

The Guilt and the Cleansing

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"Purge me with hyssop, and/shall be clean: wash me, and/shall be whiter than snow."

[Psalm 51:7.](#)

[Another Sermon by Mr. Spurgeon on the same text is #1937, Volume 32—A MINGLED STRAIN.]

You know how David had sinned. To the sin of adultery he had added that of murder. David felt like one who was shut out from God and was unworthy to approach Him. He could not be content to remain in such a condition. He longed to be reconciled to God and he remembered that he had sometimes seen a man who had the leprosy put out of the city as an unclean person, or he had seen one who had defiled himself by touching a corpse shut out for a time from all communion with those who drew near to worship God. "Ah," he thought, "that is just as I am—I am unworthy to appear before God, for I am spiritually unclean."

But David had also seen the priest take a basin full of blood and dip hyssop in it—and when the bunch of hyssop had soaked up the blood, he had seen the priest sprinkle the unclean person therewith and then say to him, "You are clean. You have admittance now to the worship of God. You can mingle with the great congregation—I pronounce you clean through the sprinkled blood." And David's faith, acting upon the telescopic principle, looked far down the ages and he saw the great atoning Sacrifice offered upon Calvary. And as he saw the Son of God bleeding for sins which were not His own, he desired that the blood of Christ might be applied to his conscience, feeling that it would take away his defilement and admit him into the courts of God's House and into the love of God's heart. And so he prayed this prayer, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean."

He felt, too, that sin was a very great defilement—that he was black and filthy—but he knew how he had often, when hunted like a wild goat among the mountains, stooped down to a cooling brook and washed away the dust and stain of travel in the running water and his face and hands had been clean again. And so, bowing down before God he sees, in the Sacrifice of Christ, a cleansing flood and his desire is expressed in these words, "Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." The words do not require any exposition—they require application. They do not need to be explained—they need to be offered up to God in prayer by broken-hearted suppliants!

There are two things I shall try to talk about, as God shall help me. The one is that sin is a very foul thing—David says, "Purge me." "Wash me." The other is that the cleansing must be very great—this process of sprinkling hyssop and of washing must be very potent, for he says, "I shall be clean." "I shall be whiter than snow."

I. First, then, a little about THE DEFILEMENT.

Sometimes it has been asked by unconverted men, "Why do you talk so much about Atonement? Why could not God be generous and forgive sin outright? Why should He require the shedding of blood and the endurance of great suffering?" Sinner, if you had a right sense of sin you would never ask such a question! In asking that question you speak upon the supposition that God is such an One as yourself. But He hates sin. He sees in sin such loathsomeness as you have never dreamed of! There is, to Him, such horrible abomination, such a heinousness, such a detestableness and uncleanness about sin that He could not pass it by. If He did, He would bring upon His own Character the suspicion that He was not holy. Had God passed by human sin without a substitutionary Sacrifice, the seraphim would have Suspended their song, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of Hosts." The judge who winks at sin is the abettor of sin. If the supreme Ruler does not punish sin, He becomes Himself the patron of all guilt and sin may take its rest beneath the shadow of His wings! But it is

not so and, Sinner, God would have you know, and have angels know—and have devils know that however lightly any of His creatures may think of sin—and however foolishly simple man may toy with it—He knows what a vile thing it is and He will have no patience with it! "He will by no means spare the guilty."

I have heard it said by persons looking at the subject from another point of view, that the preaching of full forgiveness through the Savior's blood, to the very chief of sinners, is apt to make men think lightly of sin—that, when we tell them—

"There is life for a look at the Crucified One, There is life at this moment"—

for every soul that looks at Christ, we do, in effect, find a plaster for men's wounded consciences which, when thus healed, will only aid and abet them in going to sin again. How untrue this is! A moment's reflection will show you. We tell the sinner that God never does gratuitously pass by a single sin and that pardon never could have come to one man of Adam's race had it not been procured by the tremendous griefs of the Savior who stood in men's place. Our own belief is that all the proclamations of the Law of God and all the threats of judgment that were ever thundered forth by the most Boanerges-like of ministers, never did show man so much the vileness of sin as the preaching of this one great Truth of God—"The Lord has caused to meet on Him the iniquity of us all. Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed." That is the great condemnation of sin—the Savior's death! Never is God dressed in such resplendent robes

of glorious holiness as when He is smiting sin as it is laid upon His only-begotten Son! Having lifted it from sinners and laid it upon Christ, He does not spare it because of the worthiness of the Person to whom it is imputed. He smites and crushes it with His full force and fury till the oppressed Victim cries out, "Behold, and see if there is any sorrow like unto My sorrow which is done unto Me when Jehovah has afflicted Me in the day of His fierce anger."

Let us now turn this subject over a little—the guilt of sin. We think that the Atonement sets forth that guilt most thoroughly—let this Truth of God reach the ears of every unpardoned man and woman here. It appears that there is nothing but blood that will ever wash your sin away—the blood of Christ, the blood of God's dear Son—this cleanses us from all sin, but nothing ease can. The blackness of your sin will appear, then, if you recollect that all the creatures in the universe could not have taken one of your sins away. If all the holy angels in Heaven had performed the best service that they could render, they could not have taken away even one of your sins! If the great archangel had left his station near the Throne of God's Glory and had been led into a deep abyss of suffering, all that he could have done would not have been a drop in the bucket compared with what would be required to take away one single sin, for sin is such an enormous evil that no created being could remove it! And even if all the saints on earth could have ceased to sin and could unceasingly have praised God day and night, yet there is not merit enough in all their songs to blot out one single offense of one single sinner! No, let me go further. Could your tears and the tears of all created intelligences, "no respite know." Could the briny drops—

"Forever flow— All for sin could not atone."

