

A SIGHT OF SELF

NO. 437

A SERMON DELIVERED ON SUNDAY MORNING, MARCH 2, 1862,
 BY REV. C. H. SPURGEON,
 AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“But we are all as an unclean thing and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags. And we all do fade as a leaf. And our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away. And there is none that calls upon Your name, that stirs up himself to take hold of You: for You have hid Your face from us and have consumed us, because of our iniquities. But now, O Lord, You are our Father. We are the clay, and You our Potter. And we all are the work of Your hand.”
Isaiah 64:6, 7, 8.

IT is easy to commit sin but hard to confess it. Man will transgress without a tempter. But even when urged by the most earnest pleader, he will not acknowledge his guilt. If we could but bring men into such a state of heart that they felt themselves to be guilty, there would be hope for them. But this is one of the most hopeless signs concerning our race, that it is so hardened and so perverse, that even when sin stares it in the face, it still pleads innocence and proudly lifts up its head and challenges the accuser.

Transgressors always seek to escape from the painful and humiliating duty of acknowledging their offenses. Some seek to hide it both from themselves and others, silencing their own consciences and throwing dust in the eyes of their companions. As Achan, digging in the earth to hide the Babylonian garment and the wedge of gold, they forget that their sins will surely find them out. As the foolish ostrich, when pursued by the hunters, buries its head in the sand and when it cannot see its enemy thinks it has escaped—so these men take the fact that they are undiscovered by men, and are at peace with themselves, as a good omen. In reality, it is a sad sign of hardness and blindness of heart.

Many pursue yet another course and make excuses for their offenses. They did do wrong, it is true, but then there is much to be said in extenuation. Like Aaron, they urge the clamors of the people, or they will have it that even Providence, itself, *compelled* them to sin. “I cast gold into the fire and there came out this calf,” as if sin were an accident, and not a willful wickedness. As if disobedience to God were a sort of necessity of nature, and not a direct rebellion of the will against the Majesty of Heaven.

Others, too, will blame their sin on their fellows—a trick which they learned from our first parents, for Adam, in the garden, said—“The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree and I did eat.” Or they may have learned it from our mother, Eve, for even she understood this stratagem—“The serpent beguiled me and I did eat.” So they will have it that they were dragged into sin by force—they were overly persuaded or craftily enticed, so that they ought not to be considered as accomplices in the crime—but that they are, in fact, only the instruments of *others’* sins and could hardly resist. So they say others must take the whole of the guilt and they themselves should go free.

Some who have attained to a higher pitch of brazen impudence will actually deny altogether that they have sinned. They will come before God’s servant as Ananias did before Peter, and say, “Yes, for so much,” while yet they are holding a lie in their right hand. We have some who will stoutly say, “We have not sinned,” and who think themselves insulted if in plain terms you accuse them of having violated the Law of God. There are some, also, and those not a few, who endeavor to color their sins and to cloak them with a profession of godliness, by attending to the ceremonies of religion with ostentatious carefulness.

Like the Pharisees of old, they devour widows’ houses but they make long prayers. They hate Christ in their hearts but they tithe mint and anise and cummin. They violate the precepts of the Law, but they bind them on their foreheads, wear long fringes on their garments, and write texts of Scripture on the doorposts of their houses. These serve at the altar of the devil, in the garb of God’s priests and offer unclean flesh upon the high places, in pretended honor of the God of Israel. We know that all these classes abound everywhere, for a man will do anything to hide sin from himself.

And he will give skin for skin, yes, all that he has, that he may be self-justified. He will do his all so that, he thinks, he may have something to answer when he stands before the Most High. So that he may find food for his pride and a coverlet for the infamous arrogance of his heart, he will dig and labor and strive. He will give his goods to the poor and his body to be burned, that he may win a righteousness of his own.

