

OUR GIFTS, AND HOW TO USE THEM

NO. 1080

A SERMON
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

*“Wherefore I put you in remembrance that you stir up the gift of God,
which is in you by the putting on of my hands.”*
2 Timothy 1:6.

I SUPPOSE that Timothy was a somewhat retiring youth and that from the gentleness of his nature he needed to be exhorted to the exercise of the bolder virtues. He is bidden not to be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, and to endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. He is called to the front though his modesty would have kept him in the rear, and he is exhorted to command and teach, suffering no man to despise his youth. Perhaps, also, he was not a man of very vigorous action, and needed every now and then a little touch of the spur to induce him to put forth all his dormant energy and keep himself and his church thoroughly up to the mark in labor for Christ. His was a choice spirit, and therefore it was desirable to see it strong, brave, and energetic. No one would wish to arouse a bad man, for like a viper he is all the worse for being awake, but in proportion to the excellence of the character is the desirability of its being full of force. The apostle Paul tells Timothy, in his first epistle, not to neglect the gift that is in him, and in the text before us he bids him stir up that gift, in each case he is sounding the trumpet in his ear, and summoning him to intense action.

He speaks of the gift that was conferred by the laying on of his hands, and in the former epistle he connects that with the hands of the presbytery. Now, it was no doubt the custom to lay on hands at the ordination of Christian ministers by the apostles, and there was an excellent reason for it, for gifts were thereby conveyed to the ordained, and when we can find anybody who can thereby confer some spiritual gift upon us, we shall be glad to have their hands laid on our heads, but empty hands we care not for. Rites cease when their meaning ceases. If practiced any longer they gender to superstition, and are fit instruments of priestcraft. The upholding of the hands of the eldership when they give their vote to elect a man to the pastorate, is a sensible proceeding, and is, I suspect, all the apostle means when he speaks of the presbytery, but empty hands it seems to me are fitly laid on empty heads, and to submit to an empty ceremony is the idlest of all idle waste of time.

If Paul were here, and could confer a gift, we should rejoice to receive it, yea, and if the meanest man in Christendom, or woman either, could confer the smallest drachma of grace by the putting on of their hands, we would bow our head in the lowliest manner, till then we shall beg to decline submitting to the imposition, or assisting in it. For this reason, and others, we cannot use the text exactly as it stands in addressing this congregation, but leaving out the reference to laying on of hands, we may honestly, without violation of the current of inspiration, proceed to exhort each one of you to stir up the gift that is in you.

There are many kinds of gifts. All Christians have some gift. Some may have but one talent, but all have one at the least. The Great Householder has apportioned to every servant a talent. No single part of a vital body is without its office. True, there are some parts of the body whose office has not been discovered, even the physician and the anatomist have not been able to tell why certain organs are in the human frame, or what use they serve, but as even these are found to be necessary, we are quite sure that they fulfill some useful purpose.

Truly, there are some Christians who might be put in that category, it might puzzle anybody to know what they are capable of, and yet it is certain they have some charge committed to them to keep, and that, if true believers, they are essential parts of the body of Christ. As every beast, bird, fish, and insect,

has its own place in nature, so has every Christian a fit position in the economy of grace. No tree, no plant, no weed, could be dispensed with without injury to nature's perfection, neither can any sort of gift or grace be lost to the church without injury to her completeness. Every living saint has his charge to keep—his talent, over which he is a steward. A measure of gift is in all of us, needing to be stirred up.

Some have gifts without them rather than within them—gifts, for instance, of worldly position, estate and substance. These ought to be well used, and considering that in these times we have a starving world to deal with, and that one of the great impediments to the spread of the Gospel is with some of us the lack of means for the maintenance of those who should preach the Word, it does seem a strange thing that professors should store up God's money and use it as if it were their own. When for our orphans, our students, our colporteurs, and our missionaries we need funds, how can men love the Lord with all their hearts, and yet keep their thousands cankering at their bankers, or their tens resting in their purses? They have not learned to provide for themselves bags that wax not old. They do not understand that to keep their money they must give it away, that truly to preserve it they must dedicate it to God.

