

**“THUS SAYS THE LORD”—OR,
THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER
WEIGHED IN THE BALANCES OF THE SANCTUARY
NO. 591**

**A SERMON
DELIVERED ON SUNDAY MORNING, SEPTEMBER 25, 1864,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.**

*“Thus says the LORD.”
Ezekiel 11:5.*

THE wise man says, “Where the word of a king is, there is power.” What power must there be where there is the word of the King of kings who rules over all! We are not left to conjecture as to the power of the divine Word, for we know that, “By the word of the LORD were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth.” Out of nothingness, the glorious creation leaped at the bidding of the Most High, and when the earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep, there was nothing wanted but that solemn voice, “Light be,” and straightway light was.

God’s word was sufficient in itself to build the temple of the universe and to finish it from its foundations to its pinnacles. That same word upholds by its power and rules all things by its might. The pillars of heaven stand because the divine word has fixed them upon their bases, nor shall they be shaken until that same Almighty word shall bid them remove. Then, as a moment’s foam dissolves into the wave which bears it and is gone forever, so shall the whole creation melt away. His word, which created, shall also destroy, but until that word is spoken, every atom of this world is imperishable.

Consider, my brethren, what power is concentrated in Him, who is clothed with a vesture dipped in blood, and whose name is “THE WORD OF GOD.” With what glorious power our Lord Jesus Christ uplifted the burden of our sins, carried the load up to the tree, and cast it forever into the Red Sea of His own atoning blood. You know how He burst the bars of death, tore away the gates of the grave, overthrew all the hosts of hell, and dragged the mightiest principalities of darkness as captives at His chariot wheels.

At this day, the government is upon His shoulders and His name is the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father. Heaven and earth salute Him as the omnipotent Word. He sustains the spiritual life of all His people by feeding them upon Himself—and He shall, in due time, perfect His saints and present them without spot before His Father’s throne. We ought, therefore, to bow with reverence to that which is truly the Word of God, since it contains within itself the highest degree of power, and is ever the way in which divine omnipotence manifests itself.

It is in the Word that we must find wisdom and power—“Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men.” The faintest whisper of JEHOVAH’s voice should fill us with solemn awe, and command the deepest obedience of our souls. Brethren, how careful we should be that we do not set up in God’s temple anything in opposition to His Word, that we do not permit the teachings of a creature to usurp the honor due to the Lord alone. “Thus says antiquity.” “Thus says authority.” “Thus says learning.” “Thus says experience”—these are but idol-gods which defile the temple of God! Be it yours and mine, as bold iconoclasts, to dash them in pieces without mercy, seeing that they usurp the place of the Word of God.

“Thus says the LORD”—this is the motto of our standard, the war cry of our spiritual conflict, the sword with which we hope yet to strike through the loins of the mighty who rise up against God’s truth. Nothing shall stand before this weapon in the day when God comes out of His hiding place, for even at

this hour when, “Thus says the LORD,” sounds from the trumpet of the Lord’s ministers, the hosts of Midian begin to tremble, for well they know the might of that terrible watchword in days of yore.

This morning I shall endeavor, first, to show, briefly, *the value of a*, “*Thus says the LORD.*” Then, secondly, I shall, with as much calmness of spirit as I can command, *request a*, “*Thus says the LORD*” *for certain things which are received and practiced in the State Establishment of our land.* Then, I shall close with *a word of personal application*, beseeching you to seek a, “Thus says the LORD,” for any hopes which you may entertain of being partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.

I. LET US CONSIDER THE VALUE OF A, “THUS SAYS THE LORD.”

1. Our *first* observation is that it is the *minister’s message*. If he is God’s minister, he does not found his teaching upon his own authority, for then his message would be only that of himself and not to be esteemed, but he shows the authority of his Master, and none can contradict him. He claims men’s attention on the ground that he utters a, “Thus says the LORD.” No matter how aged he may be, he does not proclaim the truth as merely the result of his long investigations or his extraordinary experience, but he grounds it upon, “Thus says the LORD.”

So spoke the hoary-headed Joshua when for many a year he had known the faithfulness of God and was about to die—he was singing his swan song, preaching his last sermon, but he did not commence with, “Thus says my age,” “Thus I say upon my own authority,” but, “Thus says the LORD God of Israel.”

A God-sent minister is the ambassador of the Most High, but he has no right to go beyond his commission. and when he does so, his office cannot yield him support. The prophets of God did not say, “Thus I speak as a prophet,” but, “Thus says the LORD.” The prophet came in Gideon’s days and spoke to erring Israel, he opened his mouth with, “Thus says the LORD God of Israel.” Turn to the pages of Isaiah and mark how frequently he quotes the divine authority. Study the plaintive words of Jeremiah and observe how solemnly his prophetic woes are prefaced with, “Thus says the LORD.”

And the soaring Ezekiel, to whom was given, as it were, six wings that he might take more lofty flights than the eagle knows—even he relied not upon the sublimity of his language or the glory of his imagery, but found the sinews of his strength in, “Thus says the LORD God.” This is the trowel and the hammer of God’s builders. This the trumpet of His watchmen and the sword of His warriors. Woe to the man who comes in any other name! If we, or an angel from heaven, shall preach unto you anything but a, “Thus says the LORD,” no matter what our character or standing, give no heed to us, but cleave unto the truth as it is in Jesus. To the law and to the testimony, if we speak not according to this Word, it is because there is no light in us. That test which we demand to be exercised upon others, we cheerfully consent to be exercised upon ourselves, praying that we may have grace to forsake our errors as we would have other men forsake theirs.