Beloved, if you and I have ever been partakers of the Grace of God, we have been brought to the distasteful duty of confession of sin, for it is not possible that we have been pardoned if we have refused to acknowledge our guilt. We cannot be partakers of the life of God in the soul if still we can say, “Lord, I am righteous and of myself I can plead exemption from Your curse.” A clear sense of our lost estate is absolutely necessary to make us even *seek* pardon.

As the man who thinks himself in good health will never send for a physician, as the man who is sufficiently warm will not avail himself of an extra garment which is offered to him, as the man who is not hungry will not accept an invitation to a feast of charity—so we find that none will come to Christ but those who feel that they *must* come—and that outside of Him they are utterly lost, ruined and undone. Moreover, as none will seek the mercy till they know their need, so we may rest assured that none would value that mercy even if it were given to them before the spiritual poverty had become manifest.

What is medicine to the healthy man? Send it to his door and what thanks will you receive? You have been guilty of an impertinence. Why offer charity to the man who is rich and increased in goods? Will he receive your dole? Will he not turn up his nose and tell you to look for the beggar in the street, but not to mistake him for one who needs your alms? Even, I say, should God give salvation to those who feel no need of it, they would not value the priceless benefit. This diamond of God would be to them but a piece of valueless broken glass. This gem from Heaven but as a pebble from the brook—

*“What comfort can a Savior bring
To those who never felt their woe?
A sinner is a sacred thing,
The Holy Spirit has made him so.”*

It is certain that God will never give pardon to those who do not confess their need of it, for it is not consistent with the sovereignty and dignity of God that He should present pardon to the man who will not first honor God’s Law by pleading that he is guilty. If a man shall still say, “I have not broken the Law,” is God unmerciful if He refuse to forgive him? Will you harden your brow like iron, and your heart as adamant—and will you accuse God of want of love, if He says, “I will send no mercy to that man, neither shall he find pardon at My hands, but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit and trembles at My Word”?

Is it any wonder, I ask you, that He should pass by the proud and the self-righteous and leave them unblest? By their own profession they *do not want* His mercy. They declare they *do not need* to be forgiven. Then perish! Perish, for you righteously deserve it. Go down to the Hell which you have chosen by your pride, and reap the fruits of your own willfulness—but impugn not the tenderness of God, if He adhere to this inviolable rule, that if we will not confess our sins we shall perish in our guilt—

*“For Christ as soon would abdicate His own,
As stoop from Heaven to sell the proud a throne.”*

This morning it is my intention, as God shall help me, to describe that view which every gracious soul is sure to have of himself. Then, secondly, to warn you of certain dangers to which those are enclosed who only know their need but who have not yet found Christ. And I hope to close with the *pleas*—some of which are in the text, some to be found elsewhere—which every soul that is conscious of guilt may urge before the Throne of Mercy.

I. First, then, I HAVE TO DESCRIBE THE VIEW WHICH EVERY TRULY GRACIOUS SOUL WILL TAKE OF HIMSELF. And as I describe it, I hope there are some here who will say, “That is what I think of myself, that is my condition before God.” Though you should think yours to be a hopeless case, yet I pray you rest assured that it is not so if you can join in the confession through which I am now about briefly to pass. I feel persuaded that it is the Spirit of God which has brought you to a deep sense of your lost estate and has thus begun a good work in your soul.

1. Every gracious soul, who is truly enlightened by the Spirit, has a clear sense of the root of all his guiltiness. He knows the plague of his own heart and cries with the text, “We are all as an unclean thing.” He discovers that not merely his outward acts, but that his very *person* is essentially sinful in the sight of God. He was willing to confess once that the

streams were black, but now he perceives to his horror that the fountain itself is defiled. You could have made him previously confess that the fruits of his boughs were bitter. But now he perceives that the root is corrupt, the tree is evil, the very sap is poisonous.

He is brought to feel now that sinfulness lies in the very marrow of his bones and is inherent in his blood. That he himself—as well as his thoughts and his acts—he himself, is “as an unclean thing.” The metaphor that is here used is hardly understood by us, because it is drawn from the Levitical and ceremonial use of the word “unclean.” Under the Jewish Law when a person was unclean he could not go up to the house of the Lord. He could offer no sacrifice.

