THE FOUNDATION AND ITS SEAL—A SERMON FOR THE TIMES

NO. 1854

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, AUGUST 9, 1885
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON

"Nevertheless the foundation of God stands sure, having this seal,
The Lord knoweth them that are his.
And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity."
2 Timothy 2:19

PAUL had met with many difficulties in his earnest career, but his most painful trials came from false brethren. It is battle enough for the church to contend with the world, but what is she to do when she has to contend with herself? To go forth weeping, bearing precious seed, and in due time to reap it in the heat of the sun, is toil enough for the husbandman—but what is he to do when the tares are sown among the wheat, and they spring up and well-nigh choke the growing grain?

He is distressed and knows not what to do. At first he is eager to root up the tares—then he fears that he might root up the wheat with them. And so, at his Master's command, he lets both grow together until the harvest. This he does with tears in his eyes, for he foresees that those growing tares must do fearful mischief to the good seed, and in the end, where he looked for much, he will gather little.

A compact army of brave spirits, every man in health, and every man a hero, can march across a continent and strike at the foe time after time—and every stroke shall fall as from the hammer of Thor. But if you have the leadership of a great and motley host—and there are many sick folk to be carried in the ambulance, while others are faint-hearted, cowardly, and cold in the cause, and yet another company are half suspected of a design to go over to the adversary—then the captain's hair may well turn grey in a night at the thought of what may be the result of a battle.

Paul was full of somewhat similar anxieties when about to leave the field of conflict to receive his crown. He was handing over his commission of watchman of the churches to Timothy, and as he did so, it was with a trembling hand as he thought of the evil influences which were at work within the church itself. Outside persecution seemed light enough to him, but internal dissension, heresy, and ungodliness weighed upon his spirit.

When I read this second epistle to Timothy, it reminds me somewhat, only it is a great improvement upon it, of David's addressing Solomon, and reminding him of those who had given him trouble in his lifetime, and exhorting him how to deal wisely with them lest his kingdom should be disturbed by them. You notice that throughout the epistle, the apostle makes more mention of troublesome individuals than in any other letter.

In the first chapter there is Phygellus and Hermogenes. And now we come upon Hymenaeus and Philetus. These dogs generally hunt in couples. A little further on you get Demas and Alexander the coppersmith, who had done much evil to the apostle. The departing saint, harboring no resentment, yet has great anxiety of spirit as to what these mischief-makers might do with a young man like Timothy, since they had been such thorns in his own side.

It is a cheering thing to note that while Paul mentions these things with a gracious anxiety, they do not disturb the serenity of his faith, nor make him question for a moment the success of the cause, nor doubt the success of the work which the Lord had wrought by his own hands. These are his words—"For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: therefore there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness,

which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them, also that love his appearing."

Courage, then, servant of God. Whatever may be your trials because of an apostatizing church, your faith will give you victory. Be faithful to the Word of the holy testimony, and the truth shall yet prevail. Live much in communion with your Master, for by His name shall you triumph!

Project yourself into the eternal future. Feel the crown already upon your head when it is aching under many sorrows. Hear the Master's word, "Well done," when you are weary with the noise of them that oppose the cross. Stand fast! Having done all, still stand! The campaign is not lost. Despite all that has happened, or ever shall happen, not one jot the less "the foundation of God standeth sure." The work of God goes on, and the reward which God gives to the workers is not diminished, nor even placed in danger. Wherefore in patience possess your soul.

This morning with deep solemnity of soul I approach this text, and pray that the Spirit of God may bless it to us all. I see in it three things. The first, perhaps, is rather in the context, it is *the lamentable overthrow* of which the apostle has been speaking. He says that these two men, Hymenaeus and Philetus, overthrew the faith of some.

Secondly, we shall survey *the abiding foundation*—"the foundation of God standeth sure." And then, thirdly, *the instructive inscription* upon the foundation stone, "The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let everyone that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity."

I. First, let us think for a little of THE LAMENTABLE OVERTHROW which the apostle so much deplored.

The apostle observed with sorrow *a general coldness*. It was in some respects coldness towards himself, but in reality it was a turning away from the simplicity of the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith. He says in the fifteenth verse of the previous chapter, "This thou knowest, that all they which are in Asia be turned away from me; of whom are Phygellus and Hermogenes," two men, I suppose, of whom he had hoped better things—perhaps persons who had professed a warm attachment to him. Their departure was the unkindest cut of all.

