

HOW TO CONVERSE WITH GOD

NO. 1255

A SERMON DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, SEPTEMBER 19, 1875,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

*“Then call, and I will answer: or let me speak, and You answer me.”
Job 13:22.*

JOB might well have been driven frantic by his miserable comforters. It is wonderful that he did not express himself far more bitterly than he did. Surely Satan found better instruments for his work in those three ungenerous friends than in the marauding Sabeans, or the pitiless whirlwind. They assailed Job remorselessly and seemed to have no more hearts of compassion than so many flint stones. No wonder that he said to them many things which otherwise he would never have thought of uttering and, a few, which I dare say, he afterwards regretted.

Possibly the expression of our text is one of those passages of too forcible speech. The tormented Patriarch did what none but a man of the highest integrity could have done so intensely as he did. He made his appeal from the false judgement of man to the bar of God and begged to be forthwith summoned before the tribunal of the Judge of All, for he was sure that God would justify him. “Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him: but I will maintain my own ways before Him. He, also, shall be my salvation: for an hypocrite shall not come before Him.” He was ready to appear at the Judgement Seat of God, there to be tried as to his sincerity and uprightness!

He says, “Only do not two things unto me: then will I not hide myself from You. Withdraw Your hand far from me: and let not Your dread make me afraid.” He offers, in the words of our text, to come before the righteous Judge in any way which He might appoint—either he will be the defendant and God shall be the plaintiff in the suit—“Call and I will answer,” or else he will take up the part of the plaintiff and the Lord shall show cause and reason for His dealings towards him, or convict him of falsehood in his pleas—“Let me speak, and You answer me.” He feels so sure he has not been a hypocrite that he will answer to the All-Seeing, then and there, without fear of the result.

Now, Brothers and Sisters, we are far from condemning Job's language, but we would be quite as far from imitating it. Considering the circumstances in which Job was placed. Considering the hideous libels which were brought against him. Considering how he must have been stung when accused so wrongfully at such a time, we do not wonder that he thus spoke. Yet it may be that he spoke unadvisedly with his lips, but, at any rate, it is not for us to employ his language in the same sense, or in any measure to enter upon self-justification before God! On the contrary, let our prayer be, “Enter not into judgement with Your servant: for in Your sight shall no man living be justified.”

How shall man be just with God? How can *we* challenge His judgement before whom the heavens are not pure and who charged His angels with folly? Unless, indeed, it is in a Gospel sense, when, covered with the righteousness of Christ, we are made bold by faith to cry, “Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifies, who is he that condemns? It is Christ that died, yes rather, that has risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us.”

I am going to use the words of Job in a different sense from that in which he employed them and shall apply them to the sweet communion which we have with our Father God. We cannot use them in reference to our appearance before His Judgement Seat to be tried, but they are exactly suitable when we speak of those blessed approaches to the Mercy Seat when we draw near to God to be enriched and sanctified by sacred communion. The text brings out a thought which I wish to convey to you—“Call, and I will answer: or let me speak, and You answer me.” May the Holy Spirit bless our meditation.

The three points this morning will be, *two methods of secret conversation*—“Call, and I will answer: or let me speak, and You answer me.” Secondly, *the method of combining the two*, and here we shall try to show how the two modes of conversation should be united in our communion with God. And thirdly, we shall show *how these two modes of fellowship are realized to the full in the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ*, who is our answer to God and God's answer to us.

I. First, then, here are TWO METHODS OF SACRED CONVERSATION BETWEEN GOD AND THE SOUL—sometimes the Lord calls to us and we reply, and at other times we speak to God and He graciously deigns to answer us. A missionary, some years ago, returning from South Africa, gave a description of the work which had been accomplished there through the preaching of the Gospel. Among other things, he pictured a little incident of which he had been an eye-witness. He said that one morning he saw a converted African chieftain sitting under a palm tree with his Bible open before him.

Every now and then he cast his eyes on his book and read a passage, and then he paused and looked up a little while, and his lips were seen to be in motion. Thus he continued alternately to look down on the Scriptures and to turn his eyes upward towards Heaven. The missionary passed by without disturbing the good man, but a little while after he mentioned to him what he had seen and asked him why it was that sometimes he read, and sometimes he looked up? The African replied—“I look down to the Bible and God speaks to me. And then I look up in prayer and speak to the Lord, and in this way we keep up a holy talk with each other.” I would set this picture before you as being the mirror and pattern of communion with Heaven—the heart hearkening to the Voice of God—and then replying in prayer and praise.

