

“GOD, AND NOT MAN”—WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

NO. 2447

A SERMON

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*“I will not return to destroy Ephraim: for I am God, and not man.”
Hosea 11:9*

THE Lord, speaking of Himself as, “God, and not man,” mentions as the special point in which He is above and beyond man, that He has greater grace, greater long-suffering, and greater willingness to forgive, “I will not return to destroy Ephraim: for I am God, and not man.” In a thousand respects, God is greater than man, for us to enter into that theme would require a very considerable length of time, but the Lord here puts this truth most prominently forward, that He is “God, and not man,” in that He is infinitely more forbearing, infinitely more tender, infinitely more ready to pass by offenses than any man ever can be. What men cannot do by reason of the narrowness and shallowness of their goodness, God can and will do by reason of the height and depth and length and breadth of His immeasurable love.

Note that truth in our text and then note another. When God can find in man no reason for showing mercy to him, He still finds a reason for displaying His mercy, for He looks for it in His own heart. He does not say, “I will not return to destroy Ephraim, for he is not as bad as he might be, and there is really something hopeful about him.” No, the Lord does not let the bucket down into that dry well, but He fetches the argument for His mercy out of Himself, “For I am God.” “It is not what he is, but what I am that decides the case,” says JEHOVAH, “I will have mercy upon Ephraim because I am God, and not man.”

Guilty one, your hope of pardon lies in the character of God, and the more quickly and completely you recognize this fact, the better will it be for you. Do not be looking into yourself to find some reason why God should have pity upon you, for there is no reason within you but what Satan can answer and overturn. Rather look to God, especially as God looks to Himself, for your hope lies in what He is whom you have offended. I know that He is just and holy, and that this truth at first condemns you, but He is also good and gracious, and this truth brings joy and brightness to you.

The only rays of light you can ever get must come to you from the sun. You will not find any in your own eyes, for they are blind, it is from the sun himself that your very power to see, as well as the light by which you can see, must come.

So, God fetches His argument in favor of mercy from Himself, you have one specimen of it in that grand passage where He says, “I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion,” drawing the reasons for the display of His mercy out of the great deeps of His own sovereignty.

Our text reveals this as God’s reason, drawn from His own nature, why He forgives men, “I am God, and not man.” I have known a despondent soul often turn to this great truth the wrong side out, and find in it a reason for despair rather than for hope. “Look,” says the awakened sinner, “if I had only offended against my fellow man, I would have some hope of pardon, but my sin is terrible because it is committed against high heaven, it is with God that I have to deal, and I can say with David, ‘Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight, that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest.’”

It is because you have to deal with God, rather than with men, that some of you think you must be shut up to despair. That mistake of yours only shows what a poor, faulty guide unbelief is, for it turns your back to the light, and makes you walk on in darkness.

Faith, on the other hand, argues after the manner of God and says, “If I had offended against man, I could not have expected him to forgive me. If I had injured man as I have injured God, I could not have hoped to be pardoned, but since I know that God is love, and that He is infinite in grace, I see that there is a wondrous depth of sound reasoning about this divine declaration, ‘I will not return to destroy Ephraim: for I am God, and not man.’”

I am going to speak upon this one theme, to hammer away upon this one nail. There will be no great variety in my subject and no particular freshness of thought in considering it, but I shall dwell upon just this one truth, that there is hope for guilty men. There is hope for every man, woman, and child who will come and confess sin, and trust in Christ, on this ground—that He with whom we have to deal is, “God, and not man.” This I shall have to show you at considerable length, and under many particulars, but the whole purpose of my discourse will be to show you the hopefulness in this great truth, that as sinners, we have to deal with God, and not with men.

I. For, first, MAN CANNOT LONG FORBEAR HIS ANGER.

I am not speaking now of certain passionate people who have no control over their tempers. Oh, dear! there are some persons whom I know, whose blood seems to lie very close to the surface, it is soon up, and very hot. With them it is, as men say, “a word and a blow,” sometimes it is the blow without even waiting for the word.

They are so very irritable that any little offense puts them on the defensive, or makes them ready to attack others. They cannot bear anything that annoys them, some, because they are so little, and as the proverb truly says, “A little pot is soon hot,” and others because they think themselves so big, that if anybody comes between the wind and their nobility, that person has committed an altogether unpardonable offense. Oh, dear! if we had to deal with a God who was like these men, we should have perished long, long ago, but our text means even more than that.

