

A WARNING TO WAVERERS NO. 2537

A SERMON
INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, OCTOBER 3, 1897.
DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
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“But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavers is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord.”
James 1:6, 7.

THE apostle James was always very practical. He never really differed from Paul, but, whereas Paul dwelt more upon the doctrinal side of the truth, James, who has given us but one Epistle, dwelt more upon the practical. I should not have wondered, if Paul had taken up the same subjects as James did, if he had written in the same style. At any rate, we are very grateful to James that he is so downright, so straightforward, so plain and practical. He never minces matters. He hits the nail on the head every time. Whenever he talks about faith, he seems to be saying all the while, “Believe.” If he discourses on prayer, you can hear him crying, “Pray!” And if he speaks concerning holy living, you can hear the thunder at the back of his words commanding us to forsake sin, and to follow after righteousness!

In the passage before us, the apostle is dealing with the matter of prayer, but not with that alone, for, while the verse previous to my text is about a man praying, and therefore James says, “Let him ask in faith, nothing wavering,” yet the verse *following* our text is *not* about prayer, but about a man's general life—“A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways.” Therefore I shall try to show you, first, that the text speaks of *the great necessity in prayer*, namely, decided faith. And then I shall use the text as pointing forward to that which follows it, and speak to you concerning *the great necessity in life*, namely, decision of character for the Lord.

I. To begin, then, the apostle James first speaks of THE GREAT NECESSITY IN PRAYER. If we would pray successfully, we must have a decided faith.

There should be, first of all, a very decided conviction in our own minds *as to the desirableness of the thing that we are asking for*. “Why,” says one, “that is self-evident! Would a man pray if he did not thoroughly desire what he asked of God?” My reply is that I am afraid a great many people ask for what they do not really desire—and they would be taken aback if God were at once to give them what they have asked for! There is a man who says that he has been praying for a new heart, but then he does not intend to give up frequenting the bars, nor will he leave off associating with his bad companions. Well, if God could give such a man as that a new heart all of a sudden, and he could still retain his love for his old evil habits, he would be likely to kneel down and pray to have it taken away again, for he would be very uncomfortable with such a burden as a new heart, and a right spirit! That is not what he truly wants. Some men pray to be made holy, but they wish to keep some little pet sin in the backyard. They do not really want what they are asking for—they are not yet convinced of the desirableness of the thing that they profess to be seeking. Men and women pray that they may be saved, but if we explained to them what it is to be saved, they would pray, “Lord, do not save us—at least, not just yet! We must have a little more of the world. We have some unholy engagements that we must keep—we do not want to be made religious people just at present.” In all probability, the more they understood of what salvation really is, the less they would think of praying to be saved. A man kneels down and says, “Lead us not into temptation,” and he gets up, and goes straight away to a place where temptations swim all around him. What is he but a self-deceived man asking for a thing which he practically proves that he does not wish for? He prays, “Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us.” Within five minutes of so praying, he says, “I will never forgive that fellow! I hate him for what he did, and the longer I live, the worse I shall hate him.” Will a man thus mock God? Will he so trifle with his Maker? Alas, how many do! If you must insult someone by your mockeries, go and insult your equal—your king

if you dare! But to go and insult your *God*—can you commit such a terrible sin as this? Yet many do it. If they complain that their prayers are not answered, they have no right to complain, for such people must not expect to receive anything of the Lord. They are wavering even as to the sincerity of their prayer! Their own wish is not intense enough, or intelligent enough to be really their settled desire. They waver even on the threshold of the house of mercy—how can they expect to succeed in their business with the great Lord of the house?