2. “Thus says the LORD” *is the only authority in God’s Church*. When the tabernacle was pitched in the wilderness, what was the authority for its length and breadth? Why was the altar of incense to be placed here, and the brazen laver there? Why so many lambs or bullocks to be offered on a certain day? Why must the Passover be roasted whole and not boiled?

Simply and only because God had shown all these things to Moses on the holy mount, and thus had JEHOVAH spoken, “Look that you make them after their pattern, which was shown you on the mount.” It is even so in the Church at the present day. True servants of God demand to see for all church ordinances and doctrines, the express authority of the Church’s only Teacher and Lord. They remember that the Lord Jesus bade the apostles to teach believers to observe all things whatsoever He had commanded them, but He neither gave to them nor to any man power to alter His commands.

The Holy Ghost revealed much of precious truth and holy precept by the apostles, and to His teaching we would give earnest heed, but when men cite the authority of fathers, and councils, and bishops, do we give place for subjection? No! Not for an hour! They may quote Irenaeus or Cyprian, Augustine or Chrysostom. They may remind us of the dogmas of Luther or Calvin. They may find authority in Simeon, or Wesley, or Gill—we will listen to the opinions of these great men with the

respect which they deserve *as men*, but having so done, we deny that we have anything to do with these men as authorities in the Church of God, for in the Church of God nothing has any authority but, “Thus says the LORD of hosts.”

Yea, if you bring us the concurrent consent of all tradition—if you shall quote precedents venerable with fifteen, sixteen, or seventeen centuries of antiquity, we burn the whole lot as so much worthless lumber, unless you put your finger upon the passage of Holy Writ which warrants the matter to be of God. You may further plead, in addition to all this venerable authority, the beauty of the ceremony and its usefulness to those who partake therein, but this is all foreign to the point, for to the true Church of God, the only question is this—is there “Thus says the LORD,” for it? And if divine authority be not forthcoming, faithful men must thrust forth the intruder as the cunning craftiness of men.

3. “Thus says the LORD” *is the most fitting word of rebuke for erring saints*. God’s people when they err, if they be rebuked, even though it should be in the gentlest manner, are too apt to resent the rebuff. But when we can come to them with, “Thus says the LORD,” if there is a spark of spiritual life left, it is sure to catch at this flame.

When the man of God came to Eli, how Eli’s heart trembled when he began, “Thus says the LORD,” and described to him the doom of his house, because his sons had made themselves vile, and he had not restrained them. David, the king, might have been moved to anger against Nathan, for that personal parable and pungent application, but his anger was stayed—nay, better still—his heart was broken because the prophet could say, “Thus says the LORD.”

My dear brethren in Christ, you and I have often risen in anger at the intrusive reproofs of ignorant men, but I hope we have far more often felt the melting power of a, “Thus says the LORD.” When the heart is right, the Word of God sweetly melts us as the breath of the south wind melts the frozen rivers.

4. “Thus says the LORD” *is the only solid ground of comfort to God’s people*. Where can a child of God find true solace apart from that which comes out of the mouth of the Most High? Truly, “Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God does man live.” “Your words were found, and I did eat them.” “How sweet are your words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth!”

When Nathan came to tell David of the covenant which the Lord would make with him and his house, David would scarcely have believed so great a mercy to be really his if the prophet had not begun with, “Thus says the LORD.” It was not, “Thus says Nathan,” or “Thus do the ancients say,” but, “Thus says the LORD,” and David’s heart was full of holy joy when he saw the covenant to be ordered in all things and sure.

When Hezekiah lay sick unto death, he turned his face to the wall and prayed, but there was no comfort to the royal suppliant until the prophet came with, “Thus says the LORD.” And when Sennacherib was about to besiege Jerusalem, and Lachish had fallen, Hezekiah prayed and the people with him, but oh! they could not think it possible that there should be a hook put into the jaw of the mighty Assyrian, and that he should be turned back by the way in which he came, till the prophet reassured their hearts with a, “Thus says the LORD.” Zion’s sons and daughters feast upon the sure word of their faithful God.

Brethren, I need not enlarge here, for I hope most of you know the preciousness of a divine promise. There is nothing needed to stay your soul in your worst troubles but the Word of God applied with power. God may not send you a friend—He may not raise up a deliverer, but if He shall only give you to believe His Word, that shall be enough for you.

Martin Luther said, “I have covenanted with my Lord that He should not send me visions, or dreams, or even angels. I am content with this one gift of the Scriptures, which abundantly teaches and supplies all that is necessary both for this life and that which is to come.” Oh Lord, only feed me on Your Word, and I will not envy kings their delicacies, nor even the angels around Your throne, the bread of heaven on which they live.

