

WHY SOME SEEKERS ARE NOT SAVED

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*“Behold the Lord’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither His ear heavy, that it cannot hear:
 but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins
 have hid His face from you, that He will not hear.”*
Isaiah. 59:1, 2.

THERE are some people who are not saved though we would have expected that they would have been converted long ago. Our text explains the reason, so, without any preface, let us come to it at once.

I. First, let us consider THE FACT CONFESSED! The people of whom I am especially thinking, just now, have been *hearers of the Gospel*, and diligent hearers, too. Their seat is seldom vacant and they are not among those who go to sleep during the sermon. They do not enjoy the Sunday after the fashion of the countryman, who said that he liked that day best because he could go to church, put up his feet, fall asleep and think of nothing at all. The people to whom I am referring really *listen* to what the preacher has to say. They are attentive and they seek to retain in their memories the Truths of God he preaches. They even talk when they are at home of the striking passages, if such there are, in what they have heard. You would suppose that such persons would get a blessing from the Gospel, yet they do not.

They have now been listening for years to an earnest minister—they would not like to hear one who was not earnest. They have grown to be somewhat discriminating in their taste—they know what is the Gospel and they would not care to be present at a service in which the Gospel was not clearly set forth. Yet, for all this, they are not saved! They stand out in the shower, yet they are not wet! They are like Gideon’s fleece, perfectly dry when all the ground was saturated with the dew. This is a strange circumstance, but, alas, by no means an uncommon one! We would not have thought that there could be such people, but we are compelled to believe that there are, for we frequently stumble across them—people who are often sitting under the sound of the Gospel, yet who never hear it with the ears of their heart! The light shines upon their eyes, yet they do not see it, for thick scales seem to be there to hide from them the beams of the sun.

You will be, perhaps, still more surprised when I add that there are some people who go *beyond hearing* and yet are not saved. *They have become men of prayer, after a fashion*—are they not described in the chapter I read to you? [Exposition of Isaiah 58 at end of sermon—ED.] “Yet they seek Me daily, and delight to know My ways, as a nation that did righteousness and forsook not the ordinances of their God: they ask of Me the ordinances of justice, they take delight in approaching God.” These people are in such a state of mind that if they went to their business without the repetition of a form of prayer, they would be uneasy through the whole day! What is more, it is not merely a *form* of prayer—in some cases there is a measure of life, desire and earnestness in their devotions. Only this morning, one of them sighed when the sermon was over and he said, “Oh, that I could be a friend of God!”

And a few Sunday nights ago, the one of whom I am speaking, when he reached his home, fell on his knees in his own private room and asked God to bless the Word to his soul. This same thing happened to him ten or even 20 years ago—he has often been stirred up and driven to his knees in prayer—yet he has gone no further, but still remains, to his own consciousness, an undecided, hesitating person, on the borders of the Kingdom of God, yet not in the Kingdom—almost persuaded, yet not fully persuaded to be a Christian! You know, dear Hearers, and I hardly need tell you, that a man who is almost honest is a rogue, and the man who is almost a Christian is *not* a Christian! There was a man who was almost saved in a fire, but he was burned to death! There was another who was almost healed of a disease, but he died! There was one who was almost reprieved, but he was hanged—and there are many in Hell who were almost saved!

I am not talking, now, just to be talking. I know that with some of my most hopeful hearers, it is just as I have been describing it—they hear the Gospel and they pray to God, yet they have not gone beyond those outward exercises—they have not believed in the Lord Jesus Christ and they have not received Him into their hearts as their own personal Savior.

I know, also, that *these people are greatly disappointed with themselves*. Not altogether so, for they know, to a great extent, where the blame lies, but yet they had hoped better things of themselves. If anyone had told them, ten, 12, or 20 years ago, that they would be where they now are, each one of them would have said, “I hope that will not be the case with me! I trust that, long before the time you mention, I shall have cast in my lot with the people of God and shall have been saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation.” They are still hoping, but their hope is curdling into *doubt* and their doubt is souring into *despair*—and I am very fearful lest that despair should lead them into still greater sin!

I want to speak especially to these friends. I shall do it with much kindness of heart towards them, but I wish to do it, also, with equal faithfulness, praying all the while that what I say may help them to escape from their present unsatisfactory and unsafe position.