Further, wavering may be seen in some persons *as to the fact of God's hearing prayer at all*. Possibly they are not even sure that there *is* a God, or, if that truth is believed, yet God's *existence* is to them a matter of great obscurity. They know little about Him, and do not care to know any more. "Yes," they say, with a kind of languid assent which they have not the moral courage to refuse, "no doubt there is a God"—and they are a little proud to think that they are not atheists as some people are—"Yes, there is a God, but does He really hear prayer as a man hears the requests of his fellow men? And does God actually attend to the prayer so as to be affected by it, and to grant the desire of His creature?" If, my dear friend, you have been led to question this truth, you must not expect to receive anything of the Lord, for "he that comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him." If either of these is a moot point with you, you might as well stand upon a hill and whistle to the wind, as go up into your chamber and bow your knee in prayer! You are a waverer about matters in which a man must not waver if he expects to be successful in pleading with God! Your fulcrum is not fixed, so you cannot have any effectual leverage in prayer. This must be a settled, and fully-believed fact, that God *is*, and that He hears and answers prayer. You may not be able to make out how that is consistent with His fixed purposes, and it is a blessing that you need not try to make it out. The way to heaven is not by explaining riddles, but by believing revelations. The way to heaven is not through the cleverness that can spell out an enigma, but through the simplicity that believes in God who cannot lie. It is true that God's eternal purpose is fixed, do not doubt that—but it is equally true that the Lord listens to the voice of a man, and that whatever we ask in prayer, believing, we shall receive.

Furthermore, there are some who very greatly spoil their prayers because they waver *as to God's granting the specific thing which they are seeking at His hands*. You know, dear friends, that there is a way of praying in which you ask for nothing, *and get it*. I have heard that kind of praying even in public prayer meetings. It was a very good prayer, indeed, containing many admirable phrases—a prayer that was very well put together—I seem to have heard it ever since I was a boy. But there is no real prayer in it, and that is the fatal flaw in it. It would be a capital prayer if it were a prayer at all—it has all the makings of a prayer—and yet it is no prayer! It is just as though you might see in a shop window all the garments of a man, but no man wearing the garments! Now, such a prayer as that never succeeds with God because He does not play at hearing prayer though far too many play at praying. It is earnest work with God, and it must be downright business work with us. Suppose you go into a bank, and stand at the counter, and say, "I want some money." The clerk says, "How much do you want, sir? Please put the amount down on this check." "Oh, I do not want to be specific! You can give me a few hundred pounds, but I do not know to a sixpence exactly what I want, I am not sure that I could put it down in black and white." You will get no money at all that way! But if you write down in black and white exactly how much you want—spell it in letters, and put it down, also, in figures—the clerk will give you the money if you have so much in your account at that bank. So, if you have an account with the great God—as, blessed be His name, some of us have—go and ask for what you want! The apostle James says in the chapter we read, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God." If a man asks of God *riches*, that is not what He has promised to give! If he asks of God good health, that may be granted to him, but still the promise is concerning *wisdom*, and that is what the man needs! Therefore, let him with all his heart pray, "Lord, give me wisdom." I think our prayers would succeed much better if we were not so wavering about what it is that we really require, and if we were not dubious as to whether God could give us that very thing.

You, dear friends, are in a fix—you do not know which way to move. Happily, you have forgotten your troubles the little while you have been in the house of prayer, but tomorrow morning the first thing you will say to yourself will be, "What am I going to do today?" Do you believe that God can give you wisdom, and that He will do so if you ask Him? Then go at once to Him, and say, "Lord, this is what I need." Specify your needs. State your exact condition. Lay the whole case before God with as much orderliness as if you were telling your story to an intelligent friend who was willing to hear it, and prepared to help you. And then say, "Lord, this is specifically what I think I need, and I ask this of You believing that You can give it to me."

If it is wisdom that you need, it will be essential, when you ask for that wisdom, that you decidedly believe that this Book, through which God teaches us wisdom, is really inspired, so that what it teaches is distinctly and unquestionably true—and is received by you as the utterance of infallibility. Ask of God in the full belief that it is so, or else I do not see how you can pray to be guided. Moreover, the Author of the Bible is prepared to teach you concerning the things which are written in this Book, and it is essential, when you ask for wisdom, that you should believe that the Holy Spirit is able to enlighten you, and is willing to instruct you concerning those things which now perplex you. Go, then, to God in prayer, believing in His Word, and believing in His Holy Spirit.

