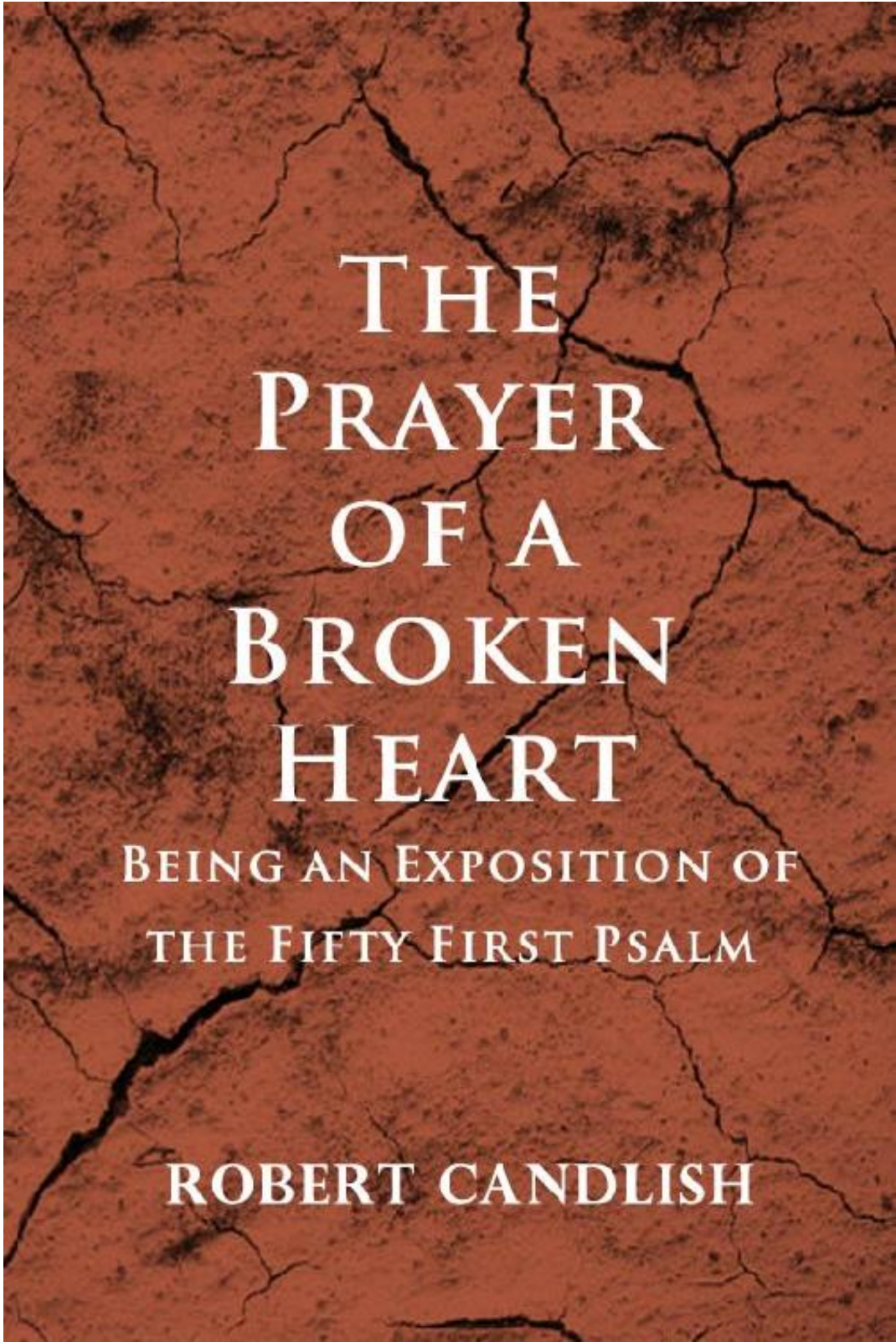
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THE  
PRAYER  
OF A  
BROKEN  
HEART

BEING AN EXPOSITION OF  
THE FIFTY FIRST PSALM

ROBERT CANDLISH

The background of the book cover is a deep red color with a cracked, leather-like texture. The cracks are dark and irregular, creating a network of lines across the surface. The text is centered and printed in a white, serif font.