We will begin with the first method of communion. *Sometimes it is well in our conversation with God that we should wait till our heavenly Father has spoken*—“Call, and I will answer.” In this way the Lord communed with His servant Abraham. If you refer to those sacred interviews with which the Patriarch was honored, you will find that the record begins—“The Lord spoke unto Abraham and said.” After a paragraph or two you hear Abraham speaking to the Lord and then comes the Lord’s reply, and another word from the Patriarch. But the conversation generally began with the Lord Himself.

So it was with Moses. While he kept his flock in the wilderness he saw a bush which burned and was not consumed. He turned aside to gaze upon it and then the Lord spoke to him out of the bush. The Lord called first and Moses answered. Notably this was the case in the instance of the holy child, Samuel. While he lay asleep, the Lord said to him, “Samuel, Samuel,” and he said, “Here I am,” and yet a second and a third time the Voice of God commenced a sacred communion. No doubt the Lord had heard the voice of the child in prayer at other times, but upon this notable occasion the Lord first called Samuel, and Samuel answered, “Speak Lord, for Your servant hears.”

So was it with Elijah. There was a still small Voice and the Lord said to the Prophet, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” Then Elijah replied, “I have been very jealous for the Lord God of Hosts, for they have thrown down Your altars and slain Your Prophets with the sword.” To which complaint his great Master gave a comfortable answer. Now, as it was with these saints of old so has it been with us—the Lord our God has spoken to us by His Spirit—and our spiritual ears have listened to His words and thus our communion with Heaven has commenced. If the Lord wills to have the first word in the holy conversation which He intends to hold with His servants, God forbid that any speech of ours should interpose!

Who would not be silent to hear Jehovah speak? How does God speak to us, then, and how does He expect us to answer? He speaks to us in the written Word. This “more sure Word of testimony, whereunto you do well if you take heed, as unto a light that shines in a dark place.” He speaks to us, also, in the ministry of His Word, when things new and old which are in Holy Scripture are brought forth by His chosen servants and are applied with power to our hearts by the Holy Spirit. The Lord is not dumb in the midst of His family, though, alas, some of His children appear to be dull of hearing!

Though the Urim and Thummim are no longer to be seen upon the breasts of mortal men, yet the oracle is not silent. O that we were always ready to hear the loving Voice of the Lord! The Lord’s Voice has many tones, all equally Divine. Sometimes He uses the voice of *awakening* and then we should give earnest heed. We are dead and He quickens us. We are sluggish and need to be awakened and the Lord, therefore, cries aloud to us, “Awake you that sleep!” We are slow to draw near to Him and, therefore, He lovingly says, “Seek you My face.” What a mercy it is if our heart at once answers, “Your face, Lord, will I seek.”

When he awakens us to duty there is true communion in our hearts if we at once reply “Here am I, send me.” Our inmost souls should reply to the Lord’s call as the echo answers to the voice. I fear it is sometimes far otherwise—and then our loving Lord has His patience tried. Remember how He says, “Behold I stand at the door and knock”? He knocks because He finds that door closed which should have been wide open. Alas, even His knocks are, for a while, in vain, for

we are stretched upon the bed of ease and make idle excuses for remaining there—"I have taken off my coat, how can I put it on? I have washed my feet, how can I defile them?"

Let us no longer treat Him in this ungenerous manner lest He take it amiss and leave us, for if He goes away from us we shall seek Him but find Him not. We shall call Him but He will give us no answer. If we will not arise at His call it may be He will leave us to slumber like sluggards till our poverty comes as one that travels and our need as an armed man. If our Beloved cries, "Rise up My Love, My fair One, and come away," let us not linger for an instant! If He cries "Awake, awake, put on your strength, O Zion," let us arise in the power of His call and shade ourselves from the dust! At the first sound of Heaven's bugle in the morning, let us leave the bed of carnal ease and go forth to meet our Lord and King. Herein is communion—the Lord draws us and we run after Him! He awakens us and we wake to serve Him! He restores our soul and our hearts praise Him!

