

THE WINNOWING FAN NO. 940

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JULY 10, 1870
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON

*“Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord:
looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God;
lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled.”
Hebrews 12:14-15*

WELL did the apostle declare that the righteous scarcely are saved. It is no child's play to be a Christian. The Christian life is beyond the poet's meaning, real and earnest. The hills of difficulty which lie before us are no molehills, and the giants and dragons with which we must contend are no phantoms of a disordered brain. When we reach heaven, what monuments of grace we shall be, and how shall we throughout eternity emulate one another's praises, each one feeling himself to be the deepest debtor to sovereign grace!

It will be well for us to remember that the religion of Jesus Christ is not a matter of trifling, that the gaining of heaven is not to be achieved by a few half-hearted efforts. And if we will at the same time recollect that all-sufficient succor is prepared for us in the covenant of grace, we shall be in a right state of mind, resolute yet humble, leaning upon the merits of Christ, and yet aiming after personal holiness.

I trust that in my ministry I shall never keep back the doctrines of the grace of God, but I am anxious at the same time with equal clearness to declare the doctrine that good works are necessary evidences of grace. I am persuaded that if self-righteousness be deadly, self-indulgence is ruinous.

Rowland Hill said he had spent a large part of his life in battling with the white devil of Arminianism, but he would now fight the black devil of Antinomianism. I desire to always maintain a balance in my ministry, and while combating self-righteousness to war perpetually with loose living.

Antinomianism is a black devil indeed, a devil whose smutty fingers have defiled full many of the pure truths of our holy faith, and made even good men shy of receiving them. We must remember that though we are saved by grace, yet grace does not stupefy us, but rather quickens us into action. And though salvation depends upon the merits of Christ, yet those who receive those merits receive with them a faith which produces holiness.

The text before us is so full of weighty matter, and my own heart is so full of solemn searching, that I despair of speaking to you all that the text has spoken to me. May the Holy Spirit, the Author of sanctification, help me, and bless the word to you. I beg you to notice that there are before us *two things to be followed and two things to be avoided*.

I. There are in the text TWO THINGS TO BE FOLLOWED. The fourteenth verse tells us what they are. “Follow *peace* with all men, and *holiness*, without which no man shall see the Lord.” We are to follow peace and holiness, the two are consistent with each other and may be followed together.

Peace is to be studied, but not such a peace as would lead us to violate holiness by conforming to the ways of unregenerate and impure men. We are only so far to yield for peace's sake as never to yield a principle. We are to be so far peaceful as never to be at peace with sin, peaceful with men, but contending earnestly against evil principles. “Follow peace,” but let the following of it be guarded by the other precept, “holiness.”

With equal ardor we are to follow holiness. Some who have aimed at holiness have made the great mistake of supposing it is needful to be morose, contentious, faultfinding, and censorious with everybody else. Their holiness has consisted of negatives, protests, and oppositions for opposition sake.

Their religion mainly lies in contrarities and singularities. To them the text offers this wise counsel, follow holiness, but also follow peace. Courtesy is not inconsistent with faithfulness. It is not needful to be savage in order to be sanctified. A bitter spirit is a poor companion for a renewed heart.

Let your determination for principle be sweetened by tenderness towards your fellow men. Be resolute for the right, but be also gentle, pitiful, and courteous. Consider the meekness as well as the boldness of Jesus. Follow peace, but not at the expense of holiness. Follow holiness, but do not needlessly endanger peace.

Having thus hinted at the connection between the two, and how the two together make up a complete character, let us now take them one by one.

Follow *peace*, “peace with all” says the text—an amplification of the expression. Follow peace with all the church. There should be no quarrels within the sacred enclosure which the electing love of God has made. Ye are one in the divine choice, ye are one by the Savior’s purchase, ye are one by the Spirit’s calling, ye have one Lord, one faith, and one baptism, ye are on the way to one heaven, see that ye fall not out by the way.

