

THE STUDENT'S PRAYER

NO. 1344

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

*“Make me to understand the way of Your precepts:
 so shall I talk of Your wondrous works.”
 Psalm 119:27.*

WHEN we seek any good thing from God, we ought also to consider how we may use it for His glory. It is right that desires for good things should flow from good motives. When the heart is not only gracious but grateful, it will turn to God with double purpose, desiring the mercy and desiring to use it to His praise. The grace of God, which brings salvation, does marvelously whet the appetite for good thing. It does more, it provokes an intense anxiety to glorify God's name in the world, even before it has imparted the ability to do any good thing. Vehement passion and abject helplessness meeting together and struggling in the breast, often lead to despondency, but they ought far rather to stimulate prayer.

As soon as we are saved by grace we are eager after supplies for our soul's wants. *“As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the Word, that you may grow thereby.”* This is the first stage of spiritual childhood, like the infant who cries for the bottle and takes its little fill and feasts, all to itself and all for itself. There follows on this another yearning, a desire for fellowship with the saints, although we feel too weak and too foolish to enter into such good company as we take the older disciples to be or even to talk to them. But I will tell you what we can do. We may all venture to ask the Lord to instruct us and make us understand His ways, that so our conversation may be welcome to His people—and so He will. *“Therefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also you do.”* This is the second stage of development. Then comes a third grade and come, it surely will, if you follow on to know the Lord. *“Then will I teach transgressors Your ways; and sinners shall be converted unto You.”* Speak, my brethren, on this wise, “You have told me, O my God, to covet earnestly the best gifts. I do covet them, Lord, You know, not to consume them upon my lusts, but to use them for Your service. I will gladly accept Your talents as a trust, not to trifle with them, not to vaunt them as the toys of my vanity, but by Your grace as a wise and faithful steward to bring You all the profit and all the interest, for I am greedy to get gain out of all those endowments You entrust to my care.” *“Make me to understand the way of Your precepts: so shall I talk of Your wondrous works.”*

I would have you further observe, on the threshold of our meditation, that there is not really any grave duty a man can be called on to discharge, no responsible office he may be elected to fill, nor even any plan or purpose he lays it on his heart to accomplish which does not require diligent preparation on his own part to fit himself, to train his faculties, and to discipline his mind. What you call unskilled labor may possibly be utilized by efficient officers, but unskillful labor is a sheer waste of power. How much more imperative the demand that we should be endowed with the requisite faculties and qualified by suitable instruction if we have any work to do for God, or any office, however humble, in the service of the great King! Zeal without knowledge would only betray us into reckless presumption. When called to talk of God's wondrous works, we ought not to rush upon that exercise unfitted and unprepared, but we should wait upon the Lord, that the eyes of our understanding may be enlightened, that our stammering tongues may be unloosed and that our lips may be attuned to tell the noble tale in grateful strains. We must first obtain for ourselves an understanding of the way of the Lord's precepts before we can make it plain to others. He who tries to teach, but has never been taught himself, will make a sorry mess of it. He who has no understanding and yet wants to make others understand, must assuredly fail. Some there are who cannot teach and will not learn, and it is because they will not learn that they cannot teach. I believe aptness for being taught is at the bottom of aptness to teach. The psalmist had both. He says, “Make me to understand the way of Your statutes.” There he would be taught. “Then,” says he, “I shall talk of Your wondrous works.” There he would be teaching.

In pondering the text, it has appeared to me to set forth three things. First, *the prayer of a student*. Secondly, *the occupation of a scholar*. And thirdly, *the intimate relation there is between them*.

I. I see in it A STUDENT'S PRAYER. I hope, my beloved brethren and sisters in Christ, that we are all students in the school of Christ—all disciples or scholars—and I trust we shall adopt the student's prayer as our own, "Make me to understand the way of Your precepts." You know that prayer is to study what fire is to the sacrifice. I beseech you, therefore, join heartily in the petition of the text.

The student's prayer deals with the main subject of the conversation which is to be that student's occupation, namely, the way of God's precepts. You and I, brethren, have to teach those things which relate to the counsels and commandments of the Lord. It is not our province to guide men in politics or to tutor them in science. Those things are better taught by men of mark, whose time and attention are absorbed in those profound and laborious researches. As for us who are Christians and servants of Christ, our business is to teach men the things of God. To that one topic we do well to keep, both for our own good and for the good of others. If we have many studies to engage us, our thoughts will soon be scattered—and if we multiply our pursuits, we shall be incapable of concentrating all our energies upon the grand topic which divine wisdom has selected for us, "the way of Your precepts."

