

## THE CHIEF OF SINNERS

NO. 530

A SERMON

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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON

*“Sinners; of whom I am chief.”*

*1 Timothy 1:15*

WHO among all the Scriptural writers can compare with Paul in the fullness of his testimony to the grace of God? Upon the doctrines of grace, upon the experience of grace, upon everything that has to do with the exceeding abundant grace of God through our Lord Jesus Christ, Paul is the mighty master and the great teacher.

If it were right to look at him from an exclusively human point of view, and speak of his genius rather than his inspiration, I might say of him that so mighty, so clear, so eloquent a teacher of truth has never existed since the days of our Lord Jesus Christ. Though Augustine was a particularly bright star, and Calvin in after generations rivaled, if he did not even excel Augustine, Paul far excels both in the brilliance with which he exhibits every quality of grace, and grace in everything that has a good quality.

Or to use another figure, Paul towers aloft above them all in the great mountain range, lofty though full many of their summits be. One reason for his clearness about grace was that he was himself a very pattern and model of its power. In him God had expressly, as much as in any other man, and perhaps more, shown forth the super-abundant power of His love in passing by transgression, iniquity, and sin—and in making the very man who had been a ringleader of mischief—to become the leader of the hosts of the Lord.

Paul calls himself in our text the chief of sinners. It is possible that he literally exceeded every other sinner, dared more, and sunk deeper in crime than any of his fellows among the sons of men. If so, let no man that lives despair of mercy. If the gate of heaven is wide enough for the chief of sinners to go through, then there must in that respect be room enough for those who must be less than the chief, who, though very great, yet cannot be quite so great as he.

I say, though I hardly think so, that it is just possible that, taking certain circumstances into consideration, Paul really was in such sense the very chief of sinners. And yet I hardly think so, because he himself in another place calls himself less than the least of all saints, which was the modest apprehension of one who in another place affirmed that he was not a whit behind the very chief of the apostles.

Might it not then rather have been that his deep view of his own sinfulness, his clear sense of his guilt, made him consider himself to be the chief of sinners, though, probably, there have been tens of thousands even greater than he?

Tonight my business is *to find out the chiefs of sinners and endeavor to describe them. And then, to inquire how it is that so often the very chiefs of sinners are saved.*

**I.** First, dear friends, as Saul hunted out believers, I have, tonight, TO TRY AND HUNT OUT THE CHIEFS OF SINNERS.

Now who are they? They come under various characters and may be classified in different lists. We will begin with *those who directly oppose themselves to God and to His Christ.* These are chief among sinners. Paul did join their ranks. He set himself determinately against the name of Christ and thought with himself that he ought to do very much against that name.

Now those who directly attack the person of God come, first, under the head of *blasphemers.* Paul says he was such. He had, no doubt, used expressions quite as strong as those sometimes used by unbelieving Jews when they are much irritated by Christians. He had said some foul things about the

*impostor crucified* upon Mount Calvary—things, perhaps, more vile than he ever cared to remember, much less to repeat.

He had been exceeding mad, and when men are mad they say exceedingly mad things. He had been a blasphemer and a blasphemer challenges the vengeance of the Almighty with no common effrontery. Have I one here whose mouth is foul with oaths? Has there strayed into this house of prayer tonight, one who has cursed God, and dared in his angry moments to lift his puny hand of rebellion, and imprecate a curse from the Most High God?

Have I the misfortune—nay, I will not call it so—have I the hopeful privilege of talking to one who has spoken against Jesus of Nazareth, and who is determined to quench His religion, or to oppose it to the utmost of his power? Is it so? Then indeed, friend, you are one of the chief of sinners, and I am glad that you are here, that I may tell you that there is mercy even for such as you are, for “All manner of sin *and blasphemy* shall be forgiven unto men.” No matter how often or how foully you have cursed the Most High, and damned yourself, He will not damn you if you will turn from the error of your ways and seek mercy through the blood of Him whom you have despised.

Others come under the same class. For instance, we must here put the *infidel*, for although his words may not take the form of blasphemy, yet the very thought that there is no God is blasphemy, and he that dares to vent that thought is not only a fool, but one of the chief of sinners.

And so you have tried to stultify your conscience and to silence its monitions by pretending to believe that there is no God! You have tried to rake up the stale arguments of Tom Paine and of Voltaire, and you have chuckled when one who called himself a bishop of God’s heritage dared to vent some strong things against the Book of His divine inspiration.