For that which is kept by the miserly is not really preserved, but wasted. That which is expended in the Master's service is laid up in heaven where neither moth nor rust can corrupt. But I am not going to speak about that, I have not much reason to speak upon that subject to those who are immediately connected with me, for I have rather to praise you than to upbraid. Most of our dear friends here serve the Lord with the gifts that are outside of them—not all as we should, but many with more than ordinary liberality, and some up to the full measure of their means, if not beyond them. There are, however, exceptions to all rules, and there are a few who attend this place who need more than a gentle hint to excite anything like generosity in them. But we must go at once to the point in hand, "The gift that is *in you*," we have now to speak of.

First, *the gift that may be in each one of us*, and then, secondly, *how we are to stir this gift up*, and in conclusion, we will give reasons *for the stirring of it*.

I. First, then, WHAT GIFT IS THERE IN US?

In some here present there are gifts of mind, which are accompanied with gifts of utterance. It is no small thing to be able to read the Scriptures and to see their inner meaning, to be able to compare spiritual things with spiritual, and to be so taught in other matters, so that we are able to see the hand of God in history, and can upon all such subjects speak to edification. It is not every one who has a mind, who has also the gift of utterance, but where God is pleased to give to any man mind and mouth, he possesses a gift which he ought abundantly to use.

Many a man is mighty in the Scriptures, but not eloquent, when the two things meet, as in Apollos, and are combined with a fervent spirit, a man of God has power indeed. May I suggest that every Christian man here who is possessed of the faculty of eloquent discourse is bound to use it for Jesus Christ. Some young men spend their evenings in Debating Societies and the like, and I have not a word to say against that, but I have this to say—whatever you may do with this talent in other directions, the Lord, who has bought you with His blood if you are a Christian man, has the first claim upon you, and you are bound to use your powers of utterance in His cause. "But I am not a minister!" What do you mean by that? Do you find anything in Scripture about clergy and laity? If so, you have read it with different eyes from mine. There were men called especially to the oversight of the church and the preaching of the Word, but everyone according to his gift had also a call, and there is no man in the church of God who has ability to speak who has any license to be silent. Not only the golden-mouthed orators, but the silver-tongued speakers—men of the second as well as of the first order—should serve in the Gospel of the Son of God.

I shall not ask any young man whether he ought to preach, but whether he can prove that he ought not. Every man is bound to tell another who is in danger to escape from that danger. Everyone who has recovered from a dreadful disease is bound to tell others what remedy was made effectual in his case. Nothing can excuse us from, in some way or other, spreading abroad the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and if we have the ability to speak, it will go hard at last with us if we have been silent with our fellow men.

The stones in the street might surely cry out against some religious professors who make the Houses of Parliament, the Council Chamber, the Courts of Justice, the Athenaeum, or the Mechanics' Hall ring with their voices, and yet preach not Jesus—who can argue points of politics and the like, but not speak a word for Christ—eloquent for the world, but dumb for Jesus. From this may God deliver us!

If you have any gift, young man, come out and use it—or old man either, if you have laid it by till late in the day. In these straitened times when the harvest is ripe and the laborers are few, let every man who has his sickle come forth into the field. Let no man say, “I pray you have me excused,” but by the blood that bought you, if you have tasted of the water of life cry aloud and spare not, and be this your message—“Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.”

There are numbers of believers who have not the gift of utterance with the tongue, who nevertheless can speak very fluently and admirably with the pen. If, then, you have the gift of the pen, are you using it for Christ as you ought? I need to stir up the gift that is in you. Letters have often been blessed to conversion, are you accustomed to write with that view? Perhaps you are a great contributor to the postal revenue, let me ask you what sort of matter it is with which you burden her Majesty's mails? Do you write letters to your children and friends full of loving testimony to what the grace of God has done for you? If you have not done so, dear friends, try at once.