In the way of God's legal precepts, we have great need of sound understanding, that we may be competent to instruct others. It is well to be initiated in the law, to discern its wonderful comprehensiveness, spirituality, and severity. We need to know the way of the law—a way too hard to be trodden by any mortal man so as to win salvation thereby. It is well to survey the way of the Lord's precepts, to see how exceedingly broad, and yet at the same time how remarkably narrow they are, for "Your commandment is exceedingly broad," and yet, "Strait is the gate and narrow is the way which leads unto life and few there are that go in there." It is well for us to know exactly what the law teaches and what the law designs—why we were made subject to its prescript and how we may be delivered from its penalties.

Great need too have we to understand the way of God's gospel precepts—what these precepts are: "repent," "believe," "be converted," and the like, to be able to see their relation, where they stand, not as means to an end, but as results of divine grace—commands but yet promises, the duty of man but yet the gift of God. Happy is that preacher and teacher who understands the way of the gospel precepts and never lets them clash with the precepts of the law, so as to teach a mangle-mangle, half law and half gospel, but who knows the way of God's legal precepts and sees them all ablaze with divine wrath on account of sin and discerns the way of the gospel precepts and sees them all bright and yet all crimson with the precious blood of Him that opened up for us the way of acceptance.

The way of God's precepts! Does not that mean that we ought to be acquainted with the relative position which the precepts occupy? For it is very easy, brethren, unless God gives us understanding, to preach up one precept to the neglect of another. It is possible for a ministry and a teaching to be lopsided and those who follow it may become rather the caricatures of Christianity than Christians harmoniously proportioned. O Lord, what foolish creatures we are! When You do exhort us one way, we run to such an extreme therein that we forget that You have given us any other counsel than that which is just now ringing in our ears. We have known some commanded to be humble who have bowed down till they have become timorous and desponding. We have known others exhorted to be confident who have gone far beyond a modest courage and grown so presumptuous that they have presently fallen into gross transgressions. Is fidelity to the truth your cardinal virtue? Take heed of being uncharitable. Is love to God and man your highest aspiration? Beware lest you become the dupe of false apostles and foul hypocrites. Have you clad yourself with zeal as with a garment? Take care, now, lest by one act of indiscretion your garment should be rolled in blood. Oh, how easy it is to exaggerate a virtue until it becomes a vice. A man may look to himself, examine himself, and scrutinize all his actions and motives till he becomes deplorably selfish. Or on the other hand, a man may look to others, counseling them and cautioning them, preaching to them and praying for them till he grows oblivious of his own estate, degenerates into hypocrisy and discovers to his surprise that his own heart is not right with God. There is a "way" about the precepts—there is a chime about them in which every bell gives out its note and makes up a tune. There is a mixture, as of old, of the anointing oil—so much of this and that and the other and if any ingredient were left out, the oil has lost its perfect aroma. So is there an anointing of the holy life in

which there is precept upon precept skillfully mingled, delicately infused, gratefully blended, and grace given to keep each of these precepts and so the life becomes sweet like an ointment most precious unto the Lord. God grant us each, if we are to teach others—and I hope we shall all try to do that—to understand the way of His precepts.

As a prayer, too, this must certainly mean, “Make me understand the way to keep Your precepts.” It is not in human strength, for he that keeps the precepts of God must be kept by the God of the precepts. To keep the precepts, we must keep Him in the heart who gave the precepts and whose life is the best exemplification of them. O Lord, teach us the way to observe and to do Your commands. Give us humble, dependent hearts receptive of the sweet influences of Your Spirit, that we may understand the way in which those precepts are to be kept. Does it not signify—“Lord, make me to understand the Christian life, for that is the way of Your precepts”? Dear friends, if you are teachers of others, you must be experientially acquainted with the Christian life. You must know the great doctrines which support it and furnish motives for it—the great doctrines which are the pavement of the road along which the Christian travels. You must know the practical precepts themselves—what they are and how the Lord has worded them for each circumstance and each age of the Christian life. You must know the doctrinal and the practical, but you must know the experiential, and he is no preacher of any value who cannot tell the way of God's precepts by having experienced that way, having *felt* the joy of running in it—having taken the precepts and been guided by them so as to have proved that “in keeping of them there is great reward.” Ay, and he will be none the worse teacher if he has a lively memory of the bitterness that comes of having wandered from those commandments, for he can tell the sinner, with the tear starting to his own eyes, that he who wanders from the way of obedience will miss the paths of peace, for the way of God's commandments is exceedingly pleasant, but they that break the hedge and follow their own will shall find that their willfulness entails upon them grievous sorrow and sore pain. This is what we want to understand the way of God's precepts. Let the prayer go up to heaven, especially from every young brother who is hoping to preach the Word before long, “Make me to understand the way of Your precepts.”

