

THE STANDARD UPLIFTED IN THE FACE OF THE FOE

NO. 718

A SERMON
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*“When the enemy shall come in like a flood,
 the Spirit of the LORD shall lift up a standard against him.”
 Isaiah 59:19*

THE Hebrew seems to be very difficult to interpret in this verse, and there have been as many translations given of it as there are days in the month. Upon the whole one is most satisfied with the translation of our authorized version, and without troubling your minds with a host of various renderings, we will keep to the one before us, which, even if it should not happen to be the precise truth taught in the passage, is nevertheless a great Scriptural truth and one which it is important for us just now to remember.

“When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the LORD shall lift up a standard against him.” This is referred by Dr. Gill and sundry other commentators to the latter days in which they believe there will be a most terrible apostasy, when the Man of Sin shall reach a yet greater development than at present, and the Christian church shall be brought to its very lowest ebb. At such a time the Spirit of the Lord will lift up a standard for the truth, and by the power of His grace the kingdom of Jesus shall be revealed in fullest glory.

We are not, however, inclined to interpret this text in a restricted manner, as relating solely to one period of time. Nothing shall induce me to attempt to interpret the prophecies. By God’s grace I will be content to expound the Gospel. I believe it to be one of the most fatal devices of Satan to turn aside useful Gospel ministers from their proper work into idle speculations upon the number of the beast, and the meaning of the little horn. The prophecies will interpret themselves by their fulfillment, but no expositor has yet arisen who has been able to do it. Providence is the true interpreter of prophecy—

*“God is His own interpreter,
 And He will make it plain.”*

But for us to try the mysterious visions of Daniel and John before they are fulfilled will, I believe, be worse than folly. It will be a guilty waste of energy which should all be spent in the winning of souls.

We shall only consider the general principle, which is clear enough—that when the enemy shall come in the greatest force against the people of God, at such times God’s Holy Spirit shall put forth His glorious power, and a standard shall be lifted up against the inroads of the foe.

We shall first refer the text to *the holy war in our own hearts*. And secondly, to *the holy war which is being waged in the world outside*, not with flesh and blood, but with spiritual wickedness in high places.

I. First we shall take the general statement of the text as referring to THE CONFLICT WHICH IS RAGING IN THE CHRISTIAN’S INNER MAN.

It is well for us to distinctly *understand the position of the Christian*. This is not the land of our triumph, neither is this the period of our rest. If we bind our brows with laurel, and cast aside our armor, our folly will be extreme. The ship is not yet in the harbor, many storms must yet beat upon her. The warrior has not slain the last of his foes, neither has the pilgrim fought with the last of the giants. The moment of conversion is rather the commencement than the closing of spiritual warfare, and until the

believer's head shall recline upon the pillow of death he will never have *finished* his conflicts. The war will not be over till we shall depart and be with Christ, which is far better.

Beloved Christian, you are in the land where foes abound. There are enemies within you. You are not clean nature delivered from the influence of inbred sin. The new nature is of divine origin, and it cannot sin because it is born of God. But the old nature, the carnal mind, is there too, and it is not reconciled to God, neither indeed can be, and therefore it strives and struggles with the new nature.

The house of Saul in our heart wars against the house of David, and tries to drive it out and despoil it of the crown. This conflict you must expect to have continued with more or less violence till you enter into rest.

Moreover, in the world without there are multitudes of foes. This vain world is no friend to the principle of the work of grace. If you were of the world the world would love its own, but as you are not of the world but of a heavenly race, you may expect to be treated as an alien and foreigner, nay, as a hated and detested foe. All sorts of snares and traps will be laid for you. Those who sought to entangle the Master in His speech will not be more lenient towards you.

Moreover there is one whose name is called "the enemy," the "evil one." He is the leader among your adversaries. Hating God with all his might, he hates that which he sees of God in you. He will not spare the arrows in his infernal quiver. He will shoot them all at you.

There are no temptations which he knows of—and he understands the art well from long practice—there are no temptations which he will not exercise upon you. He will sometimes fawn upon you, and at other times will frown. He will lift you up, if possible, with self-righteousness, and then cast you down with despair. You will always find him your fierce, insatiable foe. Know this then, and put on the whole armor of God, march with your sword always drawn in your hand, as one who sees a foe in the path.

