

“PERSECUTED, BUT NOT FORSAKEN”
NO. 2574

A SERMON
INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD’S-DAY, JUNE 12, 1898.
DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
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“Many a time have they afflicted me from my youth, may Israel now say: many a time have they afflicted me from my youth: yet they have not prevailed against me. The plowers plowed upon my back: they made long their furrows. The Lord is righteous: He has cut asunder the cords of the wicked. Let them all be confounded and turned back that hate Zion. Let them be as the grass upon the housetops, which withers before it grows up: which the mower fills not his hand; nor he that binds sheaves his bosom. Neither do they which go by say, The blessing of the LORD be upon you: we bless you in the name of the LORD.”
Psalm 129.

YOU see, dear friends, the Psalm speaks of two sorts of people; there is Israel, and there are those that hate Zion. The first three verses are dedicated to God’s people; the last five speak of those who are not God’s people, but are the haters of them. From the very first, there have been two seeds in the world. The first man that was born—Cain, was of the seed of the serpent; but the second was, by the grace of God, of the seed of the woman; and so early, when those two boys had but just developed into manhood, he that was born by grace served his God, and brought a lamb as his sacrifice, but he that was born after the flesh—the firstborn of man—became his brother’s murderer. Thus, in the very first household that ever existed, there was a sharp line of demarcation between the man of faith and the man of sense—the man that lived unto God and the man that lived after his own passions. Always and everywhere since that day there have been the same two characters; and, albeit there is a large number of persons about whom you or I may not be able to give any decision, for they seem as if they stood between the two, yet in the sight of God there is a line, narrow, but most sure, which divides the living from the dead—the believing from the unbelieving—the men that fear God from them that fear Him not; and still, right down the ages, that word that was spoken to the serpent in the Garden of Eden stands true: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed.” There are the believing people of God—His own elect, brought out from among men, and there is the world that lies in the wicked one. To one of these two classes we all belong; there are really no neutrals, it is not possible that there should be. There is no borderland between life and death; a man is either alive by the quickening of the Spirit, or he remains dead in trespasses and sins.

I am going to speak of each of these two classes that are mentioned in my text; so, first, let us notice the description given of God’s own people. The first three verses of the Psalm may be summed up thus—*Israel persecuted, but not forsaken*. When I have spoken on that theme, I shall hope to say something about *the wicked flourishing, but perishing*. Those two words—flourishing, perishing—describe the condition of those that hate Zion, and that hate the children of Zion. Before I plunge into the text, however, let me give you a few sentences by way of introduction.

The life of the Lord Jesus Christ is the picture of the life of His people. “As He was,” says Paul, “so are we also in this world.” This is so remarkably true that, in the Psalms, we sometimes can hardly tell whether the writer is describing himself or the Lord Jesus; because, as is the Head, so are the members, and there is a growing likeness which is often spoken of in Scripture as if these two were one, as indeed, in the highest sense, they are. If you read this Psalm carefully, you can see Christ in it. Jesus could truly say: “Many a time have they afflicted Me from My youth: yet they have not prevailed against Me.” Herod sought the young child’s life to destroy it; Satan seemed to stir hell itself to seek the destruction of the infant Jesus. “The plowers plowed upon My back: they made long their furrows.” How true was that of our Divine Master! When He was in His agony in the garden, the furrows were plainly visible. When

He was brought before Herod, and before Pilate, and was scourged till He was covered with wounds, and when He died, and they took down that blessed but mangled body, how deep were the furrows!

Now the sufferings of Christ, of which I spoke to you last Sunday night [See Sermon #2573, Volume 44—*Unparalleled Suffering*] are in their measure repeated in His people; we are made to have fellowship with Him in His sufferings. Shall the disciple be above his Master? Shall the servant be above his Lord? If they have persecuted Him, they will also persecute us. He bids us look for such treatment as this. Do not, therefore, expect rest where Christ had none, or look to wear a crown of gold where Christ did wear a crown of thorns.