No, I will go a step lower. The pains of the damned in Hell are no atonement for sin! They suffer in consequence of sin, but no atonement has been made by them, for all they have suffered has not lessened what they have to suffer. And when ten thousand times ten thousand years shall have rolled over their poor accursed heads, they will be just as far off having satisfied Divine Justice as they are now, for sin is such a dreadful thing that even Tophet cannot burn it up, though "the pile thereof is fire and much wood," and though "the breath of the Lord, like a stream of brimstone, does kindle it." Sin is cast into its flames and men suffer there—but all the burnings of Gehenna never did consume a single sin—and never could! Think of that! Earth, Heaven and Hell could never take away a single sin from a single soul!

None but Christ could do it and even Christ Himself could not do it unless He became a Man. It was absolutely necessary that the Substitute for human sin should be of the same nature as the offender. Christ must therefore be born of Mary that He might become Man. Man must suffer, for man had sinned. As in Adam all died, so in another Adam must all be made alive if they were ever to be made alive at all. They fell by one man, so they must rise by another Man, or else never rise. But even the Man Christ Jesus, in association with the

Godhead, could not have taken away your sins unless He had died. I never read in Scripture that all that He did in His life could take away sin. The Savior's life is the robe of

righteousness with which His people are covered, but that is not the bath in which they are washed. The whole life of Christ—all His preaching upon the mountains, all His fasting in the wilderness, all His travail in birth for souls, yes, all His bloody sweat, all His scourging, all the shame and the spitting that He endured could not have saved your soul, or take away one sin, for it is written, "Without shedding of blood is no remission" of sin. Think of this, Sinner! To take out that one sin of yours, if you had only one sin, the Infinite must become an Infant and the Immortal must yoke Himself with mortality! And then, in that position, and in that condition, He must become "obedient unto death," or else not one sin on your part could ever be removed from your soul!

But I want you to go with me further than this. Christ Himself, in His death, could not have taken away one sin if it had not been for the peculiar form of death which He endured. He had to be crucified and then Paul could write, "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the Law, being made a curse for us, for it is written, Cursed is everyone that hangs on a tree. Christ must, therefore, hang upon a tree that He might be cursed—and there is no man who ever lived who can tell what is meant by that expression—that Christ was cursed. If all the mighty orators who have moved the Christian Church at once to tears and to joy, could stand here, I would defy them to weigh this burden of the Lord, or estimate its tremendous meaning, "Christ was made a curse for us." Christ a curse! Jehovah-Tsidkenu a curse! Jesus, the darling of the Father, made a curse! He, who "counted it not robbery to be equal with God," a curse! O angels, you may well marvel at this mystery, for its astounding depths you cannot fathom! Yet so it is. "He has made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him."

And this leads me to mention what I think is surely the climax here, that although Christ died the death of the Cross, even then He could not have taken any sin away unless it had been expressly ordained and settled that He therein did Himself take our sin as well as our curse—and did therein stand before God, though in Himself personally innocent—as if He had been a sinner and there suffer, "the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God." There is that black, that hideous, that damning, that everlasting soul-destroying thing called sin! Jehovah-Jesus sees it on His people. He knows that they can never be with Him where He is while that sin rests on them and He also knows that there is no way by which they can be freed from it except by His taking it. Can you picture the scene? He takes that terrible, that cursed, that Hell-kindling, that Hell-feeding thing—that fuel of the eternal Pit, that object of eternal Wrath—He takes that sin upon Himself and now what does sin seem to say? It is imputed to Christ and it seems to hide itself behind Christ—and it says to God, "O God, You hate me, but You cannot reach me here. Here I am! I am Your enemy, but there is between us an impassable barrier." Now, what will become of sin? Hear this, you sinners

who still have your sins resting upon you! What will become of sin? God says, "Awake, O sword, against My Shepherd, and against the Man that is My Fellow, says the Lord of Hosts: smite the Shepherd." And the sword did smite Him, so that Christ cried out, "All Your waves and Your billows are gone over Me." And He uttered that dreadful shriek, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" in unutterable depths of anguish because God had turned away His face and smitten Him in His fierce anger, pounded Him as in a mortar, trampled on Him as in the wine-press, crushed Him as in the olive-press, broke Him between the upper and the nether millstones of His awful wrath made Him to drink the whole cup dry and caused Him to suffer—

"All that Incarnate God could bear, With strength enough, but none to spare."

So you see that before even one sin can be pardoned, Christ must suffer what that sin deserves, or something tantamount thereunto by which Divine Holiness shall be cleared of all stain. Then what an awfully evil thing sin must be! Yet you will see her standing at the corner of the street, with a smiling face, trying to allure you. But shake your head at her and say, "No, no! The Savior bled because of you!" And you will see sin sparkling in the wine-cup, but look not on it when it is red, and moves itself aright, but say unto it, "O Sin, I loathe you, for you did open my Savior's veins and cause His precious blood to flow!" It is easy to get black by sin, but remember that it is so hard to get clean that only God's Omnipotence, in the Person of Christ, could provide a Cleanser for your sins!

