

“THE STRONG ONE DRIVEN OUT BY A STRONGER ONE”

NO. 613

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BY C. H. SPURGEON,

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“When a strong man armed keeps his palace, his goods are in peace: but when a stronger than he shall come upon him and overcome him, he takes from him all his armor wherein he trusted, and divides his spoils. He that is not with Me is against Me: and he that gathers not with Me scatters. When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walks through dry places, seeking rest. And finding none, he says, I will return unto my house from where I came out. And when he comes, he finds it swept and garnished. Then goes he and takes to him seven other spirits more wicked than himself; and they enter in and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first.”
Luke 11:21-26.

THE Lord Jesus is ever in direct and open antagonism to Satan. “I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your seed and her seed,” has been most emphatically fulfilled. Christ has never tolerated any truce or parley with the Evil One and never will. Whenever Christ strikes a blow at Satan, it is a *real* blow and not a feint and is meant to destroy, not to amend. He never asks Satan’s help to subdue Satan—never fights evil by evil—He uses the weapons which are not carnal, but mighty to the pulling down of strongholds. And He uses them ever with this intention—not to dally with Satan, but to cut up his empire, root and branch. “For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.”

There is a deadly, implacable, infinite, eternal hatred between Christ and that sin of which Satan is the representative. No compromise can ever be thought of, no quarter will ever be allowed. The Lord will never turn from His purpose to bruise Satan under His feet and to cast him into the lake of fire. Therefore there was nothing more libelous than the assertion of certain Pharisees in Christ’s day that He cast out devils through Beelzebub, the Prince of devils! O base suggestion that the Lord of Glory was in league with the dunghill deity, the Prince of devils! He never fights the Lord’s battles with the devil’s weapons! He has not the most distant affiance with evil! It is not possible that He should be the friend and patron of that spirit of unhallowed charity which for the sake of peace would give tolerance to error.

No, Christ never allies Himself with Satan to advance the kingdom of God. He comes against him as a strong man armed, determined to fight until He wins a decisive victory. We shall observe this more clearly as we open up the passage now before us. Our text presents us with a picture of man in his sinful state. Then it gives us a representation of man for a time reformed, but eventually subjected to the worst forms of evil. And it also shows us a graphic portrait of man, entirely conquered by the power of the great Redeemer.

I. First, WE SHALL ATTENTIVELY LOOK AT THE PICTURE OF MAN AS HE IS IN A STATE OF NATURE. “When a strong man armed keeps his palace, his goods are in peace.” Observe that although man’s heart was intended to be the Throne of God, it has now become the palace of Satan—whereas Adam was the obedient servant of the Most High and his body was a temple for God’s love, now, through the Fall, we have become the servants of sin and our bodies have become the workshops of Satan.

“The spirit that now works in the children of disobedience.” This spirit is called a strong man and truly so he is—who can stand against him? Like the monster in the book of Job, we may say of him, “Lay your hand upon him, remember the battle, do no more. Behold, the hope of him is in vain! Shall not one be cast down even at the sight of him?” Though a thousand Philistines are smitten hip and thigh with a great slaughter by Samson, the avenger of Israel, yet the strong man falls a victim to the stronger fiend.

That mighty hero, though he could rend a lion, was no match for the lion of the pit who overcame him to his shame and hurt. Solomon, the wisest of men, was outwitted by Satan, for his heart was led astray by the arch-tempter. Even he

who was the sire of men was overthrown by this dread enemy in the early days of innocence and happiness. He is so strong that if all of us should combine against him, Satan would laugh at us as Leviathan laughs at the shaking of the spear. Strong he is, not simply as possessing force, but in the sense of cunning. He knows how to adapt his temptations to our besetting sins. He discovers fitting times in which to assail us. He understands that there is a time when kings go forth to battle and he is ever ready for the fight.

He is a good swordsman. He knows every cut and guard and thrust and parry and he knows our weak places and the joints in our harness. Christians who have ever stood foot to foot with him will give him credit for this—that he is strong, indeed. And unbelievers who have at any time sought to resist his power in their own strength have soon been made to feel that their strength was perfect weakness. He is a strong man with a vengeance! Oh, Christian, well is it for you that there is a stronger than he—the might of Satan would crush you to your ruin if it were not that the almightiness of Christ comes in to the rescue!

