

PROMPT OBEDIENCE

NO. 3310

A SERMON

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*“As soon as they hear of me, they shall obey me: the strangers shall submit themselves unto me.”
 Psalm 18:44.*

THERE is no doubt that we have David speaking to us in this Psalm, but it is equally certain that we must not limit it to David. Paul quoted verses 2 and 49 as applying to David’s Lord, and we shall not be wrong in following his example with regard to our text.

I. I am going to make several observations upon the text, and the first is that IT TELLS US THE SAVIOR’S CLAIMS UPON THE HEARTS OF MEN. He claims that they should obey Him and submit themselves unto Him. The great practical end of the gospel is to bring the human heart into obedience to Christ and to make the stubborn will acknowledge allegiance to His sway.

Now, in this matter many great mistakes are made by men. *Some think it is sufficient to go to a place of worship and to hear or repeat solemn words.* This is a good thing to do, of course, but if all ends there, the purpose of the gospel is not served. Such people will find, to their cost, that it is not the mere hearers of the word, but the *doers* of it who are blessed. We still need the message that the Apostle James wrote long ago, “If any be a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a mirror: for he beholds himself and goes his way, and immediately forgets what manner of man he was.” It is the wayside hearers who simply hear the word, but neither understanding nor receiving it, they derive no benefit from it. Let none of us be numbered among them, nor among those who merely repeat certain forms of words without feeling the force and power of them in their hearts.

Others think it is enough if they carefully attend to the gospel. If they do that, they seem to imagine that this is all that can be expected of them. This also is good as far as it goes—we have not a word to say against it, but much to say in its favor. But, my dear hearer, if you pay ever so much outward attention to the word of God, unless you submit your soul and spirit to its dominion, you cannot possibly expect to receive benefit from it. You are in the position of one who pays much attention to his physician’s prescription who spells out the Latin words, notes the quantities of the various drugs that are to be compounded, but who never gets a chemist to make up the prescription, or if he does go as far as that—never tastes the medicine! Such a man will never be cured of his malady in that way, nor will you be cured of your soul-sickness unless you actually take the remedy which the great physician has so graciously prescribed. You may carefully note all the bakers’ shops that you pass on your way home tonight. You may correctly calculate the quantity of bread that would be required for your family—and you may accurately estimate what it would cost—yet your household will not be fed unless you actually purchase the bread and give to each one a portion in due season. And your soul will not be fed unless you really partake of the bread of life.

What Christ requires of you who hear His word is that *you should obey Him and submit yourselves unto Him.* How are you to do this? The Apostle John writes, “This is His commandment that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as He gave us commandment.” This is Christ’s claim upon us, that we should trust Him—trust Him as our Savior, trust Him as our Lord and Master—trust Him so as to obey Him in all that He has commanded us. If we do this, we shall find that His commandments are not grievous and that obedience to them will yield to us the peaceable fruits of righteousness. He says to you, sinner, “Give up all other confidences and come and trust in Me. If you

would be saved, do not merely hear Me say to you, ‘Look unto Me,’ but really look unto Me, believe in Me, trust Me, forsake all your false refuges, leave those Babel buildings of your own devices and come to the sure rock whereon a soul may safely build for time and for eternity.” When you hear this command of Christ, give heed to it—obey Him and submit yourself to Him!

Then, if obedience to that command is truly rendered, there will follow obedience to all the Savior’s commands. No man is really saved unless he is, in his heart, obedient to Christ. I do not say that you will be perfect, but you will desire to be so. I do not say that you will not be tempted to sin until you die, but there will be no sin that you will love, there will be no sin from which you will not long to be delivered. Your spirit will cheerfully bend down its neck to wear the collar of sacred service and as far as your inner and spiritual man is concerned, you will cry mightily unto God against the very thought of sin—and pray that you may walk in holiness and in the fear of the Lord all the days of your life.

If any of you have thought that trusting Christ does not involve obeying Him, you have made a great mistake. They do very wrong who cry up believing in Christ and yet depreciate obedience to Him, for obeying is believing in another form and springs out of believing. Neither may anyone say, “I will obey one command of Christ, but I will not obey another.” The very principle of trustful obedience lies in your not making any choice as to which commands you will obey. A soldier asks no question and makes no objection when he receives his orders—his captain bids him go and he goes—or he bids him come and he comes. He never says, “I will go thus far in obedience, but no further.” So must it be with you if you enlist under the banner of the captain of our salvation—your obedience must be wholehearted and complete. If tonight you are the Lord’s, you must say to Him out of the very depths of your soul, “Show me, my Master, what You would have me do. You have bidden me trust You, and I do trust You. And out of that trust springs a reverent desire to submit absolutely to Your holy will. Help me, by Your gracious Spirit, to obey You in everything. And from this time forth, O blessed Savior, reign as the undisputed Lord of my whole life!”