Jesus needs consecrated pens, and in His name I claim your service. The writing of tracts and the dissemination of holy truth by means of the press are most important—any person who has any gifts in that direction should be sure to use them. Why are writers upon religion often so dull, while the world commands talent and vivacity? Many thousands of pens are running every day upon the idlest nonsense, and making booksellers' shelves groan with the literature of fiction! Are there none who, with splendor of diction or in humbler guise, could write interestingly of the Gospel, and tell of its power among the sons of men? If there be in the tribe of Zebulon any that handle the pen of the ready writer, let them not keep back from the help of the Lord—the help of the Lord against the mighty.

Another form of gift that belongs to us is influence. We have all of us influence of some sort—some more, some less. What an influence the parent has. To a great extent you mold your children's lives. Some of us owe what we never can repay to our mothers. What they have done for us shall make us grateful to them even when they shall slumber in the dust. The nurse girl who has the care of little children should be very careful, for a remark she may make without intention may shape the character—ay, mar or bless the child's character throughout eternity. And you who associate daily with working men—is there enough among Christian masters of earnest zeal to use a holy and affectionate influence among the employed? If classes are alienated one from the other, as it is to be feared they are, is it not because we meet each other just as a matter of business, and that there is little of anything like Christian affection and communion between the one and the other?

Indeed some scout the idea as ridiculous, and tell me I know very little of the world to dream of such a thing. I will leave that question to the day which shall reveal all things, and I think I know who will prove to be right. Let every one of us reckon up what influence he has, and having done so, let us ask God's grace that we may use it aright. I shall not go into details here. You are all affecting those around you for good or evil. As Christian men you are either leading others to Christ even unconsciously, or else you are deadening their consciences, and leading them to think there is not much in religion after all, and surely you would not wish to do that. You have the gift of influence, I would stir you up to use it.

Many of the elder members of the church have another gift, namely, experience. Certainly, experience cannot be purchased, nor taught, it is given us of the Lord who teaches us to profit. It is a peculiar treasure each man wins for himself as he is led through the wilderness. An experienced Christian is put in the church on purpose that he may guide the inexperienced, that he may help those who are distressed with a word of comfort derived from his own experience of God's helping hand in time of trouble, that he may warn the heedless by the mischiefs he himself has suffered through carelessness.

Now, when an experienced Christian merely uses his experience for his own comfort, or as a standard by which to judge his fellow Christians, or makes use of it for self-exaltation as though he were infinitely superior to the most zealous young men, such a man mars his talent, does mischief with it, and makes himself heavily responsible.

Dear brethren and sisters, I, who am so young in years compared with many of you, beseech you who have long walked in the ways of godliness to use your experience continually in your visitation of the sick, in your conversations with the poor, in your meetings with young beginners, and in your dealings with backsliders, let your paths drop fatness, let the anointing God has given you fall upon those who are round about you. May you be of such a sort as a certain clergyman I heard of the other day. I asked a poor woman, "What sort of man is he?" She said, "He is such a sort of man, sir, that if he comes to see you, you know he has been there." I understood what she meant, he left behind him some godly saying, weighty advice, holy consolation, or devout reflection, which she could remember after he had left her cottage door. May our venerable friends always have this said of them.

Another gift which many have is the gift of prayer—of prayer with power, in private for the church and with sinners. There are some who have learned by long practice how to knock at heaven's door, so as to get a readier opening of the door than others. Numbers of these have coupled with this the gift of utterance in public prayer. Such dear friends ought not to be absent from the prayer meeting, except when absolute necessity compels. They should not only be content with coming to prayer meetings that are established, but they should stir up the gift that is in them, and try to establish others in neglected places. There was never a period when the church had too much prayer. "The Sacraments," as they are called, may have been unduly exalted, but who has ever unduly exalted prayer. Bible-readings may degenerate into mere discussion, and even preaching into a show of oratory, but prayer has vital elements about it which survive many an injury.

