

KICKING AGAINST THE PRICKS NO. 709

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON SUNDAY MORNING, SEPTEMBER 9, 1866,
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

*“It is hard for you to kick against the pricks.”
Acts 9:5.*

THIS expression is highly characteristic of the Savior from *its figurative form*. While He was on earth, He spoke to the people in parables; and speaking out of heaven, in this instance, He still adopts the parabolic style, as He did in Patmos, when He revealed Himself to John as walking among the golden candlesticks. Here is a parable wrapped up in a few words—the parable of the ox that was willful, and being stricken with the ox-goad kicked against it, and drove the ox-goad still deeper into its flesh—a very instructive simile, very natural and unstrained like the rest of the Savior’s parables, and very full of meaning. It is plain, direct, appropriate, simple, and self-explaining, like the other parables of our Lord. I recognize in the speaker, who addressed Saul of Tarsus, the man to whom the common people listened gladly, because of the interesting manner in which He delivered His teachings. The great Master of simple metaphor, who here addresses the rebellious Saul, clings to His chosen style, and continues to clothe truth in allegory. He does not say to Saul, “It is injurious to you to resist My appeals,” that would be mere abstract fact, but He puts it more pictorially, “It is hard for you to kick against the pricks.”

Another feature of our Lord’s character is very manifest in this sentence. Observe *the tenderness of the rebuke*. It is not, “Oh, Saul, it is wicked, ungenerous, and mischievous of you to resist Me.” There is no rebuke of that kind; unless it may be implied in the expression, “Why do you persecute Me?” But the Savior leaves Saul’s conscience to say that, and does not utter it Himself. Nor did Jesus say, “Saul, Saul, it is very hard for My people to bear your cruelties,” nor does He add, “It is very provoking to Me, and I shall before long strike you in My wrath.” No, it is not, “It is hard for Me,” but “It is hard for *you*,” as if the thoughts of the Savior were so set upon His poor, erring, but ignorant child that He felt, “As to what you do to My cause, I will say nothing; but look what you are doing to yourself; you are losing joy and comfort; you are injuring your own soul; you are sowing for yourself the seeds of future sorrow. It is hard for *you*.” Who but the Savior could have spoken after this fashion? I do not believe that the most tender-hearted of the Savior’s ministers have been accustomed to look upon persecutors in that light. If we hear of tyrants breathing out threats and slaughter against God’s people, we very readily say, “What a wicked thing! What a cruel and unrighteous thing!” But how seldom do we exclaim, “What a sad thing it is for the persecutor!” We add, perhaps, with a little sober vindictiveness, “What a terrible fate will be that man’s!” But we feel but little deep pity for one whose terrible case it is to be an enemy to the sinner’s friend. Alas, what a bitter portion the poor, ignorant, offending persecutor has chosen; may we be Christ-like enough to have pity upon him! The Savior looks at sin through the glass of compassion; we often look upon it through the lens of Pharisaic pride. Jesus, in the words before us, shines forth as the very same Savior who said to the woman taken in adultery, “Neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more!” It was a gentle voice which said, “It is hard for you to kick against the pricks.”

We shall ask you to commence this discourse by praying that He who said, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?” may be pleased to speak to some in this great assembly; and may He who turned the enemy into a friend do the same wonder with some men and women here! People of God, breathe that prayer! There is no need for you to speak it; the searcher of all hearts knows your desire. Why should not gracious wonders be worked while we have such a God to deal with? There are many reasons why it should be our desire and our prayer. The more grievous the offender may have been the greater will be the triumph of divine grace in his conversion, and the richer the consolation that shall come to the church, as it will be to us a greater proof of the power of the grace of God in these latter days. Pray, then, that the proud sinner may be brought upon his knees today.