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# **The Prayer of a Broken Heart**

## **Being an Exposition of the Fifty First Psalm**

**by Robert S. Candlish**

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### **I.—CONFESSION OF SIN**

Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving-kindness; according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I

sinned, and done this evil in thy sight; that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest. Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me. Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts; and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom. -  
PSALM 51:1-6

THE psalm opens with an abrupt and impulsive appeal. It is the psalmist's ordinary way; to begin with an outburst of feeling; and then go on to explain more leisurely the experience which led up to it. So is it here. His cry is for mercy;—"God be merciful to me a sinner." And it is a cry altogether self-abandoning and self-despairing. It is a simple casting of himself, sinner as he is, upon God. It is upon God, "according to his loving kindness, according to the multitude of his tender mercies," that he casts himself. The rich, and large, and bountiful grace of God is his only stay. He appeals to it in terms expressive of the most emphatic fulness of contrite conviction and believing confidence:—"Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving kindness; according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions."

Two unequivocal signs of grace follow; a desire to be thoroughly washed and cleansed,— "Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin,"—and a willingness to appear before God, for that end, without concealment and without guile,— "I acknowledge my transgressions; and my sin is ever before me."

These are the two features in respect of which the "godly sorrow which worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of" differs from "the sorrow of the world which worketh death" (2 Cor. 7:10); the desire to be thoroughly cleansed, and the owning of all sin. And they are the distinguishing features of this case; the case of one deeply, deplorably, fallen in sin; but yet hopeful.

For deep and deplorable as his fall has been, his faith does not fail.

It is a case like that of Peter "I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not,"—is the Master's word to his self-confident disciple, on the eve of the sad denial. If that prayer had not been heard and answered, Peter might have been like Judas; a despairing suicide. For, when a man's sin really finds him out, it may sink him into insane terror, or lash him into impotent fury,—but never of itself, without a sense of pardoning mercy; and pardoning mercy in the line of righteousness; will it move him to salutary tears.

It was a strange and blessed coincidence in Peter's case;—"Immediately, while he yet spake, the cock crew, and the Lord turned and looked upon Peter" (Luke 22:60, 61). Blessed, thrice blessed, this concurrence of providence and of grace! The reminding and accusing sound in providence; and the melting glance of the divine eye in grace; meet together. Well, indeed, that it is so in the instance of Peter's fall and recovery; and in the instance of David's; and in that of every poor penitent sinner.

Some may be at a loss to understand why this should be so very necessary ... It will be those only whose sin has not yet found them out. Thou wilt be of another mind; thou to whom the prophet's fiery word has come home; "Thou art the man!" The shock of that stunning and awakening deathblow thou couldst not stand, were it not for thy simple confession, "I have sinned against the Lord," being met with the instant assurance, "The Lord also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die" (2 Samuel 12:13).

On the faith of that assurance, David may be held to pour out his earnest cry in the opening verses of this psalm,— "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving-kindness; according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin."

There is no enlargement here; no detail. It is a bare cry generally for mercy; the grasping, as it were, of the helping hand; the simple acceptance of a pardoning voice. It is a casting of himself, just as he



is, with no analysis of his case, "on the loving-kindness of God." But it is a thorough and unreserved casting of himself upon that. For he desires to be "thoroughly washed and cleansed." It is not any slight or superficial healing of the hurt of his soul that he seeks; but a probing of it to the bottom, with a view to a radical cure. And this desire distinguishes his frame of mind from that of one feeling merely "the sorrow of this world which worketh death," and turns it into the "godly sorrow which worketh repentance unto salvation not to be repented of."

It is this desire that prompts the deep spiritual exercise of soul that follows; which may be traced, I think, under three heads.

There is first an indication of the penitent's frame of mind generally as a state of guilelessness and openness before God, "I acknowledge my transgressions; and my sin is ever before me." There is secondly a setting forth of the views in which the genuine penitent regards sin, "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight; that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest and be clear when thou judgest." There is thirdly the tracing up of the deadly disease to its source; the tracking back and deep of the guilt and sinfulness to its radical origin, "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me."

The central head is of course the one that bulks prominently; the first preparing the way for the experience described in it; and the second, pointing to its deepest issue, in its being ultimately run up into its original cause; the fall of man and the ruin of his nature which that entailed.

I. "I acknowledge my transgressions; and my sin is ever before me." In this exercise, there is, at the outset, an entire abandonment of guile. All reserve is laid aside. All now is laid open and bare. There is no more any concealment of my transgressions; any palliating or cloaking of them; but a full acknowledgment. I seek no hiding-place for them, or for me. I own them all. And the sin of all of them; my

sin; is ever before me. It is before me, as it is before thee. And I would have it to be so. The sin of my transgressions; the deep root of sin which underlies them all; my sin; I would have to be to me what it is to thee; before me, as before thee, thou searcher of hearts, my Lord and my God!

There is a great transition here from the natural mind in me. It is like passing from a dark den into broad and bright day-light. The light at first startles and appals me! It opens up the sordid squalor of my prison cell. But it is a glad relief in the end. I leave the dark den, where I have been trying to lull conscience asleep, and dose myself into a fond security. I come out, erect and open, into the open presence of my God. I stand unsheltered under his pure and holy eye. I consent, I desire, so to stand in his searching sight; though it blights all my righteousnesses as filthy rags; and makes my sin exceeding sinful.

It is a great step in the line of true repentance when, under the pressure of real and genuine godly sorrow;—having respect to God more than even to myself;—I am enabled and moved to say, "I acknowledge my transgressions; and my sin is ever before me."

II. "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight; that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest." In this "godly sorrow, working repentance unto salvation not to be repented of,"—there is throughout an eye toward God. For it is only in that way that it can be godly. And the reference to God is threefold—(I.) He is the offended party; "against thee, thee only, have I sinned." It is to thee that I have given offence. (II.) He is the measurer of the offence; he alone sees and estimates its real import and amount; "I have done this evil in thy sight." Thou alone takest notice of it in all its heinousness. Thou seest it as it really is. It is in thy view of it that I now would see the evil I have done. (III.) He is the judge; he alone. To him I own my guilt. From him I accept my sentence; "That thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest."

These three views are closely connected. The first recognises the sovereignty of God. The second adores his holiness. The third acquiesces in his righteous judgment.

(I.) God is the Lord, sovereign and supreme. The awakened soul, accordingly, in its deep spiritual exercise, recognises him as such. "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned." All others whom my sin has affected are lost in the one overwhelming sense of its being committed against thee. I have no eye but for thee; no thought but of thee. I have offended thee. In that aspect of it, my sin is ever before me. When the light from heaven shines about me, and I am smitten to the ground, the voice I hear in my startled conscience is, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?"

Did that voice indicate anything like indifference to Saul's persecution of the saints?

Nay! The Lord made it persecution of himself! It is I whom thou persecutest! I alone! It is with me, with me alone, that thou hast to deal. Against me only hast thou sinned!

It is not a question between thee and the victims of thy cruel bigotry. If it were, it might admit of explanation and excuse. History has accommodated in that way the case of many a persecution. And as between man and man, there may be no serious objection to so charitable a construction of actions and of motives.

But why persecutest thou me?—is the Lord's pointed appeal; carrying all actions and motives, about any such transaction, into the highest court of divine sovereignty. And the stricken soul replies, I have been persecuting thee. "Against thee, thee only have I sinned."

In fact, it is only thus that the sinfulness of my sin, as against my fellows, can be truly realised. If I look upon it merely as a wrong done to my neighbour, I am but too ready to apologise for it. I can explain it away, or offer some sort of restitution and satisfaction. I



can palliate my conduct, or I can make amends for it. But my sin is against thee! "Why persecutest thou me?"

Thou takest up into thyself all the wrong and cruelty; all the insult and offence of my sin. It has hurt, and perhaps ruined, some weak and loving soul. It has treacherously done to death some trusty and trusting friend. It has brought an all but fatal blight upon my conscience and my heart; sealing me up for months in a silent and dogged refusal to confess and be forgiven. But thou sinkest all these considerations in the one awful question—"Why persecutest thou me?" Against me, me only, thou hast sinned.

The reply to this, accordingly—"Against thee, thee only, have I sinned;" indicates no indifference to the injury inflicted on my fellows whom my sin has affected. The Lord's question,—Why persecutest thou me?—indicates no such indifference or insensibility on his part. It indicates the very opposite. It comes home to Saul, "breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the Lord's disciples." Their cause is mine. They and I are one. It is I, I only, whom thou persecutest. It is as a sin against me, me only, that thou hast to acknowledge thy "breathing out of threatenings and slaughter" against my disciples. So accordingly the smitten persecutor owns his fault. "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned,"—is his virtual reply. Not the less, however, on that account, but all the more, he feels the wrong his sin has done to its victims. To the close of his ministry he is always humbled, and often depressed, by the consideration of this reminiscence,—I "persecuted the Church of God."

(II.) The God against whom I have sinned is the Holy One—the only Holy One. And it is in his sight that I now see this evil has been done. "I have done evil in thy sight." I have done what is evil in thine eyes.

The thought of the ungodly man, the thought of the natural mind, is the opposite of this conviction of the awful and inviolable holiness of God, and the exceeding sinfulness of sin in his sight, and as viewed

by him. The temptation to say, or to imagine, that "the Lord seeth not, that the Lord regardeth not," is very strong and subtle. The evil done is scarcely at all deliberately noticed or resented among men. Its consequences are extenuated; its causes apologised for, or explained away. Will not the Lord also look on it with an indulgent eye, and put the best construction on it that is possible?

The third commandment teaches a different doctrine;—"Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord,"—whatever men may say or think,—"the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain." And so also does that very solemn warning of the Apostle,—"Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled; but whoremongers and adulterers," however society may treat them, "God will judge" (Heb. 13:4).

For it is not what my sin is in the sight of man that I have to consider; but what it is in thy sight, O thou Holy One!—who art of purer eyes than to behold iniquity.

My sin is ever before me; all my sin; as "evil done in thy sight." It is set before me, as thou hast set it before thee; "my secret sin set in the light of thy countenance." Well may my poor heart be overwhelmed.

Ah! when I abide the deep and searching scrutiny of that watchful and holy eye of the Lord my God; that eye which never slumbers, and which cannot look on sin; that eye ever open and ever pure; how does my guilty soul,—my unclean and unloving and unlovely spirit,—sink within me! I read indeed a message of mercy in that eye,—of love,—of love unspeakable,—to sinners,—to me of all sinners the chief. It is not, however, as others think, and I once thought myself,—it is not that the eye is become blind to my sin. No. It is ever open still, and still also ever pure. The very love that beams from it, shining on me through the medium of the cross, in which the spirit shows me how—"Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty,"—enhances the piercing energy of that calm, clear look, which, speaking nought but peace, sends a dagger to my bosom. My Father

runs and falls upon my neck, and kisses me. There is not one upbraiding word; not one angry glance. But the very graciousness of my reception unmans and overawes me. I cannot stand that eye,—so benignant, so venerable, so holy. Father, I have sinned before thee. "I have done evil in thy sight."

(III.) He against whom I have sinned, and in whose sight I have done evil,—the sovereign Lord, the Holy One,—is the righteous Judge; and his righteousness is to be acknowledged;—"that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest." This is a most material element in all true repentance, in all really godly sorrow for sin. The smitten soul, the contrite spirit, must be brought to own, not only the reality, but the righteousness, of the condemnation of his sin.

It is here, and at this point, very specially, that the gracious work of the Spirit, convincing me of sin, comes out in most marked contrast to the working of the flesh.

For nothing can be more opposed to the natural feeling of that carnal mind which is enmity against God and insubordination to his law, than such an acknowledgment

"Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"—is the devout ejaculation of Abraham. Alas! how few are willing and able, in their own case, honestly to echo his words!

Who among you, if you were to be at this moment called to your last account, found guilty, and condemned to everlasting punishment, would be prepared to allow your doom to be simply just? Nay, to put the question in a far milder form, if you were subjected to the same chastisement which David suffered on account of his sin,—the loss of a darling child,—would you not be tempted secretly to murmur, as if you were harshly, and even unfairly, treated?

"Why," asks the prophet, "should a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?" And yet every man is ready to complain,

and has much to say against his guilt being visited with any serious penalty at all. It might almost seem indeed as if men had thoroughly satisfied themselves that it would be unreasonable and unrighteous on the part of God to judge them; so securely do they reckon on indulgence and impunity, and so indignantly do they rebel or protest against the slightest infliction of severity, or the faintest threatening of wrath.

What wonder if, in such a mood of mind, the rich and free grace of God,—his sovereign mercy, proclaimed in the Gospel,—is not adequately appreciated, or duly valued and welcomed? For in truth, on this footing, there is really no room for anything like free grace or sovereign mercy at all; since it is clear that if there would not be perfect justice in my being condemned, there is no grace or mercy,—there can be none,—in my being forgiven. If a boon in any sense at all, it is a boon which I am entitled to expect without anxiety, and will be disposed to accept without gratitude, as a mere matter of course;—not as a gratuitous favour, but almost as the redress of a wrong.

When my sin finds me out, all this confidence or conceit is gone. For it is a vain dream in which men trust when they affect to question or defy the righteous judgment of the Most High. Their own consciences, even partially awakened, more than half attest its hollow vanity. Nor will their unbelief make void the unchanging truth, and justice, and faithfulness, of God. Nay rather, as the Apostle quotes this text (Rom. 3:4),—"Let God be true, and every man a liar; as it is written, That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged." Even when men presume to try the sayings of that God who reproveth them, and to sit in judgment on his right to accuse them and his procedure in condemning them,—they are compelled to justify him and blame themselves. They feel that he overcomes, and that they cannot contend against him. They may try to make out on their own behalf a case of supposed grievance. They may urge pleas to show that they ought to be excused, and that it would be extreme rigour to visit

them with any severe doom. But they fail thoroughly to satisfy themselves. They have a secret consciousness that they are resting on slippery ground. They have misgivings already, which, ere long, may become terrible alarms. The eternal truth stands as a rock of adamant against all their sophistries. It haunts them on earth, as it will hold them fast in hell. Their sin has been wilful, and God is not unrighteous in taking vengeance.

Oh! that this conviction may be mine now; mine in my inmost soul; that I may accept the punishment of my sin as just; that I may plead guilty, and receive sentence accordingly! Then may I hope to behold the glory of the free grace and sovereign mercy of my God, emerging and shining forth out of the deep, dark cloud of righteous retribution. For what do I see, as I stand now defenceless, awaiting the stroke of the inevitable bolt of wrath? What do I hear? See! I see one fairer than the sons of men, the Son of God himself, baring his bosom as he presents himself to the righteous Father, answering in the judgment for me! Hear! I hear that awful voice,—“Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, against the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord!” So righteous is the stroke impending over me,—so inexorably just the judicial retribution which I have deserved,—that even in richest and freest mercy, it cannot be averted, or turned away. It must descend and take effect. It must come down. But upon whom? Not now upon me; but upon Jesus, my surety; upon him, crucified for me; upon me, crucified in him. Surely now, I may see and feel condemnation to be righteous. “Thou art justified when thou speakest, and clear when thou judgest.”

Thus, in this penitential exercise of soul, the Psalmist, giving expression to his godly sorrow for sin, makes a full and frank acknowledgment of it; as no longer hidden in unconsciousness or guile, but ever before him; and as ever before him in the threefold view of its being (I.) against God; (II.) in his sight; and (III.) deserving his righteous judgment.

III. One other element in this godly sorrow, thus working repentance not to be repented of, remains to be noticed. "Behold I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me." The penitent, in his godly sorrow, thus goes to the very root of his sad case. He does so, under the sense of what follows:—"Behold thou desirest truth in the inward parts; and in the hidden part thou hast made me to know wisdom."

His experience here is in the line of the experience of Paul (Rom. 7.)—"We know that the law is spiritual." "I delight in the law of God after the inward man." So is it here. "In the hidden part hast thou made me to know wisdom." And in both instances the same result follows; a painful sense of the original and inveterate corruption of the flesh; the innate or inborn depravity of man's very nature, and of the whole of it. "I was born in iniquity, and conceived in sin," says the Psalmist. And the Apostle bewails his-state—"The law is spiritual; but I am carnal."

Thus, it is in connection with a realising sense of the spirituality of God's law, that the Psalmist and the Apostle are brought to apprehend the fact of that original sin; that inheritance by birth and by nature of guilt and corruption, of condemnation and unholiness,—which alone can explain all the experience of a sinful heart, and a sinful life,—and which needs ultimately to be met and grappled with, if the heart is to be renewed, and the life is to be reformed.

For the knowledge or sense of original sin; birth-guilt and birth-depravity; can only be reached in this way, through a dealing of the Spirit with us, as to the evil of sin in the life and in the heart. In a doctrinal or systematic point of view, the consideration of original sin and natural corruption may properly come up otherwise. But experimentally, and as regards the actual spiritual history of a saved soul, the order is that of the Psalmist and the Apostle. I cannot begin my confession with an acknowledgment of birth-guilt and birth-depravity. That is not first in my feeling and my conviction. It is, first, sin as an overt act that startles and staggers me. Then, secondly,

I feel it to be sin in the heart. And I am led to own it as committed against God's supreme law; to loathe it as offensive in his holy sight; to sink under the sentence of its righteous condemnation. I have now to deal with it, in order to overcome and get rid of it. Alas! I find that to be a harder task than I anticipated. So far from giving way to an effort of the will, or even to the most sincere and strenuous strivings of holy resolution;—which it surely would do, if it were merely a casual error to be corrected, or an acquired habit to be overcome;—the sin which now so painfully vexes me rather gains strength by the inward struggle, and all the more prevails against me. My indwelling corruption, my lust, my spirit of rebelliousness against God, is provoked rather than subdued by the restraint I honestly attempt to put upon it. In spite of repeated purposes of obedience, my heart, my carnal mind, is still proving itself more and more to be enmity against God. It is not subject to his law, neither indeed can be. I make the sad discovery experimentally that I was born in iniquity, and conceived in sin. I am shut up to the Apostle's all but despairing cry—"Oh, wretched man that I am; who shall deliver me from the body of this death."

This is the last drop in the cup of godly sorrow. And, blessed be God, under the working of the Spirit, it makes it run over into the vast, wide, boundless ocean of rich mercy and redeeming love. "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord." The last link of the chain of self-righteousness is severed, and the prisoner of hope is set for ever free. "There is now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus;" who therefore now walk at liberty, "not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." If the case were less desperate than I now feel it to be; if my sin were an affair of the life merely, consisting of evil thoughts, evil words, evil deeds; I might still hold on, cleaving to the hope of effecting at last, with some help from above, my own deliverance; cleansing and saving myself. I might still be ever trying some new experiment in the line of self-purification, hoping for some measure of success in the end. Waiting always until I became a better man, worthier, or at all events less unworthy, I might continue to put away from me the gospel call and gift of sovereign grace, and indefinitely



postpone compliance with its free invitation. But the experimental discovery which the Spirit makes to me of the impotency of my will to grapple with inborn desire,—of the inveterate corruption of my fallen nature,—puts an end to all idea of the hurt of my soul being slightly healed,—or indeed healed at all,—by any process of self-justification or self-reform. I am shut up in the Spirit to the only complete and effectual cure. I am fairly driven out of myself to Christ. By him alone, I am at once and thoroughly purged from guilt. In him alone, I am created anew. The old man is hopelessly depraved and dead. I put it off altogether. I die. "I am crucified with Christ." And with him now I live, accepted, quickened, renewed; raised in and with him to newness of life; "sin no more having dominion over me; for I am not under the law but under grace."

I close for the present with one practical observation relative to that exercise of godly sorrow which I have been considering.

It must be very manifest that it is not merely a sudden impulse, an abrupt and sharp pang of remorse, coming upon our souls all at once, or, as it were, by fits and starts. It is a prolonged, deliberate, calm consideration of the whole state of the case as between God and us; the entire question of the disposition of our hearts towards God. No doubt there may be, there must be, more or less, in every instance of spiritual awakening, a keen sense of guilt and danger, prompting prayer, at first perhaps almost inarticulate and incoherent, like the cry of the drowning mariner at sea. There was all that in the experience of David. His guilt, his danger, did indeed flash upon him, in one moment, as a bolt of fire from heaven. Under the prophet's sharp appeal, his conscience, his whole soul, was startled into instantaneous alarm. And his brief confession, "I have sinned against the Lord," instantaneously brought relief in the assurance, "The Lord hath put away thy sin." But that did not end the matter. "My sin is ever before me." Notwithstanding the Lord's putting it away,—nay, rather all the more on that very account, my sin is ever before me; in what sense and to what effect, he has himself been telling us.

