

HOLINESS, THE LAW OF GOD'S HOUSE

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A SERMON
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*“This is the law of the house;
 Upon the top of the mountain the whole limit thereof round about shall be most holy.
 Behold, this is the law of the house.”*
Ezekiel 43:12

I SHALL not enter into the immediate meaning of Ezekiel's vision. I believe that the house of which Ezekiel speaks is typical of the church of the Living God. In it I see not so much the visible church as that spiritual, mystical church of Jesus Christ, which is the one place of His abode. It is found in a state of grace on earth, and in full glory in heaven. Below it is the holy church militant—above it is the holy church triumphant.

The church is the only thing upon earth which can properly be called the house of God, for He dwells not in temples made with hands, that is to say of this building. The finest architecture could never constitute a proper shrine for Deity. Look to yon blue heavens, gaze upon the spangled vault of night, and view the ever-flashing, wide, and open sea, and tell me if any handiwork of man can rival the temple of nature.

Peer into boundless space, and see what a temple is already builded—within what walls would you hope to house the infinite JEHOVAH? He has deigned, however, to choose Zion, and to desire it for His habitation. The saints are built together as a spiritual house, a habitation of God through the Spirit. He resides among His people according to His promise, “I will dwell in them and walk in them.”

Hence the church is the home of the Great Father, where He dwells in the midst of His family, and takes His rest. Has He not said, “This is my rest for ever: here will I dwell, for I have desired it”? As a man in his own house takes his case and finds delight, so does God take pleasure in them that fear Him—“His foundation is in the holy mountains. The LORD loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob.”

The church is God's house, for there He makes Himself known, and manifests Himself as He does not unto the outside world. “In Judah is God known, his name is great in Israel.” His people know Him, for they are all taught of the Lord. None of them has need to say to his neighbor, “Know the LORD,” for they all know Him as their Father, from the least even to the greatest.

What sweet familiarities are enjoyed in the church! What holy intimacies between the great Father and His children. How tenderly does He unbosom Himself so that the secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him. His saints are a people near unto Him—they have access to Him at all times, for they dwell in His house, and are His own dearly beloved children.

What more glorious thing can be said of the church than this—“God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved”? Of what but the church, the true house of the Lord, could we read such words as these—“The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over you with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing”?

The church is God's house, and therefore He provides for it even as a man cares for his own house, spends his strength for it, exercises his wisdom on its behalf, and is ever thoughtful over it. God does lay out Himself for His people. For this His Son has both died and risen again. For this the Lord arranges the purposes of heaven. For this He works among the children of men.

The Lord's portion is His people, Jacob is the lot of His inheritance—to His chosen He has special regard. He will see to it that His spiritual house is not allowed to decay, or to be short of anything which makes for its comfort, security, and honor.

The Lord links His own name with the church as a man does with his house. It is the house of the Lord, and He is the Lord of the house. Beloved, it is the greatest honor that can happen to any man to be a member of the household of God.

There are great houses in the world of long descent and of imperial rank, but what are they compared with the household of God? The one family in heaven and earth named by the name of Jesus has far more true glory about it than all the families of princes. I had rather be the meanest saint than the greatest emperor. Such honor have all the saints.

Now, brothers and sisters, if you and I have had the privilege to be admitted into God's house, and to be made a part of His family, it is exceedingly necessary that we should know the law of the house. This is desirable at our entrance, and equally necessary as long as we remain in the house of the Lord. Paul wrote to Timothy with this design, "That thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God."

To this end Ezekiel was sent of God to those who desired the favor of God. He was to show them the form of the house, and the goings out thereof, and the comings in thereof, and all the ordinances thereof, and all the forms thereof, and laws thereof. And write it in their sight, that they might keep the whole form thereof, and all the ordinances thereof, and do them.