We have in the text five things—*an ox, an ox-goad, kicks against it, painful results, and a wise counsel.*

I. We have in the parable of the text AN OX. That ox is here employed as the picture of persecuting Saul and of all who are like he. No other beast besides the ox is driven by an ox-goad, and therefore it must be the ox which is here meant as kicking against the pricks or goads when he is urged onward by the driver. Alas, how low is man fallen that he can fitly be *compared to a brute beast!* “Oh,” said the proud heart, “does God compare me to a beast?” Ah, my friend, and it is the beast which has cause to complain rather than you; for what beast is that which has rebelled against God? I never heard of such. The beast acknowledges God and bows its neck to man, whom God appoints to be its ruler; the beast fulfils its Maker’s purpose; it lives and it dies, and both in life and death it answers the end for which God sent it into the world; but as for you, you wantonly to run against God, and when you know His will you do the contrary; and though He has addressed you with words of love and tenderness as He does some of you every Sunday, yet you will not hear, but reject what He says, and go on in your rebellious ways. Do not be angry if God should compare you to a beast, for if you knew yourself you would compare yourself to one too, for even holy David once said, “So foolish was I and ignorant, I was as a beast before You.” Penitent sinners have frequently wished that they had been beasts rather than men, for they have felt as if sin had degraded their nature below the degradation of the meanest reptile that creeps upon its belly. Oh, soul, if you know yourself you will not be angry for being thus compared, but smiting upon your breast like the publican, you will confess yourself unworthy to lift so much as your eyes to heaven.

But courage! Though God compares the unregenerate and rebellious sinner to a beast, yet it is to a *valuable animal*; it is to a creature which is an object of property and possesses value. The text does not liken a man to a wild beast without an owner, but to an ox for which its master cares, and for which he has paid a price. The ox is bought with money; it is often dearly purchased. When God compared Saul to an ox, He did as good as say to him, “You are acting like a wild bull, running against Me and goring My people; but still you are precious in My sight, and are purchased with a price.” “I,” says Jesus, “I whom you persecute, I redeemed you, not with corruptible things, as with silver and gold, but with My own precious blood; you are Mine, and I will not let you go; you are Mine, and I will break you in—I will curb that stubborn will of yours. Why do you kick against Me, for I mean to subdue you to do My work. It is vain for you to strive and struggle, for I have bought you and I will have you. I have paid for you too dearly to let you be lost. I have looked upon you as Mine too long to let you go astray from Me any more. I will have you, and therefore bow at once, for your will shall not long stand out against Mine.” There are some in this house whose conduct might make them comparable to beasts, but I hope they are the objects of God’s eternal love and of the purchase of the Savior’s Atonement, and they are therefore not likened to the wild beasts of the forest that go to their dens uncared for, but to an ox which is written down among the wealth of its possessor.

Our Lord Jesus also compared Saul here to the ox, because *the ox is an animal that is dependent upon its master for the supply of its needs.* Here you will remember the prophet Isaiah said, “The ox knows its owner and the ass its master’s crib.” The ox receives its fodder from its master’s hand, and knows the hand that feeds it. You who are an enemy to God this morning, do you not know that you are His creature, and that you are the object of His daily providence? The breath which is in your nostrils and in mine comes from the Most High. He formed us of clay, and His omnipotence keeps together the particles of dust that make our frame; but for His preservation we should at once go back to Mother Earth and the place that knows us would know us no more forever. Dear hearer, have we not been worse than oxen? We have not known the hand that feeds us. Have we not kicked against the God from whom all our mercies have been flowing? Oh, then, we must be worse than beasts if we do not feel a pang of conscience at the thought of God’s kindness and our ingratitude. To be indebted to God for twenty, thirty, forty, fifty, sixty, 70 years of mercy, and yet never to be grateful to Him! To have received life, breath, and strength from Him, and today to receive the gospel from His hands and yet to go our way indifferent and careless! This is a crime to be detested and abominated.