The Hebrew of this passage is very significant and expressive, and it might be rendered thus, “I will not return to destroy Ephraim: for I am God, and not the best of men,” for with even the best of men, the noble spirits who can bear a good deal more than ordinary individuals, yet there is still a point of forbearance beyond which they cannot and will not go.

If you have offended them once, twice, thrice, it may be that they are patient with you and forgive you, but when the offense is repeated, and the provocation is multiplied, even the best of men are apt to ask, “Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Till seven times?” He who put that question thought that he had gone a long way when he suggested sevenfold forgiveness, but the Savior said to Peter, “I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, until seventy times seven.”

You remember what the apostles said when they heard this saying, they prayed, “Lord, increase our faith,” As much as to say, “It needs very great faith to be able to forgive an offender until seventy times seven.”

We have offended against God far more often than seventy times seven, yet He has borne with us. We who are here are the living monuments of divine mercy, and might truly write upon our brows, “Spared by the long-suffering of God,” for if He had strictly marked our sin, He must have destroyed us, and if He had even dealt with any one of us who has been unfruitful, He must have said, as did the owner of the fruitless fig tree, “Cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?”

But here is the mercy of our case, we have to deal with the God of patience who is long-suffering and very full of pity, who is, in fact, as our text declares, “God, and not man.” This should make us bless His name continually for the great forbearance He has shown toward us, and this goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering of God should lead us to repentance. We may not continue in sin because God’s grace abounds, but His abounding grace should make us loathe and leave sin.

II. Next, if we had to deal, not with God, but with our fellow men, we should very often find that **WHEN MEN GET INTO A LOW, NERVOUS, SENSITIVE STATE THEMSELVES, THEY ARE USUALLY QUITE UNABLE TO BEAR WITH OTHERS.**

A person's temper often depends a great deal upon the state of his health. If a man is perfectly well, sound in mind and body, he can put up with a good deal, but there are times when the head aches, or when the tooth aches, or when the heart aches, or when there is an overpowering sense of nervousness upon you, and then you know what a very little thing will put you out. “Oh, take that child away!” you cry, petulantly, “I cannot bear its noise.” That ring at the bell has startled you, that cry of the costermonger in the street has quite irritated you, and now you are in a very fit state of mind to act the part of a tyrant.

One who was discussing a certain trial said, “I wonder what the jurymen are having for breakfast this morning, for their food will have a good deal to do with the verdict they will give,” and no doubt, unless a person is himself pretty well, and in a good mental and spiritual condition, his weakness or his sensitiveness will make him deal severely with others even for a very small offense.

What a mercy it is that the One with whom we have to deal is, “God and not man”! Our glorious JEHOVAH is never weak, impetuous, unjust, ungenerous. He is always magnanimous, kind, gracious, forbearing. He is never in such a condition that He feels ready to be irritated with His creatures, but self-contained and self-possessed, dwelling in the eternal sublimities of His own unsullied happiness, the God over all, blessed forever, He is in that state of mind—if I may so speak of Him after the manner of men—that He is willing to pass by iniquity, transgression and sin, He is a God ready to pardon, waiting to forgive the guilty.

Could you truly know Him, and see how free He is from those human frailties which lie at the roots of all irritability, and unwillingness to forgive offenders, you would understand what a mercy it is that He is, “God, and not man.”

Come, poor soul, approach your God, you have not to come before an angry judge, you have not to approach an austere person who is ready to take offense even at little things, but you are coming to the infinitely-blessed God who delights not in the death of any, but would rather that they should turn to Him and live.

III. There is a third reason why we should rejoice that the Lord is “God, and not man. It is this, **MEN ARE NOT ANXIOUS TO RECONCILE TO THEMSELVES THOSE WHO HAVE OFFENDED THEM IF THEY ARE PERSONS OF BAD CHARACTER.**

A man who has been injured may, in the greatness of his mind, say, “I hope that person did not realize the wrong that he was doing. I hope that he is a good man, he must surely have misunderstood the consequences of his action, probably only made a mistake, so I am willing to see him, and frankly, to forgive him and to put the matter right as soon as possible.”

But suppose that you have been grievously wronged by some mean, base individual, whose character you know to be altogether beneath contempt, I know what you say to yourself, “Well, I shall not put myself out of the way to seek him, I do not particularly care what he thinks or says about me. Perhaps it is just as well that such a person as he is should remain at a distance, I do not want his company, for I prefer his room. Let him go, he really is not worth my seeking to be reconciled to him.”