God also teaches men sometimes by providence. He guides their way as otherwise it could not have been directed. Believe in the providence of God, in the overruling hand of God everywhere in everything, and believing that, go upon your knees, and say to Him, “Lord, give me direction. Give me wisdom by Your Word, by Your Spirit, or by some other means in Your gracious providence, and I will bless Your name for it.” But, mark you, when you go to God asking for wisdom, you will not get any help from Him unless you are prepared to follow the guidance of that wisdom when He gives it to you! Many people, when they ask advice, have long before made up their minds what they mean to do. It is not infrequently my lot as pastor to be consulted by some persons about marriage. I am very careful as to what I say upon that matter because I am pretty sure that long before they ask my opinion, they have decided whom they mean to marry. In the case of marriage with ungodly persons, they only come just to salve their consciences, meaning all the while to do what they know is wrong. Now, dear friends, do not go to God in that fashion—having made up your mind already what you mean to do! “Lord,” says one, “help me to do right in this business.” And he means to do right if it will not be too expensive. “Lord,” he says, “keep me upright in this transaction.” And he means upon the whole preferably to be upright—if, if, if—if there is anything to be made by it! He would sooner get the money honestly than the other way, but still he means to make money somehow! Well, that kind of praying is impudence, and worse than that—it is an attempt to flatter the oracle to take the responsibility of iniquity off your shoulders—and that will never do when God Jehovah, the all-glorious One, is the oracle to which you appeal! No, there must be in our cries to God a firm belief in the power of prayer, a firm conviction of the truth of revelation, and a strong resolve that whatever the Lord bids us do, we will do it, for only to the man who keeps His commandments, and delights himself in the Lord, will God give the desires of his heart. If you will not listen to God’s Word, neither will God listen to your word when you come to Him in prayer.

II. Now I want to gather up all my strength, and to ask the special attention of all of you who are undecided, while I speak about THE GREAT NECESSITY IN LIFE, that is, decision for God and for His truth.

What is indecision? Well, first, *it is a thing which permeates the lives of many men.* I could describe some of them, and they would probably think that I was very personal. I wish that they would believe that I mean to be exactly so! They wish above all things to be Christians, especially on Sundays, but they have some associates whose company is particularly pleasurable—and when they are with them, they studiously avoid anything that looks like religion! I have seen them among Christian people, and they are very cautious, for they would not like to be thought worldly. And I have seen them among worldly people, and they are very cautious there too, for they would not wish to be thought to be Christians! They highly approve of a religious book, but then, as some men like a little rotten cheese for the taste of it, so they like just a flavoring of bad literature because they must know what is in the world—and that rottenness has to them rather a pleasant flavor. As for prayer, of course that is admirable—they are glad that their wives pray, they would be delighted to hear that their children pray, and they themselves do pray—but not very often. They do it when they are obliged to, just as some ships put into harbor when there is rough weather about. They are upright in business, nobody can find much fault with them in that respect. They only rob God, *that is all*—and God being of no particular consequence to them, they act just as they like towards Him. Imagine, dear friends, that you can see a pair of scales, and you have a good illustration of what these waverers are like. Look, that scale slowly gets to a balance, and by-and-by the wrong side goes down, and the right side proves to be short weight! That is how it is with these people—they would, and they would not—they are “to good and evil equal bent.” And, according to the mood in which you catch the man, he is either a devil or a saint! He can speak very prettily when, after a service, he is questioned about his conversion. He says that he is very much obliged to the friend for being so careful about his soul, and he hopes that there is some good thing in himself toward the Lord God of Israel. If one from the opposite camp were to accost him in his shop and say, “You go to a place of worship, don’t you?” he is such a coward that though he might not actually tell a

lie about it, he would sail wonderfully near the wind, and you might think from what he said, that he was much more often at the theater than at a house of prayer!