The text leads us to *look for seasons when this position will be more than ordinarily perilous*. Who that has gone on pilgrimage does not know that at certain times the enemy comes in upon him like a flood? Like a flood—suddenly without notice, as when the mountain lake bursts through its banks, and rushes into the valley beneath. Irresistibly destructive, sweeping everything before it in its headlong flood! Insatiable! sparing neither cattle, nor abode of man, nor provender for the ox, nor corn for the household, drowning young and old in one watery grave, with cold unfeeling power destroying all within its awful sweep!

The flood has no compassion, and yields to no entreaties. Such and so terrible are the onsets of our spiritual foes. When sins, and doubts, and temptations assail us, who can without divine aid stand against them? Who is able to resist them? You who are veterans in the spiritual fight, you know right well, that there are times when kings go forth to battle, seasons when the traitors within are unusually troublesome, and when you have need of extraordinary grace.

It will be well for you who know the spiritual conflict to be *thoroughly conscious of your own utter impotence against this terrific danger*. What can a man do against a flood? How shall he escape it or stem it? The strongest swimmer, though he strain every muscle, must, if he be unaided, yield to its overwhelming force. If a man has nothing to depend upon but his own vigorous strugglings, what can he do against a foaming torrent? Not all the impetuous fury of a rushing flood can exceed the fury of our enemies, where is the human strength which can avail to endure its force?

Christian, you are surrounded with enemies, and you, in your own person, are helpless in the day of battle. If you are not clothed with heavenly armor, you are like a naked man into whose flesh every dart must penetrate. If the shield of faith shall not cover you, the spears of the tempter will soon reach your heart. You are crushed before the moth, and as easily trampled upon as a worm. You are as weak as water, as frail as dust.

Your strength, your fancied strength, is perfect weakness, then what must your weakness be? Your highest natural wisdom is folly, then what must your folly be? As well should a bird with broken wing attempt to mount into the skies as you attempt to reach heaven by your own strength. As well should a child with a straw hope to stand against a host of armed men, as you to bear the onslaught of your

spiritual enemies, unless the mighty God of Jacob should be your defense. Your warfare needs the Eternal arm to bear you through it, and yet you are weakness itself, how shall you be able to achieve the victory? Cease from self-confidence. Know yourself to be feebleness itself. Look above you to a nobler and surer source of strength than yourself.

The text after having plainly bidden us to thoroughly realize our position, and after suggesting to us our weakness, bids us *turn to our only help*, a Helper mysterious but divine. When the enemy comes in like a flood, what then? Shall the Christian stem it? It is not so written. Shall he avoid it? Not thus is it in the Word. Shall he fly to his minister, shall he gather together his Christian friends, and shall they conjointly dam the stream or turn the battle? Not they, they are all alike weak, and their union will bring no strength.

What can a multitude of ciphers make? They are each one nothing, and add them all together they make but nothing. The united fullness of so many emptinesses is only a greater display of emptiness. The united wisdom of a thousand fools is only so much more folly.

Where then does the text direct us? It reminds us of one whose name we mention with affectionate reverence—the Spirit of the Lord. What do we not owe to Him already? Blessed Spirit! You are He who sought us when we were strangers, wandering from the fold of God. Who strove with us when our desperate wills were set on mischief. Who bowed us down at length as He convinced us of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment to come.

Blessed Spirit! It is to Him we owe our present holy comfort. He brought us to the Savior's cross, and opened our blind eyes to see the wonders of atoning love. He endeared the Savior, applied the promise, gave us the Spirit of adoption, and taught us to say, "Abba, Father." It was by His living power that we were quickened and made to live. We were lying, like Lazarus, rotting in the grave, until He called us forth.

It is by His teaching that we have been enlightened thus far in the things of Christ. He has taught us all things, and brought all things to our remembrance, whatsoever Christ delivered unto us. Up till now He has been our indwelling guide, illuminating the darkness of our faith, constraining the waywardness of our will, sanctifying our nature, and bearing us onward against ourselves towards the ultimate perfection for which our spirit pants. Blessed Spirit!