And now, Sinner, I say this word to you, yet some will go and mock it. I cannot make you see the filthiness of sin. You think it a mere trifling thing. God Almighty, you say, is very merciful, forgetting how tremendously just He is. But though I cannot make you see sin, yet I can leave this Truth with you—you will one day feel what sin means unless you repent of it, for He that spared not His own Son will not spare you! If the Judge upon the Throne of God smote Christ, who had no sin of His own—smote Him so sternly for other men's sins—what will He do with you? If He spared not His Beloved Son, what will He do with His enemies? If the fire burned up Christ, how will it burn up you? O you who are out of Christ—without God and without hope—what will you do? What will you do when God shall put on His robe of thunder and come forth to deal with you in His wrath? Beware, beware, you that forget God, lest He tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver you! "Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and you perish from the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little."

I want you to take this prayer now. I have tried to bring out the meaning of it. You are thus black, so pray to God, "Purge me with blood: apply it by Your Holy Spirit, as the priest applied to the leper the blood upon the bunch of hyssop. 'Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.'"

II. And now we shall have a few words upon THE POWER OF THE CLEANSING.

Whom can it cleanse? That is the first question. David answers it, for he says, "It can cleanse me" He meant himself. I would not exaggerate David's sin, but it was a very frightful one. What could be more dreadful than for a man so highly-favored, who had so much of the Light of God, so much communion with God and who stood so high as a light in the midst of the nation to commit two crimes so accursed as those which we must lay at his door—adultery and murder? While my blood runs chill at the very thought of his having committed them, yet in my soul I am glad that the Holy Spirit ever permitted such a black case to stand on record! What an encouragement to seek pardon it has been to many who have sinned as foully as David did! If you can bend your knees and pray David's prayer, you shall get David's answer! "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean." What if you have even defiled your neighbor's wife? What if you have even struck your neighbor to his heart and left him dead upon the earth? These two crimes will damn you to all eternity unless you shall find pardon for them through the blood of Jesus—and there is pardon for them there! If you look up to where that blood is streaming from the hands and feet and side of Jesus. If you trust your broken spirit in His hands, there is pardon for your crimson sins to be had right now! Is there a harlot here? O poor fallen woman, I pray that Christ may so forgive you that you will wash His feet with your tears and wipe them with the hairs of your head! Is there a thief here? Men say that you will never be reclaimed, but I pray the same Eternal Mercy which saved the dying thief to save the living thief! Have I any here who have cursed God to His face a thousand times? Return unto your God, for He comes to meet you! Say to Him, "Father, I have sinned." Bury your head in His bosom! Receive His kiss of forgiveness, for God delights to pardon and to blot out transgression. Now that He has smitten Christ, He will not smite any sinner who comes to Him through Christ. His wrath is gone and He can now say, "Fury is not in Me." Here, then, is a great wonder—that Christ's precious blood can cleanse the vilest of the vile and you may now pray the prayer of the text, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean."

From what can it cleanse? I dare not mention every kind of sin, but there is no sin from which it cannot cleanse. What a precious Truth of God that is, "The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanses us from all sin." During this last week I have been with Brother Offord conducting Prayer Meetings. And he told, one evening, a tale which I made him tell every evening afterwards, for I thought it so good. He said there was a poor man living in Dartmoor who had been employed during the summer in looking after horses, cows and so on, that were turned out on the moor. He was a perfect heathen and never went to a place of worship, perhaps, since he was a child. For him there was no Sabbath. After a time, he grew very ill. He was over 60 years of age and, having nothing to live upon, he went into the workhouse. While he was there, it pleased the mysterious Spirit to make him uneasy as to his soul. He felt that he must die and the old man had just enough Light of God to let him see that if he did die, all was wrong with regard to a future state. He had a little grandchild who lived in

a neighboring town—Plymouth, I think it was—and he asked leave for his grandchild to come in to see him every day. As he was very ill and near death, that was allowed. She came in and he said to her, "Read the Bible to me, Dear." She complied and the more she read, the more wretched the old man grew. "Read again," he said. The more she read, the more dark his mind seemed to be with a sense of guilt.

At last, one day, she came to that passage in the first Epistle of John—you know it—"The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanses us from all sin." "Is that there?" he asked. "Yes, Grandfather," replied the little girl, "that is there." "Is that there?" "Oh, yes, Grandfather, it is there." "Then read it again! Read it again!" She again read, "The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanses us from all sin." "My Dear, are you sure it is just like that?" "Yes, Grandfather." "Then read it again, Dear." "The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanses us from all sin." "Then," he said, "take my finger and put it on that verse. Is it on that text, Child?—is my finger on that blessed text?" "Yes, Grandfather." "Then," he said, "tell

them," (alluding to his friends) "that I die in the faith of that!"—and he closed his eyes and doubtless entered into eternal rest. And I will die in the faith of that Truth of God, by the Grace of God—and so will you, I trust, Brothers and Sisters, die with your finger on that text, "The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanses us from all sin." Oh, it is sweet living and it is sweet dying if you can rest there! Now we see, then, that whatever your sins may have been, they are all included in those little words, "all sin"—therefore be of good comfort, poor Sinner—if you believe in Jesus Christ, you are born of God and His blood cleanses you from all sin!

