

THE TENDER PITY OF THE LORD

NO. 941

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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

*“Like as a father pities his children, so the Lord pities them that fear Him.
For he knows our frame. He remembers that we are dust.”
Psalm 103:13, 14.*

DAVID sang of the compassionate pity of our heavenly Father who will not always chide, nor keep His anger forever. He had proved in relation to Himself that the Lord is not easily provoked but is plenteous in mercy. Remembering how feeble and how frail we are, the Lord bears and forbears with His weak and sinful children and is gentle towards them as a nurse with her child. Although our own observation has proved this to be true, and our experience everyday goes to show how truthfully David sang, yet assuredly the clearest display of the patience and pity of God towards us may be seen in the life of Him in whom dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.

Therefore, instead of speaking upon Providential patience, I shall bid you gaze upon God in Christ Jesus, and see there how human weaknesses and follies are pitied of the Lord. With a text from the Old Testament, I purpose to take you straight away to the New, and the tenderness and pity of the Father shall be illustrated by the meekness and lowliness of the Son towards His immediate disciples, the Apostles. While the Holy Spirit shows you thus the pity of Jesus Christ towards His own personal attendants, you will see as in a glass His pity towards you.

I. At the outset let us attentively and admiringly observe THE DIVINE PATIENCE OF OUR LORD JESUS TOWARDS THE APOSTLES. I shall begin on this point by reminding you of their origin. Who, and what were these whom He received into intimate fellowship with Himself? They were not the high-born and powerful of the earth, for, “Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are chosen.” Not a single nobleman was numbered with the Apostles. They were not even educated persons who, if poor, might still wear a gentle heart beneath a peasant's garb.

There was not a rabbi nor a philosopher among them. They were as uninstructed and as clownish as the rest of the peasantry of Palestine. He selected them from the populace. They were either fishermen or publicans—and these He made to be the first instruments of spreading abroad the Gospel and establishing His kingdom. For our Lord Christ, who had been accustomed to the thrones, and royalties of Heaven, to stoop to be the familiar companion of any of the sons of men would be wonderful condescension! But what shall I say when He elects the weak, and the poor, and the despised, to be His friends? He might have selected for His associates the choicest spirits, the advanced intellects, the educated minds, but, lo, He makes foolish the wisdom of this world, and chooses the things that are not to bring to nothing the things that are.

I do not exaggerate when I speak of the clownishness of the Apostles—their dullness and their ignorance. They were very honest and sincere, but they were far from being naturally quick of understanding. It was intentionally that our Lord made choice of them, on purpose, to illustrate the sovereignty of election, and that no flesh should glory in His Presence. He resolved that when He had filled them with the Divine Spirit, and ordained them to be the chosen vessels to bear His name unto the Gentiles, none should ascribe their power to themselves—but all the glory should evidently belong unto the Lord alone.

At the same time we must not forget that it must have caused the Lord Jesus much inconvenience and trouble to bear with such disciples. The refined spirit cannot be in continual contact with the coarse without enduring pain. Some may call such pain sentimental, but in so doing they only reveal their own ignorance, for, probably, no shocks are more severe, no wounds more smarting than those inflicted upon the delicate, the pure, the holy, the refined, by association with the groveling, the selfish, the sinful, the unspiritual. The glory of our Master's patience is this—that He did not betray even the slightest disgust or weariness of His poor friends.

Though He might have said to them, as well as to the multitude, “O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I suffer you?” yet He bore with them without repining, and only now and then gave them a rebuke. He never looked contemptuously upon them as His inferiors, though they were vastly so in all respects. He called them friends. He told them mysteries as if they could understand them, though often when He explained them to them they missed the inner meaning. He took them into His most retired haunts. He familiarized them with the garden and the Mount of Olives, where He was likely to seek His retirement.

He would even stay His prayers to teach them how to pray—there was nothing that He would not do for them. Just such as they were He accepted them, and resolved to train them for His service. Having once loved them, He loved them unto the end. He never made them feel a dread of His superiority, or shudder at the distance between their character and His own. He kept no register of their faults—He never rehearsed the list of their shortcomings—but, on the contrary, His main rebuke was His own perfect example. And He always treated them as His friends and Brethren. Think of this, and you will see in Christ Jesus that, “like as a father pities his children, so the Lord pities them that fear Him.”