Brethren, let us never grieve Him. "Quench not the Spirit." Let His faintest admonitions be obeyed. Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it. Let His power in our spirits be like that of the centurion in the ranks which he commanded. If He saith unto us, "Go," may we go, and if He saith unto His servant, "Do this," may it be said, "He doeth it." Let us beware of losing the comforts of His presence lest we have mournfully to bemoan His absence, crying out—

***"Return, O holy Dove, return,
Sweet Messenger of rest!
I hate the sins that made Thee mourn,
And drove Thee from my breast."***

Let us cultivate an affectionate dependence upon His power and presence. In all our Christian exercises let us wait upon Him for strength. Let us entreat Him to indite our prayers and inspire our songs, in both exercises helping our infirmities and encouraging our hearts. Let us continually believe in the Holy Ghost as the true life of all Christian effort. When we think of our ministries, let us refer them to the Spirit who gives them, and who alone can bless them, and for the divers works which the church performs, let us only look for success to attend them as the Holy Spirit is pleased to put forth His power by them.

See then, dear friends, we are not referred to one of whom we do not know, and who is a stranger to us, but our tearful eyes are bidden to look for divine assistance from our best and dearest Friend, from

Him who though He fills heaven itself and is God over all, blessed for ever, yet makes our poor bodies to be His temples, and dwells in the church continually.

It is said of the Holy Spirit that in our times of distress He will come to our rescue. Has it not been so with us until now? Just when faith was fainting, the Holy Spirit feasted her upon a comfortable promise, which faith fed upon as Elijah did upon the cake baken on the coals, so that she went in the strength of that meat a forty days' journey into the wilderness.

When it appeared that our love had ebbed out till there was none of it left, the Spirit came, and by revealing the glorious person of the Lord Jesus, our soul, or ever it was aware, was made like the chariots of Amminadab. We thought surely no spiritual life remained in us, but the Holy Spirit, heavenly Dove, came with all His quickening powers, and by shedding abroad a Savior's love He instantly rekindled the flame upon the altar of our hearts.

We were lifted up from lethargy to earnestness, from sloth to zealous industry. We scarce understood how it could be that we who groped with the mole suddenly mounted with the eagle. This is the Spirit's work, when the enemy comes in like a flood then He lifts up in our hearts a standard against him.

We have then to fall back as to our present difficulty, whatever it may be, upon spiritual power. Oh! beloved, if the battle of salvation were to be fought by man alone, then you and I might throw down sword and shield and despairingly give it all up, for why should we waste our exertions in fruitless toil? but when we understand that the Spirit of God has laid bare His holy arm to save us, and that He works in us to will and to do of His own good pleasure, we are not afraid of the worst moment in the fight, we are not dispirited concerning the blackest hour of the conflict.

No, let the enemy rush forward with concentrated and infuriated force. Let the powers of darkness and of inward corruption advance with malignant might, there is One who is greater than them all, whose standard shall stop their onslaught. Let the evil spirit do his uttermost, for then we shall see what the Holy Ghost can do when the fullness of His power is displayed.

We cannot expect to see God at His best unless we see the devil at his worst, but when our plight becomes the most dolorous, then shall our help become the most glorious. And when the creature is ready to die of despair, then there shall be an opportunity for the Creator's irresistible arm to put forth its energy and to glorify itself in us.

Let us now for a minute or two *take two or three instances in which this great truth is conspicuous.* This is true of a soul under conviction of sin. This is Satan's hour and opportunity with many seeking souls. When sin is heavy upon the Christian and his soul is burdened, he is very apt to be, as John Bunyan says, "Tumbled up and down in his mind," till he hardly has his right wits and senses, for the terrors of the law are sometimes so distracting, that the poor heart which is the subject of them scarcely knows darkness from light, or light from darkness.

At such a time, just when Satan knows that the creature is very weak and without courage to resist him, he comes in with some detestable suggestion, either that such a soul is appointed to everlasting destruction and to present despair, or that its sins are past forgiveness, that it has committed the unpardonable sin, or that it is not in a right state to receive mercy, is hardened, left by the Spirit, and is quite unfit to receive divine favor.

If all these insinuations are driven out one by one, Satan has as many more. In fact, the variety of temptations with which Satan can assault a troubled, seeking soul, is as nearly infinite as possible.

A wide pastoral experience has never enabled us to set any limit to the craft of Satan, for though the temptations of this state are very much the one like the other, yet in no two cases are they precisely similar, for it is a part of Satan's policy to make each man think that his case is the only one of the kind, that he is peculiar, that there is no description given of him in the Word of God, no promise meant for him—that he is one whom God did not in fact intend to bless, and therefore left him entirely out of His Word.