5. Yet, again—"Thus says the LORD" is that *with which we must confront the Lord's enemies*. When Moses went in before Pharaoh, the words which he used were not, "The elders of Israel have consulted, and thus have they bidden me say," nor, "Our father Abraham once said, and his words have been handed to us by long tradition"—such talk would have been readily resisted—but he confronted the haughty monarch with, "Thus says the LORD, let my people go," and it was the power of this divine word which rained plagues upon the fields of Zoan, and brought forth the captives with silver and gold. Pharaoh might boast, "Who is the LORD that I should obey his voice?" But ere long, he knew that JEHOVAH's word was mightier than all the horsemen and chariots of Mizraim, and was not to be resisted without terrible defeat.

To this day, if we would break sinners' hearts, our hammer must be, "Thus says the LORD," and if we would woo them to obedience to King Jesus, our reasons must come from His own Word. I have often noticed in conversions, that though sometimes a particular passage of the sermon may be quoted by the converted person as the means of enlightenment, yet in the majority of cases it is the text, or some passage of Scripture, quoted during the sermon, which is blessed to do the work. McCheyne says, "Depend upon it, it is God's Word, not our comment upon God's Word, that saves souls." And so it is. Let us use much of Scripture, much of the pure silver of sacred revelation, and no human alloy. "What is the chaff to the wheat, says the LORD?"

6. To close this point. Such an authority has a, "Thus says the LORD," that *it is not to be despised without entailing upon the offender the severest penalty*. Samuel came to Saul with, "Thus says the LORD," and bade him destroy the Amalekites. He was to utterly cut them off and not to spare so much as one of them. But Saul saved the best of the cattle and the sheep, and brought home Agag—and what was the result? His kingdom was taken from him and given to a neighbor of his that was better than he, and because he exalted himself beyond measure to do otherwise than according to the letter of God's command, he was put away forever from having dominion over Israel.

And mark this word—if any church in Christendom shall continue, after light is given and after plain rebuke is uttered, to walk contrary to the Word of God, and to teach that which is inconsistent with Holy Scripture—as Saul was put away from the kingdom, so shall that church be put away from before the Lord of hosts. And if any man, be he who he may, after receiving light from on high, continues willfully to shut his eyes, he shall not, if an heir of heaven, be rejected from eternal salvation, but he shall be cast off from much of the usefulness and comfort which he might otherwise have enjoyed.

He knew his Master's will and did it not—he shall be beaten with many stripes. He has been as the horse or the mule which have no understanding, and his mouth shall be held in with bit and bridle. Many sorrows shall be to those who dare to dash themselves against the thick points of JEHOVAH's buckler by opposing His "Thus says the LORD." Upon whomsoever this stone shall fall, it shall grind him to powder, and whosoever shall fall upon it shall be broken to his own lasting damage.

O! my brethren, I would that we trembled and stood more in awe of God's Word. I fear that many treat the things of God as though they were merely matters of opinion, but remember that opinion cannot govern in God's house. God's Word, not man's opinion, claims your allegiance. Remember that, although our ignorant conscience may not accuse us of error, yet if we walk contrary to God's Word, our conscientiousness does not screen us from sin, for conscience is not the sovereign arbiter of right and wrong, but the plain Word of God is the rule of equity.

I do not sin as foully as if I sinned against my conscience, but I still sin, if, having an unenlightened conscience, I ignorantly transgress. But if I willfully keep my conscience in darkness and continue in errors, which I might easily know to be such by a little thought and searching of God's Word, then my conscience can offer me no excuse, for I am guilty of blindfolding the guide which I have chosen, and then, knowing him to be blindfolded, I am guilty of the folly of letting him lead me into rebellion against God. O Church of God, hear the voice of your great Founder and Lord. "Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven." "He who has my commandments, and keeps them, he it is who loves me: and he

who loves me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.” O for a stern integrity that will hold the Word and will never depart from it, come what may. This much concerning the value of a, “Thus says the LORD.”

II. Dear friends, the second part of our subject may be very displeasing to some who have strayed in here, but that I cannot help. I do not remember ever asking anyone to come and hear me, and therefore, as you come of your own wills, when I have any truth to speak, I shall not conceal it because you choose to be present. At the present crisis, I feel that it is woe unto me if I do not lift up my voice like a trumpet and urge with all my might the necessity of reformation in our State Church.

I have moreover an excellent excuse for the inquiry I am about to make, for as I am publicly charged with ignorance, it is at once my duty and my privilege to seek instruction of those who claim authority to teach. When one is known to be profoundly ignorant, and there are certain fathers in the faith who have the power to instruct, the least thing that can be allowed us is to ask questions, and the smallest gift we can expect is to have them answered by men expressly ordained to instruct the ignorant.

The Rev. W. Goode, the Dean of Ripon, appears to be much better acquainted with the extent of my reading and mental acquirements than I am myself. He speaks with all the positiveness of a personal acquaintance concerning my reputed ignorance, and for my own part, I am not at all anxious to question so very reverend an authority.