Much forbearance He had with their lack of understanding. The Apostles, before Pentecost, were very gross and unspiritual in judgment. He Himself had to say to them, “O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the Prophets have spoken.” Until the Holy Spirit came upon them, and made them quick of understanding, they were sorry dunces, dull scholars—even though the best of masters had become their Teacher. They did not understand the object of His mission. They fancied that He came to be a king, and they expected to receive crowns and dignities, and even began to quarrel over the division of the spoil—disputing as to which of them should be the greatest peer in the kingdom which they expected Him to establish.

He was thinking of suffering and death while they were dreaming of robes and coronets. The mother of Zebedee’s children even asked for her sons that one might sit on His right hand and the other on His left in His kingdom—a gross misconception, indeed, of what that kingdom would be—and a piece of pride and selfishness that she should seek for her sons, probably with their acquiescence—a place above their fellow disciples. When He spoke to them concerning His sufferings, though He used great plainness of speech, yet they could not understand Him. Take this passage in the ninth of Luke, at the forty-third verse—“While they wondered, everyone, at all things which Jesus did, He said unto His disciples, Let these sayings sink down into your ears: for the Son of Man shall be delivered into the hands of men. But they understood not this saying, and it was hid from them, that they perceived it not: and they feared to ask Him of that saying.”

The thought that the Son of God, the King of Israel should, by-and-by, be proclaimed king upon a felon’s Cross could not by any means find place in their minds. They continued to cling tenaciously to the idea of earthly dominion. What strange ignorance was that which led them to think the Savior referred to their having no bread when He said, “Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees.” Think, too, of the dullness of Philip when the Lord was speaking concerning the Father, and he said, “Lord, show us the Father, and it suffices us.”

And Thomas was not much wiser when he said, “Lord, we know not where You go, and how can we know the way?” There were many truths which Christ did not clearly teach to them before the descent of the Spirit, for the reason which He once gave—“I have many things to say unto you, but you cannot bear them now.” Even when He made that simple statement, “A little while, and you shall not see Me: and again, a little while, and you shall see Me, because I go to the Father,” they did not understand Him. And He said to them, “Do you enquire among yourselves of that I said, A little while, and you shall not see Me: and again, a little while, and you shall see Me?”

The expression was so simple that they should have understood it, but their prejudices blinded their eyes. Nor was this confined to the early days of their fellowship with Him, for even after our Lord had risen from the tomb, those with whom He conversed on the road to Emmaus, who were probably by no means inferior to the rest, did not understand the references of the Prophets to Christ, and were not prepared to see in His Resurrection the manifest fulfillment of the words which had been spoken of old. Their eyes were held in more senses than one. Many a master would have grown weary of such pupils, but infinite love brought to its succor infinite patience, and He continued still to teach them though they were so slow to learn. “Like as a father pities his children, so the Lord pities them that fear Him.”

Reflect again, my Brethren, upon the unevangelical spirit which these Apostles often showed. On one occasion even John, as mild and gentle a spirit as any of them, asked to be permitted to call fire from Heaven to destroy certain Samari-

tans who would not receive the Savior because His face was set towards Jerusalem. Jesus, the friend of sinners, calling fire from Heaven? This might suit Elijah, but was not after the manner of the meek and lowly Prince of Peace. It would have been quite foreign to all His purposes, and contrary to His entire spirit. Yet the two sons of thunder would hurl lightning on their Master's foes!

He might well have spoken to them as bitterly as David did to the sons of Zeruiah, when in their hot rage they would have slain their leader's foolish foes. He might have said, "What have I to do with you, you sons of Zebedee?" But He merely said, "You know not what spirit you are of." Read the ninth chapter of Luke, which is full of the failings of the disciples, and notice how John and the rest forbade the man who was casting out devils in Jesus' name. With the true spirit of bigoted monopoly that will not tolerate anything outside the pale of orthodoxy, they said, "We saw one casting out devils in Your name."

And instead of rejoicing that there were some beyond our company who were assisted by the Master's power, and were glorifying the Master's name, "we forbade him because he follows not with us." Their Lord, instead of angrily upbraiding their intolerance, gently chided them with the sentence, "Forbid him not, for he that is not against us is for us." Remember, also, how the disciples put away the mothers of Israel when they brought their tender offspring to receive the Savior's blessing? This showed a very unevangelical spirit. They would not have their Lord interrupted by the cries of babes, and thought the children too insignificant to be worthy of His consideration.

