

WHY MEN CANNOT BELIEVE IN CHRIST NO. 1245

A SERMON
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON

*“How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another,
and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?”
John 5:44*

OUR Savior was addressing Himself to Pharisees, who would not receive Him, and who, no doubt, pleaded that they *could* not believe on Him. They had just seen a very notable miracle wrought by Him—a man who had been many years sick had been suddenly restored, and that by a word. That miracle, being of the same nature as the wonderful works of the great Father, a miracle of tenderness and omnipotence, ought to have convinced them that Christ was the Son of God.

They saw the miracle, however, and instead of drawing the proper inference, they began to cavil at the Master because He had performed it upon the Sabbath day. The teaching of our Lord’s wonderful work of mercy and power was lost upon them. They could not, they would not see the finger of God.

Before this miracle had occurred, John the Baptist had come—the Elias who was foretold to herald the Messiah. These Pharisees had felt a partial belief in John, and the popular voice compelled them to stifle any unbelief concerning him which may have lingered in their hearts. They dared not say that his ministry was altogether of man, and consequently, they were posed by the Savior’s question, “The ministry of John, was it from heaven or of men?”

They could not answer the question, because if they denied his mission, the people would cry out against them. And on the other hand, if they confessed that John came from heaven, our Lord’s reply would be, “Why, then, did ye not believe him, and accept his testimony concerning me?” They had, therefore, in addition to the miracle which Jesus wrought, the testimony of John the Baptist, but still *they could not believe*.

In addition to this, these men were exceedingly well-acquainted with the Scriptures. The scribes made it their business to transcribe the Old Testament. They learned chapters and books by heart. Many of them were so well-acquainted with the letter of Scripture that they could tell you which was the middle verse in each book, and they have left us Masoretic notes which tell us what is the middle verse of the Bible, and the middle letter of the Bible, and like trifles. They were very curious and careful concerning all the little jots and tittles of the sacred manuscripts.

Now, those books speak plainly of Christ. It is marvelous that men conversant with Old Testament Scripture could see Jesus Christ, and observe His doings, and not discover that He was the Messiah, of whom Moses in the law and the prophets did write. What witness can be plainer than that of Isaiah? Here was testimony upon testimony, and yet in the teeth of it all, the Christ was rejected.

There are persons of this kind in the world still. They believe the Scriptures to be the Word of God, though they do not believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. They accept the Gospel narrative. They have no doubt, whatever that Jesus, the Son of God, did live on earth a life of perfection, and died as a substitutionary sacrifice. They also believe that He has risen from the dead, and is gone into glory, and has all power to save.

They believe that the Gospel message is true, and yet they do not believe on the Lord Jesus—I mean that they do not so believe in Him in spirit and in truth, as to believe unto salvation. They stop short with the knowledge of the outward facts, and they do not come with their hearts and rest upon Him as their whole salvation.

And if you ask them why not, they will not say that they will not, and shall not, but that they cannot. They plead a want of ability, and they endeavor, as well as they can, to screen themselves behind that want of ability. It is a monstrous thing, beyond all things monstrous, that a man should plead that he is under a necessity to give his God the lie direct.

It is an amazing thing that a man should actually urge as an apology for remaining at enmity to God that he cannot believe Him. That is to say, he actually pleads the great sin of making God a liar, as an excuse for his rebellion. What is that but to insult the majesty of heaven with an excuse which is in itself the highest insolence?

To say I cannot believe a man is to malign his character. And to say that I cannot believe God is to do Him the highest conceivable dishonor. To what a pitch has the human heart gone in extravagance of presumptuous daring, when it boldly tells God that it cannot believe His testimony concerning His Son. And though He says, "Believe in My Son and you are saved," man dares to answer Him thus, "We cannot believe in Your Son," as if the Christ of God were a liar too, and He who died for us, and gave the best pledge of His love, were not to be trusted.

Alas for our race! Has it indeed come to this, that it is a hard thing to rely upon One who cannot deceive us, and difficult to place our dependence upon One who is able to save to the uttermost?

Now, I want to deal as gently as I dare with those of you who have pleaded inability. It is very likely true that you cannot believe—let us try to find out the reason of it. The difficulty does not lie in the truth to be believed, for it is neither absurd nor incredible. Neither does it lie in any want of mental faculty in yourself by which you might believe.

