

A BLOW AT SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS

NO. 350

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON SABBATH MORNING, DECEMBER 16, 1860
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AT EXETER HALL, STRAND

*“If I justify myself, mine own mouth shall condemn me:
if I say, I am perfect, it shall also prove me perverse.”*
Job 9:20

EVER since man became a sinner he has been self-righteous. When he had a righteousness of his own he never gloried of it, but ever since he has lost it, he has pretended to be the possessor of it. Those proud words which our father Adam uttered, when he sought to screen himself from the guilt of his treason against his Maker, laying the blame apparently on Eve, but really upon God who gave him the woman, were virtually a claim to blamelessness. It was but a fig leaf he could find to cover his nakedness, but how proud was he of that fig-leaf excuse, and how tenaciously did he hold to it.

As it was with our first parents, so is it with us—self-righteousness is born with us, and there is perhaps no sin which has so much vitality in it as the sin of righteous self. We can overcome lust itself, and anger, and the fierce passions of the will better than we can ever master the proud boastfulness which rises in our hearts, and tempts us to think ourselves rich and increased in goods, while God knows we are naked, and poor, and miserable.

Tens of thousands of sermons have been preached against self-righteousness, and yet it is as necessary to turn the great guns of the law against its walls today as ever it was. Martin Luther said he scarcely ever preached a sermon without inveighing against the righteousness of man, and yet, he said, “I find that I still cannot preach it down. Still men will boast in what they can do, and mistake the path to heaven to be a road paved by their own merits, and not a way besprinkled by the blood of the atonement of Jesus Christ.”

My dear hearers, I cannot compliment you by imagining that all of you have been delivered from the great delusion of trusting in yourselves. The godly, those who are righteous through faith in Christ, still have to mourn that this infirmity clings to them. While as to the unconverted themselves, their besetting sin is to deny their guiltiness, to plead that they are as good as others, and to indulge still the vain and foolish hope that they shall enter into heaven from some doings, sufferings, or weepings of their own.

I do not suppose there are any who are self-righteous in as bold a sense as the poor countryman I have heard of. His minister had tried to explain to him the way of salvation, but either his head was very dull, or else his soul was very hostile to the truth the minister would impart. For he so little understood what he had heard, that when the question was put, “Now then, what is the way by which you hope you can be saved before God?” the poor honest simpleton said, “Do you not think, sir, if I were to sleep one cold frosty night under a hawthorn bush, that would go a great way towards it?” conceiving that his suffering might, in some degree at least, assist him in getting into heaven.

You would not state your opinion in so bold a manner—you would refine it, you would gild it, you would disguise it—but it would come to the same thing after all. You would still believe that some sufferings, repentings, or believings of your own might possibly merit salvation. The Romish church indeed often tells this so very plainly, that we cannot think it less than profanity.

I have been informed that there is in one of the Romish chapels in Cork, a monument bearing these words upon it, “I. H. S. Sacred to the memory of the benevolent Edward Molloy; a friend of humanity, the father of the poor; he employed the wealth of this world only to procure the riches of the next; and

leaving a balance of merit in the book of life, he made heaven debtor to mercy. He died October 17th, 1818, aged 90.”

I do not suppose that any of you will have such an epitaph on your tombstones, or ever dream of putting it as a matter of account with God, and striking a balance with Him—your sins being on one side and your righteousness on the other, and hoping that a balance might remain. And yet the very same idea, only not so honestly expressed—a little more guarded and a little more refined—the same idea, only taught to speak after a Gospel dialect—is inherent in us all, and only divine grace can thoroughly cast it out of us.

The sermon of this morning is intended to be another blow against our self-righteousness. If it will not die, at least let us spare no arrows against it. Let us draw the bow, and if the shaft cannot penetrate its heart, it may at least stick in its flesh and help to worry it to its grave.

I. Endeavoring to keep close to my text, I shall start with this first point—that THE PLEA OF SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS CONTRADICTS ITSELF. “If I justify myself, mine own mouth shall condemn me.”

Come, friend, you who justify yourself by your own works, let me hear you speak. “I say that I have no need of a salvation by the blood and righteousness of another, for I believe that I have kept the commands of God from my youth up, and I do not think that I am guilty in His sight. But I hope that I may be able in my own right to claim a seat in paradise.”

