

Historical Reflection

The Minister In These Times

By Charles Haddon Spurgeon



Beloved brethren, I desire, on this occasion, to say something that shall be suitable for the times. I have never, according to the current phrase, preached *to* the times, but yet I would speak *for* the times, believing that a timely word now may bless all times to come. The times impress me in so many ways, and in such various modes, that I must take up a roving commission, and touch briefly upon a wide range of matters, instead of confining myself to one subject. Accept from me "here a little, and there a little," instead of much upon one subject.

First, let us reflect upon our Lord's position towards us. Here we have many points which must be boldly maintained in our preaching. Be assured that we cannot be right in the rest, unless we think rightly of HIM. In forming your system of astronomy, where do you put the sun? If you are not clear on that cardinal matter, your scheme will be a failure. If you have not found out the true "tabernacle for the sun," I am not very particular as to where you put Mars or Jupiter. Where is Christ in your theological system? How does He stand in your thoughts? Whereabouts is Jesus in reference to yourself, and your work, and your fellow-men?

Many are the aspects under which we must regard our Divine Lord, but I must always give the greatest prominence to His saving character as *Christ our Sacrifice and Sin-bearer*. If ever there was a time when we should be clear, pronounced, and vehement upon this point, it is now. Now the banner of the cross must lead the way. We cannot afford to put the atonement upon the shelf as a truth to be taken for granted, and left among the curiosities of unpractical belief. We cannot now afford to use orthodox words and phrases upon this subject as one might repeat the language of a liturgy; we must livingly and intensely believe the truth ourselves, and we must enforce it with the full energy of our being. The vital truth of our Lord's expiation must be preached often, clearly, and with emphasis; and, if it be not so, we have not correctly learned Christ, neither shall we successfully teach Him. To attempt to preach Christ without His cross, is to betray Him with a kiss.

I observe that certain persons claim to believe in the atonement, but they will not say what they mean by it. May not this mean that really they have no clear knowledge of it; and, possibly, no real faith in it? Every man has a theory of what he knows; at least, he can give a statement of what he understands. We have heard of the men of Athens, and of their altar erected "to the unknown God": in England, we have philosophical people who believe in an unknown atonement. We conceive that, in this way, they "ignorantly worship." Robertson, of Brighton, was orthodox compared with many in this advanced age; but one said of him that he taught that our Lord did something or other, which in some way or other was more or less connected with our salvation. Flimsy as that was, it is better than the doctrine of this hour. Some now think it absurd to believe that what was done at Calvary, nineteen centuries ago, can have any relation to the sins of today. Others, who speak not quite so wildly, yet deny that our sins could be laid on the Lord Jesus, and that His righteousness could be imputed to us; this, they say, would be immoral. The ethical side of the atonement is frequently held, and beautifully and strikingly shown to the people; but we are not satisfied with this one-sided view of the great subject. Whatever may be the shadow of the atonement, by which we mean its ethical influence, we believe that there was a substance in the atonement; and if that substance be removed, the shadow is gone also.

We have no home-made theory; but our solemn witness is, that He "His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree." Even if it be called immoral, as some have impudently asserted, we yet believe that God "hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." "The chastisement of our peace was upon Him," for "the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all" It would do us all good to look through the texts, in the Old and New Testaments, which refer to this fundamental truth; they are many, and definite. If we use language in its natural sense, we cannot get away from the assured belief that the Scripture teaches us to come to God through Jesus Christ, believing that He took our sin upon Himself, and suffered on its account, that He might render to God's moral government a recompense for the dishonor which man's rebellion had put upon it. Through His blood, there is forgiveness; and by reason of His vicarious satisfaction, guilt is put away, and the believer is "accepted in the Beloved."

Those who set aside the atonement as a satisfaction for sin, also murder the doctrine of justification by faith. They must do so. There is a common element which is the essence of both doctrines; so that, if you deny the one, you destroy the other. Modern thought is nothing but an attempt to bring back the legal system of salvation by works. Our battle is the same as that which Luther fought at the Reformation. If you go to the very ground and root of it, grace is taken away, and human merit is substituted. The gracious act of God in pardoning sin is excluded, and human effort is made all in all, both for past sin and future hope. Every man is now to set up as his own savior, and the atonement is shelved as a pious fraud. I will not foul my mouth with the unworthy phrases which have been used in reference to the substitutionary work of our Lord Jesus Christ; but it is a sore grief of heart to note how these evil things are tolerated by men whom we respect.

We shall not cease, dear brethren, in our ministry, most definitely and decidedly to preach the atoning sacrifice; and I will tell you why I shall be sure to do so. I have not personally a shadow of a hope of salvation from any other quarter: I am lost if Jesus be not my Substitute. I have been driven up into a corner by a pressing sense of my own personal sin, and have been made to despair of ever doing or being such that God can accept me in myself. I must have a righteousness, perfect and Divine; yet it is beyond my own power to create. I find it in Christ: I read that it will become mine by faith, and by faith I take it. My conscience tells me that I must render to God's justice a recompense for the dishonor that I have done to His law, and I cannot find anything which bears the semblance of such a recompense till I look to Christ Jesus. Do I not remember when I first looked to Him, and was lightened? Do I not remember how often I have gone as a sinner to my Savior's feet, and looked anew at His wounds, and believed over again unto eternal life, feeling the old joy repeated by the deed? Brethren, I cannot preach anything else, for I know nothing else. New dogmas may or may not be true; but of the truth of this doctrine, I am sure.