God could accept nothing at his hands. He was an outcast and an alien so long as he remained unclean. If he sat upon a bed, it must be washed with water. If he touched a vessel of earth it must be broken, for it was unclean. If he ate any food, the whole of that food was unclean and no clean person might venture to touch it. When this uncleanness was connected with disease, as in the case of leprosy, the man became loathsome—so utterly loathsome to himself that it must have been a horror to have lived. And so loathsome to his fellow creatures that his only appropriate spot was solitude, where alone, far from any water brook of which human lips might drink, alone so that the air might not be contaminated with his disease, alone, he lived and cried, “Unclean! Unclean! Unclean!”

Every gracious soul knows itself to be by nature as an unclean thing. He feels that of himself he cannot worship God acceptably. That he cannot stand within the veil on his own merits. That he can bring no sacrifice which God can accept. That he is the means of injury to others. That his ill example leads others astray. And that, in fact, he is not fit to stand in the congregation of the righteous, nor to be numbered with God’s chosen, for he is, in himself, polluted and polluting.

When a sense of his horrible depravity and degradation is heavy upon him, before he has found Christ, that man will slink into the House of God like a felon and hide. Or, if he sits down with God’s people, it is with the idea that he is out of place like a filthy beggar in a palace, or a loathsome reptile in a hallowed temple. Often he feels, when a Christian speaks to him, as if he were not fit to give an answer. He feels himself to be in person, utterly unfit to live.

Ah, well do I remember the period when first I discovered this Truth of God. And how did I wish, as John Bunyan did, that I had been anything but a man—a toad, or a serpent—sooner than have been a man, a creature that had offended its own Maker. A creature in itself so prone to go astray, so sure to sin if left alone. In “Grace Abounding,” Bunyan says, “My original and inward pollution, that, *that* was my plague and affliction. That, I say, at a dreadful rate, always putting forth itself within me. That I had the guilt of, to amazement, by reason of that, I was more loathsome in my own eyes than was a toad.”

And I thought I was so in God’s eyes, too. “Sin and corruption,” I said, “would as naturally bubble out of my heart, as water would bubble out of a fountain. I thought that everyone had a better heart than I had. I could have changed hearts with anybody. I thought none but the devil, himself, could equal me for inward wickedness and pollution of mind. I fell, therefore, at the sight of my own vileness, deeply into despair. For I concluded that this condition that I was in could not stand with a state of Grace.”

Oh, there was no talk of human dignity then! There are still some few of your fine preachers who will have it that there is a deal of dignity in human nature—that man is a noble creature. Alas, Brethren, he that talks about the dignity of nature, and the nobility of fallen man, does not know himself. So far from being fit for the pulpit, he ought to begin to learn his catechism. He cannot speak of a state of Grace, for he has not yet learned aright his own state by nature! He must be a blind leader of the blind who can talk like this. He does not know the first work of the Spirit in his own soul, or else he would feel that we are just the reverse of anything that is noble or good, for “we are all as an unclean thing.”

The whole man is vile and desperately evil, there is not one sound spot left within or without. The sin is white on our very forehead, but its core lies deep within. The heart is deceitful. The passions are corrupt. The understanding is eaten through and through with a deadly leprosy. And in us, that is, in our own flesh, there dwells no good thing—

*“Lord, when Your Spirit deigns to show
The badness of our hearts,
Astonished at the amazing view,
The soul with horror starts.
The dungeon opening, foul as Hell,
Its loathsome stench emits;
And, brooding in each secret cell,*

*Some hideous monster sits,
Swarms of ill thoughts their bane diffuse,
Proud, envious, false, unclean;
And every ransacked corner shows
Some unsuspected sin."*

2. But in the second place, the spiritually enlightened man—and we insist upon it that none else are spiritually enlightened—the *spiritually enlightened man, then, perceives that all his actions are evil*. “All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags.” Our *righteousnesses*. It does not say our *unrighteousnesses*. Brethren, if our righteousnesses are so bad, what must our *unrighteousnesses* be? Our “righteousnesses,” that is, our prayers, our tears, our good deeds—those things whereof we once gloried—when we are really taught of God, we perceive that these are filthy rags.