In your case, the difficulty is not a mental one, for you already believe in the inspiration of the Word of God, and in the mission of Christ, and so on. Your difficulty is a moral one, and I shall be faithful with you, and try to put my finger upon it, just as Christ was faithful with these people, and pointed out their moral difficulty—"How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another?" May the Holy Ghost put power into my words.

First, let us speak of *the hindrance which was in the way of these Pharisees*. And then, secondly, let us make some guesses at *the hindrances in the way of some of you who cannot believe*.

I. First, THE HINDRANCE IN THE WAY OF THE PHARISEES.

It may be in the way of some here, and therefore let us note it carefully. They received honor one of another. Now, *the mere fact of receiving honor, even if that honor be rightly rendered, may make faith in Christ a difficulty*. A man gets to feel that he is something when others honor him, and this is dangerous, for a man never believes in Jesus till he knows himself to be nothing.

If others praise us, if they dwell upon our good points, if they pay respect to our rank, if they notice our abilities and talents, we are very apt to think that there should be some special way to heaven for us—some platform tickets to let us in by a back door a little apart from the common crowd of sinners, because we are so respected.

And when the Gospel says, "You must be saved as a sinner or not at all. You must give up all claims of merit, and all reliance upon what you can do, or else you never can be saved," then in all probability the mere fact of our having received honor from other people will render it the more difficult for us to believe a doctrine which gives no honor to men, but stains the pride of all glory, and casts human excellency into the dust.

It is still more perilous if, receiving honor, we come to expect it, as these people did. They expected their countrymen to pay them homage. Were they not called by their brethren "great," and "distinguished," and "learned"? Were they not styled "doctor" and "rabbi" and the like? They came to think that the people ought to honor and esteem them. And thus they went a step deeper into the perilous floods, for *when a man gets to feel that he ought to be honored, he is in extreme danger*.

I have known some who have been worthy of much honor, and have received it without being in any degree elevated. With a proper modesty, they have shunned the fame which followed them, and blushed when it has overtaken them. But it is not given to all men to bear the serious trial of honor. Too many

men, receiving honor, come to expect honor—and he who expects honor is not in that condition of heart which renders it easy to fall down on his knees at the throne of divine mercy and cry, “God be merciful to me a sinner.”

Now, some of you may be very much esteemed in your families—I am very glad you are. But perhaps without your knowing it, there is growing up the feeling that you *ought to be* esteemed. Now, dear friend, take care lest that should fester into a dangerous pride which will be your ruin.

You know the simple story (I dare say you have heard it told) of the slave owner who was under conviction, and who had a servant under impressions too. But poor Sam found Christ and peace long before his master did, at which the master expressed his wonder.

The slave replied, “Do you see, massa, when de angel comes along with a white robe, he says to massa, ‘Here is a new robe for you.’ Massa looks at his coat, a little worn and a few holes, but still pretty fine. ‘Ah,’ says massa, ‘it will patch up and do a little longer,’ so massa does not get de new robe. De angel come to Sam and says, ‘Sam, new robe for you.’ Sam says, ‘Ah, I am all rags—I am all rags. Thank you!’ and I put on de new robe at once, massa.”

Now, there is just that fear lest your very amiable character, and the respect it brings you should lead you to be all the longer in accepting the righteousness of Jesus Christ. That perhaps is where your difficulty may be found at the present time. And if so, dear friend, humble yourself under the mighty hand of God, and you shall be exalted in due time, “For God resisteth the proud, but he giveth grace to the humble.”

Remember, you may not be at all offensively proud to other people, and yet there may be much pride in your heart in the sight of God—and this may be hindering you from believing the simple, precious Gospel, which is meant for the guilty and the lost and the ruined, and which, dear friends, is really meant for you, if you did but know your own condition.

In the case of the Pharisees, however, there was something more than that. They not only received honor and expected honor, but *this honor was quite undeserved*. These men won respect by a false character. Oh, they were wonderfully good men, and marvelously religious! They had two pennyworth of halfpence to give away, and they sounded a trumpet in the street, and everybody said, “What a generous man that Rabbi Ben Simeon is! He has been giving money away at the corner of the street.”

