

A SILLY DOVE

NO. 2984

A SERMON

PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY, APRIL 19, 1906

DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON

IN THE YEAR 1863

“Ephraim also is like a silly dove without heart.”

Hosea 7:11

THE race of Ephraim is not extinct. Men are to this very day very much like what they were in the days of the prophets. The same rebukes are still suitable, as well as the same comforts. As man has altered very little, if at all, in his outward bodily conformation, so has he not varied in the inner constitution, he is much the same today as he was in the time of Hosea. In this congregation, in the midst of the city of London, we have too large a company of those who are “like a silly dove without heart.”

To proceed at once with the text, I want you to notice four things, first, *a saintly similitude*, secondly, *a secret distinction*, thirdly, *a severe description*, and lastly, *a serious consideration*.

I. Here we have A SAINTLY SIMILITUDE, “Ephraim is like a dove.”

The people are not compared here to the eagle that soars aloft, and scents its prey from afar, nor to the vulture which delights to gorge itself with carrion, they are not likened to any foul and unclean bird which was put aside under the law, but the very figure which is constantly chosen to set forth the beauty of holiness, to describe the believer, and to picture the whole church—nay, that very emblem by which we set forth Him who is holiness itself, God the Holy Spirit—that same comparison to a dove is here used to describe those who were without heart. “Ephraim is like a dove,”—it is a saintly similitude.

Let me remind you that, in all congregations, there are those who are *like* doves, but not Christ’s doves, who never build their nests in the clefts of the rock, in the bosom of the Savior. They are *like* doves, you can never tell them from genuine believers, and *like* doves, *they are perfectly harmless*, they do no mischief to others in their lives.

Track them, if you will, you will never find them in the alehouse, they sing not the song of the drunkard, no man ever loses anything in business by them. Men may have their pockets picked in the streets, but never by them. Persons may go staggering home under a wound, but that wound never comes from their hand, there is no uncleanness in their heart, and no slander on their tongue, they are amiable, admirable, we might almost hold them up for examples of propriety. Alas! alas! that we have only to look within to find that they are not what they seem.

Moreover, being like doves for harmlessness, *they are also like them for loving good company*. We find not the dove flying with a host of eagles, but it consorts with its own kind. Some of you are never happier than when you are either in the Tabernacle or else in some of the classes formed by various members of the congregation. You also find such a pleasant excitement in the prayer meeting that you are not absent from it except when you are prevented by business. You love being where God’s people go, their hymns are sweet to your ears, in their prayers you find some sort of comfort, and in the ministry of the Word you take delight. You fly like a cloud, and like doves to their windows, and it is a joy to us to see you do it, and yet it may be that, although you know how to congregate like doves, you are simply “like a silly dove without heart.”

Moreover, these persons are still more like the dove in that *they have the same meekness apparently, as distinguishes the dove*. They hear as God’s people hear and sit as His people sit. They are not sceptics, they never object to the exposition of the doctrines to which they listen, they pick no holes in the preacher’s coat—they have no particular fault to find either with the style or the matter of his

discourse, they decorously frequent the house of God, and behave themselves in a seemly manner when there, nay, more than that, they do seem with meekness to receive the Word, though they do not receive it, as engrafted into their own hearts, they even receive it with joy when the seed is scattered on them, but having no root in themselves, the good seed comes to nothing.

O my dear hearers, it is a great subject for thanksgiving that so many of you are ready and willing to listen to the Word with deep and profound respect, but I do beseech you to remember that you may, in this, be like unto the dove, and yet, after all, you may be taken in the same net and destroyed with the same destruction as that which fell upon the Ephraimites, who were “like a silly love without heart.”

The dove, you know, is a cleanly feeder, and so we have many who get as far as that. They know the distinction between the precious and the vile, they will not feed on law, they can only live on grace, they have come to know the doctrines of the Gospel, and they feed on them—upon pure corn well winnowed. You have only to bring in a little free will, and straightway they know the chaff from the wheat, and refuse to receive it. They cast it away as refuse metal, which is of no value to them.