“Let brotherly love continue.” Let each esteem others better than himself. Let each seek his brother’s good to edification. Let us by no means be divided in heart, for schisms grieve the Holy Spirit, destroy our comfort, weaken our graces, afford occasion for gainsayers, and bring a thousand ills upon us.

Whereas in these evil days the church is so much divided into denominations, and sections, follow peace with all those who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. Hold what you believe with firmness, for you are not to trifle with God’s truth, but wherever you see anything of Christ, there confess relationship, and act as a brother towards your Brother in Christ.

Follow peace with all, especially with your own relatives and friends at home. Call we that man a Christian who will not speak with his own brother? We may call him such, but such he cannot be. “If he loves not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?” When we hear of strife between husband and wife, between brother and sister, between father and child, we are ashamed that the name of Christ should be connected with such unhallowed contentions.

Instead of bidding such persons follow after holiness, I would speak to them as unto carnal, and bid them first bring forth fruits meet for repentance. Do not even publicans and sinners love their own relatives? Are they not often forgiving and gentle? How is it, then, that you, calling yourself a follower of Christ, allow enmity to reign in your spirit? What are your gifts and worshipping while wrath rules within your bosom? What hast thou to do with worshipping God? Leave thy gift before the altar, and go thy way, first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer your gift.

Follow peace with all your neighbors. A Christian man should not make himself hated by all around him, yet there are some who seem to fancy that they are true to their religion in proportion as they make themselves disagreeable. Win your neighbors by your willingness to oblige. Disarm their opposition, if possible, by courtesy, by charitableness, by kindness. “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God.”

“The servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle unto all.” Do not sow nettles, nor scatter thistle seeds, but let the peaceful honeysuckle and loving jasmine adorn your porch. Salute each neighbor’s dwelling with “peace be to this house.” Let the peacefulness of your deportment shame those who delight in ill will and strife, and may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace, always by all means.

“Follow peace with all,” that is, even with persecutors. Believers in Paul’s day were commanded not to resent the evil done to them. They were to render to no man evil for evil, but to follow that which is good, both among themselves and to all. They were put in prison, they were robbed, calumniated, and even cruelly tormented, and yet it is wonderful to observe in history how meekly they endured their afflictions.

Scarcely in any case was a word uttered by them inconsistent with the gentleness of their Savior. Now and then a hot spirit would pronounce a fiery denunciation of the cruelties practiced against the

followers of Jesus, but as a rule the saints were led like sheep to the slaughter, and suffered in all the glory of patient innocence. Here is the patience of the saints! Even thus it should be at this day.

We are to follow peace with the most infidel, the most superstitious, the most wicked, the most cruel. If they will fight, let the fighting be all on one side, or if we take up any weapons, let the weapons be those of longsuffering and of love. Let us kill fire with fire, and by the flame of love overcome the flame of hatred. The anvil after all breaks the hammer, because it bears every stroke and returns none. So be it with the Christian. "Love your enemies, bless them who curse you, do good to them who hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you."

The text says, "*Follow peace*," and the word "follow" indicates a hunter in pursuit of his game. He tracks the footsteps of his prey, he follows it over hill and dale, by the edge of the precipice, over the dangerous ridge, across the brook and along the river, through the woods and down the glen. Follow peace in this way. That is, do not merely be peaceful if nobody irritates you, but go out of your way to be peaceful. Give up many things that you have a right to enjoy. The respect that is due to you be willing to forego. In fine, yield all but truth for peace's sake.

"Charity suffereth long, and is kind." "Charity beareth all things, hopeth all things, and endureth all things." Often the Alpine hunter, when pursuing the chamois, will leap from crag to crag, will wear out the live-long day, will spend the night upon the mountain's cold brow, and then descend to the valleys, and up again to the hills, as though he could never tire, and could never rest until he has found his prey. So perseveringly, with strong resolve to imitate your Lord and Master, follow peace with all.