God's house is not lawless. It is the abode of liberty, but not of license. They that dwell in God's house are in His immediate presence, and our God is a consuming fire. He had better be holy who dwells with the thrice holy God. The Lord will be sanctified in them that come near Him, and if any enter the house to misbehave themselves, they will find that judgment begins at the house of God. How terrible are those words—"If any man defile the temple of God, him will God destroy."

Come we, then, with great attention to look at our text, which will inform us as to the law of the house. O that the Spirit may cause us to understand, and then lead us to obey.

Let us first try to *expound the law of the house*. Secondly, *let us examine ourselves as to whether we have observed this law of the house*. Thirdly, let us *see the bearings of this law*, and fourthly, let us *take orders for having this law of the house obeyed*.

I. First, LET US EXPOUND THE LAW OF THE HOUSE.

Note the text carefully. It begins and ends with the same words—"This is the law of the house; upon the top of the mountain the whole limit thereof round about shall be most holy. Behold, *this is the law of the house*." These words make a frame for the statute, or a sort of hand on each side pointing to it. "This is the law of the house."

Why are the words mentioned twice? Is it because we are such wayward scholars that we need to be told everything twice at the least? Is it because we are so blind and dull that unless we have a thing repeated we are not likely to notice it, or noticing it are sure to forget it? Or was this posted up because of the peculiar law as to going in and out of the temple?

We read in the forty-sixth chapter, at the ninth verse, "But when the people of the land shall come before the LORD in the solemn feasts, he that entereth in by the way of the north gate to worship shall go out by the way of the south gate; and he that entereth by the way of the south gate shall go forth by the way of the north gate: he shall not return by the way of the gate whereby he came in, but shall go forth over against it."

When the worshipper entered, he saw over the portal, "This is the law of the house"—and when he went out, if he looked back at the gate of his departure, he would see there too, "This is the law of the house."

Or is it because this is the law of the house at the beginning of life, and this is the law of the house at the end of it? Is it because this is the law of the house for the young convert, and this is the law of the

house for the most venerable saint? At any rate, the alpha and omega of Christian conduct is contained in the law of the house.

You can go no higher than obedience to that law. Indeed, you may say of it, "It is high, I cannot attain unto it." Go as far as you may, this still remains, to the most advanced among us the law of the house, for the Lord's commandments is exceedingly broad.

And what is this law of the house? Why, that everything about it is *holy*. All things in the church must be pure, clean, right, gracious, commendable, God-like. Everything that has to do with the church of God must be holy. Here are the words, "Upon the top of the mountain the whole limit round about shall be most holy."

Observe that all must be *holy*. Nay, observe again, it must be *most holy*. In the old temple, there was only one little chamber in the center that was most holy—this was called the holy of holies, or the holiness of holiness. But now in the church of God, every chamber, hall, and court is to be most holy. As was the veiled shrine into which none entered except the high priest, and he but once a year, and then not without blood—as was that august apartment in which God shone forth from between the cherubim, such for holiness is the entire church to be in every member and every service.

Observe that this law of the house is not only intense, reaching to the superlative degree of holiness, but it is *most sweeping and encompassing*, for we read, "Upon the top of the mountain the whole limit thereof round about shall be most holy."

The outer courts, the courts of the Gentiles, the walls, the promenades outside the walls, the slopes of the hill—every part that had to do with the mountain upon which the temple stood—was to be most holy. From which I gather that in the church of God, it is not merely her ministers that are to be most holy, but her common members—not her sacraments only, but her ordinary meals. Not her Sabbaths only, but her workdays. Not her worship only, but her daily labor. All that which surrounds our consecrated life is to be consecrated too.

The secular matters which touch our religion are to be made religious—whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do, we are to do all in the name of the Lord Jesus. Not only are the bells on the high priest's garments to be "Holiness unto the LORD," but the bells of the horses are to be the same. The pots and bowls of our kitchens are to be as truly sacred as the golden vessels with which the priests served the altar of the Most High.

Holiness should be far reaching, and cover the whole ground of a Christian's life. He should be sanctified, "spirit, soul, and body," and in all things he should bear evidence of having been set apart unto the Lord. Paul prayed that the very God of peace would sanctify us wholly. Amen. So let it be.

