

QUESTION AND EXCLAMATION

NO. 2742

A SERMON

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DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,

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“But I said, How can I put you among the children, and give you a pleasant land, a goodly heritage of the hosts of nations? And I said, You shall call Me, My Father; and shall not turn away from Me.”
Jeremiah 3:19.

MEN think very lightly of sin unless it brings them under the eyes of the law of the land. They smile at it, as though it were a trifle, but God thinks not as they do. He calls sin by very black names. In this chapter, from which our text is taken, the Lord uses very strong terms in describing sin and He knows what sin is. He is a better judge of it than we are, so He does not regard it as a trifle, but He calls it *“adultery,”* which among men is regarded as one of the grossest of wrongs and the foulest of crimes. Oh, if some here who think themselves righteous, could only see themselves, not as their fellow creatures see them, but as God sees them, the sight would appall them!

Then, because man thinks so little of sin, he also thinks very little of the Grace of God. To him it seems a very simple matter to remove human guilt—just let God rub it out and leave a clean sheet. But God, who knows what sin really is, makes a very different estimate of the difficulties in the way of mercy and, accordingly, in our text we find Him asking the idolatrous nation, “How can I put you among the children?” The Omniscient, the Omnipotent, is enquiring, “How can such a thing as this be done?” The Lord adopts the language of wonder and speaks after the manner of men, as the best method by which He can communicate to our mind His own conception of the difficulty of saving a sinner. He wants to save him—longs to save him—yearns to put him among His children, but so many difficulties arise that He says, “How can I put you among the children?”

I am going to speak of my text in two ways. You have, perhaps, noticed that our translators regarded the first clause of this verse as a question and they, therefore, put a note of interrogation, or question mark, after the word, “nations.” “How can I put you among the children, and give you a pleasant land, a goodly heritage of the hosts of nations?” But the Hebrew bears another sense and some later scholars assert that the second meaning is the true one, namely that there ought to be here a note of exclamation or of admiration, as if God Himself delighted to think of all the wonders His Grace was about to work—“How can I put you among the children, and give you a pleasant land, a goodly heritage of the hosts of nations!” The same meaning really underlies each of these two renderings, and we may get at the true sense of the passage by considering both of them. But please understand that my objective is not so much to expound this text as to bring unrenewed hearts into harmony with it. I long, I pray, I agonize that God may put among His children many of you who have never been numbered with them before.

I. First, then, let us CONSIDER THE TEXT AS WRITTEN WITH A NOTE OF INTERROGATION. And, in that sense, it divides itself into two parts—a difficult question. “How can I put you among the children?” And the Divine answer—“I said, You shall call Me, My Father; and shall not turn away from Me.”

First comes *the difficult question.* “How can I put you among the children?”

The Lord seems to say, “How can I do it? This man has lived in total neglect of Me. I was not in all his thoughts, or if he did think of Me at all, it was only to say to Me, ‘Be You far from me. I do not want to be brought near to You.’ How can I put him among the children? He neglected My statutes and my testimonies, and would have none of them. I called him, but he refused to come to Me. I warned him, but he despised My warnings. How can I, whom he has thus treated

with neglect, put him among the children? No, he has not merely forgotten Me and neglected Me, but he has chosen other lovers. He has found some other objects for his life's ambition and spent his strength in seeking everything but that which is for My Glory. Let him go to his idol gods and find refuge among them in the day of his trouble. Let him call upon the objects of his ambition to administer comfort to him. If he has sought gold, let gold console him. If he has gone into the pleasures of sin, let the pleasures of sin yield him sweetness in the retrospect if they can. But why should I interfere with him? He has destroyed himself. He has pulled the house down upon his own head and all the while, when I stood by offering to bless him, he refused Me, rejected Me and turned against Me. Why then should I be called in now? Why should I be summoned to the rescue of one who is his own destroyer, and who has deliberately rejected Me?"