II. So, in the second place, I call their attention to THE IMPUTATION IMPLIED AND MET. It is suggested to some, that inasmuch as they are not saved though they have put themselves in the way of saving ordinances, and though they have sought salvation, perhaps salvation is not so easily to be had as it used to be—perhaps Christ cannot save *them* as He has saved others!

Notice the first word of our text—“Behold.” This is like our *nota bene*—mark well, turn your eye this way, *Ecce*—“Behold, the Lord’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither His ear heavy, that it cannot hear.” You are called upon to mark this—*distinctly to see it*—and to entertain no doubt about it! If you are not saved, it is *not* because God is unable to save you, nor is it because He is unwilling to hear your prayers!

Listen to this word, for *it is God Himself who speaks it*. He knows whether His hand is palsied, or whether His ear is deaf and, He, Himself, declares that His hand is *not* shortened that it cannot save, and that His ear is *not* heavy that it cannot hear. If you have any doubt about this fact, I recommend you to prove it for yourselves—come by *faith* to Jesus, and see whether He will save you. We sang just now—

“Venture on Him, venture wholly,”

and if you think that it is a venture, if you fancy that, perhaps, the blood of Christ cannot cleanse you, or the Spirit of God cannot renew you, come and put the matter to the test! Dare, *now*, to cast yourself at Jesus’ feet and say, “I believe that You can save me, and I trust You to be my Savior.” If He does not save you—if He cannot do so—you have at least made the trial. But I beseech you to listen to this text—do not close your ears or your heart to its message—“Behold, behold, behold, the Lord’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither His ears heavy, that they cannot hear.”

This passage proves that *the power to save remains unimpaired with God*. Just as of old He forgave great sinners through the atoning Sacrifice of His well-beloved Son, so is He able to forgive great sinners now! He forgave the dying thief and He can forgive you! All manner of sin and of blasphemy have been forgiven of men and all manner of sin and of blasphemy can be forgiven of you. Though you had spent a lifetime in drunkenness, or unchastity, or dishonesty, or any other form of evil, though you should have grown gray in the service of sin and Satan—

*“There is a fountain filled with blood,
Drawn from Immanuel’s veins
And sinners, plunged beneath that flood,*

still, still—

Lose all their guilty stains!”

There is the same power with God to forgive sin as there used to be, for the blood of Jesus is as powerful to cleanse as it ever was!

Note, also, that there is the same power of the Holy Spirit to change your nature as there ever was. He who turned Saul of Tarsus from an enemy into an Apostle can do the same with you. Of old, conversion was likened to the raising of the dead and He who has quickened many a dead soul can quicken your dead soul, and raise *you* from the dead! It was also called a new creation—and He who made all things new in other men can make all things new in you!

Look, Sirs, if you think that God cannot forgive sin, nowadays, as He did in the olden times, I stand here as a living witness to the contrary, for I know that He has pardoned me! It has always surprised me, but I do not think that in all my life I so much wondered at being a child of God as I wonder now. Thirty-seven years ago I was baptized into the sacred

name, and I adored the Grace of God, then, but not as much as I do now. What I owe to that Grace, it is not possible for me to express. Every time I preach to you, I feel unworthy of my sacred office and I would gladly run from it if I dared! But woe is unto me if I preach not the Gospel! Yet I bear witness to this fact, that the Grace of God, which was able to save me, is able to save you! Here, give me your hand, you trembler, give me your hand! I wish that I could go round the galleries and down below in the area, there, and get a hold of your hands and say to each one of you, “My Brother, my Sister, the Lord can save you, He can save you! I am a witness that He can save you because He has saved me! His hand is not shortened, that it cannot save.”

But I need not speak of myself, only. If it were proper, I could ask hundreds, yes, thousands of persons who are present this evening, at this service, to stand up and bear witness that the Lord saved them and that they firmly believe, after what has been worked in them, that no case is beyond the reach of Almighty Grace! Come along with you, then, do not cast blame upon *God*, as though your not being saved was the result of lack of power on the part of God the Father, God the Son, or God the Holy Spirit, for it is not so!