A great want of spiritual life and zeal for the truth is our trial today. Laodicea is not the only church that is neither cold nor hot. I am at this moment unwillingly compelled to believe that a very serious blight is upon many of our churches. From a wide correspondence, I gather that a wintry chill is just now upon the church—possibly it is not to such an extent as in certain terrible periods—but still to a very saddening degree.

There is not that firmness in the faith, that holiness of life, and that enthusiasm for the cross of Christ that one would wish to see. I view the immediate prospect with serious anxiety. Yet, I was reading Mr. Bunyan's words concerning the age in which he lived, and I find that he had similar apprehensions in his time. And I notice that before his day, each loyal-hearted man of God was troubled with similar fears.

Nor were those fears childish—they were not a presumptuous trembling for the ark of the Lord, but a godly jealousy, lest the enemy should get an advantage over the hosts of God. It is a mercy that there should be somebody to complain—somebody to express the longing of the church for better things. I am sure that there is grave reason for regret at this moment. Though we look with the greatest gratitude upon all the things that are good, we still have to look with heavy hearts upon much that is grievous to the Spirit of God in the churches of the present day.

Furthermore, the apostle saw with much alarm that *teachers were erring*. He names two especially, Hymenaeus and Philetus, and he mentions the doctrine that they taught—not needlessly explaining it, but merely giving a hint at it. They taught, among other things, that the resurrection was past already. I suppose they had fallen into the manner of certain in our day, who spiritualize or rationalize everything.

They say, "This is mythical. This death of Christ is to be understood as the triumph of self-sacrifice. This resurrection of Christ means the revival of forgotten principles." Thus they hold an atonement which is no atonement, and a resurrection which is no resurrection. They appear to accept the great historical fact, and yet they reduce it to fiction.

This is the subtlety of the old serpent. Somehow or other, these men manage to extract from the Gospel an attractive philosophy, but it is not the Gospel which God intended to be preached. They seek rather the wisdom of man's thought than the revelation of God's thoughts. You need not that I go into particulars, for all around us men are dealing craftily with the truth of God—adulterating it, and in heart denying it.

These are by no means persons to be trifled with—many of them are keen, acute, and thoughtful—and it is the great peril of the church at this moment that she numbers such among her teachers. These can stab under the shield. We care not for the besiegers without, but we are distressed because of the traitors within. God grant that this thing may go no further, but may His people become alarmed by the growing decline of the church, and resolve to be rid of this destructive influence, which eats as does a canker.

In Paul's day, many *professors were apostatizing from the faith* because of the evil leaders. Sheep are such creatures to follow something that, when they do not follow the shepherd, they display great readiness to follow one another. When Hymenaeus and Philetus taught a highly intellectual doctrine, ever so many people, who fancied themselves to be cultured, must needs be of their mind.

Hymenaeus had discovered a method of being abreast of the times, so that the Christian teacher could figure in the heathen academy, and be complimented for his liberal views. These "cultured" teachers looked down with contempt upon those uncouth fishermen, who were so unlearned and ignorant as to believe that the teaching of Jesus meant what it said.

For they themselves gave the Gospel a more rational meaning. They thought themselves profound and eclectic, men who could see the soul of things, and therefore they rejected the simplicity of the cross, and put in its place the theories of the philosophers. They took away the foundation facts under the pretence of building higher, and thus the faith of many was overthrown.

Take away the resurrection, and what remains of the Gospel? The resurrection of Christ, and the consequent resurrection of His people, is the keystone of the arch of the Christian system. And if that be removed as a myth, the whole building falls. The apostle saw numbers of persons led astray by this error—as, alas! we see many in these times deluded with kindred falsehoods.

It becomes Christian men nowadays carefully to discriminate as to what they hear. I read the other day a complaint as to small towns having many chapels where one might have sufficed. Truly, one might suffice if the Gospel were faithfully preached in it, but a score would not be enough if in them all there was an absence of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and of the life and power of the Holy Ghost.

When another Gospel is introduced, those who love the truth of God are bound to enter their earnest protest, and to form another congregation. I am for unity in the life and truth of God, and for our coming closer and closer together—spiritual men to spiritual men—but that is quite another thing from making an aggregate of this great motley mass of Christian profession, and unchristian teaching, since it has so little of the true life of Christ within it.

