

Are You Mocked?

A Sermon

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Delivered by

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"Ye have shamed the counsel of the poor, because the Lord is his refuge."—[Psalm 14:6](#).

GOD'S Word divides the whole human race into two portions. There is the seed of the serpent, and the seed of the woman—the children of God, and the children of the devil—those who are by nature still what they always were, and those who have been begotten again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. There are many distinctions among men, but they are not much more than surface-deep. This one distinction, however, goes right through, and it is very deep. I may say that between the two classes, the saved and the unsaved, there is a great gulf fixed. There is as wide a difference between the righteous and the wicked as there is between the living and the dead. The Psalmist, David, in this particular Psalm calls one class of men fools, and another class the poor. You will observe that he begins by describing the fool, by which he does not mean one particular man, but the whole race as it is by nature—the whole of that portion of the human race that remains unregenerate. In our text he describes another class as the poor, in which he comprehends all the saved, all the godly, all the righteous, of whom our Redeemer hath said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Now from the very first, between the two seeds there has always been an enmity—an enmity which has never been mitigated, and never will. It displays itself in various ways, but it is always there. In some ages the enmity has burst forth into open persecution—Herod has sought the young child to destroy it; Haman has sought to destroy the whole generation of Israel; stakes have been erected, and the faithful have been burnt; racks and inhuman engines of cruelty have been fashioned by the art of man, through the malice of his heart, to exterminate, if it were possible, the children of the living God. For there is war—perpetually war to the knife—war ever between the two generations. At this particular time the warfare is not less bitter; but the restraints of Providence do not allow it to display itself as it once did, and it now generally takes the form of cruel mockings so that our text is as applicable to the present race as it was in David's time, "Ye have shamed the counsel of the poor, because the Lord is his refuge." The fool hath made a mock of the righteous man, called the poor man; and this has been the subject of his mockery, that the godly man has been fool enough as he calls him, to put his trust in God, and to make this the main point and purpose of his life. There may be some here who

have done this; all of us do it to some extent until we are new-born. We ridicule, if not with the tongue, yet in our heart, those who have made God their refuge, for when we begin to value the people of God, it is a sign of some degree of grace in us: "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren"; but until we come into that state of grace there is a hatred or contempt, more or less developed, against those who are resting in the living God.

Now I shall at this time first of all speak of *those who are mocked*; secondly, of *the mockers*; and thirdly, of *how those who are mocked might to behave* towards those who try to put them to shame. First, then, let us take the subject—the object—of the mockery of carnal minds.

I. WHO ARE MOCKED.

Here we have three points: "Ye have shamed the poor," that is, *the persons*; "the counsel of the poor," that is *the reasons* of their faith; then *their faith itself*, "because the Lord is his refuge."

To begin, it is very common for ungodly men to pour contempt upon God's people, the poor; and oftentimes they will do it by the use of these words. It so happens that many of God's people are poor in pocket, and how often do hear the observation, "Oh! these Methodists, these Presbyterians, these Baptists, they are a set of poor people, mechanics, and servant-girls and so on," and how often is that uttered with a sneer upon the lips! Well now, that is a fine thing to make fun of, isn't it, for, after all, what is there to be ashamed of in honest poverty? I will stand here and say that if I could stand to-morrow morning in Cheapside, and pick out a dozen poor men, and then if I were to pick out a dozen middle-class men, and then if I were to pick out a dozen rich men, I believe, as to character, they would be very much of a muchness. You shall go, if you will, and pick out at random twelve good princes, and *see if you could do it*; but I will pick you out twelve working men that shall be honest, and upright, and chaste—which great men are not always. The poor are no worse than the rich, and have no more right to be despised. And if it were true that all who fear God were poor, it might, perhaps, be rather to their credit than to their dishonour, for, at any rate, nobody would be able to say that their Dockets were lined with the result of fraud. If they were poor, they would, at any rate, be free from many of the accusations that might be brought against rich men. I care no more for one class than another, especially when I preach the gospel—you are all alike to me, one as the other—but this I will say, that of all jests and all sneers that is one of the most ridiculous and mean against godly people, because they are poor.

