

THE SINNER'S REFUGE

NO. 2621

A SERMON

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AT NEW PARK STREET CHAPEL, SOUTHWARK

ON A LORD'S-DAY EVENING, EARLY IN THE YEAR 1857

*“Then ye shall appoint you cities to be cities of refuge for you;
that the slayer may flee thither, which killeth any person at unawares.”*

Numbers 35:11

YOU are aware that the principle of blood-revenge is a deep-seated one in the Eastern mind. From the earliest ages it was always the custom with the Orientals, when a man was murdered, or slain without malice aforethought, for the nearest relative, his heir, or any person related to him, to take revenge for him upon the person who, either intentionally or unintentionally, was the means of his death. This revenge was a very special thing to the Oriental mind.

The avenger of blood would hunt his victim for forty years—ay, until he died, if he was not able to reach him before—and would be on his track all his life, that he might slay him. It was not necessary that the manslayer should have any trial before a judge—his victim was dead and if the one who killed him was not put to death, it was reckoned among some tribes to be legitimate to kill his father, or indeed any member of his tribe—and until someone in that tribe was put to death, as a revenge for the man who had been slain, by accident or otherwise, a deadly feud existed between the two clans which never could be quenched except by blood.

Now, when the Lord gave to the Jews this law concerning the cities of refuge, he took advantage of their deep-rooted love towards the system of the revenge of blood by the nearest relative. And God acted wisely in this, as He has done in all things. There are two matters mentioned in Scripture which I do not believe God ever approved, but which, finding they were deep-seated, He did not forbid to the Jews. One was polygamy, the practice of marrying many wives had become so established that, though God abhorred it, yet He permitted it to the Jews because He foresaw that they would inevitably have broken the commandment if He had made an ordinance that they should have but one wife.

It was the same with this matter of blood-revenge—it was so firmly fixed in the mind of the people that God, instead of refusing to the Jews what they regarded as the privilege of taking vengeance upon their fellows, enacted a law which rendered it almost impossible that a man should be killed unless he were really a murderer. For He appointed six cities, at convenient distances, so that when one man killed another by accident, and so committed homicide, he might at once flee to one of those cities. And though he might have to remain there all his life, yet the avenger of blood could never touch him, if he were innocent.

He would have a fair trial, but even if he were found innocent, he must stay within the city into which the avenger of blood could not by any possibility come. If he went out of the city, the avenger might kill him. He was therefore to suffer perpetual banishment, even for causing death accidentally, in order that it might be seen how much God regarded the rights of blood, and how fearful a thing it is to put a man to death in any way.

You see, dear friends, that this prevented the likelihood of anyone being killed who was not guilty of murder, for, as soon as one man struck another to the ground by accident, by a stone or any other means, he fled to a city of refuge. He had a head start from the pursuer and if he arrived there first, he was secure and safe.

I wish to use this custom of the Jews as a metaphor and type to set forth the salvation of men through Jesus Christ our Lord. I shall give you, first, *an explanation* and then, *an exhortation*.

I. I SHALL ATTEMPT AN EXPLANATION OF THIS TYPE.

Note, first, *the person for whom the city of refuge was provided*. It was not a place of shelter for the willful murderer. If he fled there, he must be dragged out of it and given up to the avenger, after a fair trial. And the avenger of death was to kill him and so have blood for blood, and life for life. But in case of an accident, when one man had slain another, without malice aforethought, and had therefore only committed homicide, the man fleeing there was perfectly safe.

Here, however, the type does not adequately represent the work of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is not a refuge provided for men who are innocent, but for men who are guilty—not for those who have accidentally transgressed, but for those who have willfully gone astray. Our Savior has come into the world to save, not those who have by mistake and error committed sin, but those who have fearfully transgressed against well-known divine commandments and who have followed the sinful dictates of their own free will, their own perversity leading them to rebel against God.

Note, next, *the avenger of blood*. In explaining this portion of the type, I must, of course, take every part of the figure. The avenger of blood, I have said, was usually the next of kin to the one who had been slain. But I believe any other member of the family was held to be competent to act as the avenger.