Frequently the voice of God is for our *instruction*. All Scripture is written for that purpose and our business is to listen to its teachings with open ears and willing heart. Well did the Psalmist say, "I will hear what God the Lord will speak, for He will speak peace unto His people." God's own command of mercy is, "Incline your ear and come unto Me, hear and your soul shall live." This is the very Gospel of God to the unsaved ones and it is an equally important message to those who have, through Grace, believed, for they, also, need to receive of His Words. "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every Word which proceeds out of the mouth of God shall men live."

Therefore one of the saints cried out, "Your Words were found and I did eat them." And another said, "How sweet are Your Words unto my taste, yes, sweeter than honey to my mouth." God's Word is the soul's manna and the soul's Water of Life. How greatly we ought to prize each Word of Divine teaching! But, dear Brothers and Sisters, do you not think that many are very neglectful of God's instructive Voice? In the Bible we have precious doctrines, precious promises, precious precepts and, above all, a precious Christ! If a man would really live upon these choice things, he might rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

But how often is the Bible left unread? And so God is not heard. He calls and we give no heed. As for the preaching of the Word, when the Holy Spirit is in it, it is the "power of God unto salvation," and the Lord is pleased by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. But all Believers do not hear the voice of the Lord by His ministers as they should. There is much carping criticism, much coldness of heart, much glorying in man, and a great need of teachableness of spirit and thus the Word is shut out of our hearts. The Lord would gladly teach us by His servants, but our ears are dull of hearing.

Is it any wonder that those professors cannot pray who are forever grumbling that they cannot hear? God will be deaf to us if we are deaf to Him. If we will not be taught, we shall not be heard. Let us not be as the adder which is deaf to the charmer's voice. Let us be willing, yes, *eager* to learn. Did not our Lord Jesus say, "take My yoke upon you and learn of Me"? And is there not a rich reward for so doing in His sweet assurance, "you shall find rest unto your souls"? Search the Scriptures that no Word from the Lord may be inadvertently slighted by you! Hear the Word attentively and ponder it in your heart. Daily make this your prayer, "What I know not, teach me." "Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of Your Law."

Let us strive against prejudice and never let us dream that we are so wise that we need learn no more. Jesus Christ would have us be teachable as little children and ready to receive, with meekness, the engrafted Word which is able to save our souls! You will have a blessed fellowship with your Lord if you will sit at His feet and receive His Words. O for His own effectual teaching! Call, O Lord, and I will answer!

The Lord also speaks to His servants with the voice of *command*. Those who trust Christ must also *obey* Him. In the day when we become the Lord's children we come under obligations to obey. Does He not, Himself, say, "If I am a father, where is My honor?" Dear Friends, we must never have a heavy ear towards the precepts. I know some who drink in the promises as Gideon's fleece did the dew, but as for the commands, they refuse them as a man turns from wormwood. But the child of God can say, "Oh, how I love Your Law! It is my meditation all the day: I will delight myself in Your Commandments which I have loved."

The will of God is very sweet to His children. They long to have their own wills perfectly conformed to it. True Christians are not pickers and choosers of God's Word—the part which tells them how they should live in the power of the Spirit of God is as sweet to them as the other portion which tells them how they are saved by virtue of the redeeming

sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Dear Brothers and Sisters, if we shut our ears to what Jesus tells us, we shall never have power in prayer, nor shall we enjoy intimate communion with the Well-Beloved. “If you keep My commandments, you shall abide in My love,” He says, “even as I have kept My Father’s commandments, and abide in His love.”

If you will not hear God, you cannot expect Him to hear you! And if you will not do what He bids you, neither can you expect Him to give you what you seek at His hands. An obedient heart is necessary if there is to be any happy conversation between God and the soul! The Lord sometimes speaks to His servants in the tone of *rebuke* and let us never be among those who harden their necks against Him. It is not a pleasant thing to be told of our faults, but it is a most profitable thing.

Brethren, when you have erred, if you are on good terms with God, He will gently chide you. His voice will sound in your conscience, “My Child, was this right? My Child, was this as it ought to be? Is this becoming in one redeemed with precious blood?” When you open the Bible, many a text will, like a mirror, show you yourself and the spots upon your face. And Conscience, looking on, will say, “Do not so, my Son, this is not as your Lord would have it.” “Surely it is meet to be said unto God, I have borne chastisement, I will not offend any more. That which I see not teach me: if I have done iniquity, I will do no more.”