Let that solemn enquiry go home to the hearts of all whom it concerns. Some of you know that all these thirty, forty, or fifty years—or even longer—you have been living without God. Now that you are in trouble, you are beginning to think about Him. But suppose He were to say, "Go to your former companions and see what they will do for you. Now that you have spent all and there is a mighty famine in the land, go to the citizens of that country and join yourself to them. Go to the swine trough and fill your belly with the husks that the swine eat." Ah, the mercy is that the Lord does not talk like that! Still, the difficulty of the task is suggested by the form of His question, "How can I put you among the children?"

The difficulty arises, next, because of the character of the person to whom He refers—"How can I put *you* among the children?" "You have been a willful sinner. You have not sinned as some have done, through ignorance—you knew better! From your early childhood you have been taught the right way, but you have neglected it. You have deliberately chosen the path of evil. You were not taken unawares, like a bird in a snare, but you have gone after sin with your eyes open. You have been foolish enough to follow after your own lusts and to drink down iniquity as the thirsty ox drinks water. You have been a willful sinner—a sinner against a mother's tears and a father's exhortations—a sinner against a conscience that would be tender against your will—a sinner against many a dream by night and many a throb of heart by day. 'How can I put *you* among the children,' when you have been set on mischief and have made your neck like an iron sinew and have kicked against the goads that would have guided you aright?"

Especially may the Lord put this question concerning some who, in addition to being willful sinners, have been open sinners. "O thief, how can I put *you* among the children? O drunkard, in your beastliness of excess, how shall I put *you* among the children? O unchaste, unclean haunter of the filthiness of night—you who have deceived and seduced others, and defiled yourself—how shall I put *you* among the children?" Does not the question seem to come with peculiar power to any who may be now present who have upon their conscience, this very hour, the guilt of sins we dare not mention in the public assembly and who, as they sit in these seats, would not greatly wonder if we were deliberately to point them out and say what they have done? Yet it is even with you, and such as you, that God determines to work marvels of mercy, although He rightly raises the question, "How can I put you among the children?"

After all, if we have not gone into open sin, as others have done, there is not much difference between one sinner and another, for we have all sinned and, having sinned, we stand condemned by the sentence of God's holy Law. See how God's question appears to you now! You are a condemned criminal—"How can I put you among the children?" You are one against whom the sentence of death is already recorded and you are only spared by a reprieve which the mediation of My Son brings to you when He cries, 'Let him alone this year, also.' Shall I have criminals in My family? Shall I take the condemned out of the cell and say, 'These shall be My sons and daughters?' Can it be so?" Oh, yes! Tell it the whole world over—it is so and it shall be so again tonight, by God's Grace! But, still, it seems to strike the Lord Himself as being a difficult thing to do, for He says, "How can I put you among the children?"

The question suggests the difficulties that must arise in the case of some who have denied the very existence of God, ridiculed the Gospel, made jests of the wounds of Christ and blasphemed His holy name, invoking His vengeance and daring to defy Him to His face. Some have persecuted the Lord's people, as Saul of Tarsus did, and that is a great and aggravating sin in His sight. They have, as it were, thrust their fingers into the very eye of God, "for thus says the Lord of Hosts, He that touches You touches the apple of His eye." It does seem to be a serious question as to how sinners such as these can be put among the children—yet God is constantly working this miracle of mercy! Therefore, publish the glory of His Grace! Tell what His arm has done, and can do again, and will do even tonight, but, still, while you publish the glad tidings, stand astonished that He should put such guilty ones among His children!

Now just turn the kaleidoscope a little and get the same thought under another aspect. Think of the position which He proposes to give to this character—to put you, great sinner, “*among the children.*” What will the world say? “What? Saul of Tarsus, who persecuted the saints—has he become a child of God? What? Is the blasphemer saying, ‘Abba, Father’? Is he sitting at the feet of Jesus? Then, surely, we may say, ‘Let us sin, that Grace may abound.’” It may be that some ribald tongues will draw blasphemous inferences from the very mercy of God—shall it, then, be exercised?

And if it is, what will “the children,” themselves, say? When they see such an one as you are coming in among them, will they not be likely to say, with the prodigal’s elder brother, “Lo, these many years did I serve You, neither transgressed I at any time Your Commandments and yet You never gave me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: but as soon as this, Your son, was come, which has devoured Your living with harlots, You have killed the fatted calf for him.” The Lord knows that there are some of His children who still talk that way and he might, therefore, very well say to the gross sinner, “How can I put you among the children?”