My next observation is that the history of God’s people, Israel, is also in type a history of His Church. Truly, the sins of Israel are far too often repeated in believers; but the woes and griefs of Israel, and their deliverance out of them, are the means of comfort to many of God’s saints. See how the Israelites were afflicted from their youth, when they were but a little nation, and went down into Egypt. How hard they had to work in the brick-kilns! With what enmity did Pharaoh look upon them! How cruelly and craftily he sought to compass the destruction of the nation by drowning the male children in the Nile! He used his wit and his power, if possible to destroy the chosen people; but the Lord preserved His own. Then, in the day of Israel’s youth, when she went into the wilderness, she was afflicted. “I remember you,” says God, “the kindness of your youth, the love of your espousals, when you went after Me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown.” But in the wilderness she had her trials; and when she came to the Promised Land, her trials did but begin again. Scarcely was she delivered from the Canaanites before she fell a prey to the Philistines; and the Philistines were hardly overcome before we hear of the Syrians, the Edomites, the Moabites, and then of the Assyrians and the Babylonians who at last carried away captive the people of God. That nation, Israel, to this day may say, “Many a time have they afflicted me from my youth: but they have not prevailed against me.”

Now one remark more; I have already reminded you that Christ’s life is the picture of His people’s life, and that the history of Israel is the picture of His Church; now notice how true it is that the Church, from her very outset, has always been afflicted; first by Herod, when he sought to slay the apostles, and did murder James; next afflicted by the Jews, and driven from city to city; then afflicted by Saul of Tarsus, who breathed out threats and slaughter against the Church of Christ from her youth. Then broke out the great Pagan persecution; your knowledge of history, I suppose, tells you how the emperors of Rome used the whole of their force to crush the Christian Church, yet they prevailed not against her. When the Roman emperors had done their worst, and done it in vain, the Church of Christ was turned into a church established by patronage, and from that moment, became a harlot, and so grew into the apostate Church of Rome. Then the Pope, with all his might, sought to crush out the Church of God. Read the stories of the Albigenses in the South of France, and the Waldenses in the valleys of Piedmont. Read the history of the Lollards in England, and of the saints of God in any country which you please to choose. They were torn asunder; they were made to rot in prison; they were tortured on the rack; they were put to death in all manner of ways; in our own country, especially, by being burned to death at the stake. Yet the enemies of Zion have not prevailed against her. No, Rome, you shall never triumph; and even now, though today our clergy preach your doctrines, and wear your garments, yet you shall not prevail against the Church of God, for He shall surely come, even He that has delivered in days gone by, and shall work deliverance for His Israel once again.

So I have spoken to you of Christ, of Israel, and of the Church. Now I come to deal with the subject as it relates to yourselves. As it was with the Church at large, as it was with Israel, as it was with our Lord Jesus, so expect it to be with you. As I go through this Psalm with you, and dwell upon it, you can apply it to yourself, my dear tried and persecuted friend.

I. In the first three verses of the Psalm, we have a description of ISRAEL PERSECUTED, BUT NOT FORSAKEN.

First notice, concerning Israel’s affliction, *from where it came*: “Many a time have they afflicted me from my youth.” Who was it that afflicted Israel? The text says, “*they*.” And why is the word “they” used? Because, to enter into particulars, would rather obscure the sense than impress anything upon the memory. “They.” Why, it meant, in the case of the nation of Israel, Egyptians, Amalekites, Hivites, Hittites, Jebusites, Philistines, Assyrians, Babylonians—it would be such a long list, so the psalmist just says, “they.” Who are the people that have afflicted you, my dear friend? The Scripture leaves room for

you to add the names if you care to put them in; but perhaps it will be wiser for you to forget all the names, and simply to leave it as it is here: "Many a time have they afflicted me from my youth."