An ox is *a creature of which service is rightly demanded.* As every man who keeps an ox expects it to serve him, so also does God expect of those creatures whose needs He supplies that they should do

His bidding. Why should God keep them, and they do Him no service? Would you yourself fodder an ox that would not plow if you use it for such work? Or would you feed a horse that would never be a beast of draft to you? Would you keep even a dog if it did not follow at your heels and flatter you? If the cur snapped at you and howled at you as you do, O sinner, against your Maker, you would soon have done with feeding him. Take heed lest God have done with feeding you, for if He gets no service out of you He will not forever spare you. We are like the ox; we must either serve or die; we must either plow or bleed; the bullock which is not good for its master in the furrows shall soon be good for the butcher in the shop; and the man who will not serve God in life shall before long have to acknowledge His Justice in the pangs of death, and to show to wondering worlds what the judgments of God are in the terrors of Eternity.

The ox was also selected as a picture of Saul because of its *perverseness*. The bullock is not easily made accustomed to the yoke. It is not easy to train an ox to do one's bidding. Therefore a very rough and cruel instrument was used by the Eastern farmer—a long stick with a sharp prong at the end which he drove into the stubborn ox to compel it to move. The ox was sometimes very perverse, and when it set its neck to go its own way it was not easy for the farmer to make it move in another, and therefore the strokes of the ox-goad were sharp and many. Ah, how perverse are our wills! They are more stubborn, surely, than the ox. We will not go in the right way; we choose the wrong naturally. We go to the fire of sin and we put our finger in it, and we burn it; but we do not learn better; we then thrust our hands into it, and though we suffer for it, we return and plunge our arm into the flame. There are some who are suffering at this very day for their sins. The sins of their youth are in their bones, and yet they stagger to their lusts again; and like the moth that flies to the candle and having singed its wings drops down in pain and agony, and only gets strength enough to fly up to the candle again, so do some men with their sins. But while we are swift to sin, how slow we are to righteousness! Parents sometimes complain that they cannot teach their children, they are so willful. Ah, if they were as willful as we are towards God, we would have cause enough to complain. The teacher says, "I have taught this child 19 times, and he will not learn," but God has taught 19,000 times—"Line upon line, and precept upon precept, here a little and there a little," every day has had its word and every night its sentence; and yet we are like the deaf adder which will not hear the voice of the charmer, though he charms ever so wisely. This is humbling, but it is true. God makes us feel it to be true, and puts us in a proper frame of mind on account of it.

Yet remember there is this thing about the ox—though thus a perverse animal, it is *a creature which can be of great service to its master*. When the ox becomes docile, and puts its neck to the yoke, and plows in patient earnestness, it is one of the most valuable possessions of the Oriental farmer. What would he do without it? The patient ox in the East is very largely used in draft as well as in tillage; and it is one of the most precious things that a poor man has in the East, to possess that admirably laborious and patient animal. When man once gives his heart to his Master—when once this brutish heart is conquered by divine grace, and becomes a servant of God, of what use he is! Do you see the labor and zeal of Paul? Why, he never grew weary. He was an ox that never fretted under the yoke. He went to the end of many a long furrow and back again and to the end again. No stripes hindered him; no prisons stopped him. He was not afraid of death itself. He crossed the boisterous sea—no mean feat in those days of unskilled navigation; he traversed the equally dangerous land, suffering perils from robbers, from rivers, from wild beasts, and from false brethren. Like a strong ox he plowed a heavy soil from morning to evening without complaint. He left no work undone, but he could say at the close of his career, "I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course; I have kept the faith!" Oh, what a vast amount of good might be done by some of those who are now doing so much mischief! When a sinner is really convicted of sin he cannot think that God Himself can ever make anything of him—but you do not know. Look at that swearing fellow on Elstow Green—the gypsy tinker—who would think that his mischievous hand would ever write of the Celestial City, of the land Beulah, and of the blessed progress of the Pilgrim? Just look at that poor fellow sold as a slave, a prey to everything that is evil; it is John Newton—who would expect to hear him in the pulpit of St. Mary Woolnoth, telling of the mighty grace of God? Ah, but the Lord can thus get a double victory over Satan, not merely by capturing Satan's best men, but by transforming them into captains in the Army of the cross. May God grant that some here,

