

A SINCERE SUMMARY, AND A SEARCHING SCRUTINY NO. 2671

A SERMON
INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, APRIL 22, 1900.
DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
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*“I have kept Your precepts and Your testimonies: for all my ways are before You.”
Psalm 119:168.*

*“I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek Your servant; for I do not forget Your commandments.”
Psalm 119:176.*

IF anyone says that these two texts contradict one another, I say that they do not. They form a paradox, and they are both true, and true of the same man, at the same time. I will read them to you again: “I have kept Your precepts and Your testimonies: for all my ways are before You.” “I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek Your servant; for I do not forget Your commandments.”

I purpose to take our first text as *a sincere summary of a godly man's life*, and our second text as *a searching scrutiny*, or as the result of a searching scrutiny, which looks below the surface, and then comes to a conclusion, not contradictory to the former one, yet supplementary to it.

I. First, then, dear friends, our first text is A SINCERE SUMMARY OF A GODLY MAN'S LIFE. Looking back, he can say of it in general, “I have kept Your precepts and Your testimonies: for all my ways are before You.”

First, let me say that *it is necessary that we should have so lived that this shall be the summary of our life*; for if we have not so lived, what evidence have we that we have been born again—that we have passed from death unto life—that we have been delivered from the bondage of sin, and brought into the way of holiness? If our life is not different from what it used to be, how can we try to deceive ourselves with the idea that we are converted? If our lives are no better than the lives of unregenerate men, what reason can we have for believing that we are regenerate? After all, at the last, we shall be judged according to our works. “By their fruits you shall know them,” is a test that still stands good, and will stand good even to the end. “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap.” And, in looking back, if our life has been ungodly—if it has been wanton and unchaste—if it has not been characterized by sobriety, honesty, prayerfulness, consecration, what can we say of it? We shall have to judge ourselves to be still “out of the way,” and to have need that we should turn to God with full purpose of heart, and seek what, evidently, we have not at present found. If the grace which we are supposed to have received has not made us to differ both from our former self and from men of the world, then it is not the true grace of God.

Next, whenever a man can truly say, with the psalmist, “I have kept Your precepts and Your testimonies,” *it is a fruit of grace*. It is not a product of the legal spirit; it is not a result of free will unhelped by God's grace and love. Wherever there is even a spark of holiness, it must have come from that great central fire which is in the heart of God. “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.” There is not on earth a rare flower of loveliness and purity which is not an exotic; it is blooming in a clime to which it is a stranger. God has planted it with His own right hand.

So, then, he who can thus sum up his life has nothing of which to glory, for he has received from God everything of good there is in it, and therefore he gives all the glory of it to the Giver, and takes none of it to himself. It is faith that works by love, purifying the soul, and producing the devout and godly character; and faith never claims any honor for itself, for it is itself the gift of God. Christ says much in praise of faith because faith says so much in praise of Christ; and faith is used, in the covenant of grace, as a means of blessing, because it excludes boasting, and gives all the glory to God, who works

all that is good within us. So, you see, dear friends, that there is nothing of legality in what I am saying now when I testify that a godly, Christian man, when he sums up his life, can say, "I have kept Your precepts and Your testimonies."

Next, *this summary of life is excellent for its breadth*. Notice how it is worded; it comprehends the precepts and the testimonies of the Lord; that is, the practical and the doctrinal parts of true religion. There are some persons who appear to be very scrupulous concerning the precepts, and they are very anxious to keep them. So far, they do well; but as to the doctrines of grace, they say, "We do not know much about them," and they appear to think that it is not at all necessary that they should know about them. A very large part of God's Word, which teaches most precious truth, they slur. They think that it does not matter to them. Should they not believe according to the denomination in which they were born or brought up? They say that there is no particular necessity for them to be so diligent in searching and knowing the Word. The psalmist thought not so, but he said to the Lord, "I have kept Your precepts and Your testimonies." I feel that I am as much bound to believe right as to act right; and it is just as truly a sin to believe error, when I can learn the truth, as it is to commit iniquity. We are responsible to God for the use we make of our understanding, as well as for the exercise of our affections. There is nothing in the Word of God to justify men in believing what they like, and anyone who neglects to search out the truth commits a sin of omission. He who holds an error, which he might see to be an error if he looked in the mirror of God's Word, is guilty of rebellion against the teaching of God. If we would live a life such as we can look back upon with pleasure, we ought to try to keep the testimonies as well as the precepts of the Lord.