You say that it must be the lack of will, then, but it is not, *for the Lord’s willingness to hear remains the same as ever*. You are called upon in the text to behold that His ear is not heavy, that it cannot hear. You know that there are none so deaf as those who will not hear and if God resolved not to hear your prayers, then He would be, indeed, the possessor of a heavy ear. But He has not resolved to refuse your prayer! You may be unwilling to pray, but God is not unwilling to hear! “If you seek Him, He will be found of you.” “Seek you the Lord while He may be found, call you upon Him while He is near.” “For everyone that asks, receives, and he that seeks, finds; and to him that knocks, it shall be opened.” If you will come *in God’s way*, and cast yourself *at Christ’s feet*, and cry for mercy *for His sake*, you shall have it as surely as there is a God in Heaven! He knows that I lie not when I offer to be bondsman for my Master that He will keep His promise, “Whoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” And that, “whoever” must include you! Call upon His name and prove for yourself the truth of the promise! Perhaps someone asks the question, “If what you tell me is true, why is it that I, who am really hearing, seeking and praying am not saved?” Now I want to try and answer that question.

III. Therefore, my third division will be, THE ACCUSATION PRESSED AND EXPLAINED.

If you will permit me, I will call upon you as a physician might. There is something the matter with you and you need to know what it is. I shall probably have to probe a little and, perhaps, have to go pretty deep. But if you really desire to receive a blessing, if there is anything which I say that fits your case, will you kindly take it home? Even if it should seem very personal and should make you feel cross, I cannot help that. You know that good blisters are not pleasant things, yet they may be very necessary. I want, if I can, to find out why it is that you have not obtained peace with God. The clue which guides me in my search is in the second verse of my text, “Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you, that He will not hear.”

Now listen. *Your accusation against God may be turned against you*. You thought that God’s hand was shortened, that it could not save, but it is *your* hand that is shortened, for you have not laid hold upon Christ! You have not taken your sins to Him to be put away. You have not turned to God with full purpose of heart—you are shorthanded, but the Lord is not. You said that God’s ear was heavy. No, no, no! It is *your* ear that is heavy. You have not heard what God the Lord has been saying to you. You have not been obedient to the heavenly message. All the mischief lies with yourself, not with God! And at the last, if you are not saved, the blame will not rest upon the Savior, but upon yourself. This is the doctrine that we preach—if a man is saved, all the honor is to be given to Christ—but if a man is lost, all the blame is to be laid upon himself! You will find all true theology summed up in these two short sentences—salvation is all of the Grace of God—damnation is all of the will of man.

The real reason why you have not found peace, you who have sought it, is *sin*—not your sins in the abstract, for, “though your sins are as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool.” No sin, whatever it is, shall ruin any man if he shall come to Christ for mercy. Though you are black as Hell’s midnight through iniquity, yet if you will come to Christ, He is ready to cleanse you. It is sin, after all, that lies at the door and blocks your way to the Savior.

First, it may be *unconfessed sin*. Permit me to ask whether you have made, before God, a full and complete confession of your sin? I do not insist that you should go into the details of every sin—that would be impossible, but there must be no cloaking or attempting to hide any sin from God. There must be no wish to excuse yourself, or to make out

that what might be sin in others was less sinful in you. The Romanist tries to get help in confession by going to his priest and the priest puts many questions to him to help his memory. We observe no such practice as that, for we believe it to be ruinous to the priest and mischievous to the man! But we do ask you to make confession to *God*, for remember that it is written, “If we confess our sins, *He* is faithful and just to forgive us our sins.” Remember how the prodigal said, “Father, I have sinned against Heaven, and in your sight”? Have you said that? That is the beginning of the saved life—the acknowledgment of your former evil ways, the humble and truthful confession that you deserve the wrath of God on account of your sin—the putting of yourself into the dock, as one who pleads guilty, and who could not speak against God even if He took you at your word, and condemned you then and there!

You must take that position! You must not expect pardon till you plead guilty! Only acknowledge your transgression and *then* may you lay hold on Christ as your Savior and believe in Him for perfect pardon! It may be that you have never had peace with God because you have not made a confession of your sin in plain, distinct terms. It is no good to mince matters with God—He knows all about you. Your secret sins—the sins your wife does not know and that no one knows but yourself—they are all known to Him! Go and whisper them into the great Father’s ear, with many a tear of deep regret that you should have offended so grievously against Him. If you do not, unconfessed sin will be a barrier between your soul and God!