Now, sir, your plea and this declaration of yours is in itself a condemnation of you, because upon its very surface it is apparent that you *are committing sin while you are pleading that you have no sin*. For the very plea itself is a piece of high and arrogant *presumption*. God has said it, let Jew and Gentile stop his mouth, and let all the world stand guilty before God. We have it on inspired authority, that “There is none righteous, no, not one.” “There is none good, save one, that is God.”

We are told by the mouth of a prophet sent from God, that, “All we like wandering sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way.” And you, in saying that you are righteous, do commit the sin of calling God a liar. You have dared to impugn His veracity, you have slandered His justice. This boast of yours is in itself a sin so great, so heinous, that if you had only that one sin to account for, it would be sufficient to sink you to the lowest hell.

The *boast*, I say, is in itself a sin. The moment that a man says, “I have no sin,” he commits a sin in the saying of it—the sin of contradicting his Maker, and making God a false accuser of His creatures.

Besides, do you not see, you vain and foolish creature, that you have been guilty of *pride* in the very language you have used? Who but a proud man would stand up and commend himself? Who, but one who was proud as Lucifer, would in the face of God’s declaration declare himself to be just and holy?

Did the best of men ever speak thus? Did they not all of them acknowledge that they were guilty? Did Job, of whom God said that he was a perfect and an upright man, claim perfection? Did he not say, “If I justify myself, mine own mouth shall condemn me”? Oh! proud wretch, how are you puffed up! How has Satan bewitched you. How has he made you lift up your horn on high and speak with a stiff neck.

Take heed to yourself, for if you had never been guilty before, this pride of yours were quite sufficient to draw JEHOVAH’s thunderbolts out of the quiver, and make Him smite you once for all to your eternal destruction.

But further, the plea of self-righteousness is self-contradictory upon another ground, for all that a self-righteous man pleads for is *comparative* righteousness. “Why,” says he, “I am no worse than my neighbors—in fact a great deal better. I do not drink, or swear. I do not commit fornication or adultery. I am no Sabbath breaker. I am no thief. The laws of my country do not accuse, much less condemn me. I am better than the most of men, and if I am not saved, God help those who are worse than I am. If I cannot enter the kingdom of heaven, then who can?”

Just so, but then all that you claim is that you are righteous as compared with others. Do you not see that this is a very vain and fatal plea, because you do in fact admit that you are not *perfectly* righteous—

that there is *some* sin in you, only you claim there is not as much in you as in another. You admit that you are diseased, but then the plague spot is not so apparent in you as in your fellow man.

You admit that you have robbed God and have broken His laws, only you have not done it with so desperate an intent, nor with so many aggravations as others. Now this is virtually a plea of guilty, disguise it as you may. You admit that you have been guilty, and against you the sentence comes forth—“*The soul that sinneth it shall die.*” Take heed to yourself that you find no shelter in this refuge of lies, for it shall certainly fail you when God shall come to judge the world with righteousness and the people with equity.

Suppose now for a moment that a command is issued to the beasts of the forest that they should become sheep. It is quite in vain for the bear to come forward and plead that he was not so venomous a creature as the serpent. Equally absurd would it be for the wolf to say that though stealthy and cunning, and gaunt and grim, yet he was not so great a grumbler, nor so ugly a creature as the bear.

And the lion might plead that he had not the craftiness of the fox. “It is true,” says he, “I wet my tongue in blood, but then I have some virtues which may commend me, and which, in fact, have made me king of beasts.” What would this argument avail? The indictment is that these animals are not sheep—their plea against the indictment is that they are no less like sheep than other creatures, and that some of them have more gentleness and more docility than others of their kind. The plea would never stand.

Or use another picture. If in the courts of justice, a thief, when called up, should argue, “Well, I am not so great a thief as some. There are to be found some living in Whitechapel or St. Giles’s who have been thieves longer than I have, and if there is one conviction in the book against me, there are some that have a dozen convictions against them.”

No magistrate would acquit a man on such an excuse as that, because it would be tantamount to his admission of a degree of guilt, though he might try to excuse himself because he had not reached a higher degree. It is so with you, sinner.

