

COMPASSION ON THE IGNORANT

NO. 2529

A SERMON
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DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON
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“Who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way.”
Hebrews 5:2

THE ignorant have need of compassion. “That the soul be without knowledge, it is not good.” Every kind of ignorance, like darkness, is evil, and knowledge, which is light, is, according to its kind, good, or better, or best. For a man to be ignorant of divine things is a very sorrowful piece of business. To be going into eternity and not to know anything about it—ay, and even to be passing through this life and yet not to know the way everlasting which leads to glory, but to be stumbling upon the dark mountains of mere thought and vain imagination—this is a very dreadful thing.

Ignorance of God, ignorance of the right, ignorance of Christ, ignorance of mercy, ignorance of heaven—these are things for which men are to be blamed, but for which they are also to be pitied. Wherever we see ignorance about the things of God, let our hearts go forth in tenderness, but let our prayers arise to God in love—and let our efforts be made in true benevolence that the ignorance may be removed, for if we are men of God like to our great High Priest, it will be true also of us that we “have compassion on the ignorant.”

Now, dear brethren, it becomes every man to have compassion on the ignorant, because the ignorant man is still a man. However little he knows, he is still a man, and you and I need not be excessively modest if we put ourselves also down among the ignorant, for what if we are better instructed than others? How little do we know after all!

The most intelligent, the most experienced—the man who has dwelt nearest to his Lord—yet how much there remains even for him to know! He knows the love of Christ, but it passes his knowledge. He knows many things, yet he is obliged to confess that here he only knows in part—and it is not till the hereafter that he shall know even as he is known. Wherefore, then, seeing you are a man, and in your measure ignorant, you are to have great compassion upon your fellow man and upon his ignorance.

And inasmuch as the ignorance here meant is the ignorance of sin, which is constantly described in the Old Testament as folly, so that every sinner is declared to be a fool—yet concerning this, you and I may well have compassion because we are sinners, too. If God has made us to differ, yet that difference is all the result of His grace and therefore not to be taken to ourselves as a reason for pride and lifting ourselves up above others.

No, a sinner yourself, you should be very tender to all other sinners. Yourself indebted—oh, how deeply—to infinite love, you should be very gentle to others who need that love. What if you are cleansed from the pollution of sin? It was a fountain filled with blood in which you were washed. Therefore, be you anxious that your fellow man should be washed there, too.

What if the power of your sin is conquered? It was the Holy Ghost who wrought in you this victory. Should you not desire that other captives should be set free, that other rebels should be subdued, that others who are under the domination of sin should be brought under the rule of your divine Lord? If you are a man, a gracious man, a man of God, a chosen man, a blood-washed man, you should “have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way.”

But dear friends, under the old dispensation, there were some who were chosen of God to take up a peculiar relationship to their fellow men. These were the priests and especially the high priest—the one man who alone of all Israel might once in the year enter into the most holy place with the blood of the atonement. He who has to deal with men for God must be, above all others, very tender and very patient.

It was a most trying experience for Hannah, when she went up with her sorrowful spirit to the house of the Lord, that God's high priest should not have been a man of tender and compassionate spirit, for Eli spoke very sharply to the good woman, and well-nigh broke that heart which God would have to be healed. It is a very sad thing when a man who is ordained of God to speak to men for God, is hard, and cold, and cruel—as if he were a judge rather than a father, or as if he were a butcher to slay the sheep rather than a shepherd to fetch it back from its wanderings.

The Lord Jesus has made all His saints to be priests—we offer no sacrifice of blood—but He has made us kings and priests unto God, and we have to deal with men for God, all of us, I mean, not ministers alone, but all of you who are the Lord's own people. And it ought to be said of all of you who are kings and priests unto God that you “can have compassion on the ignorant.”

A Christian without compassion seems to me to have missed a very vital part of the Christian character. A hard-hearted Christian—is not that a complete contradiction? Must not our hearts have been broken before we could ourselves be penitent? And He who bound them up and healed them, did not harden them with His gentle touch. I reckon that He gave them an additional tenderness by the very act of binding them up with His own dear pierced hands.