It was not so very long ago that I heard a minister say that he did not believe in the revival, which was then being experienced, because so many outrageous sinners had professed to be saved. He thought it was due to regular attendants at places of worship that, if anybody was saved, they should be the first—a precious piece of abominable legalism! But the Lord does not act in that fashion. He makes them a people who were not a people, and calls her beloved who was not beloved. He takes the very lowest of the low and exalts them! He lifts the beggar from the dunghill and sets him among princes, even the princes of His people, to the praise of the glory of His Grace! Yet still, He is obliged to ask the question, ‘How can I put you among the children?’ How will the children like it?” Blessed be God, the children at the Tabernacle will like it very much! They will say, “The more, the merrier. Oh, that the Lord would bring in among us some of the outcasts of Israel, and some of the worst sinners of the Gentiles! How we would rejoice to welcome them!” Still, only fancy what would happen if you were to propose to take into your family some of the vilest characters possible? I am afraid that lady-like daughter of yours would object to such a brothel! And I am not certain that that most respectable, gentlemanly son of yours would care to receive such a sister! But God takes into His family such persons as we should never think of receiving into ours!

Think of another individual to whom the Lord has to say, “How can I put you among the children?” Who is he? Where is he? He used to be among the children, at least, in name, for he was enrolled with them. He used to sit among them with considerable delight and he was highly esteemed among them. But he went aside to drink from the drunkard’s bowl, or he was led astray by some Delilah and his locks, like Samson’s, have been shorn. I think I hear the Lord say to him, “How can I put you back again among My children? You went from the Communion Cup to the cup of devils! You rose from your knees to go deliberately into vice. You knew your duty, but you did it not. You denied your Savior, as Peter did, even if you did not betray Him, as Judas did.” We do not wonder that God speaks thus, yet we rejoice that in this very chapter we have this gracious invitation, “Return, you backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings.” Happy will they be who respond, “Behold, we come unto You, for You are the Lord our God.”

There are others concerning whom the Lord might appropriately ask this difficult question. They are the Grace-resisting sinners. Years ago, they were “almost persuaded.” They almost yielded to Christ, yet they never fully surrendered themselves to Him. They were, for a time, burdened with a sense of guilt—they seemed to be, for a while, earnest in the pursuit of righteousness—but, somehow, the root of the matter was not in them. Whatever was good in them withered away and now it would take a very sharp knife to cut them to the quick, Do not some of you remember when you used to sit in these galleries and tremble as you listened to the Word? Yet, now, though I should speak to you as straight as words could enable me, and pour out my very soul so as to make the Gospel of God’s Grace a living message to you, it would only glide past your ears and utterly fail to reach your heart. Now the Lord seems to say, after so many rejected warnings, after such violence done to the man’s own conscience and to all the better instincts of his nature, “Let him alone! How can I put him among the children?” Would you wonder if He said it?

I will speak to just one other individual, and then I will turn to another part of the subject. How old are you, my Friend? I see by your white hairs, that you are past the usual age of men. You lean heavily upon your staff—you cannot live much longer. What has been your manner of life? Alas, it has been a life spent in neglect of God and in the pursuit of sin of one kind or another! You have passed your threescore years and ten. You are going on towards eighty—perhaps you are even past that. What is to become of you? You have given your best days to the devil, may he not as well give you

rest? You made your choice of masters long ago and you have served Satan even until now—so take your wages, terrible as they are. Shall God be put off with the tail end of your life? Shall all the prime, and pith, and marrow of your manhood be spent in opposition to God and then, just at the last, shall you be received and be put among the children? Yes, that you shall, if the Lord, by His Grace, brings you to the feet of Jesus, no matter how old you may be, nor how sinful you may have been! And we will give you the right hand of holy fellowship as we see the hoary sinner made into a babe in Grace—and your end shall not be like your beginning, but you shall find mercy at the hand of our God, whose love surpasses all thought and outshines all the imaginations of our hearts!

I think I have thus shown you that, in many cases, the question in our text is really a very difficult one. “How can I put you among the children?”