But, next, sin is a very great hindrance to Grace when it is *unforsaken sin*. Some men know they are doing wrong, yet they will not stop. They confess sin, yet still go on with it. They are half resolved to part with it, but they never really do. They know that it is the right eye that offends, but they dare not pluck it out. They know that it is the right hand that offends, but they will not cut it off. They are dilatory about this work and they still go on in sin. I appeal to your own conscience, can you expect God to pardon your sin while you continue in it? Can you think of the blessed Son of God coming to the world to be a minister of sin? That heart must be wicked to an awful extreme which will dare to say, “God is merciful, therefore I will continue in sin. We are saved by faith, alone, therefore I will believe in Christ and go on in my sin.” Why, man, you are perverting the Gospel of Christ to your own destruction! You are making for yourself a deathbed which will be very terrible, since you are finding a way to Hell close by that wicket gate which lets men into the road to Heaven!

I pray you, do not desecrate the very Cross of Christ by hanging yourself upon it! There are some who do even that. You must forsake your sins if you would be saved. Christ has come to save His people *from* their sins, not *in* their sins. Drunkard, you cannot keep your cup and yet go to Heaven! I speak plainly. You who are accustomed to lie cannot have a lying tongue and a saved soul! If any of you cheat in business, do not talk to me about your faith in Christ! If you can lie and cheat, and act unfairly, you are of your father, the devil, and he will have you as surely as you live, unless you repent and turn from your evil ways! There is no real salvation except salvation from sinning, so your sin must be stopped. I put this question to any man here who is a hearer, and a seeker, and yet who does not find peace—“Is there not some sin that you have yet to abandon?” If there is, God help you, by His mighty Grace, to get rid of it at once!

There may also be some sin that has been forsaken, but it is still loved. *Sin hankered after* is a great barrier to Grace. When the cow’s calf is taken away, how she bellows after it! And there is many a man who has had his sin taken away from him, yet he still longs after it. He does not sin with his hand or his foot, but he sins with his heart—his soul goes a-lusting after his iniquities. Now, while it is so, while sin still lies in the heart, can you expect to have peace with God? No, you must have the evil out, not only from the house, but from the *heart*. You must have done with it, not with the hand, only, but with the very desire of your spirit. “Oh,” you say, “that is hard work!” It is harder work than you can accomplish! And in order to do it, you must be *born again*. This Truth of God should drive you to Christ that He may give you this new life by His Holy Spirit! But, mark you, if it is not your desire to give up the love of sin, you will *never* find salvation while you are thus hankering after evil.

There are some who are hindered from finding peace, I do not doubt, *through sin of which they are not aware*. “Oh,” you say, “that is rather a puzzling statement!” Well, there is many a man who is living in sin without being aware that it is sin, and that may keep him back from finding peace with God. I have to add this, also, that many men do not really want to find out! There are great numbers of people who do not want to learn too much about their sin! You know that light breaks in upon us by degrees—if we sin in the dark, that sin is not so grossly guilty and serious as sin in the light. But if we are in that darkness *willfully*, and we do not wish to have it removed, then we shall be guilty, indeed! If I com-

mit a crime and then say, “I did not know that I was breaking the law,” the judge says, “I cannot help your ignorance; you broke the law and you must bear the penalty.”

But supposing I have a book at home that tells me all about the requirements of the law and I still say to the judge, “I did not know what the law forbade”? Then he would answer, “But you ought to have known. You have committed a double offense, as you have not studied the law. It was put into your house with a command that you should study it and you are, therefore, doubly guilty, for you have refused to pay sufficient respect to the law to learn what it says.” I fear that some of you people are not conscious of your sin because you do not want to know it. Where ignorance is bliss, you think it folly to be wise, but it would not be folly to be wise unto salvation! Some of you are losing comfort, losing years of usefulness, losing all certainty about Heaven because you will not search the Scriptures and you do not desire to know what an evil thing it is in you which separates you and your God! O men and women, do not lie under such a charge as this! Say, “I will know the worst of my case. If I have to probe as with a lancet, I will find out what the mischief is. My prayer shall be, ‘Lord, let me know the very worst of my case, that I may afterwards find that sure salvation which will stand the test, even, of the Day of Judgment itself!’”