You know in your heart that there is a God. Your conscience tells you that He is a just God. You expect to be punished for your sins. That start the other night when you were alone, that cold shiver when someone spoke of death—all these prove that your infidelity is not so stout and brave a thing as you have dreamed it was.

A poor, craven, cowardly thing it is, that turns pale at a sickbed, and flies, with coward paleness on its cheek, when once it thinks of judgment to come. Oh! if you be here, you Atheist, you Deist, you disbeliever in Christ Jesus, you are one of the chief of sinners, and I am glad you are here that I may tell you that a God of love waits to embrace you, and that He still declares this to be true—that He is able to save to the uttermost all them who come unto God by Him.

Fling down your weapons, man! You cannot fight the Most High! End this unequal quarrel. Have neither truce nor parley, but consider how you may be at peace with Him. The hand of His love is stretched out to accept the hand of your submission. Oh! be you reconciled to God through the death of His Son.

And here I ought to include *those who hold views derogatory of the Deity and the person of Christ*. Faithfulness to you, my hearers, compels me to put down the *Socinian*. I will not call him Unitarian, for we all hold the unity of the Godhead. Trinitarians, but Unitarians are we still. Far otherwise the Socinian and the Arian—I put them down here—the men who say that Christ is not God, that the Redeemer of the world was but the son of Mary, that He who walked the waters of the deep, chained the winds, cast out evil spirits, and made even Hades startle with His voice when the soul of Lazarus came back—that He was but a prophet, a creature, a mere man! Surely, sir, you are one of the chief of sinners to have talked thus of Him who is “very God of very God,” the express Image of His Father’s person!

But even to you is Jesus gracious and He bids you still believe in Him. You shall bow the knee to Him one day, and worship Him, for “At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess that he is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” Bow your knee now, and kiss the Son lest He be angry and you perish from the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little.

He bids you come to Him, then will He blot out your sins like a cloud, and like a thick cloud your iniquities. The chiefs of sinners, we are sure, are found among those who directly attack the person of JEHOVAH’s Christ, yet even to these is the Gospel of salvation sent.

Another group of princes and peers in the realm of evil may be described as *those who attack Christ's people and who seek to pervert them from the right way*. This sin pressed heavily upon the conscience of Paul. He had not only put them in prison, which was bad enough, but he had taken the saints into the synagogue, and probably they had been beaten before the assembly, and compelled to blaspheme.

You, perhaps, know what that means—compel them to blaspheme. The Roman way of doing it was to say, “Curse Christ.” Often did the Roman Emperor command the martyrs to curse Christ, and you remember Polycarp’s answer?—“How can I curse Him? Sixty years have I known Him. He never did me a displeasure, and I cannot and I will not curse Him.”

Then the whip was applied, or the hand was held over burning coals, or the flesh was pinched with hot irons, and then the question was put again—“Will you curse Christ now?” Paul says that he, though probably using milder means, compelled the professors of Christ’s faith to blaspheme.

And there may be some such here—the husband who persecutes his wife for Christ’s sake. The father who charges his child, upon his obedience, never to go to the sanctuary of the Lord again. The master who plagues his servant, mocks and jeers, and can never be content except when he is saying hard things against him.

Have I not many here who still practice the device of cruel mockings? You abhor Christ and His people. You fight against God in His little ones. Beware! beware! for this is a high sin! Nothing puts a man on his mettle like meddling with his children, “Touch me, if you will,” the father says, “if you are a man, smite me if you dare.” But touch his children, and the blood is in his cheek, and the mettle is up, and there is no knowing what a man will do when he sees the offspring of his own heart ill-treated.

So God will avenge His own elect that cry day and night unto Him, though He bear long with them. To you who thus rank with the chiefs of sinners, I say that Paul the persecutor “obtained mercy,” and so may you. “This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom” *persecutors* rank among the chief.

There is another group whom you will all acknowledge to be of the chiefs of sinners—*those who have sinned foully in the world’s esteem*—violating the instincts of nature, and outraging the common sense of morality and decency. It scarcely needs that I should mention the harlot who infests the streets and pollutes society. Or that worse wretch, the whoremonger, who first leads her astray.