But, though our Lord was much displeased with the disciples, yet He only said, "Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not. For of such is the kingdom of Heaven." But, my Brethren, it must have required great patience for our dear Lord and Master, who Himself would not break a bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax, to bear with these rough men who pushed the little ones on one side, who would gag the mouths of those who were doing good in their own way, and who would even call fire from Heaven upon poor ignorant sinners! Admire much His patience with their impatience, and see how, "Like as a father pities his children, so He pitied them," because He knew they feared Him in their hearts, and their faults were rather infirmities than rebellions.

Again, their weakness of faith must have been, in itself, a great provocation to Him, and yet He bore with it most meekly. When in the storm, on the lake, they ought not to have been afraid, because Jesus was with them, though asleep. But their alarm was so great that they must awaken Him, not thinking of His weariness which required rest in sleep. And they were so ungenerously unbelieving as to insinuate that He was unkindly thoughtless of their danger—"Master," said they, "do You not care that we perish?" Oh, what unbelief was here! He might well have been angry, but He rather rebuked the wind than they, and sweetly said, "Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?"

Not many days after, however, they found themselves in a like case, and after such a deliverance, they ought to have been confident, but again they were troubled. Let us not upbraid them, for it has been our case full often. Jesus came to them in the midst of the storm, walking on the sea, and they were afraid of Him, and thought it was a spirit, and they cried out. Their faith was so feeble—it was scarcely faith, but rather unbelief. Peter was a fair representative of them all when on that occasion he said, "If it is You, bid me come to You on the water."

He had faith enough with venturous footstep to tread the wave, and to continue to do so until a more than usually boisterous gust made his heart tremble, and down he went. Jesus, as He caught him, tenderly said, "O you of little faith, why do you doubt?" No anger was in that fatherly rebuke. He spoke as a mother might, when, after teaching her child to walk, she saw its little feet give way and saved it from a fall.

Take another instance of their unbelief. Our Lord had fed the multitude, if you remember, with five loaves and two fishes, and but a short time after, another vast crowd was in a similar hungry condition. Jesus declared His compassion to the Apostles in much the same language as He had used previously—one would have thought that after seeing Him feed the five thousand so short a time before, they would have had no fear about the four thousand then to be fed, but would have said, "Lord, do as You did before. Here are our seven loaves and our few little fishes. If five loaves fed five thousand, surely you can feed four thousand with seven."

Instead of that they said, "Why should we have so much bread in the wilderness as to fill so great a multitude?" Alas, for such unbelief! How could they doubt when with all their eyes they had seen what the Master could do? How could they be so unbelieving as to ask, "How can a man satisfy these men with bread here in this wilderness?" Surely the Savior must have been sorely put to it to bear with this. Moreover, they lost, by their unbelief, a large amount of power which

they might have exercised for good—and they exposed their Master’s name to derision. When He came down from the Mount of Transfiguration, He found a company gathered at the foot of the mountain who were glorying over the baffled disciples, because they could not cast out a devil from a poor tormented child.

There were the reviling multitude, and there the disconcerted disciples. The Lord Jesus immediately rectified the mischief by casting out the devil, and when alone with the disciples He answered their question, “Why could not we cast him out?” How pityingly and encouragingly He replied, “Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you shall say unto this mountain, Remove therefore to yonder place. And it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.” Now, where unbelief not only makes the person fearful, but causes him to be weak where he should be strong—and to expose his Master’s name and fame to doubt and distrust—it is enough to provoke anger in the holiest.

And yet the Master was not provoked, for He pitied His disciples as a father pities his children. Again, I would remark that it was not only in the earlier period of His communion that they were unbelieving. There might have been some excuse at that time, but even at the close of His sojourn with them they still remained doubters. Take Thomas as a case in point and hear him obstinately declare, “Except I shall see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, I will not believe.” Yet our gentle Lord condescended to grant His incredulous disciple the tokens for which he had asked.