If anybody here is preaching the atonement, but does not like it, I dare not advise him to cease preaching it, but the words tremble on my lips. I am firmly persuaded that the unwilling or cold-hearted preacher of any doctrine is its worst enemy. It comes to this, in the long run, that the wounds of truth in the house of its false friends are worse than those given it by foes. If you do not love the cross in your heart's core, you had better let it alone. I can truly say that I preach the atonement *con amore*, with all my heart. Some seem to think that we poor souls, who are of the Puritanic school, are "cabin'd, cribb'd, confined" by harsh dogmas, from which we would gladly escape. They imagine that we have to check every rising aspiration of our nobler selves, so as to preserve the tyranny of a certain iron system. John Calvin is supposed to ride us like a nightmare, and we lead dogs' lives under his lash. Brethren, it is far otherwise. Little do these slanderers know of our happiness and peace. If they feel more joy in preaching than we do, their felicity is great; but, from their tone and style, I should greatly question it. Observers will have noticed that the joyous element has gone out of many pulpits. The preacher does not enjoy his own subject, and seldom speaks of having been in the Spirit while he was discoursing. He likes twenty minutes' preaching a great deal better than forty; and he is peculiarly apt to merge his two week-night services into one. Nobody enjoys modern doctrine, for there is nothing to enjoy. The people have to do their best with that soup of which our friend spoke last night so admirably,—the soup made from a borrowed bone, which had been lent out for a similar purpose on six previous days, so that the flavor of meat no longer remained upon it. No, my brothers; let our opponents dismiss from their minds all pity for our enslaved

condition under the old gospel. We are the free men, whom the Lord makes free, and all are slaves besides. I would like to rise from my bed, during the last five minutes of my life, to bear witness to the Divine sacrifice and the sin-atoning blood. I would then repeat those words which speak the truth of substitution most positively, even should I shock my hearers; for how could I regret that, as in Heaven my first words would be to ascribe my salvation to my Master's blood, my last act on earth was to shock His enemies by a testimony to the same fact?

Next, we hold that Christ Jesus is *the sole Mediator and High Priest*. And this makes us look with indignation upon the claims of superstition. We have in England still, what we thought, in our younger days, had become extinct, namely, the gospel of priestcraft, the priestcraft of old Rome, without its venerableness of age. There are men among us who claim to be priests in a sense other than that in which all believers are priests unto God. According to this dream, our Lord Jesus is not, in Himself, an all-sufficient Mediator; that is to say, He may go a certain distance Godward; but, manward, between sinful man and the Lord Christ, there is a gap which can only be filled by a participator in a fancied apostolical succession. Of course, the sacraments, duly administered, are described as certain conduits of grace. Still we hear the words, "Baptism, wherein I was made a member of Christ, a child of God, and an inheritor of the Kingdom of Heaven." In priestly hands, bread and wine undergo a miraculous change, very near akin to Popish transubstantiation. Sacraments are magnified, because they are administered by priests, and thus they are but a footstool upon which the priest can mount a little higher. The church, the altar, the priest, these are cried up beyond measure; yet these are not our Lord Jesus, but rivals to His priesthood. We hear it asserted, and our poor are continually taught it, that anyone who undertakes to teach the gospel, though he can prove his doctrine from the Bible, and may have an evident blessing resting on his ministry, is to be denounced as a schismatic, unless he has received episcopal laying on of hands. To break bread together as believers in the Lord Jesus, is not allowable to ordinary Christians; and if they dare to do so, they are guilty of schism,—an awful crime, which would seem to be several degrees worse than adultery or murder. You might be forgiven, and it might even be difficult to keep you from the sacraments, though guilty of fornication; but schism, if persevered in, puts you beyond hope.

Brethren, let us bear most earnest protests against this revived superstition. Let us tolerate nothing between the soul and Christ. It may be that, in London, this priestly assumption does not come so closely and vexatiously under your notice; but many brethren in this room have to see it before their eyes every day, and to feel its iron hand laid upon their poorer people. Wherever they go, they find claims put forth which uplift a certain class of men into Brahmins, whose blessing is indispensable. Sinners may not come to Christ directly, on their own account; the way to salvation is set forth as being by the appointed priest. Earnestly protest against this error. Even when it is accompanied by a measure of gospel teaching, it is deadly.

We must be zealous to have no measure of complicity in this superstition. My brethren, be not priests yourselves. It is very possible to give yourselves the airs of hierarchs, even though you are avowedly nothing more than Nonconformist pastors. There is a style of dress, the affectation of it is not praiseworthy. There is a style of language, the imitation of it is not commendable. There is an assumption of superiority, looking down upon the common people as mere laity; this piece of pompousness is ridiculous. Avoid the way of certain clerics who seem intent on making their people feel that a minister is a dignified individual, and that the rest of the members of the church should hardly venture to differ from him. Say what we like about all believers in Christ being a generation of priests, we still find vain fellows among us who would be thought of as possessors of a mystic specialty. Our office, as pastors, deserves to be respected, and will be if properly carried out; but I have observed that some who are very anxious to magnify their office, really try to magnify themselves. Yet, as the official has gone up, the man has gone down. One has wondered how so small a man has obtained so great an office. I heard, yesterday, a question to which I have not yet found a satisfactory answer; it was this: "Which is worse, the man who can preach and won't preach, or the man who cannot preach and will preach?" We have, I fear, some of the latter sort among us; but if they suppose that the mere fact of their being chosen to a pastorate has endowed them with peculiar powers, they deceive themselves.