This is the kind of man who is undecided, and in describing him, I take leave to tell him that his *condition is one of immorality*. Nothing can be more immoral than for a man to know the right, yet not to follow it, and so far to admit the importance of that right as well-near to yield to it, and yet to do such despite to God, and to his own conscience, as not to yield to it at all, but to be drawn aside by altogether opposite influences! If a man were to say, “Well, I am undecided upon the question of honesty,” I would be very decided about locking up the spoons! If there should be a woman who said, “I am very undecided about the question of purity of morals,” I would know that she was no better than she ought to be. There are some things about which a man must not be undecided—you must not be undecided about being chaste, about speaking the truth—and you cannot be undecided about serving God without being guilty, in that very indecision, of manifest treason against the majesty of heaven! I pray every undecided man to give himself his true character, and that will not be a good one. It will be written out in large letters, “You are in an immoral state as long as you are halting between two opinions.” Christ reckons that the man who is not with Him is against Him! He who does not serve Christ is opposing Him. There are no “betweenites”—none can dwell on the fence. You are either in Immanuel’s land, or else you are in the dominions of Satan—you can be sure of that! If not right, you are wrong! If not a friend of Christ, you are His enemy!

This condition of things is also *very dangerous*. There are some persons here for whom I always pray whenever I enter the pulpit, and see them here. There are some not here, as I see by their not being in their places, for whom I think no Sunday has passed over my head for years without my breathing a prayer for them. And still they are not saved. I have seen some very strange persons who had never come in before, and they have been converted the first time they have attended this place. But these other people have been here, some of them for 20 years, and they are not a bit nearer than they were at first because they have always seemed so near. They still appear very promising, but it never comes to anything. Everybody who knows them says that within a very short time they will come forward and confess Christ, but a *very long time has already passed*, and they have not done so yet because they do not know Him in their heart, and therefore they cannot confess Him with their mouth. You know that when a man is an out-and-out black sinner, you can aim at him, and hit the mark the first shot—but these people who are a sort of whitey-black, or a kind of blackey-white—you do not know which they are! It might have been white originally, but certainly it has been smoked nearly black. Or it may have been originally black, but it has been certainly bleached to look like white. These undecided people somehow baffle us. We cannot get at them, and meanwhile they get confirmed in that wretched condition—and there is no doing anything with them. It is a very, very dangerous position for a man to occupy. O my friend, if this is where you are, I pray you not to sit down at ease in such a state as that! As well might a man go to the edge of Shakespeare Cliff at Dover, and lie down to sleep there, and feel himself perfectly safe, when in a moment he may be dashed to pieces at the foot of the rock! O sirs, will you stay where you are? You are on a volcano! It will burst before long to your destruction. Therefore, escape for your life!

Our text also tells us what this indecision is like—“He that wavers is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed.” Like a wave of the sea! Well, a wave of the sea is very *unrestful*. You see it come rolling up from a distance. On, on it sweeps, and never stops! Out on the broad Atlantic, what a life a wave seems to have—never still—never for a second in one place. Now up like a mountain, then down again like a great abyss! Such is the life of the undecided man—he does not know where he is—and you do not know where to find him. He is never quiet, never still, never at rest. A man who gives himself up to the devil gets a kind of dead peace within him. His conscience being seared as with a hot iron, he is still. This is quite different from the state of the Christian who gives himself up wholly to his Lord, and who therefore enters into a delightful heavenly peace which continually deepens and increases. The man who is always shilly-shallying, playing at see-saw all his life, knows nothing of real rest. He does not make even the best that can be made out of the devil—he gets nothing worth having from either one side or the other—so he is a wretched creature, indeed! The church will not acknowledge him, and the world is suspicious of him. I am always glad when the world turns out a person of this character. When I was pastor at Waterbeach, a certain young man joined the church. We thought he was an excellent young man, but there used to be in the village, once a year, a great temptation in the form of a feast, and when the feast came round, this young fellow was there in very evil company. He was in the long room of a public house in the evening, and when I heard what happened I really felt an intense gratitude

to the landlady of that place. When she came in and saw him there, she said, "Halloa, Jack So-and-So, are you here? Why, you are one of Spurgeon's lot, yet you are *here*? You ought to be ashamed of yourself! This is not fit company for you. Put him out the window, boys." And they did put him out the window on the Friday night—and we put him out the door on the Sunday—for we removed his name from our church-book! Where was he to go? The world would not have him, and the church would not have him. If he had been all for the world, the world would have made something of him—and if he had been all for Christ, Christ would have made something of him. But as he tried to be a little of each, and so nothing to either, his life became a wretched one! As he walked the streets, people pointed at him with scorn. The Christians turned away, thinking him a hypocrite, as I fear he was, and the worldlings called him so, and made his name a by-word and a proverb. Oh, you who are neither for God nor the devil, nobody will respect you long! They cannot! You fancy, just now, because you have money in your pocket, that you are a very respectable person. But you are a disreputable person, and the world itself says that you are! And you will find it out, yourself before long—and you will be unrestful, like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed!

