

# A Sermon.

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[Taken from "Quaint Sermons of Samuel Rutherford," by the Rev. Andrew A. Bonar, D.D.]

"Set the trumpet to thy mouth. He shall come as an eagle against the house of the Lord, because they have transgressed my covenant, and trespassed against my law. Israel shall cry unto me, My God, we know thee. Israel hath cast off the thing that is good: the enemy shall pursue him" – Hosea 8:1-3.

The Lord's prophet, beloved in the Lord, had to do with very rough and hard timber at this time; he had to do with a stiff-necked people. And not only had the prophet of God to do with the ten tribes, to prophesy to them; but sometimes also he prophesies against the Kirk and the kingdom of Judah. The most part of this chapter is prophesied against the kingdom of Israel, the ten tribes, and the last verse thereof is prophesied against Judah. And because the Lord's prophet had to do with such a stiff-necked and rebellious people, therefore he uses more threatenings than he does promises; and he has more threatenings than any of the rest of the prophets has. For this prophet lived in a time when the people where he lived had no sense nor knowledge of God. And the kings and princes of these lands, they had set their heads and their shoulders together for bearing down the true worship of God. And ye know an ill and a great knot of timber requires a hard wedge to make it split up. Even so because they had all revolted from God, and had taken them to a false worship, he must speak to them as one who kent very well what was in their hearts; and therefore, for the most part, he speaks to them of the wrath and anger of God. And in this chapter the prophet, inspired by the Spirit of God, begins with a charge and a proclamation: "Set the trumpet to thy mouth. He shall come as an eagle against the house of the Lord." That is, declare unto them that there is war coming against them from the Lord. And then he gives a reason for it, why he makes this proclamation. Some expone this to be the king of Assyria, Salmanasar, that was to come against this people – "who should come as an eagle against the house of the Lord"; and some expone it other ways. But this is sure, that this was some swift judgment that was to come against them. Some of them thought this judgment is long a-coming; but when it comes, it comes with eagle's wings. It is a better judgment – if any judgment can be better than another – that comes upon feet than that which comes upon horseback. Against whom shall this judgment come? Not against the wicked folks in the world, but against the house of the Lord – against His own sworn and covenanted people; His main quarrel and controversy that He has is against them. What ails the Lord to come against His own house? He must be very angry when He does so. A father that comes against his own child to strike him, if he be wise, must have a just cause for it, and be very angry at him. And the prophet says that the Lord has just cause to do this. In the first verse He gives one reason of it: "Because they have transgressed my covenant, and trespassed against my law." That is a warrantable judgment that comes for such a cause. When there is sin against God's law and transgressing of His covenant among a people, He has just cause to punish them.

What! will Israel make no apology for themselves when the wrath of God comes thus upon them? Yet, says the prophet, they will have their own excuses at that time. "Israel shall cry unto me, my God, we know thee." That is the first skonce [A shed under which stones are hewed, defence, protection.] that ever the pursued people of God get to hide themselves under, and a hypocritical people, when they are plagued, make this objection against the Lord first. Will the Lord, say they, send a destroying enemy against us, since Thou art our God, and Thou art in covenant with us, and so why should we be put to the worse? Why should Assyria come as an eagle against us, seeing we say, "We know Thee," and we profess Thee to be our God? In the third verse that objection is answered, as there is nothing that a plastered hypocrite can

say to God as an excuse of his ill but the Lord has an answer to it. "Israel hath cast off the thing that is good: the enemy shall pursue him." It is not said that they have forsaken good, but they have forsaken the thing that is good. They have forsaken the Lord, and taken them to Balaam; they have forsaken the fountain of living waters, and digged to themselves broken cisterns that can hold no water. And therefore judgment shall come upon them – the enemy shall pursue them.

Now for the first part, that there is a charge given to the Lord's prophet, "Set the trumpet to thy mouth." What is the duty of those who are the Lord's ministers when wrath is coming upon a people? They must either tell them of it, or their blood shall be upon the pastor's head. Isaiah 58:1, "Cry aloud and spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and show my people their transgressions, and the house of Jacob their sins." All ministers and prophets of God who would be free of the blood of lost souls, are bound and obliged before God to tell them freely of their sins. The Lord says to the prophet (Ezekiel 2), "Tell them from me what it is that they have deserved." Then all ministers are heralds sent out in God's name to denounce woe against all God's foes, and to speak peace unto God's friends, and they are messengers sent out from the Lord to tell what is the will of God to His people – to declare whether He be at peace or if He be at war with a nation.

The *use* of this is – any prophet or minister that changes God's message by the way, and tells it not as God bids him tell it, is not a faithful messenger, nor a right blower of the Lord's trumpet. He cries not the alarm at the command of the general, as he should that cries not unto the righteous, "Mercy, mercy unto you for all thy doubting and fainting; salvation to you for all the contrary thoughts thou hast, for there is blood enough in Christ's wounds to cleanse and to save you"; and that tells not to the wicked man, "Laugh and rejoice as thou wilt, the anger of God is awaiting you, albeit thou seest it not." That is a false minister that changes God's wine and puts in his own water instead of it, that changes God's copy in any point and fills it up with his own devices, that has not his warrant to show you for what he does. As he is a false messenger that will not show his message to you when he summons you, it is a token he is not right. Even so, all these who cannot let you see the copy of God's Word for anything they speak to you, it is a token that they are bastard trumpeters, and are not sent of God to speak to His people. Such ministers run and God sends them not; they speak the lies of their own head, without the warrant of God's Word; and whenever there is a service pressed upon the Kirk that is not warranted out of the Word of God – that contains such things therein as bowing before altars, and sets apart days of man's devising for worshipping of saints – that is a false copy of God's will, and whoever follows it, they speak and God sends them not.

Wherefore is a trumpet mentioned here? Because a trumpet is a shrill instrument of war, and a trumpet is ordinarily blown to waken all, and to stir them up, who are not thinking of war, nor has any mind of it. So this is as much as if it were said, "Set thy trumpet to thy mouth; let them hear on the deaf side of their head." The thing that we are to learn here is that a sleeping world and a sleeping Kirk must have a trumpet blown to waken them, for they will not be wakened with whispering into their ear to tell them that God is angry at them. But we must blow a trumpet, and tell you of the wrath of God and of His anger against you. And there are four reasons wherefore we must blow with a trumpet to waken secure sinners.

First, because they caress their own conscience that it may not accuse them for that which their mind lets them see to be wrong. Even as a father does to a caressed bairn – lets him not know, by correcting him, when he does wrong. Even like unto that spoken by the prophet (Isaiah 30:10), they "say to the seers, See not, prophecy not," so that sinners have need to be shouted unto as with a trumpet, that they may be wakened. Woe's them that can never be wakened with nothing till hell waken them; and if anything in the world be our wreck, that same is it – even a spiritual security and sleeping in sin.

A second reason wherefore there must be blowing with a trumpet to waken sinners is because there is much din, and that hinders hearing when God speaks unto us. Gain is crying so loud in some men's ears, and court, and the honour and pleasing of kings, and ease, etc. These things, and the like, cry so loud in the ear of the natural man, that all that God's ministers and His prophets can cry unto him of the Lord's righteousness, of His justice, of His truth, they will not hear, neither can they hear. They who know what a disease in the ears means say this of it, that when there is a wound within, it makes a crackling there, and it hinders hearing of any sound without; and that is it which makes deafness. Even so, when the day of the Lord's anger and wrath – of His taking vengeance on transgressors – is spoken of to some, there is something within that cries louder to them, that makes them not to hear the other, and therefore the Lord bids sound a trumpet unto such.

A third reason wherefore the Lord bids sound a trumpet is: it is an ordinary thing for the devil to hold men off their accounts till they be over the score – to keep them from seeing them till they can do no better – until they come to that, that he makes them to think that they are over long a-counting with God. Woe's them that let their accounts run long, or without taking order with them, for it is a very dangerous thing. Our Lord, again, will have His messengers to set a trumpet to their mouth to tell His people what sin is, for nature will never tell a man what sin is. There are two sorts of convictions for sin that the Lord's Word tells us of. *First*, there is a natural conviction, and that never lets a man see what sin is. The natural man is only a patient in that conviction; he never comes to be an agent. The conscience of the natural man may convict him of sin, but for his will and his affections, they are mere patients, and join not at all in the work. They know that there is death and hell; but they would have death and hell to stay away from them, and this is the cause of that which is spoken (Isaiah 26:11), "Lord, when thy hand is lifted up, they will not see"; (Amos 6:3), "They put the ill day far from them"; and since they think the ill day to be far from them, and since they see not the hand of God lifted up, albeit all the world should cry to them, they will not hear nor make them to know what they are doing. *Second*, the Word of God tells us of a spiritual conviction where God is an agent, and man himself he convicts also; (1 Corinthians 11:31), "If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged of the Lord"; (Micah 7:9), "I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him." There is an evident mark of one who hears the voice of God convicting of sin when they come to that.

A fourth reason wherefore a trumpet must be blown is, because to believe news of the wrath of God and of the Lamb is a supernatural thing, and so the spirit of nature will never make a man to believe them. Nature will never tell a man the thousandth part of the ill and sinfulness of sin, and therefore the Lord must cry it into the soul as with a trumpet.

*Use.* – Well's that soul whom the Lord works upon in time, and He makes to hear Him when He cries. Well were Scotland if they wakened in time out of their security! I durst say, if Scotland were wakened in the name of that Lord, who sent me here to speak to you, that mercy should be the end of all these tumults and troubles that have been among us. There is nothing that hitherto has been the wreck of Scotland but only security, and that the sinners of Scotland have never been wakened. There be two things that serve for wakening sinners out of their security, and we have both these to waken us.

First, the sins of the land wherein we live call upon us to be humbled. And if there were no more but the drunkenness, the atheism, the hypocrisy, the ignorance of God, the sins of the families of the land in not setting up the worship of God, we have just cause to be humbled for these and for the like.

Another thing which calls for humiliation is, when judgment is already begun, and that is among us. And God knows that it be not time for us now to take our pleasure and ease, and to lay down our heads upon a pillow of the devil's stuffing, when the Lord's ark is in the fields, and when the Lord's people of this land are entering into a strange land; and God

knows who are their friends or who are their foes into it; and yet we trust that God will make the people of that land to be for their good, and will cause them sell them meat and drink and what they stand in need of, and that He who has said, "Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm," will do for them, albeit they should not show themselves friends to them. But when the Lord's glory is in such hazard, woe to them who are not praying to God for preserving, and for them who are in hazard for it, and are not humbled now for them, for they shall get none of our Lord's comforts in that day when He shall laugh and rejoice, and shall be set up high above all His enemies. They will not do something now when our Lord must either die, or die when we are like to be an undone people if He die not for us. Woe to them! But we trust that our Lord's salvation is not far off, but He will help us in time for His covenant's sake, seeing we are a people that are in covenant with Him; albeit the people of this land were all devils and remedy-less sinners. He will help us now, and take another time for punishing any wrongs of that kind.

There is a reason given for this in the next place why the Lord's prophet should set the trumpet to his mouth. "He shall come as an eagle against the house of the Lord." What king this was that at this time was threatened to come against this people, is differed upon by some of the interpreters. That it was Salmanasar, as some say, it is not likely; and yet it is sure that Assyria was to come against this people and to overcome them, and he was to come against them in a fierce and terrible manner. But we leave that. There are two sorts of judgments that come against the Kirk of God. There are some judgments that come upon four feet to them – that come, as it were, upon eagle's wings. And some judgments that come at leisure again, such as the wrath of God that came upon the old world. It was an hundred and twenty years coming upon them or it lighted, and yet for all that it came at last. Let the wicked in the world say as they will, yet the wrath of the Lord is long in coming, yet He is aye coming, and His judgment and wrath against the wicked sleep not. Isaiah 30:18, "The Lord waits that he may be gracious, therefore will he be exalted, that he may have mercy upon you, for the Lord is a God of judgment." The judgments of God sometimes go at leisure, but they will come (2 Peter 3:4). There is a reason asked for this – wherefore the Lord's judgments that He has threatened are so longsome in coming? And it is answered, "The Lord delays it, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night." This is referred to the words that are spoken before. He is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish. So that the enemies of the grace of God can get no ground for their false doctrine.

But the Lord has other judgments that come not slowly but swiftly, and upon four feet, as it were. And the Lord's Word uses three comparisons to show this swiftness of the Lord's judgments. This text that we have read says that they come with eagle's wings, and this is the king of all flying fowls, and comes with a clap upon the prey thereof. So do the judgments of God upon His enemies sometimes. The second word that is said for that is written (1 Thessalonians 5:3), destruction shall come upon the wicked as pains upon a woman in travail. So is it with those who are wicked men. When they think least of destruction to come upon them, and when they are preaching peace to themselves, and are building their castles upon high, that they think no evil shall come near them, then the wrath and anger of God breaks out upon them and destroys them. The third comparison for showing the swiftness of the coming of the judgment of the wicked is in the Proverbs 1:27. It is said thereof that their destruction cometh as a whirlwind, and ye know a whirlwind is a thing that comes very suddenly. For presently before it there is a calm, and immediately after the calm there comes a blast of a whirlwind that blows away all light things where it comes. Even so does the wrath of God when it comes upon the wicked. They see nothing but a calm before, and then after their greatest calm immediately the whirlwind of the wrath of God comes, and blows them away, root and branches.

Let our *use* of this be to learn to make use of the time which God gives unto us, for if the Lord's wrath come after such a manner upon His enemies, it is best for all to be looking their accounts in time. Well's them that have all their accounts laid and examined before the Lord come upon them to call them to account. He is a blessed soul who can learn wisdom from the foolishness of the five sleeping virgins, and so escape the wrath of God that comes upon the wicked to the world. O, but that be a sorrowful saying which that man in the Gospel says: "Soul, take thy rest, for thou hast enough laid up for many years." "Fool!" – is that well said? – "this night thy soul shall be taken from thee, and then whose shall all these things be?" The very time when he is proclaiming peace and ease to himself – aye, when thou art proclaiming rest every way to thyself – it may be that even then the Lord shall send a messenger to take thy soul from you, as was done to Him. And what will all thy full barns and thy renewed confidence in the world that thou trusted so much unto, do to you then? Well's them who are prepared again the Lord come to call upon them. They fear not His call when it comes. What if the Lord shall be pleased to send a trial upon this land, and upon us of this congregation who think they shall be most able to stand out against any trial? None shall be able to stand out against the trial as these who can say in effect that there is no new event come upon them but that which formerly they looked might be, and were preparing themselves for the same; who can say there they resolved to be content, and they are content to quit husband, wife, children, life, lands, and rents, and all for their Lord and for His cause. And so let everyone take pains to read over the count of their old sins – the night-drinker for his drunkenness, the blasphemer of God's name for his blasphemy, and such as were anyways art and part bringing in a new worship in the Kirk of God in this land, who consented unto the five articles of Perth, etc., [In 1618 an Assembly at Perth, formed of members chosen according to directions from Court, passed the Five Articles, viz., kneeling at the Sacrament of the Supper, private administration of baptism, private communicating, observance of holydays, and confirmation. These articles were afterwards, amidst much opposition, ratified by the Parliament held at Edinburgh, 4th August, 1621. They were enforced with rigour. Ministers were threatened with deposition if they would not submit to them. – See Row's "History of the Kirk of Scotland," page 318, etc.] and be humbled before God for them. If ye would have a lap of Christ's garment to cover you in the ill day – if ye would be safe when the Lord comes against the sinners of Zion as an eagle – count for your old sins and be humbled for them, and ye shall be safe.

Another thing that we have to mark in this comparison is, What is it that leads the eagle to come against the prey? Nothing else but the smell of the prey. What was it, think ye, that led Assyria to come against the people of God when they came? Was it the glory of God? No, it was nothing else but the love of the world and the things thereof, without any respect to God's glory. Our Saviour, Christ, says (Matthew 24:28), "Where the carcasses are, thither will the eagles resort." Wherever there is a breakfast for the eagles, they will be there. Even so, wherever the enemies of the Kirk of God may get their vantage against the same, they will be there. It is a plain instinct of nature that leads the eagles to the prey, and hunger is enough to them to make them seek where the prey is. And the thing that leads the enemies of the Kirk of God to come against the Kirk is nothing else but the malice they have against the Kirk and the love of blood. They have such a greedy desire after it. And the Lord's Spirit tells of Nebuchadnezzar, that was drunk with the blood of His people, and that he coveted after the same. We may thank the Lord for this, that we know what it is that leads on the enemies of the Kirk to come against His Kirk – that it is not the Lord nor His glory. Is the end that they have before them, think ye, the Lord or His glory? No, no; say what they will. They will say the divine service book which our enemies stand for this day – as one of them imprudently has said of it – that it is a divine book, and that there is more sound divinity therein than in all the extemporal prayers of all the ministers, both in our neighbour land and in this land also. But let them say what they will, it is nothing but themselves and the filling of their fat bellies and the pleasures of the world which they have been and are still seeking. It is a foolish thing

for the enemies of the grace of God to say that man's free will is a thing indifferent to choose or to refuse anything as it pleases, whether it be good or ill. Is the eagle's hunger a thing indifferent for the eagle to seek to have it stayed or not? No; it is natural for it to seek to have it stayed by the prey. They say there be three things that show that the will of man is a thing indifferent. First, they say there is in man a thing which they call indifference to do good or to do ill at his pleasure. Second, they say that there is a conscience within those who are enemies to God as well as these have a conscience who are in favour with Him; but that conscience will not keep them in if so be they want grace. Third, they say they have the awe of the Lord in His Word to keep them from sin, and that will be a restraint to them. But there are other three which we may set against these, which are also in every man by nature, that sets them a work to do, as ill from their conception. First, there is the habit of natural corruption that leads them to commit sin; for natural corruption, as they say, is not like a pirate that comes out of the harbour, and it is a thing indifferent for it to go east or to go west, and so they go where they may best find their prey. Nay, natural corruption is not a thing indifferent, but it leads every man captive to the law of sin. Second, there is in every man the habit of acquired corruption, beside the natural corruption which is in all by nature He has more sin added to that sin wherein he was born, and that leads him on to commit sin. Third, is an individual induration that is come upon wicked men, whereby God has tied them, in His righteous judgment, to sin, and given them over to their own wicked heart, that whether they will or not by reason of that individual induration that is come upon them, they must sin. Well's them that have their will guided by the grace of God, and not by another thing. See what it is that makes ye to stand for the cause of God; whether it be because there are thousands and multitudes upon Christ's side of it, and it would be hard with thee if thou dost otherways. That is a wrong motive, and it will not miss to fail thee if there come any trial. But that is a gracious freewill that resolves to stand in defence of the cause of God, and to stand by the same albeit there were no more upon Christ's side of it; that albeit all others should turn their backs upon Him, yet they will stand with Christ where He is.