On the day of Pentecost, the Spirit wrought abruptly and mightily. At a single stroke the people were smitten down. Their sin in crucifying the Lord of glory smote them instantaneously. And instantaneously also they were moved by the Spirit to look believingly on him whom they had pierced, and find peace. But did that end the matter with them? Not if they were like-minded with Paul, who, long after he had obtained mercy, continued to be exercised deeply in his soul about his sin which was ever before him.

So let it be with you, O poor sinner! I call upon you, whatever and whoever you are, to see your sin now, to embrace your Saviour now. You have sin enough upon your conscience now. Confess now. Believe now. But I call upon you, believing now, not lightly or hastily to dismiss the matter from your thoughts. Ponder your sin. Consider it in all its bearings. Be seeking ever, as it is ever before you, to get deeper, more searching, more humbling views of its exceeding sinfulness. For it is thus, and only thus, that by God's grace, under the teaching of his Holy Spirit, you will be getting more and more of an insight into God's marvellous grace and love, and proving more and more thoroughly the blessedness of a full, as well as a free, forgiveness; of complete reconciliation; of perfect peace.

## **II.—SUPPLICATION FOR FULL CLEANSING**

Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice. Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Create in me a clean

heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy Holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit. - PSALM 51:7-12

THIS Psalm opens with an abrupt and ejaculatory cry for mercy; founded upon a general recognition and acknowledgment of the Lord's loving-kindness, and the multitude of his tender mercies,—"Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving kindness; according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies, blot out my transgressions; wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin" (ver. 1, 2). There is in the prayer, brief as it is, a thoroughly evangelical element. It breathes a spiritual frame of mind. It asks a thorough blotting out of all transgressions, and a thorough washing and cleansing from all iniquity and all sin. That is not the characteristic of the sorrow of the world, which rather seeks compromise and courts accommodation; being willing to make acknowledgments, with some real tears perhaps of regret for the past; but under some secret reserve for the future. It is godly sorrow that prompts this cry.

Accordingly it is followed up with a more detailed and deliberate setting forth of the penitent's case,— "For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight; that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest. Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me. Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts; and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom" (ver. 3-6). At the outset there is an entire abandonment of all reserve and all self-deception. There is no longer any guile in his spirit, any desire to cloak, or conceal, or palliate his offence; no more of that sullen and hard "keeping silence" which had been first deadening, and then irritating to very madness, the sensibilities of the soul with reference to God. All is now open between God and the poor smitten sinner. The very worst is laid bare, frankly and freely. Then sin, all sin, is

deliberately looked at in all the points of view in which it may be supposed to be regarded by God. Thus, first, it is provocation given to him, the sovereign ruler and Lord. He is the party entitled to take offence, and to resent all injury done to any of his creatures as injury done to him. Again, sin is now seen as God sees it. It is viewed as evil in his sight. The evil of it is estimated not by any human judgment but solely by the judgment of God. And finally, the condemnation of sin, its being judicially and penally visited, is recognised, as both inevitable and just. The reality and the righteousness of judgment are acknowledged. There is no more rebellion against the sentence of wrath. There is a plea of guilty put in; and no apology or defence. After these three views of sin, under the broad light of a guileless and frank confession,—there remains the sad discovery I have to make, in my desperate struggle to become what God requires me to be, and what I would fain be; that the evil in me which I have to grapple with has its root far back and very deep; not in my will merely, nor even in my heart's desire; but in my very nature. That is radically corrupt and wrong. There must be a new birth; a new creation,—"Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me."