who have been like the ox for perverseness and stubbornness, and whose final doom would be to be felled by the pole-axe of death, may be subdued by the great Lion-tamer, who can surely tame the ox. May Jesus come and put His yoke upon your necks, for “His yoke is easy and His burden is light.” And from this day forth may you serve in the kingdom of King Jesus, to the praise of the glory of His grace.

II. In the second place, in this little parable, which is so full of teaching, we have THE OX-GOAD. No doubt it is a cruel instrument, but it is one which was thought by the Oriental farmer to be necessary for the stubborn nature of the ox. When he needed to make his ox go he just drove the goad into it from behind; not walking by the side of it, as we would probably do here, but keeping to the handle of the plow, and then pricking the ox from behind. Our God has many ways of goading us, but He does not use the goad with us where gentler means will avail. I should think that a kind farmer would speak to his ox, and might get it into such a condition that it would know what it was to do and be obedient to his word. Now God brings His people into such a state as that. He says, “I will guide you with My eyes.” And He says, “Be not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding—whose mouth must be held with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto you.” He might also have said, “Be you not as the ox, which has need to feel the ox-goad or else it will not stir.” God does not come to blows with men till He has first tried words with them. It is a word and a blow with man; but there is often a long space between the word and the blow with God. It is, “Turn! Turn! Why will you die?” before He comes with the executioner’s axe. Before the tree is cut down there is a time of sparing, in which it is dug about, in hopes it may bring forth fruit. But when words are of no avail, then the Lord, in tender mercy, if He means to save the soul, adopts sharper means, and comes from words to blows and then wounds. Some of you know how God will wound us when He means to save us. The Psalmist describes it as being broken in pieces. He groans over “the bones which You have broken,” for God does give such cuffs by the hand of providence, and such blows by the law upon the conscience, that He appears as if He were cruel and would utterly slay us; and, indeed, He will kill us in order that He may save us; He will break us in pieces that He may bind us up; and He will wound us that He may come, in all His power, to heal.

Let us for a minute or two think about this ox-goad, and how you and I have felt it, and how some are feeling it today and yet kicking against it. Some of us felt the ox-goad when we were children. Under *the government of our parents and friends* we were often very restive, and felt it hard to sin. We wanted to go after our own devices, but our parents loved us, and they would not permit it. Perhaps they were stern; it may be that they chastened us after their own pleasure, as we thought, though if we were wise we might have perceived that it was for our profit. And how some of us kicked and struggled against a mother’s tears; and how irksome was a father’s good advice! Many men showed in their childhood what they were made of by their early rebellions against the holy admonitions of loving and anxious parents. Oh, young offenders, yours is no small responsibility! Oh how the young heart can rebel! I speak experimentally when I say I believe a young child’s heart is capable of as thorough and deep-seated rebellion against God and right as the heart of the oldest man, and though the child may not be able either by word or deed to express what he feels, there are evil moments with some children when passion seems as if it would choke them, and their ravings or sullenness prove that a child’s nature is inclined to evil, and is most undoubtedly fallen from its birth. In looking back we see that the goad was used upon us even as children. Since that time some of you have felt the irksome goad in the good advice of friends with whom you have been situated. You do not like to be talked to about religion—some of you. You have half a mind to shift your lodgings to get away from godly people who pester you. You would gladly get another job, for you work at a bench close by the side of a Christian, and he makes sinning uncomfortable to you; he speaks to you very tenderly and plainly, and you jest at him, and put it off, but still he does make it an uneasy thing for you to be what you are. Oh, how grateful you ought to be for this, and yet I should not wonder but what you are kicking at it. These are all goads which God uses. He is saying to you, “You stubborn ox-like man, you shall not go to hell.” He has sent these warnings to you first by one, and then by another, with a view to your good.