I speak plain words, such as I find in Scripture. Such God shall judge when He comes at the last day, for this temptation is a deep ditch, and the abhorred of the Lord shall fall into it. This crying sin of our land needs to be sternly rebuked. Other sins are without the body, but this pollutes both body and soul, and often sends down to generations yet unborn a horrid curse—at the very thought of which the soul is sick!

Of all sins, young man, young woman, take care that you stand aloof from this! Pass not by the house of the strange woman if you love your life, for her gates lead down to death, even to the chambers of the damned! Yet, glory be to divine grace, there is mercy, mercy for such—and multitudes of these chief of sinners have become as the very brightest stars in heaven—snatched by the strong arm of Jesus from the miry clay and out of that horrible pit. Clothed, and in their right mind, they have gone to sit at the feet of Jesus, to sing of redeeming love.

There was that Mary, that Mary whom Jesus had forgiven. Well might she love much! and many a loving spirit do I know, and there are some very dear to God’s church here, who love their Lord, and often shame some of us who stand more prominent than they who once drank deep of that bitter cup, and once went to the very depths of that sin.

Publish it in your streets! Tell it wherever you meet with the most loathsome and most defiled, Jesus is able to save to the uttermost. He was the friend of publicans and sinners. “This man receiveth sinners,” is Jesus Christ’s motto. Other men reject the sinner—they turn aside from her—woe unto her if she come between the wind and their nobility.

But “*This man receiveth sinners*”—receives them to His heart, and to His bosom, to His kingdom, and to His throne. You chiefs of sinners, rejoice that if you believe in Jesus there is mercy for you!

And surely I may find another class of the chiefs of sinners among *those who have become not only sinners themselves, but the tutors to others in the school of evil*. Satan has a university, and there are many who have fairly won their diplomas as first-class professors there. They have learned to sin with a high hand and with an outstretched arm, until they not only sin themselves, but delight in the sins of others.

Have we not seen the old drunkard, and how he gloats when he sees another man won to the army of the bestial! Have you not seen the eyes of some base old demon in a country village twinkle when he sees that fair-haired boy for the first time pander to the infamous customs in which he has long reveled? Have we not known some of those foul-mouthed masters of all baseness, whose very talk is enough to make a whole parish sick with the pestilence of vice—men that you had rather go over hedge and ditch seventy miles than meet!

There are such. You have seen them, I dare say. And mark you, *when that being is a woman*, if anything it is worse then! The softer sex, usually by far more apt to teach, instills the secret vice of evil, and wraps it up in insidious enchantments, by reason of which many a strong man has fallen when Delilah has been his charmed inveigler and tutor in sin!

I may not, oh! I hope I may not have one such being within earshot now. Yet, it is hardly possible, amidst the thousands that this house now contains, but what there must be some of you who roll sin under your tongue as a sweet morsel, and talk of it with a gusto till you tickle the fancies of others, and lead them into defilements which otherwise they never might have touched—artfully conceal the hook while putting the bait in the young man’s way, and thrusting the knowledge of new vices upon those who should have shunned them!

Oh, you are the chief of sinners with a vengeance, and hung up like Haman upon the lofty gallows, shall you be for everlasting execration if you repent not! Yet, O sovereign grace! how can I tell Your heights? O sea of love, how can I ever fathom Your depths! There is even mercy proclaimed for such. Turn you, turn you, why will you die, O house of Israel? Why will you perish?

***“While the lamp holds out to burn  
The vilest sinner may return.”***

I find no exception in the offer of mercy, you are included in the invitation of welcome, “Whosoever will, let him come and take of the water of life freely.” “Though your sins be as scarlet they shall be as wool; though they be red like crimson they shall be whiter than snow.” Here is a full, a free, a perfect, and a complete pardon for all your past offenses.

Though I have not yet finished the list, I would rather change the note for a minute. I have another class of the chiefs of sinners to find out. I, myself, belong to them, and I therefore speak with feeling. In this section we include *those who have had much light, and yet have sinned against it; who have been taught better, who have had a knowledge of the way of truth, and yet have turned aside to crooked paths*.

To have been nursed upon the lap of piety, and dandled upon the knee of Christian affection, is no small privilege. To be lighted to one’s cradle by the lamps of the sanctuary, and to be hushed to sleep with a lullaby in which the name of Jesus comes as a sweet refrain—this involves an awful responsibility.

