PETER'S BLUNDER—A LESSON FOR OURSELVES

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A SERMON
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"But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean."
Acts 10:14

"NOT so, Lord." This is a very curious expression. I do not mind how you turn it into English from the original, it is a very strange compound. If Peter had said, "Not so," there would have been a clear consistency in his language and tone. But "Not so, *Lord*," is an odd jumble of self-will and reverence, of pride and humility, of contradiction and devotion.

Surely, when you say, "Not so," it ought not to be said to the Lord, and if you say, "Lord," you ought not to put side by side with such an ascription the expression, "Not so." Peter always was a blunderer in his early days, and he had not grown out of his old habits of honest impetuosity. He meant well, and his expression was not intended to convey all that we might easily make of it.

At any rate, it is not for us to condemn him. Who are we that we should sit in judgment on a saint of God? Besides, we are not without fault ourselves in the matter of incorrect speech. You and I have said some very curious things in our time. We have uttered exclamations that have been so good that the Lord accepted them, but they have been so bad that He could not have accepted them if it had not been for His infinite mercy.

In our utterances there has been faith mixed with unbelief, love defaced with a want of submission, gratitude combined with distrust, humility flavored with self-conceit, courage undermined with cowardice, fervor mingled with indifference. We are as strange beings as the image which Nebuchadnezzar saw in his dream, and our speech betrays the fact.

When we were fashioned by nature first of all, we were "fearfully and wonderfully made." But when we fell, and were unmade by sin, we became monstrosities, combinations of contrarieties. I will not dwell upon that topic, but every man who looks within, if the candle of God be shining within him, must often cry out, "Lord, what is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?"

In our speech, this mixed estate of ours most plainly shows itself. We often feel as if we could eat our words, or at the least unsay them. Speeches that have had about them real sincerity and true devotion have been greatly marred by expressions which were not fit for the occasion. Our tongues need a sevenfold sanctification if we are always to speak that which is good and acceptable. And surely, that is what we desire.

Now, we will have a look at Peter, and see what we can learn from this amazing expression of his—this strangely compounded exclamation, "Not so, Lord."

I. The first truth which we may easily learn is that THE OLD MAN REMAINS IN THE CHRISTIAN MAN.

Albeit we are made new creatures in Christ Jesus, and the life that is within us, the dominant life, is new, and holy, and heavenly, yet the old nature still survives. Though crucified, it is long in dying, and struggles hard. Sin dwells in us, so that we painfully discover that, though we are new men, we are yet men—and though the grace of God reigns within us, yet there is a struggle for the kingdom, and the sin

that dwells in us strives after the mastery. We are renewed sinners, but we are sinners still. Our hearts and hands are cleansed by divine grace, but they have a sad tendency to become defiled.

Peter was Peter still. Why, dear friends, I think that if I had never before seen this passage in Acts, but had read Peter's life as I find it in the writings of the four evangelists, and somebody had newly shown me the present text and said, "I have left out the name of the apostle, but one of them, when he had seen a vision from God, and knew that God spoke to him, nevertheless said, 'Not so, Lord'—what apostle was that?"

I would not have had to guess twice, I am sure. I would have been sure that it was Peter. So you see Peter is Peter after the grace of God has renewed him. I think we must say the same of ourselves. You, Thomas, who used to be so thoughtful and careful—and somewhat particular and nervous—you are a child of God, but you are Thomas still. And I suspect that you will be wanting to put your finger into the print of the nails, and to thrust your hand into His side, or else you will not believe.

And you, John—you always were very loving and hearty, and at the same time hot in your zeal—and now that you have become a disciple of Christ, I am sure that you will be more loving than ever. But I should not wonder if even now you should be heard saying, "Master, send fire upon those who reject thee, and destroy them."

