

CHARITY AND PURITY

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A SERMON

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DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON

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“Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.”

James 1:27

THERE is a great deal said, a great deal written, a great deal of zeal on the one side, and of anger on the other, expended upon the externals of religion. Some think that they should be very fine, not to say gaudy, very impressive, not to say imposing. They like what they call, “bright” services, though we might call them by another name. But the great question with many people is, “What are to be the externals of religion?” What dress is religion to wear? Shall it be robed in the plainness of Quakerdom, or shall it be adorned with all the brilliance of Romanism? Which shall it be?

Well, dear friends, after all, we may spend much time over that question and find no satisfactory answer to it, but the Biblical Ritualism, the pure external worship, the true embodiment of the inward principles of religion is to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction and to keep himself unspotted from the world.

Charity and purity are the two great garments of Christianity. Charity was once cried up by the Romanists to an extreme point—almsgiving seeming to be to many the beginning and the end of piety. It was an almsgiving which had a great deal that was excellent about it and which I cannot regard, as some do, altogether with abhorrence—an almsgiving which covered this land with houses of entertainment for the poor, so that they journeyed from one halting-place to another—and were freely lodged and housed. And we had, at least, no poor law, or workhouse, with all (I was about to say) the horrors which accompany the present system.

But unfortunately, charity was thought to be everything, and purity was too much neglected, so that even those houses which were originally built to be the abode of those who should help the poor and needy, and instruct the ignorant, became, to a sad degree, the haunts of luxury and vice. The monastery, which should have been a place of pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father, as it entertained the fatherless and the widows, was not famed for being unspotted by the world's sins, but on the contrary, it was famous or infamous for its foulness. I have no doubt that this was a great deal exaggerated, but at any rate, the accusation did seem to lie, to a very sad extent, against it, that those who were supposed to be dedicated to God were not such consecrated men as they professed to be. Purity went down and charity went up.

Well, in these days, I sometimes fear lest we should by no means insist too much on purity, but should certainly insist too little upon charity. The visitation of the fatherless and widows in their affliction is not left optional. It is not to be the privilege of a few worldly men who give all their substance to orphanages. Every Christian is bound to wear his part of the external dress of religion, that is, charity.

This charity is to be manifested especially to those who need it most, whose need cannot be a matter of imposture, but must be real. These are the fatherless and widows during the time of their destitution and affliction—when the orphans are not able to earn the bread that perishes—and the mother has her children weeping around her and pining in poverty. Not only *may* this charity be shown, but it *must* be

manifested if we would have pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father. The increase of charity, of careful and discreet consideration for the poor and needy, would bring a great blessing with it, and is what is greatly needed, even in these times, when, perhaps, we fancy that we are doing almost enough in this direction, although we certainly are not.

Yet charity without purity will be of no avail. In vain should we give all our substance to the poor and give our bodies to be burned, if we do not walk in the way of holiness, “without which no man shall see the Lord.” If we do not come out from the world and keep ourselves from its polluting influence, we have not yet learned what pure and undefiled religion really is. We may be very orthodox in creed, or we may be very far advanced in our knowledge of religious matters, we may think ourselves to be Hebrews of the Hebrews, Pharisees of the Pharisees, and as touching the righteousness which is of the law, blameless, but we are in the sight of God only as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal, unless, by divine grace, we have learned to keep ourselves unspotted from the world.

Without forgetting what I have said to you about charity, we will examine those words in our text which especially speak of purity, and in doing so, I notice, first, that *they indicate separation*. Look below their surface and they certainly indicate that. Secondly, *they impress upon us spotlessness*—“to keep himself unspotted from the world.” And thirdly, *they insist upon careful self-watching*.

I. First, then, beloved friends, if you look below the surface of the words here, you will see that **THEY INDICATE SEPARATION**.

“To keep himself unspotted from the world,” implies that the man is not a part of the world. He is in it, but evidently not of it. He is one thing and the world is another thing—and he is so much apart from the world that even a spot from the pools of the world would defile him. He is to be quite outside the world even while he is in it.