But the sneer then takes another form. It is not that they are poor in pocket, so much as that they are very poor in education. "Ah!" say they, "these people—well, what do they know? They are not philosophical; they are not amongst those who cultivate the higher walks of literature; they are mostly plain, simple-minded people, and, therefore, they believe

their Bibles." Well, I don't believe that. Amongst Christian people there are many men of as high an education as among any class. The mind of Newton found root in Scripture, and discovered depths which it could not fathom. But even if you say that, what of it? If these men have the wisdom which cometh from above, they have something that will last when the wisdom which is merely of this earth will have perished. Go, take the skull of the wise man in your hand, and look at it. Is it not as brown, is it not as ghastly a sight as the skull of the peasant? And what matters it to him, now that he lies among the clods of the valley, that once he spent his nights, with the lamp, poring into ancient tomes, or walked with his staff to heaven to measure the distance of the stars, or bored into the depths of the earth? It is all one to him, and if he is a lost soul, ah! who would not give the preference to the man that was learned in the kingdom of heaven beyond the man that was only learned in the things of earth? I see no great reason for jest on the subject therefore. And the sneer is, to say the least, ungenerous; for if the ungodly be so much the wiser, let them show their wisdom by not sneering at those who do not happen to possess their gifts, but who possess what is much more precious.

And then it will take another shape—this shaming of the poor because of their poverty. They will say, "Ah! but they are poor in spirit; they have not good ideas of themselves. Hear them—they are always confessing sinfulness and weakness, and they appear to go through the world without self-reliance, relying upon some unseen power, and always distrusting themselves, and they do not seem to have the pluck that the ungodly have. Why, we, we who know not God can drink, and they will stop where we can go. And we can let out an oath, but they are afraid. And there is many a song that we can sing that these fastidious folks would not dare to hear, and there is many an amusement which we can enjoy which they, poor creatures, are obliged to deny themselves." Ah! well, well, if they choose to be miserable, I do not know that you could do better than pity them. It would be a pity to be angry with them for not enjoying what you enjoy. Don't, therefore, sneer. But, after all, sir, you know very well that there is more manliness in refusing to sin than there is in sinning; that there is more pluck in saying, "No, I cannot," than there is in being led by the devil, first into one sin, and then into another. And these men of the world that have this high spirit, and are so bold and brave—what is it better than the high spirit of a lunatic, who dares to put his hand in the fire? I dare not do that which would dishonour God. I am thankful to be such a coward that I dare not venture it. But you shall not say that we are cowardly. Lived there ever a more earnest Christian than Havelock? Were there ever better soldiers than his Highlanders, who learned to bow the knee before Jehovah? But, O sirs, they could fight; they were men brave enough in the day of battle, though they could not be brave in the way in which the ungodly are. Talk to us Christians about want of courage! Do you ever wish to see the Ironsides again in England, with old Oliver Cromwell at their head? We hate war, but still we quote these instances to show that a man can bow before God like a sneaking

Presbyterian, as you call him, and yet rise up and drive the Cavaliers, like chaff before the wind. It is not true that we are poor in spirit in the sense that is often attached to us. We have as much of courage of the right kind as the ungodly have. But, sir, we can afford to bear your jest. We *are* afraid to be damned; we *are* afraid to take a leap into the dark future, with wrath upon our heads; we *do* tremble before the living god, though we will tremble nowhere else. We count it no dim honour to fear him who is a consuming fire. But this is commonly the cry, "They're a poor set; they're a poor set of milksops." "Ye have shamed the counsel of the poor."

But now the next point—a very common jest—is *the reasons that Christian men give* for being Christians. You notice the text says, "the counsel of the poor," for the Christian, when he becomes a believer in Christ, takes counsel about it. He does not believe his Bible because his grandmother did; he does not accept the Word of God because some priest has told him it is true; he takes counsel, and considers. This counsel, however, is generally sneered at, as though there were no reasonableness in it; therefore, let me just state it.