Let me say, very softly and whisperingly, that there are little things among ourselves which must be carefully looked after, or we shall have a leaven of Ritualism and priesthood working in our measures of

meal. In our revival services, it might be as well to vary our procedure. Sometimes shut up that inquiry-room. I have my fears about that institution if it be used in permanence, and as an inevitable part of the services. It may be a very wise thing to invite persons, who are under concern of soul, to come apart from the rest of the congregation, and have conversation with godly people; but if you should ever see that a notion is fashioning itself that there is something to be got in the private room which is not to be had at once in the assembly, or that God is more at that penitent form than elsewhere, aim a blow at that notion at once. We must not come back by a rapid march to the old way of altars and confessionals, and have Romish trumpery restored in a coarser form. If we make men think that conversation with ourselves or with our helpers is essential to their faith in Christ, we are taking the direct line for priestcraft. In the gospel, the sinner and the Savior are to come together, with none between. Speak upon this point very clearly, "You, sinner, sitting where you are, believing on the Lord Jesus Christ, shall have eternal life. Do not stop till you pass into an inquiry-room. Do not think it essential to confer with me. Do not suppose that I have the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, or that these godly men and women associated with me can tell you any other gospel than this, 'He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life.'"

In the next place, let us see to it that we set forth our Lord Jesus Christ as *the infallible Teacher*, through His inspired Word. I do not understand that loyalty to Christ which is accompanied by indifference to His words. How can we reverence His person, if His own words and those of His apostles are treated with disrespect? Unless we receive Christ's words, we cannot receive Christ; and unless we receive His apostles' words, we do not receive Christ; for John saith, "He that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error." We must love and reverence all the teaching of our Lord; and we build our houses on the sand if we do not. It is as important to know Christ as the truth, as it is to know Christ as the way and the life. Some excellent brethren seem to think more of the life than of the truth; for when I warn them that the enemy has poisoned the children's bread, they answer, "Dear brother, we are sorry to hear it; and, to counteract the evil, we will open the window, and give the children fresh air." Yes, open the window, and give them fresh air, by all means. You cannot do a better thing, in view of many purposes; but, at the same time, this ought you to have done, and not to have left the other undone. Arrest the poisoners, and open the windows, too. While men go on preaching false doctrine, you may talk as much as you will about deepening their spiritual life, but you will fail in it. While you do one good thing, do not neglect another. Instead of saying that the life is more important, or the truth is more important, or the way is more important, let us be united in the firm belief that they are each one equally important, and that one cannot be well sustained and thoroughly carried out without the rest.

Some quit the teaching of Christ out of sheer wantonness, and childish love of novelty. To younger brethren, false doctrine comes as an infantile disease, a sort of inevitable spiritual measles. I wish them well through with the disorder, and I trust it will leave nothing bad behind it. With deep anxiety, I have watched over minds infected with this raging epidemic; and I have rejoiced as I have seen the rash of unbelief come out beautifully, and have heard the patient say, "Thank God, I shall never go back to *that* any more." Still, it is a pity that so many should find it needful to traverse the foul way which has bemired others. They remind me of a certain worldly lady, to whom her minister, remarking her great gaiety, said, "Solomon has said, 'Vanity of vanities; all is vanity.'" "Yes," she replied, "I know what Solomon has said; but he found it out by his own personal experience, and I should like to do the same." She was no Solomon, assuredly; for they who have wisdom will profit by the experience of others. If you have seen others go abroad for wool, and come home shorn, prudence would suggest that you need not go also.

Some fall into doubt through an inward crookedness. Certain men start new doctrines because "something is rotten in the state of Denmark," and out of rottenness fungoid growths must come. You may have read Pliny's "Natural History." If you have not read it, you need not do so, for the history is not generally natural, but fabulous. Pliny tells us that, when the elephant goes to a pool of water, and sees himself in it, he is moved with such disgust at his own ugliness, that he straightway stirs the water, and makes it muddy, that he may not see himself. Such an elephant never lived; but I have seen men who have been very comparable to it. Holy Scripture has not agreed with them,—so much the worse for Holy Scripture! Such-and- such doctrines do not suit their tastes, so they must be misrepresented, or denied. An unregenerate heart lies at the bottom of "modern thought." Men are down-grade in doctrine because

they were never put on the up-grade by the renewal of their minds.

