

LET HIM ALONE NO. 1140

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

*“Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone.”
Hosea 4:17.*

TO what purpose these vast assemblies Sunday after Sunday? Why do you crowd these aisles and galleries till every seat is occupied, and every foot of standing room is filled? Have you, all of you, a zeal to worship? Do you all thirst to hear the Word of the Lord? Ah me! I am beset with fears and misgivings. My heart is troubled for full many of you. Many persons entertain the evil notion that preaching sermons and hearing sermons is a light matter. When the occasion is past, the exhortation closed, the congregations broken up, and the Sunday over, they think that all is done and ended. The doors are shut, and what they have heard they no longer heed any more than if they had been at the theater, and the curtain had fallen, and the lights were out. To them the Sunday is but as any other day, and the preacher but an orator who helps them to while away an hour. But it is not so. Whether *we* look for a result from the proclamation of God's Word or not, you may be sure God looks for it. No man in his senses sows a field without looking for a harvest. No man engages in trade without expecting profit. Oh, sirs! God is not mocked. He does not send His Word that it may return unto Him void. Neither does He think that it is enough when His servants have been as those who make pleasant music, or sing a sweet song, and the audience may repair to the sanctuary as they would go to a theater, content to be pleased and careless about being profited. Listen, then, to this solemn lesson. For every Sunday that I occupy this place, I shall have to give an account before God. My fidelity to my congregation is of such solemn moment that were it not for the infinite mercy of God in Christ Jesus, I feel it had been better for me that I had never been born, than to have to render in that account. Oh, the faults of which I am, myself, personally conscious! They fill me with shame, though they are, I fear, but few compared with what God Himself beholds in the service I attempt to render. But, then, *you* also will have to answer for every sermon you have heard or may yet hear. Dare any of you imagine that an opportunity of hearing the gospel is given to you that you may tread it under foot? Oh, what would dying men give to hear the gospel again! What would lost souls in hell give if they could have the opportunities of grace again! They are priceless beyond all estimates, and as they are so precious, a strict account will be taken of them. The hearer who went his way and said, “I heard the sermon, and I formed a judgment of the preacher's style,” and flip-pantly quoted this or that, will find that another view of the service has been taken by Almighty God, and another form of reckoning will be carried out before His judgment seat. Do you suppose that the preaching of the gospel is no more than the performance of a play? Or shall men come and listen to the truth, as it is in Jesus, preached earnestly to them with less concern than to an orator in Parliament? Are death and judgment, heaven and hell, to be looked upon as common themes which awaken nothing but a passing interest? You may judge so if you will, but God's servants dare not think so, nor does God Himself, think so. The text suggests these inquiries. It appears that the Ephraimites, or rather the whole people of Israel, the 10 tribes, had been warned again, and again, and again. And because they did not turn at the warning, but refused the message of God, and continued in their sin, at last God was provoked with them, and He said to His servants, “Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone.” No longer waste your powers on careless minds. On such a rock as that it is vain to plow. The case is become utterly hopeless. Cease your labor. Go somewhere else where your hallowed occupation will be more remunerative, where hearts will be touched, and ears will be opened to the Word. “Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone.”

Fearing lest there may be some in this congregation—no, being persuaded that there are some on the verge of being such, I shall try to speak, first, *upon the sin which provoked this punishment*; then I will speak upon *the strange punishment*; and thirdly, upon such *practical reasoning as arises out of the whole subject*.