And this old liar, who was a murderer from the beginning, continues to pour in these horrible thoughts one after another, not distilling them like drops of poison, but as if to make sure of his prey pouring them into the human heart like a flood, sometimes so commingled and indistinct, that the person who is the subject of them cannot tell them to another, so that his friends may give him comfort. He is so beset, so downcast, that he is like a struggling fly in the midst of a flood that is carried on, whirled round and round in every eddy, tossed on every wave, without a hope of being rescued from the stream.

Now what is to be done? The foe has fairly got possession of the field and treads it under foot, and plows it up, and dyes it with blood. What is to be done? Why, nothing can be done in such a case without the Holy Spirit's interposition. The preacher tries to comfort. He seeks out goodly words, by which he may bring peace, but he is disappointed, for the case of many a soul beset with sin is the minister's nonplus.

As they used to say of certain diseases that they were the scandal of the physician, the physician could not touch them, so some soul-sicknesses are the scandal of the minister. For though we can find promises which should suit the case and do teach doctrines which ought to give comfort, yet it is one thing to find the medicine, and quite another thing to bring the soul to receive it.

As the old proverb has it, "One man may bring a horse to the water, but twenty cannot make it drink." And one man may bring a soul to the promise, but twenty men cannot make that promise to be received by the soul.

But oh! the joy of my text, "The Spirit of the LORD shall lift up a standard against him." And that standard in your case, poor troubled soul, will be the cross. He will lift up before your eyes the suffering Son of God. This is the standard that makes hell flee. Satan knows the power of that heel which once he bruised, the foot of Jesus has already broken his head, and he takes flight whenever God's own Son is lifted up.

I beseech you, poor sinner—and may the Holy Ghost enable you—I beseech you to look to the slaughtered Lamb of God upon Calvary's cross. There is atonement for sin in those sufferings, there is readiness to receive you in that pierced heart. There is cleansing, sanctifying power in that water which flows with blood from His opened side. There is nothing asked of you but to look and live. And oh! at this moment may the Holy Ghost do for you what I cannot—may He lift up that standard in your heart, that all your doubts and fears may flee at once, and the battle may be yours because Christ has espoused your cause.

I believe it will be so. You may be a long time in the darkness, but you shall not always be there. Never did a soul perish that sought the Lord with all its heart. You may be outside mercy's door and knock, and it may be a cold wintry day, and your very fingers may get chilled as you hold the rapper, but the door must open ultimately, there is no question about that.

God must un-God Himself before He can refuse a pleading sinner. If you are willing to be God's, God is willing to be yours, for He never yet turned the human will where He had not already made up His own will as to the salvation of that soul. The Spirit of the Lord will be thy helper.

Now we will suppose that there is another case present, and try and apply the text. After conversion it frequently happens, and especially to those who have been guilty of gross sin before conversion, that temptation comes in with unusual force. You must not suppose that a man who is converted from drunkenness will never be tempted to drunkenness again. He will, that will probably be his burden for a long time.

Any person who has fallen into lust will find it in his bones, and though he hates it and strives against it, yet there will be times when it will be as much as he can do and more than he could do without God's grace to stand against it.

Some of us who from the early period of our conversion were spared the grosser sins have nevertheless been tormented with very horrible temptations. Especially I believe God sends great temptations to those of His ministers whom He means to use to comfort afflicted souls. Oh the horrible blasphemies, the infernal suggestions, the worse than hellish thoughts that some of God's servants have

had to struggle with by the hour together, so that they clapped their hands to their mouths for fear such thoughts should ever be spoken. These men have hated these evil thoughts even to loathing, and have endeavored to cast them out and shake them off as Paul shook the viper from his hand into the fire, and yet they could not be rid of them.

It is a dreadful thing to be tempted as some of God's best servants are tempted, for there is no Christian, let him live where he may, who will wholly escape temptations, and the more eminently useful the more eminently tempted full often. What then? Why, at such times look not to your own experience for strength, neither turn you to your own wisdom for guidance, for then your trouble will be ten times worse than before.

Go not to these broken cisterns, for they hold no water, but I charge you, Christian, go to the strong for strength, go you to the blessed Spirit who alone can effectually lift up the standard, and rally your soul anew to the conflict and give you the victory. You shall conquer through the Lamb's redeeming blood. This is the victory which overcomes the world, even our faith. We shall need spiritual reinforcements, and we shall have them in the time of trouble.

