

A SECRET AND YET NO SECRET NO. 431

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON SUNDAY MORNING, JANUARY 26, 1862
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON

“A garden inclosed is my sister, my spouse; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed.”

Song of Solomon 4:12

“A fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon.”

Song of Solomon 4:15

OBSERVE the sweet titles with which Christ the husband addresses His church the bride. “*My sister*,” one near to Me by ties of nature, My next of kin, born of the same mother, partaker of the same sympathies. *My spouse*, nearest and dearest, united to Me by the tenderest bands of love, My sweet companion, part of My own Self. *My sister*, by My incarnation, which makes Me bone of your bone and flesh of your flesh, *My spouse*, by heavenly betrothal in which I have espoused you unto Myself in righteousness. *My sister*, whom I knew of old and over whom I watched from her earliest infancy, *My spouse*, taken from among the daughters, embraced by arms of love, and affianced unto Me forever.

See, my brethren, how true is it that our royal kinsman is not ashamed of us, for He dwells with manifest delight upon this twofold relationship. Be not, O beloved, slow to return the hallowed flame of His love. We have the word “my” twice in our version. As if Christ dwelt with rapture on His possession of His church. “His delights were with the sons of men,” because those sons of men were His. He, the Shepherd, sought the sheep, because they were *His* sheep, He lit the candle, and swept the house, because it was *His* money that was lost, He has gone about “to seek and to save that which was lost,” because that which was lost was *His* long before it was lost to itself or lost to Him.

The church is the exclusive portion of her Lord, none else may claim a partnership, or pretend to share her love. Jesus, Your church delights to have it so! Let every believing soul drink solace out of these wells. Soul, Christ is near to you in ties of relationship, Christ is dear to you in bonds of marriage union, and you are dear to Him, behold, He grasps both of your hands with both His own, saying, “*My sister, my spouse.*”

Mark the two sacred holdfasts by which your Lord gets such a double hold of you that He neither can nor will ever let you go. Do you say in your heart this morning, “My Brother, my Husband?” Seek to be near to Him in nature—to be like your Brother, a son of God, and to be near to Him in fellowship—to have near and dear communion with your Husband, that you may know Him and have fellowship with Him, being conformable unto His death.

Leaving this porch of cedar, let us enter the palace. Observe the contrast which the two verses present to us. I think that the Spirit of God intends that the verses should be understood, as we intend to use them this morning, but even if we should be mistaken as to the precise interpretation of the passage in its connection, we shall not err in enlisting so beautiful a string of metaphors in the service of the truth.

You know, beloved, there are two works of the Holy Spirit within us. The first is when He puts into us the living waters, the next is when He enables us to pour forth streams of the same living waters in our daily life. Our blessed Lord expressed what we mean, when on that great day of the feast He cried, saying, “If any man thirst let him come unto me and drink. He that believeth on me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. This spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive.”

The Spirit of God first implants in us the new nature. This is His work—to regenerate us, to put into us the new principle, the life of God in Christ. Then next, He gives us power to send forth that life in gracious emanations of holiness of life, of devoutness of communion with God, of likeness to Christ, of conformity to His image. The streams are as much of the Holy Spirit as the fountain itself. He digs the well, and He afterwards with heavenly rain fills the pools. He first of all makes the stream in the desert to flow from the flinty rock, and afterwards out of His infinite supplies He feeds the stream and bids it follow us all our days.

I was pleased to meet a quotation the other day from one of the early fathers, which contains in it views I have frequently expressed to you, “The true believer is composed of body, soul, and the Holy Spirit.” After the greatest research, eminent mental philosophers have given up all idea of a third principle which they can discover in man, as man. They can find nothing but the body and the soul. But rest assured that as there is a certain something in the vegetable which we call vegetable life, as there is a sensitive substance which makes animal life, as there is a mysterious subsistence developed as mental life, so there is some real, substantial, divine principle forming spiritual life.

The believer has three principles, the body, the soul, and the indwelling Spirit, which is none other than the Holy Spirit of God, which abides in the faithful continually. Just such a relationship as the soul bears to the body, does the spirit bear to the soul, for as the body without the soul is dead, so the soul without the Spirit is dead in trespasses and sins, as the body without the soul is naturally dead, so the soul without the Spirit is spiritually dead.