What is the quarrel that this eagle has against the house of the Lord and against His covenanted people, for it would be thought, Who should be free of stroke, if so be that the Lord's people be not free of it? No; by the contrary, you know it is said, "Judgment must begin at the house of God." And (Ezekiel 9:1), where those six men are sent out with slaughter weapons in their hands, to slay all in the city save only those that were marked by the man with the pen-case inkhorn, even Christ, they are commanded to begin at the Lord's sanctuary. Whenever wrath is a-dealing, professors that have gone on in a wrong course shall be sure to get the first dint of it. And so think not with yourselves that a profession will save you when the ill days come. Now there be three ill in a bare profession that will rather hasten wrath upon men than keep it off.

First, Where there is a profession of religion there is more light than where there is not a profession; at least, there should be more light, and that makes the wrath to come sooner and to light fiercer and hotter upon those who have it than upon those who have no profession at all. The more profession and the greater light thou hast, if so be that thou go against the same, thou shalt get the more strokes and the greater wrath shall light upon you. Of all the enemies, he that is an house enemy, ye know, is the worst enemy. A minister that goes with a gown upon him, and bears a Bible about with him, if so be that he be false, is the worst enemy that the Kirk of Christ has. You know who it was that sold Christ, our Lord. Even Judas, who was one of His disciples; and even when he was betraying Him, he seemed to be very kind to Him, for even then he would kiss Him, and our Lord says to him, "Friend, betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss?" And it is very ordinary to be so. The worst enemies that the Kirk of Christ has in our neighbour kingdom are those that are called the heads of the Kirk and the reverend fathers in God – Canterbury, [Laud was Archbishop of Canterbury

from 1633 to 1641.] and those of that kind. Those are the greatest enemies that Christ and our Father and His have, and it is they who betray Him and His cause.

Another ill that comes of a profession is – ye know the Spirit of God in His Word uses to reckon from a profession; (Amos 3:2), “You only have I known of all the families in the earth: therefore will I punish you for all your iniquities.” “I made you my chosen people beyond all others, and therefore I will not let you gang unpunished.” The Lord cannot endure a people who have a profession of religion to sin against Him as others do. A lord or a laird cannot endure a thistle to be in his garden, but causes it to be plucked up by the roots and cast over the dike. He cares not to let many thistles stand in the mountain, but for a thistle in his garden, he cannot endure that. Those who give themselves out to be the Lord’s beloved people, and yet are barren of any good fruits, if there be a sore judgment in the world, it shall light upon such.

A third ill that comes of a profession is – we believe that a profession makes black sins to become white sins. No; it is not so. David’s adultery is adultery as well as the adultery of the greatest reprobate that is; albeit his adultery is taken away, and theirs is to be kept to the fore against them, yet in themselves they are one. The enemies of the grace of God put a calumny upon us in this when they say that we say, “God hates not the sin of the elect.” No; we say, and affirm it, that the Lord hates their sin, but withal He hates not their persons but loves them; and for temporal judgments – albeit they miss spiritual and eternal judgments – they shall not miss them who are guilty of any sin or goes against the Lord’s covenant, or seem to be for it and are not so in heart; though they were never so dear to God, even as dear as Coniah, as it is said (Jeremiah 22:24): “As I live, saith the Lord, though Coniah, the son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, were the signet upon my right hand, yet would I pluck thee hence; and I will give thee into the hand of them that seek thy life,” etc. And so, of all the sore judgments that come upon any people, it shall come upon them who profess the Lord and religion and are not an honour to their profession. I am sure this is Scotland’s note. Some, it may be, will be ready to say, “I am sure the Lord will defend me, seeing I am a covenanter, and it is God’s covenant.” No; but if there be a chosen stroke for any, if thou be not a heart-covenanter, it shall light upon you. The Lord has a judgment prepared for you, albeit thou shouldest never go unto the fields because thou hast no more but a name and a profession thereof. Woe’s them that know no more of religion but only the bare name of it!

The prophet goes on, in the next verse, to tell what a people the people of Israel were, and what they shall do under their trouble. Israel shall say unto me, “My God, we know thee.” “Thou art our God, and we know that thou art our God.” This is an objection to what has been said before: shall Assyria come against the Kirk of God as an eagle? No, it may not be so, for we will tell Him that He is our God and we are His people, and therefore we will cry unto Him in our distress and trouble. There are three things contained in this prayer. First, that Israel, in their distress, will cry. Second, that in their distress they will cry My God.” Third, they will cry, “My God, we know thee.”

First: That they will cry to God under their distress and trouble. It teaches us this far that hypocrites, when they are under the hand of God, are all very holy folks then. In Judges 10:10, and in divers other parts, it is said of the predecessors of this same people, in their distress they cried unto the Lord, and acknowledged they had sinned against Him. (Jeremiah 2:27), In prosperity people turned their back upon God, “and not their face; but in the time of their trouble they will say, Arise and save us.” This is an ordinary way that we use when we can do no better; then we cry unto the Lord for help and deliverance. (Psalm 78:34), “When he slew them, they sought him; and they returned and inquired early after God. And they remembered that God was their Rock, and the Most High God their Redeemer.” When the vengeance of God was lying sore and heavy upon them, they cried unto the Lord, “Lord, save us.” When anything ails hypocrites they will cry fast to Christ then. O! but there be

many who will be content to winter Christ that cannot be content to summer him also. When worldly men see the hand of God to be upon them, O, but they will seem to be holy and to be devout then. But whenever the hand of God is taken off them again, immediately they return unto their old ways. This should make us to examine bed holiness, and holiness that comes by reason of crosses, very well. For there are many that, in their sickness, and when they are under the hand of God any way, will cry fast for the minister then, and seem to be sorry for their former ill-spent time, and will promise very fair, if God will spare them then, they shall be better servants to Him in all time coming; and yet when time is granted to them they will return after that to be as ill every way as ever they were before. There are three things that we should try of our holiness in such a case. First, we should try whether it be our own holiness and ease, or if it be God Himself, that makes us to cry to Him and to humble ourselves. Well's that soul that humbles itself under the mighty hand of God, and is brought home to Himself by its troubles. Second, in trouble compare these two together – whether you think it better to be guilty or if ye think it best to be miserable. If you had rather choose misery before you choose guiltiness, and if ye be more for sin committed than ye are for the misery that comes upon you because of sin. There are three things that we look not to in our afflictions. First, for the present our punishment or the afflictions of any, they are not grace. Affliction may well restrain the act of pride for the present, but it cannot restrain the habit thereof. As in Ahab and in Cain, when punishment was upon them the act of pride was restrained indeed, but the habit thereof was not restrained. Second, we should consider that all the crosses in the world will do no good unto any if so be they be not blessed unto us by the Cross of Christ. No, they will rather if He bless them not. The Lord complains of His people (Amos 8). that the more He struck and plagued them, the more they ran away from Him. Third, we should remember that affliction of itself is not grace at all, albeit it be a means whereby the Lord works grace in the hearts of His own children, and makes them pliable for it. Fire, ye know, changes not the nature of metals, to make one metal of another; it may well make them hot and soft, yet for all that it cannot make iron gold. Even so affliction cannot make the devil's iron to become God's gold; it may well make it some softer. And so we had need to try whether our afflictions be blessed of God or not, and we had need to try our holiness then. There are many who make a form to pray to God now, who have their son in the camp, or their husband, that, it may be, never made an errand to pray to God before, and yet for all that have a crooked heart within them. It is not an easy thing to come rightly to Christ. It is no marvel the enemies of God's grace say it is an easy thing to come to Christ and to believe, because they know nothing of it; but it is not easier than that which is spoken of in John 12:32, "When I am lifted up, I shall draw all men unto me." It is a pull of God's arm that must do our turn to draw us to Him, and not all the afflictions and calamities in the world.

Oh, that the Lord will be pleased to bless our public trials in this land, and that He would let all see that it is not good jesting with the Lord now at this time, when the Lord is taking away the husband from the wife, the father from the children, the child from the parents, the friend from the friends, the minister from the flock, etc. It is time for us to lift up ourselves in prayer to God, now beseeching Him that He would make His hand to work more and more for us. Well is the soul that comes under the hand of God. In Hosea 5:15, it is said, "In their affliction they will seek me early." Well's that soul that seeks home to God by its afflictions. There is a blessed word spoken (Hosea 2:6); when the Kirk is running away from God, and there is a hedge of thorns set in her way that she cannot win away from Him; when she is following her other lovers and cannot overtake them, she says, "I will go and return to my first love, for then it was better with me than now." Well expended trouble and affliction that come upon any soul when it comes home to the Lord, and all the dross thereof is taken away, and when a people are brought home, as it is spoken (Jeremiah 50:5) of Israel and



Judah: “Come, and let us join ourselves in a perpetual covenant with the Lord, never to be forgotten.” That is a blessed trouble for evermore that leads us home nearer to our Lord. Now the Lord Himself, who is able to do this unto us, draw us nearer unto Himself by all the crosses and afflictions that come upon us! And to this Lord who can do this for us, to the Son of God, Christ Jesus, to His Father and our Father, and the Spirit of grace, be everlasting praise and glory. Amen.

[May 1910]

## A Sermon.

By the late REV. L. M'PERSON. Ontario, Canada.

The Pharisee and the Publican. – Luke 18:9-14.

We are told the occasion of this parable. It was spoken “unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others.” These are the two principal elements in a self-righteous spirit – pride and uncharitableness. They invariably go together, and they prove the person in whom they predominate to be far from righteousness, and an

utter stranger to himself and to God. This is very different, however, from the opinion which the self-righteous person forms of himself. He imagines that God thinks as highly of him as he does himself. He never suspects that anything is wrong with him, nor does he ever inquire, but takes all for granted, until, either in judgment or in mercy, he is awakened from his dream, and made to see things as they truly are. The object of this parable is to correct this dangerous error with which so many are infected. It shows that it is not the person who commendeth himself that is approved, but he whom the Lord commendeth (2 Corinthians 10:18), and that every one that exalteth himself shall be abased, and that he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

At the tenth verse we read of two men who went up to the Temple to pray – the one a Pharisee, the other a publican. They are both here introduced as worshippers, but in several respects as worshippers of very different characters. As regards public opinion, no two classes could be more directly opposite than the Pharisees and publicans – the former being regarded as the best among the good, and the latter as the worst among the bad. They were opposite besides, in the present case, as regards the view which each took of himself, and opposite also as regards the view which God took of them. The Pharisee viewed himself as an innocent, holy, and righteous person, possessed of the very highest attainments – a particular favourite with God, and meriting the highest praise and preferment. The publican, on the other hand, viewed himself as a sinful, guilty, condemned, and lost man – one in whom there was no redeeming quality whatever, and one for whom there was no hope, unless God should take pity upon him and out of pure mercy pardon him. In the former, God beheld a self-sufficient, self-righteous, uncharitable, and censorious sinner, swollen with pride and self-conceit, and utterly forgetful of that humility and reverence which became him as a creature in the presence of his Maker. In the latter, He saw a humbled, broken-hearted, and penitent sinner, crying out from the depths of his sin and misery for mercy to save him.

These two characters may be regarded as a faithful representation of the two classes which comprise the whole body of professors in every age and place, viz., such as are building on the sandy foundation of their own righteousness, and such as either have already fled, or are now fleeing, to Christ as the only refuge from the wrath to come. And in laying before you what observations I have to make on the passage, I shall take up these characters in the order in which they are here presented.

I. *The Pharisee.* – “The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself.” He had, no doubt, chosen as conspicuous a place as possible, where he could be seen to the best advantage and admired. To one who was so full of his own praise it could not fail to be gratifying to see all in the Temple take the most respectful notice of him. The Pharisees were, in general, particularly fond of popularity, and much of what they did in the way of religious performances was done in the most public places, expressly for the purpose of being seen and admired of men. In this, however, we must not regard them as singular. Many, like them, have no higher object than to obtain a name and be well spoken of by others; and if their fellow-creatures happen to err in estimating too highly of them, and bestow more praise than is due, they are not particularly anxious to rectify the mistake. It is a sure sign of a self-righteous spirit if a person feels as if he had lost his pains when his good deeds are not known and duly acknowledged by others. “The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself: God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week; I give tithes of all that I possess.”

1. The first thing which claims our attention here is the object he had in view in going up unto the Temple. It is but reasonable to expect that every one who goes to the house of God should have some object or other in view, and this object must always indicate the state of the heart, for it must necessarily be in keeping with the character of the man. It must be either right or wrong, pure or corrupt, just as he is renewed or unrenewed.

The Pharisee's ostensible object was to worship, or to pray, as we are here informed, but his real object was to justify himself. He came not to apply for help as a sinner, but rather to show that he needed none. What he intended in going up to the Temple was merely to prove that he was everything that a righteous man could desire to be; for in all that he uttered there is not the slightest indication of a sense of need; not one word of prayer, properly speaking, from beginning to end; no humble acknowledgments for mercies received, for all he possessed was self-acquired; no confession of transgressions and shortcomings, and no earnest supplication for mercy to pardon, nor for grace to help him in his time of need. It was upon no such errand he came, but merely to justify himself. Here then, so far, we have a true likeness of the heart of every unhumbled and self-righteous sinner. It is invariably the case with such, that they are more intent upon making it appear that they *are righteous* than on *becoming so*; and hence the unceasing effort to conceal by all possible means their sins and defects both from God and from men, and as much as possible from themselves too. To have their moral deformity and worthlessness exposed to view would be altogether intolerable. The cure would be a thousand times worse than the disease itself. No sinner while in a state of nature likes to see himself humbled, but, on the contrary, would like to be something great, and not only would like to be great, but actually believes he is so. The Pharisee certainly believed that he was all that he represented himself to be, and the reason why he asked nothing was because he felt no need, and the whole tendency of his harangue was to show that he had none. He needed not mercy, for he was not a sinner like other men; neither did he need grace, for he had a sufficiency already, and was, besides, able to keep what he had without being assisted. And what is the tendency of the imaginations of the heart of a self-righteous person, as well as of all his outward religion, but to show that he needs nothing? If not this, what then means his eagerness to appear righteous by displaying his imagined excellencies, and studiously concealing his deformities? Is it not plainly to do away with the impression that he is a sinner, for none but sinners need mercy?

Here, then, the blindness and folly of the self-righteous person appears. He is blind to his true condition before God; he knows not himself, and he is blind to his own interest, for he loses his object by taking the wrong way to obtain it. He begins at the wrong end of his work, and puts himself out of the way of obtaining anything. "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble." It is true, indeed, that self-righteous persons often make great professions of sinfulness, of wants, of contrition, and humility. Their prayers are not like the prayer of the Pharisee – destitute of even the form of a prayer. In theirs may be found all the parts of which a prayer should consist, and these well jointed and well expressed. Were we to judge of these persons by their prayers, it would seem as if they were overwhelmed with a sense of guilt, and deeply humbled on account of their vileness and unworthiness. But the truth is, they confess a great deal more than they believe themselves to be guilty of, and would be extremely unwilling that either God or men should take them at their word. The only difference between them and the Pharisee is that they are the more dexterous hypocrites. He spoke out in plain terms the true sentiments of his heart. He made no secret of his good opinion of himself, but openly declared it. They, on the other hand, conceal theirs under the mask of humility. Whatever differences outward circumstances may make in the manners of men, the principles of the heart are in all the same; and until a change is produced by divine grace, they remain, like the Pharisee, proud and self-sufficient. They feel not their need of a Saviour, but aim at justifying and exalting themselves.

2. Having thus far considered the object of the Pharisee, which was to show that he was a righteous man and needed nothing, let us now proceed to examine the evidence he brings to prove his point.