We notice, once again, that *this holiness was to be conspicuous*. The church is not as a house sequestered in a valley, or hidden away in a wood, but it is as the temple which was set upon the top of a mountain, where it could be seen from afar. The whole of that mountain was holy.

Conspicuous holiness ought to be the mark of the church of God. We should be a peculiar people, distinguished by this as a race dwelling alone, that cannot be numbered among the nations. We ought to be noted, not for talent, not for wealth, not for loud professions, but for holiness. Somehow or other true holiness is sure to be spied out and remarked upon. Like the violet, it tries to hide itself, but it is betrayed by its perfume. Like the star, it twinkles with modesty, but it is discovered by its light.

Grace cannot be put under a bushel. It would fain be sheltered from its enemies by its obscurity, but the holy city evermore stands on a hill, and it cannot be hidden. Would God that whenever people speak of the church to which we belong they may acknowledge its holiness! Would God that whenever they speak of you or me, they may have no evil thing to say of us unless they lie.

The world does not know how to name the thing which it both admires and hates, but it soon perceives its existence and owns its power—the thing I mean is holiness, which is at once the glory and the strength of the people of God.

What is holiness? I know what it is, and yet I cannot define it in a few words. I will bring out its meaning by degrees, but I shall not do better than the poor Irish lad who had been converted to the faith.

When he was asked by the missionary, "Patrick, what is holiness?" "Sir," said he, "it is having a clean inside." Just so. Morality is a clean outside, but holiness is being clean within. Morality is a dead body washed, and laid in clean white linen—holiness is the living form in perfect purity. To be just to man is morality, to be hallowed unto God is holiness.

The church of God must not be reputedly good, but really pure. She must not have a name for virtue, but her heart must be right before God—she must have a clean inside. Our lives must be such that observers may peep within doors, and may see nothing for which to blame us.

Our moral cleanliness must not be like that of a bad housewife, who sweeps the dirt under the mats, and puts away rags and rotteness in the corner cupboards. We must be so clear of the accursed thing that even if they dig in the earth they will not find an Achan's treasure hidden there. God desires truth in the inward parts, and in the hidden part He would make us to know wisdom.

We might instructively divide holiness into four things, and the first would be its negative side—*separation* from the world. There may be morality, but there can be no holiness in a worldling. The man who is as other men are, having experienced no change of nature, and knowing no change of life, is not yet acquainted with Scriptural holiness.

The word to every true saint is, "Come ye out from among them. Be ye separate: touch not the unclean thing." If we are conformed to the world, we cannot be holy. Jesus said of all His saints, "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." We are redeemed from among men that we may be like our Redeemer—"holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners."

We are not to be separate as to place, avoiding men with monkish fanaticism, for nobody mixed more with sinners than did our Lord. "This man receiveth sinners and eateth with them" is the old reproach, but yet our Lord was not one of them, as everybody could see. Nothing could be more clear than the difference between the lost sheep and the Shepherd, who came among them seeking out His own.

Every action, every word, every movement betokened that He was another man from the sinners whom He sought to bless. So must it be with us. As the lily among thorns, so must we be among the mass of men.

My fellow professors, are you different from those among whom you dwell? Are you as different from them as a Jew is from a Gentile? Now, a Jew may do what he likes—he may live in the same style as an Englishman, a Pole, or a German, and he may in garb, in business, in speech be like the people among whom he dwells, but the image of father Jacob is upon him, and he cannot disguise the fact that he is an Israelite.

If he is converted to Christianity, he still does not lose his nationality—you can still perceive that he is of the seed of Abraham. So ought it to be with the real Christian. Wherever he is, and whatever he does, men ought to spy out that he is of the sect which is everywhere spoken against—and not an ordinary man.

The title, "the Peculiar People," belongs to all the followers of Jesus. They are strangers and sojourners, aliens and foreigners in this world, for they have come out at the divine call to be separated unto the Lord forever. There is no holiness without separateness from the world.