When they paid their tithes, they were very particular to send the servant down into the garden to cut exactly a tenth-part of the mint, the anise, and the cumin. True, it was not worth two pence, it would not have made up a pound sterling in a hundred years—but it was intended to let everybody see their thorough-going principles.

Everybody said, “Rabbi Ben Simeon is so very exact in the payment of his tithes. He is such a very holy man. He actually begged the collector to give him change for half a farthing, so as to be quite correct, and not have even a sprig of mint on his conscience. He is very holy.

“Look at the border of his garment—other people wear theirs about an inch wide, but his is six inches at least. His tailor says that he is one of the godliest men he ever knew, and spends a deal in trimmings. He is very holy, and observes all the fasts—you can tell that by his sad countenance. He fasts twice in the week. Whoever heard of such self-denial? It is true he has a famous appetite on the other five days, but yet he is a very holy man.”

They extolled one another for this ostentatious religiousness—this wonderful piety. But if you could have seen the Pharisee in private, you would have discovered that he really did not deserve a word of praise, for there, behind the door, what is that he is eating? Our Lord tells you—it is a widow’s substance. “You devour widows’ houses, and for a show make long prayers.”

He has been washing his hands, because he has been to market, and they need it, for an orphan’s plunder defiles them. He carefully washes before he eats bread, but though he has made clean the outside of the cup and the platter, his inner part is full of filthiness.

Albeit that he was strict as to ceremonies, he taught men to set aside the commandments of God, and follow instead the commandments of men. The fellow, instead of deserving to be praised, ought to have been hooted off the stage for his hypocrisy.

Now, be sure of this, if a man has a fine character, but does not deserve it—if he allows that piece of dishonesty to go on, I do not wonder that he cannot believe in Jesus Christ. How should he? A man so false through and through—how should he believe the truth? If a man has lived in the dark all his life, do you wonder that the light makes his eyes ache, and that therefore he hates it?

If a man has been incrustated in filth from his birth and thrived in it, there is no wonder that he judges purity to be quite a superfluity. Believe in Jesus Christ? O man, while you are acting so vile a part, there is no wonder that you cannot believe in the honest, truthful Savior.

Now, is there anybody here who wears before the eye of men a fair character, and yet, in secret, is anything but what he ought to be? O sir, if *you* cannot believe in Jesus, I can very well comprehend your difficulty. But oh, may God make you sincere—may He turn you into that honest and good ground on which the seed will grow, for it never will grow in a hypocrite's heart, let us preach to him as long as we may.

These people who received honor had a further difficulty, namely, that, *always receiving this undeserved honor, they deceived themselves into believing that they deserved it.* A man who deludes other people by degrees comes to delude himself. The deluder first makes dupes of others and then becomes a dupe to himself.

I should not wonder but what the Pope really believes that he is “infallible,” and that he ought to be saluted as “his holiness.” It must have taken him a good time to arrive at that eminence of self-deception, but he has got to that, I dare say, by now, and every one who kisses his toe confirms him in his insane idea.

When everybody else believes a flattering falsehood concerning you, you come at last to believe it yourself, or at least to think that it may be so. These Pharisees, being continually called “the learned rabbi,” “the holy scribe,” “the devout and pious doctor,” “the sanctified teacher,” almost believed the flattering compliments.

They used very grand phrases in those days, and doctors of divinity were very common, almost as common as they are now. And the crowd of doctors and rabbis helped to keep each other in countenance by repeating one another's fine names till they believed they meant something.

Dear friends, it is very difficult to receive honor, and to expect it, and yet to keep your eyesight, for men's eyes gradually grow dull through the smoke of the incense which is burned before them. And when their eyes become dim with self-conceit, it will not be at all marvelous if they say, “We cannot believe in Jesus Christ.” Their own great selves conceal the cross, and make them unable to believe the truth.

Once more, the praise of men generally *turns the receivers of it into great cowards.* How could they believe in Jesus? Why, the people would leave off terming them “the learned rabbi,” and “the celestial doctor,” and their brethren would put them out of the synagogue.