I. WHAT THEN, IS THE SIN WHICH PROVOKES THIS UTTERANCE, “Let that man alone”? The sin appeared to be, in Ephraim’s case, *continuance in idolatry*. Israel had set up idols. They knew the Lord, but when they separated from the tribe of Judah, Jeroboam, in order to keep them from going up to Jerusalem, set up golden calves. It was not intended that they should worship other gods, but the theory was that they would worship God, the true God, through the representation of an ox, which represented power. It was a symbol which they conceived to be appropriate and instructive, just as they tell us nowadays, “We do not want people to worship idols, but they are to worship Christ through a representation of a cross, or of a man hanging on a crucifix. This will teach them, and assist their devotions. They are not to worship the image itself, but to worship God through the image. Now, be it never forgotten that this method of devotion is expressly forbidden in the law, and is contrary to one of the ten commands. “You shall not make to yourself any graven image, or the likeness of anything which is in heaven above, or in the earth beneath, or in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them nor worship them.” This command was disregarded, and the ten tribes became practically the representatives of the Papist or Ritualist of the present day. They worshipped God through images, and after a while they went further, (as this kind of superstition always does go further)—they began to set up false gods and goddesses—Baal, Ashtoreth, and the like. Thus at length they went aside altogether from the Most High. Prophet after prophet came and said, “If you do this, you will be visited with judgments for it. The Lord our God is a jealous God, and can only be worshipped in the manner which He has Himself, ordained. If you decide to worship Him in these new-fangled ways, with these devices and superstitious ordinances of your own, He will be angry with you, and will smite you.” They listened not to these prophets. Even Elijah, that mightiest of God’s messengers, gained but a slender hearing from them. Elisha, his successor, was equally disregarded. Servant after servant of God’s household came to them and admonished them in the name of the Lord, but it was all to no purpose. They despised the message, persecuted those who delivered it, and in the sequel put many of them to evil deaths. So, at last, the Lord said, “They are bound to their idols; they cling and cleave to them with a morbid infatuation. Their heart is callous, their purpose stubborn, they will never give them up. Let My servants, therefore, return and refrain themselves, and go no more to them. Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone.” I fear the same judgment will come upon the Ritualists of our time, but I prefer to deal rather with you who hear me this day. To you, also, this bitter foreboding is addressed as long as your ears are deaf to counsel, and your conscience numb to reproof. Any vice deliberately harbored, any one sin persistently indulged may bring about this fearful result. God will speak of you, then, not as an erring creature that it is possible to reclaim, but as a wretched outcast whom it is necessary to abandon. A man may be overtaken with a fault. If he has been guilty of drunkenness, his conscience rebukes him. Falling into that sin once or twice, he has felt, (as well he may) that he has been degraded by it. Let that man continue—and I might especially say, “Let that *woman* continue,” (for the common use or the constant abuse of intoxicating drinks exerts its baneful spell over both sexes)—let anyone continue to violate the laws of sobriety, and before long that sin will become a rooted habit. Then conscience will cease to accuse, and God will practically say, “Ephraim is given to his cups: let him alone!” Or let a man begin some practice of fraud in his business. At first it will trouble him—he will feel uneasy. By-and-by his systematic dishonesty will bring him no compunction. He will become so familiar with crime that he will call it custom, and wonder how he could have ever been so chicken-hearted as to feel any trouble about it at all. God will let him alone, and leave him to eat the fruit of his own ways. He is given to his sin, and his sin will bind him with iron chains, and hold him a captive. I cannot, of course, pick out the special sin of any here present, but whatever your sin is, you are warned against it. Your conscience tells you it is wrong. If you persevere in it, it may come to be your eternal ruin. God will say, “The man is joined unto idols: let him

alone!” *Continuance in sin* provokes sentence—especially when that continuance in sin is perpetrated in the teeth of many admonitions. A person who continues in sin, unwarned may, comparatively, have but little fault compared with another who is frequently and faithfully rebuked. The child, who in his early sinfulness was affectionately admonished by a gracious mother, who felt the hot drops of her tears fall on his brow because his offense had grieved her, the child who was again and again admonished by a faithful father, when he has grown somewhat older, and laughed to scorn paternal teaching, and went further and further astray, does not sin at all so cheaply as the little Arab boy of the streets who has been poisoned by bad example from his youth up. Some of you who have sat under the sound of the gospel, where the word is preached in awful earnestness, will sin ten times more grievously if you despise the exhortations of the Lord, than those whose Sundays were wasted by listening to sermons which never touched their conscience, and were never intended to do other than lull the moral sense, and charm the taste. You, young man, cannot have been warned as you have been of late by that kind friend. You cannot have been admonished as you have been, lately, by that Bible you have been reading, which has deeply impressed you. You cannot have been impressed as you have recently been by the example and especially by the dying words of your departed sister, and then go on as you used to do, without incurring seven-fold guilt. Continuance in sin after admonition is that which provokes God to say, “He is joined to his idols: let him alone.”