I hardly like to think of who they are who, in many cases, have afflicted God's true servants, but it is still true that "a man's foes shall be they of his own household." A woman is just brought to Christ, and her greatest trouble comes from him whom she loves best of all living mortals; her husband becomes her terror. When a child has been brought to the Savior, it is sad that his worst fears should arise concerning the treatment he will receive from his father or his mother; but it has often been so. We do not put the names in; we can pray for the persecutors all the better if we leave it "*they*." A newly-converted Christian goes out into business; does he find friends there? Sometimes, God is very tender and pitiful, and casts the lot of his young children in among the gracious; but there are others who have a hard time of it, for they have to earn their bread in the midst of the ungodly, and Christ seems to say to them, "Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves;" and these wolves are always seeking to destroy the lambs, if possible. Is it not a singular thing in providence that, though the wolves might have eaten all the lambs up long ago, yet there are a great many more sheep in the world now than there are wolves; and in this country, you know, there is not a wolf left, they have all died out. They could take care of themselves and fight, yet they have all gone. The sheep could not defend themselves, yet here they are in flocks. God takes care of the weak and the feeble; and in that very fact of natural history He seems to say to His people, "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." When the wicked are cut off, you shall see it. "The meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace." Outside, in the world, the Christian frequently meets with those who would rejoice to see him stumble, who try to make faults where there are none, and exaggerate little mistakes into great crimes. Wherever he goes, he has to travel with his sword drawn; he finds an adversary behind every bush. He is a pilgrim through the midst of Vanity Fair whom the traders there cannot understand. In his case, that ancient word is again fulfilled: "My heritage is unto me as a speckled bird, the birds round about are against her." Such a man can truly say, "Many a time have they afflicted me."

But, next, let us ask, *how does this persecution come?* The Psalm says, "Many a time;" that means, very often. So then, you who are faithful to God must expect that you will frequently be assailed by the foe. I know some of God's saints who feel almost frightened when people speak well of them; they begin to say, "What have we been doing wrong? Would these people commend us if we had been serving our Master faithfully?" There is another side to that truth, for, "when a man's ways please the Lord, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him;" but, between the two, it is not always easy to tell which is the right course. This we know, we are not to expect to find favor where Christ found no favor. If they called the Master of the house Beelzebub, we must expect that they will have ill names for us. If they imputed evil motives to Him, they will impute evil motives to us. If they even said of Him that He was a drunk and a wine-bibber, we must not be astonished if sometimes things of which we have never heard, or things that we abhor, should be laid to our charge. Therefore, arm yourselves also with the same mind as Christ had, who endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself many and many a time.

The Psalm tells us that these attacks of the ungodly were a real affliction to the people of God: "Many a time have they afflicted me. . . Many a time have they afflicted me." It is written twice over to show how trying it was. The brine did make poor Israel's wounds smart; she was really hurt, and she felt it. I have sometimes met with a person who has said, "I do not care what people say of me." I am not sure whether that feeling is right, or wrong; sometimes it may be an indifference which is pitiable, at other times it may be a courage which is admirable. But this I do know, that the saints of God have found slander to be a very piercing thing; it has gone right to their heart, the iron has entered into their soul. Hence the Savior said to His disciples, "Let not your heart be troubled," for trouble does sometimes get to the heart. Affliction that does not really afflict is no affliction. But here they felt it; they groaned under it; the plowers made deep furrows, not mere surface ones, but they cut down deep into the very spirit, into the very soul of Israel; and we must not wonder if, sometimes, for Christ's sake, we have to meet with this kind of trial. Possibly, some Christian sitting here is saying, "I do not know much about that sort of affliction." Well, be very thankful if you do not, but be ready, do be prepared for it. There are some of us who had a hard time of it in years gone by; there was not any name in the catalog of contempt which some of us have not been made to bear; and now, perhaps, we have smoother times; but we stand quite ready to go into the burning fiery furnace again if so it must be, for this is a part of

the portion of God’s servants: “Many a time have they afflicted me . . . Many a time have they afflicted me.”

But notice, while we are speaking of how affliction came to Israel, that it came to her in her youth. What a coward Satan is! He always tries to attack God’s children most fiercely when they are young. Fight one of your own size, sir! But that he is afraid to do. When the child of God gets well matured, and by experience knows how to fly to his God, Satan will often leave him quietly alone. You know the story in the Revelation of how, when the woman was delivered of a man-child, the dragon sought to destroy the child at once; and it was therefore caught up unto God, and to His throne. No sooner did the devil spy out Christ, as He rose dripping from the waters of baptism, than he determined to assail Him with his fierce temptations, and, if possible, destroy Him before He began His ministry; but that young Christ, freshly anointed of the Spirit, was more than a match for him. Many a time since then has the adversary met God’s people in their youth, when as yet they were feeble, when they were not expert in war, just as David in his youth had to fight the lion and the bear, and afterwards to meet the giant. Oh, it was grand for that ruddy youth to be able to say to Saul, “Your servant slew both the lion and the bear; and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he has defied the armies of the living God.” It may be so with you who are young in grace; do not be astonished if you meet with your fiercest attacks in the morning of your days; but have courage, and say to yourself, “It was told me that it would probably be so; I am not taken at unawares, I was warned of that as I read the Psalm, ‘Many a time have they afflicted me from my youth, may Israel now say: many a time have they afflicted me from my youth: yet they have not prevailed against me.’”