The rest of the Apostles do not seem to have been much stronger in faith, for when He appeared, “they were terrified and affrighted,” and were not comforted even when He said, “Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; handle Me and see, for a spirit has not flesh and bones, as you see I have.” How gracious it was on His part, since they yet believed not, to eat before them all a piece of a broiled fish, and of a honeycomb, to prove that He was yet alive and in a real body!

What? Had they seen Him three years? Had they beheld the miracles which He worked? Had they listened to His teaching and perceived the Divinity which dwelt within Him—and yet when He had risen from the dead, did they refuse to believe the testimony of the holy women and of Peter and John? Did they disbelieve the evidence of the empty tomb? Oh, yes! For unbelief, “as in them all, and they might each have cried, “Lord, I believe, help You my unbelief.” Yet He put up with them and pitied them still.

Nor have I exhausted this matter. Their emulations of each other must very frequently have distressed the lowly mind of Jesus. Again and again we find them striving among themselves which should be the greatest. After James and John had so foolishly sought to sit on His right hand and on His left, the ten, it is said, had indignation against *them*, proving that if they did not show it in the same manner, yet they were actuated by much the same spirit as the sons of Zebedee. We find them again contending which should be the greatest when our Lord took a little child and set him in their midst, and said, “Except you be converted, and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of Heaven.”

As much as to say, “You need not choose places in the kingdom, and dispute as to precedence, you cannot even enter there while you are moved by the spirit of ambition. You must be humble, and become like this child before you can understand that kingdom.” Perhaps the worst case of the Apostles’ emulation is that recorded in Luke 22:24, when even after the blessed festival of love the apple of discord was thrown upon the table. Sad to think that at the Lord’s Supper Satan should be so present. Extraordinary as it may seem, yet so it was. The question, “Lord, is it I?” was succeeded by the question which of them should be the greatest.

Their Lord was about to die. Gethsemane’s sweat of agony was almost gathering on His brow. His passion was close at hand, and yet His disciples were taken up with so contemptible a question as which of them should take precedence of the other. That dear rebuke of washing their feet was a sweet way of reproving them and revealing His own love.

I must not forget that on some occasions they showed their pride in a very wrong and even insulting manner. Peter, who was, after all, but a type of the rest, when our Lord had spoken of His death, took Him and began to rebuke Him! Yes, he rebuked his Master!!! His Lord then turned Himself and rebuked the devil rather than Peter, though Peter had become the foolish instrument of the devil, and He said, “Get you behind Me, Satan: you are an offense unto Me: for you savor not the things that are of God, but those that are of men.” Nor was this the only occasion, for when He had warned Peter that he would deny Him that night, He was contradicted point blank by His rash follower, and his fellow disciples joined Peter in the contradiction.

“Likewise also said all the disciples.” They were told to pray that they might not enter into temptation, but they were proud enough to believe that their Master did not know them and to think that no temptation could overcome them. Here was pride, indeed, and yet though those poor things who had needed to be humbled in the dust, spoke so exceeding proudly and lifted up their horn on high, yet all Jesus did was just pity them and to pray for them, and bear with their ignorance and their ill manners. Having loved them He pitied them, and remembered that they were but dust.

I will only mention one other matter, and that was His patience with their infirmities. I mean not only their sinless weaknesses, but those in which sin was in some degree present. Remember their weakness in the garden? He was in agony, and He selected three of them to watch near the scene of His passion. But when, in the midst of His distress, He came to them, as if He would have a word of comfort from them, He found them sleeping. Oh, the pathos of those words, “What? Could you not watch with Me one hour?” And such an hour—an hour of such extremity! Where was their love that they could sleep while He was in agony?

Yet how mild His language—“The spirit, truly is willing, but the flesh is weak.” Worse than that, no sooner was He taken, than not one of all the band, so valiant in their own opinion, was found standing at his Master’s side! Then all the disciples forsook Him and fled. And the bravest of them all, in the hall where his Master was accused as a criminal, stood by the fire and warmed his hands, and said, “I know not the Man.” And then with oaths and cursing, even a third time declared, “I know not what you say.” Here was cowardly weakness, indeed, at which the Savior’s resentment might well have been kindled. But He showed no anger, He only turned and looked at Peter.