Alas! Alas! for churches which have given up prayer meetings. You shall judge of the presence of God by the prayer meeting, as accurately as you shall judge the temperature of the air by the thermometer. It is one of the truest signs that God is with the people when they pray, and it is one of the darkest signs that He has departed when prayer is lacking. You, who have sweet communion with God in private, look upon your prevalence on the knee not only as a blessing for yourselves, but as a gift that is bestowed upon you for the good of others.

There is another gift which is a very admirable one. It is the gift of conversation, not a readiness for chit chat and gossip—he who has that wretched propensity may bury it in the earth and never dig it up again—but the gift of leading conversation, of being what George Herbert called the "master-gunner," when we have that, we should most conscientiously use it for God.

There lived some fifty years or so ago a set of great table-talkers, who were asked out to dine because of their lively conversational powers. Now if this be in any of you never waste it in mere pleasantries, but say something worth saying, and aim at the highest results. Remember Jesus was a mighty table-talker, as the evangelists take care to note. I wish I could with discreet adroitness break in upon a conversation in a railway carriage and turn it round to the Savior—turn it round to something worth speaking of. I often envy those of my brethren who can go up to individuals and talk to them with freedom. I do not always find myself able to do so, though when I have been divinely aided I have had a large reward.

When a Christian man can get hold of a man and talk to him, it is like one of the old men-of-war lying alongside a French ship and giving her a broadside, making every timber shiver, and at last sending her to the bottom. How many a soul has been brought to Christ by the loving personal exhortations of Christian people who know how to do it? To be able, like Elijah, to stretch yourselves upon the dead child, to put your hands upon his hands, your feet upon his feet and breathe the life by God's help into the dead—oh, some of you can do this better, perhaps, than those who are called to speak to hundreds and thousands. Do use it if you have the ability, and try to get the ability if you have it not. Peradventure you possess it, and have not found it out. No unconverted person should come to this

place without your speaking to him, and as to a person attending the Tabernacle three Sabbath days without being spoken to by some Christian, it ought to be an impossibility, and would be if all were in a right warm-hearted state, earnestly desiring the salvation of others. May God teach us, if we can converse personally with individuals, to furbish up the gift, keep it in good condition, and continually use it.

My inventory of the gifts which are in us is not complete, nor is it intended to be. Each person may have a separate gift. Even the gift to be able to lie still and suffer is not a small one. The gift of being able to be poor and content is not to be despised. The gift of nursing the sick, or of interesting children, should be lovingly employed, neither ought any talent to be wrapped in a napkin. But whatever it is, the word is, "Stir up the gift which is in you."

II. And this brings us, secondly, to the consideration of—HOW WE ARE TO STIR UP OUR GIFTS.

First, we should do it by examination to see what gifts we really have. There should be an overhauling of all our stores to see what we have of capital entrusted to our stewardship. May I ask you for a minute to sit quietly and take stock of all God has given you? Remember you shall assess yourself, for I am sure your manhood, not to say your self-esteem, will not let you put yourself down as utterly without gifts. If somebody were to speak of you depreciatingly, you would very soon defend yourself, and argue for your own capacity in many departments. I would put you on your mettle, and bring you to acknowledge your capabilities.

Now think of all the abilities you have, dear brother, dear sister. What has God trusted you with? Add up each item, and compute the total sum. What trading-money have you of your Lord's? To whom much is given, of him much will be required. What, then, has been given to you? Such an inquiry will help you to stir up the gift that is in you. The self-examination of every mental faculty, every spiritual attainment, every form of characteristic force or individual influence, will be an excellent commencement for a more vigorous course of action. Inquire of what you can do, what more you could do, what more you might learn to do, what more you ought at least to attempt. Diminish nothing from the just amount of your possibilities, and it will greatly tend to stir you up, if you then inquire, "How far have I done what I could do? How far have I used all that has been committed to me? How much of my life has been allowed to rust, and how much has been made bright by wear and tear in the service of my Master?"