Holiness next consists very largely in *consecration*. The holy things of the sanctuary were holy because they were dedicated to God. No one drank out of the sacred vessels except God's servants the priests. No victims were killed by the sacrificial knife, or laid upon the altar except such as were consecrated to JEHOVAH, for the altar was holy, and the fire thereof was holy.

So must it be with us if we are to be holy—we must belong to JEHOVAH—we must be consecrated to Him, and be used for His own purposes. Not nominally only, but really, and as a matter of fact, we must live for God, and labor for God. That is our reason for existence, and if we answer not this end, we have no excuse for living—we are blots upon the face of nature, waste places, and barren trees which cumber the ground. Only so far as we are bringing glory to God are we answering the end and design of our creation.

We are the Lord's priests, and if we do not serve Him, we are base pretenders. As Christians, we are not our own, but bought with a price, and if we live as if we were our own, we defraud our Redeemer. Will a man rob God? Will he rob Jesus of the purchase of His blood? Can we consent that the world, the flesh, the devil should use the vessels which are dedicated to God? Shall such sacrilege be tolerated?

No, let us feel that we are the Lord's, and that His vows are upon us, binding us to lay ourselves out for Him alone. This is an essential ingredient of holiness—the cleanest bowl in the sanctuary was not holy because it was clean—it became holy when, in addition to being cleansed, it was also hallowed unto the Lord. This is more than morality, decency, honesty, virtue.

You tell me of your generosity, your goodness, and your pious intentions—what of these? Are you consecrated, for if you are not consecrated to God, you know nothing of holiness. This is the law of the house, that the church is consecrated to Christ, and that every man that comes into her midst must be the same. We must live for God, and for His glorious kingdom, or we are not holy. Oh to make a dedication of ourselves to God without reserve, and then to stand to it forever—that is the way of holiness.

But this does not complete the idea of holiness unless you add to it *conformity* to the will and character of God. If we are God's servants, we must follow God's commands—we must be ready to do as our Master bids us because He is the Lord, and must be obeyed. We must make the Lord Jesus our example, and as Ezekiel says, "We must measure the pattern."

It must be our meat and drink to do the will of Him that sent us. Our rule is not our judgment, much less our fancy, but the Word of God is our statute book. We are to obey God that we may grow like God. The question to be asked is, "What would the Lord have me do?" Or "What would Christ, Himself, have done under the circumstances?" Not, what is my wish, but what is God's law about this. Not, what will please me, but what will please Him?

Having been begotten again by God into the image of Christ, and so having become His true children, we are to grow up into Him in all things who is the Head, being imitators of God as dear children, for so, and so only, shall we be holy.

Do understand, then, that with regard to the whole range of the church, however wide her action, conformity to the character of God is the law of the house. Likeness to Christ must be seen in every single member, and in every act of every member, and in the whole body, and in all its corporate acts. This is the law of the house.

I must add, however, to make up the idea of holiness, that there must be a close *communion* between the soul and God, for if a man could be—which is not possible—conformed to the likeness of God, and consecrated to God, yet if he never had any communication with God, the idea of holiness would not be complete. The temple becomes holy because God dwells in it. He came into the most holy place in a most especial manner, and this accounted for its being the holy of holies. Even so, special communion with the Lord creates special holiness. God's presence demands and creates holiness.

And so, brothers and sisters, if we would be holy we must dwell in God, and God must dwell in us. We cannot be holy at a distance from God. How is it with you? How is it with this church? Is God with us in all our services? Is He recognized in all our efforts? Does He reign in all our hearts? Does Jesus abide with us, for this is according to the law of the house that God should be everywhere recognized—that we should in all things conform to His will—in all things be consecrated to His purposes, and for His sake in all things be separated from the rest of mankind. This is the law of the house.

