

“NEVERTHELESS AT YOUR WORD”

NO. 2810

A SERMON
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DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
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*“Nevertheless at Your word.”
Luke 5:5.*

OUR Lord Jesus Christ had preached a sermon to the multitude while He was sitting down in Peter’s boat; and after the people had gone, He had a private message for Simon. He said to him, “Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught.” Christ’s discourses to the general public were all full of most blessed teaching, but His little private talks to His intimate acquaintances were even more helpful and precious. They were important truths which He proclaimed to the many, but the choicest things He reserved for the few. Many a parable, which He addressed to the crowd, He explained only to His own disciples, and many a thing which He never said to the crowd at all, because they could not understand it, and it would have been like casting pearls before swine, He whispered in the ears of His disciples. So it was with Simon Peter at this time. There was the sermon to the many first, and after the sermon this word to Peter about launching out into the deep. Mind that you, who love the Lord, always look for the private piece after the public sermon. Watch for the sweet word which your Master is always willing to utter, and do not be satisfied unless you hear it.

Then, if the message that He gives you shall be a precept, or a command, like that addressed to Simon, bidding him let down his nets, be careful that you at once obey it. Be not negligent of the special voice of God in your own heart and conscience, for God intends thereby to bestow a great blessing upon you, even as He did upon Simon whose boat was filled with fish almost to sinking. If you give heed to that special private word of your Lord to your own heart and soul, many a boatful of fish shall you have, or rather, many a heart full of untold blessing which otherwise you might never have received.

Peter, being exhorted to launch out into the deep, and to let down his nets for a draught, reasoned that, according to the ordinary course of events, it would be of very little use to do so, for he and his comrades had been toiling hard with their great seine net all through the night, yet they had caught nothing, and it did not, therefore, seem probable that they would catch anything now. However, feeling that Christ was his Master and Lord, and that it did not become him to raise any question about the matter, he just stated the facts of the case, and then added, cheerfully, “Nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net.”

Those four words, “Nevertheless at Your word,” seem to furnish me with a topic upon which I shall try to speak thus—First, *the word of Christ is our supreme rule*: “At Your word.” Secondly, *the word of Christ is our sufficient warrant*. If we have that at our back, we may well say, “Nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net;” and, thirdly, *to keep that word will always ensure a reward*.

I. First, then, THE WORD OF CHRIST IS THE SUPREME RULE OF THE CHRISTIAN.

Time out of mind have we spoken to you about the precious blood of Christ that cleanses all sin, and about the blessings that Jesus brings to you when He becomes your Savior; but we are also bound to remind all of you, who profess to have believed on Him, and to have become His disciples, that you must not only own Him as your Master and Lord, but that you must do whatsoever He bids you—

*“Faith must obey the Savior’s will,
As well as trust His grace.”*

The moment we become Christians, who are saved by Christ, we become His servants to obey all His commandments. Hence, it is incumbent upon us to search the Scriptures that we may know what our Master’s will is. There He has written it out for us in plain letters, and it is an act of disobedience to neglect this search. By refusing to learn what the will of our Lord is, the sin of ignorance becomes willful, because we do not use the means by which we might receive instruction. Every servant of Christ is bound to know what he or she is to do; and then, when he knows it, he should at once do it. The Christian man’s business

is, first, to learn Christ’s will, and, secondly, to do it. Once learned, that will is the supreme law of the Christian whatever may seem to oppose it.

Let me just mention a few of the times when it seems difficult to conform to that will, but when we must say, “Nevertheless at Your word.”