He writes—“As to that young minister, who is now raving against the evangelical clergy on this point, it is to be regretted that so much notice has been taken of his railings. He is to be pitied, because his entire lack of acquaintance with theological literature leaves him utterly unfit for the determination of such a question, which is a question, not of mere doctrine, but of what may be called historical theology. And his charges are just a parallel to those which the Romanists would bring against himself as well as others for the interpretation of the words, ‘This is My body.’ But were he a wiser man than he is, he would know better what his qualifications are for passing judgment on such a point, and he would be willing to learn from such facts, among others, as the Gorham Judgment and the cases of Mr. Maskell and Mr. Mozley, what ground there is for his charges against the evangelical clergy. Let him hold and enforce his own view of doctrine as he pleases, but when he undertakes to determine what is the exclusive meaning of the Book of Common Prayer, and brings a charge of dishonesty against those who take a different view of that meaning from what he does, he only shows the presumptuous self-confidence with which he is prepared to pronounce judgment upon matters of which he is profoundly ignorant. To hold a controversy with him upon the subject would be to as little purpose as to attempt to hold a logically-constructed argument with a child unacquainted with logical terms.”

When this paragraph caught my eye, my heart leaped with joy, for I knew that the sinners in Zion were afraid, and I thought I heard a voice crying from the Word, “Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God has chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, has God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence.”

My mind flew back to the valley of Elah, and I remembered the words of the old record—“And when the Philistine looked about and saw David, he disdained him: for he was but a youth, and ruddy, and of a fair countenance. And the Philistine said unto David, Am I a dog that you come to me with staves? And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. And the Philistine said to David, Come to me, and I will give your flesh unto the fowls of the air, and to the beasts of the field.”

My spirit kindled at these words of the boastful champion of yore, and at their modern reproduction by the vainglorious divine of Ripon, and the answer of David was in my heart, as it is even now upon my tongue—“You come to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day will the LORD deliver you into my hand...that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel. And all

this assembly shall know that the LORD saves not with sword and spear: for the battle is the LORD’s, and he will give you into our hands.”

Admitting the witness of the venerable dean to be correct, and that “the young minister” is not an expert in logic, I am not therefore, ashamed, far otherwise, I will rather glory in my infirmities that the power of Christ may rest upon me, “For when I am weak, then am I strong.” Take, O you great ones of the earth, every profit that can be made out of your belief in my utter total ignorance, and your own profound and extensive learning, and then go your ways, and learn what this means—“Your wisdom and your knowledge, it has perverted you; and you have said in your heart, I am, and none else beside me. Therefore shall evil come upon you; you shall not know from whence it rises.”

And now, at this hour, having been condemned as intolerably ignorant, I feel I have the liberty to ask just a few explanations of those reverend divines who do know, or ought to know, the grounds of their faith and practice.

1. I open this little book—the Prayer Book, of whose occasional services, the more I know, the less I approve—and I find in the *Baptismal Service* that, when little children are brought to be sprinkled, certain godfathers and godmothers promise for them that they shall renounce the devil and all his works, the vain pomp and glory of the world, with all covetous desires of the same, etc.—and that they shall obediently keep all God’s holy will and commandments, and walk in the same all the days of their life.

To me it seems that they might as well promise that the infants should grow up with Roman noses, auburn hair, and blue eyes, for they are just as able to make them do the one as the other. I shall not, however, intrude my opinion further, but simply ask whether there is a, “Thus says the LORD,” for any man’s standing proxy for a babe, and making such promises in its name? In other words, I ask for apostolic, prophetic, or any other form of Scriptural precept or precedent, for the use of proxies in baptism.

True religion is a personal matter—is its first manifestation in regeneration to be connected with the impossible promises of others? Plain proof texts are requested for godfathers and godmothers, and such important persons deserve to be defended by the clergy, if texts of Scripture can be discovered. As I cannot imagine where the texts will be found, I must pause till the learned shall produce them.

Further, I find that these children enter into a covenant by proxy, of which we are assured that the promise of our Lord Jesus will, for His part, most surely keep and perform, but the children are bound to do their part, that part being something more than the gigantic task of keeping all the commandments of God. Now, I ask for a, “Thus says the LORD,” for such a covenant as this. I find two covenants in the Word of God—one is the covenant of works, “This do and you shall live.” I find another, the covenant of grace, which runs only in this wise, “I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”

I find it expressly declared that there cannot be a mixture of works and grace, for says Paul, “If by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace; but if it is of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work.” And I ask a, “Thus says the LORD,” for this baptismal covenant, which is nominally of grace, but really of works, or at best an unnatural conglomerate of grace and works. I ask those who have searched Scripture through to find me the form or the command for any baptismal covenant whatever. It is idle to say that such a covenant was allowed among the early Christians. Their witness is not early enough for us—we want a, “Thus says the LORD,” and nothing but this will justify this pretended covenant.

We then find that after this covenant has been made, and the water has been applied in a manner which we think also needs a, “Thus says the LORD,” to justify it, it is publicly declared that the baby is regenerated—“Seeing now, dearly beloved brethren, that this child is ‘regenerate and grafted into the body of Christ’s Church, let us give thanks unto Almighty God for these benefits, and with one accord make our prayers unto Him, that this child may lead the rest of his life according to this beginning.’”

And, again, “We yield You hearty thanks, most merciful Father, that it has pleased You to regenerate this infant with Your Holy Spirit, to receive him for Your own child by adoption, and to incorporate him into Your holy Church,” etc. We are told we do not understand the meaning of, “regeneration,” as it is

used in the services of the Anglican Church. The meaning of this passage is historical, hypothetical, ecclesiastical, and we know not what. The words, “To be born again,” did not formerly seem to us to be so very difficult to understand, nor do they appear so now as they stand in Scripture, for we find in them the one regeneration which has renewed us in the spirit of our mind and we cannot consent to use those words in any other sense.

