

THE NATURE AND DESIGN OF DIVINE CHASTENING

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A SERMON
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DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
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“When we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.”
1 Corinthians 11:32.

THERE had been great irregularities in the Corinthian Church with regard to the Lord's Supper. They had made that solemn festival a scene of gluttony. Each person had brought his own provisions with him and while the rich were feasting on dainties, the poor often had scarcely anything to eat. The Apostle Paul tells them that on that occasion they did not come together for a feast of carnal things. He says, “In eating everyone takes before others his own supper, and one is hungry, and another is drunk. What? Have you not houses to eat and to drink in? Or despise you the Church of God, and shame them that have not? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I praise you not.”

Now, on account of these irregularities, God was pleased to visit the Church at Corinth with many sore afflictions. A great many of the members were smitten with sickness and some were even taken away by death. Little did the Church at Corinth understand the reason for this plague, this visitation of God upon their members, but the Apostle explains it to them. He says, “For this cause”—note the 30th verse—“many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged.” There is a constant judgment going on in the Church of God. If we would judge ourselves and walk orderly and worthily in God's sight, then we shall not be judged—the plagues will not come upon us. But when we are judged, what are we to say with regard to that? Is that a proof that God hates His Church and that He has cast His people away? And especially, too, if any die as the result of their iniquities, is that a proof that they perish eternally? “Oh no” says Paul, “they are judged now, in this world—they are chastened now of the Lord, that they should not be condemned with the world.”

What a great mystery is Providence, even to us who believe in a future state! We throw down the gauntlet of defiance to the infidel. We declare and with the best reason on our side, that it is utterly impossible for men to understand how there can be any justice in the dispensations of God in this world, or how there can be any justice in God at all, if there is not a time to come in which the great mysteries of this life shall all be set right. We defy any man who disbelieves in the immortality of the soul, to account for the fact that the most godly are those who suffer the most, and that, often, those who have the greatest happiness in this world are the men who least deserve it and are the most wicked! If there is not a future state of rewards and punishments. If the just man shall not reap the full reward of all his sufferings and griefs, and if the wicked shall not receive punishment for all his sins, how can God be just—and how can the Judge of all the earth do right?

There is also another mistake into which we may very readily fall. It is very easy for us to judge of the characters of men by their position in this world—and so to judge in a manner entirely apart from the facts. Some will have it that if a man is exceedingly prosperous, it stands to reason that he must have been good. “Surely God would not have rewarded him,” they say, “unless there had been something worthy about him.” This is what is inculcated upon our children. How often does the father pat his child upon the head and, pointing to an alderman who is growing exceedingly fat with riches, tell his son that he must be a good boy and then he, too, will become as great? Or, taking him by the hand of some exceedingly rich man, how often does the father tell his child that if he shall be good—which is, I suppose, but a brief, pithy expression, to signify if he shall be obedient and keep the Laws of God—then he shall be rich? And so, in fact, it is

thought impossible to make a child understand that a man may be rich and yet wicked—that he may be happy in this world and have much of visible blessedness and yet, after all, be a stranger to God and be the very reverse of good! We, I trust, in our riper years, are free enough from such a mistake as that.

Yes, Friends, we must never judge of men's inward condition by their outward position. A rich man may be gracious and a poor man may be wicked—and we may turn the truth in the other direction and declare that many are the poor who have Divine Grace within, and many are the rich who are but fattening for God's slaughtering-day at the last! It is a well-known fact, which has, doubtless, led to both the errors which I have mentioned—the error of thinking that God is unrighteous and also the error of judging men by their outward state. I say it is doubtless a fact that many of the true children of God are exceedingly troubled in this world, while, full often, the wicked escape. Why is this? Our text explains it. It declares that “we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.”

I. THE PEOPLE OF GOD ARE CHASTENED OF THE LORD—THEY ARE MORE CHASTENED THAN ANY OTHER MEN. They are chastened every morning and they are plagued all the day long. Why is this? God must be right in acting thus—what is His reason? I will give you a few reasons. First, the righteous are more chastened than other men because their sins are worse than those of others. Secondly, they are more chastened than other men, that God may make them an example of His hatred against sin. And then, they also receive extraordinary chastening because of God's extraordinary value of them and His determination to wean them from their sins and cure them of their iniquities.