And contrary to the general teaching of modern theologians, we insist upon it that the Spirit of God not only renovates the faculties which were there already, but does actually implant a new principle—that He does not merely set to rights a machinery which had before gone awry, but implants a new life which could not have been there. It is not a waking up of dormant faculties—it is the infusion of a supernatural Spirit to which the natural heart is an utter stranger.

Now, we think the first verse, to a great extent, sets forth the secret and mysterious work of the Holy Spirit in the creation of the new man in the soul. Into this secret no eye of man can look. The inner life in the Christian may well be compared to an enclosed garden—to a spring shut up—to a fountain sealed.

But the second verse sets forth the manifest effects of grace, for no sooner is that life given than it begins to show itself. No sooner is the mystery of righteousness in the heart, than like the mystery of iniquity, it “doth already work.” It cannot lie still, it cannot be idle, it must not rest, but as God is ever active, so this God-like principle is active too, thus you have a picture of the outer life, proceeding from the inner.

“A fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon.” The first is what the Christian is before God, the next is what the Christian will become before men. The first is the blessedness which he receives in himself, the next is the blessedness which he diffuses to others.

We will begin then, where God the Holy Ghost begins with us, when He enters the recesses of the heart and breathes the secret life.

I. With regard to the first text, you will clearly perceive that in each of the three metaphors you have very plainly the idea of *secrecy*. There is a garden. A garden is a place where trees have been planted by a skillful hand, where they are nurtured and tended with care, and fruit is expected by its owner. Such is the church—such is each renewed soul. But it is a garden *enclosed*, and so enclosed that one cannot see over its walls—so shut out from the world’s wilderness, that the passerby must not enter it—so protected from all intrusion that it is a guarded paradise—as secret as was that inner place, the holy of holies, within the tabernacle of old.

The church—and mark, when I say the church, the same is true of each individual Christian—is set forth next as a *spring*. “A spring”—the mother of sweet draughts of refreshing water, reaching down into some impenetrable caverns, and bubbling up with perennial supplies from the great deeps. Not a mere cistern, which *contains* only, but a fresh spring, which through an inward principle within, begets, continues, overflows.

But then, it is a spring *shut up*, just as there were springs in the East, over which an edifice was built, so that none could reach the springs save those who knew the secret entrance. So is the heart of a believer when it is renewed by grace, there is a mysterious life within which no human skill can touch. And then it is said to be a *fountain*, but it is a fountain *sealed*. The outward stones may be discovered, but the door is sealed, so that no man can get into the hidden springs, they are altogether hidden, and hidden too by a royal will and decree of which the seal is the emblem. I say the idea is very much that of secrecy.

Now, such is the inner life of the Christian. It is a secret which no other man knows, nay, which the very man who is the possessor of it cannot tell to his neighbor. “The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh or whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit.”

There are mysteries in nature so profound that we only label them with some hard name and leave them, and all the knowledge that we have about them is that they are beyond the reach of man, but what they are, what are those mysterious impulses which link distant worlds with one another, what is the real essence of that power which flashes along the electric wire, what is the very substance of that awful force which rives the oak, or splits the spire, we do not know.

These are mysteries, but even if we could enter these caverns of knowledge, if we could penetrate the secret chamber of nature, if we could climb the lofty tree of knowledge till we found the nest where the callow principles of nature as yet unfledged are lying, yet even then we could not find out where that hidden life is. It is a something—as certainly a something as the natural life of man. It is a reality—not a dream, not a delusion, it is as real (though far more divine) as that “vital spark” which we say is “of heavenly flame.”

But though real, it is not in itself perceptible by human senses. It is so hidden from the eyes of men who have it not, that they do not believe in its existence. “Oh,” they say, “there is no difference between a Christian and another man. There may sometimes be a little difference in his outward acts, but as to his being the possessor of another life the idea is vain.”

As to the regenerate being men of a distinct race of being, as much above man naturally as man is above the brute beasts, that carnal men would scorn to acknowledge. They cannot make this out. How can they? It is a spring shut up, it is a fountain sealed. No, and the Christian himself, though he feels the throbbing of the great life-force within, though he feels the perpetual bubblings up of the ever-living fountain, yet he does not know what it is. It is a mystery to him. He knows it came there once upon a time, perhaps he knows the instrumentality by which it came, but what it was he cannot tell.