You have sinned. Another man’s sins cannot excuse you—you must stand upon your own feet. At the day of judgment you must yourself make a personal appearance, and it will not be what another man has done that will condemn or acquit you, but your own personal guilt. Take heed, then, take heed, sinner, for it will not avail you that there are others blacker with sin than yourself. If there be but a spot upon you, you are lost. If there be but one sin unwashed by Jesus’ blood, your portion must be with the tormentors. A holy God cannot look even upon the least degree of iniquity.

But further, the plea of the self-conceited man is that he has done his best and can claim a partial righteousness. It is true, if you touch him in a tender place, he acknowledges that his boyhood and his youth were stained with sin. He tells you that in his early days he was a “fast lad,” that he did many things which he is sorry for now.

“But then,” he says, “these are only like spots in the sun. These are only like a small headland of waste ground in acres of fruitful soil. I am still good. I am still righteous, because my virtues exceed my vices, and my good deeds quite cover up all the mistakes that I have committed.” Well, sir, do you not see that the only righteousness you claim is a *partial* righteousness, and in that very claim, you do in fact make an admission that you are not perfect, that you have committed some sins.

Now I am not responsible for what I am about to state, nor am I to be blamed for harshness in it, because I state neither more nor less than the very truth of God. It is of no saving avail to you that you have not committed ten thousand sins—for if you have committed one, you are a lost soul. The law is to be kept intact and entire, and the least crack, or flaw, or breakage, spoils it.

The robe of righteousness in which you must stand at last must be without spot or blemish, and if there be but one microscopic stain upon it, which is supposing what is never true, yet even then the gates of heaven never can admit you. A perfect righteousness you must have or else you shall never be admitted to that wedding feast.

You may say, “I have kept such a commandment and have never broken it,” but if you have broken another, you are guilty of the whole, because the whole law is like one rich and costly vase—it is one in design and fashion. Though you break not the foot, and stain not the margin, yet if there be any flaw or damage, the whole vessel is marred. And so if you have sinned in any point, at any time, and in any degree, you have broken the whole law. You stand guilty of it before God—nor can you be saved by the works of the law, do what you may.

“It is a hard sentence,” says one, “and who can bear it!” Indeed, who *can* bear it? Who *can* bear to stand at the foot of Sinai and hear its thunders roar? “If so much as a beast touch the mountain it must be stoned or thrust through with a dart.” Who can stand when the lightnings flash and God descends upon Mount Paran and the hills melt like wax beneath His feet?

“By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh living be justified.” “Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things that are written in the law to do them.” Cursed is the man who sins but once, yea, hopelessly cursed so far as the law is concerned.

Oh! sinner, I cannot help turning aside from the subject for a moment to remind you that there *is* a way of salvation, and a way by which the law’s demands can be fully satisfied. *Christ* bore all the punishment of all believers, so that they cannot be punished. Christ kept the law of God for believers, and He is willing to cast about any and every penitent sinner that perfect robe of righteousness which He Himself has wrought out.

But *you* cannot keep the law, and if you bring up your self-righteousness the law condemns both it and you. Out of your own mouth it condemns you, inasmuch as you have not done all things and have not kept all the law. A great rock lies in your path to heaven; a mountain insurmountable; a gulf impassable; and by that road no man shall ever enter into eternal life.

The plea of self-righteousness, then, is in itself self-contradicting, and has only to be fairly stated to an honest man for him to see that it will not hold water for a single moment. What need of labored argument to disprove a self-evident lie? Why should we tarry longer? Who but a very fool would maintain a notion which flies in its own face, and witnesses against itself?

II. But now I pass to the second point, THE MAN WHO USES THIS PLEA CONDEMNS THE PLEA HIMSELF.

Not only does the plea cut its own throat, but the man himself is aware when he uses it that it is an evil, and false, and vain refuge. Now this is a matter of conscience, and therefore I must deal plainly with you, and if I speak not what you have felt, then you can say I am mistaken. But if I speak what you must confess to be true, let it be as the very voice of God to you.

Men *know* that they are guilty. The conscience of the proudest man, when it is allowed to speak, tells him that he deserves the wrath of God. He may brag in public, but the very loudness of his bragging proves that he has an uneasy conscience, and therefore he makes a mighty din in order to drown its voice.