Another case sometimes occurs to a Christian, when it is not so much enticement to sin as temptation to doubt. What a mercy it would be if we could live without doubting! But so common are doubts and fears that Mr. John Bunyan, the greatest master of Christian experience that ever lived, in his "Holy War," represents an army of doubters as trying to capture the city of Mansoul, and he divides them into a great number of regiments. There are the Election Doubters, the Calling Doubters, the Perseverance Doubters, and so on. And these fellows, with the great hell drum which they kept continually beating, much alarmed the town of Mansoul, and even forced an entrance into it, and well-nigh took the castle of the heart itself, but they could not quite take the citadel, and were ultimately driven out.

When doubts and fears prevail, do not tell me that you can get rid of them when you like. I know they are sins, and they are strong sins. I know it is a disease to doubt, but it is a disease which is very common among God's people—I wish it were not—and when these gloomy doubts prevail, there is no comfort in the heart nor joy in life—

*“For oh, when gloomy doubts prevail,
I fear to call Thee mine,
The springs of comfort seem to fail,
And all my hopes decline.”*

What then shall we do? Why, once again fly to the Comforter, and cry, "Blessed Consoler of Your people, You whose balmy wings can bring us peace, descend!" When He works within us, and spreads abroad those wings of love, order reigns instead of confusion. He says, "Let there be light!" and the thick darkness yields, and there is light, and our soul rejoices "with joy unspeakable and full of glory." Now this is the experience, I believe, of every Christian, and it shall be your experience, my beloved brother, if you can but cast yourself upon divine power.

I leave this promise in its relation to our inward state, only reminding you that it is a sure and true promise. It is one of God's "shalls," and it is a comfortable thing when you grasp a divine "shall." "The Spirit of the LORD *shall* lift up a standard." It is as true now as when Isaiah wrote it. It is true of you, it is true in your present darkness, you shall find it true, and in heaven you shall bear testimony that the Spirit of God *does* lift up the battle standard against the enemy in the day of conflict.

II. Let us now turn to the second head—THE HOLY WAR WITHOUT US.

The Christian church is too conspicuous an object of divine love not to be the butt of the malice of the powers of darkness. From the very moment when the church was born, Satan, like Herod, tried to destroy the young Child. And if the flames of persecution and the inventions of heresy could have destroyed the church, she would have been destroyed long ago.

There have been distinct periods all down church history when the enemy has come in upon her, making a more than unusually terrific and effective onslaught. How terrible was the attack upon the early church when Peter was laid in prison, James having already been slain with the sword. Herod designed to destroy the whole band of followers of the despised Nazarene, and after him the Pharisaic zeal of Saul hounded them to death.

But the Spirit of God very speedily made amends for all Herod's operations, and the persecutions of the Pharisees met with a most effectual rebuff when the leader in them was himself converted, and Saul of Tarsus became Paul, the apostle of the Gentiles. The spiritual power which rested upon the church in the early ages was sufficient for her protection against the malevolence of her enemies. Not only so, but it was so mighty that it made profit out of that which was for its damage.

The zeal of the church turned her persecutions into fiery chariots, in which she rode forth triumphantly to the uttermost ends of the earth. Satan stirred a series of persecutions which you who are acquainted with history will remember to have been of the most ferocious kind. These persecutions we may compare to Nebuchadnezzar's furnace when it was heated seven times hotter, but not so much as the smell of fire passed upon the church.

The game of persecution was played out, and ended in the total defeat of the persecutor, for do you not remember how the saints volunteered to die, and even panted for the martyrs' crown? Young men came before the tribunals. Young men, did I say? old men leaning upon the staff, and women, and even little children came to the tribunal, and protested that they were followers of Jesus. The prisons were crowded with Christians, and the amphitheaters glutted with their blood. The spirit of holy boldness was so abundant that the foe was baffled, glutted with blood he turned with loathing from the murder of the inoffensive sheep which was once so great a luxury to him.

The Spirit of God, by giving to Christians an indomitable courage, which made them, as it were, insensible to pain and defiant of death in his most ghastly form, lifted up a standard against the fury of the enemy. Then Satan changed his tactics, and set on that baptized heathen Constantine to profess to become a Christian. And he, for reasons of statecraft and subtle policy, made Christianity the national religion, and thus struck the most fearful blow at the vitals of Christianity.