And it was such a look of mingled sorrow and pity that the poor denier of his Lord went out and wept bitterly. When the Lord had risen from the dead, He did not upbraid Peter, but He sent a special love message to him, “Go, tell My disciples and Peter.” And when Peter was with Him by the sea, the only rebuke, if rebuke it could be called, was the question, “Simon, son of Jonas, do you love Me?” Asked a third time in remembrance of the three times in which he had denied Him, and that three times he might have the privilege of saying, “Yes, Lord, You know all things. You know that I love You.”

Beloved Friends, it is meet that I should add that the pain to our Lord arising from these faults must be estimated by His matchless Character and by the end He had in view. Remember He was perfectly holy as Man, and, moreover, He was God. And to have to bear with such poor creatures as these was therefore the most wonderful condescension and pity. Engaged as He was in seeking their good, and not His own, it was the harder to endure that they should be such stubborn materials, and so great a hindrance to Him. Moreover, remember that He did not merely bear with them but treated them as His friends.

All things that He had heard of His Father He made known unto them. He admitted them into His most intimate acquaintanceship, and all the while almost His only rebuke to them was His own perfect example. He taught them humility by His humility. He taught them gentleness by His gentleness. He did not point out their defects in words. He did not dwell upon their errors—He rather let them see their own spots by His purity, their own defects by His perfection. Oh, the marvelous tenderness of Christ, who so paternally pitied them that feared Him!

II. Let us think for a short time of THE REASONS OF THIS DIVINE PATIENCE in the case of our Lord. Doubtless we must find the first reason in what He is. Our Lord was so greatly good that He could bear with poor frail humanity. When you and I cannot bear with other people it is because we are so weak ourselves. If you cannot bear with your imperfect brother, take it for certain that you are very imperfect yourself. Jesus was so free from selfishness that anything that they might do which was injurious to the honor due to Him did not afflict Him in the same way as our pride would afflict us.

All the suffering He would feel would be grief that they should be so erring, that they should have learned so slowly. He would not think of Himself, but would only think of them. Besides, He was so gentle, so tender! It was no exaggeration or egotism when He said, “I am meek and lowly in heart.” I would to God we could copy His love and borrow His “meekness so Divine.” He bore with them and pitied them because of His relationship to them. He had loved them as He has loved many of us, “from before the foundation of the world.” He was their Shepherd, and He pitied the diseases of His flock.

He was their Savior, and He lamented the sins from which He was about to save them. He was their “Brother born for adversity,” and He stooped to be familiar with their frailties. He had determined to bring many sons unto glory, and therefore, for the joy that was set before Him, He endured all things for the elects’ sake.

Another reason for His patience was His intention to become perfect as the Captain of our salvation, through suffering. You have perhaps enquired, “Why did not the Lord Jesus at once perfectly sanctify these Apostles, and deliver them from sin? He might have done so.” I grant you He might and I have often wondered why He does not do the same with us. But I do not wonder when I remember that it was necessary that He should become a faithful High Priest, touched with a feeling of our infirmities by being tempted in all points, like as we are.

Now, you and I have to bear with our imperfect brethren and if our Lord had never endured the same, He could not in that point have shown fellowship with us. In order that He might be a complete High Priest, and know all the temptations of all His servants, He bears with the infirmities and sins of disciples whom He could have perfected at once if He had willed, but whom He did not choose to perfect because He desired to reveal His tender pity towards them, and to obtain by experience complete likeness to His Brethren. Thus the High Priest of our profession became capable of sympathy with us in like condition, by having to bear with all the infirmities of His disciples.

Did He not also do this, my dear Friends, that He might honor the Holy Spirit? If Jesus had perfected the Apostles, they would not have seen so manifestly the Glory of the Holy Spirit. Until the Holy Spirit was come, what poor creatures the eleven were! But when the Holy Spirit was given, what brave men, what heroes, how deeply instructed, how powerful in speech, how eminent in every virtue they became! It is the object of Jesus Christ to glorify the Spirit, even as it is the design of the Holy Spirit to glorify Christ in our hearts.

Moreover, our Lord was considering the future of the Apostles, and therefore bore with them instead of removing all their evil. He knew that after His decease they would think of these things. And I can well conceive that in their solitude, and when they met each other, they would either soliloquize or say to each other, “Do you not remember how our Lord spoke to us on such an occasion? I do remember the very words He used.” “Yes,” says the other, blushing and with tears, “I do remember we did not understand Him.” “And do you remember the question Philip put to Him?” “Yes,” says the other, “but do you know I did not confess it, but I was just going to say the very same thing, for I was quite as foolish as Philip.”