If we do not listen to God’s rebuking voice in His Word, He will probably speak in harsher tones by some addicting Providence. Perhaps He will hide from us the light of His Countenance and deny us the consolations of the Spirit. Before this is the case, it will be wise to turn our hearts unto the Lord, or if it has already come to that, let us say, “Show me why You contend with me. Make me to know my faults, my Father, and help me to purge myself from them.” Brothers and Sisters, be you not as the horse, or as the mule, but pray to be made tender in spirit. Be this your prayer—

*“Quick as the apple of an eye,
Oh, God, my conscience make.
Awake, my soul, when sin is near,
And keep it still awake.
Oh may the least omission pain
My well instructed soul
And drive me to the blood again,
Which makes the wounded whole!”*

Let us hear Nathan as kindly when he rebukes us as when he brings a promise, for in both cases the Prophet speaks his Master’s own sure word. Let us thank the Lord for chiding us and zealously set about destroying the idols against which His anger is lifted. It is due to the Lord and it is the wisest course for ourselves.

But blessed be His name, the Lord will not always chide, neither will He keep His anger forever! Very frequently the Lord speaks to us in *consolatory* language. How full the Bible is of comforts! How truly has God carried out His own precept to the Prophet—“Comfort you, comfort you My people, says your God.” What more, indeed, could God have said than He has said for the consolation of His own beloved? Be not slow to hear when God is swift to cheer you. Alas, our mischief sometimes turns a deaf ear even to the sweetest note of Jehovah’s love! We cannot think that all things will work together for our good. We cannot believe that the Providence which looks so evil can really be a blessing in disguise.

Blind unbelief is sure to err and it errs principally in stopping its ear against those dulcet tones of everlasting lovingkindness which ought to make our hearts leap within us for joy! Beloved, be not hard to comfort, and when God calls, be ready to answer Him, and say, “I believe You, Lord, and rejoice in Your Word, and therefore my soul shall put away her mourning and gird herself with delight.” This is the way to keep up fellowship with God—to hear His consolations and to be grateful for them. And last of all upon this point, God speaks to His people, sometimes in the tones which *invite to innermost communion*. I cannot tell now how they sound—your ear must, itself, have heard them to know what they are.

Sometimes He calls His beloved ones to come away to the top of Amana, to ascend above the world and all its cares, and to come to the Mount of Transfiguration. “There,” says He, “will I show you My loves.” There the Lord seems to lay bare His heart to His child and to tell him all the heights and depths of love unsearchable. There the Lord allows him to understand his eternal union with Christ and the safety that comes of it. There the Lord reveals the mystical Covenant with all its treasures, “for the secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him, and He will show them His Covenant.” It is a

sad thing when the Lord calls us into the secret chamber, where none may approach but men greatly beloved, and we are not prepared to enter.

That innermost heart-to-heart communion is not given to him who is unclean. God said even to Moses, “Put off your shoes from off your feet, for the place whereon you stand is holy ground.” There is no enjoying that extraordinary nearness to God with which He sometimes favors His choice ones, unless the feet have been washed in the bronze laver and the hands have been cleansed in innocence. “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” He that is of clean hands and a pure heart, he shall dwell on high, but only he, for God will not draw inconsistent professors and those who are dallying with sin into close contact with Himself. “Be you clean that bear the vessels of the Lord,” and especially be you clean who hope to stand in His holy place and to behold His face, for that face is only to be beheld in righteousness.

Brethren, it is clear that the voice of God speaks to us in different tones and our business, as His children, is to answer *at once* when He speaks to us. This is one form of holy fellowship. The second and equally common form is that *we speak to God and He graciously replies to us*. How should we speak to the Most High? I answer, first, we ought constantly to speak to Him in the tone of *adoration*. We do not, I fear, adore and reverently magnify God one hundredth as much as we should. The general frame of a Christian should be such that whenever his mind is taken off from the necessary thoughts of his calling, he should at once stand before the Throne blessing the Lord, if not in words, yet in heart.

I was watching the lilies, the other day, as they stood upon their tall stalks with flowers so fair and beautiful. They cannot sing, but they seemed to me to be offering continual hymns to God by their very existence! They had lifted themselves as near to Heaven as they could. Indeed, they would not commence to flower till they had risen as far from the earth as their nature would permit—and then they just stood still in their beauty and showed to all around what God can do—and as they poured out their sweet perfume in silence they said by their example, “Bless the Lord as we, also, do by pouring out our very souls in sweetness.”