Another question is, When will it cleanse? It will cleanse now. It will cleanse at this moment! You remember that it is in the present tense, "The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanses"—that is to say, just at this particular moment, some three or four minutes to eight o'clock—there is efficacy in the precious blood of Jesus to cleanse now. You need not stop till you get home to pray. He who trusts Christ is saved the moment that he trusts! His sin is blotted out the instant that he accepts Christ as his Substitute and justifies God in smiting sin in the Person of the Savior. There is efficacy in the blood now! Perhaps there has strayed in here one who says, "It is too late." Who told you that? Sir, it was the devil—and he was a liar from the beginning! "Ah," says another, "but you do not know that I have sinned against the Light of God and knowledge." My dear Friend, I do not know how much you have sinned, but I do know that it is written, "He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him." And I know that you have not gone beyond the uttermost, so I conclude that He is able to save you—right now, just as you are, standing in yonder crowd, or sitting here in these pews!

Once more—In what way is Christ able thus to cleanse? I answer—In a perfect and complete way! David says, "Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." We do not see snow very often, now, but when we did see it last time, what a dazzling whiteness there was upon

it! You took a sheet of paper and laid it upon the snow and you were perfectly surprised to see the clean, white paper turned yellow or brown in comparison with the snow's dazzling whiteness! But David says, "I shall be whiter than snow." You see, snow is only earthly whiteness, only created whiteness, but the whiteness which Christ gives us when He washes us in His blood, is Divine whiteness! The whiteness is the righteousness of God Himself! Besides, snow soon melts and then where is the whiteness? The snow and the whiteness run away together, but there is no power in temptation, no power in sin which is able to stain the whiteness which God gives to a pardoned sinner! And then snow, especially here in this, our smoky city, soon gets brown or black—but this righteousness never will—

"No age can change its glorious hue— The robe of Christ is always new!"

"And is this perfect whiteness for me?" asks one. Yes, for you, if you believe in Jesus! If you were as black as the devil himself, if you did but believe in Jesus, you should be as white as an angel in a moment because, by believing, you accept God's way of saving souls—and to do this is the greatest thing that can be done! The Pharisees came to Christ and they said, making a great fuss about their zeal, "Here is our money. Here is our talent. Here is our time—'what shall we do, that we might work the works of God?'" They opened their ears for His answer and they thought He would say, "Give tithing of mint, anise and cummin. Be careful to wash your hands every time you eat. Give your money to the poor. Endow a row of almshouses. Become monks. Lacerate your backs. Tear your flesh," and so on. But Jesus said nothing of the kind! They wondered, I have no doubt, what He was going to say and they seemed to be all on tiptoes. "Now He is going to tell us the greatest work that a creature can do." "What shall we do that we might work the works of God." He answers them thus—"This is the work of God, that you believe on Him whom He has sent." Ah, then they went away, directly, for no such simple thing, no such humbling thing as this would they do! Perhaps there are some of you who say, "Why don't you preach morality?" "Talk of morality!" Says Cowper—

"O You bleeding Lamb, The best morality is love of You"— and so, indeed, it is! If I were to tell you that I was commissioned by God to say that if you walked from here to John o'Groat's House in the cold and wet, bare-footed and ate nothing on the way but dry bread and drank nothing but water, you would inherit eternal life, you would all be on the road tomorrow morning, if not tonight! But when I say just this, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved," what do you do, then? Are you such a fool as to be damned because the way to be saved is too simple? My anger waxes hot against you, that you should play the fool with

your own soul and be damned because it is too easy! Think of a man who has a disease that is killing him and he will not take the medicine because it is too simple. He will not apply to the physician because his terms are too cheap. He will not apply such-and-such a

remedy because it is too simple! Then when that man dies, who can pity him? Did he not reject the remedy from the worst and emptiest of all motives?

"Oh!" says one, "but, simple as it is, it seems too hard for me—I cannot believe!" Sinner, what can you not believe? Can you not believe that if Jesus Christ took human sin and was punished for it, God can be just in forgiving it? Why, you can surely believe that! You say that you cannot believe, that is, you cannot trust Christ! Why, poor Soul, I should find it the hardest work in the world if I were to try not to trust Him, for He is such a precious Savior, such a mighty Savior that I can say with John Hyatt that I would not only trust Him with my one soul, but with a million souls if I had them! Yet it may be that you do not understand what believing is. It is not doing anything! It is leaving off doing. It is just believing that Christ did it all—

"Nothing, either great or small,
Nothing, Sinner, no—
Jesus did it, did it all
Long, long ago!"

Christ is worthy of being trusted. Rely upon Him! God give you the Grace to do so and you are saved! Remember what we said the other night—there is all the difference in the world between the religion that is made up of, "Do, do," and that other religion that is spelt "D-o-n-e, done." He who has the religion of, "It is all done," loves God out of gratitude and serves Him because he is saved. But he who has the religion of "Do" is always a slave, never gets salvation, but perishes in his doings—as they deserve to do who will look to themselves instead of looking to Christ! May the Lord now command His own blessing for Jesus' sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON: PSALM 51.

May God graciously grant to all of us the Grace which shall enable us to enter into the penitential spirit which is so remarkable in this Psalm!

Verse 1. Have mercy upon me, O God. David breaks the silence at last and he does so by crying to God for mercy! Before he says anything else, he appeals to this attribute of mercy which is so glorious a trait in the Character of Jehovah. And he casts himself, all guilty as he is, upon the absolute mercy of God. "Have mercy upon me, O God."