The undecided man is also like a wave of the sea, *unstable*. Yonder great wave seems to form a pyramid—look how it towers aloft! It is a wonderful sight, but while you are admiring it, it is gone. It was only made of water, and it has disappeared into its own element. So are there some people who appear to be excellent and admirable, but they are undecided, and their goodness is as the morning cloud, and as the early dew—it soon passes away.

They are also *uncertain*. That wave that is rolling away yonder, where will it end? Will it sweep across the Atlantic till it reaches the shore of America? Look, there comes a north wind, and it turns towards the icebergs! But another wind blows, and now the wave is rolling towards the coast of England. It is in a perpetual whirl, just as the winds happen to drive it—and we have many people of that uncertain kind—"driven with the wind and tossed."

These undecided persons, too, are like the waves of the sea because they have *no inward vital principle*. A wave of the sea is dependent upon the wind that comes to bear it on. There may be a great force in the waves, but even that is not mighty enough to stand against the rough gale—they are "driven with the wind and tossed." And look at some of you! There has only to be a bit of a breeze, and see how you are driven by it. You sang with us just now, "Happy day! Happy day!" Yet, perhaps, tomorrow evening you will be at a social party where there will be jesting at religion, and some questionable witticisms—and you will laugh at them as loudly as others will! And if somebody does charge you with being on the other side, you will stutter, stammer, blush, and at last you will say something that all the while you do not like to say. Yes, you are "driven with the wind." There are some fellows six feet high if they did but stand upright, yet anybody can twist them whichever way he likes. For my part, "I had as well not be, as live to be in awe of such a thing as I myself." What does it matter to me what a mere man's opinion of me may be? Nothing whatever! If a thing is right, I believe it, say it, and try to live it. And if others also think that it is right, so much the better for them, but if they think it is wrong, it is none the worse for me when I have once learned to stand on my own legs. But there is a certain class of people who always stand on other people's feet. They ask "Mrs. Grundy" what is the proper thing to do. If they move in West-End circles, they would sooner die than be out of the cruel bondage that is called, "fashion." If they live at the East-End, there is a rough sort of fashion there, and they cannot stand against it. They are "like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed." I should have an unutterable contempt for all such people if I did not feel an earnest desire that they might yet possess a living, powerful principle, and begin to stand alone in the power and energy of the divine life which God gives to all of those who believe in His Son, Jesus Christ.

The worst of these wavering, undecided people is that, like waves of the sea, though they are creatures of circumstances, yet they have a *great force for evil*. Those waves of the sea, driven with the wind, and tossed, sink many a gallant ship, and devour many a brave mariner—and these unstable people have an influence by which they carry many away. They half wish that they were not themselves carried away, yet they are. There is something good about them, but there is also something so bad that they sweep others on with them to destruction! Perhaps they are bearing their own children away by their indecision, so that they, too, will grow up undecided—and generation after generation may be cursed by their wicked hesitation. God grant that they may not continue in this evil condition a single moment longer!

In closing, what shall I say to you who are undecided? I pray you think whether you have not been undecided long enough. Remember that the question you have to decide is by no means a difficult one.

Whether you shall serve God or Satan, whether you shall live with Christ in heaven, or lie among the lost in hell forever—these are not questions about which there ought to be any choice! Decide, then, foolish waverer! If you are a believer in the Scriptures, a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Savior of men, decide to follow the teaching of those Scriptures, and to accept that Savior—and decide at once! May God help you to decide very speedily! All this while you are robbing yourself of happiness, robbing God of glory, robbing His people of your help, you are even robbing this poor wicked world of what little you might do for its benefit, robbing your family of a holy example, robbing your entire life by letting its best days go for nothing! It is time, then, you were decided! O Lord, bring these waverers to decision, for Your dear Son's sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C.H. SPURGEON: JAMES 1.