The man is still the same man—he is greatly altered, but he has not lost his identity. Whatever change has taken place in him, Peter is Peter, and I should like you young converts to recollect *that*, for perhaps you think that in the day when you were converted you lost your old selves altogether. I can assure you that you did not. The hasty temper, the sluggish constitution, the gloomy tendency, or the fickle humor will be there still—to be struggled with so long as you are here below. You received a new self, and a better self, but the old self is there still.

Your mother will be able to recognize you, I dare say, if you live at home as a young person—she will know that it is the same John, or the same Mary, for your foibles and weaknesses will crop up, if not your faults. And therefore you must keep a watch upon yourself. You are greatly changed. God has done wonders for you—He has put a new heart within you, and a new song into your mouth, but the inclination to evil is not dead. Your passions, appetites, desires, are each one prone to overleap the boundary and transgress.

The best of men are men at the best. And Peter, after the Holy Ghost has fallen upon him, and he has preached a very wonderful soul-winning sermon, is, nevertheless, Peter—and you can tell that he is the selfsame person—the accent of his words still bewrays him.

Note that *Peter here shows how readily he fell, not precisely into the same sin, but into the same kind of sin*. His tendency was still to err in a certain direction. This Peter who said, "Not so, Lord," is he not the same man who, in his impudence *rebuked His Master*, and said, "That be far from thee, Lord"? Impudence, I call it. It was a piece of impertinence for which he was well-rebuked when the Master said, "Get thee behind me, Satan."

Our Lord detected Satan endeavoring to work through the zealous enthusiasm of Peter, to tempt Him to turn aside from the great work that He came to do. I do not think that the other disciples would have gone as far as Peter did—they had faults in other directions, but it remained for Peter to rebuke his Master—and now we see him half rebuking his Lord again, as he declines to kill and eat the creatures let down from heaven. Yes, Peter actually says, "Not so, Lord." May we never be found questioning providence, or disputing with revelation, lest we be taken in the same fault, and receive a rebuke for rebuking our Lord!

Is not this the same man who at suppertime *refused his Master*? When the Lord Jesus took a towel, and girded Himself, and was about to wash the disciples' feet, Peter said to Him, "Dost thou wash my feet?" for He was astounded at such an example of humility. When the Master came with the basin, Peter said, "Thou shalt never wash my feet."

And then you recollect what a turn he made when his Lord said, "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me." Then he cried, "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head." He was always impulsive, and from this cause he rebukes his Master, and he refuses his Master.

He acts as if he fancied that he knew better than his Lord, though in his heart of hearts he had no such notion. Yes, this is the same Peter who cried, "Not so, Lord." He refuses for the moment to do his Lord's bidding, for it happens to be contrary to his ideas of propriety. Oh, that we may be kept clear of this grave fault!

And this is he who *flatly contradicted his Master* on another occasion. When Jesus said to His disciples, "All ye shall be offended because of me," then Peter said, "Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended." His Lord had told him that he would deny Him, and yet he declared he should not.

I know all the excuses that we make for Peter, and I am quite prepared to make them. But at the same time, that was the way of Peter—that is the part in which he was weak. He did this in his earlier days, but after the Holy Ghost had come upon him, and he had been baptized into His power, and had risen into quite a superior condition from that in which he was in the life of our Lord on earth, yet he still tripped in the same place where he used to fall. And he said, "Not so, Lord," as if he would again rebuke, refuse, and contradict his Lord.

I therefore put it again. What were your faults before conversion? Guard against them now. What have been your failures, and your weaknesses, and your errors since you have been converted? Watch against them still, for if you have now become an experienced Christian, and your graces have been greatly developed—and you have become exceedingly useful in the church of God—yet, beloved brother, the points in which there is a weakness in your natural constitution, and in which you have made failures, are the points at which you must set a double guard—watching and praying lest you be led into temptation by those special features of your character.

Kindly notice this earnest advice, which my loving anxiety leads me to press upon you. I have seen so much of the fruits of presumption that I entreat you not to give way to it. If anybody tells you that the old man is quite dead, you may say, "Nobody but the old devil could have set you on to whisper such a lie in my ear. The truth is not in you."