(1) He gives an account of his religion, which consists, as here set down, of negative and positive. "God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust,

adulterers.” This is what may be termed the negative part, and from the specimen here given we may form our opinion of the standard by which he estimated sin. It is the standard which all self-righteous persons use; and it shows how ignorant he was of the law of God – the true standard – which takes cognizance of the state and operation of the heart as well as of the outward actions. He notices a few gross and scandalous sins, from which he boasts of being free, but takes no notice of others quite as dangerous to the soul and as hateful in the sight of God as those he mentioned. Like others, he regarded merely the letter of the law. There were heart sins of which he took no notice, such as pride, covetousness, uncharitableness, malice, and such like. He had not the slightest idea of the depravity of his nature – that the fountain of all sin was within him, and that it continually sent forth its streams of pollution, by which he was defiled. Ere he could be a righteous man, he must be pure in *heart* as well as pure in life. But of his heart and the law of God both, he was totally ignorant, and this was the reason why he set so high a value on his own imagined goodness. The same thing is true of every unregenerate sinner.

It is a common thing to hear men compliment themselves with being free from gross and scandalous sins. They look upon themselves as entitled to the highest commendation on this account, and often speak with much apparent detestation of the crimes of others evidently from no better motive than to draw special attention to their own good character. The standard which such persons use is not the law of God; with that standard they are, properly speaking, utterly unacquainted. Theirs is one of their own making, and made too to suit their own dimensions. With this standard the sinner can measure himself to the best advantage, for it can be made to rise or fall just as circumstances may require, and hence it was that Paul, while an unconverted man, found it an easy matter to come up to the demands of the law, for he was then, as he himself expresses it, “*without* the law.” The law in its spirituality and breadth was unknown to him, and being thus altogether in the dark, and his mind filled with false views of the character of God, of his own true character, and of the real nature of sin, he could easily have imagined that he was “*alive*.” But when the commandment came sin revived and Paul died. When the Spirit of the Lord revealed to him the law which had been hitherto hid from his view, and he was made to see his own true self in its light, all his good thoughts of himself, and all his fair hopes vanished together, and he became a dead man. Thus, it is the low thoughts that men have of the law of God that is the cause of their having such high thoughts of themselves. They can live as long as they are “*without* the law,” but when once the law comes and manifests to the poor deceived sinner his true state, he will have nothing more to do with his false standard, and will henceforward find but little cause to boast of the wretched measure with which he could once feel very well satisfied. He will no longer regard sin as something without, or beyond him, which by its entering in the shape of gross or scandalous sins might defile him, but rather as having its seat or fountain in the heart, and consequently he is not occasionally or accidentally but continually defiled, and his cry will be “*Enter not into judgment with thy servant; for in thy sight shall no man living be justified*” (Psalm 143:2). But we must proceed to consider the other part of the Pharisee’s religion – his positive righteousness.

“*I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all I possess.*” It is not unfrequently the case that those who think the most of themselves have, after all, the least occasion to boast. From one who gave himself out to be so much better than other men, we might expect, when he came to recount his own good works, to hear something more than ordinary, and not the miserable specimen here given. As it was his object, however, to display his goodness to the best advantage, we may believe that what is here presented was the best he had to show, or, at all events, that on which he himself set the highest value. It is characteristic of self-righteous persons that they set a high value on trifles and points of minor importance, while they neglect the weightier matters of the law. A little goes a great length with them, and less will

satisfy them than would satisfy a believer who works not as a servant for a reward, but from love. The specimen which the Pharisee here gives of his positive religion is extremely meagre. It consists merely of two duties, or rather one duty, and it by no means of the highest order, the other being, as he performed it, but a work of supererogation.

“I fast twice in the week.” Fasting, when performed in a right spirit and on proper occasions, was a duty, but as the Pharisee performed it, it was merely a self-imposed duty – a work of supererogation for which he merited no praise. This is not, however, what he thought himself. Together with what more of its kind he might have possessed, it constituted the one-half of his stock, and that too, the half to which he gave the precedence. His fasting so often seemed to indicate his great humility and mortification of the flesh, and gave him an air of extraordinary sanctity and heavenly-mindedness. Hypocrites are particularly fond of being famed for such things as these, although in reality none possess less of them than they.

“I give tithes of all I possess.” To pay tithes was a commanded duty, and so far he did what was right in supporting the cause of God. And in this he might put multitudes of professing Christians in our day to shame, who possess much of the bounties of Providence, but who make no due acknowledgment of the favours thus bestowed, by contributing according to their ability towards the support and further extension of the cause of Christ. The duty, however, would have been better performed had he not told that he had done it, and better performed still had he not thought that in doing it he made God his debtor. He had forgotten that in paying his tithes he gave nothing away that was properly his own, for all he possessed was the gift of Providence. No praise was, therefore, due to him for merely returning what was not his own; and if he were of a right spirit, he would rather feel grateful that God would even condescend to command him to perform any duty, and especially that He would accept of such imperfect services as those necessarily must be which are performed by fallen and erring creatures, and would rather be ashamed for how little he did, and regret that he could do no more. But after all, the duty here mentioned was not of the highest order – it was but a very common duty, and one which would by no means go far to prove him to be a righteous man. Many of far humbler pretensions could say as much for themselves in this respect as he could. There were many exercises of a far higher order of which he takes no notice. As in the former case, he was ignorant of heart sins, so is he also ignorant and destitute of heart religion. Indeed, these two always go together, and are never wanting in the hearts of self-righteous persons.

But are there none among us who resemble the Pharisee in this respect? How many there are who go the round of outward duties, and yet know nothing of true religion! They attend on the ministrations of the word and ordinances, are honest in their worldly transactions, give of their substance towards the support of the cause, and are free from scandalous sins, and having these to recommend them, they doubt not but all is right. Like the Pharisee, their standard of sin and religion is infinitely short of the true one; but like him they are nevertheless pleased with themselves, and vainly imagine that God is pleased with them likewise, and, with the young man in the gospel, triumphantly ask, What lack we yet? To such, however, it must be said, the weightiest of all things are yet lacking. They need to be convinced that all is wrong with them; they need to be convinced that they are “wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.” They need to know God as He is manifested in Christ: at present they know Him not. Their God is one of their own making, and altogether such a one as themselves. They need the new heart, and they need the righteousness of Christ to be substituted in the place of their own.

(2) The second way in which the Pharisee attempts to prove that he is a righteous man is by *comparison*. His goodness would appear to better advantage when contrasted with the extreme badness of others. “I thank thee that I am not as other men are” – and then to be more particular, “nor even as this publican.” Mark here the self-complacency and unbounded

conceit of this vaunting sinner. It is not sufficient that he should proclaim his righteousness and display his virtues in all their plenitude and beauty, but he calls particular attention to the important fact that such virtue was exceedingly rare – that it was a scarce article, so to speak, a consideration which in his opinion fairly entitles him to a much higher price than in ordinary circumstances the like virtues would bring. There were so many wicked men, and these so very wicked too; and there were so few, if indeed any, who had the least regard to virtue, that the wonder was how, in such circumstances, a good man could even exist, or preserve his integrity for a day, but more particularly that he could have attained to so high a measure of perfection. He met with very little that might be helpful to him, but on the other hand had many discouragements. There were many temptations; the very worst example was continually before him; but notwithstanding all these his virtue sustained no defeat.

Mark, in the second place, the contempt with which he regards his fellow-creatures. He looks down upon them with proud disdain. If he is in any sense superior to them, it never occurs to him that grace alone could have made him to differ, and that by nature both he and they are upon a level. Nothing of this kind ever entered into his mind. Grace is not an article of his creed; it is purely to himself he owes all his goodness. It is his own *good heart* and his own extraordinary exertions that he has to thank for it all. He imagines himself to be a particular favourite with God, and like Haman of old, is delighted with the idea that he himself is the only one whom the King delighteth to honour. However abominable such pride may appear, yet it is very common. The decent well-behaved hypocrite, would on no account be seen mingling with the common herd of sinners, upon whom he looks down with sovereign contempt. But the way to hell is broad – so broad indeed that the publicans and other abandoned sinners may walk abreast with the self-righteous hypocrite without the one disturbing the other.

Mark, in the third place, the uncharitableness here displayed by the Pharisee. At the very moment he is attempting to justify himself, he unconsciously proves himself to be a most unrighteous man, for by his uncharitableness towards the publican and others he violates the second precept of the law – “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.” Were he actuated by right principles, he would rather pity his sinful fellow-creature, and pray that God might have mercy on him and grant him repentance. If he possessed the true charity which thinketh no evil, he would prefer to hope the best, than go so far in judging as even appearances might seem to warrant. Besides, in the present case there were even some grounds afforded for the exercise of such a hope. It was by no means an unfavourable symptom to see the poor man come to the Temple on the same errand with himself. Besides, there was certainly something in the humility manifested by him in keeping at so respectful a distance – something like a felt sense of unworthiness. The Pharisee therefore ought to have rejoiced at these favourable symptoms, and rather have helped and encouraged him, both by his counsel and his prayers. But instead of this, he appears before God as his accuser, and, as if he feared He were too indulgent in suffering such a great sinner to live, he calls His attention to his case in particular, and reminds Him of what sort of a person he is.

There are none so ready to condemn others as those who are themselves still under condemnation. They have eyes that can see every person’s sins but their own. They censure and condemn without mercy. Whatever allowances they make for their own shortcomings, they make none for those of others. They would have all sinners to be dealt with as sinners but themselves. These are they who are spoken of in the introduction to the parable as persons who trust in themselves that they are righteous and despise others. It was to them that the parable was spoken, and the Pharisee whose character we have thus far considered is introduced merely as one of them, speaking the sentiments of all the rest. Let such remember the conclusion – that “he that exalteth himself shall be abased.” But we must hasten now to the second part of the parable.

II. *The Publican*. – “And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me, a sinner” (verse 13).

We have here presented to us a sketch of the character of a true penitent who comes to God seeking mercy and finds it. And as the character is drawn by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself and approved by Him, we have good reason to believe that it is, in all respects, just what He would have it to be; and it is here contrasted with a very opposite character purposely to show us who are they that are approved of God and who are not. If appearances were to be regarded, the publican’s case was the most unpromising of the two. His character could bear no comparison with that of the Pharisee, who was, to all appearance outwardly, a moral man, against whom the world could bring no charge, and was probably regarded by others as well as by himself as a righteous and holy man. He could therefore enter boldly into the Temple, advance with firm tread (as near as possible) into the presence of God, stand up to pray, and with countenance erect, and unfaltering tongue, proclaim the innocency and holiness of his life, and, without the least fear of contradiction, appeal to his Maker, and in the hearing of all present, if he were not the very identical righteous man that he professed himself to be. But with the publican it was far otherwise. He was confessedly on all hands a bad man. His very occupation was sufficient to indicate what he was. In all likelihood his associates were the abandoned and profane, and his own practices like theirs. He had cast off the fear of God, had violated His law, and could not even pretend to outward decency itself. All knew that *he* was a sinner, and it were vain for him, even were he so disposed, to attempt to deny it. And still this man comes up to the Temple to pray!

What, therefore, might have brought him there? Is he resolved with harlot face which refuses shame, to brave it out, and say something in his turn in his own justification? Nay, indeed, in his case it was impossible. Did he attempt it, there were witnesses on every side who knew him full well, and were prepared to give evidence against him. If he said it secretly, God and his own conscience were there staring him in the face, and at that very moment in particular charging home his crimes upon him; and if he said it openly, the Pharisee and others were there who would confront him with the lie. Alas! poor man! his very attitude and manner bespoke a felt sense of guilt and unworthiness, and plainly showed that for no such purpose he had come thither. He seemed rather like one whose sins had found him out; one whose soul was pressed with a load of guilt, which saddened his heart, shut his mouth, filled his countenance with shame and confusion, and made him fear to approach into the presence of God. And such indeed he was; for he was an awakened sinner, now brought to a right understanding of his true condition before God. He stood condemned at the bar of God, the bar of conscience, and the bar of public opinion. The terrors of the Lord had set themselves in array against him; the avenger of blood pressed on close behind; the sentence of condemnation recorded against him continually rung in his ears, and his conscience told him “*Thou art the man.*” It was thus that the publican stood convicted in his own conscience and before God, and it was in this state that he ventures to come into His presence without a single word which he can say for himself.

He makes no attempt to disprove the charges brought against him, nor even to lessen or extenuate the crime; nor does he find fault with the strictness of the law nor the severity of the sentence. No, he comes not to stand upon his own defence, but to give himself up as that transgressor against whom such and such charges had been brought and proved, and against whom such a sentence had been recorded. He confesses he is that transgressor and deserves to die. He acknowledges the truth of the charges and the equity of the verdict, and throws himself upon the mercy of his Judge, and thus puts it out of the power of all other means to save him.

It was here then that, most of all, the difference between the Pharisee and the publican lay. Outwardly, we have seen, there was a difference, but in the sight of God both were sinners under condemnation, and both equally needed mercy, and there was but one way in which either could obtain it. The publican chose this way – he came as a lost sinner, guilty and unworthy. He confessed his sinfulness and misery, justified God, and condemned himself, and threw himself upon His mercy. The Pharisee, on the other hand, thought that he was a righteous man that needed no repentance, and therefore would never think of having recourse to this last resort. Indeed, he knew nothing at all about it, nor could he ever find it out until he first found out that he was a sinner. He chose to come trusting to his own righteousness, thus virtually denying that he was a sinner, or that God had aught to charge him with. He went down therefore unto his house an unjustified sinner. What he did not need he would not ask, and what he did not ask he did not obtain. So he that exalted himself was abased, and he that humbled himself was exalted; thus far in general.

I shall now notice a few things in particular in the publican's case, and then conclude.

- (1) His conviction;
- (2) his confession;
- (3) his faith;
- (4) his success.

1. *His conviction.* – We are not here informed what the circumstances were which might have led to the publican's conviction. The first view we get of him is as a convicted criminal standing before his Judge, and fully sensible of all the circumstances of his case. He is awakened from his security, and things of which he only heard before, but never believed, present themselves to his view in all their awfulness and certainty. His eyes are opened, and God, sin, and his own lost and ruined state by it are no longer matters of indifference or mere speculation, but of conviction. They are tremendous facts which he understands, believes, and with the awful importance of which he is deeply impressed.

(1) He is made to see and believe that there is a God, and this God he recognises in His true character. But it might here be asked – Did he not know and believe this before, and do not all who are in any measure acquainted with the Scriptures believe and acknowledge this? I answer, No; for “the fool hath said in his heart there is no God” (Psalm 14), and such fools are all unconverted persons, for the Scripture saith again that “the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” Natural men do, indeed, profess to believe in His existence and the representation given of His character in the Word, but their belief is merely a vague assent to a thing which is generally asserted, but which for all they know concerning it may or may not be true. The objects of their belief are too far off to possess any interest for them. They are in reality but phantoms of the imagination, with which they neither are nor can be impressed, and serve rather as toys, with which they amuse themselves. “Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble” (James 2:19). The devils tremble because the objects of their belief are *realities*, which deeply concern them. It is no phantom, no dream, nor mere shadow that makes them thus tremble, for with the true character of God they are well acquainted. That He is, and what He is, are to them well known; but with unawakened sinners it is otherwise, and hence it is that they do not likewise tremble. The publican, no doubt, before his conviction believed in his own way that there was a God who took cognisance of the actions of men, and would bring them into judgment; but with this belief he could feel as much at ease when he lived in open wickedness, as the Pharisee did when he gloried in his own righteousness; but now that the veil is removed, he has a full view of the true character of God, especially as regards His



majesty, His omniscience, His holiness, His justice and truth. This is very manifest from his confession and the whole of his deportment.

He stood afar off – would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven – but cried, “God be merciful to me, a sinner.” There was here a full acknowledgment of the majesty of God. It was not against one like himself he had sinned, but against the Great and Glorious Being who created all things, and who is Sovereign Lord of the universe, who is glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, and to whom is due the homage and obedience of all in heaven and earth; and this sense that he had of the divine majesty made him tremble in His presence, stand at a distance, and not open his mouth before Him except in self-condemnation and in pleading for mercy. He feels also that he has to do with one who is *omniscient*, from whom nothing secret or open can be hid. The eyes of Jehovah were at that moment as a flame of fire searching his heart, and all his sins – whether secret or open – lay exposed in their true colour at once to the view of God and to his own; and hence he addresses Him as one who knew him to be a sinner of such a description, and confesses, without palliation or reserve, that he is that sinner. And as he is sensible of His omniscience, so is he also of His *holiness* and justice. It was in the light of the former that he saw what he was himself, and in the latter he saw what he deserved and what he must expect unless mercy interpose in his behalf. For, when he says, “God be merciful to me, a sinner,” he thereby acknowledges that sin is that abominable thing which God hates, that it is contrary to His nature, and that the person on whom it is found is thereby cut off from His favour and justly exposed to everlasting punishment.

