

THE DOUBLE DRAWING NEAR

NO. 2795

A SERMON
INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, SEPTEMBER 7, 1902.
DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,
ON LORD'S-DAY EVENING, SEPTEMBER 22, 1878.

“Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you.”
James 4:8.

AS soon as man had disobeyed God, he ran away from Him. Our first parents hid themselves among the trees of the garden when they heard the voice of the Lord God calling them. They did not come to Him at once, confess the wrong which they had committed, and ask for mercy. The natural effect of their sin was to harden their hearts, and not to lead them penitently to the great Father, but it led them impertinently to run away from Him. So, when the Lord came walking in the garden, in the cool of the day, Adam did not seek Him, to plead for mercy from Him; but the first words had to come from God: “the Lord God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where are you?” It was God’s voice speaking in mercy to His wandering child.

Our blessed Savior has set forth the result of sin in His parable of the lost sheep, which has strayed from the fold; and which, if left to itself, continues to go further and yet further away. We have, all of us gone astray; as Dr. Watts says—

*“Each wandering in a different way,
 But all the downward road.”*

Our Lord Jesus has set forth this same truth in that other parable in which He describes the prodigal son as gathering all together, and taking his journey into a far country, away from his father. He could not live as he wished in his father’s house; he could not there waste his substance with riotous living. His father’s eye would have been a check upon him at home; so, the only way for him to obtain that foolish and ruinous liberty for which he sought was to get as far off as ever he could from his father. Alas! This is the condition of every unregenerate sinner; he has gone away from God, and he tries continually to get further and further away from God. Why do men neglect to keep holy the Sabbath day, unless it is that they do not want to think of God? Why do they put religious books on one side? Why do they leave their Bibles unread, but because God’s name, God’s person, God’s law, God’s gospel—all about God—has become distasteful to them? Like the fool, of whom David tells us, they say in their hearts, “No God!” They do not want Him; and if there could be an official announcement made that there is no God, they would welcome it. God is not in all their thoughts; or if He is there, it is as an enemy, or as one for whom they have no care, one whom they are not willing to have to reign over them. O heart of man, you have indeed gone astray from your God when the distance at which you are from Him is loved by you, and you do even wish, in your unkindness and your folly, to make that distance greater! If you wish to return, you are already halfway back; but, alas! You do not wish to return. That thought comes not to you; but, if you could, you would take the wings of the morning, and fly to the uttermost parts of the earth, in the hope that there you could be hidden from the eye and the presence of God.

Knowing this to be true, I am glad to be able to give the message of my text to those who are far off from God, because the only cure for such sinful wandering is for the sinner to come back to God. While the prodigal was in the far country, he could not be set right. The first step towards getting back into his right position was his resolve, “I will arise and go to my father.” If he could have filled his belly with husks or anything else—if he could have had his rags exchanged for robes—if he could have been made a nobleman in that far-off land, it would have been a mischief rather than a benefit to him, for the radical cure, in his case, must lie in his saying, “Father, I have sinned,” and in receiving his father’s kiss of forgiveness, and all the tokens of restoration to his father’s favor. It must be the same with any of you who are far off from God; if you would be right with Him, you must come back to Him. Poor creatures, how

can you be right till you love your Creator? Poor sheep, how can you be right till you are back under the care of the good Shepherd? O poor immortal, how can you hope for an eternity of blessedness till the immortal God is reconciled to you, and you are reconciled to Him? A creature remaining at enmity against God must expect to dwell forever with the devils in hell; where can it dwell but where other rebels are confined in chains? You must come back to your God, man, if you would have eternal bliss; for if you could have one of the harps of heaven, it would yield no music to you till you had yielded yourself into submission to the God of heaven. If you could have the street of gold, it would not enrich you until you had the God of heaven to be your Friend; so I say again that the only remedy for sin—the only radical efficient cure for the great evil of iniquity—is for the sinner to come back to God. I want to impress this one point upon you, and I pray that God, the Holy Spirit, will work effectually upon some who are here, and draw them back to God while, in His name, I deliver this gracious message to them, “Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you.”