Remember, too, that where a man becomes guilty of *despising the chastisements of God*, and perseveres in his wickedness after having suffered for it, there, again, the guilt assumes a double dye. For instance, the sailor has been profane, a common swearer, and at whatever port he has touched, he has spent his time in riotous living. But the other day he was at sea in a tremendous storm, and he cried unto God. He escaped, as it were, by the skin of his teeth, and while he was being saved from impending death, his heart trembled on account of his guilt. Now, if that man, after being saved from shipwreck, goes back to blasphemy and debauchery, there will be sharp reckoning with him. That soldier who has been in the hospital, laid aside by sickness brought on by his own folly, who, after his life was despaired of, has nevertheless recovered, if he shall return like a dog to his vomit, every sin that he will commit will count for many times as much as those sins he rebelled in before that warning. That young man who left his father’s house in the country, where he had been trained to virtue, and came to London, and plunged into its whirlpool of vice, but who, in the infinite mercy of God has been snatched like a brand from the burning for a while, and is able, again, to come up to worship with God’s people—if he should go back like the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire, woe be unto him! It may be that he will never have God’s rod to make him smart again. The rod will be put up, and the axe of Justice will be used before long. You know how the Roman lictors, as they went through the street with the consul, carried a bundle of rods, and when a culprit was brought before the consul, he would say sometimes, “Let him be smitten with rods,” and they began to unbind the bundle. It was a rule that the “fasces,” as they were called, should be tightly bound so that it would take a long time to unbind them. This was to give time for the criminal to make confession, or to plead something as a mitigating circumstance. Sometimes, where the case was one of treason, which perhaps the culprit repented of, and confessed, he would be forgiven. They would be, for a while, untying the knots, and the consul would look the man in the face, to see if there were any signs of relenting, or if he were altogether stubborn. Then when the rods were unbound, it was a good thing for the criminal if the lictors began to smite him with the rods, because that might be a token that he was not to die. But if the rods were laid aside, and the axe brought forth, then it was known that he must die. So God has smitten you in mercy. Fever and disease have been God’s lictors that have used the rods upon you. By-and-by He will say, “Let him alone,” because He is reserving you for the axe of future and inevitable doom. Oh, sirs, the Lord knows all your hearts. Where are you? I may be speaking right into the face of some of you who have endured many afflictions, and been brought low by poverty and want, or by disease and sickness, so that you have come to death’s door. And all this has been the milder chastisement of God, by which He has been saying to you, “My Child, do not destroy yourself!” It has been the hand of mercy put upon the bridle of that wild

horse of yours, to draw him back, that he may not leap with you over the precipice. But if you spur him on in defiance of the hand of mercy, you will be permitted to take the leap to your own destruction, for God may say, "He is joined to his idols: let him alone."

Once again, this punishment may be brought, and generally is brought, upon men when they have done distinct *violence to their conscience*. Before sin has come to its worst, there is a great deal of struggling in men's minds. Conscience will not be quiet. It cries out against the maltreatment which it suffers from ungodly lives. Many a young man, especially if he has been well brought up, and many a young woman too, if she has been trained in religious ways, will have times in which they are pulled up short, and it comes to this—"I have been wrong. If I go further in this wrong I shall suffer for it. There is a way of grace; I see the door of mercy open to me." They have stood hesitating, as if a hand had been laid on their shoulder, and they have felt as though they were turned from the wrong, and drawn into the right way. But some have fought against mercy, and the evil spirit has set before them all the sparkle of fleshly lust and worldly pleasure. And at last, with a desperate effort, they have dragged themselves away to their sins. Now, the next time they do that they will not suffer half the compunction, and the next time after that they will have less, still, for every time conscience is violated, it becomes less vigorous, and is more easily tranquillized. I remember an earnest Christian telling me how, before conversion, he used to spend his nights in shameful ways, and frequently would be in the streets—though the son of a most respectable man—in a state of half intoxication. As he stood under a lamp one night, with his brain confused, and his mind bewildered, he put his hand into his pocket and took out a letter. By some strange impulse he was induced to begin to read it. It was a tender appeal from a loving, pious sister. Unknown reflections cast their shadows across his breast. Taking counsel with himself he thought, "Well, what is it to be?" He was sober enough, even then, to feel as if he had come to a decision. Thinking over the matter, and deliberating upon it, it pleased God to lead him to put that letter back into his pocket, and say, "I will go home, and I will seek my sister's God." That resolution proved to be the first step to his conversion—