“One thing I know, whereas I was blind now I see, whereas I once loved sin I now hate it, whereas I had no thoughts after God and Christ, now my heart is wholly set upon divine things.” This he can say. But how it was he does not know! Only God did it—did it in some mysterious way, by an agency which it is utterly impossible for him to detect.

Nay, there are even times when the Christian finds this well so shut up that he cannot see it himself, and he is led to doubt about it. “Oh!” saith he, “I question whether the life of God be in me at all.” I know some have scouted the idea of a Christian’s being alive, and at the same time doubting his spiritual existence, but however great a paradox it may seem, it is, nevertheless, a mournful truth in our experience.

That spring, I say, is sometimes shut up even to ourselves, and that fountain is so fast sealed, that although it is as really there as when we could drink of it, and the garden is as truly there as when we refreshed ourselves among its spicy beds, yet we cannot find any solace therein. There have been times, when if we could have the world for it, we could not discover a spark of love in our hearts towards God—nay, not a grain of faith. Yet He could see our love when our blind eyes could not, and He could honor our faith even when we feared we had none.

There have been moments when, if heaven and hell depended on our possession of full assurance, we certainly must have been lost, for not only had we no full assurance, but we had scarcely any faith.

Children of light do walk in darkness, there are times when they see not their signs, when for three days neither sun nor moon appears. There are periods when their only cry is, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”

There is little wonder about this when we see how secret, how impalpable, how undiscernible by eye, or touch, or human intellect, is the Spirit of God within us. It is little wonder that sometimes flesh and blood should fail to know whether the life of God is in us at all. “A garden enclosed, a spring shut up, a fountain sealed.”

A second thought is written upon the surface of the text. Here you see not only secrecy but *separation*. That also runs through the three figures. It is a garden but it is a garden enclosed—altogether shut out from the surrounding heaths and commons, enclosed with briars and hedged with thorns, which are impassable by the wild beasts. There is a gate through which the great husbandman himself can come, but there is also a gate which shuts out all those who would only rob the keeper of the vineyard of his rightful fruit.

There is separation in the spring also. It is not the common spring, of which every passerby may drink, it is one so kept and preserved distinct from men, that no lips may touch, no eyes may even see its secret. It is a something which the stranger doesn't interfere with, it is a life which the world cannot give and cannot take away. All through, you see, there is a separateness, a distinctness. If it be ranged with springs, still it is a spring specially shut up, if it be put with fountains, still it is a fountain bearing a particular mark—a king's royal seal, so that all can perceive that this is not a general fountain, but a fountain that has a proprietor, and stands specially by itself alone.

So is it with the spiritual life. It is a separate thing. The chosen of God, we know, were separated in the eternal decree. Their names were written in a different book from the rest of men, the book of life records their names, and none but theirs. They were separated by God in the day of redemption, when Christ redeemed them from among men, out of every kindred and nation and tribe. They are separated day by day by divine providence, for the fiery pillar gives light to them, while it is darkness to the Egyptians. But their separation, so far as they can most clearly see it, must be a separation caused by the possession of the life which others have not.

I fear there are some professed Christians who have never realized this. They are a garden. One could hardly speak ill of their character, their carriage is excellent, their deportment amiable, their good works commend them before men, but still they are not separate from sinners, in vital essential distinction they have little manifest share. Their speech may be half of Canaan but the other half is of Ashdod, they may bring unto God thank-offerings, but there is a niche in their house for Baal too.

They have not yet heard the cry, “Come ye out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her plagues.” Not yet has the mandate of the prophet rung in their ears, “Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from hence; be ye clean that bear the vessels of the LORD.” They are a garden, but they are not a garden walled round.

Oh, how many we have in this day of this kind. They can come to the church, they can go to the world, they can talk as God's people talk, and they can murmur as the rebellious murmur, they understand well the gift of prayer, but they understand little of the secret of the inner life of devotion.