Whenever I hear an infidel saying hard things of Christ, it reminds me of the men of Moloch, who beat the drums that they might not hear the screams of their own children. These loud blasphemies, these braggart boastings, are only a noisy way of drowning the shrieks of conscience. Do not believe that these men are honest. I think all controversy with them is time thrown away. I would never controvert with a thief about the principles of honesty, or with a known adulterer concerning the duty of chastity.

Devils are not to be reasoned with, but to be cast out. Parleying with hell serves no one’s turn except the devil’s. Did Paul argue with Elymas? or Peter with Simon Magus? I would not cross swords with a man who says there is no God—*he knows there is a God*. When a man laughs at Holy Scripture, you need not argue with him—he is either a fool or a knave—perhaps both.

However villainous he may be, his conscience has some light—he knows that what he speaks is untrue. I cannot believe that conscience is so dead in any man as to let him believe that he is speaking the truth when he denies the Godhead. And much more I am certain that conscience never did give assent to the utterance of the braggart, who says he deserves eternal life, or has no sin of which to

repent, or which by repentance may be washed away without the blood of Christ. He knows within himself that he speaks that which is false.

When Professor Webster was shut up in prison for murder, he complained to the prison authorities that he had been insulted by his fellow prisoners, for he said that through the walls of the prison he could hear them always crying out to him, "You bloody man! You bloody man!" As it was not consistent with law that one prisoner should insult another, the strictest inquiry was made, and it was found that no prisoner had ever said such a word, or that if he had said it, Webster could not have heard it.

It was his own conscience. It was not a word coming through the walls of the prison, but an echo reverberating from the wall of his bad heart, as conscience shouted, "You bloody man! You bloody man!" There is in all your hearts a witness who will not cease his testimony. It cries "You sinful man! You sinful man!"

You have only to listen to it, and you will soon find that every pretense of being saved by your good works must crumble to the ground. Oh! hear it now and listen to it for a moment. I am sure *my* conscience says, "You sinful man! You sinful man!" And I think yours must say the same unless you are given up of God, and left to a seared conscience to perish in your sins.

When men get alone, if in their loneliness the thought of death forces itself upon them, they boast no more of goodness. It is not easy for a man to lie on his bed seeing the naked face of death, not at a distance, but feeling that his breath is breathing upon the skeleton, and that he must soon pass through the iron gates of death—it is not easy for a man to plead his self-righteousness then.

The bony fingers thrust themselves like daggers into his proud flesh. "Ah!" says grim Death, in tones which cannot be heard by mortal ear, but which are listened to by the mortal heart—"Where now are all your glories?" He looks upon the man, and the wreath of laurel that was upon his brow fades and falls to the earth like blasted flowers. He touches his breast, and the star of honor which he wore molds and is quenched into darkness.

He looks at him yet again—that breast-plate of self-righteousness which glittered upon him like golden mail, suddenly dissolves into dust, like the apples of Sodom before the touch of the gatherer. And the man finds himself to his own surprise naked and poor, and miserable, when most he needed to be rich, when most he required to be happy, and to be blessed.

Ay, sinner, even while this sermon is being uttered, you may seek to refute it to yourself and say, "Well, I believe I am as good as others, and that this fuss about a new birth, imputed righteousness, and being washed in blood is all unnecessary." But in the loneliness of your silent chamber, especially when death shall be your dread and grim companion, you shall not need me to state this—you shall see it clearly enough yourselves. See it with eyes of horror—and feel it with a heart of dismay and despair, and perish because you have despised the righteousness of Christ.

How abundantly true, however, will this be at the day of judgment. I think I see that day of fire, that day of wrath. You are gathered as a great multitude before the eternal throne. Those who are robed in Christ's fine linen, which is the righteousness of the saints, are caught up to the right hand. And now the trumpet sounds—if there be any who have kept the law of God, if there be faultless ones, if there be any that have never sinned, let them stand forth and claim the promised reward.

But if not, let the pit engulf the sinner, let the fiery thunder-bolt be launched upon the impenitent offenders. Now, stand forth, sir, and clear yourself! Come forth, my friend, and claim the reward, because of the church you endowed, or the row of almshouses that you erected. What! what! does your tongue lie dumb in your mouth? Come forward, come forward—you who said you had been a good citizen, had fed the hungry, and clothed the naked—come forward and claim the reward.