And then they would smile to themselves, and say, “How slow of understanding we were in those days!” “Yes,” but the other would say, “Did you not notice that our blessed and ever dear Master never smiled contemptuously upon us, and never seemed wearied by our folly? He evidently looked at us as being little children, and He just explained Himself again and again. And when we did not comprehend He was still ready to explain once more. Oh, how tenderly He dealt with us!” And then one of them would say, “How often have I lamented that I fled that night when He was seized. I wish I had gone with Him right up to the judgment seat. I wish I had stood at the foot of the Cross or hung on another cross side by side with Him.

“But do you know when I met Him after His Resurrection, I thought He would have said a word, but there was never even a hint about my cowardice. He received me with just the same tranquil love He had been likely to show before, and He sent me on an errand just as He had been likely to do, to show He could trust me still.” Oh, what a dear and tender Lord He was! They did not know when He was alive how good He was, but when He was gone, and had given them the Spirit, they could see it all.

Just as with a photograph, when it is first taken the image is not yet visible to the eye, it has to be a little while in the bath, and to be washed before the artist brings it out. And so the picture of Christ on their hearts had to be baptized in the Holy Spirit, and then it was revealed to them. And as they looked on it, they said, “Never was there such a One. He was, and is, the Chief among ten thousand, and our souls shall love Him even unto death.” If it is so on earth it will be much more so in Heaven—when we enter within the pearly gate we shall see how Jesus loved us when we were on earth.

“I remember well,” says one, “that trial which passed over me, and I said God has forgotten me, He will be mindful of me no more—and all the while He was afflicting me in very faithfulness, and in love to my soul.” Then will another saint bear testimony, “Though I was very often cold of heart and forgot Him, yet He said unto me, ‘Return unto Me, I am married unto you, says the Lord.’ And when I did return I do remember how gently He received me and let out the

full flood of His love into my soul once again! So that He restored unto me the love of my espousals, and I rejoiced in His salvation.”

You see, the Lord is thinking of our *eternity*. He does not sanctify us at once, for we should not know all the sin that is in us, and therefore should not know how much we owe to Him. No, He leaves us these thirty, forty, fifty years in the wilderness that we may see what is in our hearts and what is in His heart as He manifests it towards us in unfailing loving kindness. Blessed be His name, that thus He pities us even as a father does his children.

III. I shall now close, by indicating THE TEACHING TO BE DERIVED FROM THIS PATIENCE. Is it not this?—First, if the Lord has thus had pity upon you as He had on His Apostles, do you even so to others. I know there is a tendency with us to feel so grieved with the inconsistencies of our fellow Christians as to lose patience. Moses, the most meek of men, yet lost his temper with Israel, and said, “Hear now, you rebels, must I fetch you water out of this rock?” I do not wonder that he called them rebels, for they were such.

But God would not have Moses call them so, for they were God’s children. Their Father may call them what names He pleases, but He will not have the servants take liberties with the children. Sometimes when we see the inconsistencies of God’s people, we are apt to speak harshly, but our Lord sets us a different example. Jesus bore with imperfect people, ought not you and I to do the same? Jesus must have borne a great deal more than we ever have borne or ever shall have to bear, yet He was still pitiful, still kind and loving to them—let us follow in His steps.

It ought to help us when we remember that we were converted through imperfect preachers. I am sure if any of you have been converted through my ministry, you have been converted through a very imperfect one. While I deeply regret my imperfections, yet in one since I glory in my infirmities, because the power of God does rest upon me. For what are we? We cannot turn any to righteousness—the Lord, alone, can do that! But, if by imperfect instruments you are blessed to the saving of your souls, you ought never again to be out of patience with imperfect people.

Remember, also, that you are imperfect yourself. You can see great faults in others, but, my dear Brother, be sure to look in the looking glass every morning and you will see quite as many faults, or else your eyes are weak. If that looking glass were to show you your own heart you would never dare look again—I fear you would even break the glass. Old John Berridge, as odd as he was good, had a number of pictures of different ministers round his room, and he had a looking glass in a frame to match. He would often take his friend into the room and say, “That is Calvin, that is John Bunyan,” and when he took him up to the looking glass he would add, “and that is the devil.” “Why,” the friend would say, “it is myself.” “Ah,” said he, “there is a devil in us all.” Being so imperfect we ought not to condemn.