The Christian has taken counsel *with his own weakness*. He says, "I cannot trust myself; I am very apt to go wrong; therefore, will I put myself into the great Father's hands, and pray him to lead and guide me. I will not go to my business in the morning until I have asked for his protection, nor will I close the day without asking still that I may be under his care." His reason is because he feels himself to be a weak and fallible creature, and he wants protection. That looks to me to be very reasonable, but to some it seems to be the theme for laughter.

The Christian has next taken counsel *with his observations*. He has looked about in the world, and he could not see that ungodly men derive pleasure from their sins. He hears them shouting loudly enough sometimes, but he knows who hath woe, and who hath redness of the eyes?"they that tarry long at the wine," men of drink; "they that go to seek mixed wine." He has seen the ungodly in their quieter moments, and observed how unsatisfactory all their best things are, and, upon the whole, he considers that what the world offers to its devotees is not worth his seeking for. Moreover, the Christian man has sometimes seen the sinner die, and' having seen him die, he has discovered that there is nothing in the principles of ungodliness to give a man comfort in his dying hour. Some of us have heard language from ungodly men in their deaths that we would hardly like to repeat, the very memory of which makes our blood chill. I remember once being at the bedside of a man who alternately cursed and asked me to pray. I could not pray as I would desire. I did what I could, and thee he would tell me it was no good; his, sins would never be forgiven him; and then he would turn again to blasphemy. It was a dread sight. I never saw—and I have seen many ungodly people did never saw one die of whom I could say, "Let me die the death of this sinner, and let my last end be like his"; nor do I think such sights are ever or anywhere to be seen. The Christian man, therefore, having taken counsel of that, looks for something better that may be his

stay in the time of trouble, and be his comfort in the time of his departure out of this life. That looks to me to be good reasoning. I think it is, and yet there are some who sneer at it.

The Christian man has also taken counsel *with the Bible*. Believing it to be God's Word, he feels that one word of God is worth a ton weight of human reason. He would sooner have a drachm of revelation than have all the weight of authority that could be brought to bear upon his mind. And assuredly, if God be true, he is not incorrect in his judgment.

Moreover, the Christian man has taken counsel *with his own conscience*, and he finds that when he walks near to God, he is most happy. He discovers that, in keeping God's commandments, there is great reward, and though he does not expect to be saved by his works, yet he finds himself most sustained when he walks most carefully and jealously before the world, and when most near to his heavenly Father. Taking such counsel as this, and finding it so much to his own inward advantage, I cannot blame him that he still puts his trust where he does.

Moreover, the Christian man takes counsel *with his own experience*. There are some of us who are as sure that God hears our prayers as we are sure that twice two make four. It is to us not a conjecture, no, nor even a belief, but a matter of fact. We are habitually in the custom of going to God and asking for what we want, and receiving it at his hands; and it is no use anybody telling us that prayer is useless. We find it constantly useful. It is of no avail for people to say these are happy coincidences. They are very strange indeed—strange coincidences when they occur again and again, and again, and God continually hears our prayers. The witness that the Christian has to the truth of his religion does not lie in the books of the learned. He is thankful for them, but his chief witness lies here—in his own heart, in his own inward experience. Now we always say that you must speak as You find. The Christian has found God faithful to him, has found him support him in the time of trial, has found him answer his prayers in the hour of distress; and this is the counsel that he has taken for himself, and he, therefore, for these reasons relies upon God. Well, sneer as some may, I think we will do with our trust in God, my brethren, as the natives of a certain American State are said to have done when they, instead of making a law-book, agreed that the State should be governed by the laws of God, until they had time to make better—we will continue to put our trust in God until somebody shall show us something better; we will still pray, and get answered; we will still bear our troubles before God, and get rid of them; we will still rely upon Christ and find comfort until somebody shall bring us something better, and it won't be just yet; and, until then, sneers and laughter shall not much affect us.

And now, once more, the great point at which the ungodly mostly aim their scoffs is *the actual faith of the believer*. He has made God to be his refuge. And what, what do they say, Why, "It's all canting talk." I do not particularly know what that means, but if ever Christian men are accused of being cants, they can make the retort by saying that the canting is quite as much on one side as the other, for of all cants the cant against cant is the worst

cant that ever was canted. But surely if a man shall speak the truth in other things, and you know he does, it is not fair to say he does not speak the truth when he says he puts his trust in God. The man is not insincere.