What! what! is your face turned to whiteness? Is there an ashy paleness on your cheek? Come forward, you multitudes of those who rejected Christ and despised His blood. Come now and say, "All the commandments have I kept from my youth up." What! are you seized with horror? Has the better light of judgment driven out the darkness of your self-righteousness?

Oh! I see you, I see you, you are not boasting now. But you, the best of you, are crying, “Ye rocks, hide me; ye mountains, open your stony bowels; and let me hide myself from the face of him that sits upon the throne.” Why, why such a coward? Come, face it out before your Maker.

Come up, infidel, now, tell God there is no God. Come, while hell is flaming in your nostrils. Come and say there is no hell, or tell the Almighty that you never could bear to hear a hell-fire sermon preached. Come now, and accuse the minister of cruelty, or say that we love to talk on these terrible themes. Let me not mock you in your misery, but let me picture to you how devils shall mock you.

“Aha!” say they “where is your courage now? Are your ribs of iron, and your bones of brass? Will you dare the Almighty now, and dash yourselves upon the bosses of His buckler or run upon His glittering spear?” See them, see them as they sink! The gulf has swallowed them up. The earth has closed again, and they are gone, a solemn silence falls upon the ears.

But hark below, if you could descend with them, you would hear their doleful groans, and hollow moans, as they now feel that the God omnipotent was right and just, and wise and tender, when He bade them forsake their righteousness, and flee to Christ and lay hold on Him who can save to the uttermost them that come unto God by Him.

III. THE PLEA IS ITSELF EVIDENCE AGAINST THE PLEADER.

There is an unregenerated man here, who says, “Am I blind also?” I answer in the words of Jesus, “But now ye say we see, therefore your sin remaineth.” You have proved by your plea, in the first place, that you have never been enlightened of the Holy Spirit, but that you remain in a state of ignorance.

A deaf man may declare that there is no such thing as music. A man who has never seen the stars is very likely to say that there are no stars. But what does he prove? Does he prove that there are no stars? He only proves his own folly and his own ignorance.

That man who can say half a word about his own righteousness has never been enlightened of God the Holy Spirit, for one of the first signs of a renewed heart is that it abhors itself in dust and ashes. If you do today feel yourself to be guilty, and lost, and ruined, there is the richest hope for you in the Gospel. But if you say, “I *am good*, I have merits,” the law condemns you and the Gospel cannot comfort you. You are in the gall of bitterness, and in the bonds of iniquity, and you are ignorant that all the while you are talking thus, the wrath of God abides on you.

A man *may* be a true Christian and *may* fall into sin, but a man cannot be a true Christian and boast in his self-righteousness. A man may be saved, though infirmity may bespatter him with much mire, but *he* cannot be saved who does not know that he has been in the filth, and is not willing to confess that he is guilty before God.

There are, in one sense, no conditions of salvation on our part, for whatever may be conditions, God gives. But thus I know, there never was a man yet who was in a state of grace who did not know himself, in himself, to be in a state of ruin, a state of depravity and condemnation. If you do not know this, then I say your plea of self-righteousness condemns you for ignorance.

But then again, inasmuch as you say that you are not guilty, this proves that you are impenitent. Now the impenitent can never come where God is. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins.” “But if we say that we have no sins, we make God a liar, and the truth is not in us.” God will pardon all men who confess their iniquity. If we weep and lament, and take with us words, and say, “We have grievously sinned, forgive us—we have greatly erred, have mercy upon us, through Jesus Christ,” God will not refuse the cry.

But if we, out of our impenitent and hard hearts, put ourselves upon God’s justice, God will give us justice, but not mercy. And that justice shall be the meting out to us of the full vials of His indignation, and of His wrath forever and ever. He that is self-righteous is impenitent, and therefore he is not, and cannot be saved.

Further than this, the self-righteous man, the moment that he says he has done anything which can recommend him to God, proves that he is not a believer. Now, salvation is for believers, and for believers only. “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; he that believeth not, shall be damned.”