Notice, again, that the Psalm goes on to describe this persecution of Israel under the imagery of plowers plowing her back. It is a kind of duplicate metaphor. It is just as the scourger, when he takes his dreadful lash, and brings it down with all his might on the bare back of his victim, makes a deep gash where the throng falls; and it is also like the furrow that is cut by a plow, only it is not made in dead clods, it is right in the quivering flesh. The scourge falls again, and there is another mark; again you can hear the dreadful motion of the whip of wire as it falls, and cuts deeper and deeper into that poor sensitive bleeding back. Now, just so, Israel says, it was with her, and you know that it was so, for she seemed to be all but destroyed many times; that little nation was hacked to pieces, Zion was plowed as a field. So is it with some of God’s people; as it was also with their Master, and as it has been with the entire Church of Christ. The whip has come down mercilessly again and again and again—forty stripes save none—for Satan will never stint his blows. He will vex God’s people again and again and again; and if he could, he would utterly destroy them. Such often has been the lives of God’s saints—the very best and truest of them—and such are their lives now. It is not so with all of us, but it has been so with many; the Lord help His suffering people! In patience may they possess their souls! As I remind you of what some of our brethren and sisters in Christ are just now suffering, I pray you to remember those that are in bonds as bound with them, and those that are in trouble, knowing that you yourselves also are yet in the body.

This, then, is the description of what God’s people have often had to suffer. The plowers have made long their furrows; they have left no headlands, they have plowed the back again and again, and scourged it with the cruel lash.

But now *what is the reason for all this persecution?* There are two reasons; and the first is, the hatred of the serpent and his seed. There are two things that are inconceivable in length and breadth. The first is, the love of God to His people, which is altogether without limit; and the next is, the hatred of the devil, which is and must be finite, for he is only a creature; but, still, it is as great as it possibly can be. We have no idea with what determined vehemence Satan hates those who belong to Christ; he will do anything he can in the hope of destroying one of them; he goes about, like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. That, beloved, is why you have so many persecutions from those who are the faithful children of Satan; they are of their father the devil, and his works they will continue to do; and one of those works is, persecuting those who are the children of God.

Still, there is a higher reason for the persecution of the saints. The second reason is, because God permits it. Why does He permit it? Well, very often for your safety. “For our safety?” you ask, “For our safety?” Yes, the Church of God has often been preserved by persecution; she was never purer, she was never holier, she was never truer, and she never lived nearer to God and more like her Savior, than when she was persecuted. I venture to say of the Church of Scotland that she was never grander than in the

Covenanting times, when they met among the glens, and up in the lone places, and sat on the heather watching lest Claverhouse’s dragoons should be near. I think, of late years, she was never nobler than in Disruption times, and I believe she will never again be so good and great unless she is persecuted.

Often we do not prosper in spiritual things, in times of ease, as we ought to do. Sometimes, the best friend of the sheep is the dog; and when the shepherd lets him loose, he fetches back the wanderers; and if there are any animals that ought not to be with the flock, the dog gets in among them, and makes the separation between his master’s sheep and other people’s. We owe a great deal to persecuting dogs. I knew a young man, who used to steal in here on Thursday nights, and who would come into the prayer meetings, and pray very sweetly and very earnestly; but he had no comfort in his home, for he had a father who could not endure his religion, and was very bitter against him. His father died, and the son inherited the property; he is never here now, he has no love for God, as far as I can judge, he has grown cold, and has turned aside; but, as long as ever he was persecuted, he certainly did seem to be one of the most earnest men I ever knew. I believe that it has often been so, for silken days do not suit Christ’s soldiers; but in the battle they win glory when their Master is with them. So you see how persecution is sometimes for our safety.

Next, it is for our trial and testing, to separate the precious from the vile. We are put into the sieve, and Satan sifts us. He likes that task; but what a fool he is to do the sifting for Christ! It is good work when it is done; and Satan, in persecuting the saints, is simply a scullion in Christ’s kitchen, cleansing His pots and pans; they never are as bright as when he scours them, and it is a scouring with a vengeance. Yet, in that way he separates or God through him separates, between the precious and the vile. The Lord sometimes allows persecution to break out upon His people that they may know more of themselves; and oh, how we fail when we come to times of persecution! I have heard of one who, when he was condemned to die for the faith, got out of bed in the night, and held his finger over the candle to see whether he could burn. Poor soul, he felt that he could not endure that pain; but yet he said, “I do verily believe that, when I come to the stake, the agony which I cannot endure in my finger now I shall bear in my whole body, for then I shall be suffering God’s will. Now, when I hold my finger in the candle, I am only suffering for my own curiosity, and I get no support and strength.” And it was so. In Foxe’s *Book of Martyrs*, the tale is told of a poor woman who was taken with the pains of travail when in prison condemned to die; and when she cried out, her enemies said to her, “If you cannot bear this which is but natural, what will you do when you come to burn?” The woman answered, “Now, I am only suffering the curse that came upon the race through sin, and I do feel it bitterly; but, when I am burning at the stake, I shall be suffering for Christ’s sake, and I shall feel it to be sweet.” And it was noticed how bravely—to quote a strange phrase—she played the man; no, she played the woman for Christ, and suffered well for Him without tears or cry. Ah, yes! When God is with His people, He helps them wonderfully; but what a test it is to them, and how they are driven at such times to prove their own weakness! How it tries their faith, and proves of what stuff it is made, and how it makes them feel trembling and weak where they thought they were steadfast and strong!

I find that my time has nearly gone, yet I am not half-way through my subject. I must just mention *the blessings which come to the tried children of God through their troubles*. I do so enjoy the reading of that part of the Psalm where it says, “But they have not prevailed against me.” You see a troop of horsemen riding into the very midst of the battle, and you lose sight of them for a moment amidst the dust and smoke; but out of the middle of that cloud you hear the brave captain’s cry, “They have not prevailed against me.” You see that little band advancing into a yet more crowded host, all glaring upon them like wolves. Surely they will be cut to pieces now; but in the very center of the struggling mass you see the banner still waving, and again comes the cry, “They have not prevailed against me.” That is, in brief, the story of the Church of Christ and that shall be the story of every man who puts his trust in God; he shall have to say, at the close of every trouble—yes, and even in the midst of it—“They have not prevailed against me.”

What is the reason why the enemy cannot prevail against the saints of God? Read the next verse: “The Lord is righteous.” If He were to forsake His people, and they were to perish, He would not be righteous; but He will not forget our work of faith and labor of love, nor will He leave us to fall in the evil day. “The Lord is righteous;” that is to say, He will take the right side; He will defend those that fight for the right and for the truth. He will prove Himself strong on the behalf of them that put their trust in Him. “The Lord is righteous;” and therefore He will smite His adversaries upon the cheekbone;

He will not let them go on forever in their pride and cruelty. They get the upper hand for a while, and they smite His saints; but “the Lord is righteous,” and He will speedily avenge His own elect that cry day and night unto Him. He may delay the overthrow of His people’s foes; but He will in the end take their part, and display His almighty power. For the present, He is patient; He bears long with the ungodly; but He will not always do so. The fact that “the Lord is righteous,” is the pledge that the wicked shall not prevail over His saints.

Then notice the next sentence: “He has cut asunder the cords of the wicked.” Literally, it should run thus: “He has cut the traces of the wicked.” They are plowing, you see; and, in the East, the oxen are fastened to the plow by a long cord. What does God do in the middle of their plowing? There are the bulls, and there is the plow; but God has cut the harness; and how wonderfully He has sometimes cut the harness of the persecutors of His people! Look at the way He did this for our poor hunted brethren in Piedmont. They were likely every one of them to be crushed; and, apparently, there was nobody to protect them. The Duke of Savoy, whose subjects they were, had given them up to be destroyed. The next country was France, and the King of France was a Roman Catholic, and as eager for their destruction as was the Duke. But, one day, Oliver Cromwell sent for the French ambassador, and said to him, “Tell your master to order the Duke of Savoy to leave off persecuting my brethren in Piedmont, or he shall hear from me about the matter.” “Sire,” said the ambassador, “they are not the subjects of the King of France; he has nothing to do with them. The Duke of Savoy is an independent prince; we cannot interfere with him.” “I do not care about that,” replied Cromwell; “I will hold your king answerable if he does not stop the Duke of Savoy from persecuting the Piedmontese.” And they knew that “Old Noll” meant what he said; so, somehow, the King of France managed to interfere with that precious independent prince, and told him that he had better cease his persecutions, for if he did not, Oliver Cromwell would take up the quarrel. Yes and when the Pope himself had persecuted some English sailors at Rome, Cromwell wrote and said that he did not know whether “his holiness” would like to hear the thunder of his guns at Rome, but he very soon would do so unless he ceased his cruelties. Cromwell was the defender of those that feared God; and it was most providential that such a man should have come into power just when he was needed for the protection of the persecuted. God always knows how to save His people; what He has done in the past, He can do again now. He can cut the traces of those that are plowing, and there will be no more deep furrows. How frequently He has done it! How often has He put out His hand, and said to the wicked, “Stop!” and they have had to stop, and that has been the end of their persecution! Cry mightily, then, you who are tried cry mightily unto the Lord to deliver you. Dearly beloved, “avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath; for it is written, Vengeance is Mine; I will repay, says the Lord.” Therefore, leave your persecutors in His hands. Be you like the anvil; there have been a great many generations of hammers that have come and have gone, but the old anvil stands in the smithy still. Be you just like that; let your persecutors hammer away, but stand you steadfast to your God, and to your faith, and may His blessed Spirit keep you so even to the end!

The latter half of the sermon must come, if the Lord will, on another Thursday night. May God’s blessing be with you! Oh, happy are they that are God’s people! Blessed are they that are in the furnace; blessed are they that are tried and troubled; has not He, whose lips can never lie, pronounced them blessed? “Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.” Therefore, reckon yourselves gladdened and honored when you are counted worthy to suffer for Christ’s sake.

**EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:
GALATIANS 4, 5:1.**

Galatians 4 Verses 1-5. *Now I say, that the heir, as long as he is a child, differs nothing from a servant, though he is lord of all; but is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father. Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world: but when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.*

Like little children, the Jewish believers were under the law. They observed this ceremony and that, just as children, though they may be heirs to vast estates, yet, while they are in their minority, are under tutors and governors. But now in Christ we have come of age, and we have done with those schoolbooks and that tutorship, and we have received the adoption of sons. Now, we have joy and peace in believing; we have begun to enter into our possession; we already have the earnest of it already, and by and by we shall receive the fullness of the inheritance of the saints in light.

6. *And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.*

While the Jewish believers, like children, were under the law, they did not have such direct access to the Father as we have. They could not enter into such close fellowship with God as now we can. We who are the sons of God, really born into His family, feel within us a something that makes us call God, “Father,” not only in prayer, saying, “Our Father, which are in heaven;” but inwardly, when we are not in the attitude of prayer, our hearts keep on crying, “Father, Father.” The Jew may say, “Abba,” and the word is very sweet; but we cry, “Father,” and it means the same thing.

7. *Therefore you are no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.*

All God’s sons are, in a certain sense, His servants; but there is a sense in which servants are not sons. We, therefore, are not like those servants who have no relationship to their master and no share in his possessions; but we are sons. Whatever service we render, we are still sons, and we have a share in all that our Father has; we are heirs, “heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ.” Are you living up to your privileges, brethren? Are we any of us fully realizing what this heirship means? Do we not often live as if we were only servants toiling for hire? Do we not tremble at God as if we were His slaves rather than His sons? Let us remember that we are God’s sons, His heirs; and let us come close to Him, let us take possession of the blessed inheritance which He has provided for us.

8-11. *Howbeit then, when you knew not God, you did service unto them which by nature are no gods. But now, after that you have known God, or rather are known of God, why turn you again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto you desire again to be in bondage? You observe days, and months, and times, and years. I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labor in vain.*

Among the heathen, there were many “lucky” and “unlucky” days; sacred days, and days in which they indulged in sensual excess. They had even “holy” months and “unholy” months. Now, all that kind of thing is done away with in the case of a Christian: he is set free from such weak and beggarly superstitions. Among the Jews, there were certain sacred festivals; times that were more notable than other seasons; but they also were done away with in Christ. We observe the Christian Sabbath; but beyond that, to the true believer, there should be no special observance of days, and months, and years. All that, is a return to “the weak and beggarly elements” from which Christ has delivered us. That bondage is all ended now; but there are some who still “observe days, and months, and times, and years;” and Paul says to them, “I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labor in vain.” Every day is holy, every year is holy, to a holy man; and every place is holy, too, to the man who brings a holy heart into it.

12. *Brethren, I beseech you, be as I am; for I am as you are: you have not injured me at all.*

“Be perfectly at home with me, for I am so with you. Though you Galatians have treated me very badly, yet you have not really injured me, and I freely overlook your ill manners toward me.”

13-15. *You know how through infirmity of the flesh I preached the gospel unto you at the first. And my temptation which was in my flesh you despised not, nor rejected; but received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus. Where is, then, the blessedness you spoke of? For I bear you record, that if it had been possible, you would have plucked out your own eyes, and have given them to me.*

The apostle remembers how they received him at first, his gospel was to them like life from the dead; and though he was full of infirmities—perhaps had weak eyes—perhaps had a stammering tongue—perhaps was at that time very much depressed in spirit—yet, he says, “You received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus. You loved me so much that, if it had been possible, you would have plucked out your own eyes, and have given them to me.”

16. *Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?*

There come times, with all God’s servants, when certain people proclaim something fresh and new in doctrine; and then the old messenger of God, who was blessed to them, comes to be despised. I have lived long enough to see dozens of very fine fancies started, but they have all come to nothing; I daresay I shall see a dozen more, and they will all come to nothing. But here I stand; I am not led astray either by

novelties of excitement or novelties of doctrine. The things which I preached at the first, I preach still, and so I shall continue, as God shall help me. But I know, in some little measure, what the apostle meant when he said, “Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?”

17-20. *They zealously affect you, but not well; yes, they would exclude you, that you might affect them. But it is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing, and not only when I am present with you. My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ is formed in you, I desire to be present with you now, and to change my voice; for I stand in doubt of you.*

The point of doubt was that they had been led astray by legal teachers; they had been made to believe that, after all, there was something in outward ceremonies, something in the works of the law, and so they had come under bondage again. So the apostle says—

21-23. *Tell me, you that desire to be under the law, do you not hear the law? For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a free woman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh;—*

By Abraham’s own strength;—

24. *But he of the freewoman was by promise.*

Born when Abraham and his wife were past age—born by the power of God’s Spirit, according to promise.

24. *Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which genders to bondage, which is Hagar.*

It is the strength of the flesh which leads to bondage.

25, 26. *For this Hagar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answers to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all.*

That is, of all of us who believe in Christ Jesus. We are born of the freewoman, not of the bondwoman; not born of the covenant of works, and in the strength of the creature; but born of the covenant of grace, in the power of God, according to promise.

27, 28. *For it is written, Rejoice, you barren that bear not; break forth and cry, you that travail not: for the desolate has many more children than she which has an husband. Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise.*

If we are God’s children, it is not by our own strength, or by the strength of the flesh, in any measure or degree; it is by the grace of God, and the promise of God, that we are what we are.

29, 30. *But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now. Nevertheless what says the Scripture?*

Make a compromise, and be friends? Let Isaac and Ishmael live in the same house, and lie in the same bed? No!

30, 31. *Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman. So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free.*

Galatians 5 Verse 1. *Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.*

God grant us grace to keep to grace! God grant us faith enough to live by faith, even to the end, as the freeborn children of God, for His name’s sake! Amen.

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