"Oh!" but they will say, "it is ridiculous—a man trusting in God." Yes, but you do not think it ridiculous to trust in yourselves. Many of you don't think it ridiculous to trust in some public man. Half of the world is trusting in its riches, and is there anything ridiculous in leaning upon that arm that bears the earth's huge pillars up? If so, ridicule on. To trust weakness seems to you to be sense. I say to trust Qmnipotence is infinitely superior wisdom, and we will continue to trust in God, for to us it seems to be no absurdity.

"But," they will say, "what does your God do for you? Some of you Christian people are very poor; some of you very sick—very much in trouble." Mark you, our God never said we should not be, but, on the contrary, told us it should be so. What he does for us is this—in six troubles he is with us, and in the seventh he does not forsake us. He never made us a promise that we should be rich; he never made us a promise of constant help; on the contrary, it is written, "In the world ye shall have tribulation." But our God does this for us, that we look upon those troubles as being so much fire that shall purge our silver: so much of the winnowing fan that shall drive away the chaff and leave the corn clean. We glory in tribulation and rejoice in the afflictions which God has laid upon us. Still, that will always be a point of jest. But there is one remark I will make before I leave this. I should like any man who doubts the reality of faith in God to do go down to Bristol, and go to Kingsdown and see the orphan-houses there, which Mr. George Muller has built. Now there they stand—substantial brick and mortar, and inside there are 2,500 boys and girls. They eat a good deal, want a good deal of clothing, and so on. And how comes the money? All the world knows, and no man can gainsay it, that it comes in answer to prayer, and as the result of Mr. Muller's faith—that, that faith has often been tried, but has never failed. What God has done for Mr. Muller, he has done for scores of us after our own way, and in our own walk, and we glorify his name. Though that stands as a palpable witness, we are not less able to say than Mr. Muller, there is a God that heareth prayer, and whoever may jest at faith, we continue in it still, and glory in it, and rejoice. Now this is what is the matter of jest for the mockers. But my time flies, so I must now speak a few words only upon:—

II. WHO ARE THE MOCKERS?

Our text says they are fools. Well, that is my opinion; but it does not signify what my opinion may be. The point that does signify, however, is that it is God's opinion of every man who is not a believer or trusting in his God. In plain English, every such man is a fool. That is God's opinion of him—God that cannot err—who is never too severe, but who speaks the literal truth—that he is a fool. Let me add, it will be that man's opinion of himself one day. If he shall ever be converted—oh! that he may!—he will think himself a fool to have been so long an unbeliever; and if not, when the truth of Scripture shall be proved, and he

shall be cast into hell, then will he see his folly, and own himself to be what God said before he was, namely, a fool. O sir, do not run the risk. There was an observation made by a countryman that is well worth quoting, when he said to the unbeliever. "I have two strings to my bow; you have not. Now," said he, "suppose there is no God, I am as well off as you are; but suppose there is, where are you?" So can we say, "Suppose, after all, our religion should be a delusion. It has made us very happy up till now; but as for you—suppose it should be true? Ah! where are you then, who have despised it and have turned away from God?" May each man who does not believe in his God know how foolish he is. Now as I gave you the reasons for the poor man's faith, let me give you the reasons why the unbeliever usually is an unbeliever. It is principally because *he knows not God*; and none of us like to trust a person we don't know. He knows nothing of the Most High, has never communed with him, nor even seen him in his works; and, therefore, he cannot trust him. The unbeliever will also say that he cannot trust God because he cannot see him, as if everything that is real must, therefore, be the object of sight as if there were not forces in nature about which no doubts can be entertained that are far beyond the ken of sight. They will also say that they cannot trust God because *they cannot understand him*. If we could understand God, he would not be God, for it is a part of the nature of God that he should be infinitely greater than any created mind. I have heard of a man who went into a smith's smithy one day, and he began complaining of the wet weather. "Why," said he, "smith, you talk about Providence! There is too much wet by half. If there were any Providence, it would manage things a great deal better. There is the wheat nearly all spoilt, and the barley is going. I tell you," says he, "there is no Providence; things don't go right." The smith took no notice of his observations, but after a while walked across the smithy, and took down an odd-looking tool which he used in his craft, and said to him, "Do you know what that is used for?" "No," said he, "I don't." "Look at it; look at it, and find out." He did look, and then he said he did not know. The smith put up that tool, and took down another, an ugly-looking tool, and says he, "Do you know what I use that for?" "No," says the man, "I cannot conceive what you do with that." "You can't! Look at it, and see; perhaps you will find out." He looked at the thing, and then he said, "No, I really do not know what is the use you put that to." The smith put it up, and then walked leisurely back and said, "You are a great dunce. You do not know the use of my tools, and I am only a smith; and you set up to judge of the use of God's tools, and say what is right and what is wrong. You don't even know about a smithy, and yet, you pretend to know about the whole world. It is a most unreasonable reason not to believe in God because I cannot understand him. The reason at the bottom is this—the ungodly man does not trust God, because he is God's enemy. He knows there is a quarrel between the two. He has broken the law, he has become an enemy to his Maker; and how shall a man trust his enemy? Besides, he knows that God won't do what he would like God to do. He would like God to give him good health to go on in sin; he would like him to make him happy in his lusts; he would like