Brethren, if you and I have ever received that third, that noble, that divine principle, the life of God, into our souls, it will be utterly impossible for us to feel at home with the men of the world. No, we shall say, “without the camp” must be my place, bearing His reproach. Sometimes, indeed, we shall not feel at home with the professing church, we shall be constrained to come even out of her, if we would follow the Lord fully.

Ay, and there are sacred seasons when we shall be so enclosed that we shall not be at ease in any society, however select, for our souls will pine for sweet solitude, secret communion, hidden embraces, we shall be compelled to walk alone with Christ. The garden will be shut up even from other gardens, distinct even from other places where Christ walks. Oh, there will be periods with your soul, if it be

renewed, when you must be alone, when the face of man will disturb you, and when only the face of Jesus can be company to you.

I would not give a farthing for that man's spiritual life who can live altogether with others, if you do not sometimes feel that you must be a garden enclosed, that you must enter into your closet, and shut to the door, if you do not feel seasons when the society of your dearest friend is an impediment, and when the face of your sweetest relation would but be a cloud between you and Christ, I cannot understand you.

Be you, O children of Christ, as chaste virgins kept alone for Christ. Gad you not abroad, O my heart, but stay at home with Jesus, your lover, your Lord, your all. Shut up your gates, O my heart, to all company but His. O my sweet well-spring of delights, be shut up to every lip but His, and O you fountain of the issues of my heart, be you sealed only for Him, that He may come and drink, and drink again, and take sweet solace in you, your soul being His, and His alone.

In the third place, it is worthy of a more distinct remark that you have in the text the idea of *sacredness*. The garden enclosed is walled up that it may be sacred to its owner, the spring shut up is preserved for the use of some special person, and the fountain sealed more eminently still bears the mark of being sacred to some distinguished personage.

Travelers have said that they have discovered gardens of Solomon which were of old enclosed where the king privately walked, and they have also found wells of most deliciously cold water, which has been dexterously covered, so that no person unacquainted with the stone in the wall, which might revolve, or might be removed, could have found the entrance to the spring.

At the foot of some lofty range of mountains a reservoir received the cooling streams which flow from melted snows, this reservoir was carefully guarded, and shut out from all common entrance, in order that the king alone might enter there, and might refresh himself during the scorching heats.

Now such is the Christian's heart. It is a spring kept for Christ. Oh, I would that it were always so. Oh, how often do we pollute the Lord's altar! How frequently, my soul, do you let in intruders, alas! how common it is for us to be feasting other friends, and shutting the door against *Him*. How often do we keep Him waiting in the street, while we are entertaining some barbarian who is passing by, who offers us his kiss, but is meanwhile stabbing us with his right hand.

Christian men and women, I appeal to your experience now. Have you not to mourn frequently that you are not so much for Christ as you could wish to be? Though you recognize the truth of the text, "Ye are not your own, but are bought with a price," do you feel its force as you ought to do, in the actions which you perform for Christ? Are they all wholly for Him? Could you take for your motto, "All for Jesus"? Could you feel that, whether you buy or sell, whether you read or pray, whether you go out in the world, or come back to your home, that Jesus only is the one object on whom your heart is set, and for whom your life is spent?

Blessed are they, those virgin souls, who whithersoever the Lamb does lead, from His footsteps ne'er depart! Thrice happy are they who wear the white robe unsoiled by contact with the world! Thrice blessed are they who can say, "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his lips, for his love is better than wine!" Every Christian should feel that he is God's man—that he has God's stamp on him—and he should be able to say with Paul, "From henceforth let no man trouble me, for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus."

But I think there is another idea prominent, and it is that of *security*—security to the inner life. "A garden enclosed." The wild boar out of the wood shall not break in there, neither shall the little foxes spoil the vines. "A fountain shut up." The bulls of Bashan shall not mud her streams with their furious feet, neither shall the wild beast of Lebanon come there to drink. "A fountain sealed." No putrid streams shall foul *her* springs, her water shall be kept clear and living, her fountains shall never be filled up with stones.

Oh, how sure and safe is the inner life of the believer. Satan does not know where it is, for "our life is hid with Christ." The world cannot touch it, it seeks to overthrow it with troubles, and trials, and persecutions, but we are covered with the eternal wings, and are safe from fear of evil. How can earthly

trials reach the Spirit? As well might a man try to strike a soul with a stone, as to destroy a spirit with afflictions.