And we ought to be very gentle—as a nurse with her child, as a mother with her darling—in dealing with the ignorant and those that are out of the way. Our sympathy ought to be always flowing, like a crystal fountain that is never dried up in summer, nor frozen in winter. The Lord has chosen us and called us to this office, that we should “have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way,” not only because we are men, but because God has made us priests—not only because we are ourselves children of God, but because we are now servants of God, set on purpose to look after the lost sheep and bring them into the fold.

But brethren, our text concerns our Lord Jesus Christ. So now let me say that I speak not merely of what ought to be, but of what is true of Him. He is a man, a brother to every man. He is a man, the friend of all mankind. Ay, the friend of His bitterest foe—and He is always tender towards all the sorrows and the griefs of men.

Then He is also a Priest in a sense in which you and I are not, a Priest above Aaron and all mere earthly priests, the great High Priest in whom all the types unite and from whom our priesthood is derived. He above all others, “can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way.”

It is to that one point that I have to call your attention, namely, our Lord Jesus Christ, as God's ordained High Priest, having compassion upon the ignorant. I pray that the words I speak may help some trembling, clouded spirit, with its eyes blurred by the mist of earth and sin. May there strike out of this starry text a living beam of light for you! He can have compassion on you who mourn your ignorance. May He have that compassion even now—plentifully, practically, permanently, savingly—and may many who until now knew Him not, learn to know Him, never to forget Him throughout eternity!

I. So, first let us ask, WHAT IS THIS IGNORANCE here mentioned?

Well, *it is common enough in all ranks of society*. I read, the other day, the opinion of a good man that most preachers give their congregations credit for knowing a great deal more than they do, and I think that it is very likely true. For there are sermons which are preached upon various truths of the Gospel in which certain other truths, necessary to the understanding of the whole, are not explained, because it is taken for granted that they are already known.

Yet in any large number of people, there must be some who are entirely strangers even to the most elementary truths of revelation. I am sure that it is so. There is, perhaps, nothing more amazing in this century than the ignorance of men about the things of God. It is certain that a knowledge of Scripture

does not keep pace with the growth of knowledge of other things and that the understanding with regard to eternal realities is not so instructed as it is with regard to politics, to science, and to other matters which are of temporary importance for this present life.

This ignorance is to be found among the poorest of people. They have had very little or no education, but that is of small consequence comparatively. They have forgotten what they learned in the Sunday school. Perhaps they never grasped what they heard preached, because they did not understand it. As I heard one say, the other day, "I went to the place of worship near my house, but it was no good to me. There was not a single sentence of the sermon that I understood, for the words were all novel to me."

I am afraid that is the case in very many places—the talk of the theological hall is not understood in the cottage—and common phrases, which reading people understand at once, are not understood by multitudes of people. But the pity is that there are also thousands of reading people who are totally ignorant of the things of God—some of the wealthiest, some of the best educated, ay, some even of those who have been to the university—and some who put the "D.D." after their names.

"No," you say, "that cannot be." I say that it is and if you yourself know the way of salvation, you have but to talk with some of these people to find that what I say is true. This is a truth that is learned by the teaching of the Holy Ghost—and not by the teaching of theological professors.

A man might spend a century under the best ministry, or in the best school that ever existed on earth, and yet, at the end of one hundred years, he might not know the things of God, for these truths must come as a revelation to each man, and God the Holy Ghost must teach them to each one, or they will never be learned.

This is the standing miracle in the church of God—and unless we see it continually wrought, we have not the clearest evidence that our religion is supernatural and divine. Every man who really receives it, receives it not because it suits his taste or his palate, but because the Spirit of God sends it home to his heart. Every man who truly knows Christ, knows Him not because with his own faculties he found Him out, but because it pleased God to reveal His Son in him.

And apart from this, there is and must be to the end of human life an absence of all real knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. First, "Ye must be born again." And then, being born again, you must be taught of the Spirit of God. And if we are not, as the strongest light cannot make a blind man see, and the greatest heat cannot make a dead man warm, so, neither can anything that we do, as long as the soul is unrenewed, ever cause it to know God and His grace aright. It is a common ignorance, then, in all ranks of society.