It is said of this strong man, moreover, that he is *armed*. Truly the Prince of the power of the air is never without weapons. His principal weapon is the lie. The sword of God’s Spirit is the Truth, but the sword of the evil spirit is the lie. It was by falsehood that he overthrew our race at first and despoiled us of perfection. And it is with continued falsehoods, of which the lie is both the forger and the user, that he continues to destroy the souls of men. He will tell the sinner sometimes that he is too young to think of death and of eternal things. And when this weapon fails he will assure him that it is too late, for the day of Grace is over—

*“He feeds our hopes with airy dreams.
Or kills with slavish fear.
And holds us still in wide extremes,
Presumption, or despair.
Now he persuades,
‘How easy ‘tis
To walk the road to Heaven!’
Then he swells our sins and cries,
‘They cannot be forgiven!’
Thus he supports his cruel throne
By mischief and deceit,
And drags the sons of Adam down
To darkness and the pit.”*

He has a way of making the worse appear the better reason. He can put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter—make men believe that it is to their own advantage to do that which is causing their everlasting ruin. He can make men carry coals of fire in their bosoms and dream that they shall not be burned. He can make them dance upon the brink of Hell as though they were on the verge of Heaven. Alas, fools that we are, how readily do his lies prevail against us! Then he has the well-feathered arrows of pleasure. The strong man is armed with the lusts of the flesh. Dainty dalliances he offers to some—overflowing cups that sparkle to the eye he presents for others! Glittering wealth he gives to the avaricious and the trump of fame and all the smoke of applause he promises to others.

Weapons? Why, I cannot attempt to mention all the war-like implements of the Prince of the power of the air. He can hurl fiery darts as thick as hail. His breath kindles coals and a flame goes out of his mouth. When he raises himself up the mighty are afraid. Bunyan’s half-inspired imagination pictured him thus—“Now the monster was hideous to behold. He was clothed with scales like a fish (and they are his pride). He had wings like a dragon, feet like a bear, and out of his belly came fire and smoke and his mouth was as the mouth of a lion.”

He is well armed at every point and he knows how to arm his slave—the sinner, too. He will plate him from head to foot with mail and put weapons into his hands against which the puny might of Gospel ministers and of human conscience can never prevail. Then we are told that he wears armor—for we read that the stronger warrior, “takes from him all his armor wherein he trusted.” Certain it is the evil spirit is well informed in that which is proof against all terrestrial steel. Prejudice, ignorance, evil education—all these are chain-armor with which Satan girds himself.

A hard heart is the impenetrable breastplate which this evil spirit wears! A seared conscience becomes to him like leaves of brass. Living in sin is a helmet of iron. We know some who, through a long period of years, have harbored

within them an evil spirit which seems to have no joints in its harness at all. It were as easy to draw blood from granite as to reach some men’s hearts—the demon who possesses them is not to be wounded by our artillery. “His scales are his pride, shut up together as with a closed seal. His heart is as firm as a stone—yes, as hard as a piece of the nether millstone.”

We have preached at such men, prayed for them, spoken sharply, spoken tenderly, assaulted them from every quarter, wooed them with love Divine, thundered at them with the judgments of God and with the terrors of His Law. But the strong man is so completely mailed that as yet we have made no impression upon him whatever. When we have struck him with such a blow that he seemed to reel, yet the armor has been thick enough to save him from a deadly wound. “The sword of him that strikes at him cannot hold, nor the spear, the dart, nor the coat of mail. He thinks of iron as straw, and brass as rotten wood. The arrow cannot make him flee—stones from slingshots are turned by him into stubble. The flakes of his flesh are joined together—they are firm in themselves. They cannot be moved.”

Notice, again, this strong man—besides being armed and plated with armor—is very watchful. It is said, “he keeps his palace.” He keeps it like the faithful warden who with ceaseless tramp and sleepless eye holds watch upon the castle wall. He does not put on the armor to sleep in it. You may find sleeping saints, but never sleeping devils. The restless activity of fallen angels is something awful to contemplate—“they rest not day nor night”—but like ravenous lions go about seeking their prey. When Satan enters a man’s heart, he takes care to watch whenever there is the slightest chance of the Truth of God coming in and driving him from his throne.

He puts a double guard on the person when he is under the sound of the Word. He will let you go to those places where the minister never attacks the conscience and never cries aloud against sin—for he feels that there his kingdom is not assailed. But wherever the true Gospel is preached and preached with Divine power, hosts of devils are sure to gather, “Because,” says Satan, “there is danger to my dominions now. I will set a double garrison to protect my citadel against the attack of God’s Truth.”