First, I shall ask you to *consider this message with hope*. When we have done that, we shall, secondly, *learn how to put it into practice*; and then, thirdly, we shall *think of how many ways it will help us if we do draw near to God*.

I. First, then, let us CONSIDER THIS MESSAGE WITH HOPE: “Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you.”

We may consider it with hope, because, first, *here is a sincere call to us to come back to God*. When we preach from such a text as this, “Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you,” somebody is sure to say, “But is not that the wrong order? Is it not a fact that God draws near to us, and then we draw near to Him?” Yes, that is the right order, and our text is in the right order too, because there is understood here something which is manifest to every careful reader, and which shows that the grace of God is implied at the back of it all. The text itself is a call from God; and no sinner ever comes back to the Lord until the Lord calls him back. But in this text He does call him; by the mouth of the apostle, He says, “Draw nigh to God;” and He bids us repeat this message in His name. To those, who are the furthest off, and who have wandered the greatest distance from Him, God says, “Draw nigh to Me.” If you had offended some friend, and wished to make up, you would feel that it was an easy matter if your friend himself invited you to come—if he took the initiative, and asked you to come to him. Then, I think, you would feel great gratitude to him, and say, “He has taken the first step towards our reconciliation, now I will willingly and cheerfully take the second.” It is thus that the Lord sends you this message to induce you to return to Him, “Draw nigh to God.”

“But may I come to Him?” someone asks. May you do what He bids you do? Of course you may. The text is not merely an invitation, it is a command. Obey it, I beseech you. You must have liberty to obey when God commands. You need not entertain any fear that you will be an intruder when, in the exercise of His gracious sovereignty, He says to you, “Come, come, come!” Surely, among those here, who are still unconverted, there must be some who will say to Him, “O Lord, You have said to us, ‘Seek you My face,’ and our heart says to you, ‘Your face, Lord, will we seek.’”

I have next to remind you that in addition to a sincere call from God, *there is also an open road to Him*. God says to you, “Draw nigh to Me,” but He would not bid you come to Him if there were no road by which you could come. Once, there was a great gulf fixed between you and God. Your sin had dug a fathomless gulf, which you could never have bridged; but Jesus bridged the awful chasm by throwing His cross across it, and now there is a plain and easy way by which the sinner may come back to God. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and has committed unto us the word of reconciliation.” When the Babe was born at Bethlehem, a multitude of the heavenly host praised God, and said, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men;” and when that Babe, after a life of perfect obedience to God’s law, offered up Himself on Calvary’s cross, He said, “It is finished,” and, then, every mountain was laid low, and every valley was filled up, that there might be a magnificent causeway over which fallen and far-off sinners might draw near to God. The making of that way cost the Savior His life; but He did make it. His heart bled out its life that He might make plain that way of expiation by which alone a sinner can come near to God; but the road is made, and there is nothing in the way now—no divine anger, no righteous wrath, no avenging law—to prevent your coming, O you who desire to return to your God! Christ has made the way, and cleared it; and “no lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon, it shall not be found there; but the redeemed shall walk there.” So, draw near, for the road is open. Draw

near, “without money, and without price,” for the road is free to all who believe in Jesus. Christ has completed it; He has not merely made it half way, but He has finished it all the way, and He Himself has said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” Oh, then, with what force does the command come, “Draw nigh to God,” when there is an open road by which you may come unto Him!

Consider the invitation of the text with great hopefulness, next, *because there is an encouraging promise appended to it*. You fear that if you were to try to get to God, you could not; and that if you did reach Him, He is so pure and holy that He must spurn you because of your impurity, and drive you from His presence. But read the whole of the text: “Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you.” There is nothing in it about casting out, or spurning, or rejecting; but the promise is emphatic, “He will draw nigh to you.” I have already referred to the parable of the prodigal son; I will refer to it again by reminding you that, “when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.” It is, after all, but little of the way that the sinner has to go in returning to his God; the greater part—no, I might say, all the way—God comes to the sinner who desires to return to Him. Only turn your face God-ward, and your God is at once with you.

“Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you.” That is the inspired declaration; do you believe it? Oh, I think, if you do, you will at once draw near to Him. Satan will perhaps whisper, “He does not mean you.” But, indeed, He means any soul that comes to Him, for His promise is, “Him that comes to Me I will in no wise cast out;” and the “*him* that comes” means any sinner, all the world over, who trusts in Jesus. Yes, you shall be received graciously, and loved freely, if you will but come back to your God through Jesus Christ His dear Son. “Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you.” Our text ought to be like a hand to beckon you, and to draw you back to your God, and you ought to run to Him as swiftly as the doves fly to their windows; you have seen the pigeons hastening home to their dove-cotes as if anxious to reach their nests, may the gracious Spirit thus move you to flee away to your resting place in the loving heart of your Lord!

There is one more thing that I want to say, before I leave this first point, in which I am urging you to a hopeful consideration of the text, and that is, draw near to God, O dear trembling ones, *because He will help you to come to Him*. Before our Lord Jesus Christ went up on high, He promised that the Holy Spirit should be given to His Church; and He had not long sat upon His throne before the Spirit descended, and that Spirit has never gone away, but He is still here to help our infirmities, to guide us in prayer, to convince us of sin, to reveal Christ to us, to create faith in us, and to strengthen that faith while it is yet weak. If you cannot come to God by yourself, here is One for you to lean upon, who will help you to come. If you feel as if you could not move a foot, here is a sweet prayer for you to present to God, “Draw me, we will run after You,” and He will draw you; I hope He is drawing some of you now. Do you feel as if you wish you could come to Him? I think that wish is a proof of His gentle drawing. Are you saying to yourself, “I will think this matter over; I will be careless no longer”? He is, as it were, putting out His finger to guide you, to help you, as a nurse does to a little child whose tottering footsteps can scarcely avoid a fall. Only be you willing to be helped, and He will help you. Yield yourself up to Him, and He will bless you. Be like the mariners, who spread the ship’s sails, after which they can do no more; but when the sails are spread, the wind fills them, and the vessel is driven onward to its desired haven. Be you like the needle of the mariner’s compass, and the Spirit of God will be like the magnet to attract you. Be you willing to be cleansed from all defilement, and He will say to you, “Be you clean,” and so you shall be; for, where the will has yielded itself to Him, the citadel of the town of Mansoul is won, and Prince Immanuel takes the entire possession and control of it.

Listen to me, for a moment or two, while I put together these things of which I have been speaking. God says, “Draw nigh.” There is His call; will you disobey it? It is implied, in that call, that, He has made a way for you to come to Him; will you not avail yourself of it? He has added to His call an encouraging promise that you shall be welcomed if you come to Him; will you suffer that promise to be made known to you, and yet not obtain the blessing that is promised? Then, beside all this, there is the Holy Spirit waiting to be gracious; will you resist the Spirit, as so many have done, who have perished in their sin? I can do no more than tell you these things with affectionate earnestness; but, dear hearers, who are far off from God, the day will come when, however poorly I have told you these things, if you despise or neglect them, you will have to answer, not to me, but to Him who sent me! Therefore, consider, I pray you, what answer you will give to Him, to the question whether you will come to Him or no, while He says to you, “Draw nigh to Me, and I will draw nigh to you.”

II. The second part of our subject is very practical. It is this, LET US LEARN HOW TO DRAW NEAR TO GOD.

“How can a man draw near to God?” someone asks. Well, we must begin thus. Draw near to Him *by thinking of Him*. God is not fixed in any one place so that we need to go on a pilgrimage in order to reach Him. “God is a Spirit,” and the way to draw near to a spirit is, first of all, to think of Him in our own spirit. I shall begin to have hope of any man’s salvation when he begins seriously to think about God, and about his own relationship to God. Will you do so, dear hearer? Take time to think about your Creator, your Preserver, your Provider, your Guardian, your Friend, your Judge, your Savior. To help you to think of Him, read His Word, for Scripture will both give you the best subject for thought and assist you to understand and know more of God.