Sir, you will be damned with all your self-righteousness, and your self-righteousness shall be like Dejanira's tunic, which she gave to Hercules, and which he put upon him, and as the old fable has it, it became a robe of fire to him. He tried to drag it away, but he pulled away pieces of his living, quivering flesh each moment, and perished miserably. Such shall your self-righteousness be to you.

It seems a pleasant draught and intoxicates for the moment—it is deadly and damnable as the venom of asps and as the wine of Gomorrah. O soul! would that you would flee, above all things, from self-righteousness, for a self-righteous man does not and cannot trust Christ, and therefore he cannot see the face of God.

None but the naked man will ever go to Christ for clothing; none but the hungry man will ever take Christ to be his food; none but thirsty souls will ever come to this well of Bethlehem to drink. The thirsty are welcome, but those who think they are good, are welcome neither to Sinai nor to Calvary. They have no hope of heaven, no peace in this world, nor in that which is to come.

Ah! soul, I know not who you are, but if you have any righteousness of your own, you are a graceless soul. If you have given all your goods to feed the poor, if you have built many and many a sanctuary, if you have gone about with self-denial among the houses of poverty to visit the sons and daughters of affliction, if you have fasted thrice in the week, if your prayers have been so long that your throat has become hoarse through your crying, if your tears have been so many that your eyes have become blinded through your weeping, if your readings of Scripture have been so long that the midnight oil has been consumed in abundance—if, I say, your heart has been so tender towards the poor, and the sick, and the needy, that you would have been willing to suffer with them, to bear all their loathsome diseases—nay, if adding all this you could give your body to be burned, yet if you trusted in any one of these things, your damnation would be as sure as though you were a thief or a drunkard.

Understand me, I mean what I say. I want you not to think I speak unguardedly now. Christ said of the Pharisees of old, the very thing that I have said of you. They were good and excellent in their way, but He said, the publicans and harlots enter the kingdom of God before *you*, because they *would* go the wrong way, while the poor publicans and harlots were led to go the right way.

The Pharisee who went about to make a righteousness of his own, did not submit to the righteousness of Christ. The publican and the harlot, knowing that they had nothing whereof to glory, came to Christ and took Him as He was, and gave their souls up to be saved by His grace. Oh! that we may do the same, for until we get rid of self-righteousness, we are in a state of condemnation, and dying—the sentence must be executed upon us forever and ever.

IV. I close now upon the last point, namely, that this plea, if we retain it, not only accuses the pleader now, but IT WILL RUIN THE PLEADER FOREVER.

Let me show you two suicides. There is a man who has sharpened a dagger, and seeking out his opportunity, he stabs himself in the heart. There he falls. Who shall blame any man for his death? He slew himself, his blood be on his own head.

Here is another—he is very sick and ill. He can scarcely crawl about the streets. A physician waits upon him. He tells him, “Sir, your disease is deadly. You must die, but I know a remedy which will certainly heal you. There it is, I freely give it to you. All I ask of you is, that you will freely take it.”

“Sir,” says the man, “you insult me. I am as well as ever I was in my life. I am not sick.” “But” says the other, “there are certain signs which I mark in your countenance which prove to me that you have a deadly disease about you, and I warn you.”

The man thinks a moment—remembers that there have been certain signs in him of this very sickness. A monitor within tells him that it is so. He obstinately replies to the physician a second time—“Sir, if I want your physic I will send for it, and if I need it I will pay for it.” He knows all the while there is not a farthing in his pocket and that he cannot get credit anywhere.

And there stands, the life-giving cup before him which the physician at great expense has obtained, but which he would freely give to him and bids him freely take. “No,” says the man, “I will not take it. I may be somewhat sick, but I am not worse than my neighbors. I am not more ill than other people and

I shall not take it.” One day you go to his bed, and you find he has slept his last sleep, and there he lies stone dead. Who slew this man? Who killed him? His blood be on his own head. He is as base a suicide as the other.

Now I will show you two more suicides. There is a man here who says—“Well, let what will happen in the next world, I will have my fill in this. Tell me where there are pleasures to be had and I will have them. Leave the things of God to old fools and such like—I shall have the things of the present, and the joys and delights of time.”