II. Now, secondly, I want your help while I say, LET US EXAMINE OURSELVES BY THIS LAW.

Let each man question himself as to whether he has carefully observed the law of the house. Brethren, the church of God is holy. It is founded by a holy God upon holy principles and for holy purposes. She has been redeemed by a holy Savior, with a holy sacrifice, and dedicated to holy service. Her great glory is the Holy Spirit, whose influences and operations are all holy. Her law-Book is the Holy Bible, her armory is the holy covenant, her comfort is holy prayer. Her convocations are holy

assemblies—her citizens are holy men and holy women—she exists for holy ends, and follows after holy examples.

Dear hearer, are you then as part of her “holiness to the LORD”? Ask yourself questions, founded on what I have already said. Do I so live as to be *separated*? Is there in my business a difference between me and those with whom I trade? Are my thoughts different? Does the current of my desire run in a different direction? Am I at home with the ungodly, or does their sin vex me? Am I one of them, or am I as a speckled bird among them? Search, brethren, search and see whether you be holy in that sense or no.

Next, let each one ask, “Am I *consecrated*? Am I living to God with my body, with my soul, with my spirit? Am I using my substance, my talents, my time, my voice, my thoughts for God's glory? What am I living for? Am I making a pretense to live to God, and am I after all really living to self? Am I like Ananias and Sapphira, pretending to give all, and yet keeping back a part of the price?” The preacher would search his own heart, and he begs you all to search yours.

Next ask the question, “Am I living in *conformity* to the mind of the holy God? Am I living as Christ would have lived in my place? Do I as a master, as a servant, as a husband as a wife, or as a child, act as God Himself would have me act so that He could say to me, ‘Well done, thou good and faithful servant’?”

He is a jealous God—am I obeying Him with care? If I am not walking in obedience to God, I am behaving disorderly. I am breaking the law of the house, and that house, the house of the living God. Ought we not to take heed lest we insult the King in His own palace, and perish from the way when His wrath is kindled but a little.

Then, again, do I live in *communion* with God? I cannot be holy, and yet have a wall of division between me and God. Is there a great gulf of separation between me and the Lord? Then I am a stranger to holiness. I must have fellowship with Him, or else I am living in a manner which is sinful, dangerous, grievous, injurious. Brother, sister, let me put this pressing question—Do you walk with God? Do you abide in fellowship with Jesus?

I know there are some who would rather not give an answer to that question. I have met with believers who have said, “If you asked me whether I was a drunk or dishonest, I should say, ‘No,’ at once. If you asked me whether I have been upright and moral, I could say, ‘Yes,’ most certainly. But when you say, ‘Are you walking in communion with the Lord? Are you enjoying habitual fellowship with God?’ I am not prepared to give you an answer, for I am weak upon this point.”

Are there not some professors among you who do not see the face of God by the month together, and seldom enjoy the presence of God at all? Their nearness to God is a thing of rare occasions, and not of everyday consciousness. At a meeting, when religious excitement stirs them, they are a little warmed up, but their general temperature suits the North Pole rather than the Equator.

But oh, dear friends, this will not do. We want you to dwell near God always—to wake up in the morning with His light saluting the eyes of your soul, and to be with Him while you are engaged in domestic concerns, or out in the busy world. We want you often to have a secret word with the Well-beloved during the day, and to go to bed at night feeling how sweet it is to fall asleep upon the Savior's bosom.

Brother, how sweet to say, “When I awake I am still with thee.” Jealous hearts count it a sorrow when even their dreams disorder their minds, and prevent their thinking of the Lord in their first conscious moment. I would to God we were so encompassed with divine love, so completely sanctified, so thoroughly holy, that we never lost for an instant a sense of the immediate presence of the Most High.

I leave that work of self-examination with yourselves in the quiet hours of this afternoon. Do, not neglect it, for as servants of the Lord, it is incumbent upon you to remember that holiness becomes His house, and it will be ill for us to be walking contrary to His mind. “Measure the pattern,” and measure yourselves by the law of the house.