Very obviously *a confession is here implied*. “Make me to understand the way of Your precepts.” It means just this, “Lord, I do not understand it of myself. I am ignorant and foolish and if I follow my own judgment—if I take to my own thinking, I shall be sure to go wrong. Lord, make me to understand.” It is a confession of a good man who did understand a great deal, but feels that he does not understand all. In this learning, he who understands most is the man who thinks he understands least. He who has the clearest knowledge of divine things is the very one to feel that there is a boundless ocean far beyond his observation and he cries “Make me to understand the way of Your precepts.” It is a confession which should be made because it is intensely felt—the consciousness of folly and ignorance forcing the confession to the lips.

Our student's prayer asks a great gift when he says, “Make me to *understand*.” This is something more than, “Make me to *know*.” He had said just before, “Teach me Your statutes.” Every Christian needs this teaching for his own sake, but he that is to be an instructor of others must especially inquire for a thorough understanding. You Sunday school teachers who take the oversight of the children, and you elders of the church who look after inquirers and help them to the Savior, you must not be satisfied with knowing—you must *understand*. A superficial acquaintance with the Scriptures will not suffice for your important office. Your mind must penetrate into the deeper meaning, the hidden treasures of wisdom. “Make me to *understand*.” A catechism may supply right answers, but we need the living teacher to give us true perceptions. Intelligence is not a faculty of babes—in understanding you must be men. Young pupils soon lose confidence in their teacher if he does not seem up to the mark. I heard two schoolboys talking of their teacher the other day. Says one, “I don't think he knows much more than we do.” “Well, he always has to look at the book before he can tell us anything, doesn't he?” said the other little chap. Just now, as I came along, I watched two babies trying to carry another baby a little smaller than themselves and they all three rolled down together. It is pretty to see little children anxious to help their little brother, but when the father comes up, he lifts all three and carries them with ease. We have not many fathers, but every Christian man should aspire to that honorable and valuable estate in the church. The wisdom that comes of experience leads up to it. “Make me to understand.” Oh Lord, the

children are pleased with the flowers, help me to spy out the roots. Take me into the secrets, let me know the deep things of God. Help me to discriminate. Enable me to judge and weigh and ponder and so to understand. Such reasons as You give, enable me to comprehend. Where You give no reason, teach my reason to feel that there must be the best of reasons for no reasons having been given. So make me to understand what can be understood and to understand that what I cannot understand is just as reliable as what I do understand. In understanding I can never find You out, O God, to perfection. In Your sight I must still be a babe, though towards my fellow Christians I may be a man. "Make me to understand."

I love to meet with those of the Lord's people who have had their senses exercised in divine things and their intelligence matured. For the most part, we find disciples like babies, unskillful in the word of righteousness, using milk because unable to digest strong meat. Thank God for the babies. Pray God they may soon grow and develop into men. He who knows that he is a sinner and that Christ Jesus is his Savior, knows enough to save him. But we have no wish to perpetuate childishness. The spelling book is essential as a primer, but not the spelling book forever. A B C must not be sung forever in wearisome monotone, nor must, "Only believe," become the everlasting song! Are there no other truths deeper and higher? There is the grand analogy of the faith. There is the doctrine of the covenant. There is the doctrine of election. There is the doctrine of the union of the saints with Jesus Christ. These are the deep things of God and I think we should pray, "Make me, Lord, to understand them." Yet the best understanding is that which aims at personal holiness. "Make me to understand *the way of Your precepts.*" Lord, if I cannot grapple with doctrine, do let me know which is the right way for me to take in my daily life. If sometimes Your truth staggers me and I cannot see where this truth squares with that, yet Lord grant that integrity and uprightness may preserve me. So make me to know and understand the way of Your statutes that if I am tempted and the Tempter come as an angel of light, I may so understand the difference between a true angel of light and the mock angel of light that I may not be taken in the snare. "Make me to understand the way of Your statutes." May my eyes be keen to know the right in all its tangles. May I follow the silken clue of uprightness where it seems to wind and twist. Give Your servant such a clear understanding of what Israel ought to do and of what he himself ought to do as a part of Israel, that he may never miss his way. This is the best kind of understanding in all the world.