If, for instance, my brother had been killed, it would have been my duty, as the first of the family, to avenge his blood, if possible, then and there—to go after the murderer, or the man who had accidentally caused his death, and to put him to death at once. If I could not do that, it would be my business and that of my father, and indeed, of every male member of the family, to hunt and pursue that man until God should deliver him into our hand so that we might put him to death.

I mean not that it is our duty now, but it would have been so regarded under the old Jewish dispensation. It was allowed, by the Mosaic law, that those who were of the kith and kin of the man killed should be the avengers of his blood.

We find the counterpart of this type, for the sinner, in the law of God. Sinner, the law of God is the blood-avenger that is on your track! You have willfully transgressed—you have, as it were, killed God's commandments, you have trampled them under your foot—the law is the avenger of blood. It is after you and it will have you in its grasp ere long. Condemnation is hanging over your head now and it shall surely overtake you. Though it may not reach you in this life, yet, in the world to come, the avenger of blood, the Moses, the law of the Lord, shall execute vengeance upon you and you shall be utterly destroyed.

But further, *there was a city of refuge provided under the law*—nay, more, *there were six cities of refuge*, in order that one of them might be at a convenient distance from any part of the country. Now, there are not six Christs—there is but one, but there is a Christ everywhere. “The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach; that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.”

The city of refuge was a priestly city—a city of the Levites and it afforded protection for life to the manslayer. He might never go out of it till the death of the then reigning high priest, after which he might go free without being touched by the avenger of blood. But during the time of his sojourn there, he was housed and fed gratuitously—everything was provided for him and he was kept entirely safe. And I would have you mark that he was safe in this city, not because of its walls, or bolts, or bars, but simply because it was the place divinely appointed for shelter.

Do you see the man running towards it? The avenger is after him, fast and furious. The manslayer has just reached the borders of the city—in a moment the avenger halts—he knows it is no use going any further after him, not because the city walls are strong, nor because the gates are barred, nor because an army stands without to resist, but because God has said the man shall be safe as soon as he has

crossed the border and has come into the suburbs of the city. Divine appointment was the only thing which made the city of refuge secure.

Now, beloved, our Lord Jesus Christ is the divinely-appointed way of salvation. Whosoever amongst us shall make haste from our sins, and fly to Christ, being convinced of our guilt, and helped by God's Spirit to enter that road, shall, without doubt, find absolute and eternal security. The curse of the law shall not touch us, Satan shall not harm us, vengeance shall not reach us, for the divine appointment, stronger than gates of iron or brass, shields everyone of us "who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us" in the Gospel.

The city of refuge, I must have you note, too, had around it, suburbs of a very great extent. Two thousand cubits were allowed for grazing land for the cattle of the priests and a thousand cubits within these for fields and vineyards. Now, no sooner did the man reach the suburbs of the city, than he was safe—it was not necessary for him to get within the walls, but the outskirts themselves were sufficient protection.

Learn, hence, that if you do but touch the hem of Christ's garment, you shall be made whole. If you do but lay hold of Him with "faith as a grain of mustard seed," with faith which is very feeble, but is truly a living principle, you are safe.

*"A little genuine grace ensures
The death of all our sins."*

Get anywhere within the borders of the city of refuge and you are at once and forever secure from the avenger.

We have some interesting particulars, also, with regard to the distance of these cities from the habitations of men in ancient Judea. It is said that wherever the crime of homicide might be committed by any man, he might get to a city of refuge within half a day, and verily, beloved, it is no great distance from a guilty sinner to the sheltering breast of Christ. It is but a simple renunciation of our own powers and a laying hold of Christ, to be our All-in-All, that is required in order to our being found within the city of refuge.

Then, with regard to the roads to the city, we are told that they were strictly preserved in good order. Every river was bridged. As far as possible, the road was made level and every obstruction removed so that the man who fled might find an easy passage to the city. Once a year the elders of the city went along the route to see that it was in proper repair and to provide, as far as they could, that nothing might occur through the breaking down of bridges, or the stopping up of the highway, to impede the flight of any manslayer, and cause him to be overtaken and killed.