Every doctrine, and every part of the teachings of God’s Word, acts like a goad to unconverted men. I have known people come in here; curiosity has brought them to hear the preacher, and his sermon has made them feel so angry that they could almost have knocked him down, but yet they could not help coming again. Why did they come? They could not tell you why, but they could not stop; and yet they

hated the truth of God they heard. Many of you know, before you were converted, that anger was just your first state of feeling when you heard the gospel. I feel rather glad when I hear that I have made some people angry. I think within myself, "Well, they were not asleep at any rate, and they gave the sermon some sort of thought." When a man thinks enough about the truth of God to begin to fight against it, I am in hope that the truth will give him a shaking, and never let him go till it has fairly beaten him into better things. Angry feeling is better than no feeling, and enmity to the truth may be looked upon with more hope than indifference. Now what a goad to some men is the doctrine of the cross! They cannot hear of the wounds of Jesus and sin pleasantly. To some the doctrine of the punishment of sin is like the file to the viper—they are always breaking their teeth by gnawing at it. There is no part of Scripture which, rightly understood, is not a goad to the sinner, saying to him unmistakably, "Sinner, turn, turn from your wicked ways, for why will you die?"

At times the Lord will goad us in another way, namely, by *personal afflictions*. Perhaps he sends a sickness, and lays the strong man moaning upon his bed. Possibly it is a failure in business, a loss of property, a disappointment in marriage, the death of friends, or a gradual decay of the constitution, or the loss of a limb or an eye. Loud voices these, if men had ears to hear. God does not come to lopping His trees until a stern remedy is needed. Some of you have had so many afflictions that the Lord might well inquire, "Why should you be stricken any more? You will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint," and you are full of wounds and putrefying sores. Oh the mischief that sin has done in some glaring cases! I know a man at the present moment, a man I said, but alas, poor wretched mortal, he looks hardly like a man. I saw him in rags, shivering in the drenching rain but yesterday. He came of reputable parents; I knew his relatives well. He had some 400 pounds or more left him a few years ago. As soon as ever he could get hold of it he came to London, and in about a month he spent it—all in a hideous whirlwind of evil. He went back a beggar and in rags, full of horrible sickness, loathsome and an outcast. Since that time he has been so often aided by his friends that they have entirely given him up, and now this poor wretch with scarcely enough rags to hide his nakedness, has no eyes left to pity him, and no hands to help him. He has been helped again, and again, and again; but to help him appears to be useless, for at the very first opportunity he returns to his old sins. The workhouse, the hospital, the grave are his portion; for he seems unable to rise to the dignity of labor, and no one will harbor him. I could fairly cry at the sight of him, but what can be done for him if he will destroy himself by his sins? If you say to him, "Why do your friends not notice you?" he will tell you, "They cannot notice me." He has brought his mother to the grave; he has worn out everybody who has pitied him, for his life has been so thoroughly bad that it excites no pity, but disgusts his own relatives. For the love of the Lord Jesus I will help this unhappy man again, and intend tomorrow to see him washed, clothed and fed, and put in a way of livelihood, but I have very slender hope of being of any lasting service to him, for he has been tried so often. Yet I never saw a wretch in such misery. He is emaciated, ragged, and has known hunger and cold and nakedness month after month, and unless he mends his ways this will be his lot till he dies. We have more than enough of such cases who cross our path, but this one outdoes them all. Now I know that some of these forlorn persons sometimes steal into the Tabernacle and if such are here let me ask you, what is to be done with you? You put even the best and most tender of persons out of patience with you. Trouble has no power to break you, and kindness no influence to melt you. Oh, while there is a remedy, may God apply it to you, poor guilty souls! There are some who have felt these goadings to the most fearful extent till they have lost all, and yet they cling to their sins. I would to God that saints would cling to Christ half as earnestly as sinners cling to the devil. If we were as willing to suffer for God as some are to suffer for their lusts, what perseverance and zeal would be seen on all sides!