Surely in the floods of great waters they shall not come nigh unto Him, He has placed us in the secret place of the tabernacles of the Most High, in His pavilion has He hidden us, and in a high rock has He secured us. As a castle preserves the besieged, and as the ramparts keep those who find refuge behind them, even so munitions of stupendous rock your dwelling place shall be. “Who is he that shall harm you,” when God is your protector? “No weapon that is formed against you shall prosper, and every tongue that riseth against thee in judgment shalt thou condemn.”

No temptation shall be able to destroy the purity of the life within, no crushing weights of doubts shall be able to take away the vital principle from that new source of strength. If all the powers of earth and hell could combine, and in their uttermost fury assault the spirit in its weakest hour, that immortal principle must still exist—it would boldly defy them all, and triumph over every one of them, for He who gave it pledged His life for its preservation. The Spirit in the Christian is a spark of the Godhead, and till the Godhead dies the Christian’s inner life can never expire.

We are immortal, even though we be mortal. Within this outward crust that perishes there is a soul which endures, and within that soul which endures there is a something which might outlast even the soul itself—a part of the being of God, the indwelling Holy One of Israel, who is Himself most surely divine. “God dwelleth in us, and we in him.” We are one with Christ, even as Christ is one with the Father, and therefore as imperishable through Christ’s life as Christ Himself. Truly may we rejoice in the fact that “because he lives we shall live also.”

Once more only. I think in looking at the text you receive the thought of unity. You notice, it is but one garden—“a garden enclosed.” “A garden.” It is but *one* spring, and that is shut up, it is but *one* fountain. So the inner life of the Christian is but one. There is the old life which still survives—that old death rather, the body of sin and death, struggling against the law of life which God has put into His members, but this has no kinship with the life divine. It is alone, and knows no relationship with earth.

There is but one life for all Christians, either we have it, or we are dead. There are degrees of operation, but it is the same God. There are differences of administration, but it is the same Spirit that quickens. We may not all of us have “one Lord, one faith, and one baptism.” I wish we had. I would that the two baptisms would cease, and that once again the church would recognize and practice the baptism of believers. But we *do* have one Spirit, otherwise we are not Christians.

I may dissent myself as much as I please from another man who is in Christ—I cannot do that however, without sin, but dissociate myself as I may I must be one with him, for the life that is in him is in me. The same life which quickens me, if I am in Christ, dwells also in him. When I hear strict communion talked of, it reminds me of a little finger which was washed very clean, and therefore thought the rest of the body too filthy to have fellowship with it. So it took a piece of red tape and bound it tightly round itself, that the life-blood might not flow from itself into the rest of the body.

What think you, brethren? Why, as long as that little finger was itself alive, the pulsations and the motions of the blood went from it to all the rest of the body, and that little piece of red tape there was but a ridiculous sham, it did not affect anything, it had no influence, it only enabled the little finger boastfully to glory, and perhaps to earn for itself the sad distinction—“These be they that separate themselves,” but the blood flowed on unimpeded, and the nerves and sinews felt the common life-throb still.

They forgot, when they denied fellowship in the outward act of eating bread and drinking wine, that the essential spirit of communion was far too spiritual to be thus restrained, it had overleaped their boundary and was gone.

The only way in which a Christian can leave off communing with all other Christians is by leaving off being a Christian. Thus can the finger leave off communing with the rest of the body—by rotting away, and no how else, as long as it is alive. Communion is the life-blood of the soul. The Holy Ghost is the Spirit that quickens the body of the church, and that Holy Ghost will go into every member, and you

may try to check Him by church decrees, or to stop Him by your trust-deeds, and your ordinances, that such and such a church shall never be loosed from the bands of ancestral bigotry, but the church's life will beat freely through all the members of the church's fellowship, and communion *will* go to all who are in Christ.