Wherever there were by-roads and turns, there were fixed up sign-posts, with this word plainly visible upon them, "Refuge"—"*Refuge*"—pointing out the way in which the man should fly, if he wished to reach the city. There were two people always kept on the road, so that in case the avenger of blood should overtake a man, they might intercept him and entreat him to stay his hand until the man had reached the city, lest haply innocent blood should be shed, without a fair trial, and so the avenger himself would be proved guilty of murder. For the risk, of course, was upon the head of the avenger, if he put one to death who did not deserve to die.

Now, beloved, I think this is a picture of the road to Christ Jesus. It is no roundabout road of the law—it is no obeying this, that, and the other command—it is a straight road. "Believe, and live." It is a road so hard, that no self-righteous man will ever tread it. But it is a road so easy that every man who knows himself to be a sinner may by it find his way to Christ and his way to heaven. And lest any should be mistaken, God has set me and my brethren in the ministry to be like hand-posts in the way, to point poor sinners to Jesus. And we desire to always have on our lips the cry, "Refuge! *Refuge!* REFUGE!" Sinner, this is the way. Walk you therein and you shall be saved.

I think I have thus given the explanation of the type. Christ is the true City of Refuge and He preserves all those who flee to Him for mercy. He does that because He is the divinely-appointed Savior, able to save unto the uttermost all them that come to God by Him.

II. Now, in the second place, I HAVE TO GIVE AN EXHORTATION.

You must allow me to picture a scene. You see that man in the field? He has been at work. He has taken an ox-goad in his hand to use it in some part of his farm work. Unfortunately, instead of doing what he desires to do, he strikes a companion of his in the heart and he falls down dead! You see the poor fellow with horror in his face. He is a guiltless man, but oh! what misery he feels when he gazes upon the corpse lying at his feet!

A pang shoots through his heart, such as you and I have never felt—horror, dread, desolation! Yes, some of us have felt something akin to it spiritually—we will not allude to the when and the wherefore—but who can describe the agony of a man who beholds his companion fall lifeless by his side? Words are incapable of expressing the anguish of his spirit. He looks upon him, he tries to lift him up—he ascertains that he is really dead—what does he do next?

Do you not see him? In a moment, he flies out of the field where he was at labor and runs along the road with all his might. He has many weary miles before him—six long hours of hard running—and as he passes the gate, he turns his head and there is the man's brother! He has just come into the field and seen his brother lying dead.

Oh! can you conceive how the manslayer's heart palpitates with fear? He has a little head start on the road—he just sees the avenger of blood, with red face, hot and fiery, rushing out of the field with the ox-goad in his hand and running after him. The way lies through the village where the dead man's father lives—how fast the poor fugitive flees through the streets! He does not even stop to bid good-bye to his wife, nor to kiss his children—but on, on, he speeds for his very life.

The relative calls to his father and his other friends, and they all rush after him. Now there is quite a troop on the road—the man is still ahead, there is no rest for him. Though one of his pursuers may pause for a while, or turn back, the others still track him. There is a horse in the village. They mount it and pursue him. If they can find any animal that can assist their swiftness, they will take it.

Can you not conceive of the manslayer crying, “Oh, that I had wings, that I might fly to the city of refuge”? See how he spurns the earth beneath his feet! What to him are the green fields on either hand? What are the babbling brooks? He stops not even so much as to wet his lips. The sun is scorching him, but still on, on, on, he runs! He casts aside one garment after another. Still he rushes on and the pursuers are close behind him. He feels like the poor stag hunted by the hounds—he knows they are eager for his blood and that if they do but once overtake him, it will be a word, a blow, and he will be a dead man. Watch how he speeds on his way.

Do you see him now? A town is rising into sight. He perceives the towers of the city of refuge—his weary feet almost refuse to carry him further. The veins are standing out on his brow like whipcords. The blood spurts from his nostrils—he is straining all his powers to the utmost as he rushes on, and he would go faster if he had any more strength. The pursuers are after him—they have almost clutched him, but see, and rejoice! He has just reached the outskirts of the city—there is the line of demarcation—he leaps over it and falls senseless to the ground—but there is joy in his heart.

The pursuers come and look at him, but they dare not slay him. The knife is in their hand and the stones, too, but they dare not touch him. He is safe, he is secure. His running has been just fast enough—he has managed to leap into the kingdom of life and to avoid a cruel and terrible death.