The expression, “filthy rags,” in the Hebrew, is one which we could not with propriety explain in the present assembly. As the confession must be made privately, and alone before God, so the full meaning of the comparison is not meant for human ears. Suffice it to say that rags which have bound up a foul, putrid, running sore, are understood by some commentators and our righteousnesses are comparable to such rags as these. Oh tell me not that we exaggerate when we describe the Fall of man! O Sirs! Say not that we love to depreciate our race and that we slander that noble creature, man.

All those things which you call exaggerations fall below the mark—even below the mark of what some of us have felt concerning ourselves—and that is very far from what God knows of our state. Sirs, there is sin in our prayers. They need to be prayed over again. There is filth in the very tears that we shed in penitence. There is sin in our very *holiness*! There is unbelief in our faith. There is hatred in our very love. There is the slime of the serpent upon the fairest flower of our garden.

I know time was, in looking back upon my past life—and it had been moral and without exception to the eyes of others—yet I loathed myself that ever I should have lived such an unworthy life. And indeed at the present I can do but little otherwise, for “in me (that is in my flesh) dwells no good thing.” I am sure when the soul is convicted of sin it will look upon self-righteousness as the most detestable lie that ever was forged by Hell. And it will regard all self-confidence as the most frightful delusion and deception into which the soul can fall.

Trust in our doings, Brethren?—we *have no doings* to trust! If our best works are bad, and so bad that they are as filthy rags, what must our *bad* works be? Oh, I would have some of you remember your bad works this morning that you may repent of them. You remember how the Apostle speaks of “fornicators, adulterers, thieves, covetous, drunkards,” and he says, “such were some of you. But you are washed, but you are sanctified”? There is no wisdom in daintily handling men’s sins. There are vices in London as much as in Corinth, and we have in our Churches those who once indulged in them.

And in this congregation this morning we may have some who *live* in them still. O God, show them their sin. Let them feel their guilt before You. And let us all, as we shall do, if Your spirit is in our hearts, confess that all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags.

3. In the next place, the enlightened heart into which the candle of the Lord has shone, *is led to see the failure and futility of all its resolutions to be better*. “We all do fade as a leaf.” Some of you have been lately awakened, you have felt yourselves to be lost souls. And what have you been doing? Why, you have promised to be better and you have tried to be. You have mended in various ways, or, rather, you have *proposed* to yourselves to amend.

Perhaps you made up your mind that you would never go out to your labor again without prayer—that you would never lose your temper—that when tempted to indulge your passions you would restrain them—that those things which had been your besetting sins should now be given up. What progress have you made with your resolutions? Are you not today like the man who resolved and *re-resolved* but remained the same? Truly in our own strength, we all do fade as a leaf. We look fair and green in the morning when we rise from our beds, fresh with midnight vows and repenting—but before night we are as faded and withered as the dry sere leaf withered with autumn blasts.

We went forth, saying, “Today I shall stand—this time I shall not fall—now I am safe—I have made up my mind—I am resolved—I know there is a something in me which can improve, I can be better if I like—I will reform—I will stand up and make myself a Christian.” But what became of it all? Down it went and, “like the baseless fabric of a vision,

left not a wreck behind.” You returned like a dog to his vomit, or the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire. How many slips men make before they learn to put themselves into God’s arms to be carried by Him!

It seems as if we must try fifty times before we will learn that simple Truth of God—“Without Me you can do nothing.” We run about over the treacherous beach looking for a spot of sand just a little harder than the last. And we compliment ourselves that we have hit upon a much more solid site for our new and noble house. “Ah, that was a mistake last time—that was a poor bit of sand to build on—this time it is all right. See how hard it is! The tide does not come here often—see it does not yield, it is like a bowling green, smooth and hard. I will build here.”