Would to God that in every place where Christ is preached professedly He were preached truthfully! Oh that you who profess to follow Christ were really doing so! But what is the chaff to the wheat? How much of chaff is mixed with every heap that lies upon our Lord's threshing floor!

Paul also deplored that *ungodliness increased*. He says that the profane and vain babblings of his time increased unto more ungodliness. O brethren and sisters, it is *godliness* that we need—the living of the soul with God, and in God, and to God. We need a holy fear of God, a sacred sense of God, a true delight in God. We want less of man and more of God. Less of mere creed-repeating, and more of vital faith in God. Less following of men and more following of God in Christ Jesus. More of union with God, living in God, and likeness to God. Oh that He would work this in us.

The world grows dark with accursed lust, and the Christian church grows more conformed to the ungodly world. Persecutions unto death have ceased—it is easy and respectable to bear the Christian name—and hence, the separation from the world, which is the glory of Christians, becomes less and less apparent.

My heart is sore wounded with the sight of some who will come into God's house, and undertake God's service during the Sabbath day, and yet during the week they are unjust, oppressive, graceless, and greedy—not servants of God, but servants of self and sin. By unholy professors, the cross is dishonored, the Holy Spirit is grieved, and Christ is put to an open shame. All this vexed the heart of the apostle in his day, and it is our cross and burden at this hour. "Lord have mercy upon us! Christ have mercy upon us!"

II. Now let us turn to the subject which supplied Paul with consolation. He speaks of the ABIDING FOUNDATION—"Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure."

It is a joy to quit the ever-moving flood for the firm, substantial rock. It is bliss to feel that there is something under your feet, something substantial, abiding, sure. "Nevertheless, the foundation of God standeth sure." Though the earth be removed, and though the mountains are carried into the midst of the sea—though the waters thereof roar and are troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof, yet will we not fear, for the Lord JEHOVAH changes not.

What is this foundation which stands sure? Those who have interpreted the passage have given many meanings to it, but I believe that all those meanings are really one. For the sake of clearness, I would give three answers to the inquiry—the foundation is, secretly, the purpose of God; doctrinally, the truth of God; effectively, the church of God—in all, the system of God whereby He glorifies His grace.

The foundation is *the divine purpose*. Though men prove fickle, false, and wicked, and the church is thereby sorely grieved, "nevertheless" God's purpose is carried out. The covenant of grace is fulfilled, and the glory of God is revealed. God has a grand design from which He has never swerved, no, not by so much as a hair's breadth. His purpose shall stand. He will do all His pleasure.

It is incumbent upon us to believe in the responsibility of men, and to feel the weight of that truth, for a truth it is of the most solemn importance. It is our duty to give ourselves up with all our might to the doing of that which is right, as if all things depended thereon. Yet when we are baffled by matters which are beyond our control, it is a blessed thing to fall back upon the purpose and providence of the Almighty, and feel that though *we* are defeated—He cannot be.

There is a power high over all which works for righteousness. The Messiah "shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth: and the isles shall wait for his law." The divine design in creation shall be effected, and in redemption and in providence, it shall be the same. The Lord shall be at the last victor all along the line. The good shall glorify Him, and even the evil shall be compelled to magnify the greatness of His majesty. "The Lord reigneth; let the earth rejoice; let the multitude of isles be glad thereof." God Himself, who is in very deed the foundation of all things, stands sure.

The apostle also meant *the divine truth*, which is the foundation of the Gospel. He had been speaking about certain truths which were spirited away by those two unworthies, Hymenaeus and Philetus, and he says, "Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure."

Interpreters have thought that Paul points at the doctrine of the resurrection. No doubt he does, but he includes every other doctrine which is a foundational truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Yonder is a man who has proved that Jesus is not truly God. Let him prove what he likes, since Jesus is God for all that.

Another man has disproved the substitutionary atonement of Christ—let him disprove it if he pleases, for it is just as true. Rhetoric and logic can do wonders in appearance, but they do nothing in reality. The orator's thunder has not shaken the unchangeable truth of God. He is proud of his triumphs, but as we look into the Book and look into the dear Master's face, we feel that, "nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure."