Verse 1. *James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting.*

According to the teaching of some in the present day, the apostle should have said, "To the two tribes, and the ten that are lost," but he does not say so, nor does Scripture say so. "To the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greetings."

2. *My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into diverse temptations.*

Or, "trials." This is a strange thing to say, is it not? Should we not count it great joy when we *escape* from trial? Perhaps so, but we are expressly told to count, or reckon, it all joy when we fall into divers trials. Have you never known what it is, in times of peace and quietness, to feel as if you missed the grandeur of the presence of God? I have looked back to times of trial with a kind of longing, not to have them return, but to feel the strength of God as I have felt it then—to feel the power of faith, as I have felt it then—to hang upon God's powerful arm as I hung upon it then, and to see God at work as I saw Him then. I think the mariner at home must sometimes feel a kind of longing to once more enjoy a storm on the ocean, and to see how the good ship rides on the billows' crest. Life gets flat, sometimes, while all goes smoothly, and we need even the variety of a trial to bring us to close dealing with our God. It is so much for our good to be tried, it is so much for the glory of God that we should be tried, that we will read the verse again, and note what the apostle says—"My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into divers trials." Be like the soldier who is not afraid of the shot and shell, and the turmoil and strife of the battle!

3. *Knowing this, that the trying of your faith works patience.*

That is a gem of the first water, well worth finding even if you have to dig in the mines of trial for it.

4. *But let patience have her perfect work, that you may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.*

This is true Christian perfection, when every gracious quality is present, and present in perfection! If you have a child, it is a great joy to you to find the child perfect as a child—with no sense deficient, no limb missing, and every part rightly formed. Oh, that we may all be such Christians—"perfect and entire, wanting nothing!"

5. *If any of you lack wisdom.*

That is the point in which we are all deficient, and if we are to be wanting in nothing, we must not be lacking in wisdom. How, then, are we to obtain it?

5. *Let him ask of God, that gives to all men liberally, and upbraids not; and it shall be given him.*

Young beginner, you who have but lately put on Christ, you certainly do lack wisdom—you cannot have attained that gift in all its fullness as yet—then go to God for it! He can give it to you, and he *will* give it to you if you ask Him for it.

6, 7. *But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavers is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord.*

It ensures failure in prayer when there is not a decided faith in the one who prays—and it ensures failure of the whole life if there is not a decided determination to serve the Lord.

8-11. *A double minded-man is unstable in all his ways. Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted: but the rich, in that he is made low: because as the flower of the grass, he shall pass away. For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withers the grass, and the flower thereof falls, and the grace—*

Or, "beauty."

11. *Of the fashion of it perishes: so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways.*

No matter how luxurious may be his mode of living, no matter how admirable may be his taste, he shall certainly fade—and all that he has will fade, too. And if this is all that can be said of him, that he is a rich man—he is a very poor creature indeed.

12. *Blessed is the man that endures temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to them that love Him.*

For that is the purpose of our trials—that we should be made to love Him more and love him better. This is that divine grace which shall win “the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to them that love Him.”

13. *Let no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempts He any man.*

That is to say, if God permits or sends temptation to any man, it is not an inducement to sin. In that sense, God tempts no man. Those temptations which are said to come from God are *trials or tests*. In that sense, God *does* tempt all His people, even as it is written, “God did tempt (or, prove) Abraham.” He tries and tests them, that they may see, and that He may see whether their faith and their profession is genuine or not, even as the Angel of the Lord said to Abraham, after the trial of his faith, “Now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son from Me.”

14. *But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.*

This is the essence of an evil temptation—a man’s own lust.

15. *Then when lust has conceived, it brings forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, brings forth death.*

There you see the egg, the larva, and the full-grown fly of sin! “Sin, when it is finished, brings forth death.”

16. *Do not err, my beloved brethren.*

Do not err about anything, but, especially do not err about this matter of temptation, where you may so easily make a blunder. “Do not err, my beloved brethren.”