But while they have an orthodox head, they have a heterodox heart, while they know the truth, and feel it, yet still it is not the right kind of feeling, they have never so received it as to incorporate it into their very being, they have accepted it with the same sort of belief, and in somewhat the same manner, as Simon did in Samaria, but after a while, when trouble and persecution shall come, and wax too hot, they will turn aside.

But I have to add yet further here, that there are some of these persons who are like doves in another respect still more singular. *As a dove is molested by all sorts of birds of prey,* so these persons do, for a time, share the lot which befalls the people of God. Why, there are some who, for the mere coming to the house of God, get nicknamed “saints.” They are not saints, but they have to bear the scoffing which is given to saints, and I know some, who have turned out great sinners, who have, for a time, put up with much scoffing and rebuke for the sake of Christ.

When pointed at in the street, it has been part of the manliness of their character to acknowledge that they did frequent such a place of worship. Though their soul has never been stricken by the Divine Word, yet it has become so sweet in their ear, that they are willing to bear some degree of reproach for the sake of it. I should not like to be compelled to say precisely wherein the saint is to be distinguished by outward signs, for really the counterfeits nowadays are so much like the genuine, that it needs the wisdom of the infallible God Himself to discern between the one and the other.

We can have false faith, false repentance, false hope, and false good works. We have all sorts of shammings—paint, varnish, tinsel—and we may so grain that a skillful eye will scarcely know whether it is the genuine wood or the artist’s skill. There are many ways of preparing metals, and sometimes, the alloy seems to have in it, for some purposes, qualities which the unalloyed metal lacks. O Lord, the great Searcher of hearts, do You search us, lest we should have applied to us saintly names, and pass the saintly reputation and character, and hold saintly offices, and after all be cast away with the rubbish over the wall, and left to be consumed for ever and ever! But enough on that point.

II. I have now to call your attention to A SECRET DISTINCTION, “Ephraim is like a dove *without heart.*”

This implies *a lack of understanding.* The dove knows but little, and experience scarcely teaches it anything. We may almost spread the snare in the flight of that bird, and yet it will fly to it, it is so silly. It does not seem to possess, at least to the outward eye, the wits and sense of some others of the feathered tribe. It has little or no understanding. And oh, how many there are who are spiritually like the dove, they have no real knowledge of the truth! They rest in the letter and think that is enough.

I solemnly believe that there are thousands who have not the shadow of an idea of the meaning of the words which they hear every Sabbath day in a form of prayer. They repeat those prayers without any appreciation of the sense of them, they would probably not notice if the words were put in any other way. Doubtless they would get as much good out of them if they were thrown together in wild disorder, as they do out of the beautiful and magnificent array in which they are marshalled. Many, who come and

hear the most simple truths, go away and say, “It is a riddle to us, we cannot understand how people can sit and listen to that.” Either they condemn the preacher’s words as trite or else as fanatical, they cannot understand them. You may fetch a clodhopper and set before him the masterpiece of an eminent old painter, and tell him, “That picture is worth sixty thousand pounds.” He looks, opens his mouth, stares again, and says he can’t make anything of it, he can’t see where the money could go. He’d sooner have carts, and horses, and pigs, and cows, and sheep.

Well now, to some extent, we might almost sympathize with him, but the high-art critics despise the man at once for having no soul above his clod. And it is just the same in spiritual things. Exhibit the glories of the person of Christ, and the matchless wisdom of the plan of salvation, that man can see nothing in it. “it is, no doubt, a very good and very proper thing,” he will attend to it, and so on, and then he goes to church, and thinks he is pious, sits in his seat, and goes through the routine, and then supposes he is reconciled to God. Oh, how many such silly doves we have fluttering in and out of our places of worship! As a quaint old preacher said, there were scarcely seats enough for the saints on account of the number of simpletons that came to listen.

But again, they were silly doves without heart, because, lacking an understanding heart, *they also lacked a decided heart*. Sometimes, however, the dove would be slandered if we should use her as a metaphor in this respect. Have you not seen the dove, when, from afar, with her quick eye, she has seen her cote, fly straight away, over miles of sea and land, straight to her beloved home? There, she could not be used as a metaphor of the ungodly, but of a child of Jesus, who thus flies to Him over the wild waves of sin.