Those of you who were here on Monday night must have been greatly amused, and also instructed, by what was said by a young seller of religious tracts. He was a little fellow—you remember him. He was going along with his pack on his back and a big man accosted him in this wise, “Well, my little fellow, do you belong to the Militia?” “No, sir, I do not, but I belong to the King’s Own.” “You little fool,” said the man, “why, there is not any king in this country, so you cannot belong to the King’s Own.” The colporteur replied, “I don’t know that I am a fool any more for that, for, do you know, I belong to another country?” “What do you mean by saying that you belong to another country? You are not a foreigner.” “Well, I won’t say that I am a foreigner, but I can say that I am a stranger in this land and I belong, as I have already told you, to another country. And that I am not a fool is quite certain, for in the country to which I belong there is a King, and I am in His army. And if you would like to know how to enlist in it, I have a book in my pack which you can buy, and in which you can read all about my King and His army.”

It was well put and it also expressed nothing more than the real truth. Here, in the midst of this world, you and I, if we are truly born again from above, are strangers and pilgrims. We have come into this land as gypsies might have come—pitching our tent here and there—but having no abiding city anywhere. We are in this world as Abraham was in Canaan. We are not related to any of the Canaanites amongst whom we dwell. We are of another country, to wit, a heavenly one—and we are looking for “a city which hath foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God.” There are some professing Christians who also try to be worldly, but a worldly Christian is an anomaly and a contradiction.

No, beloved friends, if we are truly the Lord’s, *we are severed from the world*. I will mention two or three of the many ways in which we are thus separated.

The first is by divine election. The Lord Jesus Christ had a people given to Him, a people whom He received of His Father, as He said, “Thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word.” “I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me.” These are they whom God chose in Christ Jesus from before the foundation of the world, having predestinated them, according to the good pleasure of His will, that they should be holy and without blame before Him

in love—“for whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.”

Now this eternal choice of God has severed believers from the rest of mankind and they stand apart as much as Israel stood apart in Egypt, even in the midst of the plagues. Thus God’s chosen ones constitute a people that shall dwell alone—they shall not be numbered among the nations. He has made them to be His portion, “for the LORD’s portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance.”

This truth, some of you may say, leads us into the great mysteries of the kingdom. Well, in due time, our separation from the world is the result of divine calling as well as divine election, for the apostle writes, “Moreover, whom he did predestinate, them he also called.”

There is a people in this world who have been called out from the world and they make up the *ecclesia*, the called-out assembly, the people to whom a voice has come which others have not spiritually heard. The people who have been drawn by Christ and have run after Christ—the people who were dead and who have been quickened—the people who were slumbering and who have been awakened. The people who were afar off and who have been brought nigh, the people who have been brought out of darkness into Christ’s marvelous light, the people whom He has separated unto Himself, and who shall show forth His praise. Do you know anything about this calling, my dear hearers? Were you ever led, by conviction of sin, and repentance, and faith, to fly to Jesus? Have you come to Him? If so, in that wondrous calling out, you have one evidence that you are distinct from the world that lies in the wicked one.

Another clear distinguishing mark is redemption. The blood of the paschal lamb was on the lintel and the two side posts of the house of every family of Israel. It was not on any house of the Egyptians, but to their dwellings the destroying angel came with swift, sure, unerring blow, smiting the firstborn in every house throughout the land. It was the blood-mark that distinguished Israel from all the rest of the people. And today, only those who are sheltered by the sprinkled blood of Jesus, the Lamb of God, are safe.

Christ has redeemed His people from among men. He loved His church and gave Himself for her—and He has redeemed that church and brought her out of the Egyptian bondage of sin with a high hand and an outstretched arm, redeeming her by power as well as by price—and she shall be His forever. Has He not espoused her unto Himself and will He not have her of whom His soul was eternally enamored, and to whom in the covenant of old He was joined by bonds of everlasting wedlock? Yes, verily, He will have her to be His own bride, world without end. This is another mark of our separation from the world—the blood-red mark of redemption, effectual redemption by the Lord Jesus Christ.