The timbers are laid, the goodly stones are squared and the house rises. But, hark! What is that? The breakers are coming up. The tide certainly does reach this very spot. It is a full spring tide that is now marching up the shore and lo, the materials are engulfed in the all-devouring deep. Our tower has tottered and great is its fall. What will disappointed man do now, Sirs? Why, he will look for another bit of sand, and so he will go on unless the Grace of God prevents him. But when Divine Grace comes he will give up all the sand at once, and begin to build upon the Rock and upon the Rock, alone.

I would have you reform as much as you can. But do not mix your reformation with religion, for you need *regeneration*—reformation will not suffice. No touching up of the old house will suffice! Down with it, down with it, for the very foundation is rotten! It is not *mending* your clothes. It is throwing them away and wearing the new robes of righteousness that will fit you for the feasts of Glory. We want no Gibeon “old shoes and clouted.” You must have shoes of iron and brass—for those are the only ones that can carry you to Heaven.

You may use your brush and your niter and your soap. But if you would enter Heaven you must go to God and ask Him to make the Ethiopian anew, for none of these things can make him white before God. “All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags—we all do fade as a leaf.” Our best professions, hopes, resolutions and pretensions—all of them fade like shadows, dreams and fancies of the brain.

4. But the truly awakened soul knows a fourth thing, namely, that *he is not in himself able to stand against the invasions of temptation*, for the text has put it—“Our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us sway.” There is a dry leaf hanging alone on that tree. All its companions have long ago fallen and are gone. Sere-leaf, you will not long hold your place, for you depend for your connection with the tree upon a very slender thread.

Listen! The north wind howls. Now shall all the trees be clear. Where is the withered leaf now? Hurried away to join the rotting heap upon the ground. So, when men find that their vows wither, they will still hang to their hopes and to their moralities. But some strong temptation comes unexpectedly upon them just at the moment when their mind is susceptible of its power and where are they? The devil catches their tinder dry and then strikes the spark. He knows how to time his temptations. He does not assail his victims when they are ready to resist him, but waylays them in the dark corner of some cutthroat lane and smites the unguarded passenger with a deadly blow.

The thief never lets you know when he intends to break in, for, “if the good man of the house had known in what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and would not have suffered his house to be broken into.” The temptation comes like a howling north wind at an unexpected moment, and where is your man now? Unable to resist, carried away by the very vice which he thought he had renounced. “Our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.”

Every Christian here knows that the Grace of God is stronger than all the winds of temptation. And he knows, also, that apart from that, he can no more resist sin than the chaff from the hand of the winnower can stand against the blast of a hurricane. He feels that if he is put into the furnace he can abide the fire through Divine Grace but that apart from Grace he is as thread before the flame or like wax before the fire. The well-instructed Believer is very much afraid of himself. He dares not go into temptation, for he feels that a man who carries a bomb within him ought to mind that he keeps away from the sparks—and that he who has a powder keg in his heart ought not to play with fire.

He knows that in himself, apart from the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, he would as certainly go back to his old sins, and fall again into his past lusts, as do those who crucify the Lord afresh, and put Him to an open shame. Ah, my Hearer, if you do not know this, I am afraid you do not know yourself. And if you do not know yourself, you do not know Christ. We must traverse the stripping room before we can enter into the robbing room. Pull that bracelet from the man’s wrist! Off with that crown! Strip him of the purple robe! Away with those sandals! Tear up that cloak. Leave him naked.

He is never fit to be clothed till he is naked. Let his foul skin be seen, for he cannot be washed till he can see his filth. Now set his feet upon the Rock, but first of all, pull his feet from the sand, for as long as they have any foothold anywhere else, they cannot stand upon the Rock of Ages safely and securely. I hope that very many of you do know that your iniquities, like the wind, will carry you away—unless you have the Grace of God.