I say, in the first place, that God chastens His people more than others, and we may find a reason for this in the fact that *their sins are worse than those of other men*. I do not mean that they are outwardly worse—I will defend the character of the people of God from any such aspersion as that! I do not mean that the people of God are worse sinners than others, judged by the Law, weighed in the scales of the Justice which will try all men. It is in another respect that they are worse—not in the light of the Law of God, but in the light of the Gospel.

They are worse, partly because the righteous have more of the Light of God than other men. In proportion to the Light of God against which we sin, is the greatness of our iniquity. A sin which a Hottentot might commit and which God would wink at because of his ignorance, He would never pass by in His own children, because His children know better. They have spiritual discernment. They are not so foolish as to put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter. Their conscience has been enlightened and besides, they have the Word of God and the indwelling of the Spirit—and when they sin, they sin against greater light and knowledge than other men have. Hence it is that their sins stand in the very first position with regard to guilt. And what wonder, therefore, that God should sorely chasten them?

On this thought I will not lay greater stress, but pass on to observe that the sins of the righteous are worse than those of other men from the fact of the greater mercy which they have received. It is impossible for any man to sin so grievously against God as the man who is God's favorite. He who lies nearest to our bosom is capable of grieving us the most. Why is it that the sin of Judas was so great? It was because Judas was an Apostle and he had been a friend of Christ. Jesus might have said to him, “It was not an enemy that reproached Me; then I could have borne it. Neither was it he that hated Me that did magnify himself against Me; then I would have hid Myself from him. But it was you, a man My equal, My guide and My acquaintance. We took sweet counsel together and walked unto the House of God in company.” Christ feels a blow from an enemy, but a stab from His friend is “the unkindest cut of all.”

What? When Christ has chosen us out of the world and has redeemed us with His precious blood. When God has taken us into His family, when He has wrapped the righteousness of Christ about us, like a robe, and has promised us an eternal dwelling place at His right hand—shall we sin, do you think, and shall not our sin be counted to be a heinous offense, indeed, because of the love at which we kicked and the great mercy over which we stumbled? A husband feels an unkind word from his wife far more than from anyone else because he loves her better than he loves others and, therefore, she has the greater power to grieve him. And Christ cares little for all the railing of a wicked world, but if His Church speaks slightly of Him—if she offends Him—then is He cut even to the heart! If we take anyone into our friendship, we entertain at once a jealousy of him. If he speaks evil behind our back, we say, “If you had been an enemy, I would never have noticed it. You might have said just what you chose, and I would never have rebuked you. But you professed to be my friend and if you say anything against me, I cannot bear it. This wounds me sorely and, therefore, I must rebuke you for it.”

One good old writer says, “When the Lord takes a man to His private chamber and admits him into His secrets, He at once becomes jealous of him—He will not permit him to sin so deeply as others. ‘Oh,’ He says, ‘have I made you My friend? Have I walked with you? Have I permitted you to lean your head upon My bosom and will you go away and break My Laws, and rebel against One who has been so loving to you as to admit you into the secret place of His Tabernacle? Then, surely, your sin is great, indeed, and I ‘will chasten you for it.’” Beloved, if you will set your sins in this light, you will at once perceive that it is no wonder that God chastens you! Ah, Brothers and Sisters, when we think of the great mercy of God to us—of His overflowing kindness, both in Providence and Grace—when we meditate upon the fond affection which has cradled us from our youth up, and the strong protection that has guarded us from all harm, surely we must think that offenses against God, committed by us, are worse than the sins of other men who have never tasted of such mercies as those which we receive daily! This, also, is another proof of the greatness of the sin of God’s people as compared with the sin of others—and is a reason for His chastising them.