Beware, O saints, when the Lord, the Holy Spirit, is working, for the great enemy is certain to be doubly active at such seasons! He keeps his goods. How would I delight to catch him unawares, but this leviathan is not to be taken with a hook, nor is his jaw to be bored through with a thorn. We may drop a warning to the sinner here, we may speak the passing word of exhortation there, we may stand in the corner of yonder street and declare salvation, or we may occupy the pulpit in Jesus’ name—we may use all the means which ingenuity can devise—but Satan is always as prompt as we are, having his unclean birds always ready to carry away any seeds that may be scattered upon the soil.

While men sleeps he sows tares, but he never slumbers himself. As Hugh Latimer used to say, he is the most industrious bishop in England. Other bishops may neglect their dioceses, but Satan, never! He is always making visitations and going from place to place upon his evil business to watch after his black sheep. The sinner’s heart must be carried away by storm if it is ever taken, for there is no hope of taking the Evil One by surprise. We have in the text a good reason given why Satan thus watches over the man whose heart he inhabits—because he considers the man to be his property—“he keeps his goods.”

They are not his in justice. Whatever goods there are in the house of manhood must belong to God who built the house and who intended to tenant it. But Satan makes up a claim and calls everything in the man *his* property. The man’s memory he makes a storehouse for ill words and bad songs. The man’s judgment he perverts so that the scales and weights are false. The man’s love he sets on fire with coals of Hell and his imagination he dazzles with foul delusions. All the powers of the man, Satan claims—“I will have his mouth—he shall swear for me! I will have his eyes—they shall wander after vanity! I will have his feet—they shall take him to the place of sinful amusement! I will have his hands—he shall work for me and be my slave!”

The heart is hard and the conscience stupefied and therefore—

*“Sin like a raging tyrant sits
Upon his flinty throne,
And all that’s good is crushed to death,
Beneath this heart of stone.”*

He claims the *whole* man to be his own. And it is amazing how readily his claim is allowed! Men fancy music in the chains with which Satan binds them and hug the fetters which he hangs upon them! Men cheerfully obey the Prince of Darkness

and yet it is hard, ah, hard indeed, to bring the followers of Jesus to yield up their members in full obedience to the sweet Prince of Peace.

Nor is this all! Satan not only claims possession, but he claims sovereignty! You perceive it is said, “his palace.” A palace is usually the abode of a *king*—so Satan considers himself a great king when he dwells in the human heart. Divine Sovereignty has ever been the great target of Satan’s attacks, because he aspires to set up his own infernal sovereignty. His sway over men is imperial and his government despotic. When he takes possession of the human heart he says to his servant, “Go,” and he goes. And to his captive, “Do this,” and he does it. He will not be regulated and ruled by reason, but he will have his own will obeyed in all its madness of rebellion. His declaration is made in apish imitation of the great God. “Cannot I do as I will with my own.” “I am, and there is none beside me.”

To what extravagances of sovereignty will not Satan go with men! He will allure them to drunkenness—nor is that enough—he will hurry them into delirium tremens. He will drive them out of their senses and urge them to lay violent hands upon themselves—no, he often covers his victims with their own blood shed by themselves! An old preacher took for his text, “When the devils entered into the swine the whole herd ran violently down a steep place into the sea and perished in the waters.” One of his points was, “The devil drives his hogs to a bad market.” And there is much truth in the rough assertion—when he gets into men there is no telling where they will go.

Another point was, “They run hard whom the devil drives.” Unto what extremities of sottish folly, cruelty and self-injury will not men go when once Satan gains possession of them? Like Baal’s priests they are cutting themselves with knives! Like the Gadarene demoniac dwelling in tombs and wearing no clothes! Like the child in the Gospel sometimes cast into the fire and then into the water—such are men when the devil rules them. No king could ever walk in his palace and say, “All this is mine,” with such pride as Satan when he walks through the heart of man! He can boastingly cry, “This man will fall down and worship me! He will sacrifice his comfort, his very life to me! He will drain my cups and not refuse the poison in the dregs! He will go upon my service and not ask me whether death is to be the everlasting wages!”