But perhaps, you have seen the dove as first she rises in the air, and then flies round and round. She deliberates in order to find out which is the right direction, and when she has made up her mind, away she flies straight as an arrow to the goal. But while she is fluttering about, she is an apt emblem of some men. They are undecided whether for God or Baal. They halt, to user Elijah’s figure, between two opinions. “How long halt ye between two opinions? If the LORD be God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him.” On Sundays, they go to church, but on Mondays, they put off their religious habits, the weather is too rough, or something else prevents them from going to the prayer meeting. On Sunday, they say—

*“My willing soul would stay
In such a frame as this,
And sit and sing herself away
To everlasting bliss;”—*

but on Monday or Tuesday, the sound of the wheels in the street, and the noise of them that buy and sell, put the music of Jerusalem out of their ears, and they would fain go back to the world again. Ah, they are silly doves, without understanding and without decision!

Nay, there are some who may be said to have a sort of decision for a time, but they are like the dove, in that *they are without resolution*. The dove seeks to fly in one direction, somebody claps his hands, and she changes in a moment, or else he sprinkles a handful of barley on the ground, and though she was flying yonder, she is over here again. How many persons there are of that kind, setting their faces to Zion, intending to join the church, perhaps they have seen the elders and the pastor, and been accepted, but after a little time, they say, “Well, they did not know all about it, there are more frightful things than they dreamt of in it!” Like Pliable, they would go to heaven, but they get into the Slough of Despond, and there is queer stuff there that gets into the ears and mouth, and so they get out on the side nearest home, and tell Christian he may have the brave country all to himself, for they don’t like the miry places on the way.

Or it may be, that some old companion comes up from the country, and he will treat them to some place of amusement, or perhaps, it may be that there is a prospect of gain to be got in some branch of business that is not quite so honest as it might be. But does not the money count as well? Isn’t it as good

to spend? Will not other men think it worth twenty shillings to the pound, however it may have been gained? These people, who seemed so true and warm-hearted, are like the silly dove without resolution, and fly away again to their old haunts, and become just what they used to be.

So likewise there are many, like a dove, *without bold hearts*. They never turn upon a persecutor. They never stood in the gap with Mr. Valiant-for-Truth, holding the sword in their hand. They cannot open their mouth to speak for Jesus, but they run away when they ought to stand out like a lion against their foes, they never give a reason for the hope that is in them. We have plenty of Baptist churches educating cowards by the score. They never come out before the whole church—that would be too trying for their nerves. They are never expected to come out boldly on the Lord's side.

Too often, baptism is administered somewhere in a corner, when as few as possible are present, and in that way, where we ought to have lion-like men, we breed those who hide their principles, and are ready to amalgamate with any sect of people so long as they can but bear the name of Christians. I would to God, dear friends, we had bolder men for our Lord and Master. Be as full of love as you can, but take care that you mix iron with your constitution. Silly are the doves that have no bold heart for God. The day will come when only the bold heart shall win, for the fearful and unbelieving are to have their part in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone.

Too many, also, there are like a silly dove, in that *they have a powerless heart*. If you visit a great manufactory where there is a large engine, you will notice that the amount of power used in the factory is proportionate to the capacity of the steam-engine. If that should work but feebly, then the wheels cannot revolve beyond a proportionate rate, and every part soon discovers that there is some lack of motive force.

Now, man's heart is the great steam-engine of his whole being, and if he has a heart that palpitates with swift strokes, it will put his whole nature in motion, and that man will be mighty for his Lord and Master, but if he has a little, insignificant heart that never did glow, and never did burn, and never did know anything about the warmth, and life, and heat, and power, and benediction of God's love, then he will fritter away his time, knowing the right and doing the wrong, loving in some sort the thing that is beautiful, but still following that which is deformed, giving his name to God, and giving what little strength he has to the other side. Brethren, I would to God there were not so many in all our communities that have but a pigeon's heart, or a dove's heart, or no heart at all.

The root of the matter lies here, *these Ephraimites have not renewed hearts*, and so they fail. Verily, verily, is it true to this hour, as in Jesu's day, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Many strive to see it in their own way, but until the effectual grace of God comes down to turn their hearts from the great and extraordinary confidence which their proud flesh has in their own works, they never will see, they never can see, the kingdom of God. How many like Ephraim, then, have the heart altogether wrong because it is not renewed, therefore it has none of these qualifications which tend to make the man what he should be.