And, first, we must do this with regard to great gospel truths *when our own reason is staggered*. No thoughtful person can seriously consider the doctrines of grace without often crying out, “They are high; I cannot attain to them.” There are many things revealed to us in the Scriptures which we cannot understand—no, not even though we give all our mind to endeavor to comprehend them. There are difficulties in theology. This doctrine does not appear to square with that, or that one with the next. One truth, perhaps, appears inconsistent with the love of God; or we may sometimes wonder how certain events in God’s providential dealings can be consistent with His goodness or justice. Well, my brother or sister, whenever you put your hand to your brow, and say, concerning anything revealed in the Scriptures, “I cannot comprehend it,” lay your other hand upon your heart, and say, “Nevertheless I believe it. It is clearly taught in the Bible; and although my reason may find it difficult to explain it, and I may not be able to discover any arguments to prove the truth of it, yet I lay my reason down at my infallible Master’s feet, and trust where I cannot see.” For a man to take his creed blindly from a pope or a priest, is to degrade himself, because he receives that teaching from his fellow man; but for him to lay his whole mind down at the feet of Jesus Christ, is no degradation, since Christ is the wisdom of God, and all wisdom is infallibly gathered up in Him. I do not expect to fully understand my Lord’s will, I only ask to be informed what that will is. I do not suppose that I can comprehend it, but I say, “What is Your will, my Master? If You will reveal it to me, I will believe it.”

We must adopt a similar course *when we are exposed to the quibbles of our fellow men*. Many young persons, especially, find themselves unable to answer all the objections that are raised by those who oppose the gospel. It would be a marvel if they could, for the old proverb says, “One fool can ask more questions than fifty wise men can answer.” It is not likely that those who are just beginning to learn divine truth should be able to overcome all its opponents. When a question has sometimes staggered me, I have felt, “Well, I cannot answer that, but I believe that it can be answered. I thank God that I have heard it asked, for it has taught me my ignorance upon that point, and I will sit down, and study God’s Word till I can answer it; but even if I cannot answer it, it does not matter. Somebody can do so; and, above all, God Himself can. Be it mine sometimes to leave the arrows of the adversary sticking in my shield; they will do no harm there. If he likes to see them there, let him be amused by it; but as long as I cling to Christ’s infallible teaching, they will not hurt me. So let him shoot, and shoot again.” You will find, beloved, that this will be good exercise for your humility, and good exercise for your loyalty to Christ. It will be shown that you are, after all, a follower of Christ, and not a believer in your own infallibility, or relying upon that reason of yours which, at best, is but a dim candle, but that you have really yielded up your mind to the lordship of your Savior.

Sometimes we shall have to say, “Nevertheless at Your word,” *when the command of Christ seems contrary to our own experience*. It would become a dangerous thing if we were always to follow the experience even of Christians, for the experience of one man might teach us one thing, but the experience of another might teach us the very reverse; and to make experience the basis of theology—though it is often a helpful illustration of it, would lead to great mistake. I must never say, “I did such-and-such a thing; I know it was not right, yet good came of it, and, therefore, I feel that I may do the same thing again.” Neither ought I to say, “I did such-and-such, which I knew was right, but I suffered great trouble as the result of it, and, therefore, I ought not to do it again.” No, no; whatever happens to us, our only course is to pursue the right path, and to avoid all that is wrong. Let each of us say, “My Master, if any act of obedience to You were to cost me many a pang—to cost me my liberty—to cause me to be put into prison”—and it has done so to many of the saints of old—“yet I will do as You command me, whatever the consequences may be.” What said Master John Bunyan, after he had lain in prison many years simply for preaching the gospel? The magistrates said to him, “John, we will let you out, but you must promise not to preach again. There are the regular divines of the country; what have you, as a tinker, to do with preaching?” John Bunyan did not say, “Well, now, I can see that this preaching is a bad thing. It has got me into prison, and I have had hard work to tag enough laces to keep my wife and that poor blind child of mine. I had better get out of this place, and stick to my tinkering.” No, he did not talk like that, but he said to the magistrates, “If you let me out of prison today, I will preach again tomorrow, by the grace of God.” And when they told him that they would not let him out unless he promised not to preach, he bravely

answered, “If I lie in jail till the moss grows on my eyelids, I will never conceal the truth which God has taught to me.”