The union of church and state is a fatal blow to true religion. The king's hand wherever it falls upon the church of Christ brings the king's evil with it. There never was a church whose spirituality survived it yet, and there never will be. Christ's kingdom is not of this world, and if we try to marry the church of Christ to a worldly kingdom we engender innumerable mischiefs.

So it happened that when the church became outwardly glorious she became spiritually debased. Her communion table glittered with gold and silver plates, but her communion with Christ was not so golden as before. Her ministers were enriched, but their doctrine was impoverished, for every ounce of outward gold which she gained she lost a treasure of grace. Her bishops became lords, and her flocks were famished. Her humble meeting places were exchanged for grand basilicas, but the true glory was departed.

She became like the heathen around her, and began to set up the images of her saints and martyrs, till at last, after years of gradual declension, the Church of Rome ceased to be the church of Christ, and that which was once nominally the church of Christ actually became the Antichrist.

Black darkness covered the lands, and dark ages set in, when instead of pardon bought with the blood of Jesus, false priests made merchandize of souls, and pardons were hawked in the streets. When, instead of deacons and elders adorned with holiness and purity, monks, and nuns, and priests, and even popes became monsters of filthiness. When instead of justification by faith men proclaimed justification by pilgrimages and by penances. When the crucifix took the place of Christ Jesus, and a piece of bread was lifted up as a god, and men bowed before it and said, "These be thy gods, O Israel, that redeemed thee from the wrath to come."

What was done in this emergency? All through that long, long period of darkness the Spirit of God lifted up a standard among the faithful few. Up yonder on the snow-clad Alps, and down deep in the

secluded valleys of Piedmont, the Lord kept alive the “two witnesses” for the truth, the Albigenses and Waldenses, hunted like partridges upon the mountains, were God’s standard-bearers, and maintained that unbroken line of true apostolic succession from which we date our succession, a succession infinitely purer than the Tractarian chain of infamous prelates and Popish priests.

The Spirit of God maintained the living church in the day of her obscurity in France, Hungary, Bohemia, Switzerland, and other regions, till at last the men came whom JEHOVAH had ordained most greatly to bless. The nations rejoiced at the coming of Luther and his great allies, Zwingli and Calvin. What a lifting up of the standard was then seen, my brethren! They said that Luther’s words were carried on the wings of angels, for the sermon which he preached today was dispersed by means of the printing press, so that tomorrow heard it thundering along the foot of the Apennines, and old Rome itself trembled at the voice of the monk of Germany.

Then God lifted up a standard in England, and our glorious old Hugh Latimer, with simple and rough speech rebuked kings, and spoke the truth in the presence of the mighty. And up there in Scotland, John Knox published the Gospel of Jesus with all the energy of his fiery nature. The Spirit of God lifted up the cross, and like the sound of a clarion, a voice was heard resounding over hill and dale, “By the works of the law there shall no flesh living be justified.” “Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

It is needs not that I should tell the tale how, in succeeding years, throughout England Christianity had declined to the verge of death. When drunken parsons polluted the pulpits, and were zealous in nothing but in feasting and fox-hunting. When Dissenting ministers were either semi-Socinian or else so orthodox as not to care whether men’s souls were saved or damned. Then, again, the Spirit of the Lord lifted up a standard.

Six young men were expelled from Oxford for praying, and these men, driven sorely against their will to uncanonical action, began to preach in the open air. Crowds in London gathered at Moorfield and Kennington. The Kingswood miners caught the flame of grace. Cornwall, far away, began to blaze with spiritual fervor. The uttermost ends of our island perceived that God the Holy Ghost had visited us, that the “daystar from on high” was shining again! The name of “Methodist” was the terror of Satan and the joy of the Church.

*“See how great a flame aspires,
Kindled by a spark of grace!
Jesu’s love the nations fires,
Sets the kingdoms on a blaze.”*

Then men knew that the blessed Spirit of the living God had appeared and lifted up a standard against false doctrine and sin.

Dear friends, I am not giving you this history for the mere purpose of detailing it, but with a practical end. I believe that no exaggeration would be possible as to the present unhappy condition of certain sections of the Christian church. The enemy is, indeed, coming in like a flood. This time the peril is within the visible church itself. We have High Church—what is it but bastard Popery! We have Broad Church—what is it but dishonest Infidelity!—an infidelity which takes the pay of a church whose foundations it labors to undermine.