Ah, sirs! if God had said that concerning us, He would have spoken justly indeed. For us, creatures of the dust, to have offended our great and glorious Creator, for us, worms of the earth, to have offended the infinite JEHOVAH, and to have done it willfully and continually, as we have done, might well have made the Lord say, “There, let them go. If they will be My enemies, let them be My enemies, they cannot harm Me, and their curses will fall on their own heads. If they speak evil of Me, what does it matter to Me while I have the songs of angels and of cherubim and seraphim? If they despise Me, what is their opinion worth one way or the other? Let them go.”

But dear friends, the Lord does not deal thus with us, for He is, “God, and not man.” What a wonder of grace and mercy it is that He should actually desire that we should be reconciled to Him, that He

should desire it with anxiety, should long for it, and that His whole heart should go forth with the desire! The Lord is not willing that we should be His enemies, He is not willing to treat us as His enemies, but to speak after the manner of men, He is anxious to reconcile us to Himself, and therefore, He sends to us His ambassadors with tears beseeching us to be reconciled to Him. Oh, this is Godlike! This is Divine!

IV. In addition to the points I have mentioned, I must remind you that **THERE ARE SOME MEN WHO ARE WILLING TO BE RECONCILED TO THOSE WHO HAVE OFFENDED THEM IF THE OFFENDERS WILL BEG FORGIVENESS.**

Notice what they say, “That person has done me grievous wrong, I am quite willing to pardon him, but let him ask to be pardoned. I do not think it is my place to go after him, I am the offended person, and it cannot be expected that I should humble myself before him. If he comes to me and asks forgiveness, I shall be going a great way if I do heartily forgive him, but as to being the first to move in this matter—well, it is not to be expected of me.”

No, friend, it is not to be expected that *you* should do so, for you are only a man, but the Lord is, “God, and not man,” and therefore He is the first to move in the direction of the reconciliation that is to end the quarrel. It is the offended One, the grievously offended One, who comes to the offender and says, “Let us be friends, I will blot out this offense, I will remove this sin. Come to Me. Accept the reconciliation I am prepared to give.”

I feel half inclined to stop here and to say, “Let us sing again the last verse of that grand hymn that we sang before prayer, and roll out the refrain in full thunder of grateful thanksgiving—

**“Oh may this strange, this matchless grace,
This God-like miracle of love,
Fill the wide earth with grateful praise,
And all th’ angelic choirs above;
Who is pardoning God like Thee?
Or who has grace so rich and free?”**

It is never the sinner who wants to be reconciled first. It is always God, in the freeness of His grace, who comes to the sinner, no sinner can ever be beforehand with God. If you are anxious to be reconciled to God, it is He who has given you that anxiety. It is His own infinite grace that has begun to work in you to will and to do of His own good pleasure, for here is seen the superiority of the Godhead to the highest and the kindest manhood, that the Lord begins the work of reconciliation by Himself seeking out those who have offended against Him.

V. Next, **A MAN MAY BE WILLING TO BE RECONCILED IF THE OFFENDER DOES NOT REPEAT THE OFFENSE.**

Suppose that the offending person breaks out again with a new offense just as the reconciliation is about to be given. “There,” says the man he has offended, “I was quite willing to have overlooked the past, but see, he is at his evil practices again. I stood prepared to give him my right hand, but he has added insult to the former injury. Even while we were talking about reconciliation, see what he has done, he has made a new breach. If there had been nothing between us before, he has acted now in a way that would have commenced a terrible battle between us. I cannot put up with this, you cannot reasonably expect that I should be on terms of amity with one who again and again and again repeats the grievance, and who, having done me wrong, at the very time that I am inviting him to be reconciled, commits that wrong again. There is a limit to all things, and certainly there must be a limit to the pardon that a man will give to an offender.”

Just so, just so, I knew there was such a limit. I do not altogether blame you, I do not say much against you, but I do say much in commendation of the forgiving grace of God. Though we do sin, though even while the sinner is repenting, there is still a measure of sin about him, and while God is forgiving, and while we are receiving the forgiveness, there is still evil about us, yet He does forgive. Is He not, as one said, a great Forgiver?

There is not any offense so aggravated but that God is willing to forgive you if you come to Jesus Christ by faith. If you have heaped up your sins mountain upon mountain, as the giants in the old fable were said to have piled Pelion upon Ossa, hill upon hill, if you have done even this, yet is God willing to sweep them all away and still be your Friend.

You remember that blessed expression in the fifty-fifth of Isaiah, “He will abundantly pardon.” I cannot help ringing out those words again and again, “He will abundantly pardon! He will abundantly pardon.” I hope that the music of them may strike the ear of some poor desponding soul who will say, “That is the word for me. It must be either great mercy or no mercy at all for me, for little mercy is of no avail for such a sinner as I am. I must have great mercy to pardon my great sin.” Oh then, thank God that you have to deal with Him and not with man!

VI. Now let me go a step further. I feel morally certain that men who are offended with their fellows, **MEN WHO HAVE BEEN VERY GREATLY WRONGED, WOULD NOT PROPOSE TO GO AND LIVE WITH THOSE WHO HAVE WRONGED THEM, AND TAKE UP A POSITION OF EQUALITY WITH THEM.**

I could not expect a king, whose subjects had revolted against him, who had refused to render to him due honor and submission, who had even insulted his crown, and done despite to his character, to say, “I will leave my palace, and my crown, and my splendor, and all that I have, and I will go and live among these rebels. I will wear their rags, I will fare as they fare, and dwell in their hovels. I know that they will kill me, they will spurn me, and spit upon me, and at last they will fasten me to a cross, and hang me up to die, but with the strong desire that they should be reconciled to me, I am willing to go and to be one with them.”

Such a thing was never heard of among men, but listen. There is One who is God as well as Man, even that blessed Savior who descended from heaven to earth, became a Man, shared our poverty, lived in the midst of our sin, and knowing that He would be despitefully entreated, and scorned, and scourged, and nailed to a cross, yet endured all out of an excess of love which overflows to the guiltiest of the guilty even now. This was compassion worthy of a God, that the Son of the Highest should leave the perfections of heaven to dwell here amid the infirmities and the sins of earth, as you know He did.

VII. If such wondrous love were possible to any man, here is another thing that I cannot conceive of, that any man would say, “I have been grievously wronged by that person, the injury is a very cruel one and there is no remedy for it, but I WILL, MYSELF, BEAR THE PENALTY FOR ALL THE WRONG WHICH HAS BEEN DONE.

The offender has broken the law. There is a penalty laid upon him for what he has done, and he righteously deserves to bear it. It was an offense against me, and he deserves to be punished for it, but I will bear the whole penalty myself.” We never heard any mere man say, “Here is a burglar who has broken into my house, he is to serve five years’ penal servitude, but I will offer to go into penal servitude in order that he may be set free,” or “Here is a murderer doomed to die, and I offer to suffer in his stead, that he may be accounted innocent.” Such a thing was never heard of among men, but this is what God has done.

As Judge, the righteous God must punish sin. Say what you will, there is a necessity that the Judge of all the earth should do right. If you could take away the justice of God, and the fact of the judgment to come, you would have stolen the linchpin from the wheels of God’s chariot; you would have marred the moral government of the universe. Sin must be punished, but the Judge Himself condescends to bear the penalty for the offenses committed against Himself, mark, to bear the consequences of sin committed against His own authority and His own Person, and to bear those consequences in His own Person so that the offending one may be reconciled to Him.

There never was such another tale as I am telling you now; it could not have been invented by men, it must be divine. It has such a stamp of originality about it, that it must have come from God. It is so divine on the very surface of it that it must be a blessed fact. God Himself becomes the Substitute for those who have broken His own law, and done despite to His own name, and in union with human

nature, in His own body on the tree He bears the consequences of the sin which otherwise must have fallen upon His enemies, the guilty sons of men. It is a very amazing story, this “old, old story, of Jesus and His love.” I cannot tell it to you as I should like to tell it, but it does not so much matter how it is told. The power of it lies not in the telling of it, but in the doctrine and truth itself when blessed by the Spirit of God.