We are, therefore, not to put our own past experience in the way of obedience to our Lord’s will, but to say to Him, “Nevertheless, however costly this duty may prove to be, at Your command I will let down the net, or do whatsoever You bid me do.” But, sometimes, people get remarkably wise through experience, or they think that they do. Old sailors, for instance, fancy that they “know a thing or two;” and Simon Peter, who had been fishing in that lake for a long while, thought he knew all that could be known about fishing. And Christ interfered with Peter just in Peter’s own line, and gave him a command about fishing. The fisherman might have said, “What is the good of casting the net? We have been fishing all night long, and have taken nothing; what is the good of our fishing anymore?” Peter did not talk so, though he may have thought like that; but he said, “Nevertheless at Your word, since You know far more about fish than I do—since You did make them, and can make them come wheresoever You will—since, Lord, You command it—I would not do it at anybody else’s bidding, but I will do it at Yours, I will let down the net.” So, sometimes, there may be something in God’s Word, or some path of duty clearly indicated to you, which does not seem to carnal judgment to be very wise; but you are to say, “Nevertheless at Your word—no other authority could make me do it—but Your law is the supreme rule for my conduct, and I will do whatsoever You do bid me.”

This great principle ought also to prevail *when self-love is in the way*. Sometimes, the command of Christ runs completely contrary to what we should ourselves like, and obedience to it involves self-denial. It threatens to take away from us much that was very pleasurable to us; and then, very likely, something within us says, “Do not obey it; it will go very hard with you if you do.” Nevertheless, brothers and sisters, may the Holy Spirit so mightily work upon you that you will do anything and everything that Christ commands, however galling to the flesh it may be. We are not our own; so let us never act as if we were. The mark of the precious blood of Jesus is upon us; we have been bought with it, so it is not right for us to make provision for the flesh, or to be looking out for our own ease or aggrandizement. It is our duty to do whatever our Lord bids us do, and to take the consequences, whatever they may be. So let us each one say, “I know that it will cost me much, my Master; but, nevertheless, I will do whatever You command me.”

Sometimes, there is a more powerful opposition still to the will of the Lord; that is, *when love of others would hinder us from obeying it*. “If I do such-and-such, which I know I ought to do, I shall grieve my parents. If I carry out that command of Christ, the dearest friend I have will be very angry with me; he has threatened to cast me off if I am baptized. My old companions, who have been very kind to me, will all consider that I have gone out of my mind, and will no longer wish to have me in their company.” If a person has a genial heart, and a loving spirit, this kind of treatment is very trying, and there is a strong temptation to say, “Well, now, how far can I go in religion, and yet manage to save these fond connections? I do not wish to set myself up in opposition to everybody else; can’t I, somehow or other, please God, and yet please these people too?” But, brethren and sisters, if we are indeed Christians, the supreme rule of our Lord’s will drives us to say to Him, “Nevertheless, I will do whatever You command.” Farewell, our best-beloved, if they stand in the way of Christ our Lord, for He said, “He that loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me: and he that loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.” Everyone else and everything else must go, that we may keep company with Christ.

It sometimes happens that we have God’s Word pointing us to a certain course of action, but we do not follow it because of *the faintness of our own heart*. Do you ever feel faint-hearted? There are some people who seem as if they were born without nerves, or feelings, for they never appear to be downcast. But some of us, at times, shrink away, and seem to be dried up, as if the marrow were gone from our bones, and the strength from our hearts. At such a time as that we know what Christ would have us do, but we hesitate to do it; we feel as if we could not—not that we would not, but that we really could not. There is a lack of courage—a lack of confidence; we are timid, and cannot dash into the fray. Then is the time—when heart and flesh fail—for us to take God to be the strength of our soul by resolving, let our weakness be what it may, that we will obey the command of Christ. When your heart is faint, dear brother or sister, still follow Christ; when you feel as if you must die at your next step, still keep close at His heel; and if your soul is almost in despair, yet hold on to Him, and keep your feet in His ways. If anyone, who fears the Lord, still walks in darkness, and has no light, let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God, for so shall His light break forth as the morning, and his heart shall be once more glad in the Lord.

So, you see, whatever obstacle there may be in the way of our obedience to the command of Christ, let each one of us still say to Him, “Nevertheless at Your word, I will do whatever You command. That shall be the supreme rule and guide for all my actions.”

