

A GENEROUS PROPOSAL NO. 916

*A SERMON
DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.*

*“Come you with us, and we will do you good.”
Numbers 10:29.*

THESE ancient words, so simple, yet so sweet, fascinate us with a potent hallowed charm; they ring out their melody like a familiar air; the language of a heart full of kindness, inspired with faith, and inspired with the enthusiasm of a divine hope so much that the lapse of ages impairs not their force, or diminishes anything from their natural spontaneous freshness. This story of Hobab one can hardly read without remembering the apostolic declaration that the Law was a “shadow of good things to come.” A truly instructive shadow it was; in this instance the shadow is so like the image, the type so like the anti-type that we can almost see the Christian church and the convert as he is invited to unite with it. And we may behold in metaphor the blessings of which he may expect to be a partaker in so doing. “Come you with us, and we will do you good,” seems to be quite as suitable an address from the lips of a Christian pastor as from those of the prophet of Horeb, who was king in Jeshurun. We do not feel in the least degree hesitant as if we were wrenching the words from their natural association, or even exercising the slightest ingenuity in accommodating them to our own circumstances, so suitable do they seem for our use.

The people of Israel in the wilderness were a type of the church of Christ; the invitation here given was such as may be given to those who are proper subjects for communion with the Christian church. We shall proceed accordingly, this evening, to talk to you upon four things. First, *the nature of a true church* as it is depicted by Israel in the wilderness; secondly, *the obligation of such a church* to invite suitable persons to join it; thirdly, *the argument that the church may use*, and the inducements it will always have to offer in setting forth the benefits to be conferred on those who heartily respond; and fourthly, *the scrupulous fidelity it behooves us*, as members of the church, to observe in keeping our pledge ever afterwards to seek the welfare of such as unite with our fellowship.

I. First, then, WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A TRUE CHURCH AS IT IS PICTURED BY ISRAEL IN THE WILDERNESS?

We might prolong the answer to this question with many minute features, but it will be unnecessary, at present, to do more than give you a simple broad outline. The people in the wilderness were a redeemed people; they had been redeemed by blood, and redeemed by power. The sprinkling of the blood of the paschal lamb over their lintels, and their doorposts had secured their safety when the first-born of Egypt was slain. Thus they were redeemed by blood, while wonderful miracles were worked throughout the whole land; and at the last, when threatened and pursued by their oppressors, the whole of the pride and pomp of Egypt was destroyed in the Red Sea; they were, indeed, redeemed by power. So, all the true members of God’s church understand what the blood of sprinkling means; they have enjoyed a passover through it. God has passed over them—passed over them in mercy; justice has executed its warrant upon the person of the Lamb, and they have escaped—they have been redeemed by blood. And the Holy Spirit has entered into their hearts, and made them hate their former sins; He has delivered them from the dominant power of their inward corruptions, has set them free, and brought them out of the bondage of sin. Thus they have also been redeemed by power, and no one has any right to think himself a member of Christ’s church unless by faith he has seen himself redeemed by blood; and in his experience has also been redeemed by the power of the Holy Spirit.

But, according to our text and the context, the Israelites were a people who were passing through a land where they found no rest; neither did they desire any, for they were journeying to another country,

the Promised Land, the Canaan! Now, here is another description of the true church of God. They are not of the world, even as Christ is not of the world; this is not their rest. Here they have no continuing city; objectives which may suit men who have no outlook beyond death would not be suitable to them; that which rejoices the heart of the mere worldling gives them but very slender solace; their hope and their consolation lie beyond the river; they look for a city that has foundations whose Builder and Maker is God. Judge then, my dear hearer, whether you are a member of God's church; of the church of Jesus Christ. If you are, you are a stranger and a foreigner this night here below, however pleasant the tent of your pilgrimage may be. Your Father's house on high is your destination; you are an exile from your home, albeit to your faith's foreseeing eyes, its golden gates may never so clearly appear. You have not yet come to your rest, but there remains to you a rest, a rest to which you shall come in due time, though you have not yet reached it. May I entreat you to put these questions to your own hearts as they arise, and judge yourselves?