There is but one garden, but one spring, but one sealed fountain, and if you have it in your heart, and I have it in mine, there is a relationship between you and me that is as near as if you and I had the same soul, for you and I have the same Spirit. If you could imagine two bodies quickened by the very same mind, what a close connection would that be! But here are hundreds of bodies, hundreds of souls, quickened by the same Spirit. Brethren, indeed not only ought we to love one another, but the love of Christ constrains us, so that we cannot resist the impulse, we do love each other in Christ Jesus!

II. I shall now need your attention, while with brevity I try to open the second text, which presents a decided contrast, because it deals not so much with the inner life as with the active life which goes abroad into all the deeds of the Christian in the world, and is the natural outgoing of the life within.

First, notice that in contradistinction to our first thought of secrecy you have in the text *manifestation*. "A fountain of gardens." Everybody can see a fountain which runs streaming through many gardens, making deserts fertile. "A well of living waters." Whatever the traveler does not see, when he is riding along on a thirsty day, he is sure to see the fountain, if there be one anywhere he is certain to observe that.

"And streams from Lebanon." So that any passerby in the valley, looking up the side of the mountain, will see by the clusters of trees which skirt the stream where the stream is, or if it be a smaller brook, just as sometimes in Cumberland and Westmoreland, on a rainy day you see the mountain suddenly marked with streaks of silver all down its brown sides, where the brooks are rippling, so the Christian becomes like the streams leaping down Lebanon's steep sides, clearly perceived even from a distance, manifest to the most casual observer.

Now, brethren, this is what you and I ought to be. No man ought to court publicity for his virtue, or notoriety for his zeal, but at the same time, it is a sin to be always seeking to hide that which God has bestowed upon us for the good of others. A Christian is not to be a city in a valley—he is to be "a city set upon a hill," he is not to be a candle put under a bushel, but a candle in a candlestick, giving light to all.

Retirement may be lovely in the eyes of some, and the hiding of oneself is doubtless a blessed thing, but the hiding of *Christ in us* can never be justified, and the keeping back of the truth which is precious to ourselves, is a sin against our kind, and an offense against God.

Those of you who are of a nervous temperament and of retired habits of life must take care that you do not too much indulge your natural propensity, lest you should be useless to the church. Seek in the name of Him who was not ashamed of you to do some little violence to your feelings, and tell others what Christ has told you. Keep not the secret—it is too precious—it too much concerns the vital interests of man.

Speak! if you can, not with trumpet tongue, yet speak with a still small voice. If the pulpit must not be your tribune, if the press may not carry on its wings your words, yet say, as Peter and John did, "Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have give I unto thee." And speak too, as you can—gently to ones, if not loudly to twentys, quietly to twos, if not publicly to scores. By Sychar's well talk to the Samaritan woman, if you cannot on the mountain preach the sermon, in the house, if not in the temple, in the field, if not upon the Exchange, in the midst of your own household, if you cannot in the midst of the great family of man.

At any rate, hide not your talent, wrap it not up. "It is but one," you say. So much the more reason why you should make the greater use of that one. Conceal it not, bring it out, trade with it, and so you shall multiply the talent, and you shall bring in good interest to your Lord and Master. The inner life is secret—mind that you have this inner mystery, but out of the secret emanates the manifest, the darkness becomes the mother of light, from the dark mines comes the blazing coal. Oh! see to it that from all that

is hidden, and secret and mysterious, there comes out the plain and the manifest, that men may see the holiness, truthfulness, and zeal of God in your life.

But clearly enough, again, we have in the second text, in opposition to the separation of the first, *diffusiveness*. The garden was enclosed before, now it is “a fountain of gardens,” the well was shut up, now it is a well of living waters, before we had the fountain sealed, now we have streams dashing down the sides of Lebanon. So a Christian is to be separate in his inner life, but in the outer manifestations of that inner life, he is to mingle for good among his fellow men.

It was usual in Romish countries for women who wished to be specially holy, to make recluses of themselves, and in the Church of St. Roche in Paris, there was a small building erected on the side of the church. The only opening was a little grating, through which the necessities of life were passed. Within this narrow cell, there lived for eighty years, and died, I think at the age of ninety-six, a woman doubtless devout, but certainly superstitious. There she passed her life. The only sound she heard was the tramp of the worshippers upon the church pavement, and the chant of the daily service, but she lived there, thinking she was serving God by being separate from men.