You and I know that inbred sin is our daily plague, a fact past all question with our souls. We have not to go many steps on our journey before we painfully feel that the sins which we thought we had subdued, and should never be subject to, any more, suddenly arouse themselves out of their graves, and fight with us as if they had never been conquered before.

If we did not cry to God with tears and agony for hourly holding up, we should find ourselves falling into the same ditches into which we fell years ago. My venerable friend, that point in which you feel that you are quite safe is the place where you lie most open to attack. Mark my words, and see if they be not verified.

Where you say to yourself, "I am past danger on that account," there the enemy will get an advantage over you. "But I am strong," say you. Nonsense, you are weak as water. You dream of perfection, but you are a mass of wants, and infirmities, and conceits. And if it were not for the infinite mercy of God, who deals tenderly with you, you would soon have most painfully to know it to your own dishonor—and to the grief of your brethren round about you. Peter is Peter still, notwithstanding what grace has done.

You notice about Peter this thing still remaining, that *he blurts out what he feels*. Be it for bad or good, prompt deliverance of his mind is still the characteristic of Peter. He has seen the vision, and he has heard the voice of God saying to him, "Rise, Peter, kill and eat." And without a minute's deliberation Peter replies, "Not so, Lord."

That was how he did before. He was always blundering because he was in such a hurry. If he had put his finger to his forehead for half a minute, he would not have said many things which he did. This was a man whose wisdom always lay at the back of his head, instead of at the front of it. It came in to tell

him that he had made a mistake, but it never came to hand soon enough to prevent the error. And Peter after Pentecost had not lost this trait of his character.

I may be addressing young folk here who are very impulsive, and speak all in a hurry things which they afterwards are sorry for. I should not wonder if you continue to be impulsive when you grow older. Perhaps it will be one of your snares through life. Be on your guard against it. It is a strength if it be rightly managed.

Give me the man who in a good cause does not think twice, but acts upon the warm impulses of a ready mind. Give me the man who understands that second thoughts are not always the best, for they are apt to chill—and the best thought is that which comes from a heart fired with the love of Christ. The best Christian workers to lead the van, to make a dash with a forlorn hope, have been those brave, impulsive, Peter-like spirits.

But that same characteristic, if not kept in proper order by the Spirit of God, may lead you into a world of mischief. You say your say so quickly, but you cannot unsay it, even in years and ages. You cannot call back the words which now cause you to bite your tongue with regret. You once grow very angry. It is true that ten minutes calmed you, and you were as sorry as possible for all your bitter speeches.

But that could not undo the injury, nor heal the cruel wound that you had given to your faithful friend. You must cry to God that, if you are impulsive, the impulses may always come from Him—and you must ask Him daily to lead and guide you in the way of understanding. I pray that you may not often pull out your sword, and cut off a man's ear, for Jesus is not here to work miracles, as He was at hand fortunately with Peter. And you may cut somebody's ear off, and not be able to put it on again. Ask Him to keep you in check, that you may not be working mischief in your haste which you will have to repent of in your leisure.

But Peter is Peter still, and so does the renewed man betray the infirmities which were with him before his renewal. Yet *Peter as Peter still has good points*, for he acknowledges all this. Luke could not have recorded this incident in the Acts of the Apostles unless Peter had personally told him, for no one else knew of it.

And in the next chapter we find that, when Peter was brought up before the other apostles for what he had done, he narrated the whole affair, and confessed, "But I said, 'Not so, Lord.'" You see he was always outspoken, honest, and clear as the day. There was a trace of dissimulation in him once, but I should think that it was strange work with him. As a general rule, the bluff fisherman spoke what first came to hand, and had no cunning about him.

In this let us be at one with him. If you carry that trait of character with you into the things of grace, so much the better, for there is no Christian that is so little a Christian as the man who is great at tricks, and mighty at "prudence." I think that is the name folks often give it. "Cunning," I call it. The man who blurts out his mind so that you know what he thinks may get himself into lots of trouble, but he does not get so many other people into trouble as the double-minded man would do.