But I must not omit to remind you of *the Divine answer to it*. If you will read the whole of our text, you will see that there are two, “I said,” in it—“I said, How can I put you among the children?...And I said, ‘You shall call Me, My Father; and shall not turn away from Me.’” If God had left us to answer this difficult question, it never would have had a reply, but He has Himself answered it in the best possible way!

What does the Lord propose to do? He proposes, first of all, to bring in one of his “*shalls*”—“You *shall* call Me.” But has God power over human hearts, to decide what they shall do? Is not man a free agent? Yes, he is, otherwise he would not be responsible for his actions. Yet, without at all infringing the freedom of man, God can exercise power over human minds. He is Omnipotent in the world of mind as in the world of matter and, as He said to the dark world, “Let there be light, and there was light,” so can He say to dark minds, “Let light come,” and light will come! And, often, in the inscrutable Sovereignty of His Grace, He speaks to those of whom it seemed impossible to imagine that they would ever be among His children—and He gives them an altogether new bias, so that they seek after that which, before, they had abhorred and, not knowing why, they turn and retrace their steps to the very thing from which, in the past, they had fled! Oh, I do pray that the Lord may say to someone here tonight, “You shall.” If He does but say it, you will sweetly melt under the beams of His love! You will gently dissolve as the icebergs do in the warm Gulf Stream! Your opposition to Him shall exist no longer and you will gladly yield yourself up wholly to Him!

Observe that the way the Lord will effect the great change is this—He will give us a new spirit. “You shall call Me, My Father.” Now, it is by the reception of the Spirit of adoption that we are enabled to cry, “Abba. Father,” so, if the Lord, in His great mercy, shall give to any of you a new heart and a right spirit, then His own Divine Spirit shall come upon you and dwell in you! The change that will be worked in you will be so great that you will not be what you were before and there shall no longer be the question of difficulty, “How can I put you among the children?”

With the new spirit, comes the new cry. The man used to say, “There is no God.” But now hear what he says, “My Father.” If he admitted God’s existence, he used to say that he did not care anything about God. But listen to him now as he says, “My Father.” He said that he did not need God, that he could do very well without Him, but now he cries, “My Father.” He said that he was happiest when he thought least of God, but now he cries, “My Father, my Father, my Father! Let me come to You, my Father. I am undone until I find You, O my Father!” He said he had no association with God and did not want to have any. But now he says, “My Father, my Father.” He said he could look up to the starry vault at night and yet not think of God. But now every star seems to twinkle the great Father’s name and he cries, “My Father, manifest Yourself to me. Come, pour Your love into my soul, for my heart says, ‘I will arise, and go unto my Father.’” Oh, yes, now there is no need to ask the question, “How can I put you among the children?” for, as soon as ever God teaches a man to cry, with all his heart, “My Father,” why, he is among the children! There was never yet the cry in the soul, “My Father,” that the Fatherhood of the great God did not respond to, but He said, “My child, My child,” and He fell upon his neck, and kissed him, and blessed him. Now I see how He puts us among the children!

There is also a “shall not” which is worthy of notice. “You shall call Me, My Father, and *shall not depart from Me.*” This reminds us of the Grace that not only brings us near to God, but that also keeps us there. Possibly someone is saying, “Well, I now call God, ‘Father,’ but perhaps I may lose Him and forget Him, and go away from Him.” No, if He has brought you to Himself, you shall never go away from Him any more! There is no fear of that happening—

*“Whom once He loves He never leaves,
But loves them to the end.”*

The Grace which He gives us is in us as a well of living water, springing up into everlasting life!

Now you see how sweet it is to be a child of God and to be among the others of His children, because, although a servant may be dismissed, you cannot be sent away. The servant may go, but the son always abides. “There are your wages, Mary, and I give you a month’s notice that I shall not require your services after that time.” Ah, but I cannot say that to my boys, whatever they may do! Your father could not say that to you, could he? No, no—your relationship is not a matter of wages and, therefore, it is not a matter of temporary abiding in the house. Once you are God’s child, you cannot be “un-childed” forever! Once brought by His great love to sit at His table, you are no longer like a guest at an inn, coming and going, but you are a child who has taken up eternal lodgings in the heart of his great Father.