VIII. MEN WOULD NOT IMPORTUNE AN OFFENDER IF HE REFUSED THE PARDON.

When a man has done all that lies in his power to make peace, when he has even suffered what he ought not to have suffered in order to produce peace with one who has offended him, suppose that after all that he comes to the offender and he says, “Let us be friends,” and the person turns on his heels and says, “I have too much to do to attend to you,” or suppose that he says, “I do not need any of your peace, it is nothing to me, I have other things to think of,” and suppose that this generous-hearted one should say, “But incline your ear and come to me, hear what I have to say, come now, and let us reason together,” and suppose that the man says, “I need none of your reasoning, I care nothing about all this talk, I do not believe it, it is all an idle tale and I want to hear nothing of it,” and suppose that this generous person should follow him and entreat him, persuade him, implore him, plead with him, and still use a thousand arguments of lovingkindness with him.

“Ah!” say you, “that is not like man.” No, it is not, but He who deals in mercy with you is “God, and not man,” and therefore He importunes you who have long resisted Him, and begs you even now to listen to Him, and even now to turn to Him. Listen to His own words, “Turn ye, turn ye, from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?” These are the pleadings of God Himself with men who have sinned against Him. If you pleaded for mercy at God’s feet, and were importunate with Him, that would seem natural enough, but for God to plead with you, and to beseech you to accept His mercy, is supernatural and divine.

IX. Yet again, remember that MEN WOULD NOT RESTORE AN OFFENDER WITHOUT A SEASON OF PROBATION.

Suppose that someone had grievously offended any one of you, and that he asked your forgiveness, do you not think that you would probably say to him, “Well, yes, I forgive you, but I—I—I—cannot forget it”? Ah! dear friends, that is a sort of forgiveness with one leg chopped off, it is a lame forgiveness and is not worth much. “But,” says one, “I want to see how this man goes on, if he is really sincerely penitent for what he has done, and he acts kindly to me for the future, then I think I could believe him to be sincere, and I think—I hope—I could restore him to my favor.”

Ah, yes! that is because you are a man that you talk like that, but He of whom I am speaking is “God, and not man,” and His invitation to you is, “Come to me just as you are.” The Lord will receive you and forgive you without any probation.

There was a good old minister who said, “The Lord Jesus took me into His service without a character. He gave me a good character, and He has helped me to keep it even to my old age.” Yes, He does take us without a character, so come to Him just as you are. He freely forgives and He perfectly forgets, for He says, “Their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more”—a feat in which omnipotence outdoes itself. For God to forget is impossible, yet He does forget the sins of His people. This is one of the impossibilities that are only possible to omnipotent grace—it would be impossible with men, but it is possible with the Lord, for He is “God, and not man.”

X. Yet further, MEN CANNOT FORESEE THE CONSEQUENCES OF BEING LENIENT.

One says, “I do not see what the consequences may be if a man is to behave so badly to me as this one has done, and I am to overlook it and say nothing about it. After that, I shall have every dog barking at my heels. I really think, sir, that you must not preach up there, and tell us absolutely to forgive, because you know that if you tread on a worm, it will turn, and really, there is something due to society. I cannot suffer such wrong as this, and pass it by, for everybody will be doing me a similar injury and saying, ‘He is such a flat, and so soft, that he will never resent it.’”

My good sir, I am not going to argue with you. You are a man, so go your way among other men, but He of whom I speak is “God, and not man.” He knows precisely what the consequences of forgiving sinners will be, and yet He does it. When we preach free pardon to the chief of sinners, what do you think they say in certain newspapers? Why, that we are encouraging immorality! The wise men who write for them say that our doctrine does not tend to public morality. Ah, pretty dears, a deal many of them know about morality!

We do not care much about their opinion on that point, for we see well enough where true morals are. They run side by side with “Free grace and dying love,” and we intend still to preach those truths, albeit that there are some, and we must admit it, who will turn the grace of God into lasciviousness. If a man means to hang himself, he is sure to find a piece of rope somewhere, and when a man means to live in sin, he can find an argument for it even in the infinite mercy of God, but we must not stop our preaching because of that. God is willing to forgive crimes of the greatest horror, sins of an intense blackness, known in their full blackness only to Him, and as for the consequences, He is well aware of what they will be.

XI. I am going another step further. MEN WOULD NOT LOVE, ADOPT, HONOR, AND ASSOCIATE WITH THE OFFENDING.

“Well,” says one, “suppose I could entirely forgive everything that has been done against me, is anything more required of me?” Could you do something else? Could you love the one who slandered you, who tried to take away your good name, who sought to injure your business, and offended you in every way that he could? Could you take him into your family and make him your son, or make him heir of all that you have? Could you provide for him for life? Could you be content to make him your friend and companion? Could you trust him, do you think—actually trust him with the most precious things that you have? Could you do all that?