*"He left the hateful ways of sin,
Turned to the fold, and entered in."*

Ever afterwards he came to regard this as the crisis of his soul's history. He said to me, "If that night I had gone elsewhere, and God's Spirit had not graciously led me, there and then, to something like decision, it may be that it would have been the very last time my conscience ever would have troubled me. And I should have gone headlong to destruction." I wonder whether such a time as that may have come to some of my hearers! If it is so, O Eternal Spirit, throw in the weight of Your omnipotent influence to decide the will of man for that which is good and right, and let not evil win the day. Do you not see in the pictures I have drawn, and the descriptions I have given, some delineation of that aggravated guilt which provokes the withering blast of incensed mercy turned into wrath which wails forth the woe of my text, "Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone"?

II. Now, I crave your earnest attention to THE SINGULAR PUNISHMENT—"Let him alone."

Is there anything in this to excite our surprise? The calamity is so dire that we may well shudder at it. But the sentence is so just, and the issue so reasonable that we can only acknowledge it to be such as might have been expected. What can be more natural? There is a piece of ground. Last year it was fertilized, and it was sown with good seed, but nothing has come up from it. The year before, the same pains were bestowed upon it. They trenched it, and it has been thoroughly drained. There could not have been better seed cast upon it than has been used. Yet nothing grew last year. No harvest rewarded the laborer's toil. Year after year its hopeless barrenness has vexed the farmer's soul. Farmer what will you do this year? "Do?" he asks. "Why, I will do nothing! What can be done with it? Let it alone." Is he not right in his verdict? Here is a man grievously sick. The doctor called upon him, but they shut the door in his face. He called again, and he gained access to the patient, and the patient cursed him. He called again, and gave him a prescription; but the sick man took the prescription, tore it in pieces, and flung it away. What do you mean to do, Doctor? "What can I do?" he says. "I must let him alone! What can I

do? My services are rejected. I am treated with insult! What more remains for me?" And here is a sinner in danger of being lost. The Lord says to him, "Behold My Son! I have anointed Him to be a Savior. If you trust Him, He will save you." This counsel is despised. It is thought nothing of, forgotten, neglected, put off, in some cases scoffed at, made a matter of ridicule, treated with hatred, and perhaps the deliverer of the message is made the subject of persecution. What will God say? Why, "That is a case in which I will let him alone! I sent his mother to him when he was a child. I sent his Sunday school teacher to him. I sent a godly friend to him. I have sent My servant, the minister, to him, times out of mind. I have put good books in his way scores of times. It is all in vain!" Brethren, is there anything that can be more reasonable or more just than for God, on His part, to say, "Let him alone"? The tree never has brought forth any fruit! What need is there to waste any more time upon it? It seems right on God's part that He should say, "Let him alone." You judge if it is not so!