III. With great brevity, we notice, in the third place, A SEVERE DESCRIPTION, "Ephraim is like a *silly dove*."

It is a fine word, that word "silly." Hardly do I know another that is so eminently descriptive. There may be some sort of dignity in being a fool, but to be silly—to attract no attention except ridicule—is so utterly contemptible that I do not know how a more sarcastic epithet could be applied.

"Ephraim is like a silly dove without heart." And why silly? Why, *it is silly*, of course, *to profess to be a dove at all, unless a dove at heart*, silly of you to enslave yourselves with the customs of a country of which you are not a citizen—to bind yourselves with the rules of a family of which you are not a member.

We find men, when they go to another country, if there is a conscription there, only too willing to plead their own nationality, in order to escape it, and yet we have persons who will serve in the Christian conscription, who give as God's people give, and outwardly do what God's people do, and yet they are not of the godly nation, but are aliens from the commonwealth of Israel. Is not this silly—to take the

irksome toil, and not to get the joy and the benefit of it? You are silly to go and work in the vineyard, though you have never eaten of the clusters, and never can unless your heart be right in the sight of God. Isn't it silly, then, to profess to be a dove at all and yet not to be a dove?

Isn't it silly, again, to think you can pass muster when your heart is wrong—to *fancy that, if you fly with the crowd, you shall enter heaven without being seen?* Do you think to deceive Omniscience? Do you think infallible wisdom will not discern you? Do you think to enter heaven while your soul is estranged from God? Then, indeed, you are worse than a fool, you are “silly” to think such a thing. How can you thus hope to deceive your God?

What is more silly than to play fast and loose in this way—first, to sing the song of Zion, and then the song of lasciviousness? There is something dignified even in the devil himself, there is something awful about the grandeur of his wickedness, because he is consistent in it, but there is nothing of that consistency in you, because you are here and there, everywhere and nowhere, everything by turns, and nothing long.

Some of you are *so silly as to hasten your own condemnation*. You know that to be without God, and without Christ, will ruin you, and yet you do that which keeps you from going to Christ, you hug the sins that prevent your laying hold on Him, and still dandle upon your knee the lusts which you know will shut the gates of heaven against you. Like Ephraim, you are silly enough to trust in that which will be your ruin. Some of you rest upon good works or hope to be saved by good feelings. The two powers which had oppressed Ephraim, Egypt and Assyria, were still the powers in which he trusted. Do not you imitate his folly by trusting to that which will ruin you.

You are silly, again, because, *when there is so much danger, you do not fly to the place of shelter*. O silly dove, when the hawk is abroad, not to seek the cleft of the rock to hide itself! And how silly are some of you! Day after day, year after year, Satan is hawking after you, the great fowler is seeking your destruction, but the wounds of Christ are open to you, and the invitation of the Gospel is freely given to you, and yet, so silly are you, that though you know better, you prefer the pleasures of the day to the joys of eternity. Yet I know not that you do *prefer them*, only somehow or other you are too silly to prove your preference, and go on like a child that is playing on the hole of the cockatrice, making mirth over your damnation, too silly to make up your minds to choose either heaven or hell.

I know there are some such people in this house, would God that the arrow might find out the right persons, but too often, these doves are so silly in another respect, that they will not let the appeal of the Gospel come home to them. They say, “It cannot be for me, for I go to Mr. A's or Mr. B's class, it cannot be for me, for I go to the prayer meeting, I contribute to the College, and every good work,” yet all the while, it means just you who act upon your own whims, but not for God, who give God anything but your heart, who are ready to make a sacrifice of all, except that you refuse that which He asks of you, “My son, give me thine heart.”

It was considered to be a sign of great calamity when the Roman augur slew a bullock, and found no heart, and it is the worst of all calamities when a man has no heart to give to God. “This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me,” is one of the complaints against Israel of old, and one of the sins which made the prophets weep, and caused Jerusalem to be ploughed like a field.

IV. I close with just a few words upon the fourth point and that is, A SERIOUS CONSIDERATION.

There are one or two things I would say solemnly, softly, and hopefully. Oh, that they may stick in the memory and the conscience of many of you!