These two powers are advancing at present like two armies in victorious march. They are sweeping everything before them. Our timid and weak hearted Evangelical friends have been so long accustomed to submit, that they have little stomach for the fight. They have acted so miserable a part in the great conflict, that the power they once possessed has been taken from them, and they are a pitiable instance of the weakening effect of accustoming one’s tongue to the use of language against which the conscience revolts. They are not now an integer in the calculation. Their friends and their foes alike know their utter unfitness for the battle.

He who hopes that the battle of Protestantism will be fought by the Evangelicals, trusts in a broken reed. I only wish I could think otherwise, but I cannot. What is to be done? I discern no sign of help from any quarter but from above. It is our hope that the Holy Spirit will now interpose and save His church. This is a dark hour, and now will He show His strength.

We have now no desire that the bishops should interfere with the Ritualists—they have let them tamper with the church so long that everybody asks what is the use of bishops? Alas! for the church of God if the bishops were the only guardians! Even the interference of parliament will avail little. Let Parliament look after politics and leave religion alone. What we want is something superior to bishops and parliament—we want the Holy Ghost, and if the Holy Ghost will take the matter in hand, He will make very short work with all this imitation of Romanism.

But how will it be done? I think I see the beginning of it. A general spirit of prayer will come over those churches which are faithful. Already it is descending. Almost in every quarter the spirit of devotion is increasing. Our brethren in London have appointed, as you know, the fifth of November, to be spent by all the ministers, and deacons, and elders of our churches, as a day of fasting and prayer to entreat the Lord's blessing upon the universal church.

I find our friends are to do the same in Birmingham, and in most of the large towns, and all this has come without any dictation from any one, indeed we have no power to dictate in our denomination, it has come spontaneously, the brethren moving towards one another as by a common instinct, coming together in the time of danger.

I think I perceive among Christian men generally the relinquishment of controversy about minor points, and a determination for union about the one great thing. We feel that we must stand together, shoulder to shoulder, as a solid phalanx in this day of conflict, and fight with heavenly weapons, or else it will go ill with us. We feel we must cry to God, for no one else can help us. With this spirit of prayer I believe there is returning to us in the church—I may be sanguine, but I think I see it—a deeper love to the old truths than there used to be.

Do not my brethren in the ministry preach more of Christ than they once did? Are they not tired of philosophical essays, and returning to the simple truth? They are no longer teasing us with Genesis and geology, but give us more of Christ on the cross. We know that preaching science and ethics instead of the Gospel is all wrong, and our brethren see that it is so.

It was but the other day I heard a Wesleyan minister stating that the reason why they had to a great extent lost a blessing for the last few years, was because they had not given enough prominence to the doctrines of grace, and he pointed to this house, and the prosperity that God gives to this church, as an indication that if Christ is preached and nothing but Christ, and if salvation by blood be the one staple theme, there is no fear of there being hearers, nor of there being converts, for the old standard, whenever it is uplifted, brings victory with it. You have only to let the standard of Christ's truth be opened to the breeze, and the battle is ours.

Now I think I can see that the Spirit of God is lifting up this standard. There is more Gospel preaching, more earnest declaration of Christ in England, than there has been for many a day.

Now, brethren and sisters, as the Spirit begins let us follow. What is a standard lifted up for, but for every soldier to rally to it? Press where you see it displayed to the wind! Press to it every man among you! The soldier does not look at a standard as being a place *from* which he is to march, but around which he is to rally in the day when it is in danger.

Every man must do his duty now in the Christian church, and count it a privilege to do it. You must scatter the Gospel. You must tell it with your lips. You must pray for it with your hearts. You must distribute it as it is printed. Do all you can to increase the sale of sound Gospel literature, but use your own mouths also to tell of the Savior's love. Every man now to his post this day, for now must we awake out of sleep.

Oh! if the Holy Spirit will but visit us now, we need not fear concerning old Rome. Like chaff before the wind the foes shall fly, they shall be driven like thin clouds before a Biscay gale. When once God

comes into the fight, woe unto you who are His enemies! woe unto you! you may quit yourselves like mighty men, but you know the might of Israel's sword in ancient times, and you shall feel it now.

Soldiers of Jesus, never despair! My brethren, do not even fear. Be of good courage! Be confident! God is on our side. "Immanuel"—let that be your watchword—"God with us—Immanuel." Be very courageous and very earnest, and the Spirit of the Lord will lift up a standard when the enemy comes in like a flood. God grant it for His name's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—ISAIAH 59

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.