Some, I doubt not, have tinkered up Christ's teachings, and Christ's gospel, from a desire to do more good. Things are allowed to be said and done at revivals which nobody could defend. Do you notice, at the present moment, the way the gospel is put? I am uttering no criticism upon anyone in particular, but I continually read the exhortation, "Give your heart to Christ." The exhortation is good, but do not suffer it to cover over the gospel word: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." In the Sunday-school, the teaching often is, "Dear children, love Jesus." Now, this is not the gospel. The love of Jesus comes as a fruit, but the gospel is, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." If we think that we shall do more good by substituting another exhortation for the gospel command, we shall find ourselves landed in serious difficulties. If, for a moment, our improvements seem to produce a larger result than the old gospel, it will be the growth of mushrooms, it may even be the growth of toadstools; but it is not the growth of trees of the Lord. Let us keep close to Christ as our infallible Teacher in these days of peril, and be exceedingly jealous of the truth, else we may be duped, as Pompeii tricked certain cities that would not admit his troops. He said, "I don't ask you to allow my armies to be billeted upon you; but here are a few sick and wounded men, for whom I ask that you will allow them to rest among you." When the invalids were within the walls, they opened the gates, and the inhabitants were easily subdued. Keep out the little errors for which sympathy is asked; or, if not, your citadel will be captured before you are aware of the attack. Stand fast in the faith once for all delivered to the saints, and let no man spoil you by philosophy and vain deceit.

Next, brethren, we must growingly insist that *Christ is the one Law-giver and only Ruler in the Church*. We have systems of religion among us in which the whole organization is an invention; it could not have been discovered in the Bible, but has been brought to it to have a text hung round its neck as a label. We have, for our neighbors, religionists who would hardly attempt to prove that their system was ever sanctioned by our Lord and His apostles. This has been the case for so long a period that we have been obliged to tolerate all kinds of things; but to tolerate is not the same thing as to approve and imitate. We should, in our own churches, keep to apostolic precedent, and follow the rule of Christ in all things. No venerable name is sufficient authority for going aside from Holy Scripture. "To the law and to the testimony;" if a doctrine or a ceremony is not there, it is nowhere for you and for me. Our sole authority is the Word of the Lord.

Worse still will it be if we dare to make omissions in the known rules of Christ. I am sorry that there are disputes in the Church as to baptism and the Lord's supper; but it is not a moot point in the Church of Christ whether baptism and the Lord's supper are to be practiced at all. How, then, can these ordinances be set aside by those who admit that they are Scriptural? I heard of one saying, "If Jesus were here now, He would see the evil that has come from those two institutions, and He would set them aside." We cannot endure such a sentence. Surely, we are not revisers of the teachings and doings of our Lord. Have you not, in your congregations, good people, who will say, "Yes, dear sir, I know that believers' baptism is in the Word; I am quite clear upon that; but I have never yet attended to it"? Have you impressed upon that person's mind the willful disobedience involved in such neglect? It is not the case of a person who says, "I do not see such an ordinance to be commanded in the Word of God;" that would be a sin of ignorance. But he says, "It is there," yet he neglects it, and boasts that he can be saved without it. Do not be in a hurry to confirm that statement, for it may turn out that the man who says, "I believe in Jesus," and then willfully refuses to keep His known commandments, is not saved. Assuredly, such a man is not saved from willful disobedience. What sort of faith is that which does not work by love, but sets up its own will in opposition to the precept of Christ? We must protest against all tampering with the law of the great Head of the Church. I mention the point of baptism merely as an example; but upon every other point of sacred rule we must be earnestly urgent. Christ is Lord as well as Savior. He has not come into His house to be trifled with, and to have His words shuffled like a pack of cards.

You may quit the rule of your Lord in another way. A brother is going to decide upon his course of action on a certain important Christian matter; but he first wants to know what is the opinion of gentlemen who subscribe considerable sums to church work. If any one of you does this, I shall cry, "Who is thy master, after all? Judas with his bag in the corner, or the Christ whom he kisses with a traitor's kiss?" Be true, and dare all things. If we do not do so, Christ Jesus is not Law-giver to us. Scorn the bribe, though it be a

covert one, and lose all for truth, if need be.

Our Lord also stands before us as *our example and pattern*. We preach the grace of God, and the blood of Christ; but if any suppose that we do not preach Christ as an example, they know nothing of our ministry; for we insist upon it that faith must obey her Savior's will as well as trust His grace. We have had some among us, like, the old Scotchwoman, who said, "It was a good sermon, all but the duties at the end." It may be possible that we put the precept in such a way that we countenance the suspicion that we are legal in spirit; this we must carefully avoid. We would preach Christ as the perfect pattern, that saints may long to be conformed to Him. Men must have the spirit of Christ, or they are lost. There is no Heaven to be found in a mere forensic justification, apart from a spiritual work within the soul,—a change of heart, and a renewal of mind.

Once more, I trust that we shall always hold Christ as *Lord and God*. Whatever else He is, He is Lord and God to us. Therefore He is to be spoken of and thought upon with deepest reverence of soul. The spirit that trifles with the Word of God, and the things of Christ, is almost more vicious than the action which comes out of it. I have read many things which I have shuddered at; but I have shuddered much more at the state of mind into which a man must have come to be able to write them. Let us cultivate the highest reverence for our Divine Lord, and the surest confidence in His power, and in His ultimate victory. Trust in that hand which He keeps on the helm. Have no shadow of a doubt that His wisdom and might will cause all things to end well. Go, therefore, and speak in His Name. When you have done stating a doctrine, command your hearers, in the Name of Jesus, to believe it. Be daring enough for that. As the apostles commanded lame men to stand, and even dead men to live, so, in the Name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, command sinners to turn unto Him, and to live. He who gives you faith will answer to His own word.

Now let us turn our earnest attention to the subject of our position towards our Lord. The position of the Christian minister towards Christ is a theme upon which one might speak in many ways, and for many a day, and yet barely do more than touch the fringe of it.