We see, then, what the claim on Christ upon the hearts of men really is. And we who preach the gospel must never rest satisfied until our hearers really submit themselves unto Him. It brings tears to our eyes as we recall how earnestly they often listen to our message—and how they even compliment us upon our faithfulness in delivering it—yet how they will be obedient to a part of it and yet be disobedient to the rest, for they will not obey Christ and submit themselves unto Him. Oh, that they had more submissive hearts, but neither you nor I can give them such hearts. We can proclaim the truth of God in their hearing and we can weep before the Lord if they do not receive it—but the power to save them lies not in human hands—we must look up to the almighty Savior and trust that He will bless the message which we have delivered in His name!

II. The second inference which we draw from the text is that **IN ORDER TO RENDER OBEDIENCE TO CHRIST, THERE IS NO NEED OF A LONG PROBATION**—“As soon as they hear of Me, they shall obey Me: the strangers shall submit themselves unto Me.”

It seems that some, as soon as they heard of Christ, yielded themselves up to Him. It used to be a very common notion, and the idea still prevails in some churches, that in order to have faith in Christ there must be long preparatory exercises. Many of the Puritans, excellent as they were, made a mistake in this matter. They felt afraid to say to a sinner, when they found him just as a sinner, “Believe on Christ”—they thought it was necessary that he should first undergo a certain amount of law-working and conviction plowing—and then they might come in with the preaching of the gospel. I owe much to Doddridge’s *Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul*, and I used to recommend it to others, but I do not do so now. That book does show the way of salvation, but it is done in a roundabout fashion—very different from the simple gospel plan, “Believe and live,” “Look and be saved.” It is true that many do have the experiences which Doddridge describes, but that is no proof that they *need* have them! It is probable that most Christians do go through that Slough of Despond which Bunyan so graphically describes, but it is not absolutely necessary that any one of them should go through it! “He that believes on the Son has everlasting life,” whether he has been in the Slough of Despond or not!

If it were necessary, I could pick out scores of members of this church whose conversion is beyond question, and who have been faithful followers of Christ for years, yet their faith in Christ came all of a sudden. The gospel just knocked at the door of their hearts and entered at once—no, in many cases, it seemed to enter without knocking! Think of Saul of Tarsus, “breathing out threats and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord,” yet suddenly arrested near Damascus, and crying out to that very Jesus whom he was persecuting, “Lord, what will You have me to do?” Think of the jailer at Philippi—a rough heathen who was about to commit suicide, almost immediately crying out, “What must I do to be saved?” And very soon afterwards baptized, “believing in God with all his house.” Think of the thief on the cross, joining with his fellow malefactor in reviling at Christ, yet presently praying, “Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom,” and receiving the cheering answer from Christ, “Today shall you be with Me in Paradise”! These were sudden conversions which were worked without that long and painful preparation which has been so cried up in some of our churches that it has become a great hindrance to many! We must put nothing before the cross of Christ—His great atoning sacrifice is the one object to which we must direct the sinner’s gaze! Genuine evangelical *repentance* runs in double harness with *faith* and they should never be separated. To suppose that we are to go through a sort of quarantine before we can be admitted into the harbor of salvation is a very serious mistake. Our text flatly contradicts this idea, for it says, “As soon as they hear of Me, they shall obey Me.”—

“There is life for a look at the Crucified One.”

There is life for a *look*—even though the heart should be as hard as the nether millstone! There is life for a *look*—even though as yet the character has undergone no change! There is life for a *look*—even though you cannot see any signs of grace—

“There is life for a look at the Crucified One.”

Jesus Christ does not look for anything in you except sin and need, but finds in Himself both the source of mercy and the means by which that mercy may come to the very chief of sinners. May the Holy Spirit make it very clear to you that there is no necessity for you to wait a long while before the blessing of salvation may be given to you, but that you may have it this very moment! The pool at Bethesda was only efficacious for the healing of the first one who stepped into the water after it had been troubled by the angel, so that the afflicted might wait there for years and still remain unhealed. But the pool which Christ filled with His precious blood always has efficacy in it, so that whoever steps in, though he may not have been waiting by the pool for even a minute, though it may be the first time he ever heard of the precious blood of Christ—if he trusts in the finished work of God’s dear Son, he shall be immediately saved!