And by the grace of God, it often happens that his directness, sincerity, and truthfulness work together to effect a great blessing in the midst of his brethren. May the Spirit of God sanctify our peculiarities, that they may make us specially useful—but save us from our constitutional infirmities, that we may not by them be led into sin!

There is the first head—the old man still remains in the regenerate man. It was apparent in Peter, and it is evident enough in us.

II. But now, secondly, THE OLD MAN GENERALLY FIGHTS AGAINST GOSPEL PRINCIPLES, for this was the point upon which Peter differed from his Lord.

This "Not so, Lord," applied to grand Gospel principles which had been put before him, as, for instance, *the abolition of the ceremonial law*. Peter was to know that those ceremonial laws, which forbade the eating of this and that, were now to be abrogated. By Christ's coming here on earth, and bearing a mortal body about with Him, He has taken away the ban from all forbidden meats, so far as

they were forbidden upon religious grounds. God has cleansed them, and what God has cleansed, Peter was not to call common.

Peter at the first revolted from this—"I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean. Not so, Lord; not so. I cannot arise, and kill, and eat." Many to this day quarrel with God's glorious Gospel on ceremonial grounds. The Scripture says that men are to be saved by faith, but these formalists say, "Surely, they must be regenerated in baptism—they must be further fed by the blessed Eucharist."

Persons who are evangelical in their hearts, and who unwittingly preach the Gospel, nevertheless muddle it up with a number of outward ordinances, and thus they say practically, "Not so, Lord." Ritualism is practically battling against that Gospel which lies in faith in Christ, and not in ceremonies—which demands spiritual life, and not external performances.

All of us are apt to err in this manner, for we incline to attach undue importance to matters which are proper and useful in their places, but which are, by no means essential to salvation. One person thinks a great deal of confirmation, which is purely an ordinance of man. Another thinks equally much of attending class meetings, which is an instructive practice, but not a subject of divine command.

Where Jesus has made no rule, we are not to make any. We are to receive all whom Christ receives. None are unclean whom He has cleansed. None are to be set aside if He admits them to His love. Yet this lesson is not soon learned by sticklers for propriety—they question any man's salvation who follows not with them, and when bidden to commune with them, they start aside with Peter's cry in their hearts, if not on their lips, "Not so, Lord."

The same battle is carried on by certain people who have never eaten anything common or unclean, in the sense that they have never associated with any but very respectable people. Here the fight is concerning *the equality of men before the law, and under the Gospel*. An evangelist brings into the congregation all the poor people of the district, and the very worst of characters gather to hear him. This ought to be a great joy, but in certain cases it is not.

Many are offended, and in effect say, "Not so, Lord. Well, really, I—I—I do not like sitting next to one who is dressed so badly, and smells so vilely. I saw a woman of loose character come in, and I felt as if I must leave my pew." Oh, you very respectable people, you know that you get into that state of mind! You do not say much about it when *we* hear you, because you know that it would not answer your purpose—yet you squeeze up against the corner of the pew to get away from the poor and needy. Do you not?

If a man with a smock-frock, or with a dirty face, comes in here, you would just as soon that he would sit on the flaps in the aisle as sit in your seat, and a great deal sooner, I dare say. There is a great deal of that kind of feeling about, and it may be very natural, but it certainly betrays feebleness of Christian love.

Truly, it is an instinct of cleanliness to shrink from the unwashed, but then it is an instinct of the new life to rejoice in the salvation of souls, and for the sake of it, to put up with greater discomforts than can arise from contact with the fallen.

I suppose that in the days of James, when he rebuked those who beckoned the rich to sit near them, the Roman or the Jewish pauper was quite as ill-savored as any that are among us at this day, yet he makes no allowance for this. Let us prize the common and unclean so much that we never think of them in that light. Never let us set up the tyranny of caste, and rebuild the middle wall of partition which our Savior died to throw down.