Sinner, that picture I have given you is a picture of yourself, in all but the man's guiltlessness, for you are a guilty man. Oh, if you did but know that the avenger of blood is after you! Oh, that God would give you grace that you might have a sense of your danger tonight. You would then not stop a solitary instant without fleeing to Christ. You would say, even while sitting in your pew, “Let me get away, away, away, where mercy is to be found,” and you would give neither sleep to your eyes, nor slumber to

your eyelids till you had found in Christ a refuge for your guilty spirit. I am come, then, to exhort you to flee away to Jesus now.

Let me pick out one of you, to be a specimen of all the rest. There is a young man here who is guilty. The proofs of his guilt lie close at hand. He knows himself to be a great transgressor—he has foully offended against God's law. Young man, young man, as you are guilty, the avenger of blood is after you. Oh! that avenger—God's fiery law—did you ever see it? It speaks words of flame. It has eyes like lamps of fire. If you could once see the law of God and mark the dread keenness of its terrible sword, you might, as you sat in your pew, quiver almost to death in horror at your impending doom.

Sinner, I think if this avenger shall seize you, it will not be merely temporal death that will be your portion—it will be death eternally. Sinner, remember, if the law of God lays its hand on you, and Christ does not deliver you, you are damned. And do you know what damnation means? Say, can you tell what are the billows of eternal wrath, and what the worm that never dies, what the lake of fire, what the pit that is bottomless? No, you cannot know how dreadful these things are. Surely, if you could, man, you would be up on your feet and flying for life—eternal life. You would be like that man in Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, who put his fingers in his ears and ran sway. And when his neighbors ran after him, he cried, "Eternal life! Eternal life!"

O stolid stupidity! O sottish ignorance! O worse than brutal folly that makes men sit down in their sins and rest content! The drunkard still quaffs his bowl—he knows not that in its dregs there lies wrath. The swearer still indulges in his blasphemy—he knows not that, one day, his oath shall return upon his own head. You will go your way and eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and live merrily and happily, but ah! poor souls, if you knew that the avenger of blood was after you, you would not act so foolishly!

Would you suppose that the man, after he had killed his neighbor, and when he saw the avenger coming, would coolly take his seat and wait to be slain, when there was a city of refuge provided? No, that consummate folly is reserved for such as you are. God has left that to be the top stone of the folly of the human race, the most glittering jewel in the crown of free will—the dress of death wherein free will does robe itself.

Oh! you will not fly to Christ, you will stay where you are, you will rest contented, and one day the law of God will seize you, and then wrath, eternal wrath, will lay hold upon you! How foolish is the man who wastes his time and carelessly loiters, when the city of refuge is before him, and the avenger of blood is after him!

Suppose, now, I take another case. There is a young man here, who says, "Why, sir, it is no use my trying to be saved. I shall not think of prayer or faith, or anything of that sort, because there is no city of refuge for me." Suppose that poor man, who had killed his neighbor, had talked like that? Suppose he had sat still, folded his arms and said, "There is no city of refuge for me." I cannot imagine such folly.

And surely, you do not mean what you said just now. If you thought there was no city of refuge for you, I know what you would do—you would shriek, and cry, and groan. There is a kind of despair that some people have which is a sham despair. I have met with many who say, "We do not believe we ever could be saved," and they seem not to care whether they are saved or not.

How foolish would the man be who would sit still and so let the avenger slay him, because he fancied there was no entrance for him into the city! But your folly is just as great, and even worse, if you sit still and say, "The Lord will never have mercy on me." He is as much a suicide who refuses the medicine, because he thinks it will not cure him, as the man who takes the knife and stabs himself to the heart.

You have no right, sir, to let your despair triumph over the promise of God. He has said it and He means it—"Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved." If He has shown you your guilt, depend upon it, there is a city of refuge for you. Haste to it. Haste to it. May God help you to betake yourselves to it now! Oh! if men only knew how dreadful is the wrath to come and how terrible will be the day of judgment, how swiftly would they flee away to Jesus! There is not a hearer of mine

here who would delay an hour to flee to Christ if he did but know how fearful is his condition out of Christ.