1. According to Your loving kindness: according unto the multitude of Your tender mercies blot out my transgressions. David talks as if the Lord had said to him, "What is the measure of the mercy that you need?" And he knows of nothing by which he can measure it except the boundless and infinite loving kindness of the Lord. "O God!" he seems to say, "deal out mercy to me according to the measure of Your own boundless Nature. Let Your mercy be the only judge of the mercy that I need."

2. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity. The forgiveness of sin is not enough for the true penitent. He needs the defilement which he has incurred through sin to also be removed.

If washing will not suffice, he asks the Lord to try any other method that will accomplish the desired end.

And, mark you, for each one of us there is a special vocation in which we can follow Christ. I do not believe that all of you would be following Christ if you were to attempt to preach. Even Christ never attempted to do what His Father did not intend Him to do. A man once asked Him to officiate as a lawyer or a judge, but He replied, "Who made Me a judge or a divider over you?" One beauty of Christ's life was that He kept to His calling and did not go beyond His commission. And you will be wise if you do the same. If you are a servant, you can follow Christ by ministering to the comfort of all who are in the house. If you are a mother, you can follow Christ by training up your children for Him. Every man has his own particular calling and every Christian's calling should be especially for God. One is called to the foreign mission field—let him go, in God's name, to the regions beyond—let him not stay at home. Another is called to go from house to house to visit the sick, to care for the poor and so on—Bible-woman, City Missionary, I greet you in Christ's name and bid you keep to your own work and never run away from it! One is called to teach an infant class and another to care for the lads or the lasses—and all are fitted for the work to which they are called by God. And to each one the Master says, "Follow Me and keep to the work which My Father has given you to do, even as I pleased not Myself by selecting My own work, but did that which My Father had appointed for Me."

II. Now secondly, IN ORDER TO FOLLOW CHRIST IT WILL BE A WISE THING TO LET A GREAT MANY

OTHER THINGS ALONE.

Peter wanted to know about John—"What shall this man do?" But Jesus said, "What is that to you? You follow Me." From this answer of Christ, we learn that we are not to be curious as to what God is going to do with other people. I will tell you what thoughts have been passing through the minds of some of us. One has said, "I am a poor humble believer in Jesus. I have to struggle with poverty and need, yet God graciously helps me and I can tell of many instances of His delivering mercy." Well, dear Friend, God is greatly glorified by this testimony! But when you go on to ask about those rich people who have everything that heart can wish, "What is God going to do with them?" I can only reply, "What is that to you? Follow you Christ and be not curious about others." It is equally wrong if a rich man says, "There are those poor people who are converted, but who cannot give much to the cause of God and who need education to enable them to teach others—what will the Lord do with them?" That is nothing to do with you, my Brother. You have to follow the Lord, yourself, and to mind your own business! Someone else says, "There's such-and-such a man—really, I can't see any ability in him! He tried to preach the other day and I was glad when he stopped, for it was very poor talk." I must confess that I have sometimes felt like that when I have listened to a friend, but I have said to myself, "What is that to me? God

knows His own servants better than we do and He knows where to place them, and how to use them to the best advantage." Possibly, someone says, concerning a fine orator, "A man who blazes away at that rate thinks too much of himself for God to bless him." But Christ says, "What is that to you? You follow Me." God has all sorts of stones in His Temple and some of them are of such a strange shape that I am glad the placing of them is not left to me, for I could not do it! I am thankful that God never sent me into the world to make people perfect, but to use them as I find them. And I believe that He also uses them as He finds them and gradually prepares them for higher uses and for the place which He means them to occupy in His Temple above. So do not say, "I am wondering what this man will do and what that man will do, and what others around me will do"—but do what you can for Christ and, as for others—leave them to the Master!

Further, this rule also applies to the character of others. How much some people are concerned because a certain man is so purse proud! It seems to be a sort of consolation to them to think how much better they are than he is. Another is very frivolous and they frequently bring his character into their conversation, apparently as a means of showing how superior in sobriety they are. To everyone of that stamp, Christ seems to me to say, "'What is that to you? You follow Me,' and then the imperfections of your neighbor will not lie so near to your heart." I have heard of a minister who, wishing to bring the Truth of God home to the hearts and consciences of his people, said that he should like to pass a Reform Act—that everybody should reform one person and then all would be reformed. He meant that they should all reform themselves, but one man said, "The minister is quite right! Everybody is to reform one and I am going home to reform our Mary." That is often our idea—that we must reform somebody else—but if we could bring ourselves to feel that weeding our own garden, watering our own plants and fulfilling our own vocation is what God requires of us, how much better it would be for the entire Church of Christ!

I think the same rule applies, to a large extent, to remarks concerning the general condition of Christian Churches. There are some of my Brothers who assure me that these are the most terrible times through which the world has ever passed. They cannot discover any ground for congratulation—everything seems to wear to them a most gloomy aspect. It may be so, yet I think I can see much reason for thankfulness as well as much cause for sorrow and regret. We are constantly told that this is a crisis, but I recollect that when I first came to London, 20 years ago, [1853] I was told that it was a crisis and it seems to have been a crisis every few weeks since! Some people appear to imagine that the future of the universe depends upon a meeting which they propose to hold in a month or so—yet so far God has managed the affairs of the universe without any help from them and He still reigns as universal King and Lord notwithstanding all the efforts of the Pope, the Devil and Essays and Reviews! I have come to the conclusion that instead of trying to set all my Master's servants

right at once, my first and most important work is to follow my Lord—and I think, my Brothers, that it will be wise for you to come to the same conclusion!