"God hath made of one blood all nations of men"—we sprang of a common parent, and for men there is but one Savior. Let us know no partialities, but desire with equal earnestness the salvation of peer and pauper, of matron and harlot, of gentleman and vagabond. To hear some people speak of their fellow men is sickening to me—they talk of them as if they were mere offal and rubbish—not worthy of their genteel notice. I bless God that I seldom hear it, for it rouses my wrath.

A minister in a certain neighborhood used solemnly to warn his people against all such wicked persons as Moody and Sankey, and the like, because they were the means of saving the lower orders. He

said, "I see people in this district professing to be saved, and yet they never before went to a place of worship at all. Therefore," he said, "I do not believe in their salvation, for surely if God were about to save a great number, He would first of all save those who have for years regularly attended our places of worship."

That was a bit of Peter-like propriety coming up, and saying, "Not so, Lord." Oh, the cruelty of respectability! If you have anything of that left in your nature, ask God to turn it out.

It was in the great Father's own house that there lived an elder brother who said, "As soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf." He was angry, and would not go in. He was a very excellent man indeed, a very respectable person—and he was not going in with such rag-tag as this prodigal brother of his. He did not like so much fuss made over a profligate.

My friend, that proud propriety is of the old man. Whenever that disposition comes up in you, it is your baser part—the part that ought to die—and in this way it shows its enmity to the Gospel of the grace of God.

I love to believe in the perfect equality of men in the sight of God as to the work of His grace. If they do but seek the Lord, and put their trust in Him, there is no difference—and this we must all maintain, as Christian men and women, by receiving all classes with joy. Otherwise, we shall be just getting where Peter was when he said, "Not so, Lord," for he said that he had not eaten anything common or unclean—and we say that we have not associated with any person living in a back slum.

The same kind of battle takes place when our old man fights against the Gospel *in its great principle of free and sovereign grace*. You war against it yourself when you are conscious of having done wrong, and therefore doubt the grace of God. At once the old man says, "You have sinned and therefore you are out of God's favor—He will cast you away, and you will perish." But the Gospel principle is—

"Whom once He loves He never leaves,
But loves them to the end."

The tendency to legalism, which is natural to us, kicks against the glorious doctrine of free grace and unchanging love—and sometimes we say, "I am afraid that I am not good enough to pray, or fit to participate in the grace of God"—as if God wanted some good in us before He could bestow His grace upon us.

A diseased man is fit to be healed, a poor man is fit for alms, a drowning man is fit to be rescued, a sinful man is fit to be forgiven. God would have us come to Him all empty, a feeble, and sinful, and erring—and just receive of His free favor in Christ Jesus, spontaneously given on His part, without anything in us that can merit His esteem.

Oh, it is a grand thing to be able to spell that word "grace—grace—grace"! Somebody said the other day that to say "free grace" was to use a redundancy. That is so. But there is such a real redundancy in grace that we do not mind using a redundancy of expression when we are talking about it. "Free grace" we still mean to say, for, as some people will not believe that grace is free, it is still necessary to make it very clear that it is so, and to say not only "grace," but "*free* grace."

Christ did not die for saints, but for sinners. He came not into the world because of our righteousness, but He died for our sins. The work of God is not to save men deserving salvation, but men who are altogether undeserving of it. The great flood of divine mercy overflows and drowns all our sins—rising and yet rising, fifty cubits upwards—till the tops of the mountains of our iniquity are all covered, never to be seen again.

What a grand article of the creed is that—"I believe in the forgiveness of sins"! Why are we so slow to believe it? Is it not our old man rising, even as it did in Peter, to give battle to free grace with its, "Not so, Lord"?

III. Thirdly, and as briefly as I can, I would remind you that THE OLD NATURE SHOWS ITSELF IN MANY WAYS, always fighting against God.