Seek, also, *to hear the gospel*. If you know anyone who speaks to your heart about God, and Christ, and the gospel, give him the opportunity of speaking to you as often as it is possible. Try also to talk with some of God’s friends—with men who pray to Him, and who have communion with Him, and get as far away as ever you can from those who deny Him and blaspheme Him. In this way, I believe that it will not be long before He will begin to show Himself to you. You will be astonished to find how He is everywhere present around you—in every flower, in every blade of grass, in every drop of dew, you will see signs of His presence. If you are willing to find Him, you will see traces of His skill and of His wisdom there. If you look at the workings of His providence, expecting to find Him, you will not look long before you do find Him; for, as we have often been reminded, He who watches providence will never be without a providence to watch. And when you begin to say, “Wherever I go, I feel that God surrounds me; He is within me, and I am in Him;”—when such thoughts as those possess you, I shall begin to have bright hopes concerning you.

Draw near to God, next, *by trusting Him*. Some of you will not be able to do that immediately; you will have to think a little about Him first. And when you have thought about Him, and, especially, when you have received what this Book tells you about Him, then draw near to Him by trusting Him. If, man, you do trust God, He will not deceive you. If you believe in Him that He will pardon your sin, He will pardon it. His rule still is, “According to your faith, be it done unto you.” Whatever you can believe concerning God, that is in accordance with what He has revealed in His Word, and that is for His glory, you shall find that He will do. He has been pleased to give His dear Son to be the Redeemer of men, and He tells us that all those who trust in Him have everlasting life. Now draw near to Him by saying, “If these things are true, I will trust myself upon them. As God has revealed them, they are true, and I will just cast myself upon Him. Jesus Christ has shed His precious blood to put away sin, and He promises to forgive all who confess their sin, and trust Him; I will confess my sin, and trust Him to forgive it.” One is getting very near to God when he does that; so I bid you, in that sense, draw near to God by trusting Him; and if you do, He will draw near to you by forgiving you. He will accept your trust, and He will welcome you. He will be as good to you as your faith, and better still.

Next, draw near to God *by repentance*. You have done wrong; do not keep away from Him, and so do more wrong. Do not try to hide your sin, or to make up a righteousness of your own, but go to God, and tell Him that you have done wrong, and plead for His forgiveness for Christ’s sake. Tell Him that you have a tendency to do wrong, and ask Him to change your heart. Tell Him that you seem to be wrong altogether, and beg Him to make you “a new creature in Christ Jesus.” Draw near to Him in a penitential spirit. It is your sense of sin that keeps you back from Him; but, rightly considered, that sense of sin should drive you to Him rather than restrain you from going to Him. What would a man do, if he has offended another, but try to make matters right between them? To my mind, it is a beautiful thing to clear up difficulties and to settle disagreements; but it is the sweetest thing of all to get right with God—to tell Him that you have been all wrong, to plead the merit of His dear Son’s obedience and sacrifice, and to ask Him to set you right both as to the past and as to the future, too. Draw near to God in that way, by repentance.

Then draw near to Him *in prayer*. Did I hear you say, “I do pray”? Yes, but *do* you really pray? That is the question; you may have said certain words, morning and night, for many years; yet you may never once have prayed all the while. Do you know that prayer is the soul speaking to God? It is not the act of repeating something that you have learned, or heard, or read; the mere utterance of any particular form of words is nothing. You might as well set up one of the prayer windmills, at which so many have smiled, as expect to pray by the mere repetition of good words. No, no; speak to God. Any true speech, straight from the heart, is accepted by God. Mr. Rowland Hill stayed one night at an inn, and he told the landlord that

he must have family prayer there. “But, sir,” said the man, “we never had such a thing in our lives.” “Then,” said Mr. Hill, “order out my horses, for I will not stay in any house where I cannot get the people together to pray.” “They shall all come in, sir,” said the landlord, hardly realizing the preacher’s purpose. Then the Bible was read, and Mr. Hill said, “Now, sir, you pray; every master should pray in his own house.” “But I cannot pray,” he said, “I wish I could.” “Tell the Lord that,” said Mr. Hill; and the man said, “Lord, I cannot pray; I wish I could.” Then Mr. Hill said, “You have begun to pray already, so I will go on for you. Only tell the Lord, from your heart, anything that is true about yourself and you have begun praying.”