II. Now, secondly, I want to show you that THE WORD OF CHRIST IS OUR SUFFICIENT WARRANT, as well as our supreme rule.

This is, first, our warrant for *believing on Him*. If the Lord Jesus Christ has bidden you do this, you certainly may do it; and if any shall ask you why you believe on Him, this shall be your triumphant answer, “The King gave me the command to do so.” Listen to this, all you who desire to have eternal life, and who have not yet obtained it. The gospel commission is, “Go you therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit;” and this is the gospel command, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved.” The poor timid soul says, “How can I venture to trust my guilty soul with Christ? It would be presumption upon my part. What right have I to come, and rely upon Him?” It must be right for you to do it, for He bids you do it; and if He bids you do it, this is warrant enough for you. Every sinner under heaven, who hears the glad tidings of salvation, is commanded to believe on Jesus; and he is warned that if he does not believe on Him, he shall be damned. “God now commands all men everywhere to repent.” This is the very widest form of command, so I bid each one of you to say, this very moment, “Lord, I am not worthy to be Your disciple; but, nevertheless, at Your command, I will believe in You. I feel that it will be a wonder of grace if I am saved, and it is almost incredible that it should ever take place, nevertheless, at Your command, I let down my net; I even dare to trust Your precious blood and Your spotless righteousness, and to expect that You will save me.” Is not that a blessed form of argument? I pray that some of you may feel its force, and act upon it even now.

Next, *this is an excellent reason for being baptized if you are a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ*. Somebody may say to you, “What is the good of baptism? It will not save you; to be immersed in water will not wash away your sins.” I hope you will be ready to reply, “Yes, I know all that; nevertheless, at Christ’s command, I mean to do it. I ask not what will be the gain to me of obeying His orders. That would be sheer selfishness; He bids me be baptized, and that is enough for me.” “But such-and-such a church does not practice the baptism of believers or baptism by immersion.” No, but Christ has ordained it. By His own example, by His plain precept, by the preaching and practice of His apostles, He has revealed His will to us, and therefore it is for us to obey that will. If any shall accuse us of making too much of the baptism of believers, we reply, “Our Lord has said, ‘He that believes and is baptized shall be saved,’ and we have no more right to leave out one portion of His words than the other; so, at His command we do this, and let men say what they will.”

This, beloved, is also *the great argument for our taking up the position which we hold as Dissenters*. Is it not a bad thing to dissent from other people. Yes, of course it is, if they are right, and we are wrong; but it is just as bad for them to dissent from us if we are right, and they are wrong. I am not to say, “I will be singular, and keep myself separate from other people.” It would be wrong for me to act like that; but it is right to say, “Whatsoever Christ commands, is law in His Church.” What synods command, or bishops command, or popes command, is not worth the paper it is written on; there is no authority in it to a Christian. He is free from all such control as that; but the law of Christ, as he finds it revealed in the Bible, is binding upon him. I should honor any man who stood absolutely alone, without another individual to support him in his opinion, for having the courage to do so, if he justified his action by the Word of God. To run with the multitude is only too often to go on the wrong road. To believe a thing because the many believe it is a coward’s reason. To slink away from truth because she stands in the pillory—because she is unpopular—because the crowd cries her down—oh, this is a cowardly spirit! I would rather be on the side of truth with half a dozen paupers than be on the side of a lie with all the kings and prelates who ever rode in their pomp through the streets of this world, for, at the last, they who were on truth’s side, and on Christ’s side, shall be honored, and they who had not the conscience and the courage to follow the Lamb shall be dishonored and covered with everlasting shame and contempt.

This principle can also be applied to many other matters. “Nevertheless at your word” ought to be *an argument for keeping on praying*. If you have been asking, for seven years, for the salvation of a soul, and yet that soul is not saved, you may be tempted to say, with Peter, “We have toiled all night, and taken nothing;” but if you do, mind that you also add, “Nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net.” Pray on still; if you have begun to pray for any man, keep on praying for him as long as you live and he lives. Or if it is some choice blessing for the Church or for the world, which God has evidently promised, and it is laid on your heart to ask for it, intercede still even though for years you should receive no answer to

your petition. Still knock at mercy’s door; wrestle till the break of day, for, if in the night the blessing comes not, before the morning sun has risen the Lord will give you the desire of your heart.