Well, but what happens when a man is thus let alone? Why, he is as a great many people would like to be. Liberty is given him. No. Let me correct myself, he takes license to pursue his own course. He is no more "pestered and bothered about religion." He is no more fretted and worried in his conscience about duties and obligations. God's people begin to let him alone. For, if they speak to him, he only growls at them, and returns an answer which grieves their hearts. So they keep out of his way, or if they do speak to him, their word, though given in earnest, is taken in jest. Like water on a slab of marble, the warning does not penetrate the surface or affect his heart. He has got out of the way of being impressed. Now he has no mother to trouble him. She has long slept under the green lawn. He has no poor old father now, to talk to him about his sins; he has long been carried to heaven. No minister disturbs him now, for he gives the servant of God a wide berth, and keeps clear of him. No books come in his way that can at all alarm him. He will not open them if they do. Give him the Sunday newspaper that is enough for him. Give him a book of science, or something that has to do with this times state. Having put his faith in infidelity, he fortifies his heart against fear. He takes care not to trouble himself about religion. No qualms or questions, no doubts or disputes disturb him. No fierce temptations or fiery trials distract his peace. Everything seems to go merrily and smoothly with him. He is the man to make money. He is the jolly fellow that can indulge in sin with impunity, put his hand into the fire and take it out again without being hurt, where another would be badly burned. He seems to have a charmed life. God has said, "Let him alone!" Those about him envy him, but if they knew! If they knew! If they knew! If they knew that God had "set him in slippery places," and that "his foot will slide in due time," they would no more envy him his prosperity and peace than they would envy the bullock that is fattening for the Christmas show, or the full-fleshed sheep that is driven to slaughter. His end is destruction. Perhaps I am speaking to some who are wrapping themselves up quite complacently, in the idea that the lines have fallen to them in pleasant places, that fortune smiles on them, and their reputation is in the ascendant. They would not wish to have their course altered, and yet the terrible sentence has gone out against them, "Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone." O men, I pity you from my soul, but I fear you will ridicule my sympathy. Alas! Alas, I can but mourn in secret, for I see that your day is coming.

I have shown you, then, what it is to be let alone by God. Do you ask now, "What is the general result of it?" Why, let me tell you. For the most part it leads the man into greater sin than he had ever committed before. It leads him to become more defiant, and more boastful than before. Very frequently he becomes a scoffer and a skeptic. And not infrequently he becomes intolerant to the poor and a persecutor of those who fear the Lord and observe His ordinances. Restraints are taken off him, those moral obligations which curbed him, and that respect for public opinion which induced him to practice a little decency, he has renounced. They are nowhere to be found. Vain conceits fill the place of virtuous counsels. He violated conscience, and conscience has left him. He wearied those who rebuked him, and they have ceased to reprove him, or if they rebuke him, he turns a deaf ear to their admonitions. He has become like the adder that cannot and will not hear the wisest charmer. So the man goes from bad to worse, still with the full conceit that he is among the happiest and most highly favored of mortals.

But here is the evil of it! The dreadful sound is in my ears. God has said to all the agents that might do that man good, "Let him alone!" But wait awhile. He will not say that to the agents which can do him harm. God has not said to the Devil, "Let him alone!" He will not say to Death, "Let him alone!" He will not say to Judgment, "Let him alone!" Nor will He say to the flames of hell, "Let him alone!" He will not say to infinite misery, "Let him alone!" On the contrary, He will let loose all the destroying angels against him, and the man who was let alone in sin shall not be let alone in punishment. I cannot speak of this as I could wish. These are things to be thought of and weighed in the soul. I pray that you may so weigh them, that if you have fallen into a state of indifference, you may be awakened out of it, and resolve that it shall not be so any longer. Oh, that you would cry out in terror, "God helping me, I will not be one of those of whom God shall say, 'Let him alone!'"