The most striking view of it comes before us in meditating upon the fact, that, as He stood in our stead, *we also stand in His stead*. To our hearers we can truly say, "We pray you, in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God." Our Lord Jesus lays His pierced hands upon our shoulders, and He says, "As the Father hath sent Me into the world, even so send I you." We are commissioned to plead for Christ, even as He is commissioned to plead for us. For Him we climb those stairs, to point that sick and ignorant woman to the blood of reconciliation. For Him we stand in the pulpit, and speak of sin, and righteousness, and judgment to come. In His place we cry, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!" Beloved brethren, do we always feel that we are not only laboring for Christ, but in His stead? Could we set forth some of our sermons as having been preached in Christ's stead? Should we not expect our own conscience to cry out against us if we were to make such a claim for those discourses? Some of our hearers would think, if they did not say so, "If that sermon is in Christ's stead, there is an awful falling off from what it would have been had Jesus spoken on His own account." Of course, there would necessarily be a falling off in Divine authority and ability; but there should be none as to truthful and earnest purpose.

We must plead with men in Christ's stead; and that will prevent partiality. We shall not give all our thoughts to the wealthy and educated few; but, as Jesus did, we shall care for the many. James the fifth of Scotland was known as "the poor man's king," because every peasant, who desired it, could get an audience with him. The Lord make us the poor men's preachers! for how else can we be in Christ's stead? In His ministry, the poor had the gospel preached unto them. If there be one of our flock more sick, more poor, more ignorant than another, let us, for the Lord's sake, seek him first. Let us assume no upstart dignity, but feel at one with the forlorn, the poor, the fallen, even as Jesus did.

If we be in Christ's stead, we shall not bully, but tenderly persuade. We shall have true sympathy, and so we shall plead with sinners unto tears, as though their ruin were our woe, and their salvation would be our bliss. We shall weep over them, because Jesus would have done so; and we shall be patient with them, because of His Divine long-suffering. We shall watch for opportunities, and use them with perseverance; for so would Jesus have done. We shall deal with our hearers as a shepherd with his lost sheep, and we

shall never rest till we have brought them home upon our shoulders rejoicing; for so was it with our Lord.

This position of ours, in Christ's stead, is greatly responsible; we shall need great grace to bear its weight. Behave yourselves, Christian brethren, for you bear a great Name. Do not disgrace the Name of the holy Jesus. It was shameful of Sheridan, when he was picked up in the gutter, to give his name to the constable as "*Wilberforce*." What a cruel wrong to our Lord Jesus, for a harsh, or proud, or idle minister to give in his name as acting in the stead of Christ! God forgive the wrong: it is a very heinous one. If you are indeed in Christ's stead, what manner of persons ought you to be! May God help you to be worthy of the embassy on which you are sent!

Therefore, brethren, *we must love sinners for Christ's sake*. Are there not a great many in your congregation whom you could not love for any other reason? Could the Lord Jesus Christ ever have loved you for your merit's sake? He loved you and me for a reason which He found in His own heart; and so must we love our hearers, from causes which are not so much in them as in our own hearts. He "loved me, and gave Himself for me;" and if now He says to me, "Love others, and give yourself for them," shall I not do it? Every angry temper must be chased out. The fallen, the frivolous, the captious, the indifferent, and even the malicious must share our love. We must love them to Jesus. With cords of a man and bands of love must we draw them. Our mission is to perpetuate on earth the love of the Savior.

Further than this, your relation to Christ is of such a sort that you are to "*fill up that which is behind of the sufferings of Christ* for His body's sake, which is the Church." His atoning griefs are finished; into that winepress, none of us can set a foot. But those sufferings by which men are won to Christ are far from being finished. All the martyr host have bled and died to keep the truth alive for us, that by the truth men may still be brought to Jesus. Every sufferer who bears pain, or slander, or loss, or personal unkindness for Christ's sake, is filling up that amount of suffering which is necessary to the bringing together of the whole body of Christ, and the upbuilding of His elect Church. "Oh!" cries one minister, "I have been shamefully treated." Yes, and worthier men have been even more evilly entreated than you have. You need not look among your fellow-soldiers for equals in suffering: consider how your Lord Himself "endured such contradiction of sinners."

When Alexander led his men into Persia, and they had to cut through a very mountain of ice and snow, they were ready to turn back, and therefore Alexander alighted from his horse, and took an ice-ax in his hand, and went forward, often up to his waist in snow, cleaving the blocks of ice, and leading the way. Then the Macedonians felt that they would cut through the world with Alexander in front of them. With Christ your Lord cleaving His way by the agonies on the cross, will not you follow where He leads, and fill up the measure that may be wanted of toil, and labor, and suffering, for the salvation of those whom He has redeemed by blood? Nothing was more affecting in our supplications this morning than the prayers of those who had been great sufferers. Through suffering comes blessing. When our Lord means to give His household wine, that our festivals may be full of gladness, what does He do? He says, "Fill the water pots with water." We must be filled with affliction to the brim. We must have as much of it as we can hold, and then He will say, "Draw out now." This is His beginning of miracles; and some of us rejoice that it was not only wrought at Cana in Galilee, but it is still wrought in this island of the sea.