Then, beloved, in due time, separation from the world comes out, externally, more fully in *sanctification*. There is a people in this world who have another nature from that of the men of this world. Would to God there were more of them! But there has come, by divine grace, a work of Christ in their heart which has changed their entire nature, aspirations, loves, hates, their whole selves, and made the whole world to become new to them, because they are totally new to it.

When this great change is wrought in the heart of a man, it crucifies him to the world and the world to him. And he becomes a member of a community as much above the common race of humanity as a man is above a horse or a dog. He becomes possessed of a higher nature, which was born in him by regeneration and which lifts him up into familiarity with God, so that he becomes a partaker of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. So says this Book on which we rest and I beseech you to believe that it speaks truly.

Sanctification is the great open separator of Christians from the world. And they are so separate and so distinct that they will never be mixed together, not even in that day when their bones shall lie mingled in the same cemetery—when grave by grave the righteous shall sleep side by side with the wicked. There shall be a distinction in that day of resurrection when the dead in Christ shall rise first, “The rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished.”

There shall be a distinction in that day when the King's words, "Come, ye blessed," or "Depart, ye cursed," shall make an everlasting division between them—and all the universe shall know that the Lord does put a difference between Israel and Egypt.

Now, beloved, you can judge for yourselves tonight—I pray you to do it—whether you are separate from the world. If you are not, you will be judged with the world. If this day there falls to your lot special grace, as well as special joy—if you have a new life and a heavenly experience all your own, then, inasmuch as you are not of the world, hear again the words of my text and keep yourselves "unspotted from the world."

Now, I want you to notice, before I leave this point, that, inasmuch as there is an evident separation between the people of God and the world, *we make it a part of worship to manifest that separation*. Observe what the text says, "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this...To keep himself unspotted from the world." Religion does not consist simply in meeting together for prayer, and in singing hymns, and hearing sermons. There is much of this that is profitable and glorifies God, but there is something more wanted to complete real worship of God.

When you and I live daily with the fear of God before our eyes, in the presence of men of the world, who care not whether there is a God or no, then are we truly manifesting "pure and undefiled religion." When we judge all our conduct by thinking how it will appear in the sight of God, when, assailed by temptation, we say to ourselves, "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" when we keep ourselves apart from every evil thing that might fascinate and entice us, saying, "So did not I, because of the fear of God," this is true worship, quite as real worship as the hymns we sing and the prayers we offer.

Abstinence from evil and seeking that which is right will manifest our separation from the world, especially if the glory of God is our one great object in life. I like that word of my dear friend, Mr. George Muller, when he says, "Never begin a day without feeling joy in the Lord." I think that is a very blessed rule—to live constantly walking in such a way that you and God are on close terms of happy fellowship, so that all that you do you do heartily as unto the Lord.

Your common service as a domestic servant, or your public service as a preacher, you do in the presence, not of the great Taskmaster, but of your great Father and Friend, of whom you have become an adopted child and to whom you are separated to be a priest serving Him every day. If everything is done, from the taking down of the shop shutters on the Monday morning to the putting of them up on Saturday night, as well as what is done on Sunday—if all is done for God's glory, this will make a great gulf between you and the man of the world who lives for baser ends.

Thus I have tried very plainly to show that the words in our text indicate separation.

II. Now, in the second place, **THEY IMPRESS UPON US SPOTLESSNESS**—"To keep himself unspotted from the world."

We learn from this, first, that *the Christian never expects to get any good from the world*. He is to keep himself from the world, specially from the spots of the world. Dr. Watts wisely asks,

*"Is this vile world a friend to grace,
To help me on to God?"*

No, it never is. It never was. It never will be. There is enmity today between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent—and so there will be to the end of the chapter. You will never get anything out of the serpent, even though you stand and listen to his philosophical questions, and his new explanations of God's Word. You will get nothing more out of him now than mother Eve did when she got from him a curse to all her posterity. You can get no good out of the world, nor out of the prince of this world.