III. A third remark which I think may be fairly based upon the text is this—IN SOME CASES, THE MESSAGE OF SALVATION WINS A VERY SPEEDY VICTORY.

It was very remarkable that three thousand persons should have believed on Christ after Peter’s sermon on the day of Pentecost. We scarcely seem to expect, nowadays, to see three thousand souls converted, baptized and added to the church in a single day, but when the gospel was first proclaimed, converts were gathered very rapidly. It seemed as though a great pile of dry wood had been accumulated and it only needed a torch to set it aflame at once! In the time of the Reformation, so rapidly was the gospel spread that men said that the writings of Luther were borne on the wings of angels—and so many of all classes believed the truth of God that hallelujahs arose from the plowman in the field and the servants in the kitchen as well as from the lords and ladies of the land! “The Lord gave the word: great was the company of those that published it,” and still greater the multitude of those that received it! When Whitefield preached to great crowds of people who had never heard the gospel before, it was like plowing virgin soil—the truth appealed to them with all the force of novelty—and also with the conviction that it was exactly suited to their case so that they received it with sudden joy and thousands were converted!

Many persons who have never previously listened to the gospel come to this Tabernacle—and it often happens that the very first sermon they hear is blessed to them! Last Tuesday, when I saw some 33 candidates for baptism, one or two of them said that they had never been to any place of worship until

they came here. Curiosity had prompted them to come and they were surprised to find that the preacher seemed to know all about them, for his message exactly suited their case. They received the word suddenly, but so mightily did it affect them that they would not give it up, for it had come to them “in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.” There is no place where I feel so happy or so much at home in preaching as on this familiar spot—with your eyes fixed upon me and your heart drinking in the truth of God—but for the winning of souls in great numbers, give me a congregation that has never heard the gospel! If I were a fisherman and were asked where I would prefer to fish, I would answer, “Where nobody else has ever fished.” So, if a preacher of the gospel might pick his place, he might well say, “Let me preach where the people have never yet heard the gospel.” If we can get among certain classes of society, high or low, to whom the gospel is a novelty, I feel persuaded that the grand prophecy of the text shall be gloriously fulfilled in their midst—“As soon as they hear of Me, they shall obey Me: the strangers shall submit themselves unto Me.” Let us *expect* this blessed result of our labors and be constantly in earnest breaking up fresh soil and casting the gospel net into waters that have never yet been fished. Oh, that some who are here for the first time tonight may obey Christ as soon as they hear of Him! He came into the world to save sinners! He took upon Himself our flesh and took upon Himself our sins—and suffered in our place for our sins—“the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God.” If we trust in Him who bore our sins in His own body on the cross, that trust brings us salvation! And it works in us peace and joy, gratitude and love—and helps us to serve the Lord with reverence and holy fear!

IV. Now we advance to a fourth point which is that STRANGERS WILL ALSO YIELD THEMSELVES TO CHRIST.

The point to which I want now to call your very special attention is not so much the suddenness of the conversion as the condition of the people who, according to our text, shall submit themselves to Christ. There are some who, in the fullest sense of the term, are “aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of praise, having no hope, and without God in the world.” Some of you who regularly attend a place of worship, are “aliens” in the sense in which Paul used the word—you are like the mixed multitude that came up with the children of Israel out of Egypt. Though you are not part of “the commonwealth of Israel” spiritually, you are at present eternally mingled with the true Israelites, the believing children of Abraham. But there are many others who are in a very definite way, “strangers.” The Sabbath bell brings no Sabbath music to them. They may rest on Sunday, but their rest consists in simply lolling about in their shirtsleeves and reading the Sunday newspaper. They never think of going into a place of worship unless it is for a wedding, or a funeral, or what they call “a christening.” There are thousands in this so-called Christian land who have never looked inside a Bible and know absolutely nothing of its contents! I have no doubt that there are to be found in London thousands of persons who, if they were asked what is meant by the atonement, would reply that they had never heard of such a thing! And as to the simple doctrine of trusting for salvation to the merits of the Lord Jesus Christ, there could not be a greater piece of news to many of our fellow citizens than this!