Now, you may not be able to preach and it would not be possible to be always singing, especially in some company. But your life, your heart, your whole being should be one perpetual discourse of the lovingkindness of the Lord and your heart, even if the Lord is silent, should carry on fellowship by adoring His blessed name. Coupled with adoration, the Lord should always hear the voice of our *gratitude*. One of our Brethren in prayer, last Monday night, commenced somewhat in this fashion. He said, “Lord, You do so continuously bless us that we feel as if we could begin to praise You now and never leave off any more. We are half ashamed to ask for anything more because You do always give so promptly, and so bountifully.”

In this spirit let us live! Let us be grateful unto Him and bless His name and come into His Presence with thanksgiving! The whole life of the Christian man should be a Psalm of which the contents should be summed up in this sentence, “Bless the Lord, O my Soul, and all that is within me bless His holy name.” Now, adoration and thanksgiving, if rendered to God with a sincere heart through Jesus Christ, will be acceptable to God and we shall receive an answer of peace from Him so that we shall realize the second half of the text. “Let me speak, and You answer me.” But, my Brothers and Sisters, it would not suffice for us to come before God with adoration, only, for we must remember what we are.

Great is He and, therefore, to be adored, but sinful are we and, therefore, when we come to Him there must always be *confession* of sin upon our lips. I never expect, until I get to Heaven, to be able to cease confessing sin every day and every time I stand before God. When I wander away from God, I may have some idea of being holy, but when I draw near to Him I always feel as Job when he said, “I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eyes see You. Therefore I abhor myself in dust and ashes.” If you would have the Lord hear, be sure you speak to Him in humble notes. You have rebelled against Him. You are a sinner by nature and though forgiven and accepted, and therefore freed from dread of wrath, you can never forget that you *were* a rebel—and if it had not been for Sovereign Grace you would have been so still—therefore speak with lowliness and humility before the Lord if you wish to receive an answer.

Beloved Friends, we should also speak to God with the voice of *petition* and this we can never cease to do, for we are always full of needs. “Give us this day our daily bread” must be our prayer as long as we are in the land where daily needs require daily supplies. We shall always need to make request for temporals and for spirituals, for ourselves and for others, too. The work of intercessory prayer must never be allowed to cease. Speak to the Lord, you that have His ear! Speak for us, His servants, who are His ambassadors to men! Speak for the Church, also! Plead for rebellious sinners and ask that unnumbered blessings may be given from above.

We should also speak to Him, sometimes, in the language of *resolution*. If the poor prodigal was right in saying, "I will arise and go to my father," so are Christians right in saying, "Therefore will I call upon Him as long as I live," or in saying, "As long as I live I will bless the Lord." Sometimes when a duty is set before you, very plainly, which you had, for a while, forgotten, it is very sweet to say unto the Lord, "Lord, Your servant will rejoice to do this, only help me!" Register the secret vow before the Lord, and honorably fulfill it. We should often use the language of *intimate communion*. "What language is that?" you ask and, again, I answer, "I cannot tell you."

There are times when we say to the blessed Bridegroom of our souls love words which the uncircumcised ear must not hear. Why, even the little that is unveiled before the world in the Book of Solomon's Song has made many a man quibble, for the carnal mind cannot understand such spiritual secrets. You know how the Church cries out concerning her Lord—"Let Him kiss me with the kisses of His mouth, for His love is better than wine." There are many love passages and love words between sanctified souls and their dear Lord and Master which it were not lawful for a man to utter in a mixed assembly—it were like the casting of pearls before swine, or reading one's love letters in the public streets. Oh, you chosen, speak to your Lord! Keep nothing from Him!

He has said, "If it were not so, I would have told you." He has told you all that He has seen with the Father! Tell Him everything that is in your heart and when you speak, speak with sacred child-like confidence, telling Him everything! You will find Him answering you with familiar love and sweet will be the fellowship thus created. Thus I have shown you that there are two forms of the Believer's communion with God.

II. Let us now consider THE METHOD OF THE COMBINATION OF THE TWO. With regard to this subject I would say that *they must be united*. Brethren, we sometimes go to prayer and we want God to hear us, but we have not heard what God has to say. This is wrong. Suppose a person neglects the hearing of the Word of God, but is very fond of prayer? I feel certain that his prayer will soon become flat, stale and unprofitable, because no conversation can be very lively which is all on one side. The man speaks, but he does not let God speak and, therefore, he will soon find it hard to maintain the conversation.