Well, whether regeneration is or is not a very equivocal word, we simply ask, is there a, “Thus says the LORD,” for the assertion that a sprinkled infant is therefore regenerate in any sense in the world? Will any person find us a text of Scripture?—He shall have large rewards from clergymen with uneasy consciences! We put our inquiry again in plain terms—will someone oblige us with a plain, “Thus says the LORD,” proving that water baptism in any one instance makes an unconscious baby a member of Christ and a child of God, in any sense which any sane person chooses to attach to those words? Where is the passage? Where? Echo answers, “Where?”

But this subject you have been considering for some time, and are well-convinced that the process of regenerating babies by occult influences conveyed by water is a pure, no, an impure invention of priest-craft. There is, therefore, no necessity that I enlarge upon a point so well understood.

2. I have a second question to ask. There is prescribed in the Book of Common Prayer, a peculiar ceremony called *Confirmation*. I do not remember to have read of that in Scripture, I would like to have a, “Thus says the LORD,” for that rite. As I am ready to yield as far as possible, suppose we take it for granted that this ceremony is defensible from Holy Writ, I would like to know whether there is any, “Thus says the LORD,” allowing a person, called a bishop, to give to the assembled youths an assurance of divine favor by laying his hands on their heads?

The bishop having laid his hands on every head presented to him, whether it be gracious or graceless, talks thus in the prayer—“Almighty and ever living God, who makes us both to will and to do those things that are good and acceptable unto Your divine majesty; we make our humble supplications unto You for these Your servants, upon whom (after the example of your holy apostles), we have now laid our hands to certify them (by this sign) of Your favor and gracious goodness towards them.”

Does this mean that the bishop’s hand certifies the person touched thereby of special divine favor? So it seems to teach, as far as I can see. We want, then, a, “Thus says the LORD,” authorizing this individual to exercise the office of an apostle! We then desire scriptural warrant permitting him to certify these kneeling youths the enjoyment or possession of any particular divine favor by putting his hands on their heads.

If this means the common goodness of God, the bishop’s hands are not needed to certify them of that, but as he has already declared in prayer that they were regenerated by water and the Spirit, and had been forgiven all their sins, it is clear that special favor is intended, we inquire, therefore, for his authority for giving these young people a further certificate of special divine favor by the imposition of his hands. Why *his* hands?

Who is he that he can certify these persons of God’s favor more than any other man? Where is his scriptural warrant to confer, by his hands, a certificate of grace upon young people who, in innumerable cases, are thoughtless and unconverted, if not profane? We want a, “Thus says the LORD,” for the whole thing, and then for each item in detail. Endless is the task thus proposed to the honest Churchman.

3. Another matter needs a little clearing up, and as this Book was set forth by learned divines and bishops, I would like a lucid explanation. The priest visits a sick man, sits down by his bedside, reads certain prayers, bids the patient remember his baptism, questions him as to his creed, gives him good advice about forgiving his enemies and making his will, moves him to make a special confession of his sin if he feels his conscience troubled with any weighty matter, after which confession the rule says, “The priest shall absolve him (if he humbly and heartily desires it), after this sort.”

Here is the absolution, and I humbly and heartily desire a, “Thus says the LORD,” for it—“Our Lord Jesus Christ, who has left power to His Church to absolve all sinners who truly repent and believe in Him, of His great mercy forgives you your offenses—and by His authority committed to me, I absolve

you from all your sins, in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Sir Priest, I need you to give me a plain warrant from God's Word for your absolving my dying neighbor at this rate. Who are you that you should use such words? The season is solemn, it is the hour of death, and the matter is weighty, for it concerns the eternal interests of the dying man, and may, nay, will, if you are found to be acting presumptuously in this matter, involve your own soul in eternal ruin.

Whence did you derive your right to forgive that sick man? Might he not raise his withered hands and return the compliment by absolving you? Are you quite sure as to the committal of divine authority to you? Then show me the deed of gift and let it be clearly of divine origin. The apostles were empowered to do many things, but who are you? Do you claim to be their successors? Then work miracles similar to theirs, take up serpents and drink deadly things without being harmed. Prove to us that you have seen the Lord, or even that cloven tongues of fire have sat upon each of you.

You evangelical clergy, dare claim to be successors of the apostles and to have power to forgive sins? Your Puseyite brethren go the whole length of superstitious pretension, but you have too much light to be so superstitious, and yet you do what is quite as wicked—you solemnly subscribe that this absolution is not contrary to the Word of God, when you know it is!

Gorham case, you say! [George C. Gorham, priest in the Church of England, vs. the Archbishop of Canterbury heard in secular court.] I care nothing for your Gorham case! I want a, "Thus says the LORD," warranting you to swear to what you know to be false and dangerous. Mr. Mozley and Mr. Maskell may give you all the comfort which they can afford, but one word of Peter or of Paul would be of more weight in this matter than a thousand words from either of them.