It is not a pleasant duty to which I have invited you. You would be much more gratified if I asked you to consider some precious promise of the covenant, and certainly I should find it more consolatory to myself, but this is necessary. Sweet things are pleasant, but sharp things are often the more beneficial. Pillows for our heads are not our main desire, we wish, as soldiers of the cross, to be found faithful first of all and above all. We will have to give an account before God. Oh, let us give an account before ourselves now, in the forum of our own conscience, and so stir up the gift that is in us.

The next mode of stirring up our gift is to consider to what use we could put the talents we possess. To what use could I put my talents in my family? Am I doing all I could for the children? Have I labored all I ought for my wife's conversion—my husband's conversion? Then about the neighborhood—is there nothing more that I could do for the salvation of my poor godless neighbors? Perhaps I see them drunken, profane, unchaste, irreligious, full of all manner of disobedience to God, can I not by God's grace uplift them? They never come to a place of worship, have I done all I could to get them there? I was not placed in that neighborhood without an objective. If it is a dark part of London, I am put there to be a lamp if I am a Christian. Am I shining then? Some people prefer to live where there is light, and for themselves the choice is wise, but I think, for usefulness, loving hearts might prefer to live in bad districts that they might do good. Are you doing all you can for Jesus? Come, answer like an honest man!

Having done so, I have more for your self-inspection. Will you examine yourself in every relation in which you stand? As a master, stir up your gift in reference to those you employ. As a servant, stir up

the gift towards your fellow servants. As a trader, stir up your gift in reference to those with whom you come in contact. Are you a sailor? Have you stepped in here tonight? What an opportunity you have, my friend, in landing on many shores, of doing something for Christ, here and there and everywhere. Are you a commercial traveler, and do you go to many places? Surely you might travel for our Lord with Gospel wares, to be distributed without money and without price, and yet attend to your own calling none the less.

If our churches were in a right state of spiritual health, men would not first say, "What can I do to make money?" but "What can I do to serve Christ, for I will take up a trade subserviently to that." But if we cannot bring men to that point, we must at least say (to all of you who profess to be Christians, at any rate), in whatever condition you are placed, high or low, rich or poor, you should live unto Christ. You should each inquire, "What can I do for the Lord in my present condition? What peculiar service does my position involve?" In this way, dear friends, stir up the gift that is in you.

But next, stir it up not merely by consideration and examination, but by actually using it. We talk much of working, but working is better than talking about working. To get really at it, and to do something for soul-winning and spreading abroad the glory of God, is infinitely better than planning and holding committees. Away with windbags, let us get to acts and deeds. None of us know what we can do till we try. The sportsman will tell you that there may be many birds in a field, but you know not how many till you walk through, and then you discover them and see them on the wing. When the wheel turns you will be able to see the force of the current. You will see the speed of the horse when you put him to his best. Work, work! and the tool that is blunt will get an edge by being used. Shine and the light you have shall grow in the very act of shining! He who has done one thing will find himself capable of doing two, and doing two will be able to accomplish four, and having achieved the four will soon go on to twelve, and from twelve to fifty, and so by growing multiples he will enlarge his power to serve God by using the ability he has.

Does this tire you? Does my subject seem too much like salvation by works? Nothing is further from my thoughts, I am not now speaking upon salvation at all, neither am I addressing those who are seeking after salvation, I am speaking to you who have been saved already by the grace of God. You are saved, and on that point all is done. You are resting in the finished work of Christ. Should it ever seem hard to you to be stirred up to serve Him? Let the vision of His tearful face come up to you. Behold His thorn-crowned brow! Let Him turn His back on you, and mark the gashes the Roman scourges made. Look at Him—a spectacle of blood and love! And is it possible that any service for Him can by you be considered hard? To burn at a stake! if we could do it a thousand times, He well deserves that we should make the sacrifice! To give Him every pulse, and every drop of blood, and every breath we breathe—He well deserves it, glory be to His name, He merits our all a thousand times over. I shall not fear to press upon you again and again and again, that you use the gifts which are in you by actual service of so precious a Master.