How could they believe and lose their status? Why, the people would say, “Has rabbi So and so become a disciple of the carpenter's son? Has he put aside his wisdom and become a child, that he may be instructed by the Nazarene?” Why, the whole Sanhedrin would hiss out indignation against the learned man, the pious man, the devout man, with his phylactery, and the broad border of his garment, if he were to follow with publicans and harlots at the heels of the rejected Messiah.

They were afraid! They were afraid! That same spirit which makes us love the praise of men makes us dread the threats of men. You cannot be pleased with the adulation of mankind without becoming fearful of their censure. It is a perilous thing to taste of human honor—if it makes you sick, it is the best thing it can do for you. If you despise it utterly, it is the only way of bearing it without being injured by it.

For I say again, delight in the praises of others saps the foundations of a man's manhood—delight in the praise of men takes a man off from following after the glory of God, and makes him afraid of following the truth if it cost him ridicule.

Now, I am afraid that there are many here who cannot believe in Jesus Christ *because they are afraid*. Yes, there is a commercial traveler over there! If he were to become a Christian, why the next time he went into the commercial room it would be known, and there would be many odd remarks and no end of chaffing. You, Mr. Commercial, cannot follow Christ, can you? It is plain that you cannot believe, and the reason is plain too—you are a great coward!

There is a working man over there, and he knows that it is right to be a believer in Jesus Christ, but he cannot believe. And the reason is that he could not stand those coarse remarks which he would be sure to get in the shop tomorrow morning. He has not spirit enough to bear with ridicule. He is the slave of others, and trembles at their laughter!

I would sooner lie in my grave than be so mean a thing. Some are afraid of their brothers, others are afraid of the companions that they spend their evenings with. They have been hitherto the first to lead the laugh at the evening convivial. If they were to be converted, they would lose their little empire, and be no longer a favorite. They could not stand contempt!

Oh, the fear of man, the fear of man, what cowards it makes of intelligent beings! It is not conscience that makes cowards of us one-half so much as the want of conscience—if we had more conscience we should have less fear of men, and should brave their scowls, and scorn their scorn, and bid defiance to their threats.

But oh, how many live on the breath of their fellow men. To be approved—to be applauded—that is their heaven. But to be despised, to be sneered at, to be called fool, to have some nickname applied to them—oh no, they would sooner go to hell than bear that. I say that they are fools with an emphasis if that be the case, and if they will use their wits for a moment, I think they will see it so, for surely to be lost to please fools is to be a fool yourself.

Please your friends as far as it is right, but never go to such an expense as the ruin of your souls to keep up friendship with sinners. That man is no friend of mine who would leave me ruin my soul. I have known *friends* come to a man and suck all his estate out of him, lead him into speculations and schemes that serve their turn, and desert him when they have ruined him. Do you call such men *friends*?

We do not, when we speak honestly, call them such, and shall I call him a friend who leads me into sinful amusements, who seeks my favor by teaching me how to indulge my passions, and courts my praise while ruining my soul? He is my decided enemy. He cannot be my friend at all.

Flee from all of his class, young man, if you cannot convert him. Do not be such a coward as to be afraid of anybody. Stand straight up as God made you, and say, "No, He never made me to be afraid of man or woman either. He has made me a man, and the very least thing I can do is to pray Him to make me manly enough to buy the truth and sell it not, and take up my cross and follow Christ, come what may of it."

Thus much upon the point as it concerned the Pharisees and some here.

II. Now, secondly, I am going to make some guesses as to OTHER HINDRANCES, and you must all help me. You who cannot believe must help me by trying to find out how far I am describing your cases.

It is, no doubt, true that some are unable to believe in Christ because they have *a very high opinion of themselves*. They have never done anything amiss—at least, not much, and they have got very good hearts at bottom. And if there has been anything awry, they mean to mend and set it all right. And they have no doubt that they will fare as well as the most of people. They will just do their best, and God Almighty is very merciful, and no doubt they will, by some means, get on the right side of the Judge at last.

Ah, dear friend, you must be purged of this perilous stuff, or you cannot be saved. Your self-satisfaction is founded upon falsehood. Your heart is not so good as you think it, nor your conduct so

commendable as you suppose. You have not done your best. If you will examine your past life, your conscience will find out many instances in which you did not do your best.