Israel in the wilderness, according to the text again, was a people walking by faith as to the future. Remember, the words are, "They were going to the place of which the Lord said, I will give it to you." They had never seen it; no one had come from it to tell them of it. True, in later days some spies had returned—but they brought up an ill report of the land, so that the people required even more faith, then, than they did before. If anyone had said to them, "But, if there is a land that flows with milk and honey, how will you gain it; the inhabitants thereof are strong and mighty; how are you sure that you will ever obtain this goodly land?" The only reply would have been, "The Lord has spoken to us concerning it." Every true Israelite had been instructed as to the covenant God had made with Abraham when He said, "To you and to your seed will I give this land to possess it," and every true Israelite was expecting that his people would find a lodgment and a portion in that land forever, because of the covenant which God had made with his fathers. They were walking then, in that respect, by faith; looking for a country which they had not seen; traversing a desert in search of a land which as yet they had not known; and with only God's word for their title deed, and nothing more. And such are God's people now. As for joys to come they have not tasted them—but they are looking for them because God has promised them. "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for them who love Him. But God has revealed them unto us by His Spirit," and the Spirit reveals them only to our faith. If you ask me, "How do you know that there is a heaven?" I must answer you, I believe it on God's testimony; I have no other warrant for it; no man has returned from that fair land to testify that he has heard the everlasting song, or seen the blessed citizens as they stand in their bright array before the everlasting throne. Nor need I that any such should return! God's word is enough; let that stand instead of the testimony of 10,000 angels, or of myriads of the white-robed host of spirits who might have returned to tell the tale; we walk by faith as Israel did of old. Are you walking by such a faith? Do you believe in the unseen future, and does the hope of an unseen reward make you despise the present rewards of sin? Are you willing to bear the reproach of Christ because you count it greater treasure than all the riches of Egypt? Are you willing, now, to take up with Christ's cross because you believe in Christ's crown? Though you have not seen it, do you believe in it, and rejoice with unspeakable joy and full of glory?

These people, also, *as to their present circumstances were walking by faith*; it was not merely faith which sang to them of Canaan, but it was faith that told them of the manna which fell day by day, and the water which flowed from the rock; which stream followed them in their journey. Why, they could not live in any other way in the wilderness but by faith in God, for from that arid strand there sprang nothing for their nourishment! Here and there a palm tree; now and then a cooling well, but for the most part, had it not been for the goodness of God, their way had been over a desert, cheerless, waste, and terrible. But He gladdened it for them, and made the place of His feet, and of their feet, too, right glorious, for His mercy and His Loving-Kindness endure forever! Now, in this world the Christian has to live by faith upon God as to present things; as to temporal necessities, he must cast all his care on Him who cares for us, but especially as to all *spiritual* supplies the Christian has no stock of grace. He has no inner spring within himself in his old nature; he has to look for everything that can sustain his new life from God, even the Father, who has promised not to forsake him. Now surely, my dear hearer, you

know whether you are living by present faith or not! If all your comfort is derived from that which you can handle, and hear, and see, and if your joys of life are only the outward things of the present—then you are no member of the church of God! Whether you may have been baptized, or confirmed; whatever profession you may have made, or whatever sign you may have received; you do not belong to Christ's people—nor can you belong to them! But if you live by faith, I care not of what church you are a member; if you are exhibiting day by day a living faith upon a living but unseen God; if your trust is in His providence; if you daily resort to Christ for help and succor; if you have that faith which is the mark of God's elect, you may depend upon it that you are one of His!

One other mark let us give among many more which might be mentioned. These people found wherever they went, that they were surrounded by foes. In the wilderness the Amalekites were against them; when they crossed into the Promised Land, all the inhabitants of Canaan were up in arms against them. So I think you will find it if you are a child of God; all places are full of snares; events, prosperous or adverse, expose you to temptations; all things that happen to you, though God makes them work for good, while in themselves they would work for evil. Here on this earth the world is no friend to divine grace to help you on to God; the bias of the current is not towards heaven; alas, it is the other way! "Behold I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves." "The whole world lies in the wicked one, and you are of God, little children." Darkness prevails; it cannot minister to your safety or to your happiness, neither can the sinful world minister light to the understanding, peace to the conscience, joy to the heart, or holiness to the life of the believer. You will have to fight continually; the last step you take will be a conflict, and you will never be able to sheathe your sword until you are in the bosom of Christ. Thus must you maintain the godly warfare—

*“Till with yonder blood-bought crowd
You shall sing on Canaan's shore
Songs oft triumph, sweet and loud,
War with Amalek no more.”*

Here, then, are some of the marks of the church of Christ. I hope that a part of that church worships in this house of prayer; a part of that church will be found to worship in every house of prayer where the disciples of our common Lord assemble, and the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ is acknowledged.