And then, dear friends, in addition to using our gift, every one of us should try to improve it. We have for years endeavored to stir up the young Christians of this congregation to educate themselves. By our evening classes it is intended that young men who preach in the street may get education in order to preaching better the Gospel of Christ, and out of this congregation have gone hundreds whom God has owned as ministers of Christ, and many such are being trained now.

I would have every man put himself in training. I think every man ought to feel, "I have been Christ's man with two talents, I will be Christ's man with ten if I can. If now I do not thoroughly understand the doctrines of His Gospel, I will try to understand them, I will read, and search, and learn." We want an intelligent race of Christians, not an affected race of boasters of culture, mental fops, who pretend to know a great deal and know nothing, but we need students of the Word, adept in theology, like the Puritans of old. Romanism will never do much with people who know the doctrines of the Word of God, it is a bat, and hates sunlight. Every one of us ought to be students and learners, trying to get more ability for usefulness as well as to be built up ourselves in our most holy faith.

To the younger members of our churches especially we speak this. Give yourselves to reading, study, and prayer. Grow mentally and spiritually. You teach in the class, you do well, but could not you do better if you knew more? And if you address children in the Sabbath schools we are glad of it, but would you not do that better if you studied more perfectly the truth of God? Apollos was not ashamed to be taught, nor need the most successful laborer be ashamed to learn. Improve your gift, for that is one way of stirring it up.

And then pray over your gifts, that is a blessed way of stirring them up—to go before God, and spread out your responsibilities before Him. In my own case I have often to cry, “Lord, You have given me this congregation, and O it is hard to be clear of the blood of them all, and to speak with affection, and prudence, and courage to all, so as not to leave one unwarned, unhelped, untaught. Help me, my Lord, that I may leave no one without his portion of meat in due season. Who is sufficient for these things? Only Your grace is sufficient for me.”

It stirs one up to preach with all his might, when he has laid before God in prayer his weakness, and the ability which God has given him too, and asked that the weakness may be consecrated to God’s glory and the ability accepted to the Lord’s praise. Should we not do just the same, whatever our calling is—take it to the Lord and say, “Assist me, great God, to live to You. If Your grace in me be only as a handful of meal and a little oil, make it hold out—make it hold out. It is not much I can do, my Master, help me to do it well, and to continue steadfast and unwearied in it.”

Pray over yourself, as it were, put your whole self upon the altar, and then let the drink-offering be the pouring out of your tears before God in prayer that He would be pleased to accept you, to qualify you, to anoint you, to direct you, and bless you in all that you do. This would be the most excellent manner of stirring up the gift that is in you. O Spirit of the living God, lead all Your people to downright, earnest, and actual service of the Redeemer, and especially work in us to that end.

III. I will not linger longer there, but close with the third observation, WHY IS IT THAT WE SHOULD STIR UP THE GIFT THAT IS IN US.

There are many replies to this. One or two will answer our purpose.

We should stir up the gift that is in us because all we shall do when we have stirred ourselves to the utmost, and when the Spirit of God has strengthened us to the highest degree, will still fall far short of what our dear Lord and Master deserves at our hands. Ah! what must Jesus think of us when He remembers His own love. Was there ever such a contrast between His furnace seven times hotter, and our iceberg spirits? He spared not Himself, and we are always sparing ourselves. He gives us everything to the last rag, and hangs naked on the cross, we keep almost all to ourselves, and count self-sacrifice to be hard. He labors, is weary, and yet ceases not, we are a little weary, and straightway we faint. He continued to preach on, notwithstanding all the ill return men made, but we take offense and throw up our work because we are not appreciated as we should be.

Oh, the little things which put some workers out of temper and out of heart. Oh, the looks or the not-looks, the words, or the silence that will make some spirits give up any place, and any service, and any work. “Forbearing one another” seems to have gone out of fashion with many people. “Forgiving one another even as God for Christ’s sake has forgiven you,” is forgotten. Brethren and sisters, if being doormats for Christ for all the church to wipe their feet upon would honor Him, we ought to think it a great glory to be so used.