Those of you, my hearers, who have been long sitting in this Tabernacle, some of you ever since it was built, and before then in other places under our ministry, yet are just the same as you used to be, ought to recollect *how sadly we look on those who are not saved*. It is no rare thing to find the attendant of the sanctuary an unbeliever. It is a common thing to find the child of converted parents, the lad educated at the Sabbath school, the man who has always had a seat in God's house, still having no hope

and without God in the world. Think of that! Be not deceived, the Gospel will harden such people as you are.

Speaking after the manner of men (for, with God, all things are possible, and a sovereign God doeth as He wills), it does seem less and less probable that you ever should be called by grace after you have sat and listened to the Word so long. The voice that once startled you now soothes you, the manner that once attracted the eye, and sometimes seemed to touch the heart, fails to do either, and the very truth that once went over your heads like a crash of thunder has so little force in it now that you even sleep under the sound thereof. Think of that, you who are like a silly dove without heart.

Remember, too, that *some of the vilest sinners that have ever lived have been manufactured out of this raw material*. Some of the worst men were once, apparently, meek-hearted hearers of the Word, but they sat under the preaching of the Gospel till they grew ripe enough to deny God and curse Him. The unsanctified hearing of the Gospel has sometimes produced more gigantic specimens of sin than the deaf ear of the adder. Beware, my hearer! I know that you will say with Hazeal, “Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?” Yes, there is dog and devil enough in you, unless you have been changed by grace, to do that thing and twenty other things that you have never dreamt of yet.

Think what multitudes of souls in hell there are like you—silly doves without heart. Many of the population of that place of wailing once heard the Gospel, heard it with gladness, and appeared to receive it for a time, but they had no root, and so the impression withered away. They never had been called effectually by grace, and never had been renewed in heart, although they had all the outward semblance of holiness. They have gone! Even now, your soul may listen to their groans and moans, the least of all which would be, “Make your calling and election sure, and be not satisfied with the name to live while you are dead.”

May the Spirit of the living God stir you up to this, for if not, I have one more consideration to urge upon you. *Remember how soon you may be in hell yourself*. And they who go there, if they have been such as you are, go there with a vengeance. To go from under the shadow of the pulpit to the pit, is terrible. To go from the communion cup, to drink the cup of devils, from the song at saints to the weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth of lost souls, from all the hallowed joys of God’s Sabbath, of God’s house, and of His Word, down to the unutterable infamy of spirits that have no love to God, but curse Him day and night—my hearers, that may to your lot within an hour, a week, a year.

It matters not what the period may be, for if it ever be your lot, the time past shall seem to have been but the twinkling of an eye for its joy, though it may appear to you to have been ages for the awful responsibility which the day of mercy will have entailed upon you. “Repent and be baptized every one of you,” as Peter said, so say I. If ye have not as yet received Christ, lay hold on eternal life, and oh, that the Spirit of the living God, while I preach the Word *generally*, may apply it *particularly*, finding out His own chosen, and gathering them out of the ruins of the Fall, that they may be jewels in the crown of the Redeemer! The Lord make us doves, but God forbid that we should be “silly doves without heart.”

EXPOSITIONS BY C. H. SPURGEON

PSALM 78:10-61 AND 1 PETER 4:1-13

The story of how the children of Israel behaved themselves towards their gracious God.

Psalm Chapter 78. Verses 10-16. *They kept not the covenant of God, and refused to walk in his law; and forgot his works, and his wonders that he had shown them. Marvellous things did he in the sight of their fathers, in the land of Egypt, in the field of Zoan. He divided the sea, and caused them to pass through; and he made the waters to stand as an heap. In the daytime also he led them with a cloud, and all the night with a light of fire. He clave the rocks in the wilderness, and gave them drink as out of the great depths. He brought streams also out of the rock, and caused waters to run down like rivers.*

In such a scene of miracles, surrounded by such prodigies of goodness, what did they do?

17. *And they sinned yet more against him by provoking the most high in the wilderness.*

What a fierce fire must sin be that it is even fed by the rivers of God's goodness and burns by means of that which ought to have quenched every spark of it. Yet there is such a fire as that raging in our hearts, and even God's mercies will make us more sinful unless His abounding grace comes with them to teach us how to use them aright.