It is also an ignorance concerning the most important matters, for the men of whom I am now speaking are, first, *ignorant of themselves*. They are ignorant of their own ignorance, and perhaps there is no ignorance that is so hard to deal with as the utter ignorance of men as to their own ignorance. "What! You call me ignorant?" a man asks. "I know everything. I have read from Genesis to Revelation and I understand it all. I could preach as well as anybody."

Yes, but that kind of talk shows that you do not know, for he that knows knows that he does not know—and there is no man less inclined to boast of his knowledge than the man who has a good deal of it. Whenever I find the men of the modern school of thought, as they are continually doing, sneering at the orthodox because we are all uncultured, and so forth, I think to myself, "And if *you* only had a little culture, you would not sneer so often."

It is a mark which will never mislead you, that he who thinks that he knows is a fool. And he who says that he knows more than anybody else and can afford to deal out his sneers liberally to others, is a gentleman who, if justice were dealt out to him, would be himself sneered at. Those who are strangers to themselves do not know their own ignorance—and that is lamentable ignorance indeed.

They are also unaware of their own depravity—they do not think that their heart is corrupt or depraved at all. No man can long know anything of himself without discovering that he has a bias toward evil—that if let alone, quite alone, his thoughts go the wrong way. He finds that he needs to

school himself to be right, and kind, and loving, but that he needs no effort to be proud, and domineering, and revengeful.

He finds that sin is indigenious to the soil of his heart, while everything that is good needs cultivation, and watching, and tender care. He finds, in fact, that his heart is “deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.” But the ignorant, who are described in our text, do not know that—and do not believe it.

They are ignorant also of the heinousness of their sin. They have never done much amiss, nothing very greatly wrong. They have not been all they ought to have been, but they have been within a shaving of it—and if they have fallen a little short, they can pick up again, and make up for all deficiencies by and by. They do not feel that there is much amiss about their characters—in fact, if they have to seek another place and have to give themselves the character they feel that they deserve—it will be a very fine one indeed. Ah, But this is gross ignorance, for he who knows himself will say, “All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.”

These ignorant people are also ignorant of their present and eternal danger. They do not suppose that sin puts them into any perilous condition with regard to God. Truly, He is very merciful, but they ignore the fact that He is as just as He is merciful, and they put aside all idea of any judgment to come, or of the wrath of God that abides on the wicked.

Though these solemn truths are clearly revealed in Scripture, they have left all such old-fashioned notions far behind, for they are “abreast of the times.” So they go on, and though often reprov'd, they harden their necks and persevere in the way which will surely lead them to everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and the glory of His power. Surely, this is utter ignorance of the worst kind.

Yet these people vainly imagine that they can turn from sin whenever they like. They have only just to will it and they shall certainly become Christians, if that be necessary, before they die. They do not know their inability or their weakness—but while they are naked, and poor, and blind, and miserable, they content themselves with believing that they are rich, and increased in goods, and have need of nothing. May God, in His infinite mercy, save such ignorant persons from the terrible consequences of their folly ere it be too late!

While ignorant of themselves, they are equally *ignorant of the way of salvation*. But they hear it, do they not? Yes, they hear it, but they do not understand it. It is to me a very curious thing—often a wonderful thing—when I am seeing persons lately converted. I have known those who have heard the Gospel in its simplicity from their childhood, and yet, as soon as ever they are awakened to a sense of sin, they try to save themselves by their good works. They know better, yet they turn to that delusive system, and if they get weaned from that, then they think they must be saved by their *feelings*. They have been warned against such a folly thousands of times, yet they run to it.

That simple principle, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved,” is an enigma, a perfect riddle, to any man until he is born again. He thinks he knows all about the Gospel, yet he does not. And though we try, by explanation and illustration, to make it as plain as possible, and put it into easy Saxon words, and say that salvation comes by a simple trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, yet, as far as they are concerned, we might just as well have spoken it in Hebrew or in Dutch.

They do not comprehend what we mean, but still fumble about after something of their own, instead of looking altogether out of themselves unto Him who is able to save them by what is in Himself—and not by what is in them. Ah, dear friends, these people I am trying to describe are ignorant of the very way of salvation!

And specially sad is it that they are *ignorant of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself*. They hear of Him, yet do not know Him. They do not know how loving, and how kind, and how full of grace and power He is, but they think of Him as though He were austere and unwilling to receive them. They are so ignorant of Him that they do not come unto Him that they may have life.