Among genuine Christians the contention is for the lowest place, among sham Christians the controversy is for the higher positions. Some will ask the question nowadays—“Which is the higher office—that of elder or deacon,” and so on. Oh, what triviality! When the Master was going up to Jerusalem to die, there was a contention among the disciples which of them should be the greatest, and so it is with us, at times when grace is low, our opinion of ourselves is very high, and then our love to Christ is little, so that we soon take affront, and are quick to resent any little insults, as we think them to be, where perhaps nothing of the kind was meant. Beloved, may we be saved from all this littleness of soul!

And remember what obligations we are under to our Master—how we should have been dead in trespasses and sins but for Him—how we should have been in hell but for Him—how our expectations tonight would have been “A fearful looking for of judgment and of fiery indignation but for Him,” but we are washed and cleansed, and on the way to heaven, and we owe it all to Him. Therefore let us stir up the gift that is in us, and serve Him with all our might.

Another reason is that these are stirring times. If *we* are not stirring, everybody else is. The church of God, it seems to me, is traveling along the road to heaven in a broad-wheel wagon, and all the world is going its own way by express speed. If men become at all earnest in the cause of God, worldly critics shout out “Fanaticism! Excitement!” Did you ever stand on the Paris Bourse—ever hear the raving, raging excitement of those stock-jobbers as they are trying to buy various forms of scrip! Nobody says, “Look at these men! See how fanatical they are!” No, they expect to see excitement on the Bourse, but if we were half as excited for God and His Gospel, there would be a hue and cry all over the country, “Here’s a set of madmen! Here’s a set of fanatics let loose.”

Of good Mr. Rowland Hill they said, “The dear old gentleman’s too earnest.” “Why,” said he, “when I was at Wotton-under-Edge I saw a piece of a gravel pit fall in upon two or three men, when I was walking by, so I went into Wotton as fast as my aged legs could carry me, and I shouted with all my might ‘Help! Help! Help!’ and nobody said, ‘The dear old man’s too earnest.’” Oh, no, you may be as earnest as you like about saving people’s lives, but if their souls awaken your sympathy, some lukewarm professor or other is sure to be ready with a wet blanket to cool your ardor. And yet were there ever times in which the wheels of life revolved so swiftly as now? The world marches with giant strides, everybody is up and awake, but the church is asleep to a great extent.

For other things men labor, and tug, and toil, and make sacrifices, for an idea they slaughter their fellow creatures, for the unity of a race they fatten fields with blood, and make rivers run with gore, but to preach Christ, and snatch sinners from the jaws of hell, they require of us to be chilled, and insist that we must not be too earnest, we must not go too fast, we must be prudent, we must be cool! From “prudence” and “coolness” good Lord deliver us! From “decorum” and “propriety” (wherein they stand in the way of our winning souls) good Lord deliver us! And from every conventionality, and every idol that has been set up among us, which prevents our being thoroughly useful and grandly serviceable to the cause of God, good Lord deliver us! Because these are stirring times, we ought to stir up the gift that is in us.

And then, again, we must stir up our gift because it needs stirring. The gifts and graces of Christian men are like a coal fire which frequently requires stirring as well as feeding with fuel. You must not stir it up too much, the poker does not give heat, and stirring up a man of itself does not make him better, indeed, it is as injurious to a weak man to stir him up as it would be to an expiring fire in the grate, but yet there must be stirring, and fires go out sometimes for the want of it. There are times with us when we become dull and heavy, doing little or nothing—restless, indifferent—and then it is that we require rebuking. If there be a solid bottom of real grace in us, we only need the poker that we be stirred up, and straightway the fire begins to burn.