The psalmist appeals to the Fountain of all wisdom, the source from where all knowledge springs. Who can put wisdom in the inward parts but the Lord? Or who can give understanding to the heart but God Most High? Our parents and our Sunday school teachers taught us the rudiments while we were supple and pliant with tender age. We thank them much and we esteem them highly. Yet they could only teach the law and imprint, if possible, the letter of it on our memory, although even that we often repeated and as often forgot. It is the Lord that teaches us to profit by the divine Spirit. How very wonderfully the Lord teaches us. Some lessons have to be whipped into us. Well, He does not spare the rod for our crying. Other lessons can only be burnt into us as with a hot iron. Some of us can bless the Lord that we bear in our body the prints of the Lord Jesus, that He branded His truth into our very flesh and bones so that we cannot now miss it, but must understand it. Into what strange places God will put His children! You have heard of colleges called by odd names—Brasen-nose and the like—but the most amazing college I ever heard of was the whale's belly. Jonah would never have bowed his self-will to sovereign grace had he not been cast into the deep, compassed about with floods and overwhelmed with billows and waves. But the soundness of his doctrine was very palpable in the voice of his thanksgiving, for as soon as he came out of the whale's belly, he said, "Salvation is of the Lord". A singular college for a prophet, but we may be content to leave the college to God and if we are, like Joseph, sold into Egypt or like the Hebrew children, carried captive into Babylon, or wherever it may be—so long as He makes us to understand the way of His precepts, we may be well content. Christ taught only three of His twelve apostles upon Tabor, but eleven of them in Gethsemane. Some though favored much with high joys, learn more by deep sorrows. He takes but three of them into the chamber where He raises the dead girl, for all His wonders are not to be seen by all His followers. But they may all behold Him on the cross and learn the sweet wonders of His dying love. I would not be satisfied, dear brethren and sisters, without trying to understand all that can be understood of the love of Jesus Christ and of all those precious truths that make up the way of God's precepts. He is a poor scholar who does not wish to learn more than lies within the bare compass of his task—a good pupil will try to get as much as he can out of his teacher. Be

it your resolve and mine always to be learning! Let us never be content to lightly skim the wave or gently sip the river's brim. Rather let us delight ourselves with diving into the clear stream of knowledge. Revelation invites research and it unfolds its choice stores only to those who search for them as for hidden treasures. Oh, my God! I long to glean, to gather, to gain knowledge. I would gladly yield up every hour I have to sit at Your feet. To You I would surrender every faculty I have that I may be learning. By the ear, by the eye, by the taste would I imbibe instruction. Yes, and in every season of recreation I would inhale the fragrance of Your wondrous works. And when I seek repose I would lean my head upon Your bosom that I may learn Your love by the touch as well as by every other sense. May each gate of Mansoul be filled with the traffic of the precious merchandise of heavenly knowledge. And Lord, I would open the inmost depth of my soul that Your light may shine into the most secret parts of my nature. Oh, hear my cry! Make me to understand the way of Your precepts!

II. Now, dear friends, let us pass on to notice, in the next place, THE OCCUPATION OF THE INSTRUCTED MAN. When the Lord has taught a man the way of His precepts, it behooves him rightly to use his sacred privileges, "So shall I talk of Your wondrous works." As a faithful teacher, let him testify of *God's works*—His wondrous works. It is a sorry sermon that is all about man's works, especially if the preacher makes out our good works to be something very remarkable. We are to preach, not man's works but God's works—not our own works, but the works of our great Substitute. There are two works especially that you Christian people must talk about to others—the work of Christ *for* us and the work of the Holy Spirit *in* us. These are themes that will never be exhausted. The work of God the Son for us in His life and death, resurrection and ascension, His intercession at the right hand of God, and His second advent—what a theme is before you here! How great are the works of Christ on our behalf! Preach His substitution emphatically. Let there be no mistake about that. Let it be told that Christ stood in the place and stead of His people and lived and died for them. Moreover, there is the work of the Holy Spirit in us—the vital interest and importance of which it would not be possible to exaggerate. I should not like any man to try and talk about this divine ministry unless he has been brought under its power and been led by experience to understand it—the work of conviction, the work of regeneration, the work of emptying, humbling, and bringing down, the work of leading to repentance and to faith, the work of sanctification, the work of daily sustenance of the divine life, the work of perfecting the soul for heaven. There is plenty of room for blundering here if God does not make you understand the way of His precepts! But if you have a good clear knowledge of what Christian life is, then, my dear brothers and sisters, always be dwelling on these two things—what the Lord has done *for* us and what the Lord is doing *in* us when He brings us out of darkness into His marvelous light.