If you are earnest in regular prayer, but do not as regularly read or hear the Scriptures, your soul gives out without taking in and is very apt to run dry. Not only thoughts and desires will flag, but even the expressions will become monotonous. If you consider how it is that your prayer appears to lack vivacity and freshness, the probable reason is that you are trying to maintain a maimed fellowship. When conversation is all one-sided, do you wonder that it flags?

If I have a friend at my house, tonight, and we wish to have fellowship with each other, I must not do all the talking, but I must wait for him to answer me or to suggest new topics, as he may please. And if he is wiser than I am, there is the more reason why I should play second in the conversation and leave its guidance very much to him. It is such a condescension on God's part to speak with us that we ought eagerly to hear what He has to say. Let Him never have to complain that we turned our ears away from Him.

At the same time, we must not be silent. For to read the Scriptures, to hear sermons and never to pray would not bring fellowship with God. That would be a lame conversation! Remember how Abraham spoke with God again and again, though he felt himself to be but dust and ashes? Remember how Moses pleaded? Do you remember how David sat before the Lord and then spoke with his tongue? Above all, remember how Jesus talked with His Father as well as listened to the Voice from Heaven. Let both forms of conversation unite and all will be well.

Again, it will be well sometimes to *vary the order*. Dear Mr. Muller, who is a man living near to God, whose every word is like a pearl, said, the other day, "Sometimes when I go into my closet to pray, I find I cannot pray as I would. What do I do then? Why, since I cannot speak to the Lord, I beg the Lord to speak to me and therefore I open the Scriptures and read my portion. And then I find the Lord gives me matter for prayer." Is not this a suggestion of much weight? Does it not commend itself to your spiritual judgement?

Have you not observed that when somebody calls to see you, you may not be in a fit condition to start a profitable conversation? But if your friend will lead, your mind takes fire and you have no difficulty in following him! Frequently it will be best to ask the Lord to lead the sacred conversation, or wait awhile till He does so. It is a blessed thing to wait at the posts of His door, expecting a Word of Love from His Throne. It is generally best, in communion with God, to begin with hearing His voice, because it is due to His sacred majesty that we should first hear what He has to say to us. And it

will especially be best for us to do so when we feel out of order for communion. If the flesh, in its weakness, hampers the spirit, then let the Bible reading come before the praying, that the soul may be awakened thereby.

Still, there are times when it will be better to speak to our heavenly Father at once. For instance, if a child has done wrong, it is very wise of him to run straight away to his father, before his father has said anything to him, and say, "Father, I have sinned." The prodigal had the first word and so should our penitence seek for speedy audience and pour itself out like water before the Lord. Sometimes, too, when our heart is very full of thankfulness, we should allow praise to burst forth at once. When we have received a great favor, we ought not to wait till the Giver of it speaks to us, but the moment we see Him we should at once acknowledge our indebtedness.

When the heart is full of either prayer or praise, and the Presence of Jesus is felt, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we begin addressing the Lord with all our hearts. The Lord has spoken and it is for us to reply at once. On the other hand, when for wise reasons our Lord is silent unto us, it is well to take with us words and come to Him. If you have read your Bible and have felt no visit from the Holy Spirit, or if you have heard a sermon and found no dew from the Lord attending it, then turn at once to prayer. Tell the Lord your condition and entreat Him to reveal Himself to you. Pray first and read afterwards, and you will find that your speaking with God will be replied to by His speaking to you through the Word. Take the two methods—commonsense and your own experience will guide you—and let sometimes one come first and sometimes the other.

But *let there be a reality about both*. Mockery in this matter is deadly sin. Do not let God's Word be before you as a mass of letterpress, but let the Book speak to your soul. Some people read the Bible through in a set time and in great haste—they might just as well never look at it at all! Can a man understand a country by merely tearing through it at a railway pace? If he desires to know the character of the soil and the condition of the people, he walks leisurely through the land and examines with care. God's Word needs digging, or its treasures will lie hidden. We must put our ear down to the heart of Scripture and hear its living throbs. Scripture often whispers, rather than thunders, and the ear must be duly trained to comprehend its language.