Oh, that God had such willing servants, such joyful martyrs as those who obey the devil! You may see the devil’s martyrs in every gin palace—ragged, haggard and diseased. You may see them in the early morning shivering till the time shall come when they shall drink another dram of Hell-draught. You may see them in every moonlit street, waiting in the cold, damp mists of night to be offered up upon his altar to prostitute both body and soul to his unhallowed worship. You may see them in every hospital rotting into their graves—their bones full of disease and their very blood polluted with a filthy taint of loathsomeness. You may see them, I say, all eager to sacrifice soul and body as a whole burnt offering to be wholly consumed by the infernal fire—that they may serve Satan with their whole heart! Oh, that we were half as faithful to God as the devil’s servants are to him. The heart is well called Apollyon’s palace, for he reigns with absolute dominion there. O eternal God, drive him out!

I must not leave this picture until you have observed that it is said, “while he keeps his palace, his goods are in peace.” This is the most fearful sign in the whole affair. The man is quite undisturbed—conscience does not prick him—why should it? God does not alarm him—who is God, that he should obey His voice? Thoughts of Hell never disturb him. “Peace, peace,” says Satan, “it is well with you now—leave these bugbears to those who believe in them.” The wrath of God, which abides on him, never frets him! When men are mortifying, they feel no pain in the mortified member. Men who are stupefied with opium may be naked but they are not cold. They may have empty stomachs, but they are not hungry. They may be diseased in body but they do not feel the torment—they are drunk and know not their misery!

And so it is with the most of carnal men—nothing awakens them. The sermon is listened to with a remark upon the style of the speaker, but the Truth of God is neglected. A judgment comes—the funeral bell tolls—a tear or two may be shed but they are soon wiped away and the man goes his way, like “the dog to his vomit and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire.” “I know nothing of what it is to be troubled in conscience,” says one. “I am quite easy—I am as jolly as the days are long.” I dare say you are—I wish you were not! If you were dissatisfied with your old master, there would be some hope that you would leave him and return to your Father’s house—but so long as you are content with the world and with the Prince who governs it, you will go on, on, on, to your own destruction!

Satan does with men as the sirens are fabled to have done with mariners. They sat upon the rocks and chanted songs so harmonious that no mariner, who once heard the sound, could ever resist the impulse to steer his ship towards them. So each vessel voyaging that way was wrecked upon the rocks through their disastrous, but enchanting strain. Such is

Satan’s voice—he lures to eternal ruin with the sweetest strains of infernal minstrelsy. He can play sonatas so inimitably enchanting in their harmony that it is not in poor mortal flesh and blood, unaided by the Spirit of God, to stand against their thrilling witchery.

This is the melodious note—“Peace, peace, peace, peace.” O Sinner, if you were not a fool you would stop up your ears to this treacherous lie! Forever blessed is that Sovereign Grace which has saved us from the enchantments of this destroyer! The tenant of the heart is called “an unclean spirit.” He is unclean, notwithstanding all the peace he gives you. I pray you not flatter yourself to the contrary. He is ever the same, unchanged, unchangeable. Perhaps you tell me that you are not subject to any uncleanness. You say you do not drink nor swear, nor lie. But remember, it is unclean to be unreconciled to God! It is unclean to be a stranger to Christ! It is unclean to disobey God who created you. And above all it is unclean not to love the Redeemer whose most precious blood has delivered His people from their sins. At his best the devil is no better than a devil and the heart in which he dwells is no better than a den for a traitor to hide in.

Thus I have given you an outline interpretation of the text—it would need much time to fill up and bring out the whole of its meaning.

II. Now let us notice THE PARTIAL REFORMATION HERE DESCRIBED. “When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walks through dry places, seeking rest. And finding none, he says, I will return unto my house from where I came out. And when he comes, he finds it swept and garnished. Then goes he and takes to him seven other spirits more wicked than himself. And they enter in and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first.”

Observe, then, that in the case before us the unclean spirit goes out of his own free will. He is not *turned* out—there is no conflict—the house still remains his own property for it is written at the end of the twenty-fourth verse, “I will return unto *my* house from where I came out.” He retires from his palace of his own free will, intending to return at his leisure or pleasure. There are some persons who appear to be converted who think they are so and therefore make a profession and are cheerfully received into the Christian Church because their outward life gives evidence of a very great and remarkable change.