him to let him live a sinner and die a saint; he would like him to shape the world so that man might take his sinful pleasure and live as he liked, and yet, after all, receive the wages of a righteous life; and as God won't do that—won't bring himself down to the sinner's taste—therefore, the sinner says, "I cannot trust God," and then he turns round and laughs at the man who can, just to quiet his own conscience and keep the little sense there is within him from rebelling against him.

Now I spoke of the Christian's faith; just let me speak of the unbeliever's faith. It takes much more faith to be an unbeliever than to be a believer. I am sure the philosophies of the present age which are currently set forth would require a deal more credulity than I am the master of. I can believe Scripture readily, and without violence to my soul, but I could not accept the theory even of the development of our race, which is so much cried up nowadays, nor a great many other theories. They seem to me to require a far greater sweep of credulity than anything that is written in the Word of God. To the ungodly man *this* seems reasonable. "It is reasonable to trust a great man, and to hope that he will be the maker of you; it is reasonable to trust your own reason—to believe you can steer your own course; it is reasonable to be a self-made man, self-reliant; it is reasonable to look after the main chance; it is reasonable to get all the money you can; it is reasonable to put your confidence in it (of course, it has not any wings, and won't fly away); it is a reasonable and discreet thing to live in this world as if you were to live for ever in it, and never think of another world at all." To a great many it seems to be philosophy to get as far away from God as ever you possibly can, and then you will get to be a wise man that the creature is wisest when it forgets its creator. That is the world's creed, and I can only say that if they scoff at our creed, we can fairly enough scoff at theirs. Trust in yourselves! Why, you are fools to think of such a thing. Trust in your wealth! Have you not seen rich men disappear? How about a few years ago when—we must remember it well, and remember it sorrowfully—how a panic comes, and down go the towers of the great, and those who seemed to be rich burst like bubbles And oh! the joys of earth! How soon are they scattered, how speedily do they disappear! What are they, after all, but a will o' the wisp? If it be a wise thing to live in this world, and never think of dying, God grant that I may be a fool. If it be a wise thing to think all about this poor body, and never about my immortal soul, may I never know such wisdom. If it be a wise thing to go into the future as a leap in the dark, believing nothing, and only by that means kept from fear, may I never know such philosophy. Truly it seems to me to be wisdom that I, a creature who certainly did not make myself, should think of my Creator; that I, a sinner, should accept that blessed way of salvation, which is laid before me in the Word of God; that I, weak and unable to steer my own course, should put my hand into the great Father's hand and say, "Lead me, guide me by thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory." This may be jested at and sneered at, but it can bear a sneer and will outlive the mocker. Now, lastly:—