"Not so, Lord," is often the cry of our unregenerate part. It is so against *the doctrine of the Gospel*. Some persons do not believe the Gospel because they do not want to believe it. They studiously omit to read all such parts of Scripture as would enlighten their minds. They are not convincible because they have already persuaded themselves as to what truth ought to be. "Not so, Lord," is their cry.

Beloved, never get into that state of mind. Follow God's Word anywhere, believing what the Spirit says—let Him teach you what He may. Whatever your notions may have been, when you come across a clear statement in the Word of God, bow your every thought to it, and accept its teaching, for it is true, whatever your thoughts may be. It is mine to believe what the Bible teaches. It is not mine to object and cry, "Not so, Lord."

This old nature of ours sometimes cries out against God *in matters of duty*. We can do anything except the special duty of the hour, and as to that one thing, we say, "Not so, Lord." Yonder young woman knows that according to God's Word she must not marry that young man, for she would be unequally yoked together with an unbeliever.

Now, she was quite willing to be baptized, and she is heartily willing to give her money to the Lord, and in fact, to do anything except that one act of self-denial, which would require her to cease from a fond friendship. Yet, my friend, I do not know what sorrow you will make for yourself if you really break that salutary rule.

I have seen many instances of mixed marriages, but I have had to mourn over nearly all of them as the cause of untold wretchedness. Take the precept, and knowing that it is God's mind concerning you, never dar*e even for a moment* to hesitate. "Whatever he saith unto you, do it." Never let your lips say, "Not so, Lord," for it is disobedience to demur against the command of the Lord your God.

As it is with your practice, so let it be with everything else. Our corrupt nature will dare to cavil at *processes of sanctification*. We are anxious to bear fruit, but we do not care to be pruned. We are glad to be delivered from dross, but not by the fire. Rebukes are undervalued, searching truths are avoided, faithful friends are shunned, and awakening Scriptures are neglected—for carnal ease pleads hard for indulgence—and the flesh whines, "Not so, Lord."

Even *in the dispensation of the kingdom* self-will comes in—we like not that God should bless men by a sect to which we do not belong. We are envious for our own Moses, lest the irregular Eldads and Medads should eclipse him. I have known old folks object to the Lord's blessing that rather obtrusive young woman, that very forward lad, that overzealous person. Let God bless us, certainly, but not by objectionable people!

Many would prefer apostles from Athens rather than from Nazareth—they prefer the smell of study lamp oil to that of the fishing boats of Galilee. We pray for conversions, yet certain persons would not believe in them if they happened out of the regular way. We are too masterful by half, and are far from taking up our proper position as servants. Too much of the Peter clings to us, and our tongue is much too ready to cry out, "Not so, Lord."

Our natural corruption is apt to quarrel with the Lord concerning *our sufferings*. Against this also be always watchful. Whenever you are called to endure trial, do not complain of the particular form it takes. Perhaps it is great bodily pain and you say, "I could bear anything better than this." That is a mistake. God knows what is the best for His child. Do not cry, "Not so."

"Oh, I could bear sickness," says another, "but I have been slandered. My character is taken away, and I cannot bear that." Thus our will asserts its place, and we pine to be our own god and ruler. This must not be. You must, my dear friend, bear that which the Lord appoints, or else you will make the matter a lot worse.

If you want anything done well, do it yourself, with this exception—that if you want your character defended, you should always let that alone. Somebody else will take care of that for you, and if slander be the rod under which you are to smart, many of us have felt it before you, and you need not complain

so bitterly, as if a strange thing had happened to you. Do not cry, "Not so, Lord," but let the Lord appoint you care or calumny, sickness or slander, for He knows best.

"But I am afraid that I shall lose my wife, or a favorite child. I think that I could have suffered anything but that." Yes, you see, a rebellious spirit contends with God one way or another—it cannot be quiet.