Besides, my Friends, the sins of God’s people are worse than those of other men from the ruinous effect of their example. When a worldling is seen drunk, there is sin, of course—but when a Church member is seen reeling in the streets, how much worse it is! The world makes this a grand excuse for itself. It is under the shadow of the imperfections of the Church that wicked men find shelter from the scorching heat of their conscience. If they can detect a minister in sin. If they can discover a deacon or an elder indulging in iniquity. If they can quote a justification for sin from the lips of a Church member, how content and pleased the wicked are! They did, as it were, but walk in their transgressions before—but when they find a Church member in the same path, then they run greedily in the way of iniquity! I say, Brothers and Sisters, our sins deserve twice the afflictions of other men if we rebel because they do more mischief. And often, you know, judges have to estimate transgressions not merely by their guilt, but by the influence of the example of the criminal—and so, God will the more heavily chasten His people because if they sin, they do so much damage to the morals of mankind and bring so much dishonor upon the name of the Lord their God! For all these reasons I am sure I am right in saying that the sins of God’s people are, in God’s esteem, worse than the sins of other men and, perhaps, this is one reason why He always chastens them, even when He lets the wicked go unpunished for a while. This is not, however, the grand reason. I come to another.

Why does God chasten His people while He permits so many others to go unpunished? I take it that another reason is that He *may give a manifest and striking example of His hatred of sin*. When God chastens all ordinary man for iniquity, His justice is seen. But when He lays His rod upon His own child, then at once you discover how much He hates iniquity. When Brutus condemned traitors, Rome could see his justice, but when his two sons are brought up and accused of the crime, and he says—“Lictors, do your duty. Strip and beat them.” And after they have been scourged, when he bids them take them away and treat them as common malefactors, then all Rome is startled with the inflexibility of the justice of Brutus! So, when God smites His own children—when He lays the rod on those who are very dear to Him, when He makes them public examples—then even the world itself cannot withhold its admiration of the justice of God.

When David—the man after God’s own heart—was smitten so sorely for one sin, God’s justice was more fully manifested than in the punishment of a hundred ordinary men. There were many men, throughout Jerusalem, ten times worse than David, but they escaped Scot free. Not so David, because David was much loved of God and, therefore, he must be chastened that the whole world might see that God hates sin, even when it nestles in the breasts of His own beloved children. Never was there such a proof of God’s hatred of iniquity as when He put His own Son to death! And next to that, the chastisement of His own well-beloved children is the most forcible proof of His hatred of iniquity. I take it that this is a second reason why the righteous are so much chastened.

But then the best reason is *because of the high value which God sets upon His people*. Our text says, “We are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.” God has a great esteem for His people and He will not let them perish. But He knows right well that if He allowed them to go unchastened, they would soon destroy themselves and lose their interest in His love. This He never can permit, for that were contrary to His oath and contrary to His Covenant. Therefore does He chasten them. So, whenever you are a chastened child of God, you may draw comfort from it. Samuel Rutherford, in writing to Lady Kenmure, who was in deep affliction, having first lost her two children and then her husband and mother, said, “Your Ladyship must certainly be a special favorite of Heaven, for if you were not, surely the Lord would not take all this pain to make you fit for Heaven. If He did not love you very much, He would not

be so jealous of your love. For I take it," he said, "this is the reason why He took away those who were dear to you—because He would have every atom of your love and, therefore, would not permit anything to be spared to you upon which your heart was set."

As for the wicked, let them have what they please—let them set their hearts upon their riches, it is their only treasure—let them give their love to their lusts and to their carnal pleasures. God wants not their love—the love of the wicked is not pleasant to Him—He wants not their praises. What have they to do with loving and praising Him while they are reveling in their iniquities? But with regard to the righteous, God loves them—He wants their love and He will have it—and He will chasten them until He gets it. He will make them even as a weaned child, taking away the breasts of this world from their lips, and putting bitterness into their mouths till they begin to loathe this world and long for a better—long to leave their present state and to be with Him who is their All-in-All!

Besides, with regard to the wicked, God says of them, "Let them go on sinning, let them fill up the measure of their iniquities." A reprobate may be many years in sin before he is discovered or punished. You have known and seen, of late, in the commercial embezzlements of our time, how long a wicked and ungodly man may go on in sin. Year after year he is embezzling money, yet he is not found out. There are a thousand opportunities for discovery, but, somehow or other, his wickedness is masked and it seems as though Providence itself helped him to conceal his iniquity. But if you are a child of God, don't you try it, for you will be found out the first time! Mark that—an heir of Heaven can never go on long in villainy. God will straightway set him up as an object of scorn before men—and why? Because the Lord loves us and He does not want us to fill up the measure of our iniquity. He desires to stop us at once in our sin and, therefore, you will find this is a fact verified in your observation—if a child of God commits but a small act of dishonesty, it is certain to be found out—but an ungodly man may heap up his iniquities and yet go unpunished for many and many a day!