(2) As the publican was convinced of the true character of God, so was he also convinced of the true nature of sin. This is manifest also from his manner and his confession, “God be merciful to me, a sinner.” This is the cry of a man in distress – one who feels himself sinking into perdition, and is calling out for help; and we are here told the cause of his distress – it is *sin!* But can this be the harmless thing with which so many amuse themselves and in the commission of which they feel so secure and unconcerned? Certainly not: for although such may in their turn, like the publican, confess that they are sinners, yet to them sin never appeared in its true character – it is only a name for something that has no real existence. “Without the law sin is dead,” and hence it follows that in order to be truly convinced of sin, the law must be set home upon the conscience by the Spirit of God. “For by the law is the knowledge of sin” (Romans 3:20). By its operation on the conscience it makes sin revive; it imparts unto it life, strength, and terror; for “the strength of sin is the law” (2 Corinthians 15:56). Sin thus seen in the glass of the law is a terrible thing – the sinner dies at the very sight of it. So did the publican, and so did Saul of Tarsus. “When the commandment came, *sin revived* and *I died.*” The law reveals to the sinner what sin is, where it is, and then stops his mouth and declares the wrath of God against him, for, “what things soever the law saith it saith to them who are under the law; that every mouth may be stopped and all the world may become guilty before God” (Romans 3:19). It thus calls the sinner’s sins to his remembrance, and increases them until they are more than can be numbered. It discovers to him that he is not only guilty of actual transgression, but that he is a sinner by nature – that the tree is corrupt and is therefore incapable of bearing good fruit. And, having thus mustered up his sins before him, it binds them upon his back with strong bands, and then utters its curse upon him, and follows him up and down wherever he goes, continually cursing him until at last, unless he is delivered from it, it drives him into hell.

It was in this miserable condition that the publican felt himself to be when he cried out, “God be merciful to me, a sinner.” He thus expressed his sense of the great evil of sin that it was indeed the greatest of all evils, since nothing could remove it but mercy. It had utterly ruined him and rendered him worthy of death – of everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and neither tears nor repentance, nor anything he could ever do in the way of obedience could suffice to atone for it.

2. *His confession, his sorrow, shame, and repentance.* – On this and on the following heads we must be brief. In all cases where conviction is followed with conversion, there will invariably accompany it a candid confession, heart-felt sorrow and shame for sin and genuine repentance. This we see clearly exemplified in the case of the publican. His standing afar off, and his hanging down his head with shame were themselves tacit confessions of what he was. But he is not satisfied with merely silent confessions of his guilt, but speaks out – “God be merciful to me, a sinner.”

There is here a full and candid confession of what he was. He makes no attempt to conceal his sin or make his case appear better than it is, but comes and tells the whole truth. He is a sinner; nor has he any one to blame for his being so but himself. In this, his confession, he represents his case in the very worst light in which it could be viewed, for there is implied in it that he had sinned against the majesty of God; that his guilt was consequently unspeakably great; that no satisfaction made by him can atone for it; that the wages of sin is death; that he deserves to die; and that God is righteous when He inflicts this punishment upon a sinner. Having thus pleaded guilty before the bar of God, he left no means for himself of escape. Why, then, should not the sentence be executed upon him? He has no just reason to assign why it should not, but simply casts himself on the mercy of his Judge. Now, rarely is such unqualified confession and self-condemnation to be found among sinners! Most find it an easy matter to confess themselves sinners, and call for mercy to save them, and the reason why they find it so easy is because God and sin are at a distance; but to see their sins and confess them in the light of God’s countenance is a different matter. The publican’s way, however, was the wisest and the only way for procuring the favour of God, and in choosing this way, he was evidently moved by divine grace.

The sinner can never succeed while he stands upon his own defence. So saith the Scripture – “He that covereth his sins shall not prosper; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy” (Proverbs 28:13). The publican made full confession, and as he confessed so did he also repent of and forsake his sins. “He smote upon his breast” – this was expressive of his sorrow for what he had done. His heart was turned against sin. His confession was but the language of his heart expressing its abhorrence of sin and its desire to be delivered from it. He was fully sensible of its hateful nature. He felt he was full of this loathsome disease, that he was but a mass of corruption, an object of abhorrence, and – as the leper under the law was commanded to do – he stands afar off, smiting upon his breast as he gazes upon the horrible picture of himself which the law presents to his view. O how does he blush and hang down his head with shame as he thus stands exposed in the presence of a Holy God! His heart is wrung with grief; and for shame and confusion of face, he will not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but in the bitterness of his soul bursts out with the distressing cry – “God be merciful to me, a sinner.”

3. *His Faith.* – It does not always follow that conviction ends in conversion. There may be very deep conviction of sin, and yet the sinner may not be saved. Guilt, when truly apprehended, has invariably a tendency to drive the sinner away from God, and it would unquestionably have done so in the case of the publican, had not saving grace been imparted to him. What inducement could there be to him, or to any other in like circumstances, to come into the presence of Him who is a consuming fire, and from whom they had nothing to expect but wrath and indignation which would devour them as adversaries? They did not like Him, and they knew full well He did not like them, and hence it is that conviction of sin, and awful apprehensions of the character of God, drive many into absolute despair. It was so with Judas, and others, of whom mention is made in the Scriptures. But in the case of the publican, while the Spirit of the Lord was working conviction on his conscience, divine grace was powerfully and savingly operating upon his heart. While he knew on the one hand that God was a consuming fire, and that if He should mark iniquities he could not stand before Him,

yet he knew on the other there was forgiveness with Him that He might be feared (Psalm 130). He had heard that He was a merciful God; and although he could not expect that anything he might promise to do could procure His favour, yet there was a possibility, if not even a probability, that He would freely pardon his sin; yea, there was even a promise made that he who should confess his sins, and forsake them, should find mercy, and many who tried, testified that they had found it so. "I acknowledged my sin unto Thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin" (Psalm 32:5). Besides, if he remained where he was there was no hope for him – he would certainly die; and if he went and did not succeed, he could only but die. He would therefore put his life in his hand and venture his soul on the mercy of Him who justifieth the ungodly, and having thus resolved, he arose and went unto Him a guilty sinner as he was – made his confession and admission, and fled to his mercy for shelter.

This was indeed strong faith violently wrestling, and taking the kingdom of heaven by force; for nothing but true faith could have surmounted the difficulties which lay in his way, and these were neither few nor small. There was a guilty conscience full of fears and terror; there was the curse of the law; and there were also dreadful apprehensions of the majesty, the holiness, the righteousness and justice of that God against whom he had sinned; but an invisible power sustained him and carried him triumphantly over them all. His eye was directed to the sacrifice which atoned for sin, and all at once to his joyful experience, where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.

4. *His success.* – "He went down to his house justified rather than the other." His sins, which were many, were forgiven; his person was accepted; the sentence of condemnation was removed, and he was declared a righteous man. O how different are the thoughts and ways of God from those of men! At the very moment that the Pharisee was frowning upon the poor publican, and looking down upon him with proud contempt and detestation, as an object of God's abhorrence, God was then viewing him with a peculiar interest. As the father, in the parable, who had seen in the distance his prodigal son returning home, ran to meet him while he was yet a great way off, and fell on his neck and kissed him, so, likewise, were the bowels of God's compassion moved towards this returning publican, as He saw him standing afar off in the temple, and heard him say secretly in his heart, "I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son," etc.

But are there not some who, notwithstanding their application at a throne of grace for mercy, still feel the burden of their guilt hanging about them, destroying their comfort, and filling them with anxiety and alarm? Let such put the question to their own consciences – have they adopted the publican's way? It is the only way of obtaining peace; it is a sure and *infallible* way, but one which is the most difficult of any to a proud and self-righteous heart. Have you then honestly and candidly confessed your sins before God, or have you attempted to conceal any of them, or have you merely confessed them in a loose and general way, which, after all, made you no greater sinners than others? Have you brought your sins with you, and, viewing them in the light of God's holiness, have you then confessed them as your own sins, for which you are condemned in your own conscience, and at the bar of God, and for which you deserve to die? And having thus passed upon yourself an unqualified sentence of condemnation, have you then, like the publican, fled for refuge to the mercy of God? Have you by a humble faith endeavoured to cast your guilty soul on the merits of Christ Jesus, who shed His blood that He might redeem sinners like you from the curse of the law? If you cannot answer these questions in the affirmative, I am not surprised that you should still feel guilt as a heavy burden upon your soul. "Blessed is the man whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in

whose spirit there is no guile.” Be persuaded to seek the removal of your burden in the good old way. God will never meet you in any other but as an adversary and a consuming fire.

Let it not once be supposed that He is now more tardy in showing mercy to returning penitents than on former occasions. If you have not experienced the blessedness of forgiveness, be assured that the fault is yours. You must first be condemned ere you are justified – you must be lost before you can be saved, and humbled before you can be exalted. Put yourselves, therefore, in His way and you will find that He will come more than half way to meet you. You will find that His compassions are very great. You will hear Him say regarding you as He did regarding a great sinner of old – “Is Ephraim my dear son? is he a pleasant child? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore my bowels are troubled for him: I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord” (Jeremiah 31:20).

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## A Sermon.

By the late REV. J. KENNEDY, D.D., Dingwall.

Preached at Dingwall on a Fast Day in 1854.

“The Lord hath a controversy with His people, and He will plead with Israel” – Micah 6:2.

He is always highly honoured who is called to plead for God. Such honour was Micah’s. He receives a commission to advocate the cause of God against His ungrateful people. Having called attention to the terms and authority of his commission, he at once proceeds to state the case for God. He addresses the “mountains” and “the strong foundations of the earth.” How powerfully may thus be rebuked the carnal ease and pride of Israel. He turns from an obdurate people to the strong mountains of their land, as if these were more likely to hear and to tremble than were they. Or these mountains, in their strength and fertility, as they fenced and furnished the home of His people, were called to witness to the power and goodness of the God of Israel, and to the weakness and ingratitude of His people. Whether we thus interpret the prophet’s invocation, or see, through a figure, the fathers and rulers, and through them again the people of the land of mountains standing before him as he pleads for God; it teaches us at least, that such was the weighty import of the prophet’s pleading, and so awful the consequences of an unsettled quarrel with the Lord, that well might the strongest

tremble at the announcement – “The Lord hath a controversy with His people, and He will plead with Israel.”

He who prosecutes in the case in which Micah is called to plead is none other and none less than “the Lord.” It is He who “hath a controversy with his people” – it is for Him the prophet is retained as advocate. The pending case is between God and Israel. He prosecutes. He will not allow the case to lie over any longer. He is resolved that it shall be tried – “*He will plead with Israel.*” He presses for a settlement. But ere he does so finally – ere the case issue in the execution of deserved judgment – the prophet is called to plead, with a view to a conviction in the conscience of the criminals, that they may feel themselves to be at the disposal of Him who is the party against them, and, casting themselves on His mercy, may prove whether He will not yet spare and bless them.

As surely as was Micah *then*, the faithful servants of the Lord are called to make this solemn announcement *now* to His professing people. *We* are His professing people – with *us* “the Lord hath a controversy.” He is now pressing for a settlement of His case against us; and the time is not far distant, when, if all overtures through His servants for a friendly adjustment of the quarrel have been rejected, the Lord Himself shall arise in His anger to plead with an impenitent nation.

Met as we are this day, professing to humble ourselves “under the mighty hand of God,” the text presents to us a suitable subject of meditation, which demands our serious and prayerful attention.

Let us then consider:

- I. The parties in this controversy.
- II. The tokens of a present controversy with ourselves.
- III. Some of the grounds of the Lord’s controversy with us. And
- IV. The right method of improving the announcement of the text.

I. *The parties in the controversy.*

1. The parties at variance are *God and His creatures*. How infinite is the disparity between them! This is not a case between parties on an equal footing in point of dignity and rank – between two of equal authority and rights – between two alike subject to law. The illustrative case is a State trial. The prosecution here is at the instance of the Crown of heaven. Men are criminals at the bar, on a citation issued by the King of Glory. The prophet is the Crown counsel, to state the charges against the criminals, and to prove their guilt. The dignity of the party prosecuting is not compromised by such a trial; and infinitely low must be their footing who are summoned as criminals to the bar of the Most High.

Separated by sin from “the fountain of living waters,” deprived of the favour and exposed to the wrath of the Almighty, how *awful to men* must be a controversy with God. How *important* must it be, for it involves the rights of the government, the honour of the law, and the glory of the name of Jehovah! How infinitely strong an interest therefore must God feel in the decision, and how impossible it is that a settlement can be indefinitely deferred or the trial loosely conducted!

2. The *righteous Lord of all* “hath a controversy with” *our nation*. He who is “Governor among the nations” is the party against us. Omniscient to know, righteous to mark, and almighty to punish our many aggravated sins, and wise to do so in the best time and way, He will settle His controversy with us as a nation *here*. The scene of a nation’s sin will be yet the scene of that nation’s judgments. Ere it cease to be a nation, or in ceasing to be so, the Lord shall smite it with the rod of His anger. The judgment will fall within the nation’s lifetime. Its age may consist of many generations, and long may it seem to prosper in its iniquity, but the “day of vengeance” will surely come at last. Time to accumulate guilt will but furnish the occasion of accumulated wrath. It may not be true of nations now, as of Israel of old, that the Lord does speedily and manifestly visit them with judgment. Such intimations of His

oversight of nations may not be so necessary now as when no king intervened between Jehovah and His people. Nor are the strokes with which He smites the nations now so marked, direct and frequent as in His dealings with Israel during all periods of their history. This is the result of there being less *fatherliness* in His dealings with nations now, not because He observes them less. How much more directly and speedily does the King, as a father, correct his child, than, as a ruler, he punishes his subject. Israel were emphatically and by distinction a people nigh to God; they only, of all the nations, were permitted to call Him Father. Just on this account they were all the more directly and frequently corrected. They were often punished because they were His children; they were speedily smitten, for they were “a people near unto Him.” The King Himself was more seen in the chastisement of Israel than in His dealings with outcast Gentiles. But although less frequent and less manifest are divine punishments of Gentile nations, not the less surely will “the day of vengeance” come.

3. The Lord hath a controversy with our nation as “*His people*” by *obligation, profession, and ENGAGEMENT*. It may not be true of us, to the full extent to which it applied to Israel, that we are “the people of the Lord;” *but as for them so for us hath the Lord done great things*. From a very small beginning how has His enriching blessing caused us to grow! Look to our place on the map of the world. Our little islands, separated from the great continents, look like outcasts from the power and wealth of the world. Yet in these “isles of the sea” has grown, under Jehovah’s care, the nation now by distinction “Great” among all the kingdoms of the earth. Provoking, by its seeming weakness at first, the contempt or rapacity, and, as it grows, by its advancing power, the jealousy, and by its spiritual revival, the hatred of other nations, how wonderful has been its preservation and its progress till now. How careful of us has the Lord been heretofore! And, first of all, the blessings He has given us. He bestowed on us the gift of “the glorious Gospel.” Early did its light shine in these distant isles of the sea, and long was that light preserved from being extinguished. Feebly it shone in favoured spots in our country, when the rest of the world was almost wholly wrapt round with darkness. And though at last the feeble spark goes out of sight, and must be carefully searched for in the ashes of the past before it be discovered, how brightly did the light shine at the blessed Reformation, when “the glory of the Lord arose” upon our land. He then called it to arise out of its degradation and darkness, and the brightest witness for the truth, “the fairest daughter of the Reformation,” appeared in the Church of our fathers. Even till now, through many trials, changes, and sins, He has preserved a remnant of the faithful in our land, and, as nowhere else, the true light yet shineth amongst us. During the interval how many precious ministers of the Gospel did the Lord raise up? how many souls ripened for glory He gathered in our land; and how often, when their “soul” was “bowed down to the dust,” has He arisen, in the days of our fathers, to “redeem” them for His “mercies’ sake.”

*As did Israel, so do we profess to be “the people of the Lord.”* It does not become us as it did them to profess, as a nation, to be “His peculiar people.” We ought not to claim to be exclusively the Lord’s. But we do profess to be a Christian and a Protestant kingdom. By our very constitution we claim this character – this is our name among the nations – although too often ashamed to act up to our profession, and too often practically denying it. Such a profession implies *an engagement to serve the Lord*. But, besides this, we have once and again entered into a solemn league and covenant with God. If not called to do so in the same way as Israel was, our fathers were called by the Lord’s voice in His providence to league themselves together against His enemies, and solemnly to pledge allegiance to Him as they went to fight His battles. And whatever be our views of the descending obligation of the covenants, we must acknowledge other ties that bind us to be loyal to King Jesus. If we disallow the obligation of a covenant not proposed from heaven to our fathers, we must at least regard their example of faithfulness and zeal as a stimulus to the discharge of our duty

to the Lord, and as a rebuke to our formality and treachery. But the time may not be distant when a crisis shall arise, such as that in which the Lord called our fathers to join in league together, and to enter into covenant with Him, and when, if our nation be unfaithful to the Lord and to His cause, the few who fear His name shall be called anew to pledge by solemn vows their faithfulness to Him in resisting the advancing power of Anti-Christ.

If the Lord has done so much for our nation – if we must be silent and ashamed as He asks us – “Oh, my people, what have I done unto thee? and wherein have I wearied thee? testify against me” – if we profess as a nation to be “the people of the Lord;” and, if, by the example of our fathers, if not by their covenants, and by our own continued profession, we are a people under engagement to serve Him – oh! how great must be the guilt of *our* sins, and how overwhelming the evidence to attest the justice of our punishment! How ought *we* to tremble in our place at the bar of God! How ought considerations of His greatness, sovereignty, goodness, and grace, and of His just and awful anger, of our infinitely strong obligations to serve Him, and of our disloyalty, ingratitude, and pride, to overwhelm us, as, standing at His bar, we hear the announcement – “The Lord hath a controversy with His people, and He will plead with Israel.”