And you cannot—mark that word—despite the apparent strength of that resolve of yours—you cannot conquer sin. I must say to you as Joshua to the children of Israel, “Ye cannot serve the LORD.” You are going to fight a stout enemy, and the spear you carry in your hand is but a reed, which will snap in battle’s perilous hour.

You think that you shall chase out the Canaanites, but they have chariots of iron, and you cannot drive them out. I wish you would give up thinking that you can, for as long as you are strong and good and meritorious, you will never be saved. Confess that you have failed. Confess that you are weakness itself. Lay hold on the divine strength. Leave yourself in the hands of Jesus. Yield to His Holy Spirit, and sin will be conquered.

Unless you do this, the real reason why you cannot believe in Christ is because you believe in yourself, and that is a very sorry reason for unbelief. The lie of self-conceit prevents your seeing the great truth of Christ’s ability to save.

In many cases, there is *a strong aversion to confession of sin and to an approach to God*, and that is the reason why men cannot believe. When they are told, “Whosoever believeth in the Lord Jesus hath everlasting life,” they make answer, “I wish I could believe, but I cannot.”

Now, let me ask one who speaks in that fashion. Did you ever go to God with tears and say, “Lord, I have sinned”? Did you ever acknowledge your transgressions before the Lord, and acknowledging them, did you then say, “God be merciful to me a sinner”? No, you have not done that, and you cannot bring your mind to it. You do not like to make a clean breast of it.

Now, he that confesses his sin shall find mercy, but none else. David said, “When I kept silence my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long.” Moreover, if you do not confess your sin to the Lord, I do not see how you can believe in Christ, because Christ has come to pardon sin, and if you will not confess that you have transgressed, how can you believe in His power to pardon? How can ye rightly value forgiveness when you are not awake to the fact that you have offended?

The Lord Jesus has come to cleanse you by virtue of His blood. But if you do not want cleansing, or will not acknowledge that you do, I can well understand you when you say, “I cannot believe in Him.” It is your hardness of heart, your hatred of God, your esteem of yourself that hinders.

Many also are unable to believe in Jesus Christ because they are *too indolent*. They are slothfully thoughtless and careless. A great many young people, and some older ones too, do not like thinking—it is too much trouble. If you think, some of you women, it is about how that ribbon will suit your complexion. And some of you men, if you think at all, it is only about how you shall get an extra five pound note by your speculations.

Thinking is a kind of work which the mass of the present race abhor. They will no more think than butterflies will make honey. They flit from flower to flower, but gather nothing. I know that this is true of multitudes in this country, and I confess it was true of myself before the Lord in mercy met with me. I did not want to think about sin, and death, and heaven, and hell. I did not mind hearing a sermon, because that was the proper thing, and one could soon shake off any uneasy impression produced by it.

To spend an hour quite alone, to look into another world, to face death, judgment, and eternity—that is very dreary work to you whose main consideration is to kill time and keep yourselves amused. Now, my dear friend, if you are a trifler, indifferent, careless, frivolous, superficial, giddy, forever giggling, not even serious enough to laugh—if life is all surface work with you—I can very well understand why you cannot believe in Jesus Christ.

You do not seem to have mind enough, or sense enough, for you degrade yourself into a semi-idiotic state by your frivolity. May God awaken you. This life was given us for something better than to be sported away. It is not all a game of battle-dore or skipping-rope. This life is given you to be followed by another—and that other will be molded by this.

What you are here, you will be forever. He that is filthy here will be filthy still. And he that is holy here will be holy still. Mind what you are at. The hours you try to get rid of, when you speak of “killing time,” will accuse you before God as their murderer, and bear blood-red evidence upon their hands against you. Wake up from such indolence, I charge you, lest you wake up when it will be too late. Already such sluggishness has kept you from believing—it will soon sleep you into hell.

There are some, again, who cannot believe in Jesus Christ because they are very, *very fond of what they call pleasure*. Now, every man is desirous of happiness, and is not to be condemned for being so. The human mind was constituted to enjoy pleasure, but it was never created that it might be content with the vanities which nowadays are falsely called pleasures.