It is implied in our text, also, that *we cannot go and wallow in the world's filth*. If there is any man here who is a professor of religion and who can go tonight and indulge himself in vice, or who can find himself at home with the world, well, he belongs to the world. Where you find your pleasure, there your

heart is. Do not pretend to belong to the church and to the world as well. I like the honesty of the man who finds that his life is not consistent with the life of Christ and therefore gives up his profession—that is plain sailing. But do not pretend that you can wallow in the mire of open sin or secret sin and yet belong to Christ, for that cannot be. Keep yourselves unspotted from the world's puddles.

In particular, *we must keep ourselves unspotted from the lepers of the world*. There is a certain number of leprous men in the world. You can tell them by their conversation and sometimes you cannot help going very near where they are. But if you hear them cry, "Unclean!" just give them a very wide berth. I wish that Christians were more careful about this leprosy in the matter of books. As soon as ever you see that there is leprosy there, do not go and play with it, and examine it, and look at it. You will catch it if you are not careful. Keep clear of it. Keep yourselves unspotted from the lepers of the world. "Well, that is easy enough," you say. Perhaps it is not as easy as you think.

But further, *we are to keep ourselves from all spots of the world when we have to mingle with it*. Notice, there are spots which come from your circumstances. Are you wealthy? Well, use your wealth for God, but mind that it does not spot you. There is a great deal of rust about riches. Mind that it does not eat into your soul as does a canker. Are you poor? Does your poverty compel you to live in a very low neighborhood with people of groveling tastes? Well, the poverty will not necessarily hurt you any more than the wealth will, but keep yourselves unspotted from it. You will need a deal of grace to live in some parts of London and not be spotted even by the people who have apartments in the house where you live.

And not only will your circumstances be likely to spot you, but the favors and honors of the world will spot you. So you have received a degree, or you have had a rise in business, and the people all speak well of you, do they? And there is that thoroughly worldly lady who has a secret admiration for you. Well, well, well, be careful. Joseph had the favor of Potiphar and of Pharaoh in Egypt, but he kept himself unspotted.

Mind that the world's favor does not spot you. "Ah," says one, "I don't get much of that. I get all frowns." Very well—persecution, slander, and frowning need not spot you, but they may, you know. There are many who cannot bear the cold atmosphere and biting frosts of persecution. Mind that you are not spotted in that way.

Then we may be spotted, dear friends, in trade. I suppose that a man has good need to be wide awake in order to stay honest. A man can soon do a wrong thing in business by simple negligence and unless he keeps both his eyes open, his very servants may be doing in his name that which will be injurious to the honor of their master. Dear friends, trade away all you can—go and prosper in it—but mind that you do not get spotted.

Then there are politics. You know what party politics are. We are all trying to get in another set of maggots to eat the cheese. That is about all it amounts to—first turn out one lot and then turn in another. It comes to little more than that. Even in the pursuit of really good matters of policy, do you know any Christian man who goes into politics who is the better for it? If I find such a man, I will have him stuffed if I can, for I have never seen such a specimen yet. I will not say, do not attend to politics, but I do say, do not let them spot you.

Then there are the societies of life. A man goes in with his neighbors and he sits at their feast. The Savior sat at a feast with a Pharisee, but mind that it does not spot you—it did not spot Him, but it may spot you, so beware. And as to your ordinary conversation with men of the world any day, are you not conscious, when you go home at night, that you want washing? After shaking hands with a good many men of the world and talking with them, do you not feel that you are apt to get spotted? And the literature, the common literature of the world. I do not mean that which we should censure, and condemn, and burn—but the common literature that is all around you—mind that it does not spot you, brethren.