Stand you still a while, my brother, and let me warn you that you cannot follow peace with yonder burden on your back. What is it? It is a mass of pride. You cannot follow peace if you are proud. Proud men must raise strife by their pride. Even if they try to exhibit good nature, yet pride neutralizes all, and inevitably excites envy and opposition. Even God Himself never sees a proud man but He resolves to pull him down, it is a part of the very nature of all intelligent beings to be offended at pride, and to desire its fall.

What have you to be proud of? Has God given you riches? You are so much the deeper in His debt. Is that a thing to boast about? Has God given you talent? You are so much the more in danger of being led astray by your own presumption. Is your greater danger a cause for pride? If your position is higher, you have more responsibility. Think less of your height, and more of the responsibility which it involves. Walk humbly, or you can not follow peace.

Nor can you follow peace whose heart is full of envy. It is true you have not the wealth of another—what would it profit you if he were as poor as yourself? It is true you have not the talent of another—in what respects would you be better if that man's gifts were taken from him? Why, I will be bound to say, you have after all as much as you will make good use of, and if not, your brother's loss would not make you the richer.

It is wrong to be proud, but it is equally wrong to be envious. An envious man is sure to see faults where they do not exist, and so he makes trouble. Envy paints upon the diseased eyeballs of her victims the faults of others. The faults they see are rather in themselves than in others, yet they think they see them there. Lay aside your envy. Rejoice that another is happier and better than you are. Rejoice in his happiness, it is the way to increase your own. Rejoice in his goodness, it will make you better. If you would double your joy, enjoy another's joy, and thank God that he has it.

Nor can you follow peace, my dear friend, you with the swift-moving tongue. It were not amiss that it moved so rapidly if it carried better burdens. But you are a tale-bearer amongst your brethren. Your tongue speaks more than is true and much more than is kind. If you perceive even a little offense in a brother, how quick you are to spread it with exaggerations of your own!

How can you follow peace till you have asked God to bridle your tongue? What has an untamed, unruly tongue to do with peace? It is the great creator and fomentor of discord. More mischief is made by idle tittle-tattle than by downright malice. The mischief that men resolve to do is very small compared with what men *and women* incidentally do by mere thoughtless love of saying something.

Thou shalt not gossip, is a commandment which lies in “Thou shalt not bear false witness,” and is akin to “Thou shalt not kill.” Follow peace with all, and restrain that busy and wicked member, which James calls a world of iniquity, that “setteth on fire the wheels of nature, and is set on fire of hell.”

If we would follow peace we must gird our loins with the girdle of forbearance. We must resolve that as we will not give offense, so neither will we take offense, or if offense is felt we must resolve to forgive. After sundown let us never harbor remembrance of an injury. As even the wasp’s sting dies when the sun sets, so let our resentments pass away. Boundless is the forgiveness of Christ, so let our forgiveness be. Until seventy times seven, said Christ to Peter. We have not yet reached that, and if we have, let us begin another seventy times seven, for God has forgiven us countless numbers of offenses.

If any tell us that this is to be mean spirited, let us tell them it is to be Christ-like. And if they call the Master mean spirited, we of His household will be content to be called the same. After all, what is grander than patience? What a holy vengeance it is to heap coals of fire upon an adversary’s head by returning kindness for malice?

O ye who are the people of God, remember that your name is men of peace, that your God is the God of peace, that your Savior is the Prince of peace, that the Gospel is the Gospel of peace, that the ministers are ambassadors of peace, that your heritage on earth is your Savior’s legacy of peace, and that your heaven is peace. “If it be possible, as much as lieth in you live peaceably with all men.” This is the winning post towards which you are to run. The crown of olive crown and not the wreath of laurel is to be your coveted prize.

The second object of pursuit is a still higher attainment—would God we had reached it. “Follow peace with all men, and *holiness*.” The amplification of the term “holiness” is the solemn declaration, “without which no man shall see the Lord.”