Suppose a man is set by his master to plow a field? His main business is to go up and down that field until he has plowed it all. But suppose that, instead of doing so, he gets into a comfortable corner under the hedge and tells his fellow plowman that the whole system of farming adopted by his master is a mistake, that this field is being sown with the wrong sort of seed, that his master does not understand the best manure to use and that if he were make me his manager, the whole farm would pay much better that it now does? If his master comes while he is talking like this and asks, "John, what have you been doing?" and he replies, "I have been expounding to William a better plan of farming than you have adopted," his master would probably say to him, "I shall have to discharge you unless you give up these speculations. Get on with your plowing at once and leave the management of the farm to me." And I would say that to many Christians— Get on with your plowing! Get to your own proper work! Teach that class in the Sunday school. Speak to sinners about Christ whenever you can and try to win them for Him—but leave those greater and deeper things to your Master. Go on following Him with all your heart and serving Him with all your might. He has His special servants whom He calls to great works of reform, those whom He uses as His speaking trumpets to proclaim the Truth upon the solemn matters with which the most of us have not so much to do.

The same rule applies to many theological questions. For instance, the puzzling problem concerning the origin of evil. I am not so much troubled about how evil came into the world as about helping to get it out! Practical common-sense seems to say, "If there is a thief in the house, let us catch him, or else get him out. And after that we will try to find out how he got in." Our Lord Jesus Christ did not come into the world to tell us how sin was brought here, but He came to show us the only way in which sin can be taken out of the world—and that is by the door which He opened in His own side. It is by His death that sin is to be expelled from the earth!

Then there is that great and weighty question concerning the relation between Divine Sovereignty and human responsibility. You may go to one place of worship and you will hear about very little except Divine Sovereignty. And you may go to another place and you will hear about little except human responsibility. Or you may have heard me

preach about both Truths of God [See Sermon #77, Volume 2—DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY; #194, Volume 4—HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY and #207, Volume 4—SOVEREIGN GRACE AND MAN'S RESPONSIBILITY.] without any

attempt to "reconcile" them, as I believe that they have never been at enmity against one another and, therefore, there is no need for any reconciliation! It has been a great temptation to many good men to get to fighting about these Truths when they would have been better employed in preaching the Atoning Sacrifice of Christ. I believe that before the foundation

of the world, God chose in Christ all those whom He will eternally save. And I equally believe that whoever believes in the Lord Jesus Christ shall be eternally saved, that salvation is all of Grace and damnation is all of man's sin—that God will have the glory of every soul that is saved—and that every lost soul will be responsible for its own ruin.

I think my text also applies to those prophetic studies in which so many seem to lose their way. I am not much encouraged to follow their example when I see how the students of prophecy denounce each other and disprove each other's theories. There are some prophetic Truths that ought to be constantly preached, as for instance that the Lord will surely come again and that there will be a Final Judgment when the righteous shall have the full glories of Heaven, and

the wicked shall know the woes of Hell. But as to the dates of the various events foretold in the prophecies that are still unfulfilled, I think I have something better to do than to puzzle my brains over them. "Oh!" say some, "but we now have the right theory." So others thought 20 years ago! But it did not prove to be right, nor did the theory that was held a hundred years ago, or 200 years ago, or even more! Yet men go on building up their card house of speculation and Time comes and pushes it all over with his finger! I advise you to study Matthew, Mark, Luke and John—and to preach the crucified Savior of which the Gospels and Epistles will tell you! And when you get to the Revelation, keep it in its proper place and ask the Holy Spirit to teach you the meaning of its mysteries. May God save this generation from the follies of some of the generations that have preceded it—and may we be most of all concerned about being born-again, about faith in Jesus, about preaching His Gospel and following Him all the days of our life!

III. Now, lastly, THERE ARE MANY REASONS WHY WE SHOULD CONFINE OUR LIFE-WORK TO THE FOLLOWING OF CHRIST. And those reasons are these.

First, our powers are limited. Mine are, I know, and I should like to use what powers I have in the work of following Christ in preaching the Gospel and seeking to bring others to follow Him.

Next, our time is limited. We may all of us live but a very short time. And at the longest it will be but a brief life. I have heard of a minister who used to say that he would be thankful, in his last hours, that he had been enabled, by God's Grace, to spend the greater part of his time in inviting sinners to the Savior. And I should like to live—and I should like you, dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ, to live in such a way that when we come to die, we may be able to say, "There, that is the kind of life I would like to have lived, now that I am at the end of it." Suppose anyone should live to fight for the Baptist denomination? When he dies, men would say, "Well, he was a thorough Baptist and he fought well for his denomination." But that would be a poor wreath to lay on his coffin! Would you care to have a long Latin inscription on your tombstone recording the fact that you were always hammering away at

some important Doctrine? Or would you wish to have it said, "There lies a man who charmed a few Christian people with the deep spirituality of his teaching, but that was all he did"?