That is not the separation of the New Testament. We are to be separate from sinners, as Christ was, and who ever went among sinners more than He did? We are to be healthy, and by that health separate from the leper, we are to be clean, and by that cleanness, separate from the filthy. But we are to go among them, we are to visit, we are to distribute ourselves what Christ has given to us. If we keep ourselves altogether apart, we shall be useless to our fellow men, we shall be like stagnant pools, we shall grow putrid by degrees. We must let the streams flow abroad, we must seek to give to others what Christ has given to us.

Now, some of you who keep yourselves separate in that sense, may I beg you to see if there is no mission of mercy for you? Go you out among them as physicians in the midst of the sick, as torchbearers in the midst of darkness. Go you out as losers of the bonds among the captives, as openers of prison doors among those that be bound, and He who has given you the true principle within, which is and must be shut up, will bless the outgoings of your zeal, both in the morning and in the evening, and cause that, watering others, your own soul shall be watered too.

Briefly we are obliged to speak on each of these points, but notice thirdly, that in opposition to the sacredness of the first text we have in the second verse an unlimited *freeness*, especially in that last expression—“streams from Lebanon.”

What can be freer than the brook, which leaps along the mountainside? There the bird wets its wings, there the red deer comes to drink, and even that wild beast of Lebanon, of which we read in the Book of the Kings comes there, and without let or hindrance slakes its thirst. What can be freer than the rivulet singing with liquid notes adown the glen? It belongs to no one, it is free to all. Whoever passes by, whether peer or peasant, may stoop there and refresh himself from the mountain stream.

So be it with you, Christian! Carry about with you a piety which you do not wish to keep for yourself. A light loses none of its own luster when others are lit at its flame. Remember, you shall earn riches by giving riches, and in this sense giving away shall be an increase of your wealth.

I know some who are in an ill sense, like fountains shut up. They love the doctrine of election, but there is one doctrine they love better, and that is the doctrine of exclusion. They love to think they are shut in, but they feel quite as much delight that others are shut out. Their conversation is always flavored with the thought of shutting others out.

They are told that in such and such a church, there has been a large increase. Well, they hope they are genuine, by which they mean that they do not believe they are. A young believer begins to tell them something of his joys. Well, they don't like to be too fast in pronouncing an opinion, by which they mean they would not like one more to get in than should, and they are half afraid that perhaps some may overstep the bounds of election and get saved who should not be!

Well, brethren, I love the doctrine of election, I love to think that the garden is enclosed, but I do love in my own life to exemplify the equally precious truth of the freeness of the Gospel, so that if I

speaking to any it shall not be to discourage them, but to encourage them—not to say, “Get you gone!” but “Come and welcome!” Depart, ye cursed,” is nothing to do with me, my business is to say, “Come, ye blessed.”

I would rather go to the door and say, “Come in, thou blessed of the Lord, wherefore standest thou without?” than slam it in a sinner’s face with, “What hast thou to do here?” Nay, we must be shut up in the inner life, but let every wall be broken down as to the outer life. We must be hidden springs within, but let us be sweetly flowing rivulets without, giving drink to every passerby.

And not to detain you long, you will notice that while we had in the other text the idea of security, in connection with that we have here in this text, the idea of *approach*. The garden was shut up—that was to keep it. There are no walls here, so that all may come to it. The streams were shut up before, here it is an open well. The fountain was sealed in the first verse, here it is a flowing stream, which is to teach us this—the way God keeps His people in security is not by shutting out their enemies from attacking them, but while laying them open to temptation and attack, He yet sustains them.

It is not much to preserve oneself behind a wall which cannot be scaled, but to stand where arrows are flying thick as hail, where lances are being pushed with fury, where the sword-cuts are falling on every part, to stand, I say, invulnerable, invincible, immortal, this is to wear a divine life which cannot be conquered by human power. Such is the Christian. We *are* to pray, “lead us not into temptation,” but indeed, we often are tempted, notwithstanding our prayer. God will put us where we must be tempted—put us where we must be tried, because if we are not tried, there is no honor to Him, and if we are not tempted, then where is the glory to the grace that delivers us out of temptations?