It makes one blush for the age in which we live when we think of the trifles light as air in which our neighbors take delight. Sinful pleasures are a great bar to faith, and must be renounced. That evil companion who has charmed you with questionable jests must be given up. Do you say that you cannot quit him? Then I see why you cannot believe in Jesus.

That house of unclean amusement, which leads to vice—unbelievers know that they must forsake it if they believe in Christ—and they cannot believe because they love the place of temptation. They hesitate. They deliberate. They say that they cannot believe in Jesus, but if they would speak the truth, they mean they cannot give up sweet sin. Sin is such a dainty that they need to roll it under their tongue, and relish it once more. They prefer their pleasure to their Savior.

Let me also say, there are some who are unable to believe in Jesus Christ *for reasons which I hardly care to utter publicly now*, and yet I must do it. I have sometimes had sorrowful proof of the reason why some men have lived in unbelief of Christ. After death, I have heard what it would have been a shame to whisper in the ear of an unsuspecting wife. The man was a respectable merchant in the city. He went into the “best society,” but he was keeping a mistress and living in fornication all the while.

He said he could not believe in Christ! Do you wonder? How could he? I speak plainly, because these things are very common among your respectable merchants, and they need to be told plainly of their sins. Do not come whining to me about “*can't* believe in Jesus Christ.” Of course you cannot while you live in filthy lusts.

Some cannot believe, but why is it? Why, about once a fortnight, or perhaps once a month, the bottle gets the upper hand of them. They cannot believe, no, and there is another thing they cannot do, *they cannot walk straight*. They cannot believe, but they could if they would fling that brandy bottle out of the window—the vile drink stands between them and Christ.

To show us that they cannot believe, they hunt up some of Tom Paine’s blasphemies. And when they get “half seas over” they blubber out their religious difficulties, and want us to believe that they are troubled about them. They are only acting a part—they are not honest infidels—they only use skepticism to quiet their consciences, for they know very well that drunkenness is their real master. There are plenty of very respectable people who never have to pay “five shillings and costs,” and yet do not go to bed sober as a rule. I mean women as well as men. These also cannot believe.

Have I not told some of you why you cannot believe? I will not mince matters with you. You know that what I say is true.

I cannot go into all the sins which separate between men and Christ, but there are some who live for *gain*, and therefore cannot believe. They must make money. Their first aim and their last is to make money—and they are making money—but they are making money in a way they would not like to have known. “There are tricks in all trades,” they say, as if they would smudge everybody else with their black brush to make themselves seem clean.

Now, I do not believe that every tradesman practices dishonesty. I believe there are many who would scorn a trick, if they could win millions thereby, and therefore it is not fair to blacken our neighbors to excuse ourselves. There are men about who seek gain, and will stick at any lie if they can make a profit. They are making “great sacrifices” always—of their customers, I suspect, mainly. They misrepresent their goods, and puff them with barefaced lies—the world is full of this rotten trading.

Are any of you engaged in such trading? Dare you go to God and say, “Lord, help me to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ,” and then take down your shutters and cheat people? Why, the Lord will never help you to do anything of the sort. You must give up knavery and puffery, for you cannot serve God and Mammon, and God will never help you to do so.

There is no promise in the Bible that God will allow a man to remain dishonest and yet be saved. You need to be saved *from* your dishonesty, to be saved *from* your drunkenness, to be saved *from* your injustice. And unless you are saved from these you can by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

May God grant us grace to shake these vipers into the fire, for, oh my brothers, though I have spoken sternly, just now, even as John the Baptist might have done, I also am a man, and would plead with you tenderly. What sin can be worth indulging at the expense of your soul?

Young soldier, over yonder, is there any sin which prevents your being a Christian in your regiment? Can any sin repay you for losing your soul? Young woman, over there, tempted by pleasure, can any gaiety be worth losing heaven for? Whether young or old, I ask you, “What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?”

I have spoken roughly to you in love—love to your souls. If the whole host of pleasurable sins could be put together, and gold piled upon them high as the moon, the whole mass would not repay a man for being cast into the fires of hell. Do not run such risks, I pray you. May great grace enable you to cast your sins away and take Christ at once.