The wonderful character of these works of God opens up a study on which the devout mind can discuss with ever awakening emotions of awe and delight. There are a few things in the world that men may wonder at. They used to speak of the seven wonders of the world. I believe that there is not one of those seven wonders which some have not ceased to wonder at. If you see them a sufficient number of times you get accustomed to them and the wonder evaporates. But the works of the Lord, and these two works especially, you may think on them, meditate upon them, inspect them, enjoy them every day of a long life and the result will be, not a diminution, but an increase of your wonder. "Your wondrous works!" God Incarnate in the Son of Mary! Wondrous work, this! God in the carpenter's shop! The Son of God driving nails and handling a hammer! Wondrous work, this! Jesus at the loom, weaving a righteousness for His people, casting His soul into every throw of the shuttle and producing such a matchless fabric for the wedding dress of His own chosen bride that all the angels in heaven stand still and gaze at it and marvel how such a fabric was worked! Behold Him—God Himself in human flesh—dying, bearing human sin with a condescension that is wonderful beyond all wonder! Behold Him casting all that sin into the depth of the sea, with wondrous might of merit, which drowned it in the bottomless abyss forever. Wondrous work, that! Then see Him going forth again, discharged from all His suretyship engagements, having paid the debt, and behold Him nailing the handwriting of the ordinances that were against us to His cross. Oh, wondrous work! One might talk thereof by night and day and never weary. View Him rising as our representative, guaranteeing life to us. See Him climbing the skies and casting a largesse of mercies among rebellious men. Consider the influence of His mediatorial authority, the power committed to Him by His Father, for He has power given Him over all flesh, that He may give eternal

life to as many as the Father gave Him. Listen, listen to His pleading as the priest upon the throne. What wondrous work is that! Still through the apocalyptic vista gaze—gaze on all the glories of the future when He shall come to reign upon the earth! There you have new fields of light breaking on your ravished view—fresh incentives to wonder, admire, and worship.

And what shall I say of these wondrous works which seem so near and so familiar to our observation and yet baffle our investigation, till the more we scrutinize them the more amazement we feel? The church in the world kept alive from generation to generation by One whose presence was promised, was bestowed, and is now felt and proved by the saints—the blessed Paraclete, the Comforter whom Jesus sent from the Father. By His agency, long seasons of drought and despondency have been ever and again succeeded by times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord by revivals and renewals of signs and wonders such as began but did not end in the day of Pentecost. I never know which to wonder at most—God in human flesh, the incarnate Son—or the Holy Spirit dwelling in man. The indwelling is as wonderful as the incarnation. Let every gospel teacher yield up his own soul to the wonder and gratitude which these works of God are fitted to inspire. I like to see the preacher, when he is talking about these things, look like a man wonderstruck, gazing forth on a vast expanse, lost in immensity, as if he were far out at sea, trembling with adoration, as if the chords of his nature vibrated to the mystery and awe that encircle him. There are lovely traces of God's transcendent skill in things minute when peered at through a microscope, but these wondrous works of God are of another order. They display His grander power. Tell not the old, old story as if it had grown trite and trifling in your ears and tripped from off your tongue. Listen to the slow deep mellow voice of the mighty ocean of grace until your soul faints within you. Then speak in tones of strong emotion like those of Paul, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!"