No man can go to hell over a mother’s tears without accumulated vengeance. no son can rebel against a father’s affectionate and tearful admonitions without perishing ten times more frightfully than as if he had never been thus privileged. Ah! my hearers, alas! alas! for the hardness of your hearts—there are many such here now.

I would charitably suppose that very few of you belong to the other classes I have been speaking of, but the great mass of you who are unconverted belong to this class. Do you remember, young man, how

your mother put her arms around your neck and wooed you to turn to Christ? Do you remember that little Bible when you first went to school, and that verse she inscribed as a motto—she watered it with her tears as she wrote it. Do you recollect those letters she addressed to you? She is now in heaven, is she? Then let them be the more sacred to your recollection. And do you remember that Sunday school teacher? Was he not a father to you? Was not that excellent woman who used to adjure you to turn from the error of your ways, a very mother to you in Israel?

Do you not remember, young women, some of you, the earnest exhortations that my beloved sister, Mrs. Bartlett, has addressed to you? If ever there was a woman that could, under God, move the heart and soul, she is that woman. And yet, there are some of you that listen to her voice and yet you are unconverted! You have the light shining upon your eye-balls and yet they are sightless still. You live in the land of mercy, where its bell summons you to come to its assembly of grace, but yet you still will not come! You have the light, but you shut your eyes against it!

Remember, young man, when you sin you sin with seven-fold atrocity, because you know better. Nay, seventy sins are rolled into one in your sin of daring deliberate willfulness. Within that egg of sin there sleeps the seed of your greater damnation, because you know the right and yet you choose the evil.

Have I not now the privilege of speaking to some whose old familiar associations are awakened up by these feeble glances at your life story? Do you not feel just now as if you were kneeling down again in that little room, and heard the native accents of your mother's prayer, while your lips hardly refrain from repeating afresh the words of your own prayer which she taught your lips to frame before she put you to your rest?

Do you not remember it? And do you not remember sometimes when your conscience was awakened, and your heart was almost broken, and your soul said, "I could almost be a Christian," but you excused yourself with a frivolous delay—"Go thy way for this time; when I have a more convenient season I will send for you"?

But alas! that *convenient season* has never yet come. And your conscience grows seared. Drugged with the opiates of sin, you grow less and less tender of the affectionate appeal. Woe worth the day of your visitation, for it shall be cloudy indeed, unless you turn at the voice of reproof. But to you, O chief of sinners, is the word of this salvation sent.

*There are those, too, who sit under an earnest ministry and yet go on in sin*—they surely belong to the class of chief sinners. O, my hearers, how I would to God that I could be as earnest with you as I want to be. The Lord knows there are times when I am not in the pulpit, when I feel that I could weep you to a Savior.

But sometimes when standing here the influence of this mighty throng seems rather to distract me, than to bring my whole soul into play. And yet, the Lord knows how earnestly I long for you in the heart of the Lord Jesus Christ. I have not shunned to declare unto you the whole counsel of God as far as I have known it. I know I have failed in knowledge, but never in honesty. Yet, I know there are some of you who come here, and yet you live in sin.

The world says, "So-and-so goes to Spurgeon's Tabernacle," and they expect you to be better for going there, and yet they say, "Ah, how they drink!" or, "Hear how they will swear!" Where are you? You used to have your shop open on Sunday morning, but it is shut now. I am glad you have got as far as that. Still let me tell you, you only compound with sin, and make a covenant with hell, if you outwardly pay respect to the Sabbath and secretly indulge in other profanities.

Drunkenness may destroy you without Sabbath-breaking. It is not giving up one sin, it is giving up the whole. It is not the barter of one sin for another, to your own quiet conscience, which will satisfy justice or rescue you from destruction. Man, there must be a divorce between you and your sins. Not a mere separation for a season, but a clear divorce.

Cut off the right arm. Pluck out the right eye, and cast them from you, or else you cannot enter into eternal life. Are there not some of you who have for years listened to my ministry, and yet you are none

the better, and some of you are rather the worse, I fear. You are getting Gospel-hardened by it all. Well, by God's grace, there is mercy for you yet.