5. Those souls upon whom God's sunlight has once shone are also painfully aware of their own *natural weakness and slothfulness in prayer*. What does the text say? "There is none that calls upon Your name, that stirs up himself to take hold of You." In my carnal state I used to hear a minister whose preaching was, as far as I could make out, "Do this and do that, and do the other, and you will be saved." According to his theory, to pray was a very easy thing. To make yourself a new heart was a thing of a few instants and could be done at almost any time. I was really convinced that I could turn to Christ when I pleased, and therefore I could put it off to the last part of my life when it might be conveniently done upon a sick bed.

But when the Lord gave my soul its first shakings in conviction, I soon knew better. I went to pray. I did pray, God knows, but it seemed to me that *I* did not. What, *I* approach the Throne? Such a wretch as *I* lay hold on the promise? *I* venture to hope that God could look on me? It seemed impossible. A tear, a groan, and sometimes not so much as that, and that was all. An "Ah," a "Would that," a "But"—the lips could not utter more. It was prayer, but it did not seem so, then. Oh, how hard is prevailing prayer to a poor God-provoking sinner! Where was the power to lay hold on God's strength or wrestle with the angel? Certainly not in *me*, for I was weak as water and sometimes hard as the nether millstone.

Every Believer feels at times a fearful inability in prayer. He goes to the Throne of Grace, and groans, and comes forth from his closet no more refreshed than a man who rises from his bed after having tossed to and fro all night. He knows what it is to pray, but he cannot perform the duty. He knows there is a power in prayer, but he cannot get the power. The chariot wheels are knocked off and he drags heavily along where once his soul was like the chariot of Abinadab.

Well, I think we do not know ourselves unless we have been led to see that God must draw near to us, or else we cannot draw near to Him—and unless we have been led to loathe ourselves, because of this indifference in prayer—we have not yet discovered what we are. Oh, to think that we cannot pray! This is not an inability for which we deserve to be comforted but a damnable inability. This is one of the greatest sins we have, that we cannot approach our Maker. It is an awful and terrific thing that we should have become so wicked, and so vile, that we cannot even ask for mercy and cry for it aright. This is no excuse but an aggravation of our guilt. Have you felt this, my Hearer? Oh, if you have not, I fear you have to begin again and learn the first elements of faith.

6. Lastly on this point, that soul which has once perceived itself in the black colors of its iniquity has discovered that through sin it has lost all the favor and the love of God which might have come if it had been without sin. For so says the text, "For You have hid Your face from us and have consumed us because of our iniquities." It is no thing to play with—that hiding of God's face.

When the Prophet says, "You have consumed us," it is a dreadful word. Do you see that burning fiery furnace? The soldiers of Nebuchadnezzar are about to cast three bound men into it, that they may be consumed. The fire is exceedingly hot, so that it may consume them quickly. To the apprehension of an awakened sinner that is his fate. He feels that he must be cast into Hell and be utterly consumed. No, more, with some, though not with all to the same degree, the man *is* consumed.

Some of us feel as if our locks were crisp even now with that awful burning through which we passed when we were first convicted of sin. Bunyan seems to have enjoyed the full light of God's countenance all the more because of his distinct recollection of the solemn period of conviction through which he passed. If you read Hart's hymns, you will be struck with their singular clearness concerning Christ and full justification.

That certainty and assurance results very much from the fact that Hart retained to his dying day, the remembrance of his experience when he was under the whip of the Law. You will remember that when he is trying to describe his own feelings, he fails to do so and he adds—

*"Oh, what a dismal state was this!
What horrors shook my feeble frame.*

*But, Brethren, surely you can guess,
For you, perhaps, have felt the same."*

Now, I do not think that all who know the Lord suffer this consumption to the same extent. But there must be in your heart—if you are saved at all—there must be heard a voice putting down every hope but Christ's, casting down every thought but that which looks to Him.