4. Foremost in guilt among the parties at the bar are *those who have come there from the house of the Lord*. Those who enjoyed the privilege of a preached Gospel, who had access to the means and ordinances of grace, who again and again renewed professions of faith in Christ and vows of allegiance to Him, stand charged with the chief share of the causes of controversy. On them especially is the Lord’s eye. With these, His professing people, the Lord has a special controversy – with them will He first plead. “Judgment must begin at the house of God.” We who “name the name of Christ” need not try to hide ourselves in the crowd that stands at the bar of God. We are first summoned to appear, and we must stand out from the rest when we come before Him. Ours is the place of chief sinners; for we, because of privileges, professions, and vows, are doubly guilty. To us especially is the announcement made, “the Lord hath a controversy with His people.” Let us beware of imagining that our profession and privileges can shelter us in a time of controversy. Out of His own house will the Lord summon all that would hide themselves there. They who are brought thence must be guiltier than all the rest; and because of their guilt, and to manifest the rigorous justice of the Lord, the execution of judgment must begin with the punishment of these.

5. Among the parties cited may be seen *the very children of the King Himself*. Even they are guilty of generation sins – even they may suffer from generation judgments. But it is their peculiar privilege that, though they may lose sight, as they stand in the midst of a guilty generation, of the smile of their Father in the frown of their Lord, although their generation sins shall be punished with generation judgments, and downcast and wounded though they may be when smitten in a time of sweeping judgment, their Father’s hand will raise and heal them. *He will not gather their souls with sinners*. And if, amidst generation judgments, death should overtake the remnant “who have not defiled their garments,” the result to them will be a speedier passage to their eternal home. The fire that comes to punish a generation’s sins will prove to them a chariot which their Father sends to carry their souls to glory.

II. *The tokens of a present controversy with ourselves*. If there were a quarrel between a man and his fellow that resulted in a trial at court, would there not be in their previous dealings with each other or in the want of any intercourse between them, enough to make them feel they were at variance, and a sign to indicate this to observers? And if the Lord hath a controversy with us – if He is resolved to settle it, and if the time to plead is drawing nigh, shall we who are in His hand, and are surrounded by the busy working of His providence, have no cause to feel even now that there is a quarrel between us and the Almighty? If we see not already tokens of his wrath, it is only because we are blind, and will not “discern the signs of the times.” If we feel not that He is angry, it is because of how profoundly we sleep.

We would now call your attention to a few of the tokens of the Lord's controversy with us, which they discern whose eyes the Lord hath opened.

1. *"The Hope of Israel" is "a Stranger" in the land.* His gracious presence has been greatly withdrawn from us. Outpourings of His Spirit are withheld from our land. His power and glory are not seen and felt in "Zion's gates" as in days of old; and "in the dwellings of Jacob" they who seek Him find cause to mourn His absence. Our churches are yet open – the means of grace are continued – the ordinances of the Lord's house are dispensed – the Gospel doctrine is preached by many, and the Gospel truly preached by some – profession is abundant – much work is done, and never was there a greater bustle among the Churches – but, after all, "Ichabod" is inscribed on our churches and homes, "the glory" of the Lord "is departed." Oh, my dear friends, we need not look away from ourselves for abundant proofs of the Lord's being a stranger. Why is it that our preaching is so lifeless? Why this desolation and darkness of spirit in seeking the Lord in "Jacob's dwellings" and in serving Him in "Zion's gates?" Why this pining of the few "trees of righteousness" yet planted amongst us? Why the cry, "My leanness, my leanness" in the mouths of those whom the Lord has quickened? Why are "the things which remain" so "ready to die?" Why serve the witnesses of Christ so little the place of the "lights of the world" and of the "salt of the earth?" and why are not the ungodly more rebuked and awed by the holiness of their lives? Why is lifeless profession so common and so easy? Why can so many who make no profession to vital religion dare to join themselves to the Church of God? Why are hypocrites in Zion so bold? Why are the multitude so profoundly asleep? Why are none from among them seen flying "as a cloud and as doves to their windows?" Why do Gospel-despisers find it so easy to abide under the power and guilt of unbelief – under the impending wrath of God? And why is it so easy for us to endure all these things? Why do none of us truly stir ourselves up to lay hold of the Lord? All these things are so, because the Lord is a stranger, and He is so because we have provoked Him to depart. We have sinned away from us the presence of the Lord; and although, for His name's sake, He has not utterly disowned and forsaken Zion, there is scarce so much left us of life as will constrain Him to return and dwell with us. This token of His anger will not be felt nor seen by an unbelieving world. They are rather rejoicing in the stillness that results from the absence of the Lord, in the ease with which they are allowed to sin, and in the growing conformity to themselves of the witnesses of Christ. But surely the Lord is very angry when He has become a stranger even in His own house. Small may be the offence that will provoke one to forsake the house of another, but guilty must be the children who have banished their father from his home, and greatly offended is that father as he goes. And if the Lord has become a stranger even in His own house, where shall we seek for Him since we find Him not there? "In the dwellings of Jacob" may be the answer of some. But hast thou found Him there? If so, hasten to "bring Him to" thy "mother's house, and to the chamber of her that conceived" thee. But thou hast not found Him, for thou art too much unconcerned whether others find Him or not. Thy prayerless ease in "the gates of Zion" betrays thine estrangement in "the dwellings of Jacob."

2. *"The righteous perisheth" "and merciful men are taken away."* This is a sign of present controversy and of "evil to come." These righteous ones are "men of mercy" to their generation while they live; their removal is a token of coming judgment. The righteous are the preserving salt of the earth, and the mass out of which they are taken will speedily ripen for judgment. They pled with God in behalf of a guilty people; the importunate pleaders are taken from between the judgment and the guilty. God, who will not refuse their cry, has raised them where no longer prayer but praise shall employ them. Some pleaders are left, but they are those who will not press for an answer, they will allow Him to perform "His strange work" of judgment. These, then, may remain even in a time of controversy. But the wrestling pleaders are removed, the "men of mercy" who could not endure to see "evil come upon their



people,” the men of prayer who would not let the Lord go without His leaving a blessing behind Him. The removal of these is indeed an intimation of such an evil coming as a favourite child must not even see. The haste in which the Lord is taking them away proves that the evil is speedily to come. If you saw a parent rush out from his door in haste, raise off the street, and carry to his house a child whom you knew to be his, would you not at once conclude that the father saw some danger coming from which he was in haste to save it? Such a sign has been given us in the dealings of the Lord in our day and our Zion. Alas! though many have seen it, few have considered “that the righteous is taken away from the evil to come.”

What were the feelings of Micah, as described in the next chapter, at such a time as the present. “Woe is me,” he saith, “for I am as when they have gathered the summer fruits.” On looking over the church, he sees the places empty, or but ill supplied of those whom “his soul desired.” A few of the Lord’s people were left, but they were as the “grape gleanings” compared with the rich “summer fruits.” He feels desolate and lonely as He looks around. He discerns, dark with the power of God, the sky of providence above him; and before him, he sees the prospect, for around him are the signs of a stormy season of judgment. And oh, my dear friends, how bare are the branches of our own vineyard already! Where are the summer fruits? Have they not been hastily gathered because winter is nigh? Scarcely more than the “gleanings” are now left – the stunted fruit that was overlooked before. Have we not then cause to raise the lamentation of the prophet, and, with him, while feeling desolate and lonely in a vineyard so stript, to tremble before the tokens of “the evil to come.”

3. *The advance of Popery.* That Popery is making progress in our land is universally allowed. *It has greatly grown of late in boldness.* This is ominous. May it not be because Satan is aware of the Lord’s estrangement from “His people,” and has discovered that communication is greatly interrupted between heaven and the few who are left to “contend for the faith?” What if it should be true that he knows better than ourselves that, though “the Lord’s hand is not shortened,” our iniquities have separated us from Him, and that, though “His ear is not heavy,” our “sins have hid His face from” us, “that He will not hear?” May it not be the inspiration of Satan’s courage because of this that emboldens “the man of sin” to raise his pretensions, and to utter his threats as in days of old? May it not also be because he has made more progress than we are yet aware of? It looks as if he had been successfully undermining, and were now challenging his opponents to provoke their advance on the ground which he had prepared for their destruction. Surely he would not be so bold if he had not reason to count on sufficient support in the event of the rupture he provokes from many in our land who are at present in disguise, as well as from the kingdoms that have lent him their power. *And has not Popery of late made many proselytes?* It is a striking fact that, in this age, which boasts of its enlightenment, a system of such monstrous absurdities in doctrine, of such abhorrent antecedents, and of such debasing tendencies, should make progress – should advance in Britain – and even there make proselytes among the noble, the educated, and the serious. Against its progress neither the refinement of rank, nor the acquirements of education, nor the sentimental fervour of a fashionable religion, have availed as barriers. We are thus taught in providence the lesson of Scripture, that all who “receive not the love of the truth” are the easy prey of Anti-Christ. And if it has advanced over every other barrier that seemed likely to arrest its course, have we not too good grounds to fear that, as another token of His anger, “strong delusion” has been sent by the Lord who “hath a controversy with our land?” Think of the withdrawal by the Lord of His Spirit, see His children fast following, and mark in the deserted land, subjected to the power of Satan, the working of a “strong delusion.” Surely with such a land “the Lord hath a controversy” – surely the people who dwell there are “the generation of His wrath.”

4. But the multitude are blind to these signs of controversy to which we have already adverted. Carnal and worldly men are unconscious of spiritual judgments. The very progress of these is marked by the measure of their ease and indifference; and as spiritual generally precede temporal judgments, the nearer the coming of the latter is the more careless and secure are the people on whom they are to fall. But even the most carnal and careless are without excuse if they do not discover from His dealings in providence that the Lord hath a controversy with us. Such tokens of His anger have been given as might be felt by flesh and blood. *Famine* has been of late in our land, wasting the strength and destroying the lives of thousands, and expelling by its terrors thousands more of our countrymen from their native land. "*The plague is begun,*" because "wrath is gone out from the Lord." *War* has been raging in our colonies, and its rumours and sorrows have reached to disturb and afflict us at home. In the East a formidable war has arisen, and our country is involved in the strife.

But it may be said – "The famine was very partial; cholera, though virulent, has visited only a few towns, and, by its frequent recurrence, has lost its marked character of a visitation of judgment, and war is yet at a distance, and our plains may never be battlefields." These, we believe, are the thought of many, and, because they are, they themselves continue at their ease. But is not such conduct a manifest abuse of the intimations of providence, and a great provocation of further judgments? True, the Lord has hitherto restrained these great wasting judgments, but *they are at work*. He has been telling us what *might* be if He removed His restraining hand, and what *shall* be if we provoke Him to do so. And shall we make light of such intimations of judgment, because they are yet mingled with mercy? Shall we learn to be coolly familiar with the tokens of His wrath, and make their very frequency a reason for denying that "the Lord hath a controversy with His people?" Shall the very progress of spiritual and the very frequency of temporal judgments be the occasion of our blindness?

III. Let us now call your attention to some of the many grounds of the Lord's controversy with us.

1. First and greatest of all the sins that can be charged against us is *our abuse of the Gospel*. The rejection of Christ is the great sin of our land. He is despised and rejected by an unbelieving and hard-hearted generation, and were there no other cause of controversy this would suffice to justify all the dealings of judgment with which we could be visited. But not only is the Son of God contemned by the most of Gospel-hearers, as has ever been the case – this is now done by a generation that inherited costly privileges, in the abuse of which it has acquired an easy habit of rejecting the "unspeakable gift" of God. The most of us sleep profoundly under the power and guilt of unbelief – yea, to many the sound of the Gospel seems to be requisite only to keep them at their ease. How awful is it to think of how easy the habit of rejecting Christ has become to many! How hardened many are by their very familiarity with the Gospel! And although the Lord has been intimating to us that the candlestick may soon be entirely removed by taking away one after another of the godly ministers of our land, the carnal ease of the multitude still continues to increase. The true Gospel has become, too, a wearisome thing to many in this guilty generation, as the manna was to Israel, and, like these rebels in the wilderness, they seek a substitute. In judgment the Lord is giving them also the desire of their heart.

As a generation that inherited Gospel privileges – that were ever wantonly abusing them – that grew in hardness while our privileges were continued – that now find it an easy thing to reject Christ and His salvation – that provoked the removal of many precious ministers of the Gospel, and that, instead of profiting by this rebuke, continue still to despise "the sincere milk of the Word" – that, though once and again violently shaken by rousing providences and awakening strivings of the Spirit of God, have sunk again into a deeper sleep than before – oh, how guilty are we before God! Is it a strange thing that the Lord hath a controversy with us?

*How is the Gospel abused by many who profess to preach it!* By some of these it is treated as if all that was desirable about it were the profits of the trade of preaching it. They seek this work not because they believe the efficacy of the remedy which the Gospel provides, but, like the street criers of quack drugs, that they may be paid for proclaiming it. Alas! by many who profess to preach Him, Jesus is treated as if He were but an imposter. By some others the Gospel is superseded by a worthless substitute, and the lives of many who profess to recommend it are a practical denial of its efficacy.

*By many who profess to believe the Gospel Christ is dishonoured and unbelievers hardened in sin.* These profess Christ because it is in fashion, not because they respect and love Himself. If they do not openly despise Him as if He were only “the carpenter’s son,” they seek but the honour of His name as “the son of David;” they know Him not, nor love Him as “the Son of God.” And their conduct tends to confirm unbelievers in their contempt of Christ, since by it they tell these that, though Christ may deserve the homage of the lips, or rather that it is convenient to give Him this, He deserves no more, and that all besides may be given to the world.

And oh, my dear friends, how little sorrow of heart do any of us feel for “the hurt of the daughter of our people,” and especially for the dishonour cast upon the Son of God! How easy it is for us to endure to see thousands around us rushing onwards to everlasting misery as they pass in contempt by the Cross of Christ! Oh, how little do any of us value and profit by the Gospel! Our barrenness, what a shame! Our carnal ease, what a reproach! Our selfishness, how guilty! Our prayerlessness, what a sure sign of deadness!

As we think of these things, what a scene is before us! An unbelieving generation busy banishing the Spirit of the Lord from among them, while the remnant of the faithful that are left are not stirred up to constrain Him to abide. Let each of us look to our contribution to this generation-guilt; and let the following questions be solemnly pondered by us all: – Have I received Christ on the terms of the Gospel? Have I ever experienced the power of the Gospel in my own soul? What conformity have I to the doctrine that teacheth me that “denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, I should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world?” What am I doing to promote the spread and success of the Gospel? And am I lamenting after the Lord who has been provoked to withdraw His presence, and to withhold His blessing from the preaching of the Gospel? If we only pondered over these things in secret and in faithfulness, we would soon find abundant reasons in our own hearts and ways why “the Lord hath a controversy with His people.”

2. *The countenance given to Popery in our land.* In the face of God’s declared abhorrence of Antichrist, and of His awful threats of judgment against those who partake of its sins – after all He has graciously done to free us as a nation from its power – notwithstanding of our experience of the many benefits resulting from this liberty – although again and again have we been taught that to concede is to multiply its demands – with an island just lying beside us on which its abominations and its miseries are spread out before us – surrounded by proofs that its spirit is unchanged, though its policy may be shifting – and in breach of solemn professions and engagements – Popery is countenanced and supported in our land. Since Papists were admitted to a seat in the Legislature – though they are the sworn subjects of a prince who hates our nation, and to whom they owe their first allegiance – in how many ways has Antichrist been receiving encouragement and aid? The College of Maynooth is endowed as a nursery of priests, who are trained to be deceivers of souls, and who prove pests of society, and disturbers of the peace, when planted in the dark districts of Ireland. Jesuits are permitted to land on our shores, and to mature their plots in the midst of us. A Popish Cardinal is allowed to sport his titles, and to employ his influence, at the very seat of government. Convents are being erected, and they are not only tolerated, but will not even be inspected. Popish chaplains are admitted to our garrisons and our jails, and are to be paid for

their services. Our Government permits the oppression of our countrymen in Popish lands, or but feebly protests against it. In the Colonies Popery is openly supported by our Government, and has so grown in power in some of them, as to have almost the ascendancy in influence and in numbers. And all this has been done in support of Antichrist, while nothing has been directly done by us, in our national capacity, for the rescue of its poor victims in Ireland. They have been left to perish in their ignorance, yea, their destroyer has been helped to ruin them. Oh, surely the Ruler of the nations will not wink at these things. And since these sins are marked in the record of the Lord, and are produced as charges in His controversy with our nation, need we wonder at tokens of His anger? Have we not acted as if our care was to establish a claim to a share of the plagues of Antichrist. Verily this shall be given us when the day of vengeance shall have come.

Let us not, my dear friends, lightly conclude that we have no share in the guilt of these national sins. Have we endured these things without all possible protest against them, and without all legitimate resistance? Have we not provoked the Lord to curse us with rulers that love not the truth, and are ashamed to defend it? Are we mourning in secret as we ought over their doings? Have we raised before God in secret our protest against them, as well as in public before men? Though we may have been petitioning Parliament, have we not neglected to plead with God? Have not applications to men for redress been too often substituted for importunity at the throne of grace? And although at present there is considerable bustle in the ranks of Protestants, although meetings are held, associations formed, information circulated, and minor differences merged, with a view to a united and vigorous resistance to the aggressions of Popery, how great is the tendency to rely on what is done by ourselves, and not on what can only be done by the Lord.