You are the chief of sinners, but the red flag is not run up yet—the white flag still floats mast-high—the flag of invitation—the flag of love—the flag of mercy. Come to it. Come to Jesus now. You may never have another invitation. Soon may this tongue be cold in death, or your ears may be deaf forever, like clay-cold marble. Turn you, at this rebuke, for if after being often reproved, you harden your necks, you shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy. To you, even to the chief of sinners, is the word of this salvation sent.

Drawing the bow at a venture, there is another class I would single out—*those who are gifted from their childhood with a tender conscience*. There are men and women who seem to be born without a conscience. So hard and dull of impression are they, that if they have any faculty of distinguishing between good and evil, it is as though they had eyes and saw not, and ears but they hear not. And does it ever speak, the voice is so weak, you can never hear it.

But there are those, on the other hand, who have a naturally quick understanding, a delicate sensitiveness, a ready perception of right and wrong, a strong and vigorous conscience. They never do sin without being aware of what they are doing, and they are troubled and pestered, as they say, about it. They cannot sleep at night after they have been committing any serious breach of propriety. Even when they are walking the streets, or when they are busy, they are quickly startled at the recoil of their own transgressions, and oftentimes there is a certain uneasiness and fretfulness which comes over them, because they are conscious that they are not pursuing the right course.

Now, if you are gifted with this tender conscience, and yet you constantly violate it, and directly act in the face of your own convictions, you are the chief of sinners. But still, still Paul the chief of sinners found mercy—and so may you.

Yet again—if you have had warning in sickness, and especially if on your sick bed you have vowed unto the Lord that you would turn to Him, then you are covenant-breakers, *you that violate vows made to the Most High*—you must also be put among the first and foremost of transgressors. When the cholera was here some nine years ago, you vowed that if God would spare you things would be different. He did spare you, but things are no better now than they were before.

When the fever prostrated you, what promises you made, and where are they now? You have lied unto the Eternal God! Is it little for you that you should have promised and not have paid—have vowed unto Him and not performed? Now, sinner, you are a liar, as well as aught besides. You are a rogue, a dishonest one against God, with whom the compact was made. But the invitation is still freely tendered unto you—come unto the Lord Jesus Christ, and believe in Him, and you shall be made whole.

The chief of sinners comprises so numerous a body, I believe every one of us must come in the list in some shape or other, and I know this—if ever you and I are saved, if God shall give us very great mercy, we shall feel that we were the greatest sinners.

When Paul saw how kindly his Master treated him, it seemed to break his heart—“What! did I ever curse that Christ who has blessed me? He that is so rich in loving kindness, did I ever spurn Him?” Verily, now I do think I have had the blackest sight of sin when I have had the brightest sight of mercy. When my dear Lord and Master has privileged me, by allowing me to come near Him in prayer, and I have felt His love shed abroad in my heart—I have felt as if I could bring imprecations upon myself for ever having been a traitor to Him.

What! could I spit in Your face, my Redeemer and my Lord? Could I ever crown Your head with thorns, which now it shall be my life's task to crown with jewels? What! did You love me so, did You forgive me so, and could I ever speak against You? It is great mercy that sets forth our great sin, for we only come to reckon ourselves the chief of sinners when we see the great love of God.

So then, without amplifying any longer, I will put the invitation thus—whoever among you have sinned against the Most High, you are all on a level, and the invitation of mercy is put to you, each and

all, and this is the Gospel—"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, he that believeth not shall be damned." May you be led to believe and to profess your faith according to God's way.

**II.** Well, now, but a few minutes remain to me, and I will endeavor to be brief while I try to answer the question, WHY THOSE WHO ARE PROVERBIALY THE CHIEF OF SINNERS ARE VERY FREQUENTLY SAVED.

One reason is *to illustrate divine sovereignty*. There is no jewel of His crown of which God is more jealous than His sovereignty. "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion."

Now, when He saves the harlot, when He calls the persecutor by sovereign grace, then all men see that this is the finger of God, and that He dispenses His love and kindness according to the purposes of His own absolute and uncontrollable Will. He chooses the chief of sinners that He may show to all men that He will take the base things of the world, and the things which are not, and things which are despised, to bring to nought the things that are—that no flesh may glory in His presence.

Another reason is *that He may show His great power*. Oh! how hell is made angry when some great champion falls! When their Goliaths are brought down, how the Philistines take to their heels! How heaven rings with songs when some chief of sinners becomes a trophy of the divine power! And how men talk, with glib tongues, of the great and mighty deeds of God, when the drunkard and the swearer, and the prostitute are washed and made saints!