He drains the cup of drunkenness, frequents the haunt of folly, and if he knows where there is any vice pursued, he rushes after it. Like Byron, he is a very thunderbolt, launched from the hand of an arch-fiend. He flashes through the whole firmament of sin, and blazes himself out, until decayed in body and soul, he dies. He is a suicide. He defied God. He went against the laws of nature and of grace, despised warnings, declared he would be damned, and he has got what he richly deserved.

Here is another. He says, “I despise these vices. I am the most upright, honest, and commendable of men. I feel that I do not need salvation, and if I did need it, I could get it myself. I can do anything you tell me to do. I feel I have mental force and manly dignity enough remaining in me to accomplish it. I tell you, sir, you insult me when you bid me trust in Christ. Well,” he says, “I consider there is such dignity in manhood, and so much virtue in me, that I need not a new heart, nor will I succumb and bend my spirit to the Gospel of Christ on free-grace terms.”

Very well sir, when in hell you lift up your eyes, and *you will do so* as surely as the most profligate and profane, your blood will be upon your own head, and you will be as truly a suicide as he who wantonly and wickedly dashed himself against the laws of God and man, and brought himself to a sudden and hasty end by his iniquity and crimes.

“Well,” says one, “this is a sermon well-adapted to self-righteous persons, but I am not one.” Then what are you, sir? Are you a believer in Christ? “I cannot say I am, sir.” Why are you not, then? “Well, I would be, but I am afraid I may not believe in Christ.” You are self-righteous, sir. God commands you to believe in Christ, and you say you are not fit. Now what does this mean but that you are waiting to make yourself fit, and this after all is the spirit of self-righteousness. You are so proud that you will not take Christ unless you think you can bring something to Him—that is it.

“Ah! no,” says one poor broken-hearted soul, “I do not think that is fair with me, for I do feel as if I would give anything, if I might hope to be saved. But oh, I am such a wretch! I am such a wretch! I cannot believe.” Now, that after all is self-righteousness. Christ bids you trust Him. You say, “No, I will not trust you, Christ, because I am such-an-one and such-an-one.”

So, then, you are wanting to make yourself somebody, and then Jesus Christ is to do the rest. It is the same spirit of self-righteousness, only in another garb. “Ah!” says one, “but if I did but feel my need enough, as you just now said, sir, then I think I would trust Christ.” Self-righteousness again, you want your sense of need to save you.

“Oh! but sir, I cannot believe in Christ as I would.” Self-righteousness again. Let me just utter a solemn sentence which you may masticate at your leisure. If you trust to your faith and to your repentance, you will be as much lost as if you trusted to your good works or trusted to your sins. The ground of your salvation is not *faith*, but *Christ*. It is not repentance, but Christ. If I trust my trust of Christ, I am lost.

My business is to trust Christ; to rest on Him; to depend, not on what the Spirit has done in me, but what Christ did for me, when He did hang upon the tree. Now be it known unto you, that when Christ died, He took the sins of all His people upon His head, and there and then they all ceased to be. At the moment when Christ died, the sins of all His redeemed were blotted out.

He did then suffer all they ought to have suffered. He paid all their debts, and their sins were actually and positively lifted that day from *their* shoulders to *His* shoulders, for “The LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.” And now, if you believe in Jesus, there is not a sin remaining upon you, for your sin was laid on Christ. Christ was punished for your sins before they were committed, and as Kent says—

*“Here’s pardon for transgressions past,
It matters not how black their caste;
And oh! my soul with wonder view,
For sins to come here’s pardon too.”*

Blessed privilege of the believer! But if you live and die unbelievers, know this, that all your sins lie on your own shoulders. Christ did never make any atonement for you—you were never bought with blood, you never had an interest in His sacrifice. You live and die in yourselves, lost—in yourselves, ruined—in yourselves utterly destroyed.

But believing—the moment you believe, you may know that you were chosen of God from before the foundation of the world. Believing, you may know that the righteousness of Christ is all yours; that all He did, He did for you; that all He suffered, He suffered for you. You do in fact, in the moment you believe, stand where Christ stood as God’s accepted Son. And Christ stands where you stood as the sinner, and suffers as if He had been the sinner, and dies as if He had been guilty—dies in your room, place, and stead.

Oh! Spirit of God, give faith this morning. Win us all from self. Knit us all to Christ—may we be saved now by His free grace and be saved in eternity.

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.