I have met with some people, who used to be more numerous than they are now, who were very strenuous about the doctrines of grace. If anybody differed from their view of the doctrines, they at once said that he was unsound. I should hardly like to repeat the hard things they used to say about such a person; but, certainly, to be sound in the truth was the grand thing with them. And I do not condemn them for that, but I do blame them because, sometimes, practical preaching seemed irksome to them, and the enforcement of the precepts of the Word made them wrathful; they could not endure it. You could tickle their palates, and delight them with a good strong sermon on the doctrines of grace; but when you came to insist upon holy walking, they would turn upon their heel, and say that the preacher was "legal." Now, inasmuch as I before said that, to neglect God's testimonies, is an evil, so I add that, to neglect the precepts, is an equal evil. Be you, O man of God, as earnest to do the right as to believe the right; and, on the other hand, as earnest to believe the right as to do the right! Your whole nature should be subject to God. He is to be your Teacher as well as your Law-giver. Will you not sit at the feet of Jesus, like Mary did, to learn of Him, as well as rise up, like Martha did, to serve Him? If you will not, then you give to Him a lame and limping obedience. "The legs of the lame are not equal," and your obedience is lame, since the legs of it are not equal. There is a long doctrine and a short obedience; or a long precept and a short doctrine. Be it not so with you, O man of God, if you would look back upon a well-ordered life! Happy shall that man be who can say, "Ever since that glad day when I was brought as a penitent to my Master's feet, I have studiously endeavored to do what He has bidden me do, and I have just as earnestly shunned and turned away from everything which I have known to be sin. I praise the Lord that He has helped me to keep my garments unspotted from the world." But if he would be a complete Christian, he must be able to add, "I have also strived to believe all that is taught in the Word of God. I have not given myself up blindly to be led by priest or minister. I felt that God had given me a conscience for which I was responsible, not to my fellow men, but to Him; so I have gone to the law and to the testimony, testing everything by that infallible standard. I have not sat down in idleness, taking things for granted because they were preached with brilliant oratory; but, like the Bereans, I have searched the Scriptures daily to see whether these things are so or not." Ah, beloved! It will make a soft pillow for your head if, in the retrospect of life, you can say, "I have made the law of God, in its teachings and in its commands, to be the rule of my whole life." God grant that you may have that satisfaction at the last!

Further, dear friends, *this summary is excellent for its length*, as well as for its breadth, for here the man of God says, "I have kept Your precepts and Your testimonies." I do not know how long the psalmist had kept them, but it seems to me natural that he should make this summary towards the close of his life. I pray that it may be so with us when we come to die. I have known the grey-headed old man—how well I knew him, and how greatly I loved him, for I mean my venerable grandfather—who, when he was dying, could say, "That which I preached when I first entered the pulpit I have preached to the last. For fifty-eight years, to the best of my knowledge I have preached nothing but Jesus Christ and Him cruci-

fied. I have nothing to retract of the testimony which I have given, for what the Spirit of God taught me, that have I taught to others." And he could equally have said at the last, "I have, as a father, trained my children in God's fear, and they are all following in my footsteps. I have, as a pastor, watched over my flock with sedulous care. I have set them an example which they can safely follow; and there is no man who can truthfully lay a charge against me, for in all uprightness and integrity have I walked before God." Mark you, this dear old man was a Calvinist, an out-and-out preacher of free grace, who would not for a moment take the slightest credit to himself for anything that he was, or had done; yet he could not have said less than this unless he had pretended to possess a modesty which was not true, and mimicked a humility which was based on falsehood. In like manner, may we be kept, by the grace of God, clear of all trusting in our works; but, at the same time, may we abound in good works to the glory of God, and both in thought and in life, may we be clear in the sight of God. Oh! How I have envied that first Quaker, George Fox, who, with all the eccentricities of his life, could honestly say, on his deathbed, "I am clear, I am clear, I am clear of the blood of all men." This is the highest ambition that a minister's heart may indulge—that he should be able to say that at the last, as other men of God have been able to do.

So, you see, this is a blessed summary as to length as well as breadth.

Above all things, *it is excellent from its cause*. Notice how the psalmist says to the Lord, "I have kept *Your* precepts and *Your* testimonies." That is what the true man of God still says, "I followed the precept because it was God's precept. I did not care whether a Church or a Council of any sort had set its stamp upon it. It was God's precept, and that was enough for me. And I believed the doctrine because it was His testimony. It might not be the testimony of any Reformer, or Confessor, but it was enough for me that it was God's testimony." That should be the reason for our conviction and our action also.

The psalmist kept God's precepts and testimonies because all his ways were before God. He felt that God was watching him, he lived under the consciousness of God's presence with him both by night and by day; and, therefore, he dared not believe anything contrary to God's truth, or act contrary to God's command. "You God see me" either held him in check or else impelled him onward. This is the way for us also to live. Dear friends, I pray that you may live thus.

I think the psalmist also meant, when he said that all his ways were before God, that they were under God's smile of approval. He not only observed, but He communed with and commended His servant. Another psalmist, or perhaps the writer of these words which form our text, said, "I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living;" and Enoch might have said, "I have walked with God from day to day. Communion with Him has been my continual delight, and all my ways have been before Him." The Book of Psalms begins thus: "Blessed is the man that walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in His law does he meditate day and night." His ways are always before God, and he has respect unto the law of the Lord evermore.

Such a life as that, dear friends, *is excellent from its use*. It is sure to be a life of happiness, even though it should bring on persecution. It is certain also to be a useful life. It is an example which your children and your children's children may safely follow. It is an argument for the gospel which the most skeptical cannot refute, and it is a most blessed way of propagating that gospel, for men are more often convinced by our actions than by our words. Seek after it, dear friends, and let your lives be such that you may close them with the words of my first text: "I have kept *Your* precepts and *Your* testimonies: for all my ways are before *You*."

II. Now let us pause a moment, and observe that the psalmist, after he had spoken thus, and spoken quite sincerely and truly, yet felt that he must close his long life's summary in another fashion. He then uttered our second text, which I called a **SEARCHING SCRUTINY**: "I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek *Your* servant; for I do not forget *Your* commandments."

His life was perfect, after the manner of Scriptural perfection, but when it was carefully examined and scrutinized, it was found to be manifestly imperfect. Suppose you take a needle, one of the very best that has ever been made—any seamstress would be glad to use it. She would never think of sending a packet of such needles back, and saying that they were not good. They are bright, untarnished, sharp, smooth, all that they should be, quite perfect needles. But just put one of them under a microscope—I have done so—and then see what it is like. Why, now, it is a bar of steel—rough and ugly-looking, tending towards a point at one end, but certainly very blunt. That is just the difference between the microscopic examination and the ordinary observation of our poor eyes. So, the life of a believer may be like

that of Job, “perfect and upright,” but when it comes under the scrutiny of an eye that is illuminated by the Spirit of God, and touched with the heavenly eye-salve, quite another verdict is given; and, tremblingly, with many tears, the confession is poured into the ear of God, “I have gone astray like a lost sheep;” followed by the petition, “Seek Your servant;” and the renewed declaration, “for I do not forget Your commandments.”

Here is, first, *a confession of imperfection and of helplessness*. It really means a continual imperfection and helplessness, for the Hebrew verb relates not only to the past, but to the present. It might just as well be read, “I am still going astray like a lost sheep;” indeed, it must be so read, for the psalmist goes on to say, “Seek Your servant.” He would not have offered such a prayer if his confession had only related to something that was at an end. There is, here, not only imperfection, and the tendency to a continuous imperfection, but there is also an acknowledgment of helplessness. The psalmist does not say, “I have gone astray like a lost sheep, but I can return when I please.” No; he prays to the Lord, “Seek Your servant,” as if the only help for him lay in the search which the great Shepherd would make, and the consequent restoration which would come by His gracious and powerful hand.

Let us just think for a little while, and then I feel sure that we shall soon say that we must confess to God as the psalmist did. I mean that each one of those here present who have led godly lives will still have to say to the Lord, “I have gone astray like a lost sheep.” Think first of God’s precepts. Have we ever gone astray in heart from any one of them? Suppose you never have departed from them in life—which is a very charitable supposition—have you never in heart felt the precepts to be hard? Had you been really perfect, it would have been easy; it would have been natural to you to keep them. Have you not sometimes had to whip yourself up to a duty? The need of being whipped up to it proves that evil is still remaining within you. Then, have you never forgotten a precept? Lives there a man who has carried out all the precepts of God without forgetting any one of them? I would like to see the brother who has done so; but such a brother I never expect to see.

I think that, with the most of us, it is thus. There is a certain duty, and we try to do it with all our hearts; but, meanwhile, we forget another duty which is just as binding upon us as the first was. We look right on, and so we overlook the duties that lie on the right hand and on the left. The very intensity which makes us earnest about one thing often prevents our attending to another thing which is equally important, and thus we present to God one duty stained with the blood of another. I have known a father, in aiming at being firm with his children, err by being too severe; and far oftener have I known others, intent upon being kind to their children, who have grown like Eli, and have winked at their sin. That is but one instance among thousands of the evil I am deploring. A man may say, “I shall rebuke So-and-So for his fault;” but he does it too sharply, and therein he errs. Or, afraid of being too severe, he says nothing, and therein he errs. Did you ever, in all your life, do any one thing so well that it could not possibly have been done better? The difference between the good there was in what you did, and the good there might have been in it, is just so much of deficiency; and sin is any lack of conformity to perfection. Whether you fall short of the mark or go over the line, matters little; in either case, you have missed the perfection God demands. If you do not reach His standard, you have not yet attained to perfect holiness, and there is still something of sin to confess.

The precepts of the Lord are so broad that they touch the secret imagination of the heart. Is there a man living who never has an unclean desire? “I fought against it,” says one. I know you did; but the very desire was sinful. Or, if it has not come to a desire, was there never an impure imagination that crossed your mind? “Yes, it just flitted across my mind,” you say. Well, in proportion as you yielded to it, in that proportion it was a guilty thing. Yes—I must say it—if even a dream has had anything of sin in it, and you have been complacent over it, it detects the sin that is within you, for were you really perfect, even the very passing thought, though it were but as a bird of the air that flew above your head, would still, by casting a shadow over your spirit, cause you vexation and sorrow. Keep that microscope close at hand, and it need not have very strong lenses; only look fairly into your own life, first, by the light of the law of God, and, secondly, by the light of your obligations to Christ who has redeemed you with His precious blood, and then I feel sure that you will have to say, “I fall short even of my own ideal, and I am persuaded that my ideal falls very far short of what God’s ideal of perfection is.”

Has it not often struck you, dear friends, as a thing very full of wonder that good men—some of the best of men who have ever lived—have nevertheless been guilty of things which, at the present moment, we regard as heinous crimes? Mr. Whitefield had a strong objection to slavery, but still it did not seem to him to be wrong to have a number of slaves at the orphan house at Savannah, and to speak of them as

his goods and chattels. That was a matter about which the conscience of the good man was not then enlightened. We do ill if we condemn men too strongly for things about which no enlightenment has come to them; but are they not themselves guilty in the sight of God? Of course, they are. There are men, nowadays, carrying on trades that are doing mischief and only mischief to the populace, but they are not aware of the evil, their conscience is not enlightened about it.

To take another line of thought, suppose a man is worth many hundreds of thousands of pounds, and all the while there are millions of people abroad perishing for lack of the gospel; and, often, the great deficiency of the Missionary Societies is not in the men, but in the means to send out the preachers of the gospel? Is that man right, before the living God, who says, "I am not my own, for I am bought with a price, and all that I am and have belongs to Christ," and yet who nevertheless remains immensely rich—rich beyond anything that he or his children after him can ever want? Yet, possibly, his conscience is not enlightened about that matter, and it is no very great crime in his judgment; neither may you and I condemn him, for our own conscience is probably quite as much in the dark upon something else. But whenever anybody, who is very rich, gets up, and says, "I am a perfect man," I feel inclined to say what Christ said to the young man who thought that he was perfect, "Sell all that you have." Somebody asks, perhaps, "Does Christ propose that test to every one of us?" No, certainly not; but to any of us who say that we are perfect, that test may be applied. If you are such a perfect man, see if you can do as our Lord said, sell all that you have, and give the proceeds to the poor. I have known a man sing—

*"Yet if I might make some reserve,
And duty did not call,
I love my God with zeal so great
That I should give Him all;"—*

but, all the while, he has been trying to feel whether it was a three-penny piece or a four-penny piece that he was going to give to the collection.

As I begin to think of these various things which I have mentioned—just casting, as it were, a little ray of light upon them, not the great light of the eternal purity of God—I cannot understand how there can be any man, even though he has kept God's precepts and testimonies as far as he could, who, nevertheless, is not bound to say, "I have gone astray like a lost sheep."

But, further, suppose it to be possible that we have not gone astray from the precepts of the Lord, how about His testimonies? Is any man here prepared to say, "I feel that I have, in every respect, believed the truth as they are revealed in God's Word, and that I have never erred from it"? Do you believe all the truth, and all the truth in its right proportions and relations? And do you give due emphasis to each truth at the right moment? Have you never believed that which afterwards you found to be incorrect and false? Possibly, you have not willfully done this, but have you done it at all? Think of Augustine, that mighty master and teacher in the Church of God, sitting down in his old age, and writing his "Confessions." Alas! Even he found that he had plenty of things to confess and to amend; and it must be so with us too. The very man who can say, "In the main, I have preached the same things all through my ministry;" yet, nevertheless, adds, "I preached them as far as I knew them, but I did not know them at the first as I learned them afterwards. I did not know this truth in relation to that truth; and I sometimes misrepresented God in my very zeal to give a correct statement, and I slew one truth in my defense of another." Ah, friends! We are all so fallible; no, more than that, we do all so sadly fail, in one way or another, that we must meekly bow our head, and each one say, "I have gone astray like a lost sheep." I am afraid that I might have put this matter much more strongly than I have ventured to lay it before you, and still have been within the mark; but there I leave it, as I need to speak upon one more point.

In that prayer of the psalmist, "Seek Your servant," I discern *conscious faith in the divine power*. He seems to say, "Lord, I am as silly as a sheep; but if I were only a sheep, I could not pray. I am a servant, too—'Your servant.' It is my joy; it is my glory, to be Your servant. Now, Lord, because I am Your servant, seek me. Do not lose me, Lord. You have bought me with Your blood. I am seeking You, Lord, so come You, and seek me. I want to be perfectly holy, come and help me now. Forgive every sin of omission or of commission. Draw me away from every mistake. Draw me nearer and yet nearer to Yourself. 'Seek Your servant.'" Perhaps you are ill, or even dying; well, living or dying, this prayer may still suit you: "Seek me, Lord, 'seek Your servant.'"

Then, lastly, comes in that sweet reflection, "For I do not forget Your commandments." "I have a love to them, I have a longing for them, and I am sure that this never grew in my heart by nature. It is the gift of Your grace; and, because You have put it there, Lord, and You have begun to work in me,

finish Your work, I pray You. Lord, You have made me long to be rid of every false way; therefore, deliver me from it. You have made me wish to be transparent and sincere, You have made me hungry and thirsty to be like Yourself, then will you not satisfy the craving You have Yourself imparted?—

*“The dearest idol I have known,
Whatever that idol be,
Help me to tear it from Your throne,
And worship only Thee.”*

“If I hold an error, yet You know that I wish not to hold it. Show me that it is an error, and I will have done with it at once. And if I am acting in good faith in a wrong way, Lord, do You but let me see that it is wrong, and, cost what it may, I will do the right, and cease from the evil.”

This is a blessed way in which to close our life, but there is a more blessed thing still, and that is, after all is said and done, and after God’s grace has been praised for everything that is lovely and of good repute that it has worked in us, then to cast *bad works and good works* all away, and just look to the cross, and to the cross alone, and see our life in Jesus’ death, our healing in His wounds, our glory in His shame, our heaven in His anguish. Look, saint! Look now. Sinner, you may do the same. Where the saint’s salvation is, there is yours too. And if the greybeard, hoary with years of honor and of virtue, gathering up his feet in the bed, knows no better or brighter hope than that of being justified through the righteousness of Christ and washed in His blood, it is a joy to know that the same hope is free to you, guilty ones, who have not kept the precepts or the testimonies of God. Turn to Christ on Calvary; cast your eyes on Him who, like the bronze serpent, is lifted up that every sin-bitten one may look unto Him, and live. Oh, by His grace, look to Him now, and you shall live, for never soul looked to Him, and died while looking there.

God bless you, dear friends, for Christ’s sake! Amen.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—185, 232, 119 (SONG 2), 538.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON: *ROMANS 7; 8:1-4.*

Chapter 7 Verses 1-3. *Know you not, brethren, (for I speak to them that know the law), how that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives? For the woman which has an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he lives; but if the husband is dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband lives, she is married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband is dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she is married to another man.*

He merely states this as an illustration.

4. *Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that you should be married to another, even to Him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God.*

While we were under the law, we could not come into the bonds of the new covenant—the covenant of grace. But, through the death of Christ, we are dead to the law, and therefore we are set free from the principle and covenant of law, and we have come under the covenant of grace.

5. *For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death.*

Sin is the transgression of the law. Therefore, out of the law, by reason of our corruption, springs sin. And, in our past lives, we did indeed find sin to be very fruitful. It grew very fast in our members, and it brought forth much “fruit unto death.”

6. *But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter.*

No longer is the message to us, “This do, and you shall live.” No more are we slaves under bondage; but we have come into a new state, we are free, rejoicing in the glorious liberty of the children of God; and what we now do is done out of a spirit of love, not of fear. We are not seeking after holiness in order to be saved by it; neither do we seek to escape from sin because we are under any fear of being cast into hell. We have another spirit altogether within us.

7. *What shall we say, then? Is the law sin? God forbid.*

No, so far from being sin, the law is the great detective of sin, discovering it, and letting us know what sin really is.

7, 8. *No, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, You shall not covet. But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, worked in me all manner of concupiscence.*

Or, “covetousness.” The very fact that God said to us, “Do it not,” worked upon our nature so that we wanted to do it, and that which God commanded, which was a matter of indifference to us while we were in ignorance of His will, became, by reason of the depravity of our hearts, a thing to be resisted just because He had enjoined it upon us. Ah, me! What wicked hearts are ours that fetch evil even out of good!

8, 9. *For without the law sin was dead. For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.*

“I did not know how sinful I was until God’s commandment came to me. Sin seemed to be dead within me, and I thought myself a righteous man; but when the law of God came home to my heart and conscience, and I understood that even a sinful thought would ruin me, that a hasty word had the essence of murder in it, and that the utmost uncleanness might lurk under the cover of what seemed a mere custom of my fellow men—when I found out all this, sin did indeed live, but I died so far as righteousness was concerned.”

10-13. *And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me. Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good. Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid.*

“If I sinned the more when God’s commandment was revealed to me; and if, by the light of the law, sin was made more apparent to me, and became so exceedingly sinful that it drove me to despair, and so to commit still worse sin; the fault was not in the law, but in sin, and in me, the sinner.”

13, 14. *But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceedingly sinful. For we know that the law is spiritual:*

The law of the Lord is a far higher thing than it seems to be in the esteem of many people. Talk not of it as a mere “decalogue.” It has far-reaching hands, and it affects the secret thoughts and purposes of men, and even their stray imaginations come under its supremacy. “The law is spiritual.”

14. *But I am carnal, sold under sin.*

“I am carnal.” There is the source of all the mischief—a disobedient and rebellious subject, not an irksome law. The law is good enough, it is absolutely perfect; “but,” says the apostle, “I am carnal”—fleshly—“sold under sin.”

15. *For that which I do I allow not:*

The man himself does that which is evil, but his conscience revolts against it.

15. *For what I would, that I do not; but what I hate, that I do.*

This is a strange contradiction—a man who has grace enough to will to do good, and yet does it not. There are two men in the one man—the new nature struggling against the old nature. This must be a renewed man who talks in this fashion, or else he could not say that he hated sin; yet there must be a part of him still imperfect, or else he would not do that which he hates.

16. *If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good.*

“If I do that against which my will and my conscience rebel, so far, the better part of me owns the goodness of the law, though the baser part of me rebels against it.”

17. *Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwells in me.*

The renewed man still stands out against sin. His heart is not wishful to sin, but that old nature within him will sin even to the end.

18, 19. *For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh), dwells no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do.*

Oh, how often have men, who have been struggling after holiness, had to use these words of the apostle! The more holy they become, the more they realize that there is still a something better beyond them, after which they struggle, but to which they cannot yet attain; so still they cry, “The good that we would we do not: but the evil which we would not, that we do.”

20. *Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwells in me.*

The true man—the newborn man—is struggling after that which is right. The real “I,” the immortal “ego,” is still pressing forward, like a ship beating up against wind and tide, and striving to reach the harbor where it shall find perfect rest. Oh, what struggles, what contentions, what fighting, there are within the men and women in whom the grace of God is working mightily! Those who have but little grace can take things easily, and swim with the current; but where grace is mighty, sin will fight for the mastery, though it must yield ultimately, for there can never be any true peace until it is subdued.

21. *I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me.*

Speaking for myself, I can say that, often, when I am most earnest in prayer, stray thoughts will come into my mind to draw me off from the holy work of supplication; and when I am most intently aiming at humility, then the shadow of pride falls upon me. Do not gracious men generally find it so? If their experience is like that of the apostle Paul, or like that of many another child of God whose biography one delights to read, it is so, and it will always be so.

22-24. *For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?*

These are birth-pangs, the throes and anguish of a regenerated spirit. The Christian man is fighting his way to sure and certain victory; so, the more of this wretchedness that he feels, the better, if it is only caused by a consciousness that sin is still lurking within him, and that he longs to be rid of it.

25. *I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.*

Chapter 8 Verse 1. *There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.*

Some people talk about “getting out of the seventh chapter, into the eighth.” But who made this into an eighth chapter? Certainly, the Holy Spirit did not. There are no chapters in the Epistle as He inspired Paul to write it, the whole of it runs straight on without a break: “There is therefore now no condemnation”—while struggling, fighting, warring, contending—

2. *For the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.*

“Has made me free”—that is, the real “I” of which he wrote a little while before—the true man himself: “‘The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.’ I have broken its bonds, I am a free man. Contending against its usurpation, I have escaped from under its yoke, and I shall yet tread sin under my feet, and God shall bruise even Satan himself under my feet shortly.”

3. *For what the Law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh:*

That He has done most effectually.

4. *That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.*

Oh, what a blessed thing it is to walk freely, “not after the flesh, but after the Spirit,” even though, all the while, there is, within the soul, this strife that the apostle has been describing!

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