They are also *ignorant of the Holy Spirit* and of His power to change the heart, and renew the mind, and deliver us from the thralldom of sin. They have heard about regeneration—they know a little about the doctrine—but what it is to come savingly under the power of the Holy Spirit, they do not know.

This ignorance is *most ruinous in its consequences* and ought, therefore, to excite the compassion of all good men. Even now, it robs the mind of joy and deprives the spirit of the best of blessings—and the future consequences will be still more terrible. Alas! this ignorance is often willful. No man is so blind as the man who will not see, no man is so deaf as he who refuses to hear. And there are none so ignorant as those who do not want to learn and will not submit themselves to the teaching of God.

II. Here comes in the mercy that the Lord Jesus Christ can have compassion on the ignorant. So now, very briefly, I want to answer a second question, which is this—WHAT IS THERE IN THIS IGNORANCE WHICH IS SO PROVOKING TO US AND THEREFORE DEMANDS COMPASSION?

I reply, first, *its folly*. If you have ever taught children, or if you have ever taught young men who have been very careless and indifferent, and by no means anxious to learn, you have sometimes been provoked even by their ignorance itself. You have said, “What! Don’t you know that?” Have you never heard a teacher speak very sharply concerning some point upon which a young man ought to have been well-informed, and he has found him a very dolt, and he has said, “What! Not know that?” and he has seemed to look at him almost with contempt for not knowing such a simple thing.

Ignorance is also usually accompanied with a great deal of *pride*. There is nobody who thinks he knows so much as he who knows nothing. He is always sure, positive, certain—he does not want you to tell him anything. In his own conceit, he is wiser than seven men that can render a reason—roll seven clever reasoners together, and you have not as much knowledge as this one poor feel fancies he has. That silly pride is very provoking to the man who is trying to instruct a fool, while the fool thinks that his instructor is the one who lacks wisdom.

And then, with ignorance, there generally goes *prejudice*. A man has imbibed certain ideas and he does not want to know anything contrary to them. He says, in his boorish brogue, “What’s the good of it? I don’t want to know nothing about it. I knowed a man once as did know something about it, and it was no good to him.”

Well, just what the countryman says about some branch of teaching, the natural man says about the things of God. “I don’t want to know. I know enough already. My father and mother always went to such and such a place and they said, ‘You do your best and Jesus Christ will make up the rest.’ And I don’t want to know about your Gospel” Now, this foolish and wicked prejudice is a very provoking thing—and you may say to the man—“Why will you not listen and hear for yourself, and let me tell you about it?” “No,” he says, “I don’t want to know,” and you turn away sad and grieved.

There also generally goes with ignorance a great deal of *obstinacy*. The man will not believe what you tell him. You say to him, “Why, it is as plain as the nose on your face.” “Yes,” he says, “but I can’t see my nose,” and he does not mean to see this particular truth that you are bringing under his notice. You may prove it as plainly as that twice two two make four, yet, as he never did see it, so he never will see it. This is provoking to anybody who is anxious to give instruction upon matters that are really vital.

Sometimes ignorance is attended with a degree of very gross *unbelief*. When the man is made to know after a certain sense, yet he says that he cannot believe it. I am always grieved when I heard anybody say, “I cannot believe in Christ.” It does seem shocking. If you cannot believe in me, I do not at all wonder. You may know something about me that may lead you to distrust what I say. But to say, “I cannot believe in Christ,” is a very horrible thing.

Did He ever lie? Is there anything untrue about Him? Is there anything about our blessed Master that savors of a sham? Surely you can believe in Him—may God give you the spiritual power now to believe in Him, and to say, “I do believe, I will believe in Christ who died for me. I will come to Him and trust in Him.” But that unbelief which goes with ignorance is full of provocation.

This is, I think, the most striking thing of all, men are ignorant through sheer *willfulness*. They will not know any better. How many men fight shy of knowledge that would rather trouble them! “Oh!” says one, “I do not want to go to hear that man again. He touches upon some point that will not let me sleep at nights.”

I have read a great many accounts of myself that have been far from true, but the other day, I met with one which greatly pleased me, because it said, “He is a man who stands up on a Sunday and troubles more people’s consciences than anybody else does.” “Oh!” I thought, “that is exactly what I meant to do and what I always want to do—to trouble people’s consciences when they ought to be troubled.”

There are some of you who know that you could not go and drink again if you gave your hearts to God. If you came and learnt the way of salvation, you could not be found in that company which now pleases you. Perhaps there is one who has beguiled you into sin, from whom you would have to separate if you were joined to Christ.

And there is many a man who says, “No, no. Not just yet, not just now. I will think of it by and by.” And meanwhile, just behind you stands death, the skeleton king, stretching out his bony hand, and perhaps tonight, he will lay it on your shoulder and chill you to a corpse. What day you will be buried is not known just now on earth, but it is known above.

Oh, that you and I, and all of us, might have grace to wish to know everything that makes for our peace! Especially would I ask you to wish to know the very worst about yourself. Pray God that you may never have anything kept from you, but that you may know that which shall lead you at once to Christ, that you may find salvation through the blood of the Lamb.

III. Now I must conclude by answering a third question—How DOES OUR LORD SHOW HIS COMPASSION TO THE IGNORANT?

He does it, first, by *offering to teach them*. If there is anybody here who desires to be taught, the Lord is willing and waiting to teach you. Is it a Mary? She may come and sit at Jesus’ feet and He will not upbraid her, but He will say that she has chosen the good part.

Is it a Zacchaeus? Would you steal into the house of God, as he climbed up into the sycamore tree, that, among the foliage, he might not be seen, but yet might hear? Well, the Lord Jesus Christ is willing to teach you, and to bid you make haste, and come down, that He may abide in your house and your heart.

He keeps a school which is always open and there is no charge for admission. The poorer and the more ignorant you are, the more welcome are you to the school of Christ—and this is how He proves His compassion on the ignorant. An ancient philosopher in Greece put over his door, “He that is ignorant of arithmetic must not enter here.” He required some amount of knowledge before he would take a pupil, but the Lord Jesus Christ puts over His door, “He that is simple, let him turn in hither. As for him who is void of understanding, let him come and learn of the Great Teacher!” Come, then, my poor ignorant friend, for He will have compassion on you.

And His compassion is shown, next, by *actually receiving all who come to Him*. There is never one who comes to Christ but He takes him in to lodge and tarry with Him till he is instructed in the things of God. Come along with you, for Jesus said, “Him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out.” If you know nothing except that you know that you know nothing, He will instruct you unto eternal life.

Our Lord also shows His gentleness by *teaching us little by little*. If you Christian people look back upon your past history, you will be delighted to note how the Lord let the light in gradually upon you. The blind man, whose eyes are opened, cannot bear the full light of noonday. And the Lord abounds toward us in all wisdom and prudence, teaching us “line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little, and there a little.”

I sometimes bless God that He does not give to some comers such a sight of sin as they get afterwards. A full sight of sin, my brethren, without a sight of the precious blood of Christ, would drive

any man among us mad. But we get a little glimpse of sin and we are appalled by it, and then we get a larger view of the atonement, and we are comforted.

Perhaps no man has such a knowledge of the heinousness of sin as that man who is just going into heaven. The Lord reveals our danger to us by degrees—we stand on a dreadful slope, where a single slip means eternal destruction. And if the Lord were to let us see where we are, it might cause our destruction. But He first lifts us out of it and then lets us see where we used to be—shows us our disease by our remedy—and lets us know, when we are getting well, how near to death's door we once were. Oh, what a compassionate Teacher of the ignorant is the Lord Jesus Christ!

He also shows His compassion by *teaching us the same thing over and over again*. “Why!” said one to a mother, “you teach that child the same thing twenty times.” “Yes,” she said, “and do you know the reason?” “No,” said the other. “Why, it is because nineteen times will not do.” Ah, how does the Lord teach us the same thing twenty times over and still we forget it. And then He teaches us again, and again, and again, and again till at last we learn it!

Another great proof of His compassion is seen in His *never casting off those He has once taken into His school*, even if they are very dull and slow to learn, and perhaps, after twenty years, do not know much. The Lord had to say to one of His apostles, “Have I been so long a time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip?”