II. Let us pass on to the second word, which is this, that **IT IS THE DUTY OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH TO INVITE SUITABLE PERSONS TO JOIN WITH IT.**

As you read—"Come you with us, and we will do you good"—are not these the terms in which any church should invite a suitable pastor to unite with it? I have always felt that they have a better application to a pastor than they have to the people, for it is said of Hobab, "You know how we are to encamp in the wilderness, and you shall be unto us instead of eyes." It was inviting a really efficient *helper*, who would be of great service to the Israelites, to come and cast in his lot with them. So should a church expect to find in its pastor one who may guide them, because he knows how they are to encamp in the wilderness; one who may be to them, in some respects, instead of eyes. Their invitation should come in this way, not only, "Come you with us, that we may *get* good out of you"—that is one design, but it should also be, "Come you with us, that we may *do you good*; that we may hold up your hands, that we may sustain you by our prayers, that we may back you up by our efforts; that being led onward by you from one work of Christian activity to another, we may never fail you, never betray you, but may stand with you even to the last." I believe you will seldom get much good unless you are willing also to confer good; those who are the nearest to the heart of the preacher, in all Christian service, will in all probability be most spiritually enriched under his ministry. I speak not of myself, nor for myself, but I specially address myself now to those of you, my hearers, who are members of other churches. Do, I exhort you, love your ministers! Stand up for their character in all companies! Rally at their side in all their efforts; never let them have to regret your absence at the weeknight service, or at any other time, if you can help it. Let them see that you appreciate the men whom you have chosen to be over you in the Lord, and that you have said in inviting them to come among you, "Come you with us, and we will do you good."

Not to linger on that view, however pertinent and seasonable, let us take the words as significant of the manner in which churches should invite suitable persons to come among them as private members. Are there not those who go in and out merely as visitors worshipping with you, who have never joined hands with you in covenant? They meet with you as mere hearers, under the same ministry, but they have not identified themselves with the brotherhood to sit down and feast with you at the table of the Lord. To such as these the proposal may be made, and the welcome proffered; the conditions, of course, need to be thoroughly understood on our part as well as on theirs; we dare not invite anyone to join the visible church, who has not first joined the *invisible* church! We do not believe that a man has any right to be baptized in water unless he has first been baptized in the Holy Spirit; nor that anyone has a right to eat of the Lord's Supper, the outward signs of bread and wine, until he has eaten of the flesh, and drank of the blood of the Son of Man in a *spiritual* sense. He must have the *essence* of the symbol before we dare give the symbol. So a man must be vitally united to the living church of Christ before he has any right to be professionally united there! And therefore it would be a *sin* on the part of any child of God to say to anyone whom he knew to be an unconverted person, "Come and unite yourself with the church." No, that cannot be! First, dear hearer, you must be one with Christ, reconciled to God, a believer in the precious blood, and then afterwards you may come to the church of God. But until then you have neither part nor lot in this matter, for you are still in the gall of bitterness, and in the bonds of iniquity. Moses did not thus invite any strangers or neighbors indiscriminately, saying, "Come you with us," but he invited Hobab as one whom he well knew, and of whose fitness he could no doubt feel. Was not Raguel his father, the priest of Midian, a servant of the Most High God? And was not Hobab also a worshipper of Jehovah, the God of Israel? "Come you with us," says he, "you are our kith and kin; birds of a feather flock together; come you with us and we will do you good. You are one of our brethren, come and welcome; nothing shall stand in the way. Come you with us, and we will do you good."