I could now picture some who, to my great grief, come under my tearful observation. Some who were once with us, but have long since arrived at the last end which was “worse than the first.” When the unclean spirit goes out of a man he becomes quite different from what he used to be. Very likely the shop that was open on the Sunday is now shut up. He turns his footsteps to the place where God’s people meet for worship. He begins to pray, even sets up family prayer. He attends Prayer Meetings, feels some sort of enjoyment in the excitement of religion. He goes where the saints go and to a great extent in life he acts as they act. The unclean spirit is fairly gone out of the man and he is another man—though not a *new creature* in Christ Jesus.

But I have said there was no struggle about it. It was suddenly that the spirit went out and the man jumped into religion. There was no repentance, no conviction, no struggling against depravity, no weeping before the Lord in prayer and no looking up to the Crucified Savior and reading pardon in His wounds. There was no agonizing struggle after holiness, no wrestling with evil—joy came suddenly and the man thought himself saved. The man was a sinner yesterday and he appears to be a saint today—nobody knows how. You talk to him about the work of the Spirit in his soul, convincing him of sin, breaking him with the hammer of the Law or by the power of the Cross, pounding him in pieces, compelling him to feel that his righteousness is filthy rags.

He does not understand you. The unclean spirit is gone out of the man and that is all. Why does the evil spirit leave a man for a time? Has he not some hellish purpose in view? Certainly he has! I think it is often because he feels if he does not go out he will be *driven* out, and he thinks that by giving way for a time he will satisfy the conscience till he gets it lulled to sleep faster than ever. Thus he will stoop to conquer, retreat to draw his opponent into an ill position. He will allow his throne to shake so that he may reestablish his dominion permanently. Moreover, he thinks that by letting the man indulge in a little religion for a time, and then turn aside from it he will make him permanently skeptical so that he will hold him fast by the iron chain of infidelity and drag him down to Hell with that hook in his jaws.

Now, after a time it appears that the evil spirit returned. He could find no rest for himself except in the hearts of the wicked and therefore he came back. There is no opposition to his entrance, the door is not locked—or if it is he has the key. He comes in—there is no tenant, no man in possession—no other proprietor. He looks round and cries, “Here is my house. I left it when I took my walks abroad and I have come back and here it is ready for me.” In due time the devil

comes back to those persons who are reformed but not renewed—who are changed but not made new creatures in Christ Jesus.

But what does the devil see? First of all he sees the place to be empty. If it had been full he could not have entered again. If Jesus Christ had been at the door there would have been a very terrible struggle for a little time, but it would have ended in Satan being driven away in disgrace. But it is empty and therefore he quietly resumes his sway. The devil shouts his, “Halloa!” and there is an echo through every room, but no intruder starts up. “Is Christ here?” No answer. He goes outside and he looks at the lintel, for Christ’s mark is sure to be there if Jesus is within. “No mark of blood on the post. Christ is not here,” he says. “It is empty, I will make myself at home.” If Jesus had been there, though He had been hidden in a closet, yet when He came out He would claim possession and drive out the traitor and say, “Be gone! This is no place for you. I have bought it with My blood and I mean to possess it forever.”

But it is empty and so Satan fills it with stores of evil. The next thing the fiend notices is that it is swept—as one says, “Swept, but never washed.” Sweeping takes away the loose dirt—washing takes away all the filth. O to be washed in Jesus’ blood! Here is a man whose house is swept—the loose sins are gone. He is not a drunkard, there is a pledge over the mantelpiece. He is no longer lustful—he hates that sin—or says he does, which is as much as the devil wants him to do. The place is swept so tidy, so neat, you would not know him to be the same man as he used to be. And he himself is so proud to think he has got his house so clean and he stands up at the threshold as he meets the devil with a, “Good morning!”

And he says “I am not as other men are, I am neither an extortioner, nor a drunkard! Nor even as that Christian over yonder who is not half what he ought to be—nor a fraction as consistent as I am.” And as the devil looks round and finds the place swept, he finds it garnished, too. The man has bought some pictures—he has not real faith, but he has a fine picture of it over the fireplace. He has no love to the Cross of Christ, but he has a very handsome crucifix hanging on the wall. He has no Divine Grace of the Spirit, but he has a fine vase of flowers on the table—of other people’s experiences and other people’s graces—and they smell tolerably sweet. There is a fireplace without fire, but there is one of the most handsome ornaments for the fireplace that was ever bought for money.