But He did not turn Philip out as a dull boy and He will not turn us out. But having once received us into His school, He will continue to use this means, and that, and the other, and still another, till at last we drink in the eternal truth and it becomes part of ourselves, and He permits us to go where the truth shall be seen in all its brightness and our heart shall be prepared to receive it. This is the substance of all I have said—Christ Jesus has compassion on the ignorant and I do entreat you, if you feel as if you do not understand divine things, to come to Him to give you an understanding heart that you may receive the truth.

“Oh, but I do not know!” says one. Then come to Him who does know, and say, “What I know not, my Lord, teach thou me.” “Oh, but I feel so empty!” Just so and you are therefore all the fitter to be filled. “Oh, but I am so ignorant!” A sense of ignorance is the doorstep of knowledge. If you have come so far, I bless God that you are on the way to something higher and better. Come to Christ.

You know, sometimes, when a boy who is a little dull goes to school, his master may not notice him among so many. And the older boys may slight and despise him—and he feels very miserable. But what if his master, noticing him, shall at once feel great tenderness for him and say, “Come here, child. I must make you the special object of my labor and care”?

That boy will surely get on, I think, and so, if you come into Christ's school, our compassionate Lord will say, “Come here. Come here. I will teach you more than others, I will teach you privately. I will give you lessons in your bed, at nighttime will I instruct you. In your sickness I will talk with you. Because you are so dull, in your own esteem, therefore will I pity you and will take more care with you than with others.”

The promise is, “All your children shall be taught of the LORD.” Not one of the whole family shall go without an education—and the very dullest shall still be “taught of the LORD.” Will you go home, if you have never been instructed by Him, and seek Him in prayer? Ask Him to teach you. If the Gospel seems all a maze and a mist to you, go and say, “Lord, will You explain it to me?”

One touch of Christ is better than years of study. You may try for many an hour to see in the dark, and yet see nothing. But if you go to Him who is the Morning Star and the Sun of righteousness, you shall soon see. God grant that it may be so, for Christ's sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

HEBREWS 4:14-16 AND 5

Hebrews 4:14. *Seeing, then, that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession.*

Why should we let it go? Jesus has triumphed, He has entered into the glory on our behalf—the victory on our account rests with Him. Therefore let us follow Him as closely as we can. May He help us, just now, if we are in the least dispirited or cast down, to pluck up courage, and press on our way!

15. *For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.*

How this ought to draw us to the Savior—that He was made like ourselves, that He knows our temptations by a practical experience of them, and though He was without sin, yet the same sins which are put before us by Satan were also set before Him.

16. *Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.*

We have a Friend at court. Our Bridegroom is on the throne. He who reigns in heaven loves us better than we love ourselves. Come, then, why should we hesitate, wherefore should we delay our approach to His throne of mercy? What is it that we need at this moment? Let us ask for it. If it is a time of need, then we see clearly from this verse that it is a time when we are permitted and encouraged to pray.

Hebrews 5:1. *For every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins:*

The high priest of old was “taken from among men.” Aaron was chosen and then his son. An angel might have been sent to perform Aaron’s duty, but it was not so. And glory be to our blessed Lord and Master, He is “One chosen out of the people,” “taken from among men.”

2. *Who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way; for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity.*

Christ was not compassed with sinful infirmity, but He was compassed with sorrowful infirmity. His were true infirmities or weaknesses—there was no evil about Him, but still He had the infirmity of misery—and He had it even to a greater extent than we have. The high priest of old was a man like those for whom he stood as a representative, and our great High Priest is like unto us, though without sin.

3. *And by reason hereof he ought,—*

That is, the ordinary high priest, chosen from among men ought,

3. *As for the people, so also for himself, to offer for sins.*

But our Lord had no sins of His own. Do not, therefore, think that He is less sympathetic with us because He had no sins—far from it. Fellowship in sin does not create true sympathy, for sin is a hardening thing. If there are two men who are guilty partners in sin, they never really help each other, they have no true heart of kindness, either of them. When the time of difficulty comes, each man looks to his own interest. The fact that Christ is free from sin is a circumstance which does not diminish the tenderness of His sympathy with us, but rather increases it.