Now, I have heard persons speak on this wise, "I believe that my child has been converted, but you must not think that I have pressed him, for I never spoke to my child about religion." I am heartily ashamed of a father who can say that! And I hope that he will be equally ashamed of himself! I quite agree, however, that no parent and no friend should press another to make a public profession of faith until he is as assured as he possibly can be that the fruits of the Spirit are put forth in that child, or that friend. But, once assured of that, there can be no credit in holding your tongue about a Christian duty! It is the duty of every child of God to be associated with the Christian church, and surely it is part of our duty to instruct others to do what the Lord would approve of! Do not, therefore, hesitate to say to such as serve and fear the Lord, "How is it that you remain outside the pale of the visible church? Come you with us, and we will do you good." So Moses did to Hobab.

As it is a very kind and tender word, "Come you with us," *let it be spoken persuasively*; use such reasoning as you can to prove that it is at once their duty and their privilege. Observe, Moses does not *command*, but he *persuades*; nor does he merely make a suggestion or give a formal invitation, but he uses an argument. He puts it attractively, "And we will do you good." So, look the matter up; study it—get your arguments ready; seek out inducements from your own experience; draw a reason, and there and then try to persuade your Christian friends.

Do it heartily. Observe how Moses puts it as from a very warm heart. "Come you with us; give me your hand, my brother; come you with us, and we will do you good." There are no "ifs," "ands," or "buts." It is not, "Well, you may perhaps be welcome," but "Come you with us." Give a hearty, loving, warm invitation to those whom you believe to be your brothers and sisters in Christ! Do it repeatedly if once will not suffice. Observe in this case, Hobab said he thought he would depart to his own land and his kindred. But Moses returned to the charge, and says, "Leave us not, I pray you." How earnestly he puts it! He will have no put off; if at first it was a request, now it is a beseeching, almost an entreaty—"Leave us not, I pray you." And how he repeats the old argument, but puts it in a better light—"If you go with us, yes, it shall be that what goodness the Lord shall do unto us, the same will we do unto you."

I would therefore earnestly say to Christian brothers and sisters here look for some among our congregation, such as you believe to be godly people, and put to them this matter. I am sure they are losing much benefit, and quite certain that they are standing in an irregular position. If it is right for any one

Christian not to be a member of a church, it is right for all Christians not to be members of churches—consequently it would be right for there to be no visible church, and ordinances might be dispensed with, for all these things must either exist through the maintenance of sacred order or else collapse with the breach of godly discipline. What is not the duty of one is not the duty of any; and what *is* the duty of one is the duty of all, for we all stand alike before God. If I may be innocent in abstaining from union with the people of God, so may all of you; or if you may, so may I; there is no more obligation upon me to preach the gospel than there is upon any one of you to make a profession of his faith! If you are a Christian, the same rule of love that prompts me to speak for my Lord should prompt you in your way to speak for your Lord; and if I should not be excusable if I remained silent, and refused to bear my testimony, neither will you be excusable, being a Christian, if you refuse to unite yourself with the people of God. Remember our Master's word, "Whoever therefore, shall confess Me *before men*, him will I confess also before My Father which is in heaven. But whoever shall deny Me before men," (which has the force there of *not confessing*), "him will I also deny before My Father which is in heaven."

Before I leave this point let me call your attention to a certain sense in which Christians may address this invitation to all who they meet with. "Come you with us, and we will do you good." Not, "come and join our church," not, "come and be members," not, "come and put on a profession of faith." You cannot say that to any but to those in whom you *see the fruits of the Spirit!* But you *may* say, and you *ought* to say, to ALL persons of all classes on all sides, "Come away from the seed of evildoers; cast in your lot with the people of God; leave the world, come on pilgrimage to the better country; forsake the pursuit of vanities—lay hold on eternal life, waste not all your thoughts upon the bootless cares of time; think about the momentous matters of eternity. Why will you be companions of those who are upon the wrong side, and whose cause is the cause of evil? Why will you remain an enemy to God? Why will you be in an unreconciled state? We, by God's grace, have cast in our lot with Christ, and with His cause; we desire to live to His glory; our ambition is to serve Him. If we could, we would live without sin, for we hate it, and loathe it; if we could, we would be as the angels are, without a single fault! Come and cast in your lot with us—that is, *believe*; that is, *trust* a Savior slain; that is, put your soul into the custody of Christ the Intercessor; that is, press forward through a life of holiness on earth to a home of happiness in heaven." "Come you with us, and we will do you good."