So, too, is it *with regard to Christian service*. I will suppose that you have begun to labor for Christ, and that you feel very stupid at it. You have not much talent; and what little you have, you hardly know how to put it to the best use. Well, brother, it looks as if you had better not try again; yet I would advise you to say to your Lord, “Nevertheless at Your word I will go to work again. I will try once more—no, I will try many times more.” Suppose you have been working in a certain district, or class and you have not succeeded; do not yield, brother. Many a hard piece of soil has, after many efforts, at last brought forth a harvest. If Jesus bade you sow there—and He did, for He told you to sow beside all waters—go you, and say, “Nevertheless at Your word I will do what You command.” When I come to address this congregation, I like to feel that I come because I am told to do so. One of you may say, “If I go to that dark village, and stand up on the green to preach, I expect I shall be mobbed, nevertheless at Your word I will do it.” It is a blessed thing to render obedience to Christ under the most difficult circumstances. To obey Him when it is pleasant to do so—when all that you do prospers—is good as far as it goes; but to obey Him when everything seems against you, and nothing appears to prosper—to trust the Lord, and still to work on for Him—this is indeed making Jesus Christ to be your Lord.

III. I must not dwell longer on this part of my theme, lest I weary you; so I will conclude with the last point, which is this, **TO KEEP YOUR MASTER’S WORD WILL ENSURE A REWARD TO YOU.**

You, who believe in Jesus, are already saved, so you will understand that I speak not of any legal reward, as of debt, for this is all of grace; but the man, who carefully and faithfully does everything according to Christ’s word, shall have, first of all, *the reward of an easy conscience*. Suppose you go home, one night, and say to yourself, “Today I have done something that I thought to be right, but I did not stop to inquire if it was according to my Master’s will, I did not wait upon Him in prayer for guidance;”—you will feel very uneasy and uncomfortable in your conscience; and if any trouble shall arise through it, you will have to say, “I brought this on myself, for I took my own course.” But if you can say, at nightfall, “What I have done today will probably be much discussed, and possibly it will be censured by some, and it may even be that it will cost me much pain, and even financial loss; but I know that, as far as I could judge, it was my Master’s will;”—you will sleep very sweetly after that. “Whatever comes of it,” you will say, “I will take it from my Savior’s pierced hand, and reckon it to be part of the sacrifice that is necessary in being a Christian.” It is better to be a loser in that way than to be a gainer in any other, for, as the old divine used to say, “He that can wear the flower called heart’s ease in his bosom is better off than he that wears diamonds in his crown, but who has not true ease of heart.” If a man goes up and down in his daily business in the world, and in his family, and is always able, by God’s grace, to feel, “I have labored as in the sight of God to do that which is right according to the teaching and example of my Lord and Savior,” he has a reward in his own heart from that very fact even if he had no other.

But, next, there is a great reward in being enabled to obey the Master’s word, because, rightly looked at, *it is in itself a blessing of divine grace*. When you thank God for the good things He has done for you, thank Him not only for keeping you out of sin, but also thank Him for enabling you to do His will. No man has any right to take credit to himself for his own integrity, for, if he is a Christian, that integrity is the gift of God’s grace, and the work of God’s Spirit within him. If you did, in your youth, form a candid, honest judgment of the Word of God, and then, burning all bridges and boats, and severing all connection with that which was behind you—if you dared to cast in your lot with the despised people of God, bless Him for it, and count it as a great favor which He did you in that He enabled you to act thus; and if, when tempted with heavy bribes, you have hitherto been able to say, “Get you behind me, Satan,” and to follow close to the heels of Christ, give God all the glory of it, and bless His holy name. In such a case as this, virtue is its own reward. To have been obedient to Christ is one of the highest blessings that God can have bestowed upon any man. There are some of us, who have to thank God that when there were pinching times, we did not dare to yield; but when friends and enemies alike pointed out another way, we saw what was our Master’s way, and followed it by His grace. We shall have to thank Him to all eternity for this. Once begin to parley with the foe—to stifle your conscience or hide your principles—young man, once begin to follow trickery in trade—once begin to dally with the wrong, and you will soon find that you are sowing thorns that will pierce through your pillow when you grow old. Be just, and fear not. Follow Christ though the skies should fall; and, in doing this, you will be rewarded, for it is a blessing in itself.