Yet it becomes you to *speak very plainly*. See how it is put. "I will talk of Your wondrous works." Talk is the simplest mode of speech. You cannot all preach, but you can all talk and if some preachers would refrain from rhetoric and tell their plain unvarnished tale, they would succeed better than they do now. Do you think that God meant His ministers to kill themselves in order to come out on Sundays with one or two splendid displays of "intellect" and eloquence? Surely this is not God's way of doing things. I do not believe that Paul ever preached a fine sermon or that Peter ever dreamed of any display of intellect. I asked the other day of one who had heard a sermon, if it was likely that sinners would be converted by it. He said, "Oh no. By no means, but it was an intellectual treat." Is there anywhere in the Bible a word about intellectual treats, or anything approximating to such an idea? Is there not a country on the other side of the sea where they are attempting fine flashy oratory sermons that remind you of the way in which they finish up the fireworks—discourses made up of blue lights and blazes? They call it a "peroration," I believe. But the way for the Christian—the real Christian—is to *talk* of God's wondrous works. Tell me the old, old story. Tell it not stately, but tell it simply, as to a little child. More glory will come to God from that, more comfort to your soul in reflection, and more benefit to the souls of those you teach than from all the flights of poetry or the flourishes of rounded periods. They that would win souls must take David's words here, and say, "Make me to understand the way of Your precepts," so shall I give up all the "spread eagle" and "I shall talk of Your wondrous works." "Blessed be God," said a farmer at a prayer meeting, "that we were fed last Sunday out of a low crib, for we have mostly had the fodder so high that we poor things could not reach it." When I heard that farmer's thanksgiving, I thought it very wise.

When a man is instructed in the faith, he will often speak about these things. Such conversation may be frequent without being irksome. David says, "I will *talk*." Preaching is an exercise to be undertaken now and then, but talking, I believe, is capable of being carried on by some people very nearly every minute of the day. Certainly few persons account it a hardship to talk every day, and when God makes us to understand the way of His precepts, we shall have the gospel at our fingertips so that whoever we meet with, we shall be able to talk to them in an earnest and simple style about God's salvation. I would, dear friends, that our talk were always seasoned with salt—that our most common conversation were bedewed with heavenly unction, ministering grace unto the hearers.

But though very plain and very frequent, the good psalmist's talk was very much to the point and it did not lack propriety, for he says, "So shall I talk of Your wondrous works." What does he mean? Why, according to understanding. "Make me to understand and then I shall talk like an intelligent man." May you, dear brethren and sisters, who talk about Jesus Christ be enabled to talk about Him in a wise way. Very serious mischief has often come from harping upon some one string. Some men are far more interested in stating their own ideals than in unfolding God's counsels. If we understand the way of God's precepts, acquire the language of it, get into the groove of it, then we shall talk with understanding and there will be a harmony and a wisdom about our utterances which will be blessed to the edification of the hearers.

III. We will close by noticing THE INTIMATE RELATION BETWEEN THE PRAYER OF THE STUDENT AND THE PURSUIT THAT HE SUBSEQUENTLY FOLLOWED. "Make me to understand the way of Your precepts: so shall I talk of Your wondrous works." The connection lies partly in the enchantment of this knowledge and the passion to communicate it. A man who understands Christ and His mediatorial work—and the Spirit and His sanctifying work—cannot be silent. The fire once kindled, the flames will spread. He will be so transported with wonder, admiration, and adoring gratitude at the great mercy and love of God that it will cause a fermentation within his breast. He will be like a full vessel wanting vent and he must have it. As with a fire in his bones, he will exclaim, "Woe is me if I preach not the gospel." I would to God there were a deeper understanding of the ways of God, for then many silent tongues would speak. The theme itself, without any remarkable gifts on the part of the man, would suffice to secure the attention it strongly claims. As the heart swells with thankfulness, the lips burst forth spontaneously into song. Doubtless Hannah would tell you that it was easier for a barren wife to restrain her tears than for a joyful mother to stifle her hymn of praise. Did Jesus love you when you were all forlorn? Did He find you when a stranger and prove Himself your friend? Did He shelter you when a sinner and shield you from all harm? Did He die that you might live? Do you know that Jesus is your near kinsman and that He takes great delight in redeeming you for Himself? Let the truth of this but dawn on your heart and though your tongue were dumb before, it must now begin to talk—

*"Now will I tell to sinners round,
What a dear Savior I have found,
I'll point to His redeeming blood
And say, 'Behold the way to God.'"*

May this stir up some of you who love the Lord and yet never talk about Him. May it lead you to a holy searching of heart. Surely you have not such an understanding of Him as you ought to have or else sometimes your silence would be thawed and your words would betray your strong emotions.