4-5. *And no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron. So also Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest; but he that said unto him, Thou art my Son, to day have I begotten thee.*

The text is quoted from the second Psalm and it proves that Christ did not arrogate to Himself any position before God. He is God’s Son, not merely because He calls Himself so, but because the Father says, “Thou art my Son, to day have I begotten thee.” He took not this honor upon Himself, but He was “called of God, as was Aaron.”

6. *As he saith also in another place,—*

In the 110th Psalm,

6. *Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.*

He does not assume the office on His own account, but it is laid upon Him. He comes not in as an amateur, but as an authorized priest of God.

7. *Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared;*

This is to prove His infinite sympathy with His people and how He was compassed with infirmity. Christ prayed. How near He comes to you and to me by this praying in an agony, even to a bloody sweat, with strong crying and with weeping! Some of you know what that means, but it did, perhaps, seem to you that Christ could not know how to pray just so. Yet He did. In the days of His flesh, He not only offered up prayer, but “prayers and supplications”—many of them, of different forms and in different shapes—and these were accompanied with “strong crying and tears.”

Possibly you have sometimes had a dread of death. So had your Lord—not a sinful fear of it, but that natural and perfectly innocent, yet very terrible dread which comes to a greater or less extent upon every living creature when in expectation of death.

Jesus also comes very near to us because He was not literally heard and answered. He said, “If it be possible, let this cup pass from me.” But the cup did not pass from Him. The better part of His prayer won the victory, and that was, “Nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt.” You will be heard, too, if that is always the principal clause in your prayers.

But you may not be heard by being delivered from the trouble. Even the prayer of faith is not always literally heard. God, sometimes, instead of taking away the sickness or the death, gives us grace that we may profit by the sickness, or that we may triumph in the hour of death. That is better than being literally heard, but even the most believing prayer may not meet with a literal answer. He “was heard in that He feared.” Yet He died and you and I, in praying for ourselves, and praying for our friends, may pray an acceptable prayer and be heard—yet they may die or we may die.

8. *Though he were a Son,—*

Emphatically, and above us all, “a Son,”

8. *Yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered;*

He was always obedient, but He had to learn experientially what obedience meant, and He could not learn it by the things which He did—He had to learn it “by the things which he suffered”—and I believe that there are some of the most sanctified children of God who have been made so, by His grace, through the things which they have suffered. We may not all suffer alike, we may not all need the same kind of suffering. But I question whether any of us can truly learn obedience except by the things which we suffer.

9. *And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him;*

“Being made perfect.” “What,” asks one, “did Christ need to be made perfect?” Not in His nature, for He was always perfect in both His divine and His human nature, but perfect as a Savior, perfect as a Sympathizer—above all, according to the context—perfect as a High Priest. “Being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him.” Christ will not save those who refuse to obey Him, those who will not believe in Him. There must be an obedient faith rendered unto Him, or else the virtue of His passion and death cannot come to us.

10. *Called of God an high priest after the order of Melchisedec.*

It is a glorious mark of our Lord Jesus that He was “called of God an high priest.” He did not assume this office to Himself, but this high honor was laid upon Him by God Himself.

11-12. *Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing. For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God;*

I hope it is not true of any of you, dear friends, but it is true of many Christians that they learn very little to any purpose and always need to be going over the A B C of the Gospel. They never get into the classics, the deep things of God. They are afraid of the doctrine of election, and of the doctrine of the eternal covenant, and of the doctrine of the sovereignty of God, for these truths are meant for men of full age, and these poor puny babes have not cut their teeth yet. They need some softer and more childlike food. Well, it is a mercy that they are children of God. It would be better, however, for them to grow so

as to become teachers of others—“Ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God;”

12-14. *And are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.*

Do not be frightened, you who have lately been brought into the Lord’s family. We are not going to feed you with meat yet. We shall be glad enough to serve you with milk for the present. At the same time, let us all be praying to the Lord to make us grow, that we may know more, and do more, and be more what the Lord would have us to be.

A child is a very beautiful object, an infant is one of the loveliest sights under heaven, but if, after twenty years, your child was still an infant, it would be a dreadful trial to you. We must keep on growing till we come to the stature of men in Christ Jesus. God grant that we may do so, for Christ’s sake! Amen.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—371, 509, 869

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