3. *The national denial of Christ as King of Zion.* “The Claim of Rights,” presented by the Church of Scotland before the Government of this country, was a demand in the name of Christ as King of Zion and King of nations. It asked that He should be acknowledged as supreme and only Ruler in His own house, and that the rights and liberties granted by Him should not be interfered with nor fettered by man. This claim was rejected with contempt. From union to a State that thus treated their King and His claims, and that would only support His Church on condition of her owning no king but Caesar, the true subjects of Christ were compelled to remove. In their stead was owned and supported as the Church of Scotland a body of men whose principles are “We have no king but Caesar.” This is the Church that claims to be the Church of Scotland, and a Church of Christ! While thinking with pity of the men, it is not a forbidden indignation we feel excited by their pretensions, who have so openly made choice of the world rather than of Christ. It becomes us all to be on our guard against wearying or being ashamed of our Church’s testimony, or losing sight of our nation’s sin in denying Christ, to mourn more over it in secret, and to tremble more before the anger which that sin has provoked.

4. *The growing desecration of the Sabbath.* There are three ways in which the progress of Sabbath profanation may be marked: – 1. By the prevalence of loose views regarding the binding obligation of the Fourth Commandment. By such views the Sabbath is profaned, however outwardly correct may be the conduct of those who hold them; and they indicate an advancing preparedness of the public mind for breaking through all the restraints that guard the sacredness of the day. 2. By systematic traffic on the day of the Lord. The extent of such traffic has fearfully increased of late. It is permitted and countenanced by the Government of our country, and the guilt connected with it is in consequence a *national sin*. 3. By the growing disregard of Sabbath sanctity, and neglect of Sabbath duties, by the body of the people. How common are Sabbath excursions of pleasure become! By how many thousands in our land is the house of God forsaken for the pleasures of sin on the Lord’s own day! But not to pass over ourselves. By some of you is the Sabbath profaned by excuseless absence

from the means of grace – by others in walks of amusement – by others in visits to friends and relations – by others in idle conversation on their way to and from the house of God – by many in abuse of precious Sabbath privileges – by the majority in the neglect of God’s word and prayer in secret – by others who use not their influence for God and His day with children, servants, and neighbours – and by all of us in not mourning as we ought over the many grievous desecrations of the Sabbath by ourselves and others. If the Sabbath is now, as it was of old, “a sign” between God and “His people,” and between “His people” and Him – if the continued observance of that day is a token of His goodwill to them, and of their loyalty to Him – what does its desecration teach us but that they are departing from their allegiance to Him, and that He therefore and justly hath a controversy with them.

5. *Growing forgetfulness of God amidst the bustle of worldly business.* This is especially true at present when trade is prosperous, new channels of commerce opening up, and the utmost efforts put forth to take advantage of them. It is always true that “the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the Word” in the minds of men, and lead them further and further away from God. But who can estimate the effects on a country of the cares of business – on a country like ours which is the modern Tyre of the world, and especially in a season of unusual bustle and prosperity. We were struck lately with observing, in one of the streets of a great commercial city, a tide of busy men pouring on to their various pursuits and employments. We were reminded by the sight of “the course of this world,” and saw, in the hasty movements of that crowd, a representation of the race for riches in which our country is going fast away from God. But the jealous eye of God is on the worshippers of Mammon, and a time to plead with them for their forgetfulness of Him shall surely come. Our country may soon be arrested in its course of advancing commercial prosperity, and it were no wonder that, with the fame and spirit of Tyre, we should yet experience her doom.

6. *Growing boldness in ungodliness and sin.* Of this, alas! we have too many proofs. It indicates an awful hardness of heart towards God contracted in the wilful abuse of precious privileges. There is, too, a bold spirit of lawlessness arising, making men unashamed to sin before those who ought to be a check and a terror to them. Alas! there is guilt on both sides. The few who should be “a terror to evil doers” have lived down the authority of their position, and while those whose lives were a rebuke to the ungodly around them are removed, the witnesses for God who survive are too much conformed to the mass. And if the drunkard, the Sabbath breaker, the unclean, and the profane have learned to sin with a high hand, and show before God and man a forehead that refuseth shame, have we not before our eyes a proof of our ripeness for judgment. Is this added to all the other causes of controversy? Verily, the time is drawing very nigh when the Lord will plead with our land.

IV. Let us now, in conclusion, and in a few words, call your attention to the position in which we are placed, and the exercises to which we are called, by the announcement of the text.

1. *It is an intimation to us of a breathing time in the controversy.* The Lord has not yet arisen in the full vengeance of judgment. He tells us that a time to plead is coming, “the day of vengeance is” yet in His “heart,” but it is surely coming. Till it comes there is an opportunity of peace. How solemn, then, is our position during that interval. How much depends on our knowing this time of visitation. How awful the result of its being abused.

2. We are called by the text *to be silent, and to tremble before the Lord.* Shall this announcement be heard with indifference? Is the Lord’s anger a thing to be made light of? Is a controversy with the Almighty a small matter to weak worms of the dust? Shall men go on in their various pursuits of business and pleasure, as if the summons of the King eternal were a thing to be despised? Alas! my dear friends, there is but little true trembling of heart before God this day amongst us, or in the assembled congregations of our land; and when the services of the day are past there is much cause to fear that the multitude will go down “the

course of this world” as before, utterly forgetful of God, and with all the impressions of His word blotted from their minds.

3. But if we are called to observe the tokens of wrath, and to tremble before the anger which they indicate, we are called also *to search for the causes of controversy*. Our sins have provoked the Lord. It is our duty to search for these, and it is our mercy that we are yet called to do so. Are we willing to find them? Are we ready to entertain the light that would reveal them? Can we honestly apply to the Lord for His teaching to enable us truly to know and to feel them? Oh, what if the “Spirit of grace and supplications” be not poured out on us ere this interval of mercy pass! Oh, what if, instead of that “mourning apart” which is the fruit of His coming, we care not to search for the causes of controversy, or if, professing to do so, we look only to others! What if, instead of realising the anger of God, and discovering the sins which deserve it, we shall seek to gratify an unholy anxiety to anticipate the details of the judgment that cometh.

4. But if we are called to discover and acknowledge our offence, it is that we may feel our need of being *turned to the Lord*. An opportunity of a gracious settlement of the controversy is yet given us by the Lord. He “waits that He may be gracious” when we as guilty sinners return to seek Him on His mercy-seat. Though “He will be exalted” in having mercy, mercy He is yet willing to bestow. Oh then, that the cry were heard by Him from our land – “Turn us, O God of our salvation, and cause Thine anger towards us to cease. Wilt Thou be angry for ever? Wilt Thou draw out Thine anger to all generations? Wilt Thou not revive us again, that Thy people may rejoice in Thee? Shew us Thy mercy, O Lord, and grant us Thy salvation.” Would that we were thus to plead with God, that families and individuals might yet be turned unto Him, that the opportunity of peace be not lost by our land, and lest the controversy terminate in the full execution of judgment.

But, in conclusion, let me remind each of you, my dear fellow-sinners, who are yet unconverted and Christless, that the Lord hath a controversy with you individually; that all must be wrong with you till it be graciously settled; that there is but one way in which peace can be obtained, even by Christ, and through His precious blood; that the peace which God hath made through the blood of the cross is yet in your offer, for Christ Himself is yet to you free; and in Him the guiltiest sinner who receives Him finds “redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins.” Oh flee to Christ, the only refuge from “the wrath to come,” while yet in the Gospel you are called to do so, and run not, by wilfully rejecting Him, the sure and awful risk of an eternal war with God.

[July and September 1910]

## A Sermon.

By the REV. ALEXANDER MACRAE, Portree;

*Moderator of Synod.*

Delivered at the opening of the Synod of the Free Presbyterian Church,  
met in the Inverness Church on 5th July, 1910.

“For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God  
to the pulling down of strongholds” – 2 Corinthians 10:4.

Corinth was the chief city of Greece in the days of the Apostle Paul. It was renowned for its wealth and learning. It had a numerous population of Jews and Greeks. The Jews were religious after their manner, scrupulously observing the rites enjoined by Moses, but the Greeks were sunk in a kind of refined heathenism, and indulged in philosophical speculations. To the one, the preaching of Christ crucified was a stumbling-block; to the other, it was foolishness. Both sections of the community were strongly prejudiced against the Gospel that the Apostle brought to their ears. Jews and Greeks alike joined in the resistance offered to it. But the power of God prevailed, and from among both Jews and Greeks there were many converts to Christianity – Justus, Cripus, and Sosthenes being pre-eminent among them. It was thus in the face of much stubborn opposition that the Church of Corinth was planted.

Satan is ever on the alert to sow the seed of dissension among Christian brethren. He stirred up among the members of this Church the spirit of strife to such an extent that it presented a sad spectacle of internal division. There had arisen four, at least, opposing factions among its members. One was of Paul, another of Apollos, a third of Cephas, and a fourth of Christ. Those who called themselves by the name of Paul are supposed to have been, in the main, the Gentile converts. They were free from the influence of Jewish ideas. But some of them had degenerated into a pronounced type of Antinomianism. Those who made themselves partisans of Apollos, probably because of his eloquence, had degenerated in like manner. Scandalous sins had been committed. Abuses and irregularities were indulged in without rebuke. The arm of discipline was weak; and for the purification of the Church and the good of its members, Paul counsels that effective measures should be taken against offenders. With equal vehemence he takes up his weapons against the Judaizing section in the Church. They went to the opposite extreme. They called themselves by the name of Peter. Those who were “of Christ” were closely associated with them. They claimed to have

relation to Christ that they denied to others. The Judaisers were the most determined opponents of the Apostle. Their headquarters were in Jerusalem, and they sent their emissaries everywhere to disturb the peace of the Christian Church. They attempted to introduce into Corinth the observance of the Jewish law. Paul speaks of them as “false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ.” They called in question his Apostleship, on the ground, it is supposed, that he was not of the original twelve. They sought a proof of Christ speaking in him. They looked upon him as a heretic. Both parties – the Antinomians and Judaisers – agreed in repudiating his authority. To prove the reality of his divine commission he had to appeal to the direct judgment of God. The faith and graces of the Corinthians themselves were a sufficient proof of it. The signs of an Apostle were wrought among them “in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds.” All opposition was ultimately quelled, and the whole Church of Corinth were constrained to confess that God was on the side of Paul. It was not by carnal weapons that he obtained his victory, but by weapons that are “mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds.”

I consider the words suitable for our meditations on the present occasion, and I shall address you from them in the following order: –

- I. – The people who war;
- II. – Those against whom they war;
- III. – What the weapons of their warfare are;
- IV. – The might that through God these weapons are said to have.

I. – Ever since the kingdom of God was set up in this world in opposition to the kingdom of darkness there has been a state of war. The interests of the one are to be defended against the malice and enmity of the other. They are the interests, not of an earthly king having rights to be defended in connection with his dominions, but of a king who exercises absolute authority over the most exalted potentates of this world. He is the King of kings and Lord of lords. As His interests are eternal, they are of infinitely greater value and importance than those that are merely temporal. They have respect to the honour of the name of the Lord and the everlasting salvation of the Church. He can vindicate His own interests as He sees fit. It has, however, pleased Him to raise up instruments, from time to time, for this end. In some generations, their number is increased; in others, their number is, as at present, very considerably diminished. They are the people called, by divine grace, to engage in the conflict implied in the words of our text. They are the people of the Lord, whatever their station in the world or their position in the visible church is. They are Christ’s witnesses. I shall make a few observations concerning them.

1. They are Christ’s chosen people. Every kingdom has its army, and an earthly sovereign has a right to choose those whom he calls to fight in defence of his kingdom. So Christ has chosen His own witnesses. They were chosen by Him before the foundation of the world “out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation.” His foundation stands sure. It is the counsel of His will, having the seal, “The Lord knoweth them that are his.” The Lord’s purpose of mercy towards them lay hid in His own bosom until the time had come, “when it pleased God, who separated them from their mother’s womb, and called them by His grace, to reveal His Son in them,” that they might shew forth His praise. They were by nature unmindful of God. They had no interest in His cause or kingdom. Their interest centred in what satisfied the flesh and promoted their worldly happiness. The rooted enmity of their heart to God revealed itself in many forms. They dishonoured His great name and wronged their own souls. Not only were they in open revolt against His authority, but many of them, like Saul, used their weapons of rebellion under the mask of a lifeless form of religion, entertaining cruel and unjust prejudices against the people of the Lord. They were indeed and



in reality the captives of Satan, whom they too long and too faithfully served. They were unwilling to acknowledge the Lord's sovereignty over them; and when, by word or providence, He asserted His rightful claims, the spirit evinced by Pharaoh was proved to be in them also, "Who is the Lord that I should obey His voice?" Notwithstanding, they are, as was said of the writer of this Epistle, chosen vessels to bear, each in his own sphere, the Lord's name before their fellow-sinners and to witness for Him.

2. They willingly enter into Christ's service. No earthly sovereign takes any into his service except those who are willing to serve him. When Christ completed the stupendous work undertaken by Him, and sat down at the right hand of God, He received the promise, "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power." He redeemed them by price, but they needed to be redeemed also by power. The atonement made for them was essential to their being made a people willing in a day of power. The atonement forms the ground of the Holy Spirit's saving work in them. The Spirit's work in them is based on Christ's work for them, and He is thus represented as a "pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb." The allusion to the Lamb undoubtedly means that the Holy Spirit comes forth in the channel of the atoning death of Christ. This promise was to be fulfilled to Christ through the "outpouring of the Holy Ghost Who, as Christ had a commandment from the Father about laying down His life and taking it again, has a commission to so work in the heart of Christ's purchased people as that they might be made a willing people in a day of power, to take Christ's yoke upon them and cheerfully enter into His service. The day of power alluded to implies an exercise of power. It is experienced in the act of quickening. The dead hear the voice of the Son of God. The voice of words from Mount Sinai was terrible in the experience of those who heard it; and so, this quickening is accompanied with a sight of the majesty of God, as a righteous Judge, and of sins committed and also duties omitted. The quickened sinner's slavish fear of God, and of the penal consequences of his sins, stirs him up to the performance of duties, in the hope that he may make up for his former delinquencies, and merit the favour of an offended God on the ground of a righteousness that he spins out of his own breast. But the demands of the law are too exacting to be long under this hallucination; and consistently with the verdict given by that law, conscience judges him worthy of eternal death. It is thus, law-condemned and self-condemned, and confronted with the stern demands of inflexible justice which he can never satisfy, that a ray of hope in the mercy of God breaks in, it may be, through the words, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." A view is given of the glory of God in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, Who poured out His soul unto death, exhausted the law's curse, quenched the flames of infinite wrath, and brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel, with such remarkable results, that the sinner is enabled to commit himself, wholly and unreservedly, to Him, as all his salvation and all his desire. It is an act of faith to receive Christ, as revealed in the Gospel, and to rest upon Him alone for salvation. It is the faith that is of the operation of God and that comes by hearing of the Word of God. The language of it is, "Thine are we, David, and on thy side, thou Son of Jesse." The fruit of it is self-denial and throwing in one's lot, like Moses, with Christ and His people. The Holy Spirit works in them both to will and to do; and it is thus that all true believers willingly engage for service to Christ in a God-dishonouring world. Tasting in their souls that the Lord is gracious, they are under many obligations to Him; and they, with a willing heart, enlist under the banner of the Captain of their salvation to contend for the honour of His name, and for His truth and cause.

3. An earthly sovereign has a right to assign positions to each individual member of his army as he sees fit. There are the rank and file who are generally not so well known. There are those who are appointed to more responsible positions, and who in virtue of the positions of trust assigned to them, are all the more accountable to him who appoints them. But

whatever their position is, they all wear the badge of their sovereign's authority. It is thus Christ acts. He calls some of His people to more public and responsible service: others, to more private service; but they all wear His livery that distinguishes them from the world that lies in sin and wickedness. It is evident that those whom the Apostle comprehends under the term "we" in the 3rd verse particularly mean those who, in a pre-eminent manner, are called to bear public witness. "He gave some, apostles; and some prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints," etc. They are not the most influential in the world's view, for it is "not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble," God calls. He called the fishermen of Galilee to remarkable service in His cause, who, like their master, were despised by the rulers of the world, and especially by the rulers of the church, because they carried out the will of their Lord. They served Him loyally and faithfully, and loved not their lives unto death. When Timothy was called to witness publicly for Christ, the Apostle enjoins Him to endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. He was to be careful about pleasing Him Who had chosen him to be a soldier. He was not to entangle himself with concerns that had no importance in comparison with the interests of Christ's truth. Nothing must enter into competition with these interests. This is the position that, in the providence of God, and I hope, by the grace of God we hold; and may the Lord grant that we all may be faithful in the discharge of the responsible trust committed to us! From the beginning the Lord has had His public witnesses, although we have reason to fear that they are comparatively very few in our generation.