“Well, Mr. Spurgeon,” says one, “it is an unreasonable thing that you are asking. You are talking quite unreasonably.” I know that I am, but that is because you are a man that it seems unreasonable to you. Yet our God goes beyond all reason, for this is exactly what He does. He takes the wretched sinner just as he is, blots out his sin, and gives him to believe in Christ, and to as many as believe in Him, to them He gives power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name.

More than that, He says, through His apostle, that if children, then they are heirs, “heirs of God, and joint heirs with Jesus Christ.” These poor miserable sinners become the objects of His daily care as they are the objects of His eternal choice. He engraves their names upon the palms of His hands. They lie on His heart, and in His heart. “They shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels.”

Yea, more, Christ is married to them, oh, what condescension it is for Him to be married to those who were black as Ethiopians! There is nothing that He will not do for a pardoned sinner, there is nothing that He will withhold from a soul that, believing in Christ, has sin forgiven. You shall be with Him where He is, you shall sit on His Throne with Him, you shall reign with Him forever and ever, as surely as you come and accept His infinite grace.

XII. The last point is that MEN WOULD NOT TRUST ONE WHO HAD FORMERLY WRONGED THEM.

I have always felt, in my own mind, that it was one of the clearest proofs that I had God’s forgiveness of my many sins, when I was trusted to preach the Gospel. I should think that if a prodigal came back to his father, the old gentleman would kiss him, and receive him, and rejoice greatly over him, but the next Saturday, market day, the old gentleman would say, “I cannot send young William to market, that would be putting temptation in his way. Here, John, you have always been with me, go to market, and buy and sell for me, for all that I have is yours. William, you stay at home with me.” He might not let him see all that he meant, but he would say to himself, “Dear boy, he is hardly fit for that great trust, I love him, but still I hardly dare trust him as much as that.”

But see what my Lord did with me, when I came home to Him as a poor prodigal, He said, “Here is My Gospel, I will entrust you with it, go and preach it.” I bless His name that I have not preached anything else, and I do not mean to begin to do so.

*“Ever since by faith I saw the stream
His flowing wounds supply,
Redeeming love has been my theme,
And shall be till I die.”*

Then the Lord said to me, “I will trust you with those people at Waterbeach, at New Park Street, at the Surrey Gardens, and at the Tabernacle. Go and see what you can do to bring them to heaven.” I do long to see souls saved as one great result of my ministry. But what an instance of my Lord’s love it is that He thus trusts me!

That was one of the things that made Paul hold up his hands in astonishment, he said that he had been put in trust with the Gospel, and he could not make it out. He was a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious, yet he was put in trust with the Gospel.

O dear heart, you who have been a drunkard, or a swearer, or whatever else you have been, come and trust in Jesus! If you do, I should not wonder but that one of these days you also will be put in trust to preach the Gospel of Christ. “Oh,” you say, “I could never preach.” You do not know what the grace of God can do for you and through you, and you would, anyhow, be able to tell what a wonderful Savior He was who saved you, would you not? That is the best preaching in the world, telling out to others what God has done for you, and I know that the burden of your testimony would be, “He is God, and not man,” and you would ask them to sing over and over again—

*“Who is a pardoning God like Thee?
Or who has grace so rich and free?”*

Now trust the Lord Jesus Christ. That is the way of salvation. “Look unto me, and be ye saved, all ye ends of the earth,” or if you want the plan of salvation stated in full, here it is, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned.” God grant to all of us grace to believe in Christ, and to confess our faith in Him, for his dear name’s sake! Amen.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—605, 202, 568

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

HOSEA 11

Verse 1. *When Israel was a child,—*

When the nation was yet young, and had scarcely started on its march among the peoples of the earth, “When Israel was a child”—

1. *Then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt.*

God’s love does not depend upon the standard of our spiritual attainments. While we are yet children in grace, the Father’s love is set upon us, as it was upon Israel in its beginnings as a nation.

2. *As they called them, so they went from them:*

Such was the perversity of this child-nation, whom nevertheless God loved, that though called by JEHOVAH, he went away, and refused to obey the divine call. The Israelites in Egypt “hearkened not unto Moses for anguish of spirit, and for cruel bondage,” and even after their great deliverance, they were constantly turning aside from the path pointed out by Moses, who bade them be faithful to their God.