III. HOW OUGHT THOSE WHO ARE MOCKED BEHAVE towards those that at mock at them? Well, the first thing is, *never yield an inch*. You young men in the great firms of London, you working men that work in the factories—you are sneered at. Let them sneer. If they can sneer you out of your religion, you have not got any worth having. Remember you can be laughed into hell, but you can never be laughed out of it. A man may by ridicule give up what religion he thought he had, but if he cast away his soul, his companions who caused his loss cannot help him in the day of his travail, and anguish, and bitterness, before the throne of the Most High. Why be ashamed? "They called me a saint." I remember once a person calling me a saint in the street. All I thought was, "I wish he could prove it." Once a man, passing me in the street, said, "There is John Bunyan." I think I felt six inches taller at the least. I was delighted to be called by such a name as that. "Oh! but they will point at you." Cannot you bear to be pointed at? "But they will chaff you." Chaff—let them chaff you. Can that hurt a man that is a man? If you are a molluscos creature that has no backbone, you may be afraid of jokes, and jeers, and jests; but if God has made you upright, stand upright and be a man. Moreover, there is one thing you should always do when you are ashamed—pray. The next verse in the Psalm is, "Oh! that God would turn the captivity of Zion." The best refuge for a believer in times of persecution is his secret resort to God. Let him to on his kneed and say, "My Lord, I have been counted worthy to be spoken ill of for thy name's sake. Help me to bear it. Now is my time of trial. Strengthen me to bear this reproach. Grant that it may be no heavy burden to me, but may I rather rejoice in it for thy name's sake." God will help you, beloved.

Then next to that, *pray always, most for those who treat you worst*. Make them the constant subjects of your prayer.

And then I would say, in your actions *prove the sincerity of your prayers by extra kindness towards those who are unkind to you*. Heap coals of fire upon their head. That is an expression not always explained. When the crucible is to be brought to a great heat, and the metal to be thoroughly melted, it is not enough for the coals all around it to glow. The silversmith that is desiring to melt it thoroughly will heap them so that the metal shall be all surrounded by flames. Do so, I pray you, with any of your enemies; heap kindnesses upon them. A Christian woman had often prayed for a very ungodly and unkind husband, but her prayers were not heard. However she did this, she treated him more kindly than she had ever done before. If there was any little thing that she could think of that would please his palate, if she had to deny herself, that would be on the table. She kept the house scrupulously comfortable, and did all she could. And one day someone said to her, "How is it that you, with such a husband can act so towards him?" "Well," she said, "I hope I shall win his soul yet, but if not"—and then the tears came in her eyes—all the happiness he will have will be in this life, and so I will let him have all I can possibly give him, since he has no happiness in the life to come." Do that with the ungodly. Lay yourself out to oblige and serve them. Let

it be known of you that the best way to get a good turn out of you is to do you a bad turn. "Oh!" says one, "it is too hard. Tread on a worm, and it will turn." And is a worm to be an example to a Christian? Christ Jesus, art thou not better for an exemplar than a poor worm that creeps into the earth? What did our Saviour do but pray for his murderers? The blood they shed redeemed them that shed it. We have heard the old story of the sandal-wood tree that perfumes the axe that cuts it. Do you so, O Christian! Perfume with your love the axe that wounds you. Be like the anvil that never strikes the hammer again, but yet the anvil wears out many hammers by its indomitable patience. Be patient, be courteous, be kind—in a word, Christ-like; and how know you that these very persons who hate you most to-day will not love you well to-morrow, and come together with you to the communion table, and together rejoice in our blessed Saviour?

Now if I have seemed to preach too harshly to-night, it is not so in my heart. Oh! how I wish you all, everyone without exception, knew what a blessed life the Christian life is! I would, not lie for God himself, but I speak the truth to you. I never knew what perfect peace was until I looked to Christ upon the cross, and rested my soul on him. I have had trials, and have suffered bitter pains, but I have always found consolation when I have turned my eyes to my bleeding Saviour, and have given myself up again to the great Father's hands. He is a blessed Lord. I serve a good Master. Trust him, give your hearts up to him, and if you have spoken against his people, or rebelled against his love, he is willing to receive you. He has no hard word to say to returning ones. Come to him; come and welcome. Come just now, and the Lord receive you, for his mercy's sake. Amen.