I pray you, dear friends, to draw near to God in prayer. Make it your habit to ask of Him what you really need, and He will draw near to you, and you will get what you have asked of Him. You will be surprised to find what gracious answers you will receive to your supplications, for I have noticed that if the Lord delays His answers to the prayers of His saints when they grow strong, He generally hears them very quickly indeed when they first begin to pray. I have often known the answer come while they have yet been speaking. Try it, dear friend, in your own case; draw near to God in prayer, and see what answers He will give you. How I wish that those who doubt the existence of God had ever tried to speak to Him! If they once came into familiar acquaintance with Him from day to day, doubts of His existence would be no more possible to them than doubts of their own existence, for they would say, “We have spoken to Him, and He has heard us, and given us the desire of our heart.” Draw near to God in prayer, and He will draw near to you.

Then, dear friend, try to draw near to God every day *by laying all your affairs before Him, and yielding up all your plans to His will*. Begin the day by asking Him to be with You, and to glorify Himself in you. Ask Him to keep near you, and to let you feel His presence, and you will have truly blessed times if you draw near to God in that way.

Sometimes, you will most appropriately draw near to God *by praise*—with sweet songs in your mouth and thankfulness in your heart. You will feel it to be indeed a—

“Happy day, happy day,”—

when you are thus brought near to God. You will do well to keep on at that praise till there will come a day—(you need not mind how soon it comes)—when the Lord will say to you, in another sense, “Draw nigh to Me;” and you will go up to your chamber, and gather up your feet in bed, and He will draw near to you with such a glorious vision of His presence that before you are ever aware, you will find yourself at His right hand, your poor mortal body left behind to wait a little while for the resurrection, but you yourself very near to Him in heaven. Then, before long, there will sound out that blast of the archangel’s trumpet that shall wake even your body from its slumber among the dust into which it had moldered, and it shall rise again; and then there shall come One, whom you have known in this life, and known still better in heaven, who will say to you, and to all the redeemed, “Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” Then your body, soul, and spirit shall draw near to Him as He draws near to you, and so shall you be “forever with the Lord.” That is what will come of your drawing near to God; it will end in your being with Him where He is, that you may behold His glory forever and for evermore; and therefore do I feel a deep stirring within my soul that every far-off sinner should hear this gracious invitation, and obey it at once; “Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you.”

III. Now I shall conclude by just a few words upon THE PRACTICAL EFFECT WHICH THIS DRAWING NEAR TO GOD WILL HAVE UPON OUR LIVES.

Well, now, if we draw near to God, it will have an effect upon our common, everyday life. How? Why, first, if you will follow the run of the chapter, you will see that drawing near to God *will help us to resist the devil*. The injunction, and promise, “Resist the devil, and he will flee from you,” are immediately followed by the words of our text, “Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you.” The devil is not quite everywhere, but it is difficult to tell where he is not to be found. He, and the powers of darkness under his control, tempt us in all sorts of ways and all manner of places; and if any one of us would be so armed as to be able to resist the great adversary of souls, the very best thing he can do is to draw near to God. The sheep is never as safe as when it is close to the shepherd, and the prodigal son is never as safe and happy as when he is sitting at his father’s table, and feasting on the good things provided by his father’s love. Draw near to God, and you will be able to resist the tempter, and drive him away from you.

In the next place, drawing near to God *will help you to become pure*. Read the whole verse from which our text is taken: “Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.” You do wish to be chaste, do you not? You wish to be sober; you wish to be honest; you wish to be pure in speech, and pure in act, do you not? Well, nothing purifies us like getting near to God in Christ. There is cleansing by water as well as by blood; the blood that washes away the guilt of sin, is accompanied by a cleansing flood that takes away the power of sin, so that hands are cleansed and hearts are purified when we draw near to God.