You must have seen the death warrant condemning your excuses, your false trusts, your proud boastings, and glorying, to an ignominious execution or surely you know not the Lord. And if you have not thus known and felt that God is angry with the wicked every day, and that you in yourself are the object of His wrath, I fear you have not yet been quickened of the Spirit. But I know there are many such here—multitudes who have passed through this and who take this view of themselves today and others who are now suffering under it. May the Lord bring us all to Christ and to His finished work!

II. I come now to the second part of my subject, which I shall dismiss with two or three words only. My dear Friends, as I have been speaking I have seen you lean forward to catch every word, for you have said, "Ah, that is me," and "He speaks of me," and "That is me. He reads my heart in the description."

Well, now, there is a danger I must warn you of and that is—DO NOT BE CONTENT WITH THE MERE KNOWLEDGE THAT IT IS SO. You must not merely *know* that you are lost but you must *feel* it. Do not be content with simply feeling that it is so, but *mourn before God* that it is so, and *hate yourself* that it is so. Do not look upon it as being a misfortune, but as being your own willful sin. Look upon yourselves, therefore, as being guilty sinners, condemned already, not only for all this but condemned because you believe not on Christ, for that, after all, is the crowning condemnation.

And when you really *feel* your sinfulness and mourn it, do not stop there. Never give yourself any rest till you know that you are delivered from it, for it is one thing to say—"Ah, I do sin," but it is quite another thing to say—"He has saved me from my sin." It is one thing to have a repentance which makes you leave the sin you loved before, and another thing to talk about *repentance*. Ah, I have sometimes seen a child of God when he has sinned, and I have seen his broken-hearted actions, and heard his piteous confessions, and I can say that my heart goes out toward the man in whom there are tears of repentance of the right kind.

It is one of the fairest sights that is seen under Heaven when a Believer who has gone wrong is willing to say, "I have sinned," and when he no more sets himself proudly up against his God but humbles himself like a little child. Such a man as that shall be exalted. But I have seen, and it is a fearful sight to see—I have seen one who can sin and repent and sin and repent. Oh, that dry-eyed repentance is a damnable repentance! Take heed of it, Brothers and Sisters.

I have known a man who professed to have been converted years and years ago, who, ever since that pretended conversion, has lived in a known sin, and yet he thinks he is a child of God because after he has fallen into the sin he has a little season of darkness arising from his conscience. But he quiets that conscience after a time and presumptuously says, "I will not give up my hope." Oh, that is an awful thing! God deliver you from dry-eyed repentance, for it is not repentance! God save you from that!

I pray you, my dear Hearers, while I describe these things, do not be saying, "There is my comfort, because I *feel* it." That is not comfort! There is no ground for comfort there. It would be just as if when the doctor walked through the hospital and stopped before a bed and said, "A man who has a fever, or a man who has a cancer, feels so and so, and so and so." And the patient should say, "Why that is just what I feel." Is there any comfort in that? The only comfort is that he knows he has a fever.

"A man that has the typhus and must die unless a miracle is worked, feels so and so." "That is how I feel." Is there any comfort in that? No, only the comfort to know that you will die. There is no comfort to be had from a *sense* of our depravity. The comfort is to be had in getting that which is to *cure* the depravity. The comfort is not to be found in the *disease*. We are not to go raking the stinking puddle of our own lusts to find sweet waters.

What? Scrape the foul dunghill of our own corruptions to find something that is to give us hope? God forbid! It is in the *remedy*, not in the disease. It is in *Christ* and not in our *sense* or *guilt* that we are to find peace. I pray you, my dear Hearers, never be satisfied till you find Christ who saves His people from their sins—

*"O! Beware of fondly thinking
God accepts you for your tears."*

*Are the shipwrecked saved by sinking?
Can the ruined rise by fears?"*

III. And now, lastly, though our second head deserves a sermon, THE TEXT SEEMS TO SUGGEST SOME PLEAS. We will use them very briefly but passionately.