Well now, these people whom I have been describing are, indeed, strangers to Christ, yet He says in our text, “the strangers shall submit themselves unto Me.” They do not know Him. But “the Lord knows them that are His” and I trust that among the strangers there are many whom the Lord has foreknown from all eternity who shall, in due time, hear His voice and follow Him, rejoicing in that eternal life which is the portion of His sheep! In the very heart of the apostate church of Rome, God may have some of His elect—and I have no doubt that He has! I pray that His Spirit may soon bring them forth into the light. Among those who are besotted with superstition and among those who have given themselves up to work with both hands in the way of carnal confidence, God may have His chosen ones. And if He has, He will surely fetch them out. Never despair concerning the church of God! The greatest blasphemer may yet become the boldest preacher of the gospel! He who hates Christ most today may love Him most tomorrow—and he will do so if the Spirit of God takes possession of him! It is not merely in the house of prayer that God has His elect—they may be tonight in the alehouse, or in the theatre, or in still worse places—but the Spirit of God can find them wherever they are! Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, not only

takes care of the 99 that are safely sheltered in the fold, but He goes out to seek and to find the one sheep that is lost! Even though all hell's hosts may have surrounded the poor wanderer, the prey shall be taken from the mighty, and the lawful captive shall be delivered.

Are you a stranger, dear friend? Are you a stranger to the gospel, a stranger to grace, a stranger to your God? Are you a stranger to the bended knee and the throne of grace? Are you a stranger to this blessed Bible and to the hope of heaven which it clearly reveals? "Oh, yes!" you say, "I am indeed a stranger and there is no hope for me!" But listen to the text, friend—"the strangers shall submit themselves unto Me." Give good heed to other gracious messages in this most precious book. "Come now, and let us reason together, says the Lord: though your sins are as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow, though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool." The heart of everlasting love is moved with pity towards you and God, Himself, speaks through a man's voice as He cries to you from heaven, "Look unto Me, and be you saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else." "As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked should turn from his way and live: turn you, turn you from your evil ways, for why will you die?" Surely, if there are any of these strangers here tonight, they ought to be compelled to yield to Christ by the prophecy of the text, "the strangers shall submit themselves unto Me."

V. Now I come to my fifth remark which is that OUR TEXT BEING TRUE, IT SHOULD GREATLY ENCOURAGE THOSE OF US WHO ARE WORKING FOR CHRIST.

Dear brothers and sisters, I am devoutly thankful to God that so many of you are watching for souls, and not only so, but that you are winners of souls! It was but little that you could do, dear friend, but you saw a stranger here and you spoke kindly to him. Perhaps you gave him a tract, certainly you prayed for him! And God blessed your efforts and the stranger yielded himself to Christ. You have sometimes visited a neighbor in time of sickness and have dropped a word in season for Christ, and you did well, for that kindly action was the means of winning a soul for the Savior! So let the past cheer you and let the text encourage you to persevere in such holy service. Possibly you know some persons who never go to a place of worship and who are quite ignorant of the gospel. Do not think of them as unlikely to be blessed! On the contrary, believe that they are the very persons who are the most likely to be influenced for good when once they are brought under the sound of the gospel! There are, alas, many who have so long heard the word preached that they have become gospel-hardened—the truth of God has become to them a savor of death unto death instead of a savor of life unto life. But it is not so with these people of whom I am speaking—they are not gospel-hardened, so be hopeful about them—go and seek them out, bring them to hear the gospel and then pray that they may be among the strangers who shall submit themselves to Christ!

If I had bread to give away, I should not be in a hurry to take it to those who had refused it again and again. But if I knew where there was a colony of hungry folk who had not tasted food for days, I think it would be among them that I should be made welcome! The place to take the gospel is not where the light of God has long been shining and men have closed their eyes to it—but down the dark court and alley where they have not before had the light and, consequently, have not had the opportunity of rejecting it. Take the gospel there and it may be that the very first time you do so, souls will be converted! If not, go again and again! Keep on sowing the good seed of the kingdom, believing that ancient promise, "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goes forth and weeps, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him."

If one should spend one's whole life for God and win only one soul by the most earnest and devoted effort, it would be a rich reward to see that one star shining forever in the firmament of heaven, to see that one gem glistening forever in the diadem of Christ, to see that one sheep feeding forever in the pastures of eternal life! It strikes me that it will help to make heaven even more heavenly to us when God has blessed us to the bringing of other souls to share our bliss in glory. Some of us will not be among strangers when we have passed through the gates of pearl! We have spiritual children already there for whom we have travailed in birth until Christ was formed in them! And whatever may be the fate of all earthly

relationships, our spiritual relationships will abide forever. How blessed it will be to be welcomed there by those whom we have begotten through the gospel and with what joy we shall present them to our God as we humbly yet gratefully say, “Here am I, Father, and the children whom You have given me”!