III. Now, thirdly, WHAT ARE THE BEARINGS OF THIS LAW OF THE HOUSE?

Those bearings of the law to which I now refer are these—If the church of God shall be most holy, it will have as the result of it the greatest possible degree of the smile and favor of God. A holy church has God in the midst of her. The consequence of God's presence is a holy liveliness in all her members, for where God comes near to man, lethargy and death soon fly away. Where the sacred presence abides, sickness of soul disappears. JEHOVAH-Rophi heals His people among whom He dwells, and the inhabitant shall no more say, "I am sick." This again causes joy, and the bones which were broken rejoice.

Where there is holiness God comes, and there is sure to be love, for love is of the very essence of holiness. The fruit of the Spirit is love both to God and man. That love begets union of heart, brotherly kindness, sympathy, and affection, and these bring peace and happiness. Among the truly holy there are no divisions, no heresies, no separation into parties, but all are one in Christ. Whence come wars and fightings? Not from holiness, but from unconquered lusts. When we shall be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect, we shall love as He loves.

This, of course, leads to success in all the church's efforts, and a consequent increase. Her prayers are intense, and they bring down a blessing, for they are holy and acceptable unto God by Jesus Christ. Her labors are abundant, and they secure an abundant harvest, for God will not forget her labor of love. The holy church, with God in the midst of her, is the place of brotherly unity, and consequently it is wet with the dew of Hermon, and there God commands the blessing, even life for evermore.

Saints in such a state keep high holiday all the year round, having foretastes of heaven. Their trials are sanctified, and their mercies are multiplied. Thus faith grows exceedingly, and hope is confirmed. To their assemblies angels come trooping down, and up from them, by the way of the ladder which Jacob saw, they ascend to God. O happy people! Thrice happy in their Holy God!

A holy church, my brethren, may we see it! A church most holy in all her solemn services shall be "fair as the sun, clear as the moon, and terrible as an army with banners." The nations among whom she dwells shall hear of her fame thereof. They shall come from afar, and ask to see her Prince, and they shall be astonished at His glory.

The sons of the aliens shall come bending to her feet. Her converts shall be like flocks of doves—she shall herself wonder from whence they came. There shall be no languor, no defeat, no disappointment, no doubt of eternal verities, and no suspicions of infinite love. In the power of the Holy Spirit, she shall be bravely confident, gloriously self-sacrificing, and so shall she go from victory to victory. Mount but this white horse of holiness, O you armies of the Lord, and Christ shall lead the van, and all of you clothed in fine white linen shall follow Him, and go forth conquering and to conquer.

On the other hand, imagine a church without holiness. What will come of it? Without holiness no man shall see the Lord, and if the church cannot even see her Lord, what is her condition? Go to Zion, and see what happens to God's house when once defiled. Mark how the holy and beautiful house was desolate and burnt with fire.

Remember how God loathed Zion and bade her enemies cast her down, stone from stone, and sow with salt the very site on which she stood. Was there ever destruction like to that which fell upon Jerusalem? Let us receive among our brotherhood unholy men and women—and let us tolerate and indulge them—and we shall soon see the anger of the Lord wax hot.

Let us ourselves give way to laxity of principle and practice, let us lose our consecration and our communion, and what will soon be the effect? Probably first will come heartburning, envy, and strife. Next, divisions, schisms, false doctrines, rivalries, contentions. Or possibly the evil may take the form of lethargy, inactivity, worldliness, want of love to Christ and souls.

By and by there will be diminished gatherings at the meetings for prayer, a cessation of all earnest pleading and consecrated living. Then a falling-off of congregations. Then a want of power in the ministry—a defect in the doctrine, perhaps, or else in the earnestness of the speaker. And all the while no conversions and no visits from the Lord.

Shall it be, in years to come, that men will pass by the Tabernacle, and ask, "What is that huge house?" And the reply will be, "It was built by an earnest, godly company in former years, but they are dead and things are changed." What is it now? There is a fine organ and a polished preacher, but the multitudes have departed, and the few who still keep together are of the cold, respectable order, who have no life or zeal.