The goad is used yet further. When God has goaded a man with afflictions, and pains, and all the doctrines of the gospel, sometimes He stirs him with the common operations of the Holy Spirit in his conscience. Saul was being goaded at that very moment when Christ spoke, and said, "Why do you persecute Me?" Ah, and take care you do not resist these goadings. "See that you refuse not Him who speaks. For if they escaped not who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven." I believe that the Holy Spirit often by what we call the common operations which He exercises upon the hearts of men, deals with men's consciences so far

as to awaken and warn them, but they quench the Spirit. They, as Stephen says, resist the Spirit as did their fathers. It is a sin which may be committed, and where it is committed often, and long, at last, the Holy Dove departs never to return—and such a soul is given up. It may be that some man or woman here is the subject of these inward strivings; may they end in effectual calling, and not lead to increased damnation, as they must do except the soul be brought to saving repentance.

III. In the third place—and here let conscience be awake—we have to speak about THE KICKS. “It is hard for you to kick against the pricks.”

The ox, when wounded, is so very foolish as to dash its foot against the goad, and consequently drives it deeper into himself and hurts himself even more. This is the natural manner of men till God makes something more than beasts of them. Man is sure, like the ox, to kick against the pricks. How can we do this? *Even when we were children we rebelled against our teachers.* When we were but little and were being instructed in the things of God, it is possible that we did not like religion; prayer was distasteful, Sunday was dull, and the house of God wearisome, and therefore we kicked against them. As some of you grew up who are now present, you took to *sneering* at those who kindly advised you. Many young men, the moment they get a word of counsel from any person, treat that person at once as an enemy, and vow that they will take no further notice of such a “cant,” as they will call him. That is a common way of kicking against the pricks. Many sinners, when the Word of God is too hot for them, take to criticizing it. When a sermon comes home, what is the easiest way of getting rid of the impression? Why, begin disputing over it. If any of you have felt any power in the sermon at any time, and you do not want to get a blessing, begin to raise an objection to some point of doctrine or expression of the minister. Do not dwell on that part which you felt was good and was meant for you, but give your thoughts to that which you can quarrel over, and the sermon will be of no use to you. Satan will be glad if you begin to blame the preacher when you ought to have blamed yourself! If you cavil at gospel doctrines, if you quibble about the high points and the low points, and say, “Well, I do not see how predestination and free will can agree,” all that will be a snare to you, to prevent your coming to Christ.

Satan does not care whether he drags you down to hell as a Calvinist or as an Arminian, as long as he can get you there. He does not care whether you are orthodox or heterodox, as long as he can make sure of you. A man who is reproved by a sermon will perhaps feel that if it is true he must give up his drunkenness. “But,” he says, “I will not give up my drunkenness; I do not want to do that, and therefore I do not believe that the sermon is true.” Or another says, “If this is correct, I must shut up my shop on Sunday, and so lose my Sunday’s profits. I cannot afford to lose money, and therefore I will criticize the preacher.” The guilty conscience cries, “I will pick a hole in the minister’s coat, because he has found one in mine. If what he says is true, I must mend my ways; but I do not intend to do that, therefore I will try and find some fault with the truth which is taught, or with the man who teaches it.” There are many individuals who are so angry at God through their sin, that they have come to *persecute God’s people*. They cannot burn them, they cannot shut them up in prison—but they vex them with cruel mocking, they twist their innocent actions into something wrong, and then they throw it in their teeth. They even sit down and wantonly invent lies against the innocent and utter libelous things against the people of God, because they have a conviction that the saints are better than themselves. It seems to be the natural suggestion of our fallen nature that when goodness rebukes us we straightway try to prove that it is not goodness in order that our conscience may be quieted.