I covet and I think I am right in doing so, the honor of having it said of me, "That man lived to snatch sinners like brands from the burning." I hope some of you will have it said when you are gone, "That woman lived to bring her children to Christ. That girl lived to talk to those she met with about the dear Savior who had been so precious to her that she wished all others to enjoy the same blessing." Oh, that each one of us might live to glorify God! To be like an arrow shot from Christ's bow by His own pierced hand! To feel an impetus given to us to bear us right on to the center of the target of the Glory of God, nothing turning us aside, either to be thought good, or to be thought great, or to be thought learned, or to desire to gain honor or esteem among our fellow men—but just to glorify God by the conversion of sinners through the Holy Spirit's blessing resting upon our labors!

Having but little strength, it is best for us to use it all in one direction. Some men know too much to be powerful for anything. They are like water that is spread over the meadows and not like the stream that runs along in a narrow channel and, therefore, concentrates its energy and renders real service to mankind. "This one thing I do," is a good motto for any man, if he does that one thing well. And the one thing that I will seek to do shall be to glorify God by following Jesus and doing the work He has given me to do! For, my Brothers and Sisters, suppose that you and I should make out the mystery of predestination? Suppose we should become adepts at prophecy? Suppose we should become exceedingly learned in a thousand subjects and yet should go down to our graves without having ever glorified God? We should find no apology for our neglect in all that we had done! Nobody will be lost, as far as I know, through my getting a wrong theory of prophecy, but thousands may be saved if I know the Truth concerning Christ and Him Crucified and preach Him with all my might! I do not know that I shall love the Savior any the less if I make a mistake about some of the great mysteries of the Kingdom, but I do know that if I give myself up wholly to His service and am the means of bringing others to do the same, I shall have no regrets compared with those I should have felt if I had neglected this all-important matter. I charge all of you, men and women, in these evil days to keep close to Jesus! Follow Him with the utmost care, reverence and love. Follow Him with intense ardor and with all your heart, soul and strength—and make that the one thing for which you live! Do not let anything divert you from the straight path of obedience to your Lord, for to that you are called above everything else! If men come to you talking about mental culture and modern thought, stand firm to this—that you will follow Christ wherever He leads you!

I wonder what God would have each of us here do? You may think I am falling into Peter's error if I press this point upon you. I wonder what there is for us to do as a Church? Do you think, dear Friends, that we are doing all that we ought to do for this neighborhood?

We have heard about what our missionaries have been doing in foreign lands and most of us have something to do with that. But I think the principal point for us is—What is to be done in Newington? What is to be done for Christ all around this region? You tract-distributors, are you earnestly attending to your work? You Sunday school teachers, are you faithfully doing your work for God? I will not bid you forget the foreign field, but still, our first concern must be our own class, our own immediate neighborhood. Many of you have come from different parts of London—what are you doing for the district where you live? Every Christian should first seek the good of those nearest to his own door. Some of you have come from the country—what are you doing in your own village? You say that you have been hearing a man of God preach the Truth. That is quite right, but is that working for God? There is a young man over there who professes to be a follower of Christ and who often speaks at the debating club. Do you, My Friend, ever preach in the street, or teach in the Sunday school? Then I am ashamed of you! Or rather, are you not ashamed of yourself? There is a man over there who is making money. I do not say that he is doing wrong, but My Friend, have you ever consecrated to God the part which belongs to Him? If you keep it for yourself, it will canker all the rest!

I might say to someone here, "You ought to be taking a Bible class for young women." I might say to others, "You ought to be teaching in the Sunday school. You come here twice on the Lord's day, but you have no business to come here twice—you ought, once at least, to go to work for Christ." I am pleased with some whose consciences prick them so that they say, "Dear Pastor, do not imagine that we are forsaking you! We would be glad to be here, but we have been down at the lodging-houses, or down in Golden Lane, or over at Bethnal Green." That is right and I am glad when I see somebody else in their seats! With four or five thousand members in the Church, if they all come here at each service, where are our converts to come from? Am I to cast the Gospel net into the midst of the fish that are already caught? If you stay away to let a sinner come here in your place and if you are, yourself, seeking to bring sinners to Christ, you are doing two good things! I want everyone of you to be living to do good to your fellow men and seeking to save souls for the Glory of God! The enemies of the faith are very busy and very earnest—and they seem to use up all their material. The moment a man gets into the Church of Rome, there is sure to be something found for him to do and I want to see all of you used to the utmost of your power. You are free men and women and, therefore, not to be controlled by me. I do not prescribe what you are to do, but cannot you, as independent men and women, obey the sacred dictates of the Spirit of God and each of you drop into your proper place?

Give up all speculating, I beseech you—give up reading books merely for the sake of curiosity, and, in God's name, get to work for Him! The graves are filling, our cemeteries are filling, and Hell is filling too! Meanwhile, the dupes of Satan are compassing sea and land to do all the mischief that they can. If you really are what you say you are, the servant

of Him who wept over Jerusalem—if you are bought with the blood He shed on Calvary's Cross—I charge you to consecrate yourself, this very hour, to that form of Christian work to which your Master calls you and follow Him through evil report and good report! Follow Him in the path of duty and let nothing turn you aside from your life-work of glorifying God! May God bless you all, for Jesus' sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON: JOHN 21.

Verse 1. After these things Jesus showed Himself again to the disciples at the sea of Tiberias; and on this wise showed He Himself. Jesus loved to show Himself to His people. Of old, His delights were with the sons of men. So now that He had risen from the dead, He was not ashamed to visit His brethren and He did not disdain to make Himself known to them—and He will still show Himself to us after a spiritual fashion, if we sincerely desire to see Him.