Then will this house be a proverb, a by-word and a hissing throughout the whole earth. How often am I jealous about this with a burning jealousy. My heart breaks when I hear of some of you that you live unholy lives. There are some, I fear, among you who so walk as to dishonor the cross of Christ.

I mean not such as we can lay our finger on, and say, "This man is a drunkard, or unchaste, or dishonest," else, as you well know, you would not long be spared—no, not a moment longer than was needful for the proof of your wrong, and of your impenitence in it.

But I mean such as cannot be thus dealt with, because their sins are not open—the tares that grow up in the wheat—the actions not yet discovered, because we cannot cast the lot so as to light upon this man or that, and say, "It is he."

I tremble lest there should be among us some, utterly unknown to us, and undiscoverable by the most vigilant eye, whose sin, nevertheless, like a leprosy, should eat into the house, and make it unfit for the habitation of God. Oh, that we may never be so fallen that God Himself shall say, "Let them alone."

It was an awful moment when, in the holy place at Jerusalem, there was heard the moving of wings and a voice which said, "Let us go hence." Then the glory of God will have departed. Woe, woe, woe! Let the curtain drop with a shower of tears upon it. God grant it never may be so!

IV. So now, lastly, dear brethren, LET US TAKE ORDER TO SECURE OBEDIENCE TO THE LAW OF THE HOUSE.

I believe that Jesus is always working in His own way for the purity of every true church. "His fan is in his hand"—see it moving continually—"and he will thoroughly purge his floor." God's melting fire is not in the world, where the dross contains no gold, but "His fire is in Zion, and his furnace in Jerusalem." "The LORD will judge his people." The Lord tries professors and their professions.

I believe that there is a judgment going on over church members that some are little aware of. Paul speaks of a church in his day in this manner, he notes their inconsistencies, and adds, "For this cause some are sickly among you, and many sleep."

A special jurisdiction is over the palace of a king, a special rule pertains to a house which does not apply to people out of doors. Church members are under peculiar discipline, as it is written, "You only have I known of all the nations of the earth, therefore I will punish you for your iniquities."

Our Lord Jesus often makes the ministry to be as a great winnowing fan. Somebody is offended, and goes. What a mercy! You could not have compelled him to depart, but he removes of his own accord, and so the house is cleansed.

The breath of the Spirit blows away much chaff. When our Lord preached His usual doctrine, the chaff kept with the wheat, but when He came to speak of eating His flesh and drinking His blood, the baser sort were offended, and "walked no more with him." Did He grieve over that separation between the precious and the vile? I think not. He meant it should be so.

A certain truth put in a certain way, with a personally pointed application—perhaps not intended by the preacher as to that particular individual—is, nevertheless, intended by God for that case, and the cutting word removes the rotten bough. Thus the purging work proceeds from day to day.

We may expect our Master to come among us every now and then with a scourge of small cords, and to smite right and left to purge the temple of God lest it should become a den of thieves. He is a jealous God, and He will not suffer defilement among His own people.

Have you never seen great Christian communities at a certain phase of their existence come into troubled waters, and break up like wrecks? There must have been a secret reason—probably the one assigned at the time was by no means the true one. Want of holiness led to want of love, and unloving spirits soon found a pretext for dispute.

Those who should have met this with love, and quenched it by gentle wisdom, acted in a harsh spirit, being themselves deficient in grace, and so flint met steel, and sparks abounded. Then came fire. Then came general conflagration. The open mischief was an effect rather than a cause—and it may be hoped was even part of the cure.

True, many a table of the moneychangers was upset, and many a dove was seen to fly away in fright—but the scourge did not fail to make a clearance. How much better would it have been had there been no need for such a purging. If churches are not holy, they cannot be prosperous, for God afflicts those who break the law of His house.