Certain theologians are so averse to the preaching of practical holiness that they have tried to import into these words the idea of imputed righteousness. In imputed righteousness I glory, but it is not mentioned here. No, my hearer, it is utterly impossible that the text should mean anything of the kind, because you will observe that we are to “*follow*” it, whatever it may be.

Now, we do not follow imputed righteousness, for as soon as we put our trust in Christ we are justified through His righteousness. It is not a grace to be followed, it is a boon possessed already by every Christian. This text deals with inward, personal holiness, and nothing else. Imputed holiness is a gross misuse of terms. It is not Scriptural, and it is a thorough perversion of this passage to force such a sense upon it. This is holiness produced in us by the Holy Ghost, which we progressively manifest in our hearts and lives.

“Follow holiness, without which no man can see the Lord.” I understand by this sentence, in the first place, that no person who is unholy can see or understand Christ the Lord, or God His Father. That is to say, he does not know who Christ is so as to have any real fellowship with Him. He may know His name, and know His history, and have some theoretical ideas of what the Redeemer did and is, but he cannot see with spiritual eyesight as holy men do. He cannot, in fact, discern the spiritual character and teaching of the Lord.

But perhaps the great meaning lies in this—without holiness no man can see the Lord in heaven at last. He will see Him on the throne of judgment, but he cannot see Him as his friend, he cannot see Him in that beatific vision which is appointed for the sanctified. He cannot see Him so as to find joy and delight in the sight of Him. He will not be able to enjoy eternal fellowship with God, he will not be permitted to enter heaven—

*“Those holy gates for ever bar
Pollution, sin, and shame;
None can obtain admittance there
But followers of the Lamb.”*

God is so holy that He never can have fellowship with unholy creatures. Heaven, the court of God, is so holy that never can unholy beings tread its hallowed pavement. An angel once became unholy, and from the battlements of heaven he was hurled into the deeps of hell. God willed to save His elect, but He would not bring them to heaven until He had sanctified them. He, therefore, sent His Son to die, that from His wounded side might flow the purifying stream.

Surely He who would not spare Satan, the bright archangel, will not admit polluted man to heaven. And He who put His Son to death to bring His own elect to heaven, by purifying them from sin, will not bring any of us there if we remain unholy and submit not ourselves to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

This is the object of election—"God hath chosen us from the beginning that we should be holy." This is the very end of our calling. "He hath called to virtue and holiness." "As he that hath called you is holy, be ye holy in all manner of conversation." This is the work of the Holy Spirit, He sanctifies the soul, and purifies us day by day. This is the test of likeness to Christ, for it is in true holiness that we are conformed unto the image of God's dear Son. Unholy men cannot enter heaven, it is impossible. Sooner might God die than unholiness live in His presence.

Now, see, my dear friends, the text says, "*Follow holiness.*" *follow* it, that is to say, you will not gain it by standing still. Nobody ever grew holy without consenting, desiring, and agonizing to be holy. Sin will grow without sowing, but holiness needs cultivation. Follow it, it will not run after you. You must pursue it with determination, with eagerness, with long-continued perseverance, as a hunter pursues his prey.

You have not yet gained all the holiness which you may have and ought to have. You are in some respects holy, all of you who have believed, for you are sanctified and set apart by God the Father. You are also rendered holy, in some respects, by being dedicated to Christ and being consecrated as His servants. But you have need to follow the holiness which the Spirit of God works in you, and I do beseech you, beseeching most of all myself, listen to this word—"Follow holiness."

Ah, dear friends, this is a very high and lofty text, almost too high to be addressed to some professors, for some who bear the name of Christ have not even followed after morality yet, much less after holiness.

Now, holiness is far beyond morality, and you cannot be holy while you are not even moral. I blush to confess that some professors are unchaste. Professors, alas! even in this church some have vexed us with uncleanness. I may not know who, in each particular case, may now be guilty of this sin, but such have been, such are, such will be, I fear, among the faithful. Men who can talk well about Christ, and yet who are living in secret indulgence of lewdness.