There is one other thing I will mention, which I am persuaded prevents a great many from believing in Christ, and it is this—they complain that they cannot believe that God will forgive such sinners as they are—and they try to make out that it is impossible that their iniquities should be pardoned. I have on several occasions discovered that the true reason has been that *they have not forgiven other people*.

Now, let us not deceive you. You must forgive everyone his trespasses against you, or your Father in heaven will never forgive you. An unforgiving man is an unforgiven man. Let us say that again—An unforgiving man is an unforgiven man. If you take your brother by the throat and say, “Pay me what thou owest,” you cannot wonder that the great King should be angry, and refuse to hear you when you pray unto Him.

It is a very dreadful thing when this kind of spirit springs up between relatives, but it does do so. We have known parents who cannot forgive children. And we have known brothers who cannot forgive brothers, so that two of the same family will not speak to each other by the year together. I hope they are not so daring as to come to the communion table in such a temper as that, because they have no right there, certainly. It is not possible for us to be at peace with God if we will not be at peace with one another. May I not have put my finger upon the cause of unbelief in some now present? I know I have.

And now to sum up all in a word. If these are the reasons why you cannot believe in Jesus Christ, are they not reasons which aggravate your sin? You dare not plead any one of them before God. They are reasons which will fail you when you come to die. Remember, they will all be made known at the day of judgment. Every secret sinner here will have to stand forth to be seen as I stand publicly before you now. Yea, and much more so.

Every man will be visible to the eyes of the assembled universe—and all his actions will be read out in the face of the sun—and more, his motives will be published too. Who—who among you but must feel some dread of the great day of assize? If you are not covered by the righteousness of Christ, how will you endure the revelation of that day?

There will be no secrets then. A trumpet voice shall proclaim aloud every hidden thing, and the lightning flash of the divine eye shall discover the deeds of darkness. O soul, if you have any of these reasons for not believing, what shall I say to you? Put away such unreasonable reasons. God has given His Son to bleed and die for sinners—all He bids sinners do is to come and trust His Son—and if they will but trust His Son, they are saved. Their transgressions are forgiven the moment they believe in Jesus. They receive a new life and begin a new career.

“But,” you say, “how am I to know that it is so?” God says it is so. Is not that enough? There are hundreds of us here who have tried and proved the truth of the promise.

*“Oh, believe the message true—
God to us His Son has given.”*

Rest on Him and you shall have the blessings which He came to give to the guilty and the lost. I feel as if I cannot utter what I feel, or feel as I ought to feel, when I look round upon this congregation, and remember that there are many here who are refusing Jesus Christ—and that some of them in a very short time will be where they will have no more space for believing unto life, but will be shut out forever from all hope.

I cannot bear the thought that one among you should then say, “I went to hear the preacher at the Tabernacle one Sabbath evening, and he preached to us about the reasons why we could not believe. But he was so very smooth-tongued and velvet-mouthed that he did not deal with our consciences fairly and honestly.”

No, sirs. You will not dare to say that. You will not dare to say that. I have spoken plainly to you. What then will you say? You will have to admit, “I was plainly warned, but I persisted in not believing in Jesus Christ. I said I *could* not, but the reason was that I would not. I harbored evils in my heart, and I refused to get rid of them, and so I could not believe in Christ.

“I chose my own destruction, and now that I have accomplished it, I have no one to blame but myself. Over the roof of that dreadful prison-house, in which I am shut in forever, I continually read these words, ‘You knew your duty, but you did it not. You heard of Jesus, but you rejected Him, and your blood is on your own head.’”

God grant it may not be so, but instead thereof, may many of you come to believe in Jesus now, and then we will meet in heaven and praise redeeming grace. Hoping that free grace will make it so, we will sing one of Mr. Sankey’s joyful hymns—“Ring the Bells of Heaven.”

*“Ring the bells of heaven! there is joy today,
For a soul returning from the wild!
See! the Father meets him out upon the way,
Welcoming His weary wand’ring child.
Glory! glory! how the angels sing,
Glory! glory! how the loud harps ring;
'Tis the ransomed army, like a mighty sea,
Pealing forth the anthem of the free.”*

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—JOHN 5

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—387, 572, 541

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. 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.