I was greatly struck with a story a dear sister told me yesterday. She was very nearly being removed from the church—she had quarreled with the Lord for taking away her husband, and she would not go to any place of worship, she felt so angry about her loss. But her little child came to her one morning, and said, "Mother, do you think Jonah was right when he said, 'I do well to be angry, even unto death'?" She replied, "O child, do not talk to me," and put the little one away. But she felt the rebuke—and it brought her back to her God, and back to her church—humbly rejoicing in Him who had used this instrumentality to set her right with her Lord.

O friends, let us be silent before the Lord, and judge His ways no longer, for in this judgment there is no benefit to ourselves or others! Do not say, "Not so," but rather, "It is the LORD, let him do what seemeth him good."

When Jacob crossed his aged hands to bless the two sons of Joseph, according to the divine will, Joseph said, "Not so, my father"—but he could not alter his father's act. Jacob guided his hands wittingly, and the blessing came as God would have it.

Perhaps a great blessing is coming on you in a cross-handed manner. The patriarch had experienced many a cross-handed blessing himself, and therefore he knew what he was at.

"Cross-handed came the blessing down
On Jacob's hoary head,
When Joseph's bloody coat was shown
As numbered with the dead."

Many a wonderful blessing has come to us in that cross-handed way. Bow your head, therefore, and silence your tongue, and have done forever with arraigning your Maker before your petty judgment seat. Shall not the heavenly Father do that which is right and good?

Sometimes our corrupt nature quarrels with God about *our service.* The Lord says, "Go into the Sunday school." "I should have liked to preach," says the young man. "Go into the Sunday school." "Not so, Lord," says he, and he will not go, and thus he misses his life-work.

It will not do for us to choose what work we will do. Who would employ servants who, when they are told to do this or go there, should say, "No, sir, I prefer another engagement"? They will get their money on Saturday night, with the advice to find a new master.

We may well pray—

"Dismiss me not Thy service, Lord,"

if we have been pickers and choosers of our work. Do what the Lord bids you, when He bids you, where He bids you, as He bids you, as long as He bids you—and do it at once. Never say, "Not so, Lord."

"But," you say, "*His providence* is very strange to me. I am called away from the place where my heart has struck its roots. God deals with me in a terrible manner." Truly His way is in the storm. Yet, never say, "Not so, Lord."

It is not a pretty position for a child of God to be in to be trying to amend the arrangements of the great Father. The Omniscient knows best. You think so, do you not? Do not act as if you thought the contrary. Oh, brothers and sisters, an obedient heart, a yielding spirit, a submissive mind, and an acquiescence in the divine will are the necessary elements of happiness—the spirit of "Not so, Lord," is the mother of all the mists and fogs that darken our pathway.

If you will walk contrary to God, He will walk contrary to you. "Unto the froward he will show himself froward," but to the humble and contrite, the submissive and obedient, He will show Himself exceeding gracious.

If you will stoop, you shall conquer. If you will yield, you shall have your desire. If you will be nothing, God will make much of you. If you will be lowly, God will exalt you. But if you will stand out against your Lord, as surely as He loves you, He will correct you, and He will teach you better manners ere He is done with you.

IV. Let us leave that point and close with a fourth observation—IT IS A GREAT PITY WHEN THIS KIND OF WILLFULNESS STANDS IN THE WAY OF USEFULNESS.

It would have been so with Peter if the Lord had not used the process by which He overcame him. "Not so, Lord," said Peter. "Not so, Lord, for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean." In some things, Peter was a great deal *too conservative*. He says, "Not so, Lord," and some read it, "Never, Lord, never, Lord, for I have never." That is, "I must never do a thing I have never done."

Many are of this mind—they cannot advance an inch. This is the hymn they sing each morning before breakfast, "As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen." And any time until they go to bed at night, it is the tune they keep on singing, "As it was in the beginning. As it was in the beginning." They will never do what has not been done, nor learn what they have not learned.

Many will only act as others act. They must keep in the fashion. Now this is a rule which I never accepted. For it always seemed to me that I was probably to do what nobody had done before me—for was I not in some points different from everyone else? One likes to look about, and search for methods of usefulness which have not been tried, for a novel form of labor may be like a bit of virgin soil which will yield a better crop than our own arable lands which have been drained so long.