Persons will dare to profess the religion of Christ who can enjoy a lascivious song and broad talk, who are given to what is softly styled imprudence, which is really impurity. Impure familiarities, glances, and sports are the commencement of actual crimes. Men and women who in any way injure their delicacy and modesty, by insensible degrees, proceed to overt sin.

All men wonder when a professor falls into foul sin, but they would not wonder if they knew how long the transgressor had gone to the verge of the precipice. The wonder would be rather that the moth had not burnt its wings in the candle long before.

Oh, hate the very thoughts of uncleanness! Your members are members of Christ, your bodies are to be raised in the image of Christ, defile them not, but walk with the utmost purity as in the sight of the thrice holy God.

Alas! I must further confess that some professors are not yet even honest. Shall I talk with them about being holy, when in their trade they cheat, and misrepresent, and lie! Should we see so many religious bankrupts, so many names before the civil courts of religious knaves and scoundrels, if there were not good need to preach plain morality even in the visible church of God? I do preach it, I dare not do otherwise, even at the risk of having it thrown in my teeth by the enemies of religion.

How can I talk of holiness to those who are dishonest in trading? Shame upon you to couple God's name with your knaveries. Get ye hence. What have ye to do with Christ? Ye are His crucifiers, ye put

Him to an open shame. I say such even weeping, that they above all others are the enemies of the cross of Christ.

Mournfully, I must go on and accuse some professors of being drunks. There are still mingled with our churches, even with our Nonconforming churches, those who put but small restraints upon their animal appetites, who are overcharged with drunkenness in their parties and in secret. They talk like the disciples of Christ, and eat and drink like the followers of Epicures.

Men given to wine cannot be filled with the Spirit. What though they are not seen staggering in the streets, is their excess one whit the less sinful than that of the public drunkard? "Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and have been wanton; ye have nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter." Is not this living unto the flesh? And shall ye not die?

There are some, again, who have not yet attained to be industrious. We have those in the church who are shamefully idle, who if they could but live on the alms of the church, would never do anything for themselves, and how the grace of God can live in a lazy man I know not. If laziness is detestable to good men, much more must it be to God. "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work," says Christ. You find no idleness among angels or saints, yet these men would eat other men's bread, and deserve to be put upon the rations appointed for such by the apostle Paul, "If any will not work, neither let him eat."

Now if I have to speak of such sins as these that are common among ungodly men, well may my heart ache when I see them in the church of God. I am wearied with the sins of professors, and sore vexed with their inconsistencies. I long to present you as a chaste virgin unto Christ, and lo! I see sin and folly in Israel. Achan troubleth the camp. How can we talk of holiness to men who fall short even in morality?

Holiness is better than morality, it includes it, it goes beyond it. Holiness affects the heart, Holiness respects the motive, holiness regards the whole nature of man. A moral man does not do wrong in act, a holy man hates the thought of doing wrong. A moral man does not swear, but a holy man adores. A moral man would not commit outward sin, a holy man would not commit inward sin, and over that inward sin, if committed, he would pour forth floods of tears.

I can hardly explain to you the word "holy," except by calling you to notice that it comes from the same Saxon root as the words "heal," "whole," and "all." A man who is made spiritually whole is a complete man, all the virtues are there. His heart is right as well as his outward acts. Heal, all, whole, wholly, holy, by these steps you reach the word.

A holy man aims to be like God, complete in his character, motives, and thoughts, renewed after the image of Him that created Him in righteousness and true holiness. Did not that word stagger you as I read the chapter this morning? Was not that a wonderful expression? "Partakers of *his* holiness"? That you and I should share in the holiness of God, is not this a lofty thing? And yet we must have no less than this, for without it we shall not see God.