Poor troubled Soul, have you been able to go with me in the confession, and can you say, "Lord, I would be made whole. I would be saved from all my sins. I desire to be made holy and to be accepted in Christ"? Then there are many pleas you can use. I am afraid you can not use the first one mentioned in the text—"You are my Father"! I am half afraid you have not faith enough for that, but oh, if you have, what a prevailing plea it is!

"My Father, I have sinned but I am Your son, though not worthy to be so called. My Father, by a father's love forgive, forgive Your erring one. By the heart of Your compassion have mercy upon me!" You who have backslidden can plead this, for you know your adoption. You feel the "Abba Father" on your lips now. Plead it. Would you, being evil, refuse to forgive your child? Would you not take him up in your arms and say, "My child, I cannot bear to see you weep. Your tears make my heart bleed"? Would you not give him a kiss and say, "Go and sin no more"?

But if that should be too hard for you, take the next plea. Say, "Lord, I am the clay and You the Potter. I am helpless like the clay which cannot fashion itself, I am worthless, Lord, like the clay that is of no value. I am filthy, Lord, like clay. I am only worthy to be trod under foot, but You are the Potter and potters can make fine things even of clay, vessels of honor out of dishonorable earth. Here I am, Lord. I put myself into Your hand. I am nothing. Make me what You would have me to be. Come, Lord, and make me, mold me, and fashion me.

"I confess I have no power. I acknowledge that I have no merit. O God, have mercy upon me! I will be the clay, You be the potter! Make me to be Your workmanship, created anew in Christ Jesus unto good works." Will not that plea suffice? Soul, use it and try its prevalence!

But listen, Sinner. There is a sweeter plea than any in the verse before us, for this is an Old Testament text. But I must take you to the New Testament of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for the plea that never fails. It is this, "Lord, it is written that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. If there was never a sinner in the world but one, I am that sinner. If you write it in capital letters I will wear it on my brow, for I the am the chief of sinners. I am a sinner not only generally but particularly, for I have broken this Law and that Law and I have gone astray always.

"But Jesus came to seek and to save that which was lost and You have said, 'This is a faithful saying.' It is, Lord and therefore I believe it. And You have added—'It is worthy of all acceptance.' Therefore, good Lord, I accept it. I believe that Jesus came to save sinners. I trust myself in His hands to save me." It is done, it is done! You are saved, you are saved! Your sins are gone. Your unrighteousnesses are forgiven. You are accepted in the Beloved. What makes this plan so hard?

Brethren, it is hard because it is so *easy*. If it were a hard way of salvation, man would like it. But because it is so easy we cannot bear it. We are so proud, that to be saved on charity, to come to Christ and trust Him to save us, to have done with saving ourselves and to let Him do it all—oh, this is so humbling! It will just suit you, then, poor Soul, for you have said in the words of my text, "All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags." Come before God and say, "Lord, by His agony and bloody sweat, by His Cross and passion, by His precious death and burial, have mercy upon me." And He will answer you when you make mention of the blood. He will say—"Your sins which are many are forgiven you."

Oh, there is hope yet, lost Soul. There is hope yet! To the very gates of Hell let my voice ring this morning—lost Soul, there is hope yet. If you have passed those gates there is no hope. But this side of the gates of Hell there is hope for you. Not in yourself, but in Jesus is your help found. Look to Him. He dies—one look will save you. Look to Him. He lives. He pleads before the Father's Throne. Faith in the living Savior will make you a living soul.

May God in His mercy empty you of self, and then faith is easy. But until you are brought there, faith is impossible. May you be brought to know that you are utterly lost, and then when I pronounce the words of Christ—"Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved"—you will joyfully obey the Divine commandment and you will find in Christ all that your needy spirit wants.

I ask the prayers of the Church very earnestly that God may bless the testimony of this morning to the fetching in of many. "Brethren, pray for us." Do not cease your prayers. Oh, that we may have an ingathering to the Church again as we have had so many times and unto *Him*, even to *Him* shall be the honor forever! Amen.