When God the Holy Spirit once convinces us of our sin, there is no halting then. The Spirit says, "Today, if ye will hear his voice," and we cry, "Today, Lord, today, hear our voice!" There is no pausing then. It is on, on, on, for our very life. I beseech you, men and brethren, you who have sinned against God, and know it—you who want to be delivered from the wrath to come—I beseech you, by Him that lives and was dead, flee to Christ.

Take heed that it is to Christ you flee, for, if the man who had slain his neighbor had fled to another city, it would have been of no avail. Had he fled to a place that was not an ordained city of refuge, he might have sped on with all the impetuosity of desire and yet have been slain within the city gates. So, you self-righteous ones, you may fly to your good works, you may practice your baptism and your confirmation, and your church-going or your chapel-going—you may be all that is good and excellent, but you are fleeing to the wrong city and the avenger of blood will find you, after all.

Poor soul! Remember that Christ Jesus the Lord is the only refuge for a guilty sinner—His blood, His wounds, His agonies, His sufferings, His death—these are the gates and walls of the city of salvation. But if we trust not in these, without a doubt, trust where we may, our hope shall be as a broken reed and we shall perish after all.

I may have one here who is newly awakened, just led to see his sin, as if it were the corpse of a murdered man lying at his feet. It seems to me that God has sent me to that one individual in particular. Man, God has shown you your guilt and He has seat me to tell you that there is a refuge for you. Though you are guilty, He is gracious. Though you have revolted and rebelled against Him, He will have mercy on all who repent and trust in the merits of His Son.

He has bidden me to say to you, "Fly, fly, fly!" And in God's name, I say to you, "Fly to Christ." He has bidden me warn you against delays. He has bidden me remind you that death surprises men when they least expect it. He has bidden me assure you that the avenger will not spare, neither will his eye pity—his sword was forged for vengeance, and vengeance it will have. God has also bidden me exhort you, by the terror of the Lord, by the day of judgment, by the wrath to come, by the uncertainty of life and by the nearness of death, to fly to Christ this very moment.

*"Haste, traveler, haste, the night comes on:
And thou far off from rest and home,
Haste, traveler, haste!"*

But oh! how much more earnest is our cry, when we say, "Haste, sinner, haste!" Not only does the night come on, but lo! the avenger of blood is close behind. Already he has slain his thousands—let the shrieks of souls, already damned, come up in your ears! Already the avenger has wrought wonders of wrath—let the howling of Gehenna startle you, let the torments of hell amaze you. What! Will you pause with such an avenger in swift pursuit?

What! Young man, will you stop this night? God has convinced you of your sin—will you go to your rest once more without a prayer for pardon? Will you live another day without fleeing to Christ? No, I think I see signs that the Spirit of God is working in you and I think I hear what He makes you say, "God helping me, I give myself to Christ even now. And if He will not at once shed abroad His love in my heart, this is my firm resolve—no rest will I find anywhere till Christ shall look on me and seal with His Holy Spirit my pardon bought with blood."

But if you sit still, young man—and you will do so, if left to your own free will—I can do no more for you than this, I must and I will weep for you in secret. Alas! for you, my hearer. Alas! for you. The ox led to the slaughter is more wise than you are. The sheep that goes to its death is not so foolish as you are. Alas! for you, my hearer, that your pulse should beat a march to hell! Alas! that yonder clock, like the muffled drum, should be the music of the funeral march of your soul! Alas! Alas! that you should

fold your arms in pleasure when the knife is at your heart! Alas! Alas! for you, that you should sing and make merriment when the rope is around your neck and the fatal drop is about to be given to you! Alas! for you, that you should go your way and live joyfully and happily, and yet be lost!

You remind me of the silly moth that dances round the flame, singeing itself for a while and then at last plunging to its death—such are you! Young woman, with your butterfly clothing, you are leaping round the flame that shall destroy you! Young man, light and frothy in your conversation, gay in your life, you are dancing to hell. You are singing your way to damnation and promenading the road to destruction. Alas! Alas! Alas! that you should be spinning your own winding-sheets—that you should every day, by your sins, be building your own gallows—that, by your transgressions, you should be digging your own graves and working hard to pile the firewood for your own eternal burning! Oh, that you were wise, that you understood this, that you would consider your latter end! Oh, that you would flee from the wrath to come!

O my hearers, think of the wrath to come, the wrath to come! How terrible that wrath is, these lips dare not venture to describe it. At the very thought of it, this heart fills with agony. O my hearers, are there not some of you who will soon be proving what the wrath to come really is? There are some of you who, if you were now to drop dead in your pews, must be damned. Ah! you know it. You know it. You dare not deny it. I see you know it, as you hang down your heads, you seem to say, “It is true. I have no Christ to trust to, no robe of righteousness to wear, no heaven to hope for!”

My hearer, give me your hand. Never did father plead with son with more impassioned earnestness than I would plead with you. Why do you sit still, when hell is burning almost in your very face? “Why will ye die, O house of Israel?” O God! Must I yearn over these people in vain? Must I continue to preach to them and be “a savor of death unto death” to them and not “a savor of life unto life”? And must I help to make their hell more intolerable? Must it be so? Must the people who now listen to us, like the people of Chorazin and Bethsaida in the days of our Lord, have a more terrible doom than the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah? O you who are left to your own free will, to choose the way to hell—as all men do when left to themselves—let these eyes run down with tears for you, because you will not weep for yourselves!

It is strange that I should feel more concern for your souls than you do for yourselves. My God knows there is not a stone that I would leave unturned to save each one of you. There is nought that human strength could do, or human study could learn, which I would not seek after if I might but be the instrument of saving you from hell. And yet you act as though it concerned you not, whom it should concern the most. It is my business, but it is far more yours.

Sirs, if you are lost, remember that it is yourselves who will be lost. And if you perish, bear me witness that I am clear of your blood. If you flee not from the wrath to come, forget not that I have warned you. I could not bear to have the blood upon my head which some, even of those who like sound doctrine, I fear, will have at the last day of account. I tremble for some I know, who preach God's Gospel, in some sense fully, but who never warn sinners. A member of my church said to me lately, “I heard So-and-So preach—a sound-doctrine-man he is called. I listened to him for nine years and I was attending the theater all the time. I could curse, I could swear, I could sin, and I never had a warning from that man's lips during the whole nine years.”

Ah, me! I would not like one of my hearers to say that concerning my preaching. Let this world hiss me. Let me wear the coat that sparkles, and the cap that garnishes a fool. Let earth condemn me and let the fools of the universe spurn me, but I will be free from the blood of my hearers. The only thing I seek in this world is to be faithful to my hearers' souls. If you are damned, it will not be for want of faithful preaching, nor of earnest warning.

Young men and maidens, old men with grey heads, merchants and tradesmen, servants, fathers, mothers, children—I have warned you this night—you are in danger of hell. And as God lives, before whom I stand, you will soon be there unless you flee from the wrath to come! Remember, none but Jesus can save you. But if God shall enable you to see your danger and give you grace to fly to Christ,

He will have mercy upon you and the avenger of blood shall never find you. No, not even when the red lightnings shall be flashing from the hand of God in the day of judgment. That city of refuge shall shelter you forever. And in heaven with Jesus, triumphant, blessed, secure, you shall sing of the blood and righteousness of Christ who delivers penitent sinners from the wrath to come. God bless and save you all! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

1 CORINTHIANS 10:1-14

Verses 1-4. *Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and did all eat the same spiritual meat; and did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them; and that Rock was Christ.*

The history of Israel in coming out of Egypt was a very instructive type of the history of the visible church of Christ. They were in slavery in Egypt as all men are in bondage to sin and Satan. They were brought out of Egypt as all the redeemed are delivered by the almighty grace of God. With a high hand and an outstretched arm, the Lord brought Israel out of the house of bondage, and by a very wonderful baptism, "in the cloud and in the sea," they commenced their career as God's separated people.

Then they all shared in the same spiritual ordinances, "They did all eat the same spiritual meat; and did all drink the same spiritual drink." Yet, for all that, they were not all God's people. They were so nominally and visibly—but they were not all really so. And as there was a mixed multitude that came up out of Egypt, together with the true seed of promise, so is there an alien element in every church at this present day. Among those who have been baptized into Christ, there are still some who, while they eat the spiritual meat and drink the spiritual drink, yet for all that have not been brought into true communion with Christ and do not in reality know the Lord.

5. *But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness.*

There was no evidence of faith in many of them and "without faith it is impossible to please God." Is it not a sad thing that in a people so highly favored as they were, there should have been so large a proportion of those who had not the faith which renders men pleasing unto God? So they did literally come out into the wilderness to die there, and they never entered into the rest of God.

6. *Now these things were our examples, to the intent we—*

We professed Christians—we, church members,—

6. *Should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted.*

They gave way to their carnal appetites. They craved for flesh when God had already given them angels' food. Now, if we act like this, we cannot be pleasing to God.

7. *Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.*

That is, to go through those unclean rites and ceremonies before their idols which are here called, "play." Ah, dear friends, may God keep us from the worship of anything which we can see with our eyes, or hear with our ears! May we never become idolaters! You know we can very easily make idols of our children. We can make idols of our own persons. We can make idols of our talents, of our respectability, and so forth. But oh! it matters not what the idol is—it is no more pleasing to God if it be of silver and gold than if it were of the mud of the river. No—"Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them."

8. *Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand.*

Fornication in God's people is peculiarly black and filthy. In the ordinary man of the world, it is evil enough, but when a man professes to be a Christian, he must flee from even the very thought of it, and

keep himself chaste, for his body is a temple of the Holy Ghost. Oh, may none of us ever come anywhere near to this great evil, but in purity of heart may we walk before our God!

9. *Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents.*

I cannot stay to mention the many ways in which we can tempt Christ, but we can readily do so still. What a dreadful doom it was to be destroyed by serpents! Yet is it not very wonderful that in connection with this great sin, and its awful punishment, the brazen serpent was lifted high, that whosoever looked at it might live? And now, if any have tempted Christ by presumptuous sin, by their delay, or by their infidelity, let them bless God that they are not yet destroyed of serpents, because Christ has been lifted up even as the serpent of brass was exalted above the camp of Israel. Remember our Lord's words to Nicodemus—"As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life."

10. *Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed by the destroyer.*

It is a dreadful habit to get into—that of complaining against God. Occasional murmuring is doubtless sinful, but habitual murmuring becomes a very great evil. I am afraid that there are some who cavil at God's providence and cavil at His Word, till they come to be cavilers and nothing else. And what good is a man who can do nothing else but carp, and cavil, and criticize? O beloved, "neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed by the destroyer."

11. *Now all these things happened to them for ensamples.*

They were like a book in which we might read our own history in large characters. We see ourselves foreshadowed in them and we read our happiness or our misery in their behavior.

11-12. *And they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.*

For if he begins to think that he stands, it may be that it is nothing but his own imagination—there may be no real standing about it. And there is no surer sign of the falsity of a man's estimate of himself than the fact that it is a high one. He that thinks himself good has not begun to be good, for the door of the palace of wisdom is humility, and the gate of the temple of virtue is lowliness of mind.

13-14. *There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it. Wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry.*

I would like to see this verse put over the top of every "sacramental" table in every "church" in England—"Wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry." If this text were properly understood, every crucifix would be broken to pieces and the altars themselves would be cleared away to make room for what should be there—the table of the Lord—and we should have no more worship of visible things, which is idolatry. O you who are the dearly-beloved of God, flee from it! Keep as far from it as you can.

I remember reading of a man of God who was the rector of a certain parish, and who had in the church a very ancient and famous painted window of which he was somewhat proud. In the design there was a representation of the Godhead—the Father was there, and oh, how blasphemous!—He was represented as an aged man.

And one day, this clergyman, who had seen no evil in the window, heard a rustic explaining to a companion that that was the God whom they worshipped. The rector did not deliberate for a moment, but he threw a stone right through that part of the painted window. I suppose that was an offense against the law of man, but certainly it was not against the law of God. He would never have that figure replaced on any account whatever, and I think that he did well.

"Dearly beloved, flee from idolatry." Put it out of your sight. Do not tamper with it, but hate it with a perfect hatred. In God's eyes, it is one of the most fearful of sins. He has said, "I the LORD thy God am a jealous God," and He will have nothing to come between us and the pure and simple worship of His own invisible self.

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.