What a noise it made at Elstow, when they said at the public-house on the green—"You know John Bunyan?" "Oh! yes, we know him. You mean the fellow who was always first at a game of tip-cat—he that could always drink the longest. Oh, yes, we know him." "Well, do you know, he was preaching over at Bedford yesterday?" "What!" says one, "preaching at Bedford? I would as soon have thought of the devil preaching as John Bunyan! What a wonderful thing the Gospel must be, to change such a man as that!"

And yet it was true and John Bunyan, who frequented the ale-house, who knew more about the county jail, and more about the Celestial City that is on the other side the flood, than most men of his times. It shows the power and the sovereignty of God when such men are saved.

And next, *how it shows His grace*! When I have sometimes sat to see inquirers, I have seen a number come in one after the other who have been born and brought up in the midst of piety, and I have blessed God for them. But by and by there has come in one whose tale has been terrible to tell, and it was not easily told—but with many sighs, and sobs, and tears, yet, when it was disclosed, there have sat two weeping together—I scarcely know which wept more—he who wept because of grace illustrated in him, and the other because he saw in another the grace which he had tasted for himself.

Oh! when great sinners tell out their tales, they are so straightforward, so explicit! There is no muddle about it, no questions about when they were converted, or how, but there they are. They say—"Ah! sir, it must be divine. Such a change has been wrought in me that nothing could have thus turned the lion to a lamb, the raven to a dove, but the grace of God." In great sinners, then, the grace of God is made conspicuous.

Again—great sinners are very frequently called by God *for the purpose of attracting others*. You know that when some great transgressor finds mercy, straightway many hearts say—"Ah! then there is mercy for me." I am glad, I am very glad that there was a Manasseh, that there was David, that there was a Saul of Tarsus, and I am glad they are in the Bible.

The wicked cut the stories out, and they laugh at us and say, "These are your saints!" Ah! we can bear that, while we can say—"No, this is what they were by nature, but they were saved, for all that, by the distinguishing grace of God, who saves men through faith, and not by their works."

Now, I believe that that case of David has been a solace to thousands, if not to millions. The hurt he did in his lifetime was certainly very great, but the incalculable benefit which has flown to the universal church from the penitential Psalms—puts altogether into the shade the damage which the fall of David did to the church in his own time.

Not that there is less shame to the sinner, but that there is more glory to the Savior, where sin abounded in the first instance, and grace did much more abound in the sequel. We can well bear this spot, for the sake of the light which comes from the sun. Sinners, all of you, if you would put yourselves among the little ones, if your lives have never been grossly vile (I am glad if they have not), but let the fact that the great sinner enters and is washed, attract you.

I have heard it said of the elephant, that sometimes before he crosses a bridge, he puts his trunk and perhaps one foot, upon it. He needs to know if it is quite safe, for he is not going to trust his bulky body to things that were built only for horses and men. Well, after he has tried it, if he finds it strong enough, away he goes and his great carcass is carried right across the stream.

Now, suppose you and I sat on the other side and said we were afraid the bridge would not bear us! Why, how absurd our unbelief would be. So when you see a great elephantine sinner, like the apostle Paul, go lumbering over the bridge of mercy, and not a timber creaks, and the bridge does not even strain under the load—why, then methinks you may come rushing in a crowd and say—“It will bear us, if it will bear him, it will carry us across, if it can take the chief of sinners to heaven!”

And then, dear friends, the saving of the chiefs of sinners is useful, *because, when they are saved they generally make the most fiery zealots against sin.* Have we not a proverb that, “The burnt child dreads the fire”? I noticed my host, on one preaching excursion, particularly anxious about my candle. Now, as everybody ought to know how careful I am, I was a little surprised, and I put the question to him why he should be so wonderfully particular. “I had my house burned down once, sir,” he said.

That explained it all. No man is so much afraid of fire as he, and they who have been in sin and know the mischief of it, protest against it the most loudly. They can speak experientially. They talk of what they have tasted and handled to their own smart and ruin!