18. *And they tempted God in their heart by asking meat for their lust.*

Not for their needs, but "for their lust." It is a dreadful thing when prayer itself is prostituted, and the mercy seat becomes a place for the expression of sinful desires which ought never to have been in our hearts. It was so, however, with these children of Israel.

19. *Yea, they spake against God;*

As you read that "they spake against God," you naturally suppose that they uttered some blasphemy, or some denial of His Deity. Listen and learn:—

19. *They said, Can God furnish a table in the wilderness?*

That is speaking against Him—to speak unbelievably—to speak in a questioning way concerning His power. I am afraid that there are very few of us who can plead innocence on this score.

20. *Behold, he smote the rock, that the waters gushed out, and the streams overflowed; can he give bread also? can he provide flesh for his people?*

These things, which they lusted after, they also turned into subjects for unbelief; and they even misused the miracle, which they dared not deny.

21-22. *Therefore the LORD heard this, and was wroth: so a fire was kindled against Jacob, and anger also came up against Israel; because they believed not in God, and trusted not in his salvation:*

This was the provoking sin. The Lord would not endure such wanton and wicked unbelief as this. After he had turned the rocks into rivers, could he not turn the stones into bread, and the dust of the desert into flesh, if he chose to do so?

23-32. *Though he had commanded the clouds from above, and opened the doors of heaven, and had rained down manna upon them to eat, and had given them of the corn of heaven. Man did eat angels' food: he sent them meat to the full. He caused an east wind to blow in the heaven: and by his power he brought in the south wind. He rained flesh also upon them as dust, and feathered fowls like as the sand of the sea: and he let it fall in the midst of their camp, round about their habitations. So they did eat, and were well filled: for he gave them their own desire; they were not estranged from their lust. But while their meat was yet in their mouths, the wrath of God came upon them, and slew the fattest of them, and smote down the chosen men of Israel. For all this they sinned still,—*

Mercy failed to move them, and judgment failed too. The right hand of God's gifts and the left hand of His chastisement were equally ignored.

32-34. *And believed not for his wondrous works. Therefore their days did he consume in vanity, and their years in trouble. When he slew them, then they sought him: and they returned and inquired early after God.*

Perhaps some of them sought Him even while they were dying, and the remnant that survived trembled, and "returned and inquired early after God."

35-36. *And they remembered that God was their rock, and the high God their redeemer. Nevertheless they did flatter him with their mouth, and they lied unto him with their tongues.*

Oh, this is terrible! One would have thought that they would have been sincere when they were broken down with sorrow, but it was not so. And I fear that the kind of religion which has to be whipped into us is never good for much. It must have in it the element of spontaneousness if it is to be sincere, it was not so with these people.

37-41. *For their heart was not right with him, neither were they steadfast in his covenant. But he, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and destroyed them not: yea, many a time turned he his anger away, and did not stir up all his wrath. For he remembered that they were but flesh; a wind that*

passeth away, and cometh not again. How oft did they provoke him in the wilderness, and grieve him in the desert! Yea, they turned back and tempted God, and limited the Holy One of Israel.

In their unbelieving imagination, they circumscribed his power; they thought that he could do something, but not everything; they believed him one day, and doubted him the next.

42-45. *They remembered not his hand, nor the day when he delivered them from the enemy. How he had wrought his signs in Egypt, and his wonders in the field of Zoan: and had turned their rivers into blood; and their floods, that they could not drink. He sent divers sorts of flies among them, which devoured them; and frogs, which destroyed them.*

All these judgments fell upon their enemies, but they failed to remember them.

46-56. *He gave also their increase unto the caterpillar, and their labor unto the locust. He destroyed their vines with hail, and their sycamore trees with frost. He gave up the cattle also to the hail, and their flocks to hot thunderbolts. He cast upon them the fierceness of his anger, wrath, and indignation, and trouble, by sending evil angels among them. He made a way to his anger; he spared not their soul from death, but gave their life over to the pestilence, and smote all the firstborn in Egypt, the chief of their strength in the tabernacles of Ham: but made his own people to go forth like sheep, and guided them in the wilderness like a flock. And he led them on safely, so that they feared not: but the sea overwhelmed their enemies. And he brought them to the border of his sanctuary, even to this mountain, which his right hand had purchased. He cast out the heathen also before them, and divided them an inheritance by line, and made the tribes of Israel to dwell in their tents. Yet they tempted and provoked the most high God, and kept not his testimonies:*

Oh, these terrible “yets”! Though God was faithful to the end, and kept His covenant, and brought them into the land which He swore to their fathers that He would give them. “YET they tempted and provoked the most high God, and kept not his testimonies.”