All things are also yours in prospect—and the day shall come when you shall possess such things as eyes have never seen, nor ears heard of! You may now be poor, but, in a very short time, you will be rich beyond the miser’s wildest dream of wealth! You may now be cast down, but, within a few months or years, you will be as happy as the angels are, and be with them forever. You may be now obscure and unknown, but if you are a Believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, you will have to endure only another prick or two of the pin of affliction and then you will go to be with God where there are pleasures forevermore! Everything is yours in reversion, and you shall have it when you come of age. You are only a child at present, but you will enter upon your majority in due season—and when you become a man, then you shall be fit to be a partaker of all those blessings that your Heavenly Father has provided for you!

I wish I could talk about these blessed Truths of God as I should like to. If I could get rid of my tongue and my lips, and let my soul speak without the intervention of these organs of clay that are such dumb cold things, I would try to tell you the grandeur of the superlative love which takes the child of the devil and puts him among the children of God—that takes the servant of sin, the companion of the swine, the man degraded below the level of the brute—and yet lifts him up and makes him to sit among the children of the eternal God and to be made like unto them! May you all know what it is by happy personal experience!

II. Now I must close My sermon by just asking you, very briefly, to CONSIDER THE TEXT AS WRITTEN WITH A NOTE OF EXCLAMATION. I have already tried to bring out that meaning—God Himself saying, as if with intense satisfaction, talking to Himself, congratulating Himself, depicting to Himself the bliss of His own benevolence when the object of His mercy is achieved, “How I will put you among the children!”

In order to bring out this great Truth of God, think of the parable of the prodigal son and try, if you can, to realize the great change in his condition. There is the Father saying, “My dear, dear son, starved in the far-off country, and defiled among the swine, you shall come back to Me and let Me once but see you coming back, and how swiftly I will run to meet you! Oh, how I will fall on your neck! How I will kiss those lips that penitently say, ‘I am not worthy to be called Your son!’ I will stop that utterance with many a kiss repeated again and again. How I will press you to My bosom, My son, My long-lost son, My son that was dead and is alive again! How will I bring you to your mother’s house and to the chamber of her that bore you! How I will conduct you within My gates, and say, ‘Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him.’ How gloriously will I array you among the children! You shall have the best My house can afford.”

The Father seems to see it all before it is actually done and He thinks, “How princely My poor boy will look when the best robe, bespangled with jewels, shall hide his nakedness! How I will put him among the children! He shall have a ring such as I give to My choicest favorites. ‘Put shoes upon his feet.’ My boy shall no longer be a bare-footed beggar. Then bring out the fatted calf, and kill it, and hold high holiday. Ring the bells of Heaven! Pour forth your sweetest minstrelsy, and let this be the keynote of it all, ‘My son, that was dead, is alive again! He was lost, but now he is found.’ How gloriously will I put you among the children!”

Of whom does my Master speak this? Soul, do you feel guilty? Does your heart repent of your sin? Are you willing to be reconciled to God? Then He speaks all this of you—of you, poor draft and scum that you are in your own estimation! Since you have been precious in His sight, you have been honorable and He has loved you, and given a wondrous price for you, even the blood of His well-beloved Son. How I wish I could get side by side with some big sinner here, tonight, and tell him what I was myself, and what the Grace of God has done for me! I would tell him that my Father in Heaven has said, even concerning him, “How gloriously will I put you among the children! How I will give you a pleasant land and a goodly inheritance among the sanctified! How I will open your lips to shout of My mercy and fire your heart with zeal to proclaim My goodness!”