Now, cannot we give earnest heed that this law is regarded among us? “Yes,” say you, “take care that you who are pastors, elders, and deacons are watchful and faithful. Guard well the door of the church, and see to it that you do not admit the ungodly—be vigilant also in discipline, so that when any are manifestly unholy they are put away.”

Brethren, this is our desire and labor, but after all, what can we do? With all our diligence, what can a small band of officers accomplish in a great church which is numbered by thousands? Brothers and sisters, this must be taken up by you all. Let every man bear his own burden. I would have every man sweep in the front of his own door. I pray that each person who belongs to this church may be jealous for its purity, and watch both over himself and his brethren, lest any form of sin should be a root of bitterness to trouble us, and thereby, many should be defiled.

Let us set to this work at once. Here is the first exercise for us—let us *repent of past failures* in holiness. We shall never overcome sin till we are conscious of it and ashamed of it. That is why the Lord said to the prophet, “Thou, son of man, show the house to the house of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities; and let them measure the pattern. And if they are ashamed of all that they have done, shew them the form of the house, and the fashion thereof.”

The first step towards purity is penitence. Let us bow our heads and lament before the Lord the sins of our holy things, our personal trespasses, our transgressions against love, our offenses against the law of the house. He that is least ashamed will probably be the person who has most cause to blush, and he who will be most humbled will be the man who has least transgressed. In any case we have sinned as a church, and come short of the glory of God—and an honest confession is due from us.

Having owned our error, let us next *make the law of God's house our earnest study* that we may avoid offenses in the future. You will hardly keep the law if you do not know it. Search the sacred Word day and night. Let the inspired page be your standard. Never mind what your minister tells you—observe what the Spirit of God tells you.

Get to your Bibles, search them, and there see how you ought to behave in the house of God. Be much upon your knees asking the Lord to teach you His mind and will, and specially beseech Him to write His law upon your hearts, for you will never keep it in your life till it is written there.

When you have studied the law of the house, then next *be intensely real in your endeavor to observe it*. How much of the religion of the present day is a sham. Men talk of being holy—do they know what they mean? We speak of consecration, and yet live as if we were mere worldlings hunting for wealth, or fame, or pleasure.

Some sing of giving all to God, and yet their contributions are miserably small. Some say they are living wholly for God, but if they had lived wholly for themselves it would not have made any particular difference in what they have done. Oh, let us be real. Do not let us preach what we do not believe, nor profess to be believers in a creed which is not true to our own souls.

Get a grip of eternal things. Hold them—feel their solemn weight, and live under their influence. That which is unreal is unholy. The bloated Pharisee is unholy. The empty formalist is unholy. But the sincere penitent, the truly honest seeker after holiness is already holy in some degree. Your eyes, O Lord, are upon truth.

Then *let us cry for a sincere and growing faith* in God concerning this matter of holiness. Let us believe in Jesus, that by His Holy Spirit He can make us holy. Do not let us believe that any sin is

inevitable—rather let us feet bound to overcome it. Let us not trust in our own struggling and striving, but let us as much trust Christ to work sanctification in us as to work for us justification. Let faith deal with the water as well as with the blood, for they both flowed from the same fountain in the Savior's riven side.

And then, lastly, let us *pray to be set on fire with an intense zeal for God*. I do not believe that there is such a thing as cold holiness in the world. As soon as a bullock was dedicated to God, and brought to the altar, it had to be burned with fire—and so must every consecrated life. You and I are never the Lord's while we are cold-hearted. We must be on fire if we are to be sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

Get rid of zeal from the church, and you have removed one of the most purifying elements, for God intends to purge Jerusalem by the spirit of judgment and by the spirit of burning. Oh, to be baptized into the Holy Ghost and into fire. May refining fire go through and through our souls till all that defiles shall be utterly consumed, and we shall be as ingots of pure gold, wholly the Lord's.

Thus have we rehearsed in your ears the law of the house. May the Holy Spirit enable you to keep it unto the end.

**PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—
GALATIANS 5:13-26**

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—162, 653, 879

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