Certain profane men have gone so far as to kick at God Himself. They do not hesitate in their malice, but they proclaim it in plain plump oaths, and dare their Maker to do most terrible things to them. Mind that He does not answer you, blasphemer. He is a hearer of prayer, and when you pray to Him to damn you, He may, one of these days, do it, sinner! Do not ask Him again lest He should do it at once. He has a way of doing what men ask Him to do; do not trifle with Him. It is His mighty mercy that has prevented Him from destroying you long ago! This is your way of kicking against the pricks, but I hope that since God has brought you here He means to stop your rebellions today. I pray He may, and that no longer you may kick against Him, but turn to Him and say, “Lord, what will You have me to do?”

IV. Time fails us, and we must therefore speak briefly upon THE RESULT OF KICKING AGAINST THE PRICKS. Christ says, “It is hard for you.” Friend, let me hold you by the buttonhole and talk to you. It has been very hard for your mother that you should have gone on as you have done.

For her sake, think! With some of you it has been very hard for your families. Drunkenness clothes a man's children in rags as well as himself. It has been hard in some cases with even your neighbors and your employers; they had a deal to put up with; but that is not the matter of consideration this morning. It is hard for *you*. Oh, young man, you know that sin does not make you happy. You have had your swing of it, and you are miserable this morning. Oh no, there is no bliss to be found in evil. At last the truth of God is beginning to dawn upon your mind. Instead of happiness you have found unrest and dissatisfaction. You are afraid of cholera—afraid to die. You would run almost anywhere to escape an infectious disease, because you know where your portion will be when you enter into another world. This is the effect of your kicking against the pricks. You have brought yourself into an unhappy and uneasy state of mind till you sometimes wish that you had never been born. Do you know what will very likely be your history if you run into sin and persist in it? You will make your present afflictions grow worse, and cause your present losses to accumulate upon you. You are kicking against the pricks, and are making the wounds already received 10 times worse, and so it will always be as long as you keep on kicking. It is possible that you may get into such a state of mind that you will by-and-by be ready to die by suicide because of remorse. It is hard for you, young man, to be such a sinner as you are now, but how hard it *will* be! I could weep when I think of how hard your sins will be for you if you are ever converted. He who is converted to God finds it hard to have been a sinner so long. His repentance is bitter in proportion to the greatness of his sin. "Alas," he says, "that I should ever have so revolted against the God who loved me with such a love!" Those who are saved late in life feel that their sins will be their plague till they die. A man does not go and plunge into the ditch of sin without bearing the stench of its vileness in his memory all his life. An old song that you used to sing in your carnal days will come up and defile your closet prayers, and perhaps the recollection of some unholy scene in which you had a part in your younger days will trouble you even when you are at the sacramental table!

The apostle Paul always bore the memory of his sin, for he says, "I was the least of the apostles because I persecuted the church of God." He always felt that; and who knows but that the stripes and imprisonment that he had to bear himself must often have brought the tears into his eyes when he endured them as he thought, "I persecuted them in their synagogue, and I compelled them to blaspheme, and now I am called to suffer the same things myself." The past life of a regenerate man will always be his grief. "God forgives me," said one, "but I can never forgive myself. It is blotted out of God's book, I know, but it can never be blotted out of mine. I shall remember to my dying day what a sinner I have been." But ah, friends, if tears might come into my eyes at the recollection of how you will feel if you are converted, I would gladly weep tears of blood as I think of what you will feel if you die unconverted! All these kicks against the pricks will be among your sharpest stings when you feel the judgment of God in another world. "Remember," says conscience, "you were warned—you did not sin without knowing it was sin—you did not choose the downward path without understanding it to be the path that led to ruin. You felt the pricks of warning, but you kicked against them, and now you receive your portion in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, with this aggravation above all others, that you knew your duty but you did it not." That great Italian poet, whose marvelous mind so singularly pictured the lost in their everlasting dwelling place, writes over the portals of hell, "*All hope abandon you who enter here!*" Ah, it is the hell of hell that there is no hope there; but while there is no hope of the future, there are unutterable regrets for the past. My hearers, I often feel it a very solemn thing to preach to you, and the more earnestly I am able to preach, the more solemn it becomes, because if this gospel is not "a savor of life unto life" to you, it will be "a savor of death unto death" to your souls. You may make it a holiday to visit the Tabernacle and hear me preach; you may come up from the country and hasten here to see this place as one of the sights of London; but it is no holiday to me to preach to your souls, and no child's play to have this responsibility upon my shoulders, to deal faithfully with your hearts and consciences! I have been a goad, I hope, to many of you, and you have tried hard to continue what you are while a loving heart has tried to bring you into a better mind. But by-and-by the goad will become a sword; the very gospel which warns will be the gospel that smites. "God shall judge the world"—how?—"according to my gospel," says the apostle Paul. It is according to the gospel that you shall be judged at the last if you reject it and perish in your sins. This is the result of kicking against the pricks.