17. *Every good gift, and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.*

Ascribe all evil to yourself, to the world, or to Satan—but ascribe all good unto God. “Every good gift and every perfect gift”—every grain of goodness, every trace of excellence that there is in the world comes from Him—but no evil ever comes from Him.

18. *Of His own will He begat us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of His creatures.*

It is a very delightful idea that we are presented to God as “a kind of first fruits of His creatures.” There is a whole harvest behind us, as Paul also reminds us in Romans 8:19-21—“For the earnest expectation of the creature waits for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of Him who has subjected the same in hope, because the creature, itself, also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.”

19, 20. *Therefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger: for the anger of man works not the righteousness of God.*

Therefore, when we are tempted, let us not be in a hurry to pronounce a verdict on the temptation. If we are slandered, and evilly spoken of, let us not be quick to reply, or to grow angry. Let us be slow—very slow—to anger. It will be our wisdom, for no good comes of human anger. “The anger of man works not the righteousness of God.”

21. *Therefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.*

Receive it as a graft. As the tree is prepared by the knife to receive the new shoot that is to be put into it, and so does receive it as to make it its own, and to use it for its own fruit-bearing purposes, even in that way “receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.”

22-24. *But be you doers of the word, and not hearers, only, deceiving your own selves. For if any is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a mirror: for he beholds himself, and goes his way, and straightway forgets what manner of man he was.*

The best thing to do when you look into a mirror, and spy a spot on your face, is to wash it off. The true use of hearing the word, or reading it, is to amend one’s self at once in those points in which the word discovers us to be faulty. To look in the mirror and not to wash off the spots is but a piece of vanity. And to hear a sermon, or read a chapter, and not to put into practice what we are taught is a sad waste of time.

25. *But whoever looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.*

There are many who complain of their short memories when they are hearing sermons. Well, then, let them be quick about *doing* what the sermon bids them, and then they will not be forgetful hearers. You have heard how one good woman described the effect of the sermon she has heard. She was one who washed wool, and when her minister went round to ask her what she had learned on the previous Sabbath, she did not even remember the text. “Oh, Janet,” he said, “I am afraid you are a forgetful hearer! I cannot see what good the sermon has done for you.” So she took him to the back of her house where she had a pump—and she worked at the handle while she held underneath the spout a sieve full of wool that was dirty and foul. The water ran through the wool, and through the sieve, and all ran away. “There,” she said, “this sieve is like my memory. But, sir, though the water does not stop in the sieve, it washes the wool—and what you preach, though it does not stay in my memory, it has washed my heart, and cleansed my life and conversation.” Never mind about keeping the water in the sieve, as long as it washes the wool! No man can be said to be a forgetful hearer who is a doer of the work that he is bid to perform!

26. *If any man among you seems to be religious.*

You know what that means and there are some who do seem to be wonderfully religious. Butter would not melt in their mouths, as we say, they are so solemn. “If any man among you seems to be religious.”

26. *And bridles not his tongue*

—That little noisy troublesome member. “And bridles not his tongue.”

26. *But deceives his own heart, this man’s religion is vain.*

If religion does not salt your tongue, and keep it sweet, it has done nothing for you. If the doctor wants to know the state of your health, he says, “Let me see your tongue.” And there is no better test of the health of the mind than to see what is on the tongue! When it gets furred up with unkind words; when it turns black with blasphemy; when it is spotted with lasciviousness, there is something very bad inside the heart, you may be quite sure of that!

27. *Pure religion.*

—It might be rendered, “Pure ritualism.”

27. *And undefiled before God and the Father is this.*

What is pure ritualism according to the inspired apostle. To wear a white surplice and to change it for a black gown? I do not see that in the Scriptures. To have little boys in white to sing for you? I do not see that. What I do see is this—

27. *To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.*

I should like to have such a surpliced choir as this—a company of Christian men and women robed in unspotted holiness! We shall have such a choir as that around the eternal throne of God, so they who wish to be there had better begin to practice the music here! The Lord help you to do so, for Christ’s sake! Amen.

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