So, then, the exhortation of our text which, strictly speaking, seems most applicable to the *minister*, becomes next suitable to the child of God who has not up to now cast in his lot with the company of our Lord's disciples! And after that, in a certain sense, it may be appropriately addressed to all who come under the *sound* of the gospel. "Come you with us, and we will do you good."

III. But now, our third observation is that THE MAIN ARGUMENT—THE MOST POWERFUL INCENTIVE WE CAN EVER USE IS—THAT ASSOCIATION WITH THE CHURCH OF CHRIST WILL DO THOSE WHO ENTER INTO IT GOOD.

I am sure it will, for I speak from experience; and if I were to call upon many scores, and even hundreds in this house of prayer, they would all bear the same testimony—that union with the people of God has done them good! The church of God may say this, first, because she can offer to those who join with her good company. In the church of God are those who are called "the excellent of the earth," in whom David said was all his delight. In the church of God are the humble, meek, and lowly, and though in that church there will come a traitorous Judas, yet there are not lacking the warm-spirited, and loving John, the bold and daring Peter, the practical James, the well-instructed Paul in labors more abundant, and many of the precious sons of Zion, and daughters of Jerusalem in like manner; all of whom I might affirm, as the apostle did of Priscilla and Aquila, that they are my helpers in Christ Jesus, unto whom I not only give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles! Truly we can sing with heart-felt sincerity, Dr. Watts' paraphrase of David's Psalm —

*"Here my best friends, my kindred dwell,
Here God my Savior reigns!"*

Good company is always a good thing, and the children of God may say to their brothers and sisters who have not yet joined with them. "Come you with us, and we will do you good, for we will introduce you to the goodly fellowship of the saints. Come join a section of the general assembly and church of the

first-born whose names are written in heaven, and whose work of faith, patience of hope, and labors of love are spread abroad throughout the world.”

“Come with us,” the church of God may say, “and you shall have *good instruction*, for it is in the true church of God that the doctrines of grace are preached, that the covenant of grace is unfolded, that the person of Christ is extolled, and that the work of the Spirit is magnified. All the precious things, indeed, which make up the spiritual meat of God’s servants, are brought forth, and put upon the table every Sunday; there the good stewards bring forth things both new and old. In the midst of the church the Good Shepherd makes us to lie down in the green pastures, and leads us beside the still waters; come you with us, and the teaching of the church shall do you good—you shall hear those glorious doctrines which shall build you up in your most holy faith.”

“Come you with us, and we will do you good,” in the best sense, *for you shall feel in our midst the good presence of God!* Where two or three are gathered together in Christ’s name, there is He in the midst of them, and in the greater assemblies of His people, when the solemn hymn swells up to heaven, and the fervent prayer rises like a cloud of sweet perfume, and the ministry of the gospel is diffused like a sweet smelling savor of Christ unto God—there is God; there the Father is, receiving returning prodigals, accepting His dear children who feel the spirit of adoption. There the Son is, manifesting Himself unto them as He does not unto the world; there the Spirit is, working in them to will and to do of His own good pleasure, and helping their infirmities as a Comforter and an Advocate. Have you not often felt the presence of God, my dear brothers and sisters, in your assemblies as the people of God? Can you not, therefore, say with the recollections in your glowing hearts of the consolations you have received in association with each other, “Come you with us, and we will do you good”?

Come with us again, *for you shall participate in all the good offices of the church;* that is to say, my Christian brothers and sisters, if you will cast in your lot with us, if there is prayer, you shall have your share in it! We will pray for you in your trouble, and trial, and anguish; if a brother’s voice can intercede for you when your tongue is dumb with grief, you shall certainly have such help as they who can minister to you. Come you with us, for in the true church of God there is sympathy; genuine believers are taught to “weep with those who weep,” and to “rejoice with those who rejoice.” They feel that they are members, one of another, and partakers of the same life with Jesus Christ. If there is anything to be found in ordinances you shall have a share of that good thing; if the Lord reveals Himself in the breaking of bread, you shall not be shut out from the table; come you with us, and when we behold Him, you shall see Him, too! Come you with us, and if our fellowship is with Christ, you shall have a share in it; and if our conversation of the things of God is sweet and pleasant, you too shall have your say, and your good word, and we will rejoice to hear you; we invite you to a pure brotherly fellowship, not to one of name only, but in deed, and in heart! “Come you with us, and we will do you good.”