Oh! what revenge there seems to be in the apostle’s heart against his sin! He seems to bring out the great battle-axes and weapons of war against it—and wherever he can see sin, he smites right and left—anywhere. Persecution, death, martyrdom—all these are nothing to him if he can but get a blow at sin. He always seems to have the gun charged to the muzzle, and no devil comes in his way but what he has a shot at him. There are no ramparts or hellish bulwarks but what Paul thinks he must take them, whether they are in Asia, or Italy, or Spain. This great knight-errant of the cross is everywhere the great antagonist of sin, and so must those always be who are saved out of great iniquity.

And then, again, *they always make the most zealous saints.* I have said, and it will come true, though I am no prophet nor the son of a prophet—I have said that the Lord will deliver this city, and deliver this age, not by ministers from colleges—not by the sons of gentlemen or the inheritors of titles, but the men who will yet shake London, and bring about a religious revival, will come from St. Giles’s, and from Whitechapel, from the slums, and from the dens and kens of infamy. God will take such men by and by, and He is beginning to work it.

There are one or two names that will come to your recollection—illustrious names in connection with the preaching in theatres. God will raise up more such, and you shall see that when human wisdom and creature devices have done their utmost to make the church of God the dull lethargic thing it now is, God, in the plenitude of His might, will raise up some who have tasted that He is gracious, and have drunk deeply of the cup of His love, that will turn the world upside down.

It is all an idle and a wicked tale, that our places of worship in the City of London cannot be supported. I see them building new places in the suburbs, and leaving the City itself destitute of the means of grace. Were the right men found, the churches in the City of London might be as crowded as those in the suburbs.

Only put into their pulpits men who know the guilt of sin, and who know that Gospel in which is revealed the righteousness of God—men who know and preach Christ—then the effect would be palpable. Give us the men who do not talk as botanists might do upon botany, when they had not seen a flower, or as some might speak of various lands who have never traveled a league.



But give us men who know experientially those things that they labor to teach, and let their tongues be set on fire by the Holy Ghost, and you shall then see London as full of the glory of the Lord as was Jerusalem of old. May this come to pass. May it begin to come to pass tonight. May the Lord find out, as He moves among this mass, some stray, strange being who has given himself up to desperation, to work mischief with both his hands—and may He say to him tonight, “I have need of you, and I will have you.”

Oh, mighty grace, do it tonight! He will have you, man! Your will must be subdued. Your pride must come down. That proud temper of yours shall yield. “I am your Master. I made you. I bought you with My blood, and do you think I will lose you? I am mighty to save, do you think that you can overcome Me? I came forth on purpose to redeem you. Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?” O that the Lord would speak thus personally to some individual now!

And now, I have done when I have just put this before you. My hearers, here is life and death. If you despise Christ, there is death for you. If you turn aside from the love and mercy which streams from the wounds of Jesus, the angry God shall find you in your sin, and cut you in pieces, and there is none that can deliver you. If you go on in your sin, you will soon meet with death.

But a few Sundays ago, we had to mark how sudden death thinned our ranks. Sometimes it is a working man. There was one, you know, some weeks ago, who lost his life in building the great bridge at Blackfriars, who was often a hearer here. And there is scarcely a day passes but we hear of someone gone out of this great assembly.

We are going one after another, and the pastor will go soon, but perhaps ere he goes he may see many of you carried to your graves—he cannot tell. But oh! wherefore will you remain without God and without Christ? If you had a lease of your lives you might go on in sin until the lease was out. But even then you would be foolish to be enemies to God, and enemies to yourselves so long. But as you may die today, God help you to repent tonight.

On the other hand, I set mercy before you—no man can say he has not been invited—no soul can say that I did not set the gate wide open enough. You are without excuse in the day of judgment. When the trumpet peals through heaven and earth, and awakes the slumbering dead—when Christ shall come in the clouds to judge the earth, I must give an account of the Gospel I have preached to you tonight.

I would to God I could preach it better, but I cannot. You know what it is. You are without excuse. You have been invited. You have been entreated. You have been bidden to come to the marriage supper. All things are ready. The oxen and the fatlings are killed—come to the supper. You who are in the highways and hedges, we would compel you to come in, that God’s house may be filled. Come.

“The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him who heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.” But if you come not, I must be a swift witness against you at the last. I am clear of your blood. I am clear of the blood of you all.

God save you, for Christ’s sake. Amen.

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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](http://www.spurgeongems.org).