III. THERE ARE SOME PRACTICAL INFERENCES FROM THIS VERY SAD SUBJECT to which I must now draw your attention.

It becomes the preacher, so long as he does not know the individual—and this he never can know—to whom God has said, "Let him alone!" to try and use the utmost endeavor to awaken every careless and indifferent man within his reach. I pray the Spirit of God to help me while I try to do so. Some of you are living in this world entirely for your own pleasure or your own gain. I do not deny that it is right that you should seek gain, or that it is natural that you should desire pleasure. Neither do I think that attention to the things of God will deprive you of any gain that is worth having, or of any pleasure that is desirable. But the sad thing is that many of you are living as if there were no hereafter. Now, do you really believe that there is no future in reserve for you? Because if you are quite persuaded that you are no better than a dog, if you are quite certain that you are nothing but an animal, and that in due time when you die and the worms eat you, there will be the end of you—why, sirs, if I were of the same mind, I should have but little to say to you. I should wish you to be as virtuous as may be in this life, for that is the best way to be happy and to benefit the community. But I do not know that this is any particular business of mine—I would leave that matter to the policeman and the magistrate. But do you really suppose that you have no higher origin than the flesh, and no further destiny than to mingle your dust with the mold of the earth? Would you like me to speak to you as to a dog? Would you like anybody to treat you as a dog? Being, as you say, only a dog, why should you not be treated as such? Can you, in your heart of hearts, really believe that the cemetery, and the shroud, and the sexton's spade will be the last of you? You do not believe it. You cannot believe it. You may try to persuade yourself that the terrors of judgment to come are merely bugaboos of the imagination. But there is something within you, an irrepressible consciousness of immortality which tells you that you will live after death. God has fixed the conviction of a future state as a kind of instinct in men, so that where the gospel has never come, a future state has been conjectured, though for the most part but dimly inferred rather than distinctly expected. There has scarcely been a heathen tribe so abject but they have had glimmerings of the fact that there is another state after death. Well, my dear sir, I cannot conceive that you have degraded yourself into the notion that you are a beast—at any rate, I will not allow myself to think that you are a beast. You will live somewhere or other after your present career is closed. Does it not stand to reason that if you have lived entirely for self, there must be a reckoning with you? Somebody made you! *God* made you! If you keep a horse or a cow, you expect some service of it, and if God made you, He must expect you to render Him some service. But you have rendered Him none. Though He has winked at your disobedience in this life, do you think He will always wink at it? Well, if you think so, you are grossly mistaken. For, as the Lord lives, there is a day of judgment coming, when the Lord Jesus Christ shall descend from heaven with a shout, and all the dead shall rise out of their graves. And all the living shall appear before His great white throne. You will as certainly be there as you are here. And when you are there, you will discover that every secret thought of yours has been written down against you, and will be read out and published before mankind. Then and there, for every idle word you have spoken, you will be brought into judgment. Can you think of this as possible, even though you may not admit that it is certain? Can you yet remain callous, indifferent, unconcerned? Is there not a something in your heart

that says, "If this is so, it is terrible—it is terrible for *me!* What must I do to be saved?" I am bound to answer you, (and cheerfully do I answer you), "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved." Whoever you may be, however far you may have gone astray, trust Jesus, dying and bleeding for sinful men, and now gone into the highest heavens to plead at the right hand of the infinite Majesty—trust Jesus and you shall live. But if you have not Christ to put away your sin, to espouse your cause, and to plead for you in that last great day, as surely as you live, whether you believe it or not, this is true, the Judge will say, "Depart from Me you cursed, into everlasting fire in hell, prepared for the devil and his angels." And that may happen to you within much less time than you dream. Not many Monday nights ago, there came a beloved Christian Sister, here, who joined with us in prayer. She was taken ill; she did not leave this house conscious. She was taken home with death upon her. Her disease proved to be past human aid, and in an hour or two she died. I hope there will never be another death in this Tabernacle, but more than once individuals have been thus called away from our very midst. Before this congregation shall have broken up, some of you may have gone to the world of spirits. In all probability within this week, one of you will be summoned before the Great Judge. If it is you, sir, or if it is you, good woman, are you ready? Are you ready? Do you feel no trouble about that question? Then I think you may be among those whom God has given up. But if the question rings through your soul like a knell, and cuts like a sharp knife, then I pray you do not think God has given you up. And do not give yourself up, but fly to Jesus. Yes, before you lay your head upon the pillow, and fall asleep, cry mightily unto the living God to save you so that you may be His in the day when the earth and the heavens will be in a blaze, and ungodly men will sink into hell. That is the first practical inference—it is the preacher's duty to continue to warn men.

Another practical thought is—if any of you are awakened, be obedient to the voice of conscience, and the calling of the Spirit. Oh, if you have any life, do not attempt to stifle it! Rather fan it to a flame! If you do but feel a little of the pain of penitence, pray God that it may deepen into true contrition, and sincere repentance. If you feel anything, do not, I pray you, repress the feeling if it is anything of a spiritual kind. I knew when I was seeking the Lord what it was to feel that. I would have given everything I had to be able to repent. When on my knees, I felt that if I could but have shed a tear for sin, I would have been willing to be poor and blind my whole life long. To have a hard heart is an awful thing! It is well, however, when it can repent, and when the man can smite upon his bosom, with tears, and sobs and groans, and cry, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" If there is any tenderness in you, oh, do not crush it out! Do not despise it. Look well to it, and above all, fly away to Christ at once. With many a man it is, "now or never." Whenever you hear the clock tick, this is what it says to you, "Now or never," "Now or never," "Now or never," "Now or never." Ah, if some would hear that, it might be the means of driving them to the cross of Christ at once, where they would find eternal life. Dear young people, especially, do not postpone the thought of eternal things while you are young and tender. Do not say, "When I have a more convenient season I will send for you."—