Further, drawing near to God *will help us to sorrow for sin*, for the next verse to our text says, “Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep.” “Oh!” says some thoughtless person, “I do not want to be helped to sorrow for sin;” and yet—and yet—and yet, if you did but know it, one of the sweetest things in all the world is godly sorrow for sin. Often do I quote to myself that verse—

*“Lord, let me weep for nothing but sin,
And after none but Thee;
And then I would—oh, that I might!—
A constant weeper be.”*

“It is a bitter sweet,” say some; but I say that it is a sweet bitter, and that the sweetness does predominate—the sweetness of so feeling the evil of sin as to loathe and shun it. It is a miserable state of things to have a hard heart. Even a hard hand may be a burden. It happened to a poor blind woman, who read with her fingers, that, after a while, they lost the delicacy of touch so that she could not distinguish the letters. It was a great grief to her, but, putting up to her lips the precious Bible that she had been accustomed to read, she found that she could read with her lips. She was very glad to have tenderness somewhere. A tender heart is necessary to the reading of the mind of God, so always try to keep your heart tender. A hard heart, or a stony heart, is an awful curse. When you feel your heart beginning to ossify or to petrify, pray God to plunge it in a bath of the Redeemer’s blood to make it soft again. The Lord grant that we may so draw near to Him that our heart may be kept soft, for hardness of heart can never come to the man who is kept near to God.

If you draw near to God, dear friends, *it will also help you to think well of other people*. “Speak not evil of one another,” says the apostle in the eleventh verse. When you know that the great Judge of all Himself is near, you will not be so quick as you sometimes are to take His work out of His hands, but you will let Him judge. I am sure that the man who lives near to God gets to have a kindly feeling towards others. If ever you find a person saying that there is no life in the Church, and finding fault with everybody, you may be sure that that man has not seen Jesus Christ of late, for Jesus Christ speaks not so. He says of His people all He can that is good. Surely, if Christ loves His Church, you ought not to find so much fault with it. “Speak not evil one of another, brethren,” else it will prove that you have not been anywhere near your Master of late.

And, last of all, if we live near to God, *it will help us to think of eternal things*. The apostle warns us not to say, “We will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain,” and all that kind of talk. He who speaks like that has not seen God of late, for he who is much with God thinks of eternal things, and he knows how near they are, and he says to himself, “I shall soon be gone. This world is not my rest; there is nothing here that is substantial and abiding.” So he is waiting to hear the trumpet sound, “Boot and saddle! Up and away!” and he stands ready, at his Captain’s call, to be gone to another and a better world. If you dwell near to God, you will not be afraid of dying; you will rather dread to remain here than to be taken away. Remember, this is your place of exile, and your state of probation. O Lord, bring us near to You! Really, brethren, I do not know anything that can do us so much good in our daily life as walking with God. If you live near to God, the family worries and troubles will not vex your spirit as they now do. You will live above them; and the outside world, with all its fault-finding, and its anxieties, and its ups and downs, will seem very small and insignificant to you when you dwell on high, and your place of defense is the munitions of rocks. Some of us know what it is not to care even a snap of the fingers when the world seems enraged against us, if we can but get away into the secret chamber of communion where God is pleased to manifest Himself to us.

If you live down in the marshes, you will get the chills and fevers; but if you live up on the mountain top, you will rejoice in the sun’s rays before your fellow creatures see them, and you will bask in them long after those below have lost sight of them; you will also find the air up there to be fresh and bracing; and, among the eagles, you will grow like an eagle yourself, for you will mount up with wings as eagles,

till, one of these days, you will mount so high that you will not come down again, for you will have gone to dwell forever near your Lord.

May the Lord bless you, beloved, with all that this drawing near to Him is capable of giving to you, for His dear name and mercy's sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:
JAMES 4.

Verse 1. *From whence come wars and fights among you?*

Whether between nations, or parties, or individuals—if there are wars and fights, where do they come from?

1. *Come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?*

Do they not arise from one desiring something, and another desiring the same thing? Is there not a competition or emulation of an evil kind, in which each one prefers himself, and seeks not the good of his neighbor?

2. *You lust, and have not: you kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: you fight and war, yet you have not,—*

This is nature's way of trying to get by contention what it desires to possess—fighting, and warring, and killing, yet the result of all this is nil. After all is done, “yet you have not.” There is a simpler and a surer way which men forget; they leave that divine path untrodden: “You have not,”—

2. *Because you ask not.*

With all your efforts you do not succeed, because you omit to pray to God. Prayer would have brought you every blessing that you need; but, instead of going to God, and asking at His hands, you rush upon your neighbor, and seek to take what you desire as spoil from him.