Do you not think that we all make mistakes as to what will be a blessing? In the matter of faith-healing, health is set before us as if it were the great thing to be desired above all other things. Is it so? I venture to say that the greatest earthly blessing that God can give to any of us is health, *with the exception of sickness*. Sickness has frequently been of more use to the saints of God than health has. If some men, that I know of, could only be favored with a month of rheumatism, it would, by God's grace, mellow them marvelously. Assuredly, they need something better to preach than what they now give their people; and, possibly, they would learn it in the chamber of suffering. I would not wish for any man a long time of sickness; and pain; but a twist now and then one might almost ask for him. A sick wife, a newly-made grave, poverty, slander, sinking of spirit, might teach lessons nowhere else to be learned so well. Trials drive us to the realities of religion. You may feed on chaff until you have real work to do, or real grief to bear; but then you want the old corn of the land, and you must have it, or else you will faint and fail

Our afflictions come to us as blessings, though they frown like curses. I have heard of one who was generous, but extremely eccentric. A man, who was deeply in debt, passed his door, and he knew that the poor debtor was terribly exercised about the matter. One day, this odd man of wealth, generous as he was, was so cruel as to throw a heavy bag at the poor debtor. The man was hurt by the missile, and looked round to see what it was. He saw no man who had inflicted the injury. He picked up the bag. He heard the chink of the coin, and when he opened the bag, he found enough to pay his debt, and he heard a voice saying, "Keep it for yourself." He never summoned that man for an assault; but thanked him for the gift. Oftentimes has Providence, with a rough hand, thrown countless gain in our way in the form of the trial of our faith, which is much more precious than gold. Blessed be the Lord, our temporary bruise is soon forgotten, but the spiritual gain abides for ever. In any case, the cause of our Lord Jesus Christ is our cause, and we are linked with Him in a fellowship which cannot be broken, whatever it may involve. We have counted the cost, and we can say, "From henceforth let no man trouble me. I am the branded slave of Jesus, and my ear is bored for Him."

Furthermore, brethren, *our position towards our Lord will become most practical when we realize what He has done for us.* I do not think that we always clearly perceive what He has actually accomplished on our behalf. We say, "We are poor, but Christ makes us rich." Why do we not say, "We are rich, for Christ has made us so"? Our poverty has passed away, and we have become rich in Christ. Brethren, He hath called us "out of darkness into His marvelous light." We are apt, when we preach from the text, to enlarge considerably upon nature's darkness; but would it not be as well to be even more full upon the "marvelous light"? Have we the present experience which would lead us to do so? Why do we make so very vivid that word of the apostle, "When I am weak"? Can we not equally dwell upon the next words, "then am I strong"? Our Lord's blessings are realities, and not fancies; let us so treat them. "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled;" why spend all the time on the hunger and the thirst? Are we not filled? If not, Lord, fill us! But if we are filled, let us feel and preach the sweetness of the Heavenly bread, and commend it with glad hearts to our hearers. Brethren, let us get on the bright side of our religion, and not be always harping upon what we are in ourselves. "The darkness is past, and the true light now shineth." We are now in Christ Jesus. We were all that is evil, but we are washed, cleansed, sanctified. Oh, for the rich enjoyment of the present blessings of the covenant! Oh, for grace to speak as we find! As Abraham's servant took care to talk largely of his master's riches, and to show the precious things which he had brought with him from his house, so let us try to win hearts for our great Lord, by showing who He is, and what He has, and what we personally know thereof.

I think, again, that we *shall do well to stand towards Christ as those who are conscious of His power and presence.* Brethren, our Lord is with us. The best of all is, that He is with us indeed and of a truth. If we are with Jesus, and preach His truth, Jesus is assuredly with us; for He said, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." That promise was not a pretty piece of romance: it is true that He is with us at this hour. Let us believe it, and act accordingly. If we do not always feel His brightness, let us, like the flowers, turn towards the sun. When the sun is not shining, the flowers know where there is most of light, and their faces turn that way. Let us be true heliotropes, or turners to the sun. When we get into the pulpit, let us look Christward and lean Christward. What a wondrous place the pulpit is when Jesus is there! In the study, when we sit down, and begin to rub our foreheads, and anxiously enquire, "What shall we preach about?" let us turn towards our Lord, and pray with our window open towards His cross and His throne. May we ever feel an influence drawing us Christ-ward when the Bible is open before us! If it be so, our weakness will all vanish, for His strength will be remembered

When you are contemplating the great struggle against sin, and are making up your account as to the forces that are on the right side, fail not to remember Jesus. You have put yourself down: that amounts to less than nothing. Now you put down your deacons: after estimating them lovingly, they are as nothing, too. You have made an item of praying friends and workers, and so on; but the total sum is just a line of ciphers. What do all these noughts amount to? Your distrust cries out, "I have here nothing, and nothing, and nothing." That is a poor reckoning for you to rely upon; but you have not done yet. What are you going to put before all these noughts? Where will you place the Infinite One? If you put him after these ciphers, like a figure in decimals, you reduce the one to the ten thousandth! Each nought set before the one robs Him of glory, and diminishes Him. But if HE be put first, before the ciphers, what a sum you have! This is not fancy; it is sound arithmetic. Go and test it, and see if it does not turn out to be mathematically

true in the spirit world. Powerless as we are alone, our Lord is with us.