But, more than this, *no man does his Master's will fully without getting a distinct reward.* Simon Peter's boatful of fish was his reward for launching out at Christ's word; and in keeping His commandments there is always a great reward. There is usefulness to others, there is happiness to yourself, and there is glory to God. I sometimes fear that we, ministers, do not preach enough about practical godliness. We tell you about justification by faith, and the doctrines of grace, and we cannot too frequently discourse upon such topics as these; but we must also insist upon it that where there is faith in Christ, there will be obedience to Christ; and we cannot too often insist upon it that while the everlasting salvation of the Christian does not depend upon what he does, yet his own comfort, his own usefulness, the glory which he will bring to God, must depend upon that. Therefore, look you well to it, beloved, young and old, rich and poor, and henceforth, as long as you live, take the Word of God to be the polestar to you in all your sailings across the ocean of life, and you shall have a blessed voyage, and reach the port of peace, not with torn sails and broken cordage, a dismasted wreck, but “an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”

May God add His blessing, for Christ's sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:
HEBREWS 10:19-39.

Verses 19-22. *Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which He has consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, His flesh; and having an high priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.*

The place of the Christian is that of the nearest conceivable access to God for “the holiest” is “the holy of holies”—that innermost part of the tabernacle to reach which the high priest had to pass through the outer court, and through the court of the priests, and then through the beautiful veil which concealed the mercy seat. At the death of Christ, that veil was torn from top to bottom, so now there is nothing to keep us back from the mercy seat. We, therefore, have boldness and liberty in that way “to enter the holiest by the blood of Jesus;” where the high priest himself could only go once in the year, we may go at all times. The veil has not been merely lifted up for a while, and then dropped down again; it is not rolled up ready for future use; it is torn in two, destroyed. Since Jesus has died, there is no separation now between the believer and his God except by means of such a veil as our base unbelief may please to hang up. The crimson way of Christ's shed blood lies open to all believers; therefore, “let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water,”

23. *Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering;*

Not only hold it, but hold it fast without wavering. Let us never have a question about it. God grant that we may have an unquestioning, unstaggering faith! To hold fast the profession of our faith seems enough; but to hold it fast without wavering is better still; and so we ought to do.

23. *(For He is faithful that promised);*

God gives us no cause for wavering, for He never wavers. If He were an unfaithful God, we might naturally be an unbelieving people; but “He is faithful that promised.” Therefore, “let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering.”

24. *And let us consider one another to stir up love and good works:*

I am afraid there are some who consider one another to provoke in quite a different spirit from this—who watch to find out a tender spot where a wound will be most felt. They observe the weakness of a brother's constitution, and then play upon it, or make jests about it. All this is evil, so let us avoid it; let us all seek out the good points of our brethren, and consider them, that we may afterwards be the means of guiding them to those peculiar good works for which they are best adapted.

“Provoke unto love and to good works.” I do not know how we can do that better than by being very loving and full of good works ourselves, for then will others be likely to say, “If these people are helped by God's grace to love like this, and to labor like this, why should not we do the same?” A good example is often better than a very proper precept.

25. *Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is;—*

Yes; there are some who even make a bad use of what ought to be a great blessing, namely, the printing press, and the printed sermon, by staying at home to read a sermon because, they say, it is better than

going out to hear one. Well, dear friend, if I could not hear profitably, I would still make one of the assembly gathered together for the worship of God. It is a bad example for a professing Christian to absent himself from the assembly of the friends of Christ. There was a dear sister, whom many of you knew, who used to attend here with great regularity, although she could not hear a word that was said; but she said it did her good to join in the hymns, and to know that she was worshipping God with the rest of His people. I wish that some who stay away for the most frivolous excuses, would think of this verse: “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some;”—

25. *But exhorting one another: and so much the more, as you see the day approaching.*

It is not the work of the minister alone to exhort, but the brethren, and the sisters, too, should exhort one another, and seek to stir each other up in the faith and fear of God.

26, 27. *For if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remains no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.*

This is a solemn text, containing a very terrible truth. If, after having been regenerated, and made children of God, we were willfully and deliberately to let the Savior go, and apostatize altogether to the world, there would be no hope for us. What, then, is our hope? Why, that we shall never be permitted to do so—that the grace of God will keep us so that, although we may fall like Peter, we shall not fall away like Judas—that, though we may sin, there shall not be that degree of studied willfulness about it that would make it to be the sin unto death, a deliberate act of spiritual suicide. The doctrine of the final perseverance of the saints derives great glory from this other truth that if they did not persevere, there is no second means of grace, no other plan of salvation. No man was ever born-again twice; no man was ever washed twice in the precious blood of Jesus. The one washing makes us so clean that “he that is washed needs not save to wash his feet,” for which Jesus provides by daily cleansing; but the one grand atoning act never fails. If it did fail, there would remain “no more sacrifice for sins.”