I would further suggest that there may be some who are really seeking to believe, but they do not find peace because of some *sin of omission*. Does that open a window anywhere for any of you? It is not so much that you are doing wrong as that you are *not doing right*. You are forgetting some positive duty and it is *that* which separates you and your God. I have had some very curious experiences which I may never tell, so that the persons about whom I relate them will never be known. There was one which happened so long ago that I may tell it without fear. A man, through reading my sermons, was convinced of sin. He sought the Savior, but he found no peace. He was a long time in darkness and, at last, it was suggested to him that perhaps he found no peace with God because of some wrongdoing that remained unforgiven. It appeared that, some years before, he had robbed a person who was not aware of the theft. He had taken a large sum of money and he could never rest till that amount had been returned.

I never saw the man who had been robbed and I had to rack my brain to find a way by which I could return that large sum to him without giving him a clue as to who it was that took it. I managed the business and I have the receipt for the money, and I have never heard another word about it. And he who was in heaviness of heart is now a joyful Christian, as I firmly believe, though I have never seen him. The money he had taken from the other man lay upon his conscience and when the stolen sum had been restored to its rightful owner, God granted peace to the one who had made restitution. It may be that there is someone else who has something that does not belong to him. If so, let him, also, make restitution. If any of you have been fraudulent bankrupts, try to make up that twenty shillings in the pound, which you ought to have paid. Christ did not come into the world to let you live as a rogue and then, at last, sneak into Heaven. No, He would make you an honest man at once—and when He has done so, there will be another obstacle to your finding joy and peace out of the way.

Now let us aim once more at the target—I am trying to find out why it is that some seeking sinners cannot find peace. Do you not think that some fail to find peace because they have an *ugly temper*? Some people are born with nasty tempers—they are a poor inheritance for anybody. I heard one say that he was sorry that he had lost his temper. I was uncommonly glad to hear that he had lost it, but I regretted that he found it, again, so soon! There are persons who are at variance with their mother or their father and it is very sad when husbands and wives are at strife with one another—perhaps some such are listening to me now. You are praying, you say, and you wonder that God does not have mercy on you—and yet there is strife in the household! Or it may be that your poor girl ran away from home and if she were to come back, tonight, you would shut the door in her face, would you not? You are so good and respectable that you could not harbor your own child! Yet you expect God to take pity upon you, do you?

Or you parted from your husband in a pet and you have never gone back to him—and you want to find peace with God. Peace with God? Get peace with *man* before you talk about finding peace with God! You brothers and sisters have had a quarrel, and have made up your minds that you will never forgive one another. O Sirs, let me be very plain with you—if you cannot be at peace with your fellow men, you cannot hope to be at peace with God! The Lord bids you leave your offering at the altar—He must not be insulted with it—first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and seek peace with your God. Malice in the heart is altogether inconsistent with Grace, and it must be cast out. I know two brothers who will not speak to one another, yet one of them professes to be a Christian and the other says he wants to be

one. What will God do with both of them? I cannot tell what to do with either of them, I am sure! A part of salvation is to save us from an evil, hateful, spirit, and to make us love God and love our fellow men, also. Perhaps that is the reason why some of you can find no peace—because you have been indulging an evil temper.

And do you not think, once more, that there are some who find no peace because of *an intellectual sin*? There are sins of intellect quite as surely as there are sins of ignorance. Some men know a great deal too much to go to Heaven—that is to say, they think that they know better than their Bibles and better than their God! Their dear mother, now in Heaven—oh, she was a poor, simple-minded creature! Their father, stern in his integrity—oh, he is a bigot! The preacher who proclaims the Gospel with all his heart and soul, and brings many to Christ—he is behind his times—he has no “culture.” Bah! What fools! I cannot use a milder word to describe some of you! I only wish that the compliment I have thus paid you were true in the best sense, for if you *were* fools, you would enter into Heaven, but because you are so wise, you are more likely to miss the way! God has oftentimes chosen those who think *nothing* of themselves and are poor and needy, while the great ones who are proudly wise, disdain the road that leads to Paradise. Oh, be not too great to enter Heaven! Be converted and become as little children, otherwise you shall in no wise enter therein.

I am going to close my discourse, yet I do not want to say the last thing that comes into my mind. I have been describing a great many reasons why some people do not find peace with God, but sometimes there are reasons that I have not mentioned. One of these is the commission of *gross or secret sin*. Oh, the things that a man who cares for the souls of his fellows has to see and mourn over in this world! It must be 15 or 16 years ago that I was called to visit a dying man. I had seen him, before, when he was ill and in distress of mind, and I had tried to bring him to the Savior and to comfort him. He attended the Tabernacle constantly, but I could not make out why he did not find rest and peace. I often tried to remove various obstacles which I thought were in his way, but I never found out why he had no peace until after he was dead. Then I understood it. I cannot tell you all that there was in it, it is sufficient to say that he was living in known sin of the saddest kind. Kind, generous, loving—all you could wish him to be, but, alas, there was another household and another family found afterwards.

And then I understand that while he lived so, there could be no peace between him and God. I hardly like to say it, but I may be addressing somebody who is in a similar condition tonight. My dear Souls, do not try to live in sin and yet to be Christians! Do not pretend to hope in God while you are indulging secret vice—it cannot be so! You must either give up your sins or give up all hope of Heaven! Men and women, this is an evil age, full of impurity, and it behooves the minister of God, when he is dealing with men’s souls, to speak very plainly, and I am forced to put the Truth of God to you thus. Nobody knows of your sin. You have never been found out, yet it may be that you are living in the constant commission of some secret sin. By the love you bear to your own souls and by your desire to find Christ, I beseech you to flee from the evil thing! Escape for your life! Flee from the wrath to come and then lay hold on eternal life, for there is salvation in Christ, there is life for a look at Him!

But that life consists, in great measure, in being healed of sin—and you cannot continue a foul life and yet be washed in the Savior’s blood! It is a contradiction in terms and a contradiction in fact. As I shall meet you, my Hearers, at the bar of God—and as a dying man who may never speak to you again, I thought that I would put this truth in such a way that, if I went home to bed to die, I should not have the blood of any of you resting upon my hands. I beseech you, by eternity, by Heaven, by Hell—and *there is a Hell*—let the smooth-tongued liars of this age say what they will—by Heaven, by Hell, and by your own immortality, fly to Christ, give up your sin and be saved by believing in Jesus even now! God grant it! Amen and Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON: *ISAIAH 58.*

Verse 1. *Cry aloud, spare not, lift up you voice like a trumpet and show My people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins.* See, Friends, how uninterested men are by nature? God’s messengers must not only speak, they must speak very forcibly—they must speak as with the sound of a trumpet before men will hear them! Among the most uninterested of all are those who think themselves God’s people, but who are not really and spiritually so. It is hard to reach

the common sinner, but it is harder, still, to reach the baptized sinner, the man who professes to be a Christian, but who has only the name to live while he is spiritually dead.

2. *Yet they seek Me daily, and delight to know My ways,* They are careful to offer morning prayers—they would not go into their business without bending the knee to God—and they are eager and attentive hearers in the House of the Lord.

2. *As a nation that did righteousness, and forsook not the ordinance of their God: they ask of Me the ordinances of justice; they take delight in approaching to God.* Is it not strange that men will often continue to take delight in the externals of religion, while they give their heart to their sins? Outwardly, they keep up with great regularity all the observances of religion, yet in heart they are far from God.

3. *Why have we fasted, say they, and then see not? Why have we afflicted our soul, and You take no knowledge?* They could not make out why they did not benefit by their religiousness. They fasted, but they did not find themselves improved, thereby. They afflicted their souls, yet they did not receive pardon for their sins, and they could not make it out. The Lord explained the mystery.

3. *Behold, in the day of your fast, you find pleasure; and exalt your labors.* It is very easy to abstain from eating food of a certain kind, yet you can make another kind of food just as palatable. And while you are resting, you may be compelling others to work for you. What is this but hypocrisy? I think it is a common saying among the Arabs and Egyptians, when a man is very ugly in temper, “One would think that he was keeping a fast,” because it often happens in long fasts that men grow irritable. What is the good of fasting when that is the only result?