Some preachers evidently do not believe that the Lord is with their gospel, because, in order to attract and save sinners, their gospel is insufficient, and they have to add to it inventions of men. Plain gospel preaching must be supplemented,—so they think. Bridget was very busy catching and killing flies. Her mistress said to her, "Bridget, what are you doing?" She answered, "You see, ma'am, we have bought some fly-papers, and we must have the flies caught on them; and as they don't go on of themselves, I am sticking them on." I should not care for fly-papers of that sort. If the gospel must be a failure unless we attract the people by some extraneous method, it is a poor business. If the fly-paper does not attract the flies, and hold them, we may as well burn the flypaper. If your gospel cannot bring the people to hear you, and if, when they come, your gospel will not impress and convert them, well, then, give it up. Open a coffee-shop, or start in the ginger-beer line; but do not call your useless talk the blessed gospel. If you are not conscious of a supernatural power and presence with the Word of the Lord, let it alone. A man said to me, "You told a dead sinner to believe." I pleaded guilty, but told him I would do it again. He said, "I could not do it, I should feel that it was of no use to do so." I answered, "Possibly, it might be of no use for you to do it, for you have not the necessary faith; but, as I believe that God bids *me* do so, I deliver the message in the Name of the Lord, and the dead sinners believe and live." I do not trust in the dead sinner's power to live, but in the power of the gospel to make him live. Now, if your gospel has not the power of the Holy Ghost in it, you cannot preach it with confidence, and you are tempted to have a performance in the schoolroom to allure the people, whom Christ crucified does not draw. If you are depending on sing-song, and fiddles, and semi-theatricals, you are disgracing the religion which you pretend to honor.

Once more, dear friends, *our position towards our Lord is that of waiting for His coming*. I do not know how far the most of you are warmly affected towards the blessed truth of the Second Advent; but I trust that many of you believe it, and are enlivened by faith in it. That great hope is gaining ground among lovers of Evangelical doctrine. At first, ministers seemed half-afraid of this grand belief, because of the fanaticism which is supposed to grow out of it. Certain charlatans also do great harm by pretending to know the day and the hour when the Lord will come. Times and seasons are not with us; but *the Lord will come*. He is on His way even now, for He says, "I am coming quickly." Our Lord may come right soon; certain signs raise our hopes very high. The love of many waxes cold, and the devil is doubly busy; and this last is no doubtful sign. When you see a farmer beginning to burn the gates, and break down the hedges, and unroof the barns, and so on, you say, "That fellow's lease has run out." Satan has great wrath when he knows that his time is short. In the case of the demoniac child, we read, "As he was yet a-coming, the devil threw him down, and tare him." He knew that he was about to be expelled, so he did his worst. The double veiling of the heavens only brings on that darkest part of the night which precedes the dawn of day. When the tale of bricks is doubled, Moses appears; and the same is true of our still greater Deliverer. Let us take courage, and be of good heart; for while we lift Christ on high, and glorify His Name, He is on the way to take up the quarrel of His covenant, and utterly to rout His foes.

Now for two or three words to finish with, upon our position individually. Peradventure, some sentence may come with power to this man and to that.

Let me say to you, brethren, *be self-contained*. I would to God that we had among us more men in the fullness of spiritual and mental vigor. The want of the period is brethren who know the gospel for themselves, who have had a personal experience of its power, who have tested it as silver is tried in a furnace of earth, and who set such a value upon it, that they would sooner part with life than give it up. We have too many in our company who will go right if they are led aright, and who are sure to swim in the right direction if the current is strong enough to carry them with it; these are all very well when the wind blows from the right quarter, but they are of small use in ill weather. At this hour, there is a call for men who can breast the torrent, and swim up stream. We need heroes who would just as soon go alone, if necessary, as march with a thousand comrades. We need men who are doing their own thinking, and do not put it out, as families do with their washing. They have thought out the truth; and, having gone to God about it, and felt the power of it in their own souls, they are not now to be moved from the hope of their calling. They are pillars in the house of our God, abiding, in their places; and not mere caterpillars, crawling after something to eat. We need captains for the good ship who know their longitude and

latitude, and can tell whence they came, and to what port they are steering. Our Commander needs warriors true as steel for this hour of conflict.

"Ye that are men, now serve Him
Against unnumbered foes."

A man is now more precious than the gold of Ophir. To be dependent upon the judgment of friends or foes in these days, is to be but half a man. Let us stand before the living God in our integrity, and seek no patronage from societies or individuals. Are you all in this state? I fear that the God-dependent are still few. We have members of our churches who do not know a good sermon till they have consulted that dear old gentleman who is their oracle. Some ministers have no opinion till they have been to "the fraternal meeting." They must hear the bell of the leading sheep before they know which way to go; for the Master's voice they neither hear nor know. O brother, thou wilt need the Spirit within thine own soul; for the right path runs through a solitary land, and if thou darest not travel alone, thou wilt never reach the Celestial City!