No truth has ever been destroyed by all the fires through which it has passed. The fire which tried the bush in the wilderness was a much more potent element than any that men can kindle, for it was God's own presence, and He is emphatically "a consuming fire." Yet the bush was not consumed by such a

fire. What, then, can destroy it? Even so, since the truth can stand the test of God, the all-trying One, depend upon it, it can endure the test of such poor fires as man can bring to bear upon it.

In a broad Scotch version I read, "The bush lowe'd and was nane the waur"—that is to say, "It was none the worse." Brethren, the Gospel is none the worse for all the opposition which has surrounded it, though it has been as fierce as devouring flame. Only the additions of men have been burnt out of it. Everything that can be consumed ought to be consumed, and only that which cannot be burned is really God's eternal truth.

All that has happened by all the controversy of all the ages, is that man's fiction has been separated from God's foundation—man's speculation has been purged out of God's revelation. The foundation of God stands sure, and oh the joy of this fact to every heart that loves the Lord!

But further, I think Paul meant here not only the purpose of God, and the truth of God, but *God's divine work* in the world in the salvation of His own. The divine election of God has been fulfilled so far—and those whom God has really saved—in whom there has been a real work of grace, stand sure when all others are overthrown.

You look upon the church, and lament that so many have turned aside—that so many others are very poor specimens of Christians—that so many more are sadly questionable, and that a certain company are evidently false. Well, it is very sad, but yet there is a remnant according to the election of grace—"the foundation of God standeth sure."

Those who were really laid upon the foundation by the Spirit of God—those who are vitally united to Christ—these still stand firm in faith and character. Those who are truly born of God live unto God. The righteous hold on their way. The choice spirits endure unto the end. Does not Jesus say, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me"? Does He not declare that, "A stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers"?

The teachers of error would, if it were possible, have deceived the very elect, but the chosen detect the deception by the spiritual discernment which is in them, and by the teaching of the Holy Ghost. They love the truth, and live the truth—and the truth lives in them. Thus in their persons, "the foundation of God standeth sure."

Brethren, let us take great joy in this foundation of God, this faithful church of God, which is steadfast and immovable in the day of blasphemy and rebuke. Blessed be the name of the Lord, He still has a quickened people. He still has a church in the world—in all communities of professing Christians there is a secret seed of faithful ones—and while the floods and the winds have driven down the stream the many towering houses that were built upon the sand, yet the house of God still stands upon the rock.

It is not yet complete so as to be fully built as the great house of God is to be. At the present it wears rather the aspect of a foundation, or basement, than of a house. But it will rise by degrees to be a fair palace, and even now the King Himself deigns to dwell in it. What there is of the true church is a sure prophecy of what there shall be ere long. "The foundation of God standeth sure."

Let us take courage from this, and be not sorely moved nor dismayed in the day of apostasy. "They went out from us, but they were not of us." The hireling flees, because he is an hireling. Let us not dwell upon the mournful side exclusively, lest we lose that joy of the Lord which is our strength. Our Master wept over Jerusalem once, but He also rejoiced in spirit when His mind looked another way.

In His heart He always mourned over the woes of ungodly men, but still He thought and spake of more cheering themes—and so must we. It would not become us to let any one form of thought gimlet our hearts through and through with painful monotony. You can contemplate the sad side of things till you become so wretched as to be unable to do good. Have a brave and hopeful heart.

When you see a black cloud, look for its silver lining. When you see that which looked like substantial material consumed in the fire, be thankful that if the wood and hay are gone, the gold and silver remain. God is laying a foundation for the future, a foundation so sure that it cannot be moved. And He will build upon it course after course of jeweled stones till its walls, great and high, appear unto all men.

Soon shall we see its windows of agate and its gates of carbuncle. Soon shall the glittering pinnacles of "the terrible crystal" shine in the eternal light. And best of all, we shall inhabit the house forever, and go no more out, for the Lord God and the Lamb shall be the glory of that house, and His faithful ones shall be built into it as living stones.

Wherefore pluck up courage, and stand in your place, O you who are trembling. "Onward!" be your watchword. Victory is not so far away as we fear. The retreat of yonder cowards is nothing—the turning back of the men of Ephraim is according to their nature. But be strong and quit yourselves like men, for the Lord of Hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge.