2. *They sacrificed unto Baalim,—*

They offered sacrifice to many Baals, first to one and then to another, for men will readily change their idols when they know not the true God.

2-3. *And burned incense to graven images. I taught Ephraim also to go,—*

This child-nation was taught by God how to walk—

3. *Taking them by their arms;*

As nurses hold up their little children when, for the first time they try to stand or toddle along.

3. *But they knew not that I healed them.*

This was an amazing thing and it shows the great blindness of man, that he does not know his own Physician. It was so with Israel, “They knew not that I healed them.” Surely, brethren, it seems impossible that we should not know our Divine Healer, yet our blindness is extreme by nature and leads to many a folly.

4. *I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love: and I was to them as they that take off the yoke on their jaws, and I laid meat unto them.*

As men do to their cattle when they have been ploughing, and they come to the end of the day’s work, then the bit is removed, or the yoke is lifted off the shoulder, and fit fodder is provided for the cattle that they may be refreshed. This is what God did to His people Israel. He brought them out of Egypt where they had to perform hard tasks, caused them to rest from their labors and gave them both material and spiritual meat to eat, yet nevertheless they were ungrateful to Him. We say that ingratitude is the worst of ills, but alas, it is one of the commonest of evils and we ourselves are ingrates to our God.

5. *He shall not return into the land of Egypt, but the Assyrian shall be his king, because they refused to return.*

If we try to escape from our trouble without hearing the voice of God in it, we shall run into another, if, by our own plotting and scheming, we escape from Egypt, then the Assyrian shall be our king, and there is small difference between Assyria and Egypt. It is always best to take with submission the sorrow that God appoints, lest, by fleeing from the bear, the serpent bite us and so we go from bad to worse.

6. *And the sword shall abide on his cities, and shall consume his branches, and devour them, because of their own counsels.*

That is a very striking expression, “Because of their own counsels.” It should be a solemn warning to us not to follow the devices of our own heart when we see the consequences of Israel’s walking after his own way.

7. *And my people are bent to backsliding from me:*

They seemed as if they *must* do it, as if their hearts were set upon it, they were “bent” upon it. Oh, that our bent and bias were towards holiness and not towards backsliding!

7. *Though they called them to the most High, none at all would exalt him.*

See how Israel puts God away and will not hear JEHOVAH’s voice?

Now observe the change in the chapter, for God speaks of His faithfulness even to backsliding Israel. He does not give His people up, and He still yearns over them in the tenderest pity and forbearance.

8. *How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together.*

And this divine turning and repenting, remember, were toward a people who did not turn to the Lord! God turned towards a people that would not turn towards Him, and His repentings were “kindled together” towards the nation that would not repent! Oh, the unspeakable, the unthinkable grace of God! He does for us “exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think.”

9. *I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim: for I am God, and not man:*

Our hope lies in the fact that God is God! Sometimes that truth is a terror to men, they are distressed at the thought of the great and holy God, yet in this truth is their only hope of salvation! The Lord says, “I will not return to destroy Ephraim, for I am God, and not man.”

9. *The Holy One in the midst of thee: and I will not enter into the city.*

That is, the Lord says, “I will not come into it to see all its iniquities, lest in my wrath I smite and destroy it.” How tenderly does God bear with wicked men! How great is His long-suffering! How graciously He seems to close His eyes, as if He would not see that which must bring upon us swift destruction if He looked upon it in His righteous anger!

10. *They shall walk after the LORD:*

It is a great blessing when men begin to seek the Lord whom they formerly shunned. This proves that there has been wrought in them a complete change of heart.

10. *He shall roar like a lion: when he shall roar, then the children shall tremble from the west.*

God’s terrible voice often makes men tremble, and that is one proof of the working of His grace in their hearts, for they tremble before Him, and flee unto Him.

11-12. *They shall tremble as a bird out of Egypt, and as a dove out of the land of Assyria: and I will place them in their houses, saith the LORD. Ephraim compasseth me about with lies, and the house of Israel with deceit: but Judah yet ruleth with God and is faithful with the saints.*

There are still some left to serve JEHOVAH, there is a remnant according to the election of grace even in the very worst of times. “Judah yet ruleth with God, and is faithful with the saints.” May we be found among the faithful few! Amen.

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.