Do you not think that Christian men are apt to be stereotyped in their ways? You must always sing so many verses and no more—you must pray at a certain time, and go right round Europe, Asia, Africa and America before you close your petitions. Certain people must always do what they have done, even though they fall asleep in the doing of it.

This kind of routine forbids enlarged usefulness, prevents our getting at out-of-the-way people, and puts a damper upon all zeal. Let us struggle against the spirit which would bind us hand and foot—where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. Let us not say, "Never, Lord, for I have never," but on the contrary—"Right speedily will I attempt this work of usefulness, because I have forgotten it so long—I will make haste and delay no longer to keep Your commandments."

Propriety hinders very many—decorum is their death. I do not know the precise meaning of it, but there are genteel people about who consider that the finest thing on earth is, "propriety." Mr. Rowland Hill was said to have ridden on the back of all order and decorum. "No," he said, "I cannot ride on the back of two horses, but I have two horses to my carriage, and I have called one of them, 'Order,' and the other 'Decorum,' to make the report come as nearly right as possible."

Order and decorum were never put to a better use than when they drew Mr. Rowland Hill from town to town preaching the Gospel. And I, for one, am glad that he never took those horses into the pulpit. He was just as disorderly and indecorous as a Christian man ought to be—that is to say, he was perfectly natural, and spoke the truth from his heart, and men that heard it felt the power of it—and so he became a blessing to this part of London, and indeed, to the whole world.

Shake yourself up a little, my brother. If you are too precise, may the Lord set you on fire and consume your bonds of red tape! If you have become so improperly proper that you cannot commit a proper impropriety, then pray God to help you to be less proper, for there are many who will never be saved by your instrumentality while you study propriety.

Again, I doubt not that some are hindered in their usefulness by *their great dignity*. It is amazing what noble creatures men can grow into, if they are let alone. "This great Babylon that I have built,"

cries Nebuchadnezzar. That is the same gentleman who afterwards ate grass like the oxen, and whose nails grew like birds' claws.

We have seen very, very, very great little people, and very, very little great people who have given themselves mighty airs—but we have never seen any good come of their greatness. Few people are blessed by these gorgeous individuals. God seldom sends His Elijahs bread and meat by peacocks.

If you go as visiting ladies into the houses of the poor very finely dressed, and you "condescend" to them, they will not want to see you any more. But if you go in and sit at their side, and show them that you are their true friends, you get at their hearts.

Love yourself less and less, and love your God more. Love the soul of every man with all the intensity of your being. Struggle and agonize to bring sinners to the Savior's feet, and God will help you. But if you stand on your dignity, and say, "Lord, not so; for I have never eaten anything common or unclean," it will be a serious injury to you.

I said to one of our classes, "Let *I* grow very small, and let *J* grow very great," and the brethren did not need an explanation. May we so love our Lord Jesus that we cease to care for dignity, and are willing to be nothing for His sake!

Are there any here who have not yet believed in Jesus? I hope they will trust their souls with Him at once, and when they have done so, let them come forward without delay, and confess His name, and be baptized into the sacred Three. Then let them try to grow downward lower and lower, till they sink into nothing, that Christ may be all in all.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—ACTS 10:1-33

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—23 (SONG III.), 704, 708

LETTER FROM MR. SPURGEON

DEAR FRIENDS—May the peace of God abide with you. With great pleasure I perform the weekly duty of preparing the sermon, and I pray our Lord to make it a blessing to all my readers. Each day I gather a measure of strength. My walking is measured by steps few and slow, but then I can walk, and this is a great reason for gratitude to one who could not put his foot down without pain. I am recovering in all respects, and feel that a fortnight in this place has done more for me than could have been effected by months of medicine.

To Him whom I worshipped in pain be grateful praises for restoring mercy.

Yours heartily,

C. H. SPURGEON

Mentone, Feb. 16, 1885

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.