In the next place, we must learn, in these times, to *be selective in our companionships*. When a man is himself right, let him not compromise himself by association with those who are not clear in their standing. Why be drawn down by holding on to the wreck which is sinking? Continual consorting with those who have no sympathy with the great truths of the gospel, is running into perpetual peril. For my part, I find association with persons of loose views a thing too painful for me. Worldly-minded men are wretched company for spiritual minds. Gordon Cumming describes a territory in Africa as "a forest of fish-hooks, relieved with patches of penknives." Men of new views, loose habits, and unspiritual talk, are quite as uncomfortable as acquaintances; especially when they pretend to be very orthodox, and yet believe nothing of the old faith. Clear yourselves of all connections which bring your own faithfulness into question. Do not talk about separation from that which is evil, and then remain in fellowship with it. Be as chaste in your companionships as in your own persons, or evil will come of it.

Furthermore, *be sanctified in life*. I cannot say that word with too much emphasis. I would drive that nail home. Be ye holy, for ye serve a holy God. If you were making a present to a prince, you would not find him a lame horse to ride upon; you would not offer him a book out of which leaves had been torn, nor carry him a timepiece whose wheels were broken. No, the best of the best you would give to one whom you honored and loved. Give your very best to your Lord. Seek to be at your best whenever you serve Him. Pray Him to make you perfect in every good work to do His will, and then present yourself unto Him a living sacrifice. Let no one of us preach a sermon, and have to feel afterwards, "I could have done better than that, but it was good enough for so poor an audience." On a Wednesday evening, in a cottage, with no more than half-a-dozen present, and those old women, do your utmost. Our richest fruit is poor enough. Give your second-best *never*. Keep you to the very first and fullest that you can produce for Christ; let your whole life be the noblest exertion of which you are capable. I said, last night, that the minister who can do any more, and does not do it, is a sluggard. It is so. We must do all that we can do, and do it in our ablest way, or we are idle. He has come up to Christ's mark, who can truly say that he can do no more, and that, if he could do anything more, he would do it at once. How few of us could conscientiously claim to have come so far!

Be diligent in action. Put all your irons into the fire. Use every faculty for Jesus. Be wide-awake to watch opportunities, and quick to seize upon them. Believe that the smallest sphere has in it or around it glorious openings for enlargement. In a very small village, infinite results may be realized. If one place be evangelized, strike out for another; and ever, like the dwellers on a common, keep up a rolling fence, which encloses a little more and a little more. Content with what we are doing must be far from us, while there is yet very much land to be possessed. May you feed your flocks as pastors, and increase them by being evangelists! In this respect, be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth. We must use every energy, and be of an adventurous and industrious spirit in these days, that we may checkmate the incessant activities of the prince of darkness.

Lastly, I desire to send you away with this in your ear, yea, with this in your heart, *be confident in spirit*. We are not going to show the white feather, nor even to tolerate a trembling thought. Years ago, they

used to charge me vehemently with being too flippant and jocose; but of late the charge has shifted, and I am reviled as despondent, bilious, and morose. I conceive that my innocence is clear. Have you read *The Salt Cellars*, written by a morose person who never smiles, who is a pessimistic alarmist, dreaming of awful catastrophes which never occur? The description must have been originally meant for someone else. I protest that I am quite as merry as may be fit. If I have undergone so great a reformation of manners as to have swung round from cheerfulness to gloom, it is singular that I am not in the least aware of it. I cannot endorse the statement that I have lost my tendency to humor, for I feel very much the other way; and were I not watchful, I should become too hilarious.

I have received a measure of pity because I am in opposition to so many; but the pity may be spared, or handed over to those on the other side. Years ago, when I preached a sermon upon Baptismal Regeneration, my venerable friend, Dr. Steane, said to me, "You have got into hot water." I replied, "No; I do not feel the water to be hot. The truth is far otherwise. I am cool enough; I am only the stoker, and other folks are in the hot water, which I am doing my best to make so hot that they will be glad to get out of it." We do not wish to fight; but if we do, we hope that the pity will be needed by those with whom we contend. The hot water does not come near to me, nor even does a breath of steam blow in my eyes. I am content with that which must inevitably come to the man who protests in downright earnest; that is to say, I am content to be criticized, misunderstood, and misrepresented. The cost was counted long ago, and the estimate was so liberal that there is no fear of its being exceeded. "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day."

There is no room for fear; at least, I see none while we hold fast to the truth. You never met an old salt, down by the sea, who was in trouble because the tide had been ebbing out for hours. No! He waits confidently for the turn of the tide, and it comes in due time. Yonder rock has been uncovered during the last half-hour, and if the sea continues to ebb out for weeks, there will be no water in the English Channel, and the French will walk over from Cherbourg. Nobody talks in that childish way, for such an ebb will never come. Nor will we speak as though the gospel would be routed, and eternal truth driven out of the land. We serve an almighty Master. Pompeii, when asked what he would do if his foes attacked him, replied, "Sir, if I stamp my foot, all Italy will swarm with soldiers." Thus he boasted; but it is no boast to say that, if our Lord does but stamp His foot, He can win for Himself all the nations of the earth against heathenism, and Mohammedanism, and Agnosticism, and Modern-thought, and every other foul error. Who is he that can harm us if we follow Jesus? How can His cause be defeated? At His will, converts will flock to His truth as numerous as the sands of the sea. Is it not written, "Thy people shall be willing in the day of Thy power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning: Thou hast the dew of Thy youth?" Wherefore, be of good courage, and go on your way singing:

"The winds of hell have blown,
The world its hate hath shown,
Yet it is not o'erthrown.
Hallelujah for the Cross!
It shall never suffer loss!"

The Lord of hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge.