile, making them to be simple-minded. They are such fools (as the world calls them) as to be believers in the Lord Jesus Christ—and that is to perform the highest act of wisdom on the part of man! They are such simpletons as to believe the old, old Bible, and to cling to the great atoning Sacrifice, and to let the novelties of modern thought blow away like the down of the thistle in the summer breeze! "The Lord preserves the simple." How did David know that? Listen.

6. I was brought low and He helped me. There is no way of knowing a general doctrine so good as that of having a particular experience of it! "I was brought low, brought to be a simpleton, brought so very low that I was obliged to pray a simple prayer—brought so very, very low that I was obliged to have a simple faith in God—for I had nobody else to believe in and nobody else to trust. 'I was brought low, and He helped me.'" What a help that is—a help in which God virtually does it all—for our poor weakness, with its best attempts, would rather hinder than help.

7. Return unto your rest, O my soul; for the LORD has dealt bountifully with you. Poor dove, you are dropping into the water. Your wings can scarcely sustain you—come back to Noah—"Return unto your Noah, O my soul!" That is the Old Testament reading of it and the New Testament rendering is, "Return unto your Jesus, O my soul, for He is your true rest! Get back to Him, 'for the Lord has dealt bountifully with you.' In past times, when you were dwelling with Him in close communion, it was better with you than it is now, that you

have wandered from Him. Return, return, poor prodigal, for there is every inducement to bring you back! In your Father's house there is bread enough and to spare. He never stinted you. 'The Lord has dealt bountifully with you' and He is dealing bountifully with you even now in giving you the opportunity to come back, in giving you the power to pray and in permitting you to go to the blood-sprinkled Mercy Seat."

8. For You have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, and my feet from falling. Just now he prayed, "Deliver my soul." He has received the answer to his petition, for he says, "You have delivered my soul from death." He said nothing, then, about his eyes, but God gives exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think. He did not say anything about his feet, but the Lord gave him a blessing for them, also—"You have delivered my feet from falling." Oh, for an all-over blessing, a blessing from head to foot—from the eyes that stream with tears to the feet that are slipping away from under us! A blessing that begins within by delivering the soul and then works its way into the very countenance and makes it resplendent with joy and thankfulness and gets into the daily life, helping us to march boldly along the slippery way! Glory be to God! He has given this deliverance to many of us!

9. I will walk before the LORD in the land of the living. 'I will not care who sees me so long as He sees me. I will court no presence but His Presence, 'I will walk before Jehovah.'" It is grand walking under a constant sense of the Lord's inspection and a delightful consciousness of His smile! This is like Enoch's walk and you know how it ends, for Enoch could not die for the life of him—he walked so near to God that he did not pass into Heaven by the ordinary road—he "was not, for God took him." And we, too, though we may die as to these bodies, know that we shall never die as to our souls, for He has given to us who have believed in Jesus, eternal life! And we can never die or be separated from Him.

10. I believed, therefore have I spoken: I was greatly afflicted. 'I believed.' Come, Friends, can you all say that? It is a blessed thing for you if you can say that when the sorrows of death compass you and the pains of the grave lay hold upon you. That is glorious faith which says, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." "I believed, therefore have I spoken." Faith is not a dumb Grace of God—it will make its voice heard.

11. I said in my haste, All men are liars. You see, he had once spoken in the power of the flesh. It was well, therefore, that he should now speak in the power of faith. "I said in my haste, All men are liars." But it was true for all that, for they will fail us if we trust them instead of the Lord. Yet, in another sense, they are not all liars, so David retracts the hasty words which might have a double meaning and might imply what he did not intend, or what he should not mean. See how quickly he turns away from this unpleasant subject! Note what comes next.

12. What shall I render unto the LORD for all His benefits toward me? "There," he seems to say, "put all men away, I have done with them. If they are all liars, let us say no more about them, but let us turn to God." When you, dear

Friends, are disappointed with men, do not sit down and worry—you should have known what to expect before you began with them—and now you have found it to be so, turn it to good account. David feels that he has received everything from God, so he says, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits toward me?" Well, what can he do? His own poverty comes rushing over his sight, again, and the answer to his question is—

13. I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the LORD. "I ask, 'What shall I render?' and I reply, 'I will take.'" That is what you and I also must say—

"The best return for one like me, So wretched and so poor, Is from His gifts to draw a plea, And ask Him still for more."

You have given God all you have when you have given Him your weakness, your sin, your emptiness—that is all that is truly yours—and then it is that you render to Him that which He asks for, that He may put away your sin, that He may fill your emptiness and glorify Himself in your weakness.

14. I will pay my vows unto the LORD now in the presence of all His people. If you have made any vows, mind that you keep them. It is often better not to vow, but when the vow is made, let it be diligently paid.

15. Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of His saints. It is very painful for us to witness, but it is precious to God. We think that they have ended their usefulness when they reach that point, but God estimates their very death to be precious! Tread very softly when you go to the bedside of a departing saint—you may brush against an angel's wing, for the room is full of them—the place whereon you stand is holy ground! Troops of angelic messengers are there to do their Master's bidding in the last hours of His child—which are about to become his first hours in Glory! Besides, the Master, Himself, is there—He is never absent when His children are dying. "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints."

16. O LORD, truly I am Your servant; I am Your servant, and the son of Your handmaid. "Born in Your own house, of one who belonged to You—a home-born slave—and glad to glory in that fact! Born in Your house, bought with Your money and yielding up myself joyfully to You—I am Your servant, and the son of Your handmaid."

16. You have loosed my bonds. Why, we thought he was going to say, "Your Grace has, like a fetter, bound my wandering heart to You." Just so—that is the liberty which he enjoys—"You have loosed my bonds." We are never so free as when free-will has had its deathblow and we have come under the power of Sovereign Grace. And now there is another free-will, born of Grace, and with its full consent we give ourselves up to God, saying, with David, "O Lord, truly I am Your servant; You have loosed my bonds."

17. I will offer to You the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call upon the name of the LORD. Now David has grown into a priest, offering sacrifices. He has also grown into a singer, praising the Lord with thanksgiving, and he has grown into a preacher—"And will call upon the name of the Lord." The very man who found the pains of Hell laying hold upon him is now engaged in the holiest exercises!

18. 19. I will pay my vows unto the LORD now in the presence of all His people, in the courts of the LORD'S house, in the midst of you, O Jerusalem. Praise you the LORD. Or, "Hallelujah!" I cannot close this reading without remarking how often my ears are shocked with the blasphemous way in which this thrice-holy word is dragged into the mire—"Hallelujah fiddles!" "Hallelujah lasses!" and I know not what. "Hallelujah"—praise unto Jehovah—is one of those words which never ought to be pronounced except with the utmost solemnity! Although there should be mixed with it the most rapturous joy. Let us take heed lest we be found guilty of taking the name of the Lord, Jehovah, our God, in vain, by using that word flippantly. But let us solemnly feel in our hearts and say with our lips, "Hallelujah—Praise the Lord!"