"This is a hard saying," says one, "you judge us too severely." Brethren, I judge you not, it is God's Word that judgeth, and I pray you regard its infallible utterance, "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord." In the Greek there are no less than three negatives in this passage, as though it said, "No never, no man shall see the Lord." Is he a great preacher? Without holiness he may preach, and the Lord may use him to win souls, but he shall never see the Lord. Is he a great giver to the cause of God? Yes, very generous, but without holiness he shall not see the Lord.

"He said he believed in Jesus Christ, and he talked a great deal about inward experience." That may be, but without holiness, whoever he may be, he shall never see God face to face. There will be no exception made for any one of us, we must all go into that scale and be weighed there, and if we be devoid of holiness, much more if we be destitute of common morality, we shall never see the Lord.

Heaven and earth shall pass away, but this Word shall never pass away. If we follow not after holiness, at the gates of heaven we shall find ourselves repulsed. Hope as we may, and boast as we may, neither you nor I, without holiness, shall never get one joyful glimpse of God.

II. Thus have I spoken on the two things to be followed, and now, with the Holy Spirit's help, I will speak on the TWO THINGS TO BE AVOIDED.

These are in the next verse, "Looking diligently, lest any man fail of the grace of God." The first thing to be avoided is *failure*. Even those who believe in the doctrine of falling from grace have honestly conceded that this text does not mean that men may fall from the grace of God, though the marginal reading might imply that. The Greek would not bear such a rendering.

There are some persons who for a time appear to possess the grace of God, and for awhile exhibit many outward evidences of being Christians, but at last *the* temptation come that are most suitable to their depraved tastes, and they are carried away with it. They fail of the grace of God. They appear to have gained it, but they fail at last, like a man in business who makes money for a time, but fails in the end.

They fail of the grace of God—like an arrow shot from the bow, which goes straight towards the target for a time, but having too little impetus fails to reach the mark. There are some who did run well, what does hinder them that they should not obey the truth?

*"Th' apostate soul does tire and faint,
And walk the ways of God no more;
He is esteemed almost a saint,
Yet makes his own damnation sure."*

Perhaps a more dangerous way of failing of the grace of God may be this, some have maintained an admirable character to all appearance all their lives, and yet have failed of the grace of God because of some secret sin. They persuaded even themselves that they were believers, and yet they were not truly so. They had no inward holiness, they allowed one sin to get the mastery, they indulged in an unsanctified passion, and so though they were laid in the grave like sheep, they died with a false hope, and missed eternal life.

This is a most dreadful state to be in, and perhaps some of us are in it. Let the prayer be breathed, "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." Are you earnest in secret prayer? Do you love the reading of the Bible? Have you the fear of God before your eyes? Do you really commune with God? Do you truly love Christ? Ask yourselves these questions often, for though we preach the free Gospel of Jesus Christ, I hope as plainly as any, we feel it to be just as needful to set you on self-examination and to excite in you a holy anxiety.

It ought to be often a question with you, "Have I the grace of God, or do I fall short of it? Am I a piece of rock crystal which is very like the diamond, but yet is not diamond? Am I like that famous wheel we have all heard so much of lately which had been revolving on its axis so long, but which had an unseen flaw in it, and therefore at last on its journey it snapped and destroyed many lives? Am I just that? Have I been revolving for years in my profession, and shall I break down at last with the whole weight of my eternal interests to be thereby eternally ruined?"

My dear friends, hear ye earnestly to the text, it says, "*Looking diligently* lest any man fail of the grace of God." The word is "*episcopountes*," a word which signifies overseeing, being true bishops, looking diligently as a man on the watchtower watches for the coming foe. See the sentry pace the rampart, he looks in one direction and he sees the brushwood stirred. He half thinks it is the foe, and suspects an ambush there. He looks to the front, across the sea, does he not discern a sail in the distance? The attack may be from the seaboard. He looks to the right, across the plain, and if even a little dust should move, he watches lest the foe should be on foot.

So in the church of God each one should be on his watchtower for himself and for others, watching diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God. The first person who is likely to fail in this church is myself. Each one ought to feel that, and so the beginning of the watch should therefore be at home.

Depend upon it, dear friends, if there be anyone likely to fall into sin it is yourself. Though I say you, I mean myself as well. Each man is himself most in danger. If you say, "I do not think so," then there is the more reason that you should think so. If upon hearing of anyone falling into sin you have said, "I do not understand it. I know I would never have done so," it is very likely you will, ere long, fall into the same or equally vile sin. You are just the man. Those who think they stand are the men who fall. "If any man thinketh he standeth, let him take heed lest he fall."

You who lie low on your faces before God in self-distrust, feeling your liability to err, and asking to be kept every day, you are the least likely to fall of any. But those who say in Pharisaic confidence, "What fools others are to be led astray in that way. I am not one of them," they are fools themselves. God help you, when you are self-reliant, for your feet have almost gone, if not to any other sin, at all events in the direction of pride. And remember a man may as easily be damned by pride as by dishonesty.

Then next, exercise watchfulness over others. How many persons might be saved from backsliding by a little oversight! If we would speak to the brother kindly and considerately, when we think he is growing a little cold, we might restore him. We need not always speak directly to him by way of rebuke, but we may place a suggestive book in his way, or speak generally upon the subject.

Love can invent many ways of warning a friend without making him angry, and a holy example will also prove a great rebuke to sin. The very presence of some men is a check and guide to others. In the church we ought to bear one another's burden, and so fulfill the law of Christ, exercising the office of bishops over one another, and watching diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God.

The second thing to be avoided is *uprising evil*. "Lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled." In the center of my lawn horseradishes will sprout up, after the smallest shower of rain it rises above the grass and proclaims its vitality. There was a garden there once, and this root maintains its old position. When the gardener cuts it down, it resolves to rise again. Now, if the gardener cannot get it quite out of the ground, it is his business constantly to cut it down.

We are but men, and even when associated in church fellowship, each one brings his own particular poisonous root, and there are sure to be bad roots in the ground. We are to watch diligently lest any of these bitter poisonous roots spring up, for if they do they will trouble us. Sin and error always bring sorrow and division, and thereby many are defiled. Sometimes the root is doctrinal error, and in these days there is a world of it. We must watch diligently lest doctrinal error springs up in our midst.

I must confess I have very little charity for many of the errors of modern times, and can never degrade this church by tolerating all sorts of views in it. If men choose errors, let them form their own churches, they have no right to thrust their views upon our community. There is a certain form of doctrine which we believe to be Scriptural, and if any members deviate from it, their first duty is to leave the church when they can no longer agree with its belief.

As long as I am pastor I shall have no controversy about doctrines which are our settled basis of association, but shall bid those who differ go where they can hold their own views in peace. If this should not prove successful, our duty will be to follow peace by extirpating the root of bitterness, and putting the Jonah overboard. Such a case has never occurred, and by God's grace I trust never will, but if it should the church must not hesitate. I am persuaded that doctrinal differences in a church, by breeding the spirit of contention, altogether prevent that church from serving God aright. If we do not agree in the same truth we had better separate, we must be one or we cannot be strong.

While we hold one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and are moved by the same Spirit, we shall advance to the battle as one man, knit together in the bonds of holy unity. But when roots of bitterness spring up, they must be cut down and kept down, or else ultimately they will bring defilement. Doctrinal error leads to practical error, and a church which treats God's doctrine as nothing, will soon allow His precept to be treated in the same way, and this would altogether defile the church of God.

Another root of bitterness is when sin prevails in the church. When they who preach the Gospel, or hold office in the church, or are members of it, fall into gross and open sin, hell laughs in derision. We should watch diligently against this.

Again, I say, each man must watch himself most diligently, and his fellow next. Do, dear friends, guard against the beginning of sin. Rest assured, Christian professors never go into great sins on a sudden. There is first a neglect of private prayer, an indulgence in something which looks innocent but is not, and by degrees it comes to open sin.