4. *Behold, you fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness* Even in their fasts, they disputed with one another! One said the fast should be on such a day, another would keep it on another day—and no doubt there are some professing Christians who are very zealous, mainly out of spite against other professors—they, with as much zeal, keep fast days or feast days the wrong way as others do the right way! It is a pity when this sort of party spirit is mixed up with the observances of religion!

4. *You shall not fast as you do this day.* Some fasted in order to appear very religious. “Oh,” people would say, “such a man must be very good, he fasts three times a week.” That is a kind of fasting to which God has no respect! To feed pride while we fast with the stomach is a poor way of showing how holy we are.

4, 5. *To make your voice to be heard on high. Is it such a fast that I have chosen? A day for a man to afflict his soul? Is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Will you call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the LORD?* The mere appearance of sorrow, the outward garb of mortification—what is there in that to please the Lord?

6. *Is not this the fast that I have chosen? To loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke?* That is the kind of fasting which God cares for—when a man leaves off oppressing those who toil for him, when he makes their tasks lighter, when he seeks their comfort—when he no longer grinds them between the millstones that threaten to crush the life out of them.

7. *Is it not to deal your bread to the hungry, and that you bring the poor that are cast out to your house? When you see the naked, that you cover him, and that you hide not yourself from your own flesh?* For they are your own flesh and blood! Though they may be total strangers to you, yet they are men like yourself. This is the fast that God delights in, when men take care to look after the poor and to relieve the distressed. When this is done—

8. *Then shall your light break forth as the morning, and your health shall spring forth speedily: and your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the LORD shall be your reward.* Do not take those promises out of their context! Observe that they are made to those that clothe the naked, feed the hungry and care for the poor. If you have done this, then you can ask God to fulfill this promise, but not otherwise. Then, when you have done this—

9. *Then shall you call, and the LORD shall answer; you shall cry, and He shall say, here I am.* If you have cared for the needy, God will care for you when you are needy. Is it not His way to reward the gift of even a cup of cold water to one of His disciples? Has He not promised that He will give back into our bosoms that which we have given to others for His sake?

9. *If you take away from the midst of you the yoke.* If you do not oppress anybody—

9. *The putting forth of the finger.* That is, the finger pointing scornfully at people and the contemptuous enquiry, “Who are *they?*”—looking down upon your fellows who, perhaps, are far better than yourself—you must put all that away!

9. *And speaking vanity.* That constant idle talk of which some are so fond, that utterance of falsehood which many practice—that, also, must be put away.

10. *And if you draw out your soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then your light shall dawn in the darkness, and your darkness shall be as the noonday.* Now mind again what I said just now—do not go stealing and run away with this promise without noticing the context in which it is placed—“If you draw out your soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then your light shall dawn in darkness,” but not till then!

11. *And the LORD shall guide you continually, and satisfy your soul in drought, and make fat your bones: and you shall be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not.* What rich promises to the generous and the kind! There are some who scatter and yet increase, and there are others who withhold more than is meet, and it tends to poverty. These promises are distinctly made to those who *care for the needy and suffering.* My Brothers and Sisters, mind well what the Lord, here, teaches you, for these things are far better than fasting! Better than any outward ordinances, whatever, are real acts of kindness, for remember that the same God who said, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind,” made the second table of His Law to run thus, “and your neighbor as yourself.”

12. *And they that shall be of you shall build the old waste places. You shall raise up the foundations of many generations; and you shall be called, The Repairer of the Breach, The Restorer of Paths to Dwell In.* God’s people are to seek to turn wildernesses into paradises! There is no part of the world so full of sorrow but the heart of the Believer may bring gladness to it!

13, 14. *If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on My holy day; and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the LORD, honorable; and shall honor Him, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words: then shall you delight yourself in the LORD.* There is no doubt that a reverent, happy, joyful keeping of the Sabbath ministers greatly to spiritual advancement. Here is the promise made to those who delight in the Sabbath—

14. *And I will cause you to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father: for the mouth of the LORD has spoken it.* God help us to be observant of the precepts of this chapter that its promises may be blessedly fulfilled in our experience! Amen.

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