II. – Christ's witnesses war against enemies. He accounts their enemies to be His own enemies. He is with them and for them in all their conflicts, and it is on this account that their final triumph is assured. I shall briefly mention a few of the enemies they war against.

1. They war against Satan. Like the children of Israel delivered from the hands of a cruel oppressor, they had no idea of the forces that they were to contend against. The Amalekites soon presented themselves for battle, and they unexpectedly found themselves in the thick of the fray. This is the experience of the people of the Lord. Wrested from the hand of Satan, they are molested by him throughout their whole course. He knows that he will not regain possession of them, but he is bent upon troubling and harassing them in every possible way. He is a powerful foe, with well organised forces, called "principalities, powers, the rulers of the darkness of this world, spiritual wickedness in high places." He is an invisible foe, well skilled in flying about his deadly arrows day and night. He is an insidious and watchful foe, carefully waiting his opportunities for attack. Too often he finds the objects of his malice off their guard, with disastrous results to themselves. He smites their life down to the ground, and makes them to dwell in darkness. He tempts them to cast away their confidence. He fills their mind with many distressing fears. He influences them to doubt the validity of the promise, and they find themselves sadly entangled in the meshes of unbelief. It is owing to the intercession of Christ that their whole ground is not lost, "I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not." Peter experienced the comfort of His intercession. He had experience of severe encounters with the prince of darkness, and he felt the necessity of stirring up others to constant watchfulness. "Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: whom resist stedfast in the faith."

2. They war against the flesh. The flesh is that corrupt principle that universally permeates human nature. It expresses the sinfulness of human nature. It is indwelling sin; and the Lord's people are called to wage war against sin in all its forms. Their experience of the flesh is that it is a powerful and subtle foe. They are in themselves absolutely helpless before the forces that it calls up against them; and they need the arm of omnipotence to deliver them from becoming its miserable captives. Too often they are overcome, for the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. How often does it combine its forces in spiritual pride, self-seeking and vain glory; in vain, atheistical, and blasphemous thoughts; and in its

many vile and degrading lusts! It reveals itself in its innate hatred to holiness. The less lively grace is in exercise the more it is set on edge, and the more fitting are its opportunities to pierce the soul with its envenomed shafts. It is a life-long conflict between “the spirit and the flesh,” growing as the years roll on in intensity, and evoking the cry, “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?”

### 3. They war against the world.

(1) They war against the world in themselves. Their experience of the world is similar to their experience of sin. They are dead to sin, but sin is not dead in them. So they are dead to the world, but they find that the world is not dead in them. Its roots are too deeply planted in their affections. It assails them when engaged in most solemn exercises. How often when in the exercise of prayer, reading the Word of God, at the public means of grace, yea, when, it may be, at the Lord’s Table, does it fiercely assail them! They dread the love of it. They dread its allurements. They dread the offers of ease and comfort it presents when set in competition with the claims of Christ in His truth and cause. The world can boast of its trophies of victory. It dragged into its net Ananias, Sapphira, Demas, and many others. Let us seek grace to contend against a spirit of worldliness. The Lord knows that we and our families have, like others, need of the necessities of this life; but let us first honestly seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto us. It is extremely sad to contemplate the deluge of worldliness in which the churches of the present day are sunk.

(2) They war against the world in respect of its sinful practices. The world still claims as its own those who have not separated themselves from its sinful habits, whatever their outward profession of religion may be. Christ called His people out of the world, and they are henceforth to set themselves in opposition to its maxims. The time past of their life suffices them to have wrought the will of the Gentiles. Christ and the world are sharply opposed, and he is not worthy of the name of a Christian minister who does not, in the spirit of the Gospel, faithfully rebuke sin. The false prophets were blind watchmen. They were compared to dumb dogs that could not bark: “they slept, lay down, and loved to slumber.” Why is it that so many sins are openly committed? Why is it that so much Sabbath-walking, Sabbath-visiting, Sabbath travelling, and Sabbath-work abound? Why is it that places of amusement are so largely resorted to, and that so many lead a dishonest life? Because, it may be said, of the sinfulness of human nature. True; but these indulgences are largely accounted for from the fact that they are not faithfully rebuked from many of the many pulpits of this land.

### 4. They war against false teachers.

(1) They war against their corrupt doctrines. This is the kind of warfare the Apostle specially alludes to, and Christ’s witnesses are, in all ages, called to engage in it. It began at the setting up of Christ’s Church in the world, and it shall be carried on to the end. The prophets of the Lord under the Old Testament dispensation had all through to contend against the perverse teaching of the false prophets. When our Lord came to the world He found scarcely any but false teachers in the Church, upon whom He multiplied His woes as blind leaders of the blind. His Apostles were compelled to engage in sharp conflict with false teachers, who craftily introduced “damnable heresies”; and, as already stated, the contention that Paul had with Judaizing teachers for their corrupt doctrines was a bitter drop in the cup of his afflictions. This same experience of warfare continued throughout the succeeding ages on to the present moment, so that we ourselves, as a Church, can claim apostolical succession in this respect. Are not the Pelagianism, Socinianism, Arminianism, Rationalism, and Romanism, that formerly infested the Christian Church, boldly confronting us, and threatening to bury out of sight the doctrines in the defence of which many of our ancestors shed the last drop of their heart’s blood? The existence of our Church is a standing testimony against these corrupt systems. Light has no communion with darkness. Truth can have no

communion with error. We have the truth, and the whole truth. Let us, therefore, persevere, in the strength of the Lord, to war in its defence and against error.

(2) Christ's witnesses war against the corrupt practices of false teachers. The Apostle was grieved at the corruptions in practice that had entered into the Church at Corinth. These necessarily follow corruptions in doctrine. If the doctrine be not pure, the practice will not be pure. The Judaisers in Corinth insisted upon Jewish modes of worship, and the Antinomians thought that they might break the law with impunity. Against the practice of both, the Apostle used his weapons of warfare. And so must we. How many false teachers there are who set the example of Sabbath-walking before their people! How many set the example of going to the place of sinful mirth, such as the concert, etc.! Is it not lamentable that so many professedly Christian ministers, almost all over the land, should be reported as giving countenance to these practices? And when we turn to the sanctuary, do we not see there something substantially the same in the social meeting and soiree? Yea, when we think of acts that are professed to be more immediately acts of divine worship, are we not told that the practice of Christ and His Apostles does not suit the imagined enlightenment of the present day? Carnal and sensuous forms of worship are introduced. Uninspired hymns and instrumental music have their part assigned to them. Ritualism of an advanced type is welcomed. Romish practices are encouraged. And all this to the great dishonour of Him Who, as King of His Church, fixed a mode of worship for the New Testament Church which He commands her to observe unaltered until He shall appear the second time in His glory. "Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." Let us, then, act as Christ would have us act, and war against all these corrupt practices.

III. – "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal." The Church is a spiritual kingdom, and it is not by carnal weapons its interests are to be defended. Peter went out of his way when he smote the servant of the high priest and cut off his right ear with the sword. For this act his Lord sharply rebuked him. Notwithstanding, the Church of Rome has always followed this method of warfare. It is one of her fundamental articles that heretics are to be exterminated with the sword; and, if she now had the power, she would have her sword weltering in the blood of saints, as of yore. The civil magistrate, as a power ordained of God, is alone invested with authority to bear the sword for the protection of those who do that which is good, and for the punishment of those that do evil. But to the Church the Lord has appointed other weapons, some of which I shall briefly enumerate.

The Apostle exhorts the Ephesians to take unto them the whole armour of God. He speaks of armour for defence and offence. There is what is fitted to protect the heart, head, and feet, such as the breastplate of righteousness, the helmet of salvation, and the preparation of the gospel of peace. Weapons are provided that the hand alone can use, for the double purpose of warding off an enemy's blow and of driving one home. There is the shield of faith; there is the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.

1. Faith, trust, or confidence in God is a weapon needed by the Church in all her conflicts. It is not the case that those who fight under a general have always confidence in him, but the Church may ever trust her General, the Captain of her salvation. "Trust ye in the Lord for ever: for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength." Faith does war after the flesh. It looks in suffering not at things seen and temporal, but at things unseen and eternal. It views God in His character of a covenant-keeping God, who will not suffer His faithfulness to fail. It was thus David went forth against the proud Philistine and slew him. Saul, who could make use of carnal weapons only, would have him clad in his coat of mail and girt with his sword and spear. When we find ourselves beset with a bewitching world, have we not need of faith in the power of God to deliver us? "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." When we find ourselves encompassed with strong contingents of alien armies combined against the truth, have we not need of faith in the God of truth, Who can enable one

to chase a thousand, and two to put ten thousand to flight? It was thus that Jehosaphat conducted his warfare against the combined armies of the aliens: "We have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon thee." Faith in God looks undismayed at the den of lions and the fiery furnace. It compasses the strongly-fortified walls of error, blowing the trumpets of rams' horns, and believing that the Lord will pull them down. It is thus by faith in her divine Head that the Church is terrible as an army with banners.

2. Prayer to God is a weapon that the Church must at all times use. The example is given her by her adorable Head, Who in the days of His flesh offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto God. On every occasion of trouble and stress she has recourse to this weapon. The greater the trial is, the greater is the value set upon it. Jacob was afraid of the approach of his brother Esau. It was with no carnal weapon that he fortified himself, but with the weapon of prayer. "Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau; for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me, and the mother with the children." With this weapon he prevailed. The Prophets, the Apostles, and the people of God, in all ages, could record signal deliverances from trouble in answer to prayer. Have we not many such on record in covenanting times in Scotland? The Reformers were pre-eminent for their use of the weapon of prayer. Many of them spent hours daily in secret prayer. Each of us must confess how sadly remiss we are in this duty. There is a loud call to it at the present moment. There is an organised plan, a plot in which professed Protestants and avowed Romanists are involved, to break down the remaining bulwarks of our Protestant Constitution. Rome, ever alive to every opportunity to advance her interests, is, with characteristic activity, mustering her forces in the hope that she may win back the supremacy lost several centuries ago and demolish the work of the Reformation in our land. Her army of Jesuits is skilfully disposed; and it looks as if our legislators are to be given up to judicial blindness. Her designs were before frustrated, and, like our godly forefathers, let us earnestly take up the weapon of prayer. These circumstances, and the condition of the cause generally, loudly call for it.

3. Another weapon is the faithful presentation of the Word of God in all its aspects. It is not a part of it that is to be set forth; it is not a one-sided statement of it that is to be made; but the whole counsel of God is to be declared. As it used to be said, ruin by Adam, redemption by Christ, and regeneration by the Holy Spirit must ever be faithfully preached. Divine sovereignty is not to be emphasized at the expense of human responsibility, nor human responsibility at the expense of divine sovereignty. Both must ever be equally held forth in a faithful presentation of truth. Law and gospel, death and life, the curse and the blessing, the word of threatening and the word of promise, the sufficiency of the atonement, justification by faith, forgiveness through the blood of Christ, and sanctification by the Spirit are topics that must be constantly dwelt upon. The Scriptures, which are all given by inspiration of God, are thus the armoury that supplies us with the weapons of our warfare. On it "there hang a thousand bucklers, all shields of mighty men." The Word of God is the sword of the Spirit. It is by it alone, effectually applied, that we can successfully resist Satan, unbelief, the world, and the flesh. This is the sword by which the Head repelled every temptation of Satan – "It is written." When we reprove sin we must lay the grounds of our reproof upon the authority of the Word of God. It is "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." It is by weapons furnished from the magazine of infallible truth that error and heresies are to be refuted. The Word of God is "powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword." It was by Scripture testimonies our Lord refuted the errors of the Pharisees and Sadducees. It was from the Scriptures that Paul convinced the Jews, and proved that Jesus was the Christ, the true Messiah. It was by arguments from Scripture that he effectually

silenced the errorists in Corinth. Thus the Scriptures are weapons supplied to Christ's witnesses to contend for purity of doctrine, of worship, and of practice.

4. The last weapon I shall mention is the weapon of Church discipline. In the civil sphere, offenders are firmly dealt with and punished according to the degree of their offence; otherwise, a state of anarchy would prevail. It cannot be expected that the Church in this world will be free from conditions that will not call forth its exercise of discipline. Christ delivered the keys of His kingdom to the disciples for the administration of its affairs, so that what they would bind on earth, *in accordance with the Word of God*, was to be bound in heaven: and what they would loose on earth was to be loosed in heaven. Paul was invested with this authority, and he used it as a weapon for the correction of offences in Corinth. He asks, "Shall I come unto you with a rod?" He means the rod of discipline. It is a power vested in the Church by her Head to the end of time. It is a weapon put into her hand by Christ – a weapon that she is to use as occasion arises, in the spirit of love, and for edification.

IV. – The weapons of the Church's warfare are mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds. In themselves they are ineffectual. They have all their might, power, and effect from God. Through Him they are so powerful as to pull down strongholds.

Strongholds are usually built on elevated ground. They are positions that are strengthened and fortified with all possible ingenuity that they may effectually resist attack and secure those who entrench themselves within them. Satan has his strongholds. They are strongly fortified and widely distributed.

1. He has his stronghold in the heart of every man and woman. He entrenches himself there and strengthens his position by the heart's enmity to God, by spiritual pride, lofty imaginations, and carnal reasonings that exalt themselves against the knowledge of God, that is, the gospel of Christ. He strengthens his position by spiritual darkness, unbelief, hardness of heart, and unwillingness; and by a false estimate of one's own imagined goodness and holiness. With these bulwarks Satan fancies his position amply buttressed; but there is a stronger than he, Who is able to deprive him of the weapons in which he trusts. Christ puts forth His irresistible power through the weapons that He puts into the hand of His delivered people; and bringing every thought into captivity to render obedience to Himself, He snatches the soul from the enemy's hand. He thus pulls down the strongholds of Satan, never to be put up again, and He enthrones Himself in the heart. "The fortress of the high fort of thy walls shall he bring down, lay low, and bring to the ground, even to the dust."

2. He has his strongholds in the visible Church. He has them in the public creed of many of the Churches throughout Christendom. A public creed is high ground on which Satan succeeds to rear his strongholds. They are fortified by legislation, and the Churches concerned give them the support of all the influence and authority that they can command. It is only in error that Satan can have his strongholds; and when error makes its way into the public creed of a Church, there he entrenches himself. Think of the strongholds that he has in the Church of Rome, and he is rapidly gaining positions in the Church of England as well as in several of the Scottish Churches. Think of the desperate efforts that he is now putting forth through so many willing agents to get the Church of Rome to be the State Church in this land, so that he may have his strongholds in both Church and State. We are in extreme danger. It is, however, with the weapons that the Gospel supplies that Christ will yet, through His mighty power, pull them all down. He shall consume the man of sin "with the spirit of his mouth and shall destroy him with the brightness of his coming." He shall yet completely demolish the strongholds of error that are spread all over Christendom in the present day.

3. He has his strongholds in the world. He has them in the organised forms of evil set up in Gospel lands; he has them in the long-established forms of idolatry in heathen lands. Much has recently been spoken and written about the heathen; but the weapons of carnal wisdom and carnal contrivance, that discard the absolute integrity of the Scriptures, are not the weapons that will pull down the strongholds of heathenism at home or abroad. The weapons furnished in the Gospel alone will do it, through the forth-putting of the almighty power of God. When His time comes, the light of the Gospel will flash throughout all lands. In spite of all opposition, Christ will have the heathen for His inheritance and the uttermost parts of the earth for His possession.

In conclusion, we have reason to bewail many shortcomings. We see little of the Lord's work anywhere in our land. The Holy Spirit is grieved. There is a general falling away from the faith once for all delivered to the saints. There is a process of retrogression persistently going on from purity of doctrine and practice. There is a growing indifference to true religion and undefiled. There is a widespread apathy to the inroads of the Papacy that aims at depriving us of our civil and religious liberties. There is a false charity that is more careful of not offending the protagonists of error and falsehood than the God of truth and righteousness. Our duty, however, is clear. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever. His truth is the same. Let us, therefore, value more and more the weapons that are mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds, and unflaggingly conduct the warfare to which the Lord has called us, in the strength of His grace, and with a single eye to His glory. "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might." Amen.

[August 1910]

# A S e r m o n .

By the REV. JOHN R. MACKAY, M.A., Inverness.

“But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly,  
his faith is reckoned for righteousness” – Romans 4:5.

In drawing attention to this portion of God’s Word, we shall, as the Holy Spirit may enable us,

- I. – Consider what is here revealed to us concerning the mental activities of those who are saved;
- II. – Point out the profitableness of these exercises;
- III. – Make some use of the doctrine involved.

I. – The Lord does not deal with those whom He saves as if they were but blocks of wood or stone. He deals with them as with rational, accountable creatures. And it is as rational, accountable creatures that those who are saved are represented to us in the words of our text; yea, and as making the best use possible of their rational faculties. We do not mean that the exercising of the understanding or intellect of a natural man upon the way of salvation, however powerful that intellect in a natural sense may be, will of itself bring the soul from death to life. Our contention simply is, that where the understanding is renewed, that understanding will be exercised in matters of law and of Gospel; and that there is no exercise of the human intellect so truly deserving of the epithet “rational” as is that of the soul, when it is thus exercised in matters of law and of Gospel. Angus of the Hills, as he was called, was mentally such an imbecile that he could scarcely count up the fingers of one hand, and yet, according to his own account of his conversion, the Lord in saving him dealt with him as with a rational, responsible being. He had heard the late Rev. Alexander MacLeod, then minister of Uig, Lewis, several times without any apparent benefit. But one day, when Mr. MacLeod preached from the words, “If ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword” (Isaiah 1:20), it came home to Angus as something new, and fearful, that he himself should have been a rebel against God from his youth. It was the beginning of a good work in the imbecile’s soul; and we will add that there are very many Gospel hearers, who are naturally gifted with much better talents than was Angus, who yet never put their understanding to the good use to which Angus, through grace, put his that day. We are, indeed, disposed to agree with those who interpret the stony-ground hearers of the parable of the sower, as meaning a people whose feelings have been touched, but whose understanding was never much exercised in law and Gospel.