But the good that Hobab was to get *was not only on the road.* He must have got a deal of good on the road, for he saw in the sacrifice what he had never seen before; while he walked among those tents of Judah he must have felt that God was remarkably present there as he had never felt it among the tents of Midian; he saw there every morning the pillar of cloud, and every night the pillar of fire; he heard the sound of the silver trumpets; he saw the uplifting of the sacred banners, and the marching of the chosen host of God, and he must have felt, “This is a place more marvelous than any I have ever trod before! In that falling manna, in that miraculous stream, I see everywhere the marks of omnipotence, love, and wisdom as I never have seen them in all my solitary musings or my long wanderings aforetime.” And so in the church of God there are the footprints of Deity; there are marks of the sublime presence of the Christ of God who abides in the furnace with His afflicted people; signs of God’s presence such as the entire world besides cannot exhibit. You shall get good on the road, but still, the main good that Hobab got was this—*he went into the Promised Land with God’s people!* We read of his people, the Kenites, dwelling in the land in aftertime; he seems to have become a partaker of the same covenant with Israel, to have become part and parcel with them! So, the main blessing that you get from being united with the invisible church of Christ through being part and parcel of the body of Christ *is reserved for the hereafter—*

“When God makes up His last account

*Of natives in the holy mount;
'Twill be an honor to appear
As one newborn, and nourished there."*

Woe unto those who shall have no part with Israel in the day when the lots shall be divided, and the portions shall be given! Woe unto such as shall be found among the Amalekites or Canaanites—strangers to the chosen seed! But happy shall all they be who have God to be their God, for their portion shall be bliss forever! Come, therefore, with us, for whatever good the Lord shall do unto us you shall be a partaker in it.

IV. And now, lastly. All this being seriously pondered, and clearly understood, the last point is a matter of very serious importance. Lest we should be found mere pretenders, LET ALL OF US WHO BELONG TO CHRIST'S CHURCH TAKE CARE TO MAKE THIS ARGUMENT TRUE.

I speak to many brothers and sisters here who have long been joined to the visible church of God, and I put these questions to them: How have you carried out this silent compact which has been made with the friends of Christ? You have promised to do them good; have you fulfilled your pledges? I am afraid few of us have done good to our fellow Christians up to the measure that we might have done, or that we ought to have done! Some professors, I fear, have forgotten the compact altogether; they joined the church, but the idea of doing good to the rest of the community has scarcely entered into their mind.

"Come you with us, and we will do you good." You say this, then, *to the poor members of the church*. Has God prospered you? Do them good; say not to them, "Be you warmed, and be you filled," but as far as ever your ability can reach, minister to them that Christ may not have to say to you, "I was hungry and you gave me no meat. I was thirsty and you gave me no drink." Let your charity be wide as the world, for God makes it to rain on the just and the unjust; but remember—He has a peculiar people, and He would have us to be a peculiar people unto Himself. Let us do good unto all men, but specially to those who are of the household of faith. If you know a brother in Christ whose need is pressing, acknowledge him as a brother; open your hands wide unto him; do him good in this respect.

You who are old members of the church, well established and instructed, you have virtually promised to *do good to the young members*—will you not try to do so? Some of them, perhaps, are not all you would like them to be; mind you, you are not to condemn, but to reform them! Can you not gently prune the luxuriance of their branches that are a little too wild? Would it not be possible for you, in a loving and an affectionate manner, to assist them in the points in which they are weak; to lead them in the matters in which they err? Do them good—do not clamor against them with reproach, censure, sneer, and jibe; nor wish to bind them down to conformity with *your* rules, judging them by the somberness of your own disposition. What if they are lively and cheerful—try to make them merry and wise! Let them be happy and rejoice—seek that their happiness may be in Christ, and their rejoicing in the Lord! Do them good.

There are some of your fellow Christians *who are faint-hearted*—not pleasant people to talk to; they will never cheer you much; they always look on the black side; they have always some trouble; they are terribly dull company—do not shun them, do them good! Strengthen the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees; say to them who are of feeble heart, "Be strong; fear not." Do not forsake them, but you who are spiritual bear their burdens, and help to make them rejoice.

Some among your number will be *backsliders*—alas, that it should be so! Let not your coldness ever accelerate the pace at which they step aside; rather let your persevering care watch over them, that their first wandering may be soon checked. Little, alas, can be done to remedy backsliding when it goes far, but much may be done by nipping it in the bud; in the church of God, *prevention* is infinitely better than *cure*! Watch over them, then. "If any man be overtaken in a fault, you who are spiritual restore such a one in the spirit of meekness, remembering yourself lest you also be tempted."

Some in the church may be *ignorant*; there always were such. No standard of height is set up in the Word of God for all the recruits to be up to that level; no bylaw prescribes that none be received unless they are of a certain stature; if, therefore, some you meet with are very ignorant, do them good. Do not set about a report of any absurd remark that they may make, or any misapprehension they may have upon a point of divinity; you were not always so wise as you are now; probably you are not as wise now as

you think you are! But anyhow, I shall argue from the wisdom you possess, your duty to impart. You have said, “Come you with us, and we will do you good.” It is not doing any man good to smile at him, to find fault with him for not knowing; but it *is* doing him good to hide his shortcomings and help his progress.

Once again—there may be some in your midst *who are in a good deal of trouble*. Have they no friends to sympathize and console them? Alas, friends in this world are often too much like swallows that are gone as soon as the first frost appears. Let it not be so with you; if you never acknowledged him your friend before, be his friend now; come to his aid if you possibly can; let him have your countenance. Do not pass him because his black coat has a rusty hue; do not get out of his way because you are afraid that he is short of cash; as far as ever you can, let him see, now he is in his trouble, that you did not value him for what he *had*, but for *himself*, for his character, for *his attachment to Christ*. If anybody has spoken ill of him, do not be ready to jot down as true the slander that every fool or villain may please to hold forth against a Christian! Search for yourselves, and if you are obliged to believe it, yet say little about it. Carry it before God, as though it were your own sin, and sorrow over it. Talk to your brother, if it is your lot to know him well, and get him to leave the evil into which he has fallen, and lead him back again, but do not forsake him! Or if he is the victim of slander and scandal, be you among the first to defend him. I do hope that there will always be among us a spirit of true Christian brotherhood so that those who love Christ, and have thrown in their lot with us, may find that we really desire to do them good.

I have thus spoken more particularly because I know that the number of Christians among us who are not making a profession is unusually large just now. I had far rather it should be so than that it should be the reverse—than that many should be making a profession without knowing or feeling the private virtue and public faith it demands. Better that you were outside the visible church all your lives, and be in Christ, than make a profession, and yet have neither part nor lot with Him! All these outward things are nothing compared with the inward. “You must be born-again.” There must be a living faith in Christ, a real change of heart, an indwelling of the Spirit of God to attest the truth of your godliness. Where these are, the rest ought not to be neglected. You ought to have done this, and not to have left the other undone, but still, even if they are left undone, it shall not amount to a total shipwreck. But if there is no faith, you may build the vessel as you will, and you may think that you have loaded her with precious treasures, but sink she must—because that alone which would have kept her afloat has been neglected.

God grant us to be one with Christ, and to be one with His people in time and in eternity. There now—there now—there is Christ’s church; and if I saw that she were in the stocks, and all were hooting her; if she stood in the pillory, and all were pelting her, yet it would be my desire to throw in my lot with her! Whatever she endured I would endure, because the day comes when those who were not on the side of Christ and His church would give their eyes if they had been; yes, would wish themselves that they had never been born to think that they did not take up with the reproached people, and did not side with the reproached Savior! O be with Christ in His sorrows, that you may be with Him in His joy! Be with Him in His reproach that you may be with Him in His glory! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—EXODUS 18; NUMBERS 10:23-36.

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