Perhaps some say, “But we do ask.” “Well, then,” says the apostle—

3. *You ask, and receive not, because you ask amiss, that you may consume it upon your lusts.*

The lusts of the flesh come in, and put us upon the wrong track; or if we take the right road, yet, if the lusts are there, God will not bless us, because, in doing so, He would be helping us to gratify our lusts.

4. *You adulterers and adulteresses, know you not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?*

The apostle uses this strong language not concerning the actual sin of adultery as the term is commonly understood, but in relation to our not loving God with true chastity of heart, but lusting after something else. This is the very essence of spiritual adultery. We ought to give God the whole affection of our being; but, instead of doing so, we allow at least some of it to wander to other objects, and therefore we are called, by the Holy Spirit Himself, “adulterers and adulteresses.” These may seem to be hard words, but they are true ones. May they bring us to our spiritual senses, and cause us to love our God with all our heart, and mind, and soul, and strength!

4. *Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.*

In one sense, Christians are the greatest friends of the world, for they desire the good of all men, and seek their salvation. But, in another sense, viewing the world as a great conglomerate of evil, we are no friends of the world. There is a certain form of theology, popular nowadays, which teaches us that we ought to remove the line of demarcation between the Church and the world. This kind of teaching may be called theology, but it comes not of God; it is a gross falsehood which we ought to abhor in the very depth of our spirit.

5, 6. *Do you think that the Scripture says in vain, The Spirit that dwells in us lusts to envy? But He gives more grace.*

There is a spirit, resident in the natural man, the human nature of man, which is always inclined toward hate and envy, always wanting to get something from other men, and always grieved if other men seem to be or to have more than the person himself has. How is this spirit to be met? This verse supplies the answer, “He gives more grace.” “More grace,”—this is the great remedy for hate and envy. “More grace”—this is the balm for sorrow. “More grace”—this is our greatest help out of all difficulties. “More grace”—this is the universal recipe for all that we need: “He gives more grace.”

6, 7. *Wherefore He says, God resists the proud, but gives grace unto the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God.*

Lay aside that fighting spirit—that effort to pull others down so as to raise yourself up—and bow before God, yield yourself wholly to His blessed will. This is the way of peace, and the way of joy, too.

7. Resist the devil,—

Who will seek to stir you up to rebellion; give no place to him: “Resist the devil,”—

7, 8. And he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you.

Hear this command, and practice it; get near to God in Christ Jesus, and you shall soon find Him come to your help in every hour of need.

8. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

For, if you are double-minded, your hands and your hearts must both need to be cleansed. The apostle does not say, “Concentrate your thoughts,” but he does say, “Cleanse your hearts;” for, to have two objectives in life, is a kind of spiritual adultery, from which we need to be purged, so the command is, “Purify your hearts, you double-minded.”

9. Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness.

If the previous verses have rightly accused you of sin, confess your guilt with shame and sorrow, and so come to Christ imploring pardon.

10. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He shall lift you up.

If you exalt yourself, He will pull you down. If you lie down in the dust before Him, He will lift you up. It is according to God’s usual way of acting to practice these reversals. Mary truly sang, “He has put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. He has filled the hungry with good things; and the rich He has sent empty away.”

11. Speak not evil of one another, brethren. He that speaks evil of his brother, and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law, and judges the law: but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law, but a judge.

If you cease to think of that which is evil, you will also cease to speak evil. If I speak evil of my brother, I have condemned the law which bids me love him as I love myself; I have practically said that it is an absurd law, and an unrighteous law; and this is a great evil in God’s sight.

12-15. There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who are you that judges another? Go to now, you that say, Today or tomorrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: whereas you know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor, that appears for a little time, and then vanishes away. For that you ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that.

We are all too apt to say what we will do, and where we will go, forgetting to add, “If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that.”

16, 17. But now you rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil. Therefore to him that knows to do good, and does it not, to him it is sin.

There are sins of omission as well as sins of commission; may the Lord graciously keep us from both forms of the evil, for His dear Son’s sake! Amen.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—130, 590, 537.

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