28, 29. *He that despised Moses’ law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: of how much sorer punishment, suppose you, shall he be thought worthy, who has trodden under foot the Son of God, and has counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith He was sanctified, an unholy thing, and has done despite unto the Spirit of grace?*

For apostasy from Christ would amount to all this; and if that were possible, what grace would remain?

30. *For we know Him that has said, Vengeance belongs unto Me, I will recompense, says the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge His people.*

O professors, take this message home to your hearts! Let every one of us take it home: “The Lord shall judge His people.” God’s fire is in Zion, and His furnace in Jerusalem. If a man tries nothing else, he will test his gold; and if no others shall be judged, yet certainly those will be who say that they are the Lord’s people. In that dread day He will separate the goats from the sheep, the tares from the wheat, and the dross from the gold; His fan will be in His hand, and He will thoroughly purge His floor; He will sit as a refiner of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi; He shall be like a refiner’s fire, and like fuller’s soap. Woe to those, in that day, who are a defilement to His Church, and an adulteration to the purity of His people!

31. *It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*

What a terrible verse that is! It is a text that ought to be preached from by those who are always saying that the punishment of the wicked will be less than, according to our minds, the Word of God leads us to expect it to be: “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”

32. *But call to remembrance the former days—*

The apostle is not expecting that any of them will ever go back to where they were before; he is persuaded that they will persevere even to the end. The very warning that he gives is a powerful preventive against apostasy. Now comes the exhortation: “Call to remembrance the former days.” Some of you can “call to remembrance” the time when you joined the church, when you had to run the gauntlet for Christ’s sake. Then, in your early Christian life, you feared nothing and nobody so long as you could glorify God. Then you had great enjoyment, sweet seasons of communion with your Lord: “Call to remembrance the former days.”

32, 33. *In which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great fight of afflictions; partly, while you were made a gazing stock both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly, while you became companions of them that were so used.*

In your early Christian days, you were pointed at, and regarded as quite singular for being servants of Christ; or, possibly, it was not yourselves so much as your pastors, your leaders, your friends who were

prominent in the church, at whom the arrows of the adversaries were aimed. They shot at you through them; and, sometimes, that pained you much more than when they distinctly attacked you. Altogether, it was “a great fight of afflictions” that you had to endure.

34. *For you had compassion of me in my bonds,*

In those early days, the Jewish believers clung to Paul just as ardently as the unbelieving Jews persecuted him.

34, 35. *And took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that you have in heaven a better and an enduring substance. Cast not away therefore your confidence, which has great recompense of reward.*

Be like the brave Spartan who would never lose his shield, but would come home either with it or on it! “Cast not away your confidence.” You trusted in God in those early days, and nothing seemed to daunt you then. “Cast not away your confidence.” Rather, get more to add to it. Let there be no thought of going back, but may there rather be a distinct advance!

36. *For you have need of patience—*

Our supply of that virtue is often very short; it is an article of which there is very little in the market, and all of us have need of more of it: “You have need of patience.”—

36. *That, after you have done the will of God, you might receive the promise.*

There must first be the doing of the will of God, and then the reward will come afterwards. God will not give to His people their full reward yet. Patience, then, brother; patience, sister. Saturday night will come one of these days; your week’s work will then be over, and you will be more than repaid for anything you have done for your Lord.

37, 38. *For yet a little while, and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.*

The drawers back—the mere professors—those who say they have been illuminated, and who have tasted, in a measure, the sweetness of religion, yet who never received Christ in their inmost heart—these are the people in whom God has no pleasure.

39. *But we—*

What a consoling end this is to the chapter! It ought to comfort every believer in Christ who has been distressed by the earlier verses: “we”—

39. *Are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.*

May that be true of every one of us, for our Lord Jesus Christ’s sake! Amen.

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