You are aware, perhaps, that it is not every man who is permitted by the Established religion to pronounce this absolution. A person called a "deacon" is, I am informed, allowed to preach and do a great many things, but when he reads the Book of Common Prayer in the daily service, he must not grant absolution—there is a supernatural something which the man has not yet received, for he has only once felt the episcopal imposition of hands. We shall see by-and-by where absolving power comes from.

The deacon has attained to one grade of priest-craft, but the full vigor of mystic influence rests not upon him. Another touch, another subscription, and the keys of St. Peter will swing at his belt, but his time is not yet. I ask him, whether he calls himself a deacon or a priest, where he gets a, "Thus says the LORD," for this absolution? which, if it is not of God, it is a piece of impertinence, superstition, blasphemy, and falsehood.

4. I turn on and find that when the sick dies, he is buried in consecrated ground, and though he may have cut his throat while under delirium tremens—if the jury does not return a verdict of suicide, the priest shall say, as he casts earth upon the body, "Forasmuch as it has pleased Almighty God of His great mercy to take unto Himself the soul of our dear brother here departed, we therefore commit his body to the ground, earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust, in sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life."

And again, "We give You hearty thanks for that it has pleased You to deliver this our brother out of the miseries of this sinful world." And yet again, "We meekly beseech You, O Father, to raise us from the death of sin unto the life of righteousness; that when we shall depart this life, we may rest in Him, as our hope is this our brother does." We beg a, "Thus says the LORD," for burying every baptized thief, harlot, rogue, drunkard, and liar who may die in the parish—"in sure and certain hope of the blessed resurrection." Oh, "It is commanded by authority." What authority?

We challenge it, and permit none to pass muster but a, "Thus says the LORD." Until clergymen will bring us scriptural warrant for uttering falsehoods over a grave, we dare not cease our testimony against them. How long will the many godly laymen in that Church remain quiet? Why do they not bestir themselves and demand revision or disruption?

5. Turning a little further on, into a part of the Prayer Book not much frequented by ordinary readers, we come to the "Ordering of Priests," or the way in which priests are made. Why priests? Is one believer more a priest than another, when all are styled a royal priesthood? Let that pass. Of course, brethren, the

priests are made by the bishops, as the bishops are made by Lord Palmerston, or Lord Derby, or any other political leader who may be in office. The Prime Minister of England is the true fountain from whom all bishops flow, and the priests are minor emanations branching off from the miter rather than the crown.

Here is the way of ordering priests. Let heaven and earth hear this and be astonished, “When this prayer is done, the bishop with the priests present shall lay their hands severally upon the head of every one who receives the order of priesthood; the receivers humbly kneeling upon their knees, and the Bishop saying, ‘Receive the Holy Ghost.’” Listen to it, now! Imagine you behold the scene—a man of God, a bishop whom you have been in the habit of considering a most gracious, godly man, and such no doubt he may be—imagine you see him putting his hands upon the head of some evangelical man whom you will go and hear, or if you like upon some young man fresh from Oxford, and imagine you hear him say, “Receive the Holy Ghost for the office and work of a priest in the Church of God, now committed unto you by the imposition of our hands. Whose sins you do forgive, they are forgiven, and whose sins you retain, they are retained.” We want a, “Thus says the LORD,” for that, for that is putting it rather strongly in the popish line, one would think.

Is the way of ordering priests in the Church of Rome much worse than this? That the apostles did confer the Holy Ghost, we never thought of denying, but that Oxford, Exeter, or any other occupants of the bench can give the Holy Spirit, needs some proof other than their silk aprons or lawn sleeves can afford us. We ask moreover for one instance in which an apostle conferred upon any minister the power to forgive sins, and where it can be found in Scripture that any man, other than an apostle, ever received authority to absolve sinners?

Sirs, let us speak the truth—however much yonder priest may pretend at his parishioner’s bedside to forgive sin, the man’s sins are not forgiven, and the troubled conscience of the sinner often bears witness to the fact, as the day of judgment, and the fearful hell of sinners must also bear witness. And what do you think, sirs, must be the curse that fills the mouth of damned souls, when in another world, they meet the priest who absolved them with this sham absolution! With what reproaches will such deceived ones meet the priest who sent them down to perdition with a lie in their right hands. Will they not say to him, “You did forgive me all my sins by an authority committed unto you, and yet here I am cast into the pit of hell!”

Oh, if I do not clear my soul upon this infamous business, and if the whole Christian Church does not cleanse herself of it, what guilt will lay upon us! This has become a crying evil, and a sin that is not to be spoken of behind the door, nor to be handled in gentle language. I have been severe, it is said, and spoken harshly. I do not believe it possible to be too severe in this matter, but, sirs, if I have been so, let that be set down as my sin if you will, but is there any comparison between my fault and that of men who know this to be contrary to the Word of God, and yet give it their unfeigned assent and consent? Or between the sin of those who can lie unto the Holy Ghost, by pretending to confer Him, who blows where He wills upon men, who, as likely as not, are as graceless as the very heathen? Fresh from the dissipations of college life, the sinner bows before the man in lawn, and rises a full blown priest, fully able to remit or retain sins. After this, how can the priests of the Church of England denounce the Roman Catholics?