No, I will go further than that! Many a man has pursued a life of fornication and uncleanness and has *never*, at least as far as we can see, been punished or chastened. His life seems to have been a continued round of gaiety. He has gone from mirth to mirth, and from merriment to debauchery. He has been the envy of his fellow men, for the strength of his body and for the vigor of his health. He has even come to die and has gone to his grave softly, without a band in his death, or a pang in his last hour—and why is this? Simply because the Lord said, "Let him alone; he is joined to idols; let him go." God did not care to cast stumbling-blocks in his path. He was running his downward way and God left him alone. "There," He said, "let him work his own damnation. Let him run the downward road. I will not stop him." And, like the swine possessed with devils, that man has run violently down a steep place into the sea of damnation and has never discovered his lost state till he has perished in the fiery waters of Hell!

But you will not find the child of God go on like that. David grossly sinned once, but it was not long before he was chastened for it. Another man might have lived for years in adultery and yet not been punished. Not so with the Believer—he must be chastened at once. God will keep His people free from the growth of iniquity. As soon as the first weed springs up, He lays the hoe to its roots. But as for the wicked, their sins may grow till they are great. "Let them alone," says God. "In the day of harvest, I will say to the reapers, 'Gather them into bundles, and burn them.'" So, you see, it is God's love to His children, His anxious desire that they may not perish, which often brings them into chastisement on account of sin which, otherwise, they might have escaped. If, then, we are often chastened and sorely vexed. If we are God's children, let us see the loving reason for it and conclude that "we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world."

II. And now, having explained the Lord's chastisement of His people, I shall occupy but a very few minutes in showing that GOD, BY THUS CHASTENING US, SPARES US FROM BEING CONDEMNED WITH THE WORLD, dwelling simply upon the fact that though the righteous are chastened here, they can never be condemned in the next world.

We are often charged with preaching immoral Doctrine when we say that the righteous man can never be condemned—that he that believes in Christ can never be punished on account of his sins. Whatever charge may be brought against us, we are not ashamed to repeat our statement, for thus it is written, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." The sufferings which God's people feel here are not punishments, but chastisements. If I have ever used the word "punishment" in relation to Believers, it must be understood in its restrictive sense.

God has punished Christ, once and for all, for all the sins which the elect have committed, or ever can commit. And *it is not consistent with the justice of God to punish the same offense twice in two different persons*. The sufferings of the righteous here are not punitive, they are corrective—they are intended to be chastening. It is not the sword of the judge, it is the rod of the father, which falls upon the Believer. The father may sometimes give his child a sterner and more severe punishment for an offense than even a judge might award. A judge might dismiss a child with a censure for some fault, but the father, when he gets him home, will see him well whipped for it and so, full often, the chastisement of God, in this world, may even seem to be heavier than if it were punitive! Yet we may always remember this for our comfort—that God is not condemning us with the world. When He is smiting us, He is not using the rod with which He will break in pieces the wicked! He is not terrifying us with the awful thunders which shall one day make all Hell quake with fright! He is but putting on an expression of anger that He may cleanse our hearts—and is but using the rod with the hand of love, that He may purge us of that folly which is bound up in the heart of His people.

I have said that a Christian shall never, in the world to come, be condemned for his sin, and it is assuredly true, for the first reason, that God cannot punish twice for one offense. It is also true for the second reason, that *God cannot condemn those whom He has justified*. That were to reverse what He has once done and so to prove Himself a mutable being! He cannot first give us the witness of forgiveness and afterwards the witness of damnation for guilt. It is not possible for Him to first kiss us with the kiss of His love and then, afterwards, to cast us into Hell. God will not play fast and loose with His children, first justifying them through His Grace and then, afterwards, condemning them through their sin. I say that were to contradict Himself.