It is swept and garnished. Oh, the garnished people I have met!—garnished, sometimes, with almsgiving—at other times with long-winded prayers! Garnished with the profession of zeal and the pretense of reverence! You will find a zealous Protestant—oh, so zealous—who would go into fits at the sign of a cross and yet will commit fornication! Do you think such a case impossible? I know such a case. You find persons shocked because another boiled a teakettle on a Sunday, or insured his life, or assisted at a bazaar, who will cheat and draw the eye teeth out of an orphan child, if they could get a sixpence by it! They are swept and garnished.

Walk in, Ladies and Gentlemen! Did you ever see a house so delightfully furnished as this? How elegant—how tasteful! Just so—but men may be damned tastefully and go to Hell respectably just as well as they can in a vulgar and debauched fashion! You see the whole, how it ends. Satan is very pleased to find the place as it is, and thinking that this is too good for one, he goes abroad and asks in seven of his friends worse than himself—for some devils are worse than others. And they come in and hold high holiday in the man’s soul. What do we mean by that? Why, we mean that such persons do really become more wicked, more hardened, more ungodly than they were before they professed to be Christians!

It is really a shocking thing that if you want to find a thoroughbred, out-and-out transgressor, you must find one who once made a profession of religion! When Satan wants a servant who will do anything and ask no questions—who will swallow camels as well as gnats—he finds one that once stood high in the Christian Church. If he can find one who used to sing Christ’s song, that is the throat to sing the devil’s song! If he can find one who once sat at the sacramental table, he will say, “This is the man to sit at the head of my banquets and conduct my feasts for me.” These renegades, these traitors, these Ahithophels, these Judases, these men who have known the Truth of God and have been once, in a manner, enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gifts and the powers of the world to come in a certain sense—and yet fall away—these become like salt that is neither fit for the land nor yet for the dunghill—even men cast them out!

They are trees twice dead, plucked up by the roots—wandering stars for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever. Have I any such in this place, any who were once swept and garnished, into whom Satan has returned? My Friend, from my soul I pity you! What will be your portion? No common Hell will be yours! Remember, there are re-

served places in the pit and those are reserved for such as you are. Read the letter of Jude and you will there find that there are some for whom are reserved, “the blackness of darkness forever.”

That is your case and this will be the aggravation of it—you sat at the Master’s Table and you must now drink the cup of fire! You preached in Christ’s courts but you must now give forth a dolorous sermon concerning your own apostasy! You sang God’s praises once—you must now howl out the Miserere of the damned! You had a glimpse of Heaven—you shall now have a dread insight into Hell! You talked about eternal life, you shall now feel eternal death—plunged in waves of flame, never to rise again, never to hope, never even to die, for to die were bliss. How dreadful shall your case be! In this world seven times worse than before, but in the world to come, damned, damned with an awful emphasis which common sinners cannot know. I pray God that these truths may make us watchful, make us careful lest we be found hypocrites or self-deceived professors.

III. I turn to a much more pleasing duty, which is TO TAKE UP THE SAVIOR’S DESCRIPTION OF TRUE CONVERSION. “When a stronger than he shall come upon him and overcome him, he takes from him all his armor wherein he trusted and divides his spoils.” Now, observe here is a “stronger than he.” This is not the man, himself. The man is the house—the man is not so strong as the devil—who is this? This is Jesus Christ who comes by His Spirit into the heart of man! The Spirit of God is vastly superior to Satanic power, as much as the infinite Creator Himself must ever be superior to the finite creature.

He who made Satan knows how to lay at him with His sword so as to cut Rahab and wound the dragon. It is not, you see, the result of the man’s free will—it is not the result of the devil’s free will, either. It is the result of a stronger than he coming into the soul. As soon as the stronger than he comes in there is a conflict. “He comes upon him,” that is to say, He attacks him!

And ah, how vehemently does Christ lay to at the great enemy of souls! One sword-cut cuts away the plume of pride! Another blow takes away the comfort of sin and another destroys the reigning power of sin. What a struggle there often is when man is worked upon by the Holy Spirit! With all the power of prayer, with all the might of faith the poor soul struggles against Satan! Christ struggles with all the power of His blood and the blessings of His Spirit and yet we know in some cases the arch fiend has been allowed to hold out for days, for weeks, even for months because of the unbelief of the poor soul. “He could not do many mighty works there,” it is written, “because of their unbelief.”