It is so very easy to fume and bluster against Puseyites and Papists, but the moment our charity begins at home and we give our evangelical brethren the same benefit which they confer upon the open Romanists, they are incensed beyond measure! Yet will we tell them to their faces, that they, despite their fair speeches, are as guilty as those whom they denounce, for there is as much popery in this priest-making as in any passage in the mass-book? Protestant England! will you long tolerate this blasphemy? Land of Wickliffe, birthplace of the martyrs of Smithfield, how long is this to be borne with? I am clear of this matter before the Most High, or hope to be, before I sleep in the grave, and having once sounded the trumpet, it shall ring till my lips are dumb.

Do you tell me it is no business of mine? Is it not the National Church?—does not its sin rest therefore upon every man and woman in the nation, Dissenter and Churchman, who does not shake himself from it by open disavowal? I am not meddling with anybody else’s church, but the church that claims me as a parishioner, would compel me, if it could, to pay its church rates, and does take from me my share of tithe every year. I ask the sturdy Protestants of England, and especially the laity of the Church of England, whether they intend to forever foster such abominations? Arise, Britannia! nation of the free, and shake your garments from the dust of this hoary superstition. And as for you, O Church of England, may God bless you with ministers who will sooner come forth to poverty and shame, than pervert, or assist in perverting the Word of God.

6. I am not quite done—I have another question to ask. Look at the thanksgiving which is offered on the twentieth day of June on account of Her Majesty’s accession. In this thanksgiving, we very heartily join, although we decline to pray by book on the twentieth of June or any other day. Look at the close of that thanksgiving, and you see the name of Lord John Russell as a sort of official authority for the prayer! Is Earl Russell also among the prophets? And on the other side of the page, in order that the Tories may edify the church as well as the Whigs, I see the hand of S. H. Walpole. Is he also a governor in Christ’s Church? Has the Lord given these men power to legislate for His Church, or sign mandates for her to obey?

But what is it all about? “Victoria Regina—our will and pleasure is that these four forms of prayer,” etc. Do you see, here is royal supremacy! Further on in the next page—“Now, therefore, our will and pleasure is,” etc. See the Preface to the Articles—“Being by God’s Ordinance, according to our just Title, Defender of the Faith, and Supreme Governor of the Church, within these our dominions.” And again—“We are Supreme Governor of the Church of England.” This is the way in which your Church bows herself before the kingdoms of this world. I demand, earnestly demand, a, “Thus says the LORD,” for this royal supremacy. If any king, or queen, or emperor, shall say in any Christian Church, “Our will and pleasure is”—we reply, “We have another King, one Jesus.”

As to the Queen, honored and beloved as she is, she is by her sex incapacitated for ruling in the Church—Paul decides that point by his plain precept, “I allow not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.” And if a king were in the case, we would say—“We render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s, and unto God the things which are God’s.” In civil matters, we cheerfully obey princes and magistrates, but if any king, queen, emperor, or what not, usurps power in the Church of God, we reply, “One is our Master even Christ, and all we are brethren. The crown-rights belong to King Jesus. He alone is King in Zion!”

But I am met at once with the reply, “Well, but Christ is the Head of the Established Church as well as the queen.” I remember reading about a three-headed dog which kept the gates of hell, but I never dreamed of a two-headed Church till I heard of the Anglican Establishment. A two-headed Church is a monster! The Queen, the Head of the Church, and King Jesus the Head of the Church too! Never. Where is a, “Thus says the LORD,” for this?

No man living, who calls himself an Englishman, has a word to say of Her Majesty except that which is full of honor, and esteem, and loyal affection, but the moment we come to talk about the Church of Christ, whosoever shall say, or think, or believe that there is any headship to the Church of Christ except the person of Christ Himself—he knows not what he says nor whereof he affirms. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the Head over all things to His Church, which is His body, the fullness of Him fills all in all.

Here stand the two letters, “V. R.” at the top of certain mandates, and they mean just this—“Our royal authority commands that you shall not believe this, and you shall believe that; you shall not pray this, and you shall pray that; and you shall pray on such a day,” and so on. The church, which thus bows to authority, commits fornication with the kings of the earth, and virtually renounces her allegiance to Christ to gain the filthy lucre of state endowments. He is the free man whom the truth makes free, and who wears no gilded collar with a chain hanging therefrom held in a royal hand. Remember how the

Chancellor laughed to scorn the whole bench of bishops, and rightly so, for he who voluntarily makes himself a bondman deserves to feel the lash.

May the little finger of our state grow heavier than the loins of James or Elizabeth until all good men flee from the house of bondage. Servants of God, will you be servants of man? You who profess to follow King Jesus and see Him crowned with the crown wherewith His mother crowned Him in the day of His espousals—do you take off His diadem to put it upon the head of another? No, it shall never be.

Scotland has repelled the royal intrusion right bravely by her sons of the Free Church, who have left all to follow King Jesus. Her bush burned in the olden times, but was not consumed. The covenant was stained with blood, but it was never slain! Let us revive that covenant, and if necessary, seal it with our blood. Let the Church of England have what king she pleases, or what prince she pleases for her head, but this I know, that there is no, “Thus says the LORD,” concerning the ecclesiastical supremacy of Victoria Regina, nor the authority of Lord John Russell, or S. H. Walpole, or any of that company, honorable though they may be.