III. Now, we are, in the third place, as we may be helped of the Holy Spirit, to look at this foundation and observe THE INSTRUCTIVE INSCRIPTION. I think this figure best expresses the apostle's intent. He represents the foundation stone as bearing an inscription upon it, like the stone mentioned by the prophet Zechariah, of which we read, "I will engrave the graving thereof, saith the LORD of hosts, and I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day."

The custom of putting inscriptions upon foundation stones is ancient and general. In the days of the Pharaohs, the royal cartouche was impressed upon each brick that was placed in buildings raised by royal authority. The structure was thus known to have been erected by a certain Pharaoh.

Here we have the royal cartouche, or seal, of the King of kings set upon the foundation of the great palace of the church. The House of Wisdom bears, on its forefront and foundation the seal of the Lord. The Jews were wont to write texts of Scripture upon the doorposts of their houses—in this also we have an illustration of our text.

The Lord has set upon His purpose, His Gospel, His truth, the double mark described in the text—the divine election and the divine sanctification. This seal is placed to declare that it belongs to the Lord alone, and to set it apart for His personal habitation. Does not the Lord thus say, "This is my rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it"?

By His choice, and by His sanctifying grace, He has formed a people for Himself, and they shall show forth His praise. The inscription, moreover, is put upon the foundation stone, that every man may take heed how he builds thereupon. We cannot be sure when we build that every stone we place upon the foundation is well and truly laid there—"The Lord knoweth them that are his." But we have this mark to guide us—those who truly name the name of Christ depart from all iniquity. "By their fruits ye shall know them."

We are to use judgment in our building, and this is the rule of it—we must look for holiness in every real convert, for "without holiness no man shall see the Lord." It is labor in vain to build those into the visible church who are not sanctified in the spirit of their minds. In doctrine also, it is in vain to preach unless our doctrine is according to godliness. A holy God will not dwell with an unholy people. If the foundation be holy, so must the building be.

The seal upon the foundation is the mark of the builder, and the indication of the object of that which is built. It is intended to denote the character of the entire edifice, for God's building is all of one piece, and of one nature throughout. On each individual Christian, who is truly so, there is the private seal of divine knowledge, and the public seal of divine likeness. God knows and approves each true believer, and each true believer proves his knowledge of God, and his delight in Him by departing from iniquity.

My inmost soul desires vehemently to aid in building up a church that shall be composed of men approved of God—God-fearing, God-loving men, in whom God lives, and who, therefore, live unto Him. What a church this will be! Upon such a people will be seen the second mark, for they will hate all sin, and flee from it. They love that which is good, and true, and loving, and God-like. In us these two things must meet—God's free and sovereign grace towards us, and our hearty and practical obedience to His will, or else we are not His sealed ones, and are not built on His sealed foundation.

If I might use another illustration, I can suppose that when the stones for the temple were quarried in the mountains, each one received a special mark from Solomon's seal, marking it as a temple stone and

perhaps denoting its place in the sacred edifice. This would be like the first inscription, "The LORD knoweth them that are his."

But the stone would not long lie in the quarry. It would be taken away from its fellows, after being marked for removal. Here is the transport mark in the second inscription—"Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity." The first seal marked it for the Lord, the second secured its removal from the common stones around it.

First comes election, and sanctification follows. I want every professing Christian to have that double mark, and so to be Christ's man, known of all to be such by coming out from the unclean, and being separated unto the Lord. Remember the words of the prophet Isaiah—"Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence, touch no unclean thing; go ye out of the midst of her; be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the LORD."

Carefully follow me while I notice that the first mark is concerning God and us, and the second mark is concerning us and God.

The first is *concerning God and us*. "The Lord knoweth them that are his." He knows, that is, He foresees, and predestinates, for "whom he did foreknow he also did predestinate." Those that are His He always has known to be His, for they were His from before the foundation of the world. They are His known ones when He deals with them in grace, and comes into their hearts by His powerful operations. He watches over them by a special providence, knowing the way that they take, and never losing sight of them.

The text teaches us that the Lord discriminates—"The Lord knoweth them that are his." Some who bear His name are not His, and He knows them not. He will say of them at the last, "I never knew you." They are supposed to be His. They suppose themselves to be His—they are taken into His church as His, they continue throughout a long life nominally His—but they are discovered at the last.

There is another and severer test than that of ministers, and elders, and church votes—the Lord knoweth the secret things of the heart. Be not deceived, God is not mocked. There is an eye that has no failure in its vision, but sees to the very soul of things, and reads the hypocrite despite his pretended sanctity.

This discernment on the part of God should make us walk very truthfully before Him. Let none of us profess to be the Lord's unless we are such—nor ever pretend to an experience which we have not truly felt. For the Lord cannot be in any measure deceived—He searches the heart and tries the reins of the children of men.

"The Lord knoweth them that are his," signifies that He is familiar with them, and communes with them. They that are really the Lord's property are also the Lord's company—He has conversation with them. They know Him, and He knows them. He makes Himself known to them, and they make themselves known to Him.

O brothers, do you know God Himself? Does God know you? Will He ever say, "I never knew you"! When I have been cast down, I have said unto the Lord—"Lord, You cannot say You do not know me, for I have knocked at Your door by the hour together. I have burdened You with my needs, and haunted You with my groanings. I have been Your daily beggar, receiving large alms at Your hands." It is a blessed thing to be sure that we are not unknown in heaven. At least we have the fellowship of asking and receiving, if no more.

Further, the words imply God's preservation of His own, for when God knows a man, He approves him, and consequently preserves him. "The Lord knoweth them that are his" and He will keep such to the end. This man Hymenaeus, and his fellow Philetus, may deceive many, but the Lord, who is the true Pastor of the church, will keep His own sheep according to His Word—"I give unto my sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." This is the first seal of the sure foundation. Be not afraid of it. "The Lord knoweth them that are his."

The second seal is *concerning us and God*—"Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity." Observe how the practical always goes with the doctrinal in holy Scripture. Those whom

free grace chooses, free grace cleanses. We are not chosen because we are holy, but chosen to be holy, and being chosen, the purpose is no dead letter, but we are made to seek after holiness.

Note that the word is universal as to believers—"Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity." You expect ministers to be careful in their conduct, and so they should be. But are not their people under the same obligation? Elders and deacons are expected to be gracious. This, indeed, is as it should be, but why not those of whom they are the servants? Let every one that is called a Christian, or trusts Christ, or preaches Christ, or teaches Christ, flee far from the ways of unrighteousness.

This is a sweeping precept as to the thing to be avoided—let him, "depart from iniquity"—not from this or that crime or folly, but from iniquity itself, from everything that is evil, from everything that is unrighteous or unholy.

O you Christian people, be holy, for Christ is holy. Do not pollute that holy name wherewith you are named. O you people of God, if you are indeed the Lord's, let no sin dwell with you. Do not say, "It is a constitutional sin." You are born again, what have you to do with the old constitution but to mortify it? Do not say, "Oh, but others do it." What have you to do with others?—to their own master they stand or fall. Depart from iniquity on your own account, even as Israel departed out of Egypt. Let your family life, your personal life, your business life, be as holy as Christ, your Lord, would have it to be.

The text is very decisive—it does not say, "Let him put iniquity on one side," but "Let him depart from it." Get away from evil. All your lives long travel further and further from it.

Do you know where my text originally came from? I believe it was taken from the Book of Numbers. Read in the sixteenth chapter the story of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. In the Septuagint, almost the same words occur as those now before us.

Moses and Aaron were the servants of God, and they were, so to speak, the foundation of the building of the Jewish Commonwealth. Moses was faithful in all his house. Korah, Dathan, and Abiram rebelled, and sought to overthrow that foundation—and Moses replied to them, "The Lord will show who are his, and who are holy; and will cause him to come near unto him; even him whom he hath chosen will he cause to come near to him."

So he bids them come and bring their censers, and officiate as priests, if they dare to do so. There they stand, and there stands Aaron, and the Lord knoweth and shows who are His. Now, turn to the twenty-sixth verse of the same chapter and read, "Depart, I pray you, from the tents of these wicked men, and touch nothing of theirs, lest ye be consumed in all their sins." Then the faithful fled away from their tents on every side, and before long, the ground clave asunder that was under them, and the earth opened her mouth and swallowed them up.

What a parallel is the whole chapter with my text! And what a warning to all who teach false doctrine within the church of God! Judgment will surely overtake them. The Lord shall "gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire."

The Lord Jesus is exercising discipline in His church every day. It is no trifling matter to be a church member, and no small business to be a preacher of the Gospel. If you name the name of Christ, you will either be settled in Him or driven from Him. There is continually going on an establishment of living stones upon the foundation, and a separating from it of the rubbish which gathers thereon.

Come to Christ, we say, and oh that you would come. But still do not come to Him pretendedly and nominally—for "His fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor." To and fro goes that great winnowing fan, and every breath of the wind drives away chaff that looked like wheat. Who could tell by sight what it was? The good grain falls to the ground, but lo, the chaff is blown away!

Yonder fire that is burning outside the threshing floor destroys it. Judgment must begin at the house of God. The Lord may let the wicked remain in this world for many a day unpunished, but if you come near to Him, He will be sanctified in you, or upon you. There is discipline within my Master's house, and if you come under His roof, you must come under that discipline. For this cause in olden times

many were sick in the churches, and many died prematurely—and it is still so, for within His great house a jealous God maintains a strict rule.

Thus says the Lord, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities." Look how He dealt with Ananias and Sapphira within the church, while many a liar outside of it grows grey in falsehood. Nadab and Abihu died before the Lord because they offered strange fire, while many another man has lived on in the blackest iniquities. For Achan's sin, the whole nation of Israel was sorely troubled. What a solemn thing is iniquity in the church of God!

Brethren, I conclude with a brief but earnest appeal. Let us seek after the highest degree of holiness. Let us not be satisfied with being nominal Christians. Let us aim at the greatest measure of godliness. Let us plunge into the stream of grace, immersing ourselves wholly into the life of God. How many professors appear to know nothing of the real force and energy of the Spirit of God in subduing sin and creating holiness! Theirs is a shallow life. Alas, how much they lose!

They come under the obligations of the house of God, but they do not know the infinite privileges of that house. It is for the truly spiritual that God reserves the choicest of His dainties. Be half a Christian, and you shall have enough religion to make you miserable—be wholly a Christian, and your joy shall be full. Walk with God in the light as He is in the light, and you shall have fellowship with Him, such as shall make earth akin to heaven.

Take a little light and a little darkness, and attempt to make a mixture of them—seek to join the church and the world—and you shall have neither the pleasures of the world nor the comforts of the Spirit. It is a pity for a man to miss joys which an angel might covet!

What an injury such professors are to the church! Each one pulls his fellows up or drags them down. Every man in the church is either a help or a hindrance. No Christian man can live to himself. He may attempt to confine himself within his own ribs, and button up his coat, and fancy that what he does is to himself alone, and that his tongue and his heart are his own, but it is not so. An aroma steals forth from every man's life, and it is either like the spikenard of the alabaster box, or like the reeking of a dung-hill. God help us to remember our influence upon others.

Think also how much the world is injured by Christians who are not Christians! Oh friends, we want nowadays a sterling Christianity. We cannot do with German silver now. We must have the real metal. I was about to say, I would sooner you had no religion, and made no pretence to having any, than to have the imitation of it.

Sin is real today. We have heard enough of how far sinners will go—they venture not only to the brink of hell, but they snatch the accursed fire out of the pit itself, and bring it into our city. Shall saints be shams, when sinners are so real? Shall Baal have worshippers that cut themselves with knives and leap upon his altar in the frenzy of their lust—and shall JEHOVAH have only a faithless company who as yet are halting between two opinions, and do not know whether He is God or not? Oh for a church of God that will shake itself loose from the world! If we had but once such church, there would be hope for our age. God send it!

Last of all, how is Christ shamed and dishonored when we are not holy, but worldly, covetous, proud, and unloving! Oh, sirs, it seems to me that since the foundation of God was laid in agony and bloody sweat, and since God Himself became incarnate that He might lay the foundation of holiness in the world, we ought to take heed how and what we build thereon.

We must come to it, for "other foundation can no man lay." But it behooves us to come very solemnly to it, and to know what we mean by building thereon. True godliness is not to say, "I believe," but to believe. Not to talk of repentance, but to repent. It is not to speak of regeneration, but to be born again. It is not to talk about consecration, but really to live to God. It is not to speak about the Holy Ghost, but to have Him dwelling in you.

Be it ours to have the truth of God in the inward parts, and grace in the core of the heart. Oh, may God bring us to this! We ask it for our Lord Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

**PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—
2 TIMOTHY 2**

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—103 (VERSION III.), 769, 668

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.