Does it seem too good to be true? Listen to my own testimony. Had anybody told me, when I was seeking the Lord's face nearly 30 years ago, that I should be here tonight to tell these thousands of people all that His love has done, in putting me among the children, I should not have thought it possible! Then, arise, young man, for the Lord can do the same for you! Look to Jesus, for the opened fountain has not yet been closed, nor shall it be till the last of His elect is washed whiter than snow—and that time has not yet arrived. Believe and live! All difficulties are removed by the atoning Sacrifice of Christ. And among the children of God you shall stand and He shall delight in all that His mighty love, His superlative Grace has done for you—

*“Cast your guilty soul on Him,
Find Him mighty to redeem!
At His feet your burden lay,
Look your doubts and cares away!
Now by faith the Son embrace—
Plead His promise, trust His Grace!”*

If I had to tell you of a hard master—if I had to stand here, like Moses, to tell of the thunders of the Law of God, I would do it, though it would go hard with me to deliver such a message. But when I have only to tell you that all manner of sin and of blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men—that the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses us from all sin. When I have to quote His words, “Look unto Me, and be you saved, all the ends of the earth,” and tell you that, as high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are His ways above your ways, and His thoughts above your thoughts—“let the wicked forsake his ways and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon!” When I have such a Gospel as this to proclaim to you, oh, I think you should accept it! No, I am sure you should accept it!

I have not to impose hard terms upon you. I do not come with threats of war and destruction. Mercy fills the Throne of God and wrath stands silently by. Oh, come and accept the mercy of your God! Some of you will do so, I know. The Lord shall lead you to do it by His gracious Spirit—and to His name shall be the praise forever. Amen and Amen!

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON: *HOSEA 14.*

According to the heading of this chapter, we have here, “an exhortation to repentance,” and, “a promise of God's blessing.”

Verse 1. *O Israel, return unto the LORD your God; for you have fallen by your iniquity.* Fallen into sorrow, fallen into shame, fallen into spiritual poverty, fallen into weakness of faith, fallen almost to destruction! Though you are Israel and God loves you, yet, “you have fallen by your iniquity,” and the only possible way in which you can obtain restoration is to “return unto the Lord your God.” Seek once again your Father's face. Cry, with the prodigal, “I will arise and go to my Father.” “O Israel, return unto the Lord your God.” You *may* do so, for He bids you come back to Him. You *should* do so, for it was unwise of you to wander from Him—so end your wandering and return to Him. “Return unto the Lord your God.” He is still “your God!” He denies not the sacred band which binds you to Himself. Though you have forsaken Him, yet still He bids you think of Him, not as a stranger, but as your God!

O child of God, are you just now very heavy in heart because of your backsliding? Is the lamp of spirituality burning very low? Do you feel as if you had got into a state of spiritual barrenness? Then return—return at once—unto the Lord your God, for your sad condition is due to your iniquity!

2. *Take with you words, and turn to the LORD: say unto Him.* He puts the Words into our mouths, for He knows that sometimes we feel as if we cannot give proper expression to our repentance. We feel it, but we cannot utter it, so He puts the very form of the confession into His children's mouths—“Take with you words, and turn to the Lord: say unto Him”—

2. *Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously: so will we render the calves of our lips.* Sin has had the mastery over you, therefore ask to have it taken away by pardon and by the cleansing which shall deliver you from the influence and power of it! Do not ask the Lord merely to take away some of your sin, but say to Him, “‘Take away all iniquity.’ Especially if I have indulged some darling sin that has been my ruin, take that away.” “Take away all iniquity, and re-

ceive us.” “You cannot receive us with our sins upon us. Will You press us to Your bosom while we are black and foul with iniquity? No, that cannot be! So, first take away all our sin, and then receive us. Receive us again into favor with You, into a conscious sense of Your love. Receive us when we come to You in prayer. Receive us when we come to the Communion Table. Receive us as You did at the first, as Your sons and daughters.” “Receive us graciously.” “We cannot hope to be received on any other footing but that of Your free and abounding Grace, for even if You forgive and cleanse us, we shall still be sinners and shall still need Your Grace and mercy.” “Receive us graciously; so will we render.” “When You have put away our sin, and received us, then we will begin to serve You. And we will bring to You, not the calves of the legal sacrifice, for a sense of Your love will make us feel that You delight not in burnt offering. But we will render unto You the calves of our lips—our testimony to Your faithfulness—our declaration of Your Truth—our prayer—our praise.”

3. *Asshur shall not save us.* When a man trusts to his God, he gets away from all other trust. Confidence in God is the death of all other confidences. “Asshur shall not save us.”