God cannot, in the third place, condemn His children *because they are His children, and He is their Father*. Having taken men into such a relation to Himself as to make Himself their Father, God has in that very act put it beyond His own power to utterly condemn and cast them out. He is Omnipotent—He can do anything as far as His power is concerned—but He cannot belie the instincts of His heart. Now, no father can forget his child—it is not possible—and it is not possible for God, after He has once forgiven and has sealed that forgiveness in the glorious privilege of adoption—it is not possible for Him to answer the cry of, “Abba, Father,” with the sentence, “Depart, you cursed!”

And, again, it is impossible for God to condemn those whom He has justified for the reason that if He did so, *all His promises and the whole tenor of the Covenant would be violated*. It was to save from their sins all those who believe in Him that Jesus died. If, then, these are not saved, everyone of them, His death must be in vain. If those whose sins He carried shall be, at last, cast into Hell, then Christ’s project of Redemption has never been fully carried out. To suppose a universal Atonement is to suppose that the design of God has been partly frustrated—that Christ has attempted to do something greater than He will really effect. But here is our solid resting place—that the Covenant stands secure and that, in Christ, every stipulation of it is firm—and through Him every single article of it shall be carried out. Now, the complete salvation of all the elect is one part of it and, therefore, chastened though they may be in this world, that is no contradiction to the fact that they shall “not be condemned with the world” hereafter.

I am going to close my discourse with a picture. The Last Great Day is coming. Do you see, yonder, the gathering storm? Do you mark the black clouds as, one after another, they accumulate? For whom is that tempest coming? Can you take a glimpse into the treasure house of God and see His hailstones and coals of fire? Can you discover His lightning, as they are stored up against the Day of Wrath? For whom are these reserved? You shall hear, by-and-by.

Look yonder in another direction, the very opposite. What does that deluge of descending rain mean? What does the rolling of that awful thunder mean? I see, in the center of that storm, a Cross. What do all that terrible display of tempest and of hurricane mean? Why, yonder, there is no sound as yet of storm! It is gathering, but it has not burst. It still gathers but, as yet, not a drop of rain descends. The lightning is bound up in bundles which are not yet loosed. Why is it that, yonder, all is the stillness of a storehouse and a mighty preparation for war, while, over there, that war is going on and all the bolts of God are launched? It means this. God has separated His people from the world. Over yonder His wrath is spending itself, the black clouds are letting out their floods, thunder is poured forth and lightning is flashing—where? Upon the head of the mighty Savior, the dying Jesus!

The wrath must be spent somewhere and so, in all its fury, it is manifesting itself around Christ! And yonder pilgrims who are just caught by a few drops that skirt the terrible tempest, are those for whom that tempest is being endured by their glorious Substitute. Yonder tried and afflicted ones, scared by the lightning and alarmed by the troubling of the

tempest—these are the men who have a share in the Substitution of Christ. I say the afflictions of God’s people are like the trickling on the skirts of that great tempest—they are the few drops on the margin of the storm which spent itself on Christ. These men, who in this world suffer afflictions—righteously endure them and patiently suffer them for Christ’s sake—are those who shall have no storm hereafter—for look, the storm is now gone. All is cleared away and, instead, the sun shines out in its glory above their heads! Angels are descending and on angelic wings they are borne upward to a Temple and to mansions prepared for them in the Presence of their Father.

But look at yonder men and women—they are dancing merrily! Though all overhead is black, not a drop of rain has yet fallen. Mark how they are marrying and giving in marriage, for not a bolt has yet been launched. Who are these? Alas, poor wretches, these are the men for whom the Judge is treasuring up wrath against the Day of Wrath. For them He is reserving fire and brimstone, hot coals of juniper and terrible destruction. They look askance on yonder pilgrims slightly wetted with the storm. They make a mock of yonder poor converted ones, trembling as they hear the rolling thunder. They say, “We hear no tempest! It is all a delusion, there is no storm!” Yes, Sinners, but the day is coming when you shall discover your mistake! You have your portion here, but Believers are happier, as they are all saved for the great hereafter. You have no bands in your death—it is that you may have the tighter bands in Hell! You have few afflictions here—it is that they may be doubled to you hereafter! You go merrily through this world, you carry the lamp of joy with you—it is that your blackness may be the more terrible and your darkness the more awful when you are excluded from earthly joys—and shut up forever in the outer darkness, where there will be weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth!