Remember, also, that if we are not patient and forbearing there is clear proof that we are more imperfect than we thought we were. Those who grow in Divine Grace grow in forbearance. He is but a mere babe in Grace who is evermore saying, “I cannot put up with such conduct from my brother.” My dear Brother, you are bound even to wash the disciples’ feet! If you know yourself, and were like your Master, you would have the charity which hopes all things and endures all things.

Remember that your Brothers and Sisters in Christ, with whom you find so much fault, are God’s elect for all that, and if He chose them, why do you reject them? They are bought with Christ’s blood, and if He thought them worth so much, why do you think so little of them? Remember, too, that with all their badness there are some good points in them in which they excel you. They do not know so much, but perhaps they act better. It may be that they are more faulty in pride, but perhaps they excel you in generosity. Or if perhaps one man is a little quick in temper, yet he is more zealous than you. Look at the bright side of your Brother, and the black side of yourself, instead of reversing the order as many do. Remember there are points about every Christian from which you may learn a lesson. Look to their excellences, and imitate them. Think, too, that small as the faith of some of your Brethren is, it will grow, and you do not know what it will grow to. Though they are now so sadly imperfect, yet if they are the Lord’s people, think of what they will be one day!

O Brothers and Sisters, shall we know them? Shall we know ourselves when we once get to Heaven, and are made like our Lord? There, my Brother, though you are a quarrelsome man, I will not quarrel with you. I am going to live in Heaven with you, and I will keep out of your way till then. I will not find fault with you, my Friend, if I can help it, because you will be one day without fault before the Throne of God. If God will so soon remove your faults, why should I

take note of them? I will not peevishly complain of the rough stone, for I see it is under the Great Artist's chisel, and I will tarry till I see the beauty which He brings out of it.

The drift of this lesson, is this—as your heavenly Father has pity on you, have pity on one another. He remembers that we are dust—remember this of others. You who live in the same house, do not fall out with each other. You, who are members of the same Church, do not criticize and judge each other so severely. Or if you are severe upon the fault, be gentle towards the person who commits it, and seek not his destruction, but his good. Preacher, mind you learn your own lesson—be as tender towards those who sin as the Master was.

Another lesson, and I have done. In your own case, my dear Friends, have firm faith in the gentleness and forbearance of Christ. You are conscious, this morning, that you have been slipping, and have fallen short or gone beyond the mark. And I know unbelief will now whisper to you that you cannot expect to enjoy renewed fellowship with Christ, or to taste His love again. O think not so! Think of how gentle He was with the Apostles, and remember He is the same still. Change of place has not changed His Character. The exaltations of Heaven have not removed from Him the tenderness of His heart. He will accept you still.

My Brother, I know that prayer of yours was not what it should be—try again. He will accept the prayer, despite the fault. I know, my dear Friend, your ministry up till now has not been so earnest as it should have been—but do not give it up. Preach again, preach with greater fervor and greater unction—He will bless you, He has not put you away. I know that with all of us there is nothing we have done but what we might weep a whole shower of tears over. But Jesus, the Pitiful, knows our meaning. He will not look at the flaws, but at the jewel. He will cover our sins with the mantle of His love, He will accept the will for the deed.

Let us try again. Let us trust in Him wholly, and devote ourselves unreservedly to His service. Let us be persuaded that as we accept from our children a poor fading nosegay on our birthday, and thank them as much as if it were pearls and diamonds, because it shows their love, even so if our heart loves Jesus, He will receive our poor imperfect service for our love's sake. “He knows our frame, He remembers that we are dust.” He knows we cannot bring a clean thing out of an unclean. He, in His infinite compassion will cover our transgressions and accept our heart's love. Be of good courage, then. Be of good courage, my Brethren, He will accept you still.

I should think this subject ought to attract many sinners to Him, and I pray it may, “for him that comes to Him He will in no wise cast out.” O that the Holy Spirit would lead many of you to fix your hope on Jesus, the gentle Lamb of God. Come and trust Him, O Sinner. The Lord bless you. Amen.

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