3. *We will not ride upon horses.* Which, somehow or other, were always the Israelites’ fear and trust. They always looked upon horsemen as the most powerful friends or foes in the day of battle. But now they feel that all creatures shall be given up and they will cling to God alone. “Asshur shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses.”

3. *Neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, You are our gods: for in You the fatherless finds mercy.* What a sweet reason this is for confidence in God, namely, that He cares for those who have nobody else to care for them—that He becomes the Helper of those who have no other helper and the Guardian of those who are left friendless in the world! O My Soul, are you not just such an one—friendless, helpless, hopeless, orphaned? Fly, then, to that God in whom the fatherless finds mercy and you, too, shall find mercy! Now let us listen to the voice of God—

4. *I will heal their backsliding.* He can do it. He will do it. He evidently rejoices to do it. He soliloquizes with Himself, as though it were a very pleasant thought to Him! “I will heal their backsliding.”

4. *I will love them freely.* “Though there is nothing lovely in them, though they deserve My wrath—though, according to their own confession, they have gone after false gods, I will love them freely.”

4. *For My anger is turned away from him.* “I have fully forgiven them, and I have caused My great wrath to pass away from them.” Now, dear child of God, you to whom I spoke just now, who have fallen into a dull, dead, dreary sort of state—are you not encouraged to return unto the Lord when He thus declares that He will heal your backsliding and love you freely? You shall have your joy-days back again! You shall have your old love restored! You shall have your old delight renewed! You shall again dance before the Lord for very joy of spirit!

5. *I will be as the dew unto Israel.* “When they come back to Me, I will refresh them—softly, sweetly, efficaciously, abundantly, mysteriously—even as the dew refreshes the thirsty earth.”

5. *He shall grow as the lily.* Your souls shall suddenly spring up. As the daffodil-lily springs up almost in a night, and its golden bells speedily appear, so you who seem so dead, shall grow up adorned with the golden flowers of God’s delight in you.

5. *And cast forth his roots as Lebanon.* Fickle as you have been, God’s Grace will make you stable. You shall have as firm a roothold as a cedar has and be as fixed as Libanus himself.

6. *His branches shall spread.* You shall begin to have influence upon others and cast a shadow over them for their good.

6. *And his beauty shall be as the olive tree.* His soul, bedewed by Divine Grace, shall be beautiful as the olive tree, which has an almost indescribable loveliness all its own.

6. *And his smell as Lebanon.* There shall be a gracious flavor about you who are now so sapless and dry, when once the Lord returns to you because you have returned to Him.

7. *They who dwell under his shadow shall return.* Your children, your friends, all those who live in your house, shall be the better for your repentance and return to God. They try you, now, but when you have left off trying God, they will leave off trying you. Among a man’s own children, there are often those who remind him of his own sin against God. Do you wonder that Jacob had so much trial with his sons when you remember what kind of man he was? Are you surprised that David’s latter days were so full of trouble when you recollect his great sin? Ah, but if the Lord restores, and revives, and refreshes you, your household shall also be blessed! “They who dwell under his shadow shall return.”

7. *They shall revive as the corn and grow as the vine: the scent thereof shall be as the wine of Lebanon.* Your household shall have such a blessedness about them that observers shall say of you and yours, “They are a seed that the Lord has blest.” The Lord has a most gracious way of making families to be very choice and select, and full of comfort and peace when those families walk in His fear. But when there is sin in the head of the household, there comes disorder in the family, the departure of the Divine blessing and all goes awry.

8. *Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols?* “I have had enough of them! They have cost me enough sorrow! They have plagued me enough. I will put them away, for I must have my God, and I cannot have Him and idols too.”

8. *I have heard him and observed him.* God hears the cry of the penitent, and observes what is going on in his heart.

8, 9. *I am like a green fir tree. From Me is your fruit found. Who is wise, and he shall understand these things? Prudent, and he shall know them? For the ways of the Lord are right, and the just shall walk in them: but the transgressors shall fall therein.* The Lord give us wisdom, by His Holy Spirit, to understand and know these things—and to put our understanding to practical account by returning to Him, for Jesus Christ’s sake! Amen.

—Adapted from *The C. H. Spurgeon Collection*, Version 1.0, Ages Software, 1.800.297.4307

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