It is pleasant to pass through a country after a storm has spent itself—to smell the freshness of the herbs after the rain has passed away and to note the drops after they have been turned to diamonds in the sunlight. That is the position of a Christian. He is going through a land where the storm has spent itself, or if there are a few drops, the written page of the Covenant cheers him on and tells him this is not for his destruction. But how terrible is it to witness the approach of a tempest—to see the preparation for the storm, to mark the birds of Heaven as they flutter their wings, to see the cattle as they lay their heads low in terror, to discern the face of the black sky, the sun which shines not and the heavens which give no light! How terrible to stand on the verge of a horrible hurricane—such as occurs, sometimes, in the tropics—to know that we cannot tell how soon the wind may come in fury, tearing up trees from their roots, forcing rocks from their pedestals and hurling down all the dwelling places of man!

And yet, Sinner, this is just your position! There are no hot drops as yet fallen, but a shower of fire is coming. There are no terrible winds blowing on you, but God’s tempest shall surely come. As yet, the floods are dammed up by Mercy, but the floodgates shall soon be opened. The bolts of God are yet in His storehouse, but, lo, judgment comes, and how awful shall be that moment when God, robed in vengeance, shall come forth in fury! Where, where, where, O Sinner, will you hide your head, or where will you flee? Oh, that the hand of Mercy may now lead you to Christ! He is freely preached to you, and you know your need of Him! Believe in Him! Cast yourself upon Him and then the fury shall be over and you need not dread to go into eternity, for no storm awaits you there, but quiet, and calm, and rest, and peace forever!

EXPOSITIONS BY C. H. SPURGEON:

RUTH 1.

Verse 1. *Now it came to pass in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehem Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he, and his wife, and his two sons.* That was a bad move on their part—better poverty with the people of God, than plenty outside of the covenanted land.

2. *And the name of the man was Elimelech.* Elimelech? It means, “my God is King.” A man with such a name as that ought not to have left the kingdom where His God was King! But some people are not worthy of the names they bear.

2. *And the name of His wife Naomi, and the name of his two sons Mahlon and Chilion, Ephrathites of Bethlehem Judah. And they came into the country of Moab, and continued there.* That is generally what happens. Those who go into the country of Moab continue there. If Christians go away from their separated life, they are very apt to continue in that condition. It may be easy to say, “I will step aside from the Christian path for just a little while,” but it is not so easy to return to it. Usually something or other hampers—the birdlime catches the birds of Paradise and holds them fast.

3, 4. *And Elimelech, Naomi's husband died, and she was left, and her two sons. And they took them wives of the women of Moab; the name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth: and they dwelled there about ten years.* Which was about ten years too long! Probably they did not intend to remain so long when they went there. They only meant to be in Moab for a little while, just as Christian people, when they fall into worldly conformity, only purpose to do it once, “for the sake of the girls, to bring them out a little.” But it happens to them as it is written here—“and they dwelled there about ten years.”

5. *And Mahlon and Chilion died also, both of them; and the woman was left of her two sons and her husband.* That seemed to be her great grief—that she was left. She would have been content to go with them, but she was left to mourn their loss.

6. *Then she arose with her daughters-in-law, that she might return from the country of Moab.* It is often the case that when our idols are broken, we turn back to our God. It is frequently the case that the loss of earthly good leads us to return to our first Husband, for we feel that then it was better with us than it is now. Naomi had also another inducement to return.

6. *For she had heard in the country of Moab how that the LORD had visited His people in giving them bread.* Have any of you professors gone a long way off from God? I wish you knew what plenty there is in the Great Father's house and what a blessed feast there is for these who live with Him! There is no famine in that land! There is plenty of gladness, plenty of comfort, plenty of everything that is joyful to be found there. You need not go to Moab and to her false gods to find pleasure and satisfaction.