2. There were together Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two other of His disciples. As John was the writer of this record, he did not put his own name there, but merely mentioned "the sons of Zebedee."

3. Simon Peter said unto them, I am going fishing. They said unto him, We will also go with you. Men who are in a right state of heart cannot willingly be idle. So, if these Apostles cannot preach for a time, they will go back to their old employment and seek to catch fish.

3. They went forth and immediately entered into a boat and that night they caught nothing. Brothers and Sisters, without Christ's Presence, that is what always happens—"they caught nothing." But notice what the next verse says.

4. But when the morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore: but the disciples knew not that it was Jesus. We must remember that a great change had taken place in Him and that the disciples were at some distance from the shore. They saw a person standing there, but they were not sure who it was.

5. Then Jesus said unto them, Children, have you any food? This is not an exact translation of our Savior's words. He might too readily have revealed His identity if He had spoken like that. His question was more like a common fisherman's salutation, "Lads, have you any food?"

5. They answered Him, No. Jesus likes us to admit that we do not possess anything of our own before He gives us the blessing He is waiting to bestow. He lets us see that the table is bare before He loads it with His bounty so that He may have all the praise and glory for what He gives us.

6. And He said unto them, Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you shall find some. They cast therefore, and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes. This is another proof of the difference between Christ's Presence and Christ's absence.

7. Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved (again John does not mention his own name) said to Peter, It is the Lord. "It is only He who could spy out the fish and only He who could fill the net with them. It is just His way of acting. 'It is the Lord.'" The eyes of true love are very quick. Peter was not the first to recognize Jesus—John was—for He loved Him most.

7. Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment (for he had taken it off) and did cast himself into the sea. He had such reverence for his Master that he would not appear before Him without a sufficient covering, yet he was in a hurry to get to Him. Peter always was in a hurry—yet he was grandly impetuous as a rule. I wish that some "slowpokes" had a little of his pace!

8, 9. And the other disciples came in the little boat, (for they were not far from land, but as it were two hundred cubits) dragging the net with fishes. As soon as they were come to land, they saw a fire of coals there and fish laid thereon, and bread. How that fire must have reminded Peter of his denial of his Lord! He saw his Master by the light of the charcoal fire—and that is how he saw Him on the night when he denied Him.

10, 11. Jesus said unto them, Bring of the fish which you have now caught. Simon Peter went up and drew the net to land full of great fishes, an hundred and fifty-three: and for all there were so many, yet was not the net broken. On the previous occasion when Peter's net was miraculously filled by Christ, we read that the net broke. That was Peter's own net, but this time I suppose it was not Peter's, but one that he had borrowed and probably he had no time to mend it, so the Master took care that it should not break. He always has His own ways of working—and they always fit the circumstances of the case and show His thoughtful care of His people.

12. Jesus said unto them, Come and dine. The Revised Version is more correct—"Come and break your fast"—

"Come and have your breakfast." [See Sermon #2072, Volume 35—BREAKFAST WITH JESUS.]

12-15. And none of the disciples dared ask Him, Who are You? knowing that it was the Lord. Jesus then came and took the bread and gave it to them, and likewise the fish. This is now the third time that Jesus showed Himself to His disciples, after that He was risen from the dead. So when they had dined. When they had broken their fast—but not until then, for Christ does not talk to men when their hunger might make them inattentive.

15. Jesus said to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, Do you love Me more than these? He had talked as if he did— "Although all shall be offended, yet will not I."

15. He said unto Him, Yes, Lord; You know that I love You. He was wise in not measuring his love in comparison with that of his fellow disciples, or in speaking of the quantity of it, but he affirmed that even Christ knew that he did really love Him.

15-17. He said unto hiim, Feed My lambs. He said to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, Do you love Me? He said unto Him, Yes, Lord; You know that I love You. He said unto Him, Feed My sheep. He said unto Him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, Do you love Me? Here is a lesson for all who would be pastors of Christ's flock. The first necessity of a true pastor is love to Christ. The second necessity of a true pastor is love to Christ. And the third necessity of a true pastor is love to Christ. A man who does not love the Great Shepherd cannot properly feed either His sheep or lambs. If his own heart is not right towards the Divine Owner of the sheep, he cannot be a true under-shepherd to Christ's flock.

17-19. Peter was grieved because He said unto him the third time, Do you love Me? And he said unto Him, Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You. Jesus said unto him, Feed My sheep. Verily, verily, I say unto you, When you were young, you gird yourself, and walked where you would: but when you shall be old, you shall stretch forth your hands, and another shall gird you, and carry you where you would not. This spoke He, signifying by what death he should glorify God. Peter was to stretch out his hands and be nailed to a cross as his Lord was.

19. And when He had spoken this, He said unto him, Follow Me. "That is to be your rule, whether you feed My sheep or lambs, or whether you stretch out your hands upon a cross and die as a martyr—"Follow Me." That is also the rule for all of us who love the Lord. O Lord, help us to obey it!

20-25. Then Peter, turning about, saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following; which also leaned on His breast at supper, and said, Lord, which is he that betrays You? Peter seeing him, said to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do? Jesus said unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to you? You follow Me. Then went this saying abroad among the brethren, that that disciple should not die: yet Jesus said not unto him, he shall not die; but, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to you? This is the disciple which testifies of these things, and wrote these things. And we know that His testimony is true. And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen