

GOD INCARNATE, THE END OF FEAR

NO. 727

A SERMON
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“And the angel said unto them, Fear not.”
Luke 2:10

NO sooner did the angel of the Lord appear to the shepherds, and the glory of the Lord shine round about them, than they were sorely afraid. It had come to this, that man was afraid of his God, and when God sent down His loving messengers with tidings of great joy, men were filled with as much fright as though the angel of death had appeared with uplifted sword. The silence of night and its dreary gloom caused no fear in the shepherds' hearts, but the joyful herald of the skies, robed in mildest glories of grace, made them afraid.

We must not condemn the shepherds on this account as though they were peculiarly timid or ignorant, for they were only acting as every other person in that age would have done under the same circumstances. Not because they were simple shepherds were they amazed with fear, but it is probable that if they had been well-instructed prophets they would have displayed the same feeling. For there are many instances recorded in Scripture in which the foremost men of their time trembled and felt a horror of great darkness when special manifestations of God were vouchsafed to them.

In fact, a slavish fear of God was so common that a *tradition* had grown out of it, which was all but universally received as nothing less than truth. It was generally believed that every supernatural manifestation was to be regarded as a token of speedy death. “We shall surely die because we have seen God” was not only Manoah's conclusion, but that of most men of his period. Few indeed were those happy minds who, like Manoah's wife, could reason in a more cheerful style, “If the LORD had meant to destroy us he would not have shewed us such things as these.”

It became *the settled conviction* of all men, whether wise or simple, whether good or bad, that a manifestation of God was not so much to be rejoiced in as to be dreaded. Even as Jacob said, “How dreadful is this place! it is none other but the house of God.” Doubtless the spirit which originated this tradition was much fostered by the *legal dispensation*, which is better fitted for trembling servants than for rejoicing sons. It was of the bond woman, and it gendered into bondage.

The solemn night in which its greatest institution was ordained was a night of trembling, death was there in the slaughter of the lamb. Blood was there sprinkled on a conspicuous part of the house, fire was there to roast the lamb, all the emblems of judgment were there to strike the mind with awe. It was at the dread hour of midnight when the solemn family conclave was assembled, the door being shut, the guests themselves standing in an uneasy attitude and awestricken, for their hearts could hear the wings of the destroying angel as he passed by the house.

Afterwards, when Israel came into the wilderness, and the law was proclaimed, do we not read that the people stood afar off, and that bounds were set about the mount, and if so much as a beast touched the mountain it was to be stoned, or thrust through with a dart? It was a day of fear and trembling when God spoke to them out of the fire.

Not with the melting notes of harp, psaltery, or dulcimer did God's law come to His people's ears. No soft wings of angels brought the message, and no sunny smiles of heaven sweetened it to the mind. But with sound of trumpet and thunder, out of the midst of blazing lightnings, with Sinai altogether on a smoke, the law was given. The law's voice was, “Come not nigh hither!!”

The spirit of Sinai is fear and trembling. The legal ceremonies were such as rather to inspire fear than to beget trust. The worshipper at the temple saw bloodshed from the first of the year to the end of the year. The morning was ushered in with the blood-shedding of the lamb, and the evening shades could not gather without blood again being spilt upon the altar.

God was in the midst of the camp, but the pillar of cloud and fire was His unapproachable pavilion. The emblem of His glory was concealed behind the curtain of blue and scarlet and fine twined linen, behind which only one foot might pass, and that but once in the year.

Men spoke of the God of Israel with bated breath, and with voices hushed and solemn. They had not learned to say, "Our Father which art in heaven." They had not received the Spirit of adoption, and were not able to say Abba. They smarted under the spirit of bondage, which made them sorely afraid when by any peculiar glory the Lord displayed His presence among them.

At the bottom of all this slavish dread lay *sin*. We never find Adam afraid of God, nor of any manifestation of Deity while he was in paradise an obedient creature, but no sooner had he touched the fatal fruit than he found that he was naked and hid himself. When he heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, Adam was afraid and hid himself from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden.

Sin makes miserable cowards of us all. See the man who once could hold delightful converse with his Maker now dreading to hear his Maker's voice and skulking in the grove like a felon who knows his guilt, and is afraid to meet the officers of justice.

Beloved, in order to remove this dread nightmare of slavish fear from the breast of humanity, where its horrible influence represses all the noblest aspirations of the soul, our Lord Jesus Christ came in the flesh. This is one of the works of the devil which He was manifested to destroy. Angels came to proclaim the good news of the advent of the incarnate God, and the very first note of their song was a foretaste of the sweet result of His coming to all those who shall receive Him.

The angel said, "Fear not," as though the times of fear were over, and the days of hope and joy had arrived. "Fear not." These words were not meant for those trembling shepherds only, but were intended for you and for me, yea for all nations to whom the glad tidings shall come. "Fear not." Let God no longer be the object of your slavish dread! Stand not at a distance from Him any more. The Word is made flesh. God has descended to tabernacle among men that there may be no hedge of fire, no yawning gulf between God and man.

Into this subject I wish to go this morning as God may help me. I am sensible of the value of the theme, and am very conscious that I cannot do it justice. I would earnestly ask God the Holy Spirit to make you drink of the golden cup of the incarnation of Christ such draughts as I have enjoyed in my quiet meditations.

I can scarce desire more delight for my dearest friends. There is no antidote for fear more excellent than the subject of that midnight song, the first and best of Christmas chorales, which from its first word to its last note chimes out the sweet message, which begins with, "Fear not"—

*"It is my sweetest comfort, Lord,
And will for ever be,
To muse upon the gracious truth
Of Thy humanity.*

*"Oh joy! there sits in our flesh,
Upon a throne of light,
One of a human mother born,
In perfect Godhead bright!*

*"Though earth's foundations should be moved,
Down to their lowest deep;*

*Though all the trembling universe
Into destruction sweep;*

*“Forever God, forever man,
My Jesus shall endure;
And fix’d on Him, my hope remains
Eternally secure.”*

Dear friends, I shall first detain your attention with a few remarks upon *the fear* of which I have already spoken. Then, secondly, we shall invite your earnest attention to *the remedy* which the angels came to proclaim. And then thirdly, as we may have time, we shall endeavor to *make an application of this remedy to various cases*.

I. Turning to THE FEAR of the text, it may be well to discriminate.

There is a kind of fear towards God from which we must not wish to be free. There is that lawful, necessary, admirable, excellent fear which is always due from the creature to the Creator, from the subject to the king, ay, and from the child toward the parent. That holy, filial fear of God, which makes us dread sin, and compels us to be obedient to His command, is to be cultivated, “we had fathers of our flesh, and we gave them reverence, shall we not be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live?” This is the “fear of the LORD which is the beginning of wisdom.” To have a holy awe of our most holy, just, righteous, and tender Parent is a privilege, not a bondage.

Godly fear is not the “fear which hath torment,” perfect love does not cast out, but dwells with it in joyful harmony. The angels perfectly love God, and yet with holy fear they veil their faces with their wings as they approach Him, and when we shall in glory behold the face of God, and shall be filled with all His fullness, we shall not cease humbly and reverently to adore the Infinite Majesty. Holy fear is a work of the Holy Ghost, and woe unto the man who does not possess it. Let him boast as he may, his “feeding himself without fear” is a mark of his hypocrisy.

The fear which is to be avoided is *slavish fear*, the fear which perfect love casts out, as Sarah cast out the bondwoman and her son. That trembling which keeps us at a distance from God, which makes us think of Him as a Spirit with whom we can have no communion, as a being who has no care for us except to punish us, and for whom consequently we have no care except to escape if possible from His terrible presence.

This fear sometimes arises in men’s hearts from their *thoughts dwelling exclusively upon the divine greatness*. Is it possible to peer long into the vast abyss of infinity and not to fear? Can the mind yield itself up to the thought of the Eternal, Self-Existent, Infinite One without being filled, first with awe and then with dread?

What am I? An aphid creeping upon a rosebud is a more considerable creature in relation to the universe of beings than I can be in comparison with God. What am I? A grain of dust, that does not turn the scale of the most delicate balance is a greater thing to man than a man is to JEHOVAH. At best we are less than nothing and vanity.

But there is more to abase us than this. We have had the impertinence to be disobedient to the will of this great One, and now the goodness and greatness of His nature are as a current against which sinful humanity struggles in vain, for the irresistible torrent must run its course and overwhelm every opponent.

What does the great God seem to us out of Christ but a stupendous rock, threatening to crush us, or a fathomless sea, hastening to swallow us up? The contemplation of the divine greatness may of itself fill man with horror, and cast him into unutterable misery! Dwell long upon such themes, and like Job, you will tremble before JEHOVAH, who shaketh the earth out of her place, and makes the pillars thereof tremble.

Each one of the sterner attributes of God will cause the like fear. Think of His power by which He rolls the stars along, and lay your hand upon your mouth. Think of His wisdom by which He numbers

the clouds, and settles the ordinances of heaven. Meditate upon any one of these attributes, but especially upon His justice, and upon that devouring fire which burns unceasingly against sin and it is no wonder if the soul becomes full of fear.

Meanwhile let *a sense of sin* with its great whip of wire, flagellate the conscience and man will dread the bare idea of God. For this is the burden of the voice of conscience to guilty man, "If thou wert an obedient creature, this God were still terrible to thee, for the heavens are not pure in his sight, and he charged His angels with folly. What art thou that thou shouldst be just with God, or have any claims upon him; for thou hast offended, thou hast lifted the hand of thy rebellion against the infinite majesty of omnipotence—what can become of thee? what can be thy portion but to be set up forever as a monument of his righteous wrath?"

Now such a fear as that being very easily created in the thoughtful mind, and being indeed, as it seems to me, the natural heritage of man, as the result of sin is most doleful and injurious. For wherever there is a slavish dread of the Divine Being, *it alienates man most thoroughly from his God*. We are by our evil nature enemies to God, and the imagination that God is cruel, harsh, and terrible, adds fuel to the fire of our enmity.

Those whom we slavishly dread we cannot love. You could not make your child show forth love to you if its little heart was full of fear, if it dreaded to hear your footstep, and was alarmed at the sound of your voice, it could not love you. You might obey some huge ogre because you were afraid of him, but to love him would be impossible.

It is one of the masterpieces of Satan to deceive man by presenting to his mind a hateful picture of God. He knows that men cannot love that which terrifies them, and therefore he paints the God of grace as a hard, unforgiving being who will not receive the penitent and have pity upon the sorrowful.

God is Love! Surely if men had but grace enough to see the beauty of that portrait of God—that miniature sketched with a single line, "God is love!" they would willingly serve such a God. When the Holy Ghost enables the mind to perceive the character of God, the heart cannot refuse to love Him.

Base, fallen, depraved as men are, when they are illuminated from on high so as to judge rightly of God, their hearts melt under the genial beams of divine love, and they love God because He has first loved them. But here is the masterpiece of Satan, that he will not let the understanding perceive the excellence of God's character, and then the heart cannot love that which the understanding does not perceive to be loveable.

In addition to alienating the heart from God, this fear *creates a prejudice against God's Gospel of grace*. There are persons in this place this morning who believe that if they were religious they would be miserable. It is the settled conviction of half of London that to trust in Jesus and to be obedient to God, which is the essence of all true religion, would be wretchedness itself.

"Oh," says the worldly man, "I should have to give up my pleasure if I were to become a Christian." Now, this is one of the most wicked slanders that ever was invented, and yet it has current belief everywhere. It is the popular theology that to be an enemy to God is happiness, but to be the friend of God is misery. What an opinion men must have of God, when they believe that to love Him is to be wretched!

Oh, could they comprehend, could they but know how good God is, instead of imagining that His service would be slavery, they would understand that to be His friend is to occupy the highest and happiest position which created beings can occupy.

This fear in some men *puts them out of all heart of ever being saved*. Thinking God to be an ungenerous being, they keep at a distance from Him, and if there be some sweet attractions now and then in a sermon, some gentle meltings of conscience, the good desire never matures into the practical resolve. They do not say, "I will arise and go unto my Father," because they do not know Him as a Father, they only know Him as a consuming fire. A man does not say, "I will arise and go unto a consuming fire."

Nay, but like Jonah, he would fain pay his fare, regardless of the expense, and go to Tarshish to flee from the presence of the Lord. This it is that makes calamity of being a man at all to most men, that they cannot get away from God, since they imagine that if they could but escape from His presence they would then wander into bliss. But being doomed to be where God is, then they conceive that for them wretchedness and misery alone remain. The soft warnings of mercy and the thunderings of justice are alike powerless upon men so long as their hearts are seared and rendered callous by an unholy dread of God.

This wicked dread of God frequently *drives men to extremities of sin*. The man says, “There is no hope for me. I have made one fatal mistake in being God’s enemy, and I am irretrievably ruined. There is no hope that I shall ever be restored to happiness or peace. Then what will I do? I will cast the reins upon the neck of my passions, I will defy fate and take my chances. I will get such happiness as may be found in sin. If I cannot be reconciled to heaven I will be a good servant of hell.”

Hence men have been known to hasten from one crime to another with a malicious inventiveness of rebellion against God, as if they could never be satisfied nor contented till they had heaped up more and more rebellions against the majesty of God whom in their hearts they dread with a burning Satanic dread mingled with hate.

If they could but comprehend that He is still willing to receive the rebellious, that His bowels yearn towards sinners, if they could but once believe that He is love and wills not the death of a sinner but had rather that he should turn unto Him and live, surely the course of their lives would be changed. But the god of this world blinds them, and maligns the Lord until they count it folly to submit to Him.

Dear friends, this evil which works a thousand ills operates in ways of evil quite innumerable. *It dishonors God*. Oh, it is infamous, it is villainous to make out our God, who is light and in whom is no darkness at all, to be an object of horrible fear. It is infernal, I may say no less, it is devilish to the highest degree to paint Him as a demon, who is JEHOVAH, the God of love.

Oh, the impertinence of the prince of darkness, and the madness of man to consent thereunto, that God should be depicted as being unwilling to forgive, unkind, untender, hard, cruel. Whereas He is love, supremely and above all things, love. He is just, but all the more truly loving because He is just. He is true, and therefore sure to punish sin, yet even punishing sin because it were not good to let sin go unpunished. This is base ingratitude on the part of a much-receiving creature that he should malign his benefactor.

The evil which is thus done to God recoils upon man, for this *fear hath torment*. No more tormenting misery in the world than to think of God as being our implacable foe. You Christians who have lost for a while, the spirit of adoption, you who have wandered a distance from God, nothing can be more tormenting to you than the fear that the Lord has cast you away and will not again receive you.

You backsliders, nothing can hold you back from your heavenly Father like a dread of Him. If you can but really know that He is not to be dreaded with slavish fear, you will come to Him as your child does to you, and you will say, “My Father, I have offended—pity me! My Father, I am vexed and grieved for my sin—forgive me, receive me again into Thine arms, and help me by Thy mighty grace that henceforth I may walk in Thy commandments, and be obedient to Thy will.”

My dear friends, you who know anything about spiritual life, do not you feel that when you have sweet thoughts of God breathed into you from above, and have His special love to you shed abroad in your hearts, it is then that you are holiest! Have you not perceived that the only way in which you can grow in that which is morally and spiritually lovely, is by having your gracious God high in your esteem, and feeling His precious love firing your hearts?

That they may be like little children is the very thing which God desires for His elect ones. It is this which His Spirit works in His chosen, it is to this that we must come if we are to be meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light. Slavish fear is so opposed to the childlike spirit that it is as the poison of asps to it. Dread and fear bring out everything in us that is of the man rather than of the child, for it stirs us up to resist the object of our fear.

An assured confidence in the goodness of God casts out fear and brings forth everything that is childlike in us. Have you ever seen a child trust some big rough man, and melt him down by its trustfulness? It trusted where there was no ground for trust apparently, and made ground for itself.

That same child simply and implicitly trusting in a good and generous father is a noble picture, and if I, a poor, weak, feeble child, conscious that I am such, knowing that I am all folly and weakness, can just believe in my good, great God, through Jesus Christ, and come and trust myself with Him, and leave Him to do as He likes with me, believing that He will not be unkind, and cannot be unwise. If I can wholly repose in His love and be obedient to His will, why then I shall have reached the highest point that the creature can reach. The Holy Ghost will then have wrought His finished work in me, and I shall be fit for heaven.

Beloved, it is because fear opposes this, and prevents this, that I would say with the angel, “Fear not.”

II. I fear I weary you while I speak upon this somewhat dolorous theme, and therefore with as much brevity as the abundance of the matter may permit, let us notice in the second place, THE CURE FOR THIS FEAR, which the angel came to proclaim.

It lies in this—“Unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.”

*“Till God in human flesh I see,
My thoughts no comfort find;
The holy, just and sacred Three,
Are terrors to my mind.*

*“But if Immanuel’s face appear,
My hope, my joy begins;
His name forbids my slavish fear,
His grace removes my sins.”*

That is the remedy—God with us—God made flesh. Let us try and show this from the angel’s song.

According to the text they were not to fear, first of all, because *the angel had come to bring them good news*. How does it run? It says, “I bring you good tidings of great joy.” But what was this Gospel? Further on we are told that the Gospel was the fact that Christ was born. So then, it is good news to men that Christ is born, that God has come down and taken manhood into union with Himself. Verily this is glad tidings. He who made the heavens slumbers in a manger.

What then? Why then God is not of necessity an enemy to man, because here is God actually taking manhood into alliance with Deity. There cannot be permanent, inveterate, rooted enmity between the two natures, or otherwise the divine nature could not have taken the human into hypostatical union with itself. Is there not comfort in that? You are a poor, erring, feeble man, and that which makes you afraid of the Lord is this fear that there is an enmity between God and man. But there need not be such enmity, for your Maker has actually taken manhood into union with Himself.

Do you not see another thought? The Eternal seems to be so far away from us. He is infinite, and we are such little creatures. There appears to be a great gulf fixed between man and God, even on the ground of creatureship. But observe, He who is God has also become man.

We never heard that God took the nature of angels into union with Himself, we may therefore say that between Godhead and angelhood there must be an infinite distance still. But here the Lord has actually taken manhood into union with Himself. There is therefore no longer a great gulf fixed, on the contrary, here is a marvelous union. Godhead has entered into marriage bonds with manhood.

O my soul, you do not stand now like a poor lone orphan wailing across the deep sea after your Father who has gone far away and cannot hear you. You do not now sob and sigh like an infant left naked and helpless, its Maker having gone too far away to regard its wants or listen to its cries. No, your Maker has become like yourself. Is that too strong a word to use? He without whom was not anything

made that was made is that same Word who tabernacled and among us and was made flesh, made flesh in such a way that He was tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin.

O manhood, was there ever such news as this for you! Poor manhood, you weak worm of the dust, far lower than the angels, lift up your head and be not afraid! Poor manhood, born in weakness, living in toil, covered with sweat, and dying at last to be eaten by the worms, be not you abashed even in the presence of seraphs, for next to God is man, and not even an archangel can come in between, nay, not next to God, there is scarcely that to be said, for Jesus who is God is man also. Jesus Christ, eternally God, was born, and lived and died as we also do. That is the first word of comfort to expel our fear.

The second point that takes away fear is that this man who was also God was actually *born*. Observe the angel's word, "Unto you is *born*."

Our Lord Jesus Christ is in some senses more man than Adam. Adam was not born, Adam never had to struggle through the risks and weaknesses of infancy. He knew not the littlenesses of childhood—he was full grown at once. Father Adam could not sympathize with me as a babe and a child. But how man-like is Jesus! He is cradled with us in the manger. He does not begin with us in mid-life, as Adam, but He accompanies us in the pains and feebleness and infirmities of infancy, and He continues with us even to the grave.

Beloved, this is such sweet comfort. He that is God this day was once an Infant, so that if my cares are little and even trivial and comparatively infantile, I may go to Him, for He was once a child. Though the great ones of the earth may sneer at the child of poverty and say, "You are too mean, and your trouble is too slight for pity." I recollect with humble joy that the King of heaven did hang upon a woman's breast, and was wrapped in swaddling bands, and therefore I tell Him all my griefs.

How wonderful that He should have been an infant, and yet should be God over all, blessed forever! I am not afraid of God now. This blessed link between me and God, the holy child Jesus, has taken all fear away.

Observe, the angel told them somewhat of His *office*, as well as of His birth. "Unto you is born this day a *Savior*." The very object for which He was born and came into this world was that He might deliver us from sin. What then, was it that made us afraid? Were we not afraid of God because we felt that we were lost through sin? Well then, here is joy upon joy. Here is not only the Lord come among us as a man, but made man in order to save man from that which separated him from God.

I feel as if I could burst out into a weeping for some here who have been spending their living riotously and gone far away from God their Father by their evil ways. I know they are afraid to come back. They think that the Lord will not receive them, that there is no mercy for such sinners as they have been.

Oh, but think of it—Jesus Christ has come to seek and to save that which was lost. He was born to save. If He does not save He was born in vain, for the object of His birth was salvation. If He shall not be a Savior, then the mission of God to earth has missed its end, for its design was that lost sinners might be saved.

Lost one, oh, lost one, if there were news that an angel had come to save you there might be some cheer in it, but there are better tidings still. God has come, the Infinite, the Almighty, has stooped from the highest heaven that He may pick you up, a poor undone and worthless worm. Is there not comfort here? Does not the incarnate Savior take away the horrible dread which hangs over men like a black pall?

Note that the angel did not forget to describe *the person* of this Savior—"A Savior which is *Christ*." There is His manhood. As man He was anointed. "*The Lord*." There is His Godhead. Yes, this is the solid truth upon which we plant our foot. Jesus of Nazareth is God. He who was conceived in the womb of the virgin and born in Bethlehem's manger is now, and always was, God over all, blessed for ever.

There is no Gospel if He be not God. It is no news to me to tell me that a great prophet is born. There have been great prophets before, but the world has never been redeemed from evil by mere testimony to the truth, and never will be. Tell me that God is born, that God Himself has espoused our nature, and

taken it into union with Himself, then the bells of my heart ring merry peals, for now may I come to God since God has come to me.

You will observe, dear friends, however, that the substance of what the angel said lay in this, “*Unto you.*” You will never get true comfort from the incarnate Savior till you perceive your personal interest in Him. Christ as man was a representative man. There never were but two thoroughly representative men. The first is Adam—Adam obedient the whole race stands, Adam disobedient the whole race falls. “In Adam all die.”

Now, the man Jesus is the second great representative man. He does not represent the whole human race, He represents as many as His Father gave Him. He represents a chosen company. Now, whatever Christ did, if you belong to those who are in Him He did for you. So that Christ circumcised or Christ crucified, Christ dead or Christ living, Christ buried or Christ risen, you are a partaker of all that He did and all that He is, for you are reckoned as one with Him.

See then, the joy and comfort of the incarnation of Christ. Does Jesus, as man, take manhood up to heaven? He has taken me up there. Father Adam fell, and I fell for I was in him. The Lord Jesus Christ rises, and I rise if I am in Him.

See, beloved, when Jesus Christ was nailed to the cross all His elect were nailed there, and they suffered and died in Him. When He was put into the grave the whole of His people lay slumbering there in Him, for they were in the loins of Jesus as Levi was in the loins of Abraham. And when He rose they rose and received the foretaste of their own future resurrection, because He lives they shall live also, and now that He has gone up on high to claim the throne, He has claimed the throne for every soul that is in Him.

Oh, this is joy indeed! Then how can I be afraid of God, for this day, by faith, I, a poor undeserving sinner, having put my trust in Jesus, am bold to say that I sit upon the throne of God. Think not that we have said too much, for in the person of Christ every believer is raised up together, and made to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. Because as Jesus is there, representatively, we are each one of us there in Him.

I wish that I had power to bring out this precious doctrine of the incarnation as I could desire, but the more one muses upon it, the more happy one becomes. Let us view it as an all-important truth, that Jesus, the Son of God, has really come in the flesh. It is so important a truth that we have three witnesses appointed to keep it before us upon earth. We have been insisting many times in this place upon the spirituality of Christian worship. We have shown that the outward in religion, by itself, avails nothing, it is the inward spirit that is the great thing.

I must confess that I have sometimes said in myself, I hope not rebelliously, “What is this baptism for, and what is this communion of the Lord’s supper for?” These two outward ordinances, whatever may be their excellent uses, have been the two things around which more errors have clustered than around anything else. And I have heard it said, by friends inclined to follow more fully the teachings of the Quakers, “Why not put aside the outward and visible altogether? Let it be the Spirit Baptism, and not the water. Let there be no bread and wine, but let there be fellowship with Christ without the outward sign.”

I must confess, though I dare not go with it, because I hope to be held fast by the plain testimony of Scripture, yet my heart has somewhat gone with the temptation, and I have half-heartedly said, “Men always will pervert these two ordinances, would not it be as well to have done with them?” While I have been exercised upon the point, conscious that the ordinances must be right, and must be held, I have rested upon that text, “There are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, the water, and the blood.”

And what do they bear witness to? They bear witness to the mission of Jesus as the Christ, in other words to the real incarnation of God. They bear witness to the materialism of Christ. Have you ever noticed that when people have given up the two outward ordinances, they have usually betrayed a tendency to give up the literal fact that “God was made flesh”?

The literal fact that Christ was really a man has generally been doubted or thrown into the background when the two outward ordinances have been given up, and I believe that these two symbolical ordinances, which are a link between the spiritual and the material, are set up on purpose to show that Christ Jesus, though most gloriously a spirit, was also a man clothed in a body of real flesh and blood like our own, so that He could be touched and handled even as He said, "Handle me and see; a spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see me have."

When I think of the Holy Spirit who bears witness that Christ was really a man, I thank Him for that witness, then I turn to the water, and when I read that Christ was publicly baptized in the Jordan, I perceive that He could not have been a phantom. He could not have been a mere spectral appearance, for He was immersed in water. He must have been a solid substantial man. The preservation of the ordinance of baptism is a witness to the reality of the incarnate God.

Then comes the blood, He could not have shed blood on Calvary if He had been a specter. There could have been no blood streaming down from His side when the spear pierced Him if He had been only a ghostly apparition. He must have been solid flesh and blood like ourselves. And as often as we come to His table, and we take the cup and hear it said, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood," there is a third witness on earth to the fact that Jesus did appear in very flesh and blood among men.

So the Spirit, the water, and the blood are the three standing testimonies in the church of God that Christ was God, and that He was also really, solidly, and substantially man.

I shall delight in the ordinances all the more because of this. Those two ordinances serve to make us recollect that Christ was really flesh and blood, and that religion has something to do with this flesh and blood of ours. This very body is to rise again from the tomb. Jesus came to deliver this poor flesh from corruption, and so, while we must ever keep the spiritual uppermost, we are prevented from casting away the material body as though that were of the devil. Christ purified as well the realm of matter as the realm of spirit, and in both He reigns triumphant. There is much comfort here.

III. Lastly, we can only occupy a few seconds in APPLYING THE CURE TO VARIOUS CASES.

Child of God, you say, "I dare not come to God today, I feel so weak." Fear not, for He that is born in Bethlehem said, "A bruised reed I will not break, and the smoking flax I will not quench." "I shall never get to heaven," says another, "I shall never see God's face with acceptance. I am so tempted." "Fear not," for ye have not an high priest which cannot be touched with a feeling of your infirmities, for He was tempted in all points like as ye are." "But I am so lonely in the world," says another, "no man cares for me." There is one man at any rate who does so care, a true Man like yourself. He is your brother still, and does not forget the lonely spirit.

But I hear a sinner say, "I am afraid to go to God this morning and confess that I am a sinner." Well, do not go to God but go to Christ. Surely you would not be afraid of Him. Think of God *in* Christ, not out of Christ. If you could but know Jesus you would go to Him at once. You would not be afraid to tell Him your sins, for you would know that He would say, "Go, and sin no more."

"I cannot pray," says one, "I am afraid to pray." What, afraid to pray when it is a man who listens to you! You might dread the face of God, but when God in human flesh you see why be alarmed? Go, poor sinner, go to Jesus.

"I feel," says one, "unfit to come." You may be unfit to come to God, but you cannot be unfit to come to Jesus. There is a fitness necessary to stand in the holy hill of the Lord, but there is no fitness needed in coming to the Lord Jesus. Come as you are, guilty, and lost, and ruined. Come just as you are, and He will receive you.

"Oh," says another, "I cannot trust." I can understand your not being able to trust the great invisible God, but cannot you trust that dying, bleeding Son of Man who is also the Son of God?

"But I cannot hope," says another, "that He would even look on me." And yet He used to look on such as you are. He received publicans and sinners and ate with them, and even harlots were not driven from His Presence. Oh, since God has thus taken man into union with Himself be not afraid!

If I speak to one who by reason of sin has wandered so far away from God that he is even afraid to think of God's name, yet inasmuch as Jesus Christ is called "the sinner's Friend," I pray you think of *Him*, poor soul, as *your* Friend. And oh! may the Spirit of God open your blind eyes to see that there is no cause for your keeping away from God except your own mistaken thoughts of Him! May you believe that He is able and willing to save to the uttermost! May you understand His good and gracious character, His readiness to pass by transgression, iniquity, and sin! And may the sweet influences of grace constrain you to come to Him this very morning!

God grant that Jesus Christ may be formed in you, the hope of glory, may be formed in you; and then you may well sing, "Glory to God in the highest; on earth peace, and goodwill toward men." Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—LUKE 2:1-24

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.

END VOLUME 12