VI. My last remark is a sad one. It has been uppermost in my mind all the while I have been speaking upon the other points. It is this, that albeit there are some who obey as soon as they hear the gospel and others who once were strangers who willingly yield themselves unto Christ, yet it is painfully evident that **THERE ARE SOME WHO DO JUST THE OPPOSITE.**

As for hearing the word, there are some of you who are always hearing it! You scarcely ever miss an opportunity of hearing it! Thickly as the leaves in autumn fall from the trees will the remembrances of gospel ministrations come back to you, but they are all as faded and as worthless to you, now, as are those dead leaves themselves! Some of you will never be lost for lack of hearing the gospel—what would others give if they could only hear what you have heard? Some of you have heard the story of the cross from your early childhood. The softest and sweetest of all lips, your mother’s, told it to you as long ago as you can remember. Then you heard it again and again from the lips of the earnest Sunday school teacher in whose class you sat so long. Some of you heard it from a loving wife or from a fond husband. You heard the gospel preached by a godly minister now in glory. And last of all, you have heard it from me, also, and I can add that you have heard it preached very plainly, for whatever my faults may be, clouding the gospel or hiding its meaning is not one of them. Yes, you have heard the gospel all these years—and while others have believed it and have been saved— you appear to be no nearer doing so than when first you heard it! And I tremble lest those solemn words of the Lord Jesus Christ should be true concerning you, “Verily I say unto you, that the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you.” Remember how the Savior upbraided the cities wherein most of His mighty works were done because “they repented not”—and beware lest their doom should also be yours!

Our text says, “The strangers shall submit themselves unto Me,” but you have not submitted yourselves to Christ. The great sinners, the very chief of sinners, have yielded themselves up to the sway of Christ, but you have not done so. This is not because you do not understand the way of salvation, for you know clearly what the gospel is and what it requires. With some of you it is not because of lack of feeling, for you have felt a great deal—you have been the subjects of all sorts of impressions. Your thoughts have often been like a case of knives cutting into your inmost spirit, or like a nest of adders stinging your soul. Friend, it has come to this pass with you—mere hearing of the word is of no service to you, even the bare remembrance of it is of no use—you must either yield to Christ or you must perish! There must be no more tarrying, delaying, dilly-dallying. You are lingering on the very brink of the precipice and you must either fall over or be saved by clutching at the garments of the Savior who stands close beside you. O soul, is it not a mercy that you are pushed to this extremity? Is it not a blessing that you are brought to this emergency—that you must either yield yourself to Christ or die as His enemy? Oh, submit yourself to Him! Your hand trembles, but stretch it out and touch the hem of His garment. You cannot save yourself, but He can save you! Look unto Him, for again I remind you that—

“There is life for a look at the Crucified One.”

When the bronze serpent was lifted up in the wilderness there was no need for the serpent-bitten Israelites to come up close to the pole on which it was suspended—all they had to do was to look—and as many as looked, lived! That is what you have to do! Look to Jesus! Look and live! Give the faith-look at Him who died upon the cross as the sinner’s Substitute and Surety—and as soon as you look, you shall live—and live forever! There is no need for you to uncover your wounds to show where the serpent has bitten you. There is no need for you to wait until the venom of the serpent reveals its deadly character more than it has already done. But look at once, lest you should tarry until you are unable to look!

Let me ask you a most solemn question—Does the Son of God, Himself, bleed and die for sinners and is not that all that is required to put away your guilt? Is Jehovah, Himself, satisfied with the sufferings of His beloved Son? And are you *not* satisfied? Has Christ woven the spotless and perfect robe of righteousness in which sinners may stand forgiven before the great white throne, and are you seeking to

add to it some of the filthy rags of your own righteousness? O soul, think not that you can share the work and the glory of salvation with the almighty Savior! Yoke a gnat with an archangel if you will, but never think of linking yourself with Christ in order to complete the great work of salvation. Oh, no! In that matter it must be none but Jesus, for—

*“None but Jesus
Can do helpless sinners good.”*

I wish I could put the truth of God so plainly that you could not help seeing it, yet I know that the Holy Spirit must open your eyes or you will never see it, however clearly it is set before you. I pray Him to do it and to do it now—and so to fulfill those two glorious “shalls” in my text—“As soon as they hear of Me, they *shall* obey Me: the strangers *shall* submit themselves unto Me.” This is my comfort—He who gave this promise and prophecy in its fullest and deepest meaning will certainly fulfill it! Blessed Master, make these potent “shalls” true in our midst tonight! Many have heard of You—give them the grace to obey You! There are strangers here—may they submit themselves unto You and so be no longer strangers, “but fellow citizens with the saints; and of the household of God”! So may it be, for Jesus’ sake! Amen.

**EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:
MATTHEW 9:1-17.**

Verses 1, 2. *And He entered into a boat, and passed over, and came into His own city. And, behold, they brought to Him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed: and Jesus, seeing their faith, said unto the sick of the palsy; Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you.* [See Sermons #2337, Volume 39—THE PHYSICIAN PARDONS HIS PALSIED PATIENT and #3016, Volume 52—GOOD CHEER FROM FORGIVEN SIN—Read/download both sermons, free of charge, at <http://www.spurgeongems.org>.] Our Lord dealt first with the greater evil, for sin is worse than even such a dreadful disease as the palsy. Forgiveness of sin is an even greater mercy than the healing of sickness.

3-7. *And, behold, certain of the scribes said within themselves, This man blasphemeth. And Jesus knowing their thoughts, said, why think you evil in your hearts? For which is easier, to say, Your sins are forgiven you; or to say, Arise, and walk? But that you may know that the Son of man has power on earth to forgive sins (then said He to the sick of the palsy), Arise, take up your bed, and go unto your house. And he arose, and departed to his house.* Jesus first proved His divinity by reading the secret thoughts of the caviling scribes—and then gave a further evidence of it by working this very notable miracle!

8-9. *But when the multitudes saw it, they marveled, and glorified God, which had given such power unto men. And as Jesus passed forth from there, He saw a man named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of customs: and He said to him, Follow Me. And he arose, and followed Him.* [See Sermon #2493, Volume 42—“A MAN NAMED MATTHEW”—Read/download the entire sermon, free of charge, at <http://www.spurgeongems.org>.] This was another notable miracle, and equally set forth the power of divine grace.

10-11. *And it came to pass, as Jesus sat at meat in the house, behold, many publicans and sinners came and sat down with Him and His disciples. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto His disciples, Why eats your Master with publicans and sinners?* He was more at home with publicans and sinners than with scribes and Pharisees! And they were more likely to welcome Him as their Lord and Savior.

12-13. *But when Jesus heard that, He said unto them, They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. But go you and learn what that means, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.* If He had come to call the righteous, where would He have found them? His call was not likely to be heeded by the self-righteous, but sinners heard it with joy—and so were made righteous by Him.

14. *Then came to Him the disciples of John, saying, Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but Your disciples fast not?* We must not suppose that because a thing is proper for ourselves, it must, therefore, be binding upon everybody else. It might be fit and right that the disciples of John should often fast—their circumstances might require it—but it might be quite wrong for the disciples of Christ to fast, as they might be in very different circumstances.

15. *And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bride chamber mourn, so long as the bridegroom is with them?* Could Christ's disciples fast while Christ fed them with heavenly foods? While His presence was to them like heaven begun below, it would have been inconsistent for them to be mourning and fasting.

15. *But the days will come when the bridegroom shall be taken from them and then shall they fast.* And nobody would say that they were turncoats if, when their circumstances had so greatly altered, they acted in harmony with their changed circumstances. The disciples could not mourn while Christ was with them! Can you, Believer, fast while Christ is with you? It cannot be. But when He has gone from you, then you will sorrow fast enough. So we must neither judge others by ourselves, nor judge ourselves at one time by what we were at some other time.

16. *No man puts a piece of new cloth unto an old garment, for that which is put in to fill it up takes from the garment—when it shrinks—*

16. *And the tear is made worse.* There must be a fitness about things. Do not impose fasting upon a joyful heart, or the singing of joyful hymns upon a sad spirit.

17. *Neither do men put new wine into old bottles: else the bottles break, and the wine runs out, and the bottles perish: but they put new wine into new bottles, and both are preserved.* Do not expect from a young beginner that which would be unsuitable to him, even though it should be most comely and seemly in an aged Christian. And do not expect to see in an aged Christian all the vigor and alertness of spirit that you look for in ardent souls in all the fervor of their first love to Christ. Let us mind the relations of things.

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