If I understand the way of God's precepts, then I shall be fully furnished with matter to talk of His wondrous works. What a dreadful thing it must be for a man to set up to be a teacher of others if he does not know the things of God experientially himself. It can be done, you know, and done very cheaply. You can buy sermons ready lithographed and guaranteed not to have been preached within so many miles—for nine pence each. You can be furnished with them for ten shillings and sixpence a quarter. But there will be a heavy account at the last for the man who does that sort of thing. It is easy for you to teach in your class by reading the Sunday School Union notes, getting up the lesson, and having it all in your head. Ah, but, my dear friend, how will you answer for having taught children in the Sunday school when you have never been God's child and never have been taught of God yourself? "Unto the wicked God says, What have you to do to declare My statutes or to take My name into your mouth?" Do not try to teach others what you do not understand yourself. Go down on your knees and cry, "Make Me to understand the way of Your precepts, so shall I talk of Your wondrous works." Dear brethren, especially you who are to be ministers of the gospel and have begun to preach, seek a deeper understanding of divine things or else your ministry will be lean and poverty-stricken. Unless you are taken into the confidence of God and initiated into His counsels, you cannot possibly discharge the solemn duties which lie upon the ambassador for Christ. Cry mightily to be well-filled with an understanding of the gospel, so shall you overflow to others and talk of God's wondrous works.

Such sound education will clothe you with authority. A man who, in his own heart, knows what he is talking about and preaches what he has tasted and handled of the good Word of grace, will put weight into every utterance. It matters but little what language he uses, the power lies not in the garnishing, but in the truth itself which he proclaims. It is not the polish of his speech, but the fervor of his soul which gives force to his persuasions. Oh, how often my heart has been refreshed by a humble testimony from a poor man who has talked only about what the Lord has done for him. What a power there is about experiential talk. Dry doctrine and pious platitudes borrowed from books fall flat on the ears and are gall to the taste, but he who talks of the things which he has made touching the King has a tongue like the pen of a ready writer. I know aged Christians who seem, every time they speak, to drop diamonds and emeralds from their lips. One could wish to treasure up every syllable they utter, not because there is anything very ingenious or original in any sentence, but because there is a sound of abundance of rain in every word, a divine depth, a sacred sweetness, a leaping of life, even in each broken utterance which is born on their lips. You say, "That man knows more than he tells. He does not expose all his wares in the window. He has been in the secret place of communion. His face shines though his voice falters." Such teachers may you and I prove in our riper years, having light in ourselves and illuminating all who are within the range of our influence. What God has led us to understand, may we be the means of communicating by our ordinary conversation, by speech easy, simple, unostentatious, yet earnest, faithful and heavenly-minded.

Brethren, be up and doing, teaching others what you know. Do not try to teach them what you do not know. As far as you know Christ, speak about Him to your kinsfolk and acquaintance, your friends and neighbors. Our dear brother and elder, the late Mr. Verdon, on such a night as this would have been anxiously looking after any person who seemed to have heard with thankfulness and he would not have suffered them to leave the place without accosting them in his own gentle manner and beginning to talk to them about Christ. I want some more like he. He has gone home. I pray the Lord that some may be baptized for the dead, to stand in his place and fill up the gap which his removal has made in our ranks. We need a host of wise and prudent Christian talkers. I do not know that we have at present any more urgent need—people who can talk in the train, can talk by the roadside, can talk in the kitchen, can talk in the workshop, can talk across a counter—can, in fact, make opportunities to talk of Jesus. I want you, dear friends, to ask the Lord to qualify you for this service and lead you into it. Some of you appear to be marching backward, for you are even more reticent than you used to be. I would have you like Archimedes when he found out his secret and could not keep it for very joy, but ran down the street crying out, "I have found it. I have found it." Come, break your guilty silence and cry aloud, "I have found Him of whom Moses in the law and the prophets did write, and I cannot help talking about Him."

As for others of you who are not believers, I pray the Lord that you may give a listening ear to the message which I ask others to tell. Here it is, "Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. Whosoever believes in Him has everlasting life." "He that believes and is baptized shall be saved." The Lord bring you to accept these tidings, to believe in Jesus, and to find eternal life. Amen.

Adapted from *The C. H. Spurgeon Collection*, Version 1.0, Ages Software.

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