*"Tis easier work when we begin
To serve the Lord betimes."*

Where grace comes into the heart while the heart is yet young and tender, there is less struggling against it in most cases, and it is a more cheerful task for the soul to submit itself to the power of Christ. The Lord bless that thought to you, and make it a converting power to your souls.

And, last of all, if there should be an unhappy individual here who says, "I believe God has given me up"—let me ask you a question, friend. Does the suggestion of such a thing make you very sad? Then the Lord has not given you up. Do you say, "I feel alarmed lest I am given up"? Then you are not given up. *He* is more likely to be given up of God who says, "I do not care whether I am or not! Give me my jolly companions, give me my amusements, give me plenty of money to spend, and good health and strength to enjoy myself, and you may have heaven if you like. I will run the risk of the future." Ah, sir, though you talk big, I do not believe in your bravado, for I know that many braggadocio sinners are cowards at heart. And I hope, notwithstanding what you say, there is something in you that answers to

the appeals I have made. But there may be some who really mean, down deep in their souls, that they have steeled themselves against reproof, and are prepared to dare all consequences. They stand like oaks I have seen splintered from top to bottom by lightning, never to send forth a shoot again. Ghastly and grim amidst the forest they lift up their heads as though they were huge deer with antlers, glorying in their desolation. There are such withered souls, defiant in awful desperation. Oh, if there are such here, if they were friends of mine, I would say, “O man, be in pain and travail like a woman with child rather than be damned! O man, better for you that you should, from this moment, begin a life of torment and agony, and never look up to God’s sun again, and never see the fields, nor hear the birds sing with joy, nor ever have a hopeful thought of this world again. So that you may but be saved, rather than go on with all your mirth and jollity, and then lift up your eyes in that eternity to come where you shall be forever, forever, forever, lost! For, let those say what they will, who are the enemies of your soul—I speak the truth before the Lord—if you are lost, you will be lost forever. And if God once pronounces that word, “Depart, you cursed!” back to Him you can never come, but departing, and departing, and departing into blacker night, and into denser glooms you must forever and forever continue. This is the dread inscription over the gate of hell—

“All hope abandon, you who enter here!”

This is branded on their chains, and stamped upon their fetters. This is the worm that never dies, and the fire that can never be quenched. The letters of fire that burn overhead in the dungeon of eternal despair spell out this word, “Eternity! Eternity! Eternity!” O my fellow men and women, as I shall meet you at the judgment seat, I implore you to fly away to Jesus lest you eternally perish.

When your eyes and mine shall meet again in the next state, when we have passed through the grave and the resurrection, do not say I did not tell you of sin, and of punishment, and of the Savior! You will not dare to say it. But as I, poor guilty sinner that I am, stand there, this shall not be one of the sins laid to my charge, that I was not in earnest with you and that I did not speak all that I felt to be the truth. To Jesus Christ I fly myself, on my own account, for if I am not washed in His blood, unhappiest of mortals surely am I. For I have preached to more men for a larger number of years than any other man, perhaps, that lives. And if I have played with souls, I have their blood upon me, and the most accursed of men am I. But I shelter my soul beneath the purple canopy of my Savior’s atoning blood. My hearers come under that same shelter, all of you. There is room enough for you. That blessed purple covering will hang between us and God even though there were millions of us, and it will cover us all. Nor can there be any fear that the dart of divine vengeance shall smite any of us who will cower down beneath the blood-red Propitiation. God save you, friends, who are strangers here! God save you, friends, who frequent these courts! God save you all, for Jesus Christ’s sake! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—PROVERBS 1:20-33.

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