We cannot, as professors, from the very force of our training and association, plunge into foul sin all of a sudden. It is by degrees that Satan entices us away from our steadfastness, and then at last we fall a prey to the foe. On your knees pray to God to crush the eggs of the old dragon before they are hatched, for if you be truly children of God and go into sin, it will cost you I know not what. It may cost you sorrow to your grave.

Poor David, poor David, up to the time of his great sin, what a grand singer he was. But if you read me one of the psalms, I can tell you whether he wrote it before or after his fall, for before that sad event his songs are jubilant and dance to the music of the timbrel, but afterwards his voice is hoarse, and bass notes preponderate, and you see traces of doubt and unbelief which never appeared before. Beware of his sin lest you fall into his sorrow.

And remember, sins which happened to some of God's people of old, and yet they were truly God's people, if they happened to you would prove that you were not among the people of God at all, for they were placed, many of them, in circumstances which, though they did not excuse the sin, yet somewhat accounted for it.

You are not placed in such circumstances, you have more light given you and a clearer revelation of Christ, and therefore more is expected of you. And I tell you in God's sight, if you do not all strive after holiness, it is in vain for you to talk about faith in Christ, for there it stands and always must stand, "Be ye holy, for I am holy." "Be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the Lord."

The Son of Man not only came to seek the lost, but to save them, and that saying is explained by His very name. "They shall call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people *from their sins*," not in their sins, but *from* their sins.

Except we, as believers, keep our Lord's commandments and walk according to His will, we shall not be able to comfort ourselves even with the blood of Jesus. For Jesus never died to give us peace while we love sin and live in it. What says the Scripture, "If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." See ye then that only as we are walking in the light as He is in the light, can we have evidence that the blood has cleansed us from sin. God grant us grace to feel the force of this.

If rightly moved by the truths taught in this sermon we shall be very humble. When Isaiah had heard the seraphim cry, "Holy, holy, holy," while the posts of the doors moved, he said, "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." Do you not feel the same? Let humility prevail in your spirit, let it rule in your heart more and more.

Do not be afraid of being brought very low, you are never so safe as when you are low. Do not be afraid of having a very humble esteem of yourself. I do not suppose any of us have in our most desponding moments ever grasped the desperate character of our own ruin by nature, and the terrible character of our personal sinfulness apart from Christ. You are undone, in your flesh there dwelleth no clean thing, and even your righteousnesses are as filthy rags.

O child of God, get you to the foot of the cross and lie there. But what then? By all-conquering faith *look up* and say, "Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, my faith is fixed on Him. O You precious Lamb of God, like the publican I cry, 'Be merciful to me, a sinner,' renew me, cleanse me, purge me. I hate my sins, deliver me from their power, keep me that I sin not against Thee, hold me up

and I shall be safe. On the blood which cleanses I depend. O let it come to me in all its purifying, sanctifying, force, and make and keep me pure within!”

If there be in this house today any who have backslidden, I beg them to mourn indeed, and put their trust in Jesus, and begin again. And if there is any professor, young or old, who ought not to be a professor, I ask him either to lay down his profession or make it real. Do not add to your sins this sin of pretending to be a Christian if you are not.

Be honest. O do not wound Christ with unnecessary wounds. If you make no profession you will at least be free from the sin of hypocrisy. But I pray you do not sell your birthright for a little pottage. Do not let your God and Savior go for a little of this world’s vanities. May you choose Christ, may you lay hold on Him and be laid hold of by Him, and may you be kept by Him even to the end, that in the last great day Jesus may say of you, “Here am I, and the children whom thou hast given me.”

If you have never been converted, and have made no profession, still the text has a bearing upon you. Remember, without holiness you cannot see the Lord. “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” Faith in Jesus is the basis of holiness. God help you to begin at the cross, and grant you His blessing from this time forth even forever. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—HEBREWS 12

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.