In any case, our text brings before us one whom we must regard as making good use of his mental faculties, in regard to both law and Gospel. This person’s soul exercise is seen first in the judgment passed upon himself. From his heart he regards himself as “one that does not work,” as “ungodly,” and it is with that conviction that he looks to God, the Saviour. What is meant by one that worketh not? It is one who is convinced that he has not merited salvation, or rather that he is incapable of meriting salvation. One may have been very diligent in the exercise of brain and of limb for worldly ends, but a natural man is unprofitable to God; he has not God in all his aims; and the person taught savingly will reckon that he has been



unprofitable to God, that the glory of God had not been his aim at all. Nay more. When he comes into Christ's school, he learns that the law of God demands, in order to life, a clean heart and clean hands; that his heart is full of uncleanness; and that his hands, so far as restraining common grace permitted, were unclean as his heart; and that on all this account he is guilty.

What is meant by one that is ungodly? It is one who, so far from meriting life from God, has merited indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish at the hands of the Righteous Judge. Now, it is a painful thing to pass a judgment like that upon one's own heart, and conduct, and condition. Yet it is very salutary, and indeed very necessary that one should do this. We do not mean that all the Lord's people have consciously had an equally deep and protracted law work before coming to Christ. We are inclined to say with the late Dr. Ronald Bayne of Kiltarlity, that if you had of law work but what might be compared to a pin-prick in your heart, if that experience turned you away from looking to the Covenant of works for salvation it was enough; you will know more of the law in your spiritual upbringing. At the same time, we have no doubt that all those who have been well taught in the law have received as true, touching themselves, what the Spirit of God in His word says about man by nature. They were brought to make a self-application of such passages as Romans 4:10-18; Ephesians 2:1-3. Now, that one should from the heart pass so severe a judgment upon oneself, surely involves soul activities which are not too common.

But, secondly, the exercise of the soul that is saved is revealed in its apprehension of God as Saviour. He is the God "that justifieth the ungodly." The fact is that if He had not revealed Himself thus, a sinner convinced of his ill deserts could not, as a rational being, put his trust in God. Let us then turn aside, and reverently seek to gaze upon this astonishing revelation which God gives of Himself, as One that justifieth the ungodly. For although the revelation be so astonishing as to appear a paradox, it is so true that through it, heaven itself will have for sinners all its light and life and happiness. According to the terms of the Covenant of works, God appeared as ready to justify the godly, to justify those who should continue to walk in the image in which mankind had been created. But in the Gospel, He appears as One who justifies the ungodly. Nor is it right to regard that revelation of Him as only partial, or as only one of many aspects. For this is His whole aspect and appearance as revealed upon the throne of Grace, as revealed in the Gospel.

A paradox is something which upon being first heard strikes one as an absurdity, but which, the more it is looked into, appears most truthful. In this sense, we say that the revelation which God gives of Himself in the Gospel is, in its surprisingness, paradoxical. For is it not a dictate even of natural conscience that certain deeds of which men have been guilty, were deserving only of death? Is it not the teaching of His word, that Jehovah is a God that hath not pleasure in wickedness? Evil shall not dwell with Him. The foolish shall not stand in His sight. He hates all workers of iniquity. He shall destroy them that speak leasing. He abhors the bloody and deceitful man (Psalm 5). Has He not demanded of earthly judges that they should justify the righteous, and condemn the wicked? (Deuteronomy 25:1). Do not both the word of God and the conscience of man teach us that if an earthly judge justifies the wicked and condemns the righteous, it is an outrage upon the law of righteousness? How, then, can we think of the Judge of all the earth as glorifying Himself when He justifieth the ungodly? And yet we say that to assert that He does justify the ungodly is, in principle, the whole Gospel.

It is only through Jesus Christ, the Mediator of the New Covenant, that God pardons sin or justifies the ungodly. If any have forgiveness of sins, it is a redemption to be had only through the blood of Him who is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of every creature, by whom all things were created that are in heaven and that are in earth, visible and invisible, who is before all things, and by whom all things consist, who is the Head of the

body, the Church (Colossians 1:15,16). And God appears as righteous in every step of the process by which this revelation of Himself as a just God and a Saviour has been realised. It was in righteousness that He entered into covenant with His own eternal Son – the fore-ordained Saviour of that which was lost – before the foundations of the world were laid. It was in righteousness, when the fulness of the time was come, that He sent this eternal Son – the same in His essential nature with Himself – into the world, made of a woman, made under the law. It was in righteousness that He laid the sins of the unjust upon the just One.

It was in righteousness that He visited this great Sin-bearer – this Jesus, who came only to seek and to save that which was lost – with the stroke of the sword of avenging justice. All Christ's sufferings were inflicted in righteousness; and because God's purpose was to reveal Himself as the Justifier of the ungodly, His servant, Jesus Christ, came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance. Yet how few receive Christ, a whole Christ, with their whole heart, in this sense!

It was in righteousness that God raised Christ from the dead and gave Him glory. Christ was as one arrested and made a prisoner until the debt which had been put to His account had been paid. But now that the debt was paid in His precious blood, it was an act of justice to take Him out of His prison-house. And every step of the exaltation of Him who was exalted far above all heavens, that He might fill all things, was a revelation of the righteousness of God. And when God pardons sins, for Christ's sake, He, in an infinitely merciful act or deed, gives an infinitely glorious revelation of Himself as a righteous Judge. Christ's exaltation is so great as that He is said to fill all things; but His exaltation is not greater than His merits, and His merits are co-extensive with the mercy of God, which is infinite. It is in Christ, the living One who was dead and is alive for evermore, that God addresses sinners, saying, "Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all ye ends of the earth, for I am God, and there is none else. There is no Saviour besides Me. I know not any." Here mercy and truth meet; righteousness and peace kiss mutually. In Christ justice and judgment are the foundations of God's throne of grace, while mercy and faithfulness to His promise go before His face.

But who among us have been brought to apprehend and to regard God in this way? Certain it is, however, that the soul that is saved so apprehends and so regards God. For how otherwise could one put one's trust in Him that justifieth the ungodly.

We have indicated that the person who is savingly taught will pass judgment upon himself as one that worketh not – as one that is ungodly. We have also briefly referred to the soul exercise which is implied in apprehending and regarding God as glorifying every attribute of His nature when He reveals Himself as One who justifieth the ungodly. But this twofold judgment must be a practical one. We mean that the view that this person takes of himself as a sinner, and of God in Christ reconciling a world to Himself, results in his going out from himself, and of his going out to God thus revealed. That is implied in its being said that he "believes" on Him that justifieth the ungodly. For to believe is to trust, faith being, as one has put it, conviction passing over into trust. So much, for the present, touching the mental activities of the soul that is saved.

II. – We proceed to speak briefly concerning the profitableness of this exercise. For to such a believer his faith is counted for righteousness. That, as we shall see, spells true riches.

There are few passages of the New Testament that have been more the subject of debate among interpreters of the Scriptures than has been this last clause of our text. Arminians have understood the clause as asserting that the act of trust was itself the ground of pardon. But that is an interpretation which excludes Christ from His own place in the scheme of redemption, and of itself is the sufficient condemnation of the Arminian interpretation. When the Apostle (Romans 5:9) says that we are justified by the blood of Christ, that is as much as to say that Christ crucified is the ground or meritorious cause of our justification, and other foundation can no man lay than that which is thus already laid.

Others have taken the word “faith” in this clause to mean not the grace of faith, or the exercise of trust, but the object of faith, which is, in a word, Christ Himself. That interpretation is more in keeping with the analogy of the faith than is the Arminian view, but, for our own part, we reckon that faith means here that “trust,” the nature and manner of which we have sought to set forth in the first part of this discourse, and we understand our text to teach that where God sees this going out from confidence in one’s self, and this going towards God in Christ in an act of confidence, God will assuredly put to that soul’s account Christ’s obedience. This person’s faith will be unto righteousness, because, according to the promises and terms of the New Covenant, every such believer will have the satisfaction, which Christ rendered to the justice of God, put to his account as surely and as amply, as though that person had been able of himself to give the said satisfaction to the justice of God; and God’s righteousness, as a judge, giving each his own, will be not less illustriously exhibited than His mercy, in pardoning that believing sinner. When we take the passage in this sense the word “faith” is taken in its most natural sense. And at the same time, faith is seen to be but the receiving instrument, the eye to see, or the ear to hear, or the heart to receive, while Christ is held forth as being the meritorious cause, even as the grace of God is the moving cause of our justification. This exercise, then, of trust in God is surely most profitable, for what could be more profitable than that which results in the forgiveness, not of some, but of all our innumerable trespasses; which results in the acceptance of our person as righteous, having thus a title to eternal life, a title from which flows a certainty of the mortification of sin in all its members, and of a final complete redemption? And it enhances the value of this personal favour that it becomes one’s own in perfect consistency and to the glory of all the claims of law and of justice.

III. – We would make two uses of the doctrine involved: (1.) one pertaining to the publicly maintaining of a pure testimony for God’s truth; (2.) the other pertaining to individual responsibility and duty.

(1.) The Protestant faith, at the Reformation, may be said to have turned upon two principles, as upon pivots. The first of these principles was the sufficiency, and divine authorship of the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. It is not necessary, at this time of day, to tell among us, how men professing to be Protestants have sought to undermine this first and formal principle of the Reformation, and have by their work of destruction been playing into the hands of the Church of Rome. For it is natural to men to seek some authority upon which to lean. Now as long as Protestants had implicit faith in the sufficiency and divine authorship of Holy Scripture, there was no temptation to ask for another prop. But when men have had their confidence in the finality of the Bible, as an authority, undermined, men are much more likely to fall a prey to the allurements of the Church of Rome, urging the Church’s, or, in practice, the Pope’s infallibility, in matters of faith. All that is very sad, but not more sad that what one witnesses nowadays in the case of men, calling themselves Protestants, who, nevertheless, try to undermine the material principle of the Reformation, as it used to be called, to wit, justification by faith, apart from works. How can we otherwise describe those who hold that “one is justified according as one is sanctified”? Yet that view is countenanced in the new edition of the Schaff-Herzog Religious Encyclopaedia. Now what is this, but to shear the Gospel of its marvellous light? And besides, it is a view fitted to weaken one’s confidence in the Reformation as a work of God. Against this new-fangled notion we enter an emphatic protest for the following among other reasons: – (1) To say that the meritorious ground of a sinner’s justification is some good disposition found in the person justified is clean contrary to the judgment which, as we have seen, those who are taught of God pass upon themselves. How should it be possible that the person capable of justification, in a Gospel sense, is one who regards himself as ungodly, if some good disposition were the meritorious ground of his pardon and acceptance? (2) The view contested is not in keeping

with the revelation of God as one that justifieth the ungodly. If one is justified as one is sanctified, then God justifies the godly, not the ungodly. That were to make the Covenant of Grace one with the Covenant of Works. This contested view may delude one who has not been deeply taught that he is a corrupt and guilty creature, but it will be no Gospel for the lost. But the serious part of the matter is that the view contested, although apparently so pious, in reality leaves the Gospel shorn of its most marvellous light, tends, in a word, effectively to obscure the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ. If we lose that, we lose everything. Nor does the Reformation of the sixteenth century in anything manifest itself as a work of God more plainly than in the way in which its leaders asserted the contrary of the view here contested.

(3) The view contested is not only contradicted by the single verse which forms our text, but is contradicted by the structure of the Epistle to the Romans, regarded as a whole. We have sometimes wondered that there is so little specific reference in the first seven chapters of the Epistle to the Romans to the work of the Holy Spirit in the application of redemption. There is a reference to the Holy Spirit, and to His agency in redemption, in Romans 5:5, and possibly in Romans 2:29, and 7:6. But it is not until one comes to the eighth chapter that one finds the subject of the agency of the Spirit in the application of redemption discussed after a detailed, adequate and consecutive method. Why is this? Doubtless the presence of the Holy Spirit is felt in this epistle in the whole course of its argument, and that in a twofold sense. His presence and activity are felt in His being the true and primary Author of the epistle. His presence is also felt in every step of that process of salvation which the Apostle describes in the first seven chapters of this epistle – a process which would have been an impossibility apart from the Spirit's presence and activity. The fruit of His agency is seen in a sinner being brought, from the heart, to judge himself to be one that does not work – an ungodly person; it is seen in a sinner being able to apprehend the glory of God as, in Christ, a sin-forgiving God; it is seen in a sinner ceasing to seek shelter in himself and going forth to find shelter in God in Christ. Yet that there should be so little specific reference to the Spirit's agency until we come to the eighth chapter in an epistle which is really a treatise in systematic theology, is a circumstance fitted to raise the question – Why is this? We believe the true answer to be that what the Apostle has in view is to set forth the great doctrine of justification by faith. Now, although the work of the Spirit in the application of redemption is as indispensable as the work of Christ in procuring redemption, it is at the same time quite necessary that these two agencies should be clearly distinguished, for the work of the Holy Spirit in us is not the ground of forgiveness and acceptance. The Spirit, by His work, does not add anything to the work which Christ undertook and perfected. To suppose that He does would imply that, instead of glorifying Christ by revealing Him as a perfect Saviour, He should detract from His glory by adding something to Christ's work, in order to make Christ's specific work perfect or complete – the very suggestion of which is to be spurned as blasphemous. For the work of Christ is in itself complete, and incapable of being added to, and is the alone ground of a sinner's justification. Abraham has been, as to his soul, for thousands of years with the spirits of just men made perfect, and in all that time has not, in spirit, done anything to grieve God, being perfect in holiness. But that perfection of holiness enters not into and adds nothing to the ground of his justification. For that ground is Christ crucified, a ground which is of its own peculiar kind, and is incapable of receiving any addition in time or in eternity from any agency whatsoever. Yet there is nothing to which one is more prone than to imagine that, if the Spirit's work in a sinner may not be substituted for Christ's work for the sinner, at the least the Spirit's work in us may be added to Christ's work for us, so as to make the ground of our justification more stable. Against that suggestion the Apostle urges the whole force of his argument. And we are convinced that the reason why in the Epistle to the Romans there is so little specific mention of the work of the Spirit, as long as the Apostle is

directly dealing with the question of justification, is just in order to deliver his readers from the snare of imagining anything else whatsoever, than Christ crucified, to be the ground of a sinner's justification before God. Not even the work of the Holy Spirit may in this matter take the place of Christ crucified. For other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

(4) In the last place, we protest against the view that one is justified according as one is sanctified, or, in other words, that the Spirit's work in one must be added to Christ's work for one as the ground of one's justification, because the Spirit does His necessary work in us in order to our coming to Christ in perfect keeping, according to the laws of our rational nature, with its being taught us that the alone ground of our justification is the blood of Christ. For when the Spirit is given in order to our union with Jesus Christ, He comes as the Spirit of truth. And what are the primary truths that He brings to us? They are these: (1) That we, in and of ourselves, are children of wrath; (2) That Christ is the perfect and only Saviour of those who are lost as we are.

(2.) The second use we would make of the doctrine involved in our text is by way of a more personal application. (1) Christ's complaint against His rejecters under the Gospel is: "Ye will not come unto Me that ye might have life." God does indeed find fault with you who are rejecters because of your having violated His law. It is because you violated His law that there was need of a Mediator between God and creatures who had become sinful. But He finds not so much fault with you for breach of the Covenant of works, as for your spurning the New Covenant which He offers to make with you. He finds not so much fault with you for sinning against His law as for sinning against His Gospel. This is the crowning condemnation of sinners under the Gospel, that light hath come into the world, and men choose darkness rather than light. Oh, then, come as you are; being assured that although your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; that though they be red like crimson they shall be as wool; yea, assured that when God accepts you, for Christ's sake, His own glory, and the glory of His Son Jesus Christ shines forth more illustriously than in any other of His works at all.

(2) The Lord's people who have for some time been followers of Christ know how little confidence they have reason to put in themselves, and the accuser of the brethren would have them fix their gaze constantly on their short-comings, on their unnatural conduct towards God, because the accuser is not so much opposed to anything as to the glory of Christ crucified, nor does anything please him so much as the thing that keeps the poor soul from believingly looking towards Christ crucified. But our doctrine instructs the children of God to remind themselves of what they once thought of the glory of God as it was revealed in their forgiveness, that it was a grace so ample as to give them a permanent place among the children of God, and that therefore it is still their duty to maintain the permanency of the filial relation. For rest assured that if you are still satisfied that the ground of your justification should be Christ, and Christ alone, neither life nor death, nor things present, nor things to come, can ever separate you from the love of God which is in Jesus Christ our Lord.

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