If we would be spotless, *we must beware of the vanities and pleasures of the world, the thoughts and the tendencies of the world*. It is supposed to be something wonderful to see "the tendency of the age,"

“the current of the age,” “the set of thought.” It is all pollution and nothing else. Instead of wishing to be abreast of it, I only desire to be abreast of it in stemming it and by opposing it, to drive it back. That is the only position for a Christian man. If you go with the current of the age, you are swimming the wrong way, for all that is of the world comes of evil even to this day. There is no change in the Scripture and there is no change in the world. If you love the world, the love of the Father is not in you. The current of human opinion always was, is, and will be, till Christ shall come, an evil current that will bear you the wrong way if you yield to it.

I might thus enlarge, but I will not, and will only say that *we must keep ourselves unspotted from the sins of the world*. What are they? Well, one of them is atheism. Keep yourselves unspotted from that horrible crime, hatred of deity. Doubt of every kind is in the air—this is the day of doubt. Keep yourselves unspotted from the world’s unbelief. This is the age of compromises—to many people, truth is not a matter of great importance nowadays, and principle is of no account. They snip and cut and mar the Scriptures as Jehudi cut the prophet’s roll—they have no care as to what God has said. Avoid compromises and be unspotted of the world.

This is the age of trifling. There is more money spent in play today than ever was since the world began, unless it was that day in which God swept all away by the flood. Keep yourselves unspotted by the world. It is the age of hollowness and gigantic shams and bubbles. Be real. Be true. Keep yourselves unspotted from the world. This subject is endless. God give us grace to carry it out!

III. I must finish by noticing, in the third place, that the words in our text INSIST UPON CAREFUL SELF-WATCHING.

Do you see, it is your very person, your soul, your heart, your very self that is to be kept unspotted? What a man is, that the man before long does. But keep yourselves clean, unspotted, my brethren. Do you say, “O Lord, how can I do this”? It is plain from the text that I am not to sit down, and say, “The Lord will do it, the Lord will do it, and the Lord must do it, or else I cannot.” The language of the text is such that it calls the Christian himself to watchfulness and care. What must he do, then?

Brethren, first, *let us go and wash*. We were washed once, many years ago. Jesus washed us and made us clean. But now, today, we have been going through the world and our feet have become bemired. Let us come to Him again tonight before we go to rest. Dear Master, wash our feet again from any spots of the world which we have acquired by going along these dusty pathways! The fairest lily in the gardens near London gets spotted by the soot of this great city—you cannot help seeing its defilement. But the shower comes and the dew falls, and the lily washes its fair face, and its loveliness is restored.

Let us go to our Lord again to be washed in His precious blood. It is never supposed in the Scriptures that we shall be without sin to confess, but it is written, “If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.” We still want cleansing, even when we are walking in the light. Let us get away to Christ, then, and say, “Lord, I would be myself unspotted. I come to You for washing.”

That done, *avoid careless walking* if you wish not to be spotted. In going home, after a shower, if you have to cross a road, it is very difficult to keep from being spotted. And if you run carelessly, you will plunge into a puddle and there will be splashes of mud all over you, before you know it. Now, do not run into the puddle—walk circumspectly. There is a clean way and it is called the way of holiness—the unclean shall not pass over it.

The Lord help us to watch every action and more than that, every thought and every word! I would like to be able to take my words out of my mouth and look at them before I speak them—and to have all the actions of my life done as under the watchful eye of God, to see whether they will look right in the day of judgment. If you cannot sleep over a thing, do not do it. As the good man said to his boy, “My boy, pay as you go.” “Suppose I cannot pay, father.” “Then, don’t go.” So would I say to you, examine your life as you go. If you dare not examine an action, or look at it, then do not do it. When you do not know whether it is right, then it is always best to feel sure that it is wrong. Even though it might be right

to another, it will be wrong to you, if you have not faith that it is right, for, “whatsoever is not of faith is sin.” If any question arises about moral conduct, that question makes it evil to you.

Next, I would say that, as you would avoid careless walking, also *avoid careless walkers*. Very frequently, when I am riding alone, and I am not getting into any mud, an omnibus comes by, and splashes me all over. It is no fault of mine, but then it is somebody near me that does it. As you walk along the street, you are very careful, but if your neighbor puts his foot in a puddle, the splash may come over you. So mind what company you keep. And when you find people getting rather “fast,” or rather “loose,” leave them—get away from them. You do not want to be bemired, so keep yourself unspotted from the world.

Above all, *cry to God to preserve you from evil*. If you go out every day, covered and protected by divine grace, then, and then only, can you be kept unspotted from the world. I would like to see a Christian, not kept in a glass case away from trial and temptation, but yet covered with an invisible shield, so that, wherever he went, he would be guarded and protected from the evil influences that are in the world in almost every place.

Thus I have spoken to God’s people, but I have said very little to sinners. But although I have not addressed them especially tonight, if you, the people of God, will go and live godly lives, you will preach to sinners better than I shall. I have to say to you who fear God, keep yourselves unspotted from the world, but what am I to say to those who are not only in the world, but also of the world?

Do you not know that “the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up”? What will become of you, then? And you who belong to the world and have your portion in this life—and your joy in this world—in that great day when the elements shall melt with fervent heat, where will you be? Then you may call to the rocks to hide you, but you will call in vain. If your portion is in this life, what will you do in the life to come?

Some of you are living within the boundaries of this mortal existence and that is your all. Poor soul! Poor soul! Poor soul! The Lord in His mercy bring you to know the life eternal. And when you once get that, your great desire will be to be delivered from the power of sin and to keep yourself unspotted from the world! The Lord bless you, for Christ’s sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

JAMES 1

Verse 1. *James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting.*

“Where are the lost ten tribes?” asks somebody. They never were lost. That is a mere piece of nonsense. There were, and there still are, twelve tribes of Israel, as much one as the other. Ask any Jew if it is not so. James writes to all his compatriots by nature and to all the fellow citizens of the saints by grace, and greets them. What a strange greeting it is!

2. *My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations;*

Or “trials.” Do not be sorry about it, be thankful for it. The gold should be glad to be put into the crucible—the Christian should rejoice to be tested and tried. Not only count it joy, but count it, “all joy when ye fall into divers temptations.”

3-4. *Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.*

You need to grow—you will not grow without trials. You need to learn—you will not learn without affliction. It is God’s school for you. Be thankful, therefore, when these afflictions come. They are the rumbling wagons of your Father, in which He sends you choice treasure. They are black ships that come from afar, loaded with precious things. But mind that you do get this patience and that when you have it, you have still more of it—“Let patience have her perfect work.”

5. *If any of you lack wisdom,—*

Ah, James, you need not say, “*If any of you lack wisdom,*” for we all lack it! We are all poor, foolish creatures—“*If any of you lack wisdom.*”

5. *Let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.*

The Lord might very well upbraid us for our folly and say, “Poor child, I will give you wisdom; yet you are very foolish.” But He does not say that. He “giveth to all men liberally; and upbraideth not.” Let him who lacks wisdom ask of God, “and it shall be given him.” Can the Lord give wisdom? Surely we must study, learn, and gain experience before we can know, and then afterwards knowledge, rightly used, grows into wisdom. Can God give us wisdom ready made? Oh, yes, He can! He gives wisdom if we ask for it.

6. *But let him ask in faith.*

A man who has no wisdom can have faith. Let him use his faith to get wisdom—“Let him ask in faith.”

6-7. *Nothing wavering. For he that wavers is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord.*

He may receive something of the Lord, but he may not think that he shall. It may come as a spontaneous gift of sovereign grace, but we have no right to expect an answer to prayer when we pray in a wavering style.

8. *A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways.*

He sees double. He runs after two objects and therefore he staggers across the street—he “is unstable in all his ways.”

9. *Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted;*

Being lifted up by the grace of God to sit among the princes of Israel.

10. *But the rich, in that he is made low:*

Hard work this! Still, the child of God should rejoice in it, for now that he is stripped of earthly things, he finds his all in God.

10-12. *Because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away. For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth: so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways. Blessed is the man that endureth temptation:*

Or “endureth trial.” Blessed is the man who is tried and tested, and who lives through it—who conquers, notwithstanding all the battle and struggle through which he passes. We would say, “Blessed is the man who is not tried,” but it is not so. He who, bearing the heavy load, receives gracious strength to sustain him under it, gets a greater blessing than the man who escapes the burden.

12-13. *For when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him. Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God:*

That would be nonsense and falsehood. When a man is seduced to evil, when evil casts its attractive spell over him, let him not blame God.

13-14. *For God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: but every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.*

God tries men. God does not, in the sense in which the word is here used, tempt men. Satan tempts—God tries. But the same trial may be both a temptation and a trial—and it may be a trial from God’s side, and a temptation from Satan’s side, just as Job suffered from Satan and it was a temptation. But he also suffered from God through Satan, and so it was a trial to him.

15. *Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.*

That is the pedigree of sin—it is born of lust, and it brings forth death. Any sin, whatever it is, if we cling to it and love it, will bring forth death—rest assured of that. The only hope we can have of eternal

life is by being parted from sin. That must be taken away from us, for there shall never enter into heaven anything that defiles. We have, from day to day, to fight against sin, till it is utterly put away from us.

16-17. *Do not err, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of Lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.*

God never turns from us, nor, in any way whatever, changes. He is the same God, ready always to bless us, ready to save us tonight as much as any other Thursday night. Ah, dear friends, what variableness we have! The other day we were frostbitten and crying out with the cold. And now, tonight, perhaps, we feel dull, and stupid, and heavy, because it is so hot. Yet, what a mercy it is that God has no variableness, neither shadow of a turning, and we may come to Him tonight, and say, “Lord, visit us as You are wont to do! Revive us and refresh us. Put us into a lively, brisk, happy frame of mind tonight and send us on our way rejoicing.”

18. *Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.*

We are His creatures, but we are better than His other creatures, for he has made us twice over. We are his twice-born creatures and we are the first ripe fruit of His creation, dedicated to His praise, gathered to His glory—“a kind of first fruits of his creatures.” Oh, that God would help us to honor Him and to live truly consecrated to Him!

19. *Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear,—*

It is a great thing to have an open ear. Some are very slow to hear, especially to hear the Word of God and the voice of God speaking that Word. Oh, to have our ears unstopped that we may hear every syllable of truth gladly, cheerfully, retentively! God grant us that swiftness of hearing tonight!

19. *Slow to speak, slow to wrath:*

For, sometimes, when men are very quick to speak, they are also very quick in other respects as well—and volubility may be accompanied by a tendency to heat or passion. “Slow to speak, slow to wrath.”

20. *For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.*

Satan does not cast out Satan. Anger does not overcome evil. We may think we do well to be angry, but that will very seldom be the case.

21. *Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.*

Perhaps you have seen a man grafting a tree. What a gash he makes in the tree before he puts in the graft! How he wounds it to make the sap flow into the new wood! If the Lord has made any of your hearts bleed tonight by the sharp cutting of His Spirit, we are not sorry, if it shall the better prepare you for receiving the grafts of His own nature, and His own Word.

22. *But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.*

It is a pity when a man deceives himself—he must be an arch-deceiver.

23-25. *For if any is a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: for he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looks into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein,—*

Perseverance to the end is wanted—“Continueth therein.”

25. *He being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.*

The blessedness of true religion lies very much in the practical effect of it. Hearing is pleasant, but doing is the effectual proof of grace.

26. *If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man’s religion is vain.*

James settles that matter off very peremptorily. An unbridled tongue indicates a godless heart.

27. *Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.*

This is not the secret part of religion. Of that we read elsewhere. But this is the very dress that true religion puts on—charitably caring for the most destitute of our fellow creatures, and holy walking, that we be not as the men of the world are—“Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.”

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—668, 649, 670

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