Resolve emphatically, "I will HEAR what God the Lord shall speak." Let God speak to you and in order that He may do so, pause and meditate, and do not proceed till you grasp the meanings of the verses as far as the Spirit enables you. If you do not understand some passages, read them again and again, and remember it is good to read even those parts of Scripture which you do not understand, even as it is good for a child to hear his father's voice whether he understands all his father has to say or not. At any rate, faith finds exercise in knowing that God never speaks in vain, even though He is not understood. Hear the Word till you understand it.

While you are listening, the sense will gradually break in upon your soul, but mind that you listen with opened ears and willing heart. When you speak to God, do not let it be a dead form, for that is an insult to the Most High. If the heart is absent, it is as wicked to say a prayer as to be prayerless. If one should obtain an audience of Her Majesty and then should read a petition in which he took no interest, which was, in fact, a mere set of words, it would be an insult of the worst kind. Beware lest you thus insult the Majesty of Heaven!

III. The last thought is only meant to be dropped before you for you to enlarge upon it at your leisure—THE BLESSED REALIZATION OF THESE TWO FORMS OF COMMUNION IN THE PERSON OF CHRIST. "Call, and I will answer." Infinite majesty of God, call upon me and ask for all You can ask, and I bless You that I have an answer for You. Ask Your poor servant for all You can demand of him and he will gladly reply. Brethren do you ask in wonder—"How can we answer Him?" The answer is clear—"By bringing Jesus to remembrance!" Our Lord Jesus Christ is man's complete answer to God.

Divine Justice demands death as the penalty of sin—behold the Son of God taken down from the Cross because He was surely dead, wrapped in the cerements of the grave and laid in Joseph's tomb! God's Justice demands suffering, demands that the sinner be abandoned of God. See yonder Cross and hear the cry, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"! Great God, You have, in Jesus, all the suffering Your Justice can ask, even to death itself. God's holiness righteously demands a life of obedience—man cannot be right before God unless he renders perfect obedience to the Law. Behold our answer, we bring a perfect Savior's active and passive obedience and lay it down at Jehovah's feet—what more can He ask for?

He requires a perfect heart and an unblemished person, and He cannot accept less than a perfect manhood. We bring the Father His Only-Begotten, the Son of Man, our Brother! And here is our answer—there is the perfect Man, the un-fallen Head of the race. Oh, never try to reply to God with any other answer than this! Whatever He asks of you, bring Him your Savior! He cannot ask for more. You bring before Him that which fully contents Him, for He, Himself, has said, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” Let your answer, then, to the Justice of God, be Christ!

But I said that Christ fulfilled the other purpose. He is God’s answer to *us*. What have you to ask of God this morning? Are you so far away from Him that you enquire, “How can I be saved?” No answer comes out of the excellent Glory except Christ on the Cross—that is God’s answer—believe in Him and live! By those wounds, by that bloody sweat, by that sacrificial death you must be saved! Look! Can you say unto the Lord, “I have trusted Christ, but am I secure of salvation?” No answer comes but Christ risen from the dead to die no more! Death has no more dominion over Him, and He has said, “Because I live, you shall live also.” The risen Christ is the Lord’s assurance of our safety for eternity!

Do you ask the Lord, “How much do You love me?” You have asked a large question, but there is a large answer for you. He gives His Son—behold what manner of love is born! Do you enquire, “Lord, what will You give me?” His Son is the answer to that question, also! Behold these lines written on His bleeding Person, “He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not, with Him, also freely give us all things?” Would you need more? Do you say, “What sign do You show that all these things are so?” He gives you Christ in Heaven!

Yes, if you ask, “Lord, what shall Your servant be when You have completed Your work of Grace upon me? He points you to Jesus in Glory, for you shall be like He is! If you ask what is to be your destiny in the future, He shows you Christ coming a second time without a sin-offering unto salvation! Dear Friend, you can ask nothing of your God, but what He gives you at once as a reply is Jesus. Oh what blessed talk is that when the Christian’s heart says Jesus, and the Christian’s God says Jesus! And how sweet it is when we come to Jesus and rest in Him and God is in Jesus and makes Him His rest forever.

Thus do Believers and their God rest together in the same Beloved One! May the Lord add His blessing to our meditation and make this kind of communion common among us for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalm 84 and 85.
HYMN FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—84 (SONG III), 95 (SONG III), 782.

Adapted from *The C.H. Spurgeon Collection*, Ages Software, 1.800.297.4307.