How I like to stir some of you up! I remember a dear brother dropping in one Thursday night to hear the Word preached—an excellent Christian, but sluggish; but the Lord touched his heart with the word spoken, and he began to preach in the streets of the city where he resides. He has now one of the largest houses of prayer, and God has given him hundreds of souls. He only wanted stirring up. Is there no other brother here, who, hearing this earnest word, shall find it like a live coal from off the altar, touching his lips, and moving him to go forth and preach the Word, and serve his Master according to his ability. We must, then, dear friends, stir ourselves up, because if we do not, we may lose the faculty, and rob ourselves of the power of usefulness. The knife which is not used loses its edge, and the man who does not work for God loses much of his ability to do so in the future.

I shall give you another reason, and that is this. If we will but stir ourselves, beloved, or rather, if God’s Holy Spirit will but stir us, we as a church may expect very great things. I can hardly tell you how

comforted I felt last Monday evening. I said on Sabbath day, "The elders and deacons will meet to pray, and those of you who love souls and are concerned about them will kindly come too, at six o'clock." I was glad to see many of you who I know love the Lord fervently, and through that warm prayer meeting which we had before our more public gathering, we felt that we had laid hold upon our God. I know there is a blessing coming. I am sure of it. I hear "A sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees." The Lord is with us. He never made His people agonize in secret, and join together publicly in deep soul earnestness, without intending to bless them. We might as well fear when the months are warm, that there will be no ripening of the wheat, as to say when Christian's hearts are warm towards God that there will be no conversions. It can't be. Inquiring saints always make inquiring sinners. If we inquire of God for sinners, sinners will soon inquire for themselves. Up, therefore, up, therefore, beloved! Bestir yourselves, for God is stirring us.

And remember, there will be a great stir by and bye. Businesses will all end, politics will be done with, and all the matters in which you are concerned will be closed eternally. What a stir there will be in that day, when we shall stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ to give an account of the deeds done in the body! What a stir about ourselves! What a stir about others! Where will they be? Will they be on the right hand, or on the left? Shall I see my boys in heaven, or will they be cast out? What a stir there will be about your husband or your wife! What a stir there will be about your neighbors! Think of it! Think of it, I say, and be stirred now! If they die as they are, they will be damned, they must be. They must sink into hell! There is no hope of their escape if they die unsaved.

What a stir there will be throughout all the nations in that day! And surely, if we look at it in the light of eternity, in the light of that tremendous day when Christ, with clouds, shall come, we shall feel that there is nothing worth living for but serving God, that the very core and center of all life is to bring glory to God by bringing sinners to Jesus Christ. God grant you may live as if you expected to die. We ought always to preach as though we should go out of the pulpit into heaven, always to pray in that way, and always to spend every day as if we had not another day to spend. For this we need much of the Holy Spirit's power. But He rests upon His people. May He come and rest upon us now, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

Rome, Nov. 5, 1872.

BELOVED FRIENDS—You will be glad to know that cessation from the cares and labors of my office has already had a most beneficial effect upon me, and I hope at the close of my forty days to come home to you more fit to serve you than I have been for some time. I am sorry that it is needful to cease from the delightful work of my ministry, but necessity has no law, and it is better both for you and for me that I retire occasionally than be broken down altogether, or suffer long sicknesses.

My heart longs to see the kingdom of God more greatly promoted among us and by us. Here are whole nations in the dark, and how little are we doing to give them the lamp of life. Alas, there are many at home in like condition, and we do not bestir ourselves. Jesus Christ demands of saved souls that they do their utmost to promote His praise; the unsaved He calls to accept His finished salvation; may both classes be obedient to Him.

I hope there will be at least one hundred to be added to our number on my return. Pray and labor for this. May the meetings for prayer never flag in any degree. Keep them up better in my absence than when I am with you. Grace and peace be unto you all, with the deacons and elders, and my dear brother. I send herewith my love to you all in Christ Jesus. Longing greatly again to join in the great congregation at the Tabernacle, I am most anxious that those who supply my place should be very greatly blessed among you. Brethren, pray for them, and for me also, and for my household, as I also do for you all.

Do not permit any good work for the Lord to lag because your Pastor is away. God bless and comfort you all.

Yours in Christ Jesus,
C. H. SPURGEON.

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