V. Then the last thing is THE GOOD COUNSEL. It is just this; since it is hard for you to kick against the pricks, and there is nothing to be got by it, cease, oh cease from your evil way! Why should you do it? If it made you happy to be sinners, I could almost pardon you. If it were a profitable thing, I might almost excuse you; but it is such an unsatisfactory thing, and the happiness is so transient, such mere scum upon the pot, that I cannot excuse you if you will follow it. Your grapes are gall, your wine is wormwood, your music is discord, your mirth is misery; why then follow after them?

O sensible, thoughtful man, kick against the pricks no more! If you do not become a Christian, do not be a persecutor. There is no need to make your eternal portion worse. Suppose you think that the gospel is not true, at any rate do not fight against it, for if it is of God you cannot prevail against it, and if it is not, it will go down without you. Do not, however, think that we ask you to cease from wrath because we are afraid of you. The gospel is like an anvil; you may hammer it and it will break your hammer, but itself remain unbroken. You may stumble against this stone and you will be broken, but you cannot break or remove the stone. Woe unto you if that stone falls upon you, for on whomever this stone shall fall it will grind him to powder. Stop and think. If we can get men to think we may have good hope of them. At any rate religion is worth a thought. If you must and will go to hell, go there with your eyes open, and do not be deceived. Eternity must be such a weighty thing that it is surely worth a thought. If the devil is worthy to be your master, consider his claims, and serve him thoughtfully. If sin, and drunkenness, and money getting, and Sabbath-breaking are the best things for you, think them over, and give a reason for the hope that is in you. There are some of us who think you foolish; justify your conduct then, and get an answer ready. Oh, if you would but think, you would soon say, “No, no, no, I know there is a God, I know I have sinned, I know that He must punish me; there is mercy in Jesus, I will find it.”

Let me say to you, sinner, *yield your heart to the goadings of divine love*, for, “it is hard for you to kick against the pricks.” Oh, think not that the Savior’s blood will be unable to cleanse you! Not your worthiness, but your unworthiness attracts His attention; not your strength, but your weakness; not your riches, but your poverty. He came to save just such as you are. Lost one, but loved one, trust in Him! Cast yourself now upon Him, having nothing of your own. Come and rest in Him. He will not cast you away. He has never cast any soul away, however filthy its previous life may have been, and He will not begin today to reject sinners. He who comes to Him He will in no wise cast out. “Ho, everyone that thirsts, come to the waters and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.” Why do you kick against the pricks? “Why do you spend money for that which is not bread and your labor for that which satisfies not? Hearken diligently unto Me, and eat that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness.” “Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God.” Trust Jesus with your whole heart! Trust in Jesus and your sins, which are many, are forgiven you! This is the gospel that we are bid to preach, “He who believes and is baptized shall be saved.” May God the Holy Spirit give you grace to be obedient, and unto Him shall be glory. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—ACTS 9.

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