57-61. *But turned back, and dealt unfaithfully like their fathers: they were turned aside like a deceitful bow. For they provoked him to anger with their high places, and moved him to jealousy with their graven images. When God heard this, he was wroth, and greatly abhorred Israel: so that he forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh, the tent which he placed among men; and delivered his strength into captivity, and his glory into the enemy’s hand.*

1 Peter Chapter 4. Verse 1. *Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin;—*

Brethren, we have a Savior who suffered for us. As the Head was, such must the members expect to be. Let us, then, be resolutely determined that, suffer as we may, we will never turn aside from our Lord; for, inasmuch as we suffered in Him, yea, and died in Him, we ought to reckon that we are henceforth dead to sin, and that we have ceased from it, and can no longer be drawn into it. “He that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin;”—

2. *That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God.*

The doctrine of substitution is the strongest possible argument for holiness. You lived in sin once, but Christ died for your sin, so you must reckon that, in Him, you died to sin, seeing that He died in your stead. And the argument is that, henceforth, your life is to be a life in Him, a life of holiness, to the praise and glory of God.

3. *For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles,—*

Suffice? O brethren, let it do much more than that! Let it make us cry, “Would God that we had never wrought the will of the Gentiles at all!” Some young people foolishly say that they must have a little space in which they can “see life.” Ah, those of you who have been converted in after years regret that ever you saw what men call “life,” which is but the *alias* for corruption and death! “For the time part of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles,”—

3-4. *When we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excesses of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries: Wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you:*

What a strange world this world is! It speaks evil of men because they will not do evil. Yet it has ever been so, the men, “of whom the world was not worthy,” have been the very people of whom worldlings have said, “Away with such fellows from the earth! It is not fit that they should live.” The world’s verdict concerning Christians is of little value.

5-6. *Who shall give account to him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead. For for this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit.*

This is a very difficult passage to expound, but I suppose the meaning is that the Gospel was preached to those departed saints who had been called to die for Christ’s sake, and that it was preached to them for this very reason, that, while they were judged by wicked men, and were by them condemned to die, they still live a far more glorious life than they lived here, because they were thus enabled, by their martyr death, to consummate their consecration to God.

7-8. *But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer. And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins.*

It covers them sometimes by not seeing them, for where there is much love, we are blind to many faults which otherwise we might see, we do not exercise the sharpness of criticism which malice would be sure to exercise. Besides that, when love applies herself to prayer, and when, in addition to prayer, she kindly gives admonition to a beloved friend, it often happens that true Christian love does really prevent a multitude of sins.

The apostle does not mean that, by loving another person, I shall cover my own sin, nor does he mean that the exercise of charity, in the common acceptation of that word, can cover my sin. But if I have much love to others, I may be the instrument, in the hand of God, for covering many of their sins in one or other of the senses I have mentioned.

9-10. *Use hospitality one to another without grudging. As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.*

Whatever “the gift” is, whether it be money, or talent, or grace, “even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.” God gives much to you that you may give it to others, it is only meant to run through you as through a pipe. You are a steward, and if a steward should receive his lord’s goods, and keep them for himself, he would be an unfaithful steward. Child of God, see to it that you faithfully discharge your responsibility as one of the “good stewards of the manifold grace of God.”

11-13. *If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen. Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.*

If you do not share in Christ’s humiliation, how can you expect to share in His exaltation? But if worldlings begin to rebuke and reproach you, take it for granted that they can discern something of Christ in you. Dogs do not usually bark at those who live in the same village with them, it is only at strangers that they bark. And when ribald tongues are lifted up against you, you have reason to hope that you are a stranger and a foreigner to the citizens of this world, for they love their own, as our Savior reminded His disciples, “If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you”

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.