This fight will sometimes grow so hot that the soul will choose strangling rather than life and yet the result of it is never doubtful! For notice in the text that the stronger than he overcomes at the last. Oh, well do I remember when the stronger than Satan overcame in my soul! Five years, more or less, was there a conflict. Sometimes my proud heart would not yield to Sovereign Grace. At another time a willful spirit would go astray after vanity. But at last, when Jesus showed His wounds and said to me, “Look unto Me and be you saved, all the ends of the earth,” I could hold out no longer and the evil spirit could resist no more!

The wounds of Christ had wounded the old dragon and the death of the Savior became the death of sin. Oh, there are many of us who know what it is to be conquered, to be subdued by a power other than our own! And in every case there must be this experience, or there is no real life. Dear Hearer, if your religion grew in your own garden it is a weed and good for nothing! If your grace springs up as the result of your own willing, your own acting, and your own seeking, it is good for nothing! Christ must seek you! It must be a power far above you—mightier than you, far stronger than you and the devil put together—which must deliver you from your sins.

As soon as ever the stronger man has conquered the enemy, what does He do? He takes the sword of rebellion, snaps it across His knee and pulls the armor from the back of the unclean spirit. Prejudice, ignorance, hard-heartedness—all these are pulled off the old enemy. I think I see him—I think I see the Savior stripping him to his shame and ejecting him from the heart with abhorrence. There, let him go among the dry places and again seek rest and find none. Happy day! Happy day for the palace which he once defiled when he is cast out and cast out forever!

Christ Jesus then proceeds to divide the spoil. “There is the man’s heart, I will take that,” says He. “That shall be a jewel in My crown. The man’s love I will set as a jewel upon My arm forever. His memory, his judgment, his power of thought, utterance and working—these are all Mine,” says Christ. He begins to divide the spoil. He puts the broad arrow of the King upon every room in the house, upon every piece of furniture. The garnishing He pulls out, “I will adorn it far better than this,” He says. “There shall be no *pictures* of faith, but faith. There shall be no ornament in yonder

grate except the ornament of the glowing fire of fervid zeal. There shall be no borrowed flowers, but I will train round this window the sweet roses and jasmine of love and peace of mind.

“I will wash what was only swept, with My blood. I will make it white and sweet and clean. And I will strike the lintel and the two side posts with the hyssop and with the blood mark—and then the destroying angel, when he sweeps by, shall sheathe his sword—and the black fiend, when he would enter, shall see the mark there and go back trembling to his accursed den.”

This is conversion, the other was only conviction! This is change of heart, the other was only change of life. I do trust, if you have been content with the former, you will now bestir yourselves and never be satisfied without the latter—

*“O Sovereign Grace, my heart subdue,
I would be led in triumph, too.
Drive the old dragon from his seat,
With all his hellish crew.”*

Sinner, cry to the stronger than you are to come and help you. You groan under your slavery—I am thankful for it! Cry to the Great Deliverer! He will come! He will come! Is there a conflict going on in you? Remember *faith* gets the victory. Look to Jesus—look to Jesus and the battle is won! Cast your poor spirit upon Jesus. Now burn that broom—it is of no use to go on sweeping! You need *washing*—washing with *blood*! Come, now, spare that money of yours with which you are going to buy garnishing—they are all rubbish! Buy no more. I counsel you buy of Him gold tried in the fire.

Come to His precious blood and be made really clean. Your Church-goings, your Chapel-goings, your prayers, your almsgivings, your fasting, your feelings, your good works are all nothing—so much dross and dung—if you try to sweep and garnish your house with them. Cast them all away! Fly from your good works as you would from your bad ones! Do not expect to be saved by anything that you can feel that is good any more than you would expect to be saved by anything that you feel that is bad—

*“None but Jesus, none but Jesus,
Can do helpless sinners good.”*

My Lord Jesus, if You are passing by, traveling in the greatness of Your strength, come and show Your prowess! Turn aside, You heavenly Samson and rend the lion in this vineyard! If You have dipped Your robes in the blood of Your foes, come dye them all again with the blood of my cruel sins! If You have trod the wine press of Jehovah’s wrath and crushed Your enemies, here is another of the accursed crew! Come and drag him out and crush him! Here is an Agag in my heart, come and hew him in pieces! Here is a dragon in my spirit, break, O break, his head and set me free from my old state of sin! Deliver me from my fierce enemy and unto You shall be the praise, forever and ever. Amen.

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