The Lord does not put His plants into a hothouse, as some gardeners do, no, He sets them out in the open air, and if the frost is coming, He says, “Ah! but no frost can kill them, and they will be all the sturdier in the summer for the cold in the winter.” He does not shelter them either from the heat of the sun, or from the cold of night, for in this world we must have tribulation, and we must have much of it too, for it is through much tribulation we inherit the kingdom.

But what God does to His people is this. He keeps them *in* tribulation, preserves them in temptation, and brings them joyfully out of all their trials. So, Christian, you may rejoice in your security, but you must not think that you are not to be attacked, you are a stream from Lebanon, to be dashed down many a cascade, to be broken over many a rough rock, to be stopped up with many a huge stone, to be impeded by many a fallen tree, but you are to dash forward with the irresistible force of God, sweeping everything away, till you find at last the place where shall be your perfect rest.

And last of all, in opposition to the unity of which I spoke, we have in our second text great *diversity*. You have “a fountain,” not of a garden but “of gardens,” you have a well, but it is a well of living waters, you have not a stream, but streams—streams from Lebanon. So a Christian is to do good in all sorts of ways, and his fruits are to be of many kinds, he is to be like the trees of paradise, which bear twelve manner of fruits. The Christian is to have all sorts of graces. “Whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good repute,” he is to have all these.

It is an old proverb that a man may have too many irons in the fire, but it depends upon what fire it is, for if it is God’s fire, put all the irons in it. A man may attempt too much they say—but not for Christ. If you should attempt great things, and have great faith, you shall succeed in all that you attempt.

There seems to be a fear among some Christian men either of doing too much themselves, or else of letting other people do too much, and I know some to whom that text might *almost* be applied, “They have the key of the kingdom of heaven but they neither enter themselves, and they that would they hinder.” Not content to refuse the burden for themselves, they will not even touch it with one of their little fingers, but they are afraid that others shall carry the burden either.

Well, we are not afraid as these are. Blessed be God, if there is a trench to be filled up, let us struggle which shall lead the way, if there is a rampart to be climbed, if there is no other man to throw the irons over with the scaling-ladder, let your minister attempt the deed, and lead the van, for he is well assured

that there are many here who would jostle with him and say, “Let me come first, let me serve my Master, let me live or let me die, if I may but glorify Him.”

What! bring forth for Christ a little shriveled cluster upon the topmost bough—a cluster which the very birds of heaven will not deign to touch, because it is too little even for their appetites? No, rather let us have every bough weighed down with clusters, like those of Eshcol, which will take two ordinary men to carry, but which we can bear in rich profusion, because the life of the Spirit of God is in us.

We are a race of little doers, of little givers, of little thinkers, of little believers. O God, raise us up again giants in these days, give us again the consecrated men who shall stand upon the sword like the old Roman and say, “For God I devote myself—to Christ I give body, soul, and spirit, and if I am offered up upon the sacrifice of your faith, I joy and rejoice with you all.”

Oh! if the fountain, the secret fountain, were better seen to, I think there would be more of these outward streams, and if the sealed well were better guarded, we would see more of these rapid streams from Lebanon, which would make glad the people of God, and the world at large.

And now, how many of you have the secret spring within you? If your soul is not renewed by grace you cannot do good. “Except a man is born again, he cannot *see* the kingdom of God.” No man enters fully into discipleship with Christ till the water as well as the Spirit has been reverently received, “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit you cannot *enter* the kingdom of heaven.”

But these two things being done, being born of water and of the Spirit, go you forth to show to others the mystery, the *fellowship* of the mystery—to make all men know that God has appeared unto us in Christ Jesus, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their iniquities. Preach of Christ when you know Christ, but not till then. Let the streams flow out where you have the inner fountain, but not till then. Sad reflection!

There are some of you that have it not. Oh! if you have it not, you perish. You cannot get it of yourselves. He alone can give it. You are in His hands to give it to you. Oh! may your longings end in groanings today, and may you groan to God, “Lord! renew me, Lord, cause me to be born again!” And those groanings will be proofs that He has begun the good work, and those longings shall be evidence that there is a well in you, though *it* is a well shut up—a well shut up even from yourself.

God grant that you may seek and find through Jesus Christ, and to Him be glory, forever and ever. Amen.

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