7-9. *Therefore she went forth out of the place where she was, and her two daughters-in-law with her; and they went on the way to return unto the land of Judah. And Naomi said unto her two daughters-in-law, Go, return each to her mother's house; the Lord deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead, and with me. The LORD grant you that you may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband. Then she kissed them: and they lifted up their voice, and wept.* Separation was painful to them, for they loved their mother-in-law, a most unselfish person who, even though it was a comfort to her to enjoy their company, thought it would be for their good, in a temporal sense, that they should abide in their own country.

10-14. *And they said unto her, Surely we will return with you unto your people. And Naomi said, Turn again, my daughters: why will you go with me? Are there yet any more sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands? Turn again, my daughters, go your way; for I am too old to have an husband. If I should say, I have hope, if I should have an husband also tonight, and should also bear sons; would you tarry for them till they were grown? Would you stay for them from having husbands? No, my daughters; for it grieves me much for your sakes that the hand of the Lord is gone out against me. And they lifted up their voice, and wept again: and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law; but Ruth cleaved unto her.* What a difference there often is between two persons who are under religious impressions at the same time! The one would like to follow Jesus, but the price is too much to pay, so there is a kiss somewhat like that of Judas, and Orpah goes back to her people, and to her idols. But how different was the other case! Ruth was, as it were, glued to Naomi! She “cleaved unto her.” Stuck to her and could not be made to go back with her sister.

15-17. *And she said, Behold, your sister-in-law is gone back unto her people, and unto her gods: return you after your sister-in-law. And Ruth said, Entreat me not to leave you, or to return from following after you: for where you go, I will go; and where you lodge, I will lodge: your people shall be my people, and your God my God: where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried: the LORD do so to me, and more, also, if anything but death parts you and me.* That was bravely spoken and she meant it, too.

8. *When she saw that she was steadfastly minded to go with her, then she left off speaking unto her.* That is a striking expression, “When she saw that she was steadfastly minded to go with her.” O you dear young friends who want to be Christians, how glad we are when we see that you are steadfastly minded to go with the people of God! There are so many who are quickly hot and quickly cold—soon excited towards good things and almost as speedily their ardor cools and they go back into the world. Do ask the Lord to make you steadfastly minded! This is one of the best frames of mind for any of us to be in.

19. *So they two went until they came to Bethlehem. And it came to pass, When they were come to Bethlehem, that all the city was moved about them, and they said, Is this Naomi?* They seemed all to turn out of doors to have a look at

these two strangers and especially at Naomi, for she was so different from what she had been when she went away. “And they said, Is this Naomi? Some said, “Is this Naomi?” questioning. Others said it with surprise as a thing incredible, “This Naomi! How can she be the same woman?” It was very rude of them to turn out, just like people without sympathy do on Ramsgate Pier, to see the sick passengers land. Nobody seems to have said, “Come into our house to lodge,” but all questioned, “Is this Naomi?”

20. *And she said unto them, Call me not Naomi.* “Call me not ‘pleasant.’”

20. *Call me Mara.* That is, “bitter.”

20. *For the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me.* It was a pity for Naomi to say that, yet I fear that many of us have done the same. We have not borne such sweet testimony to the Lord as we might have done, but have sorrowfully moaned, as this poor woman did.

21. *I went out full.* Why, then, did you go out?

21. *And the LORD has brought me home again empty.* Ah, but He *has* brought you home again! Oh, if she would but have noticed the mercy there was in it all, she might still have spoken like Naomi! But now she speaks like Mara—bitterness. Her husband and her two boys—all her heart’s delight—were with her when she went out. And now that they are gone, she says—

21. *Why then call you me Naomi, seeing the LORD has testified against me, and the Almighty has afflicted me?* Yet it is a sweet thing to be able to trace the hand of God in our affliction, for nothing can come from that hand towards one of His children but that which is good and right! If you will think of those hands of which the Lord says, “I have engraved you upon the palms of My hands,” you may rest assured that nothing can come from those hands but what Infinite Wisdom directs and Infinite Love has ordained!

22. *So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter-in-law, with her, which returned out of the country of Moab: and they came to Bethlehem in the beginning of barley harvest.* That is, at the time of the Passover. Let us hope that they received a blessing in observing the ordinances of that time and that they were thus helped to get back to the only right and happy state of heart.

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

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