7. Now, once more, one more question. I am profoundly ignorant, and have not the power to judge of these things (so I am informed), and therefore, I would like to ask for a, “Thus says the LORD,” for a few of the canons—no, perhaps I had better not read them—they are too bad—they are all full of malice and uncharitableness, and everything that comes of the foul fiend. I will ask whether there can be found any, “Thus says the LORD,” for this—Canon 10. “Maintainers of Schismatics in the Church of England to be censured—Whoever shall hereafter affirm, that such ministers as refuse to subscribe to the form and manner of God’s worship in the Church of England, prescribed in the Communion Book, and their adherents, may truly take unto them the name of another Church not established by law, and dare presume to publish it, that this their pretended Church has of long time groaned under the burden of certain grievances imposed upon it, and upon the members thereof before mentioned, by the Church of England, and the orders and constitutions therein by law established, let them be excommunicated, and not restored until they repent, and publicly revoke such their wicked errors.” What Scripture warrants one church to excommunicate another merely for being a church, and complaining of undoubted grievances?

Canon 11—“Maintainers of Conventicles, censured—Whoever shall hereafter affirm or maintain, that there are within this realm other meetings, assemblies, or congregations of the King’s born subjects, than such as by the laws of this land are held and allowed, which may rightly challenge to themselves the name of true and lawful Churches, let him be excommunicated, and not restored but by the Archbishop, after his repentance and public revocation of such his wicked errors.” Where does Holy Scripture authorize the excommunication of every good man who is charitable enough to believe that there are other churches beside his own? Get the Book of the Lord and read!

For very much in this Book of Canons I beg to be informed of a, “Thus says the LORD.” For matters which do not concern religion, and have only to do with the mere arrangement of service, we neither ask nor expect a divine precept, but upon vital points of doctrine, ceremony, or precept, we cannot do without it. Scarcely can any document be more inconsistent with Scripture than the Book of Canons, and therefore, it is always kept in the background, because those who know anything about it must be ashamed of it. And yet these are Canons of the Church of England—canons which are inconsistent, many of them, with even the common rules of our own present enlightened law, let alone the Word of God. We ask a, “Thus says the LORD,” for them, and we wait until a, “Thus says the LORD,” shall be found to defend them.

Now, some will ask why I take this matter up and look into it. I have already told you the reason, dear friends. There is an opportunity for pushing another Reformation given to us just now, of which, if we do not avail ourselves, we shall be verily guilty. Some have said, “Why not go on preaching the Gospel to sinners?” I do preach the Gospel to sinners as earnestly as I ever did in my life, and there are as many conversions to God as at any former period. This is God’s work, and beware lest any of you lift a finger against it. The hand of the Lord is in this thing, and he that lives shall see it.

Let us have your prayers that good may come of this controversy, even though you may deplore it. As for anything else that you can do, it shall not turn us a hair’s breadth from this testimony to which we feel God has called us—though it brings upon us every evil that flesh would shrink from. The words of Dr. Guthrie are well worth quoting here—“The servant is no better than his master, and I do believe, were we more true to God, more faithful and honest in opposing the world for its good, we should get less smoothly along the path of life, and have less reason to read with apprehension these words of Jesus, ‘Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you.’ Not less true than shrewd was the remark of a Scotch woman respecting one who, just settled in the ministry, had been borne to his pulpit amid the applause of all the people, ‘If he is a faithful servant of the Lord Jesus Christ, he will have all the blackguards in the parish on his head before a month is gone.’”

III. Now to close, let me ask you, my hearers, have any of you a hope of heaven which will not stand the test of, “Thus says the LORD”? What are you resting upon? Are you resting upon something which you felt when excited at a prayer meeting or under a sermon? Remember, you will not have that excitement to bear you up in death, and the religion of excitement will not suffice in the day of judgment. Are you building upon your own works? Are you depending upon your own feelings? Do you rely upon sacraments? Are you placing your trust upon the word of man?

If so, remember that when God shakes all things, He will shake these false foundations, but O, build upon the Word of my Lord and Master. Trust your soul with Jesus! Hating sin and clinging to the great Sin-Bearer, you shall find in Him a rock of refuge which can never, never fail you. I beg you, as the Lord lives, search and try yourselves by the Word of God.

No doubt, there are many among us who are not built upon the Rock of Ages, and we may any of us be deceived by a mere name to live. Do then, since the test-day must come—since you must be weighed in the balances—weigh yourselves now, my hearers, and let none of us go down to the chambers of destruction believing ourselves to be heirs of heaven, being all the while enemies to the Most High God. May the Lord exalt His own Word and give us a sure inheritance in the blessings which it brings. Amen.

BAPTISMAL REGENERATION

The following sermons contain Mr. SPURGEON’S views upon the question now under controversy.

No. 573—“Baptismal Regeneration.”

No. 577—“Let Us Go Forth.”

No. 581—“Children Brought to Christ, Not to the Font.”

No. 591—““Thus Says the Lord”—Or, the Book of Common Prayer Weighed in the Balances of the Sanctuary

Two letters from C. H. Spurgeon—one to the Evangelical Alliance, signifying his withdrawal from the Association and another to The Christian Public, proving that his Accusations against the Evangelical clergy are neither novel nor singular.

Taken from The C. H. Spurgeon Collection, Version 1.0, Ages Software. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.