The particular pleading with God,—in detail, as it were,—in the verses on the consideration of which I now enter, fitly follows the penitent's profound and searching investigation of his own sin. There is an obvious difference between the prayer that precedes, and this which follows, that confession. The prayer which goes before is, as I have said, quite vague and general. The prayer which comes after is special, pointed, and precise. When my sin finds me out; when the cock crows; when I hear the voice "Thou art the man;" the shock of the sudden discovery to me of my guilt, under the eye of Jesus, "turning and looking on me," moves me to tears and prayer. It is prayer; perhaps for the first time truly prayer. It is the abrupt cry,—Lord save me; I perish. Blessed be God, even that is enough. But there comes a closer dealing with my soul; which I welcome and improve. And I turn from that soul-exercise again to God. I plead with him more in detail, about my case. And my detailed pleading, in

renewed prayer, corresponds to the detailed penitential exercise out of which it arises and proceeds.

The correspondence comes out chiefly in connection with the views of sin indicated in the fourth verse. I, I have to deal with God as the one only sovereign Lord; against whom, against whom only, I have sinned. Hence the prayer,—“Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean. Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me to hear joy and gladness, that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice” (ver. 7, 8). II. I have to deal with God as the Holy One; of purer eyes than to behold iniquity. It is in his sight that I have done this evil; in the sight of him to whom it is so loathsome. Hence the prayer:—“Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me” (ver. 9, 10). III. I have to deal with God as the Righteous Judge, who must needs execute righteous judgment; whom I own to be justified in speaking to me and clear in condemning me. Therefore I appeal to him,—“Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy Holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit” (ver. 11, 12).

I. (ver. 7, 8) The sovereignty of God is here acknowledged—first, as the only dispenser of grace; and secondly, as dispensing it in his own way.

First, “Purge thou me; wash thou me.” To God alone does the smitten soul apply; to God, against whom only he has sinned. He alone is the offended party. To him alone I have to answer. He alone can forgive. To him alone, accordingly, I have recourse; to him directly; to him alone. “Purge thou me; wash thou me.”

I do not go to any priest. If I had sinned merely against the priest, or against such ordinances as the priest has to guard; then the priest might, on due submission, absolve and bless me. I do not go to any of my fellows whom my sin may have touched. They may receive or reject an apology or a compensation. How they may regard and treat

me is now comparatively a secondary and subordinate consideration; serious, indeed, in one view, for I would fain have their forgiveness; but not the vital consideration. It is against God, God only, that I have sinned. And how God may deal with me is the real question. Nor can I go to my own heart. There once I might have reckoned upon a verdict of acquittal, or at least of apology. Now, however, nothing short of the sentence of God can relieve or content me.

But now, if God,—the very God against whom, against whom only, I have sinned, does, in the exercise of his undoubted and irresistible sovereignty, purge me, and wash me, and make my broken bones to hear joy and gladness,—who may gainsay or call in question the gracious act? The priest may refuse to absolve me. But if God purge me, I am clean. My fellow-sinners may not acquit or pardon me. But if God wash me, I am whiter than the snow. My own heart may testify only evil of me, and write bitter things against me. But even from that verdict I appeal. If God make me to hear joy and gladness, my broken bones may yet rejoice. There is much comfort in this thought of the sovereignty of God.

But there is terror also. For, let me remind the careless one, it is with God alone that you have to do. Against him, him only, you have sinned; and with him, him only, you have to reckon. You may satisfy the priest. You may conciliate your brother. You may pacify your own conscience. What will it avail you if your sin as against God still stands out? Consent, however, to let God justify you. Then you may utter the bold challenge, "Who is he that can condemn?"

But, secondly, in order to this, there must be submission to God, not merely as the only dispenser of purging, washing, gladdening grace; but as dispensing it in his own way; "with hyssop," and through "the breaking of the bones." That is not the way nature likes. Naturally I would prefer another way. I do not see the need of the hyssop. I stand out against the breaking of my bones.

Hyssop! That herb was used in connection with the typical sacrifices of the ceremonial ritual. It was the means or instrument of the sprinkling of atoning blood and purifying water on those who, being ceremonially unclean, needed to be purged. But it is not the priest's act of outward purging with hyssop dipped in the blood of bulls and of goats that will now avail the sin-stricken soul. It must be the sprinkling, by a better priest, of better blood, with better hyssop.

And the broken bones! That now also comes in as an element in my new spiritual experience; my new sense of sin. "I am crucified with Christ." My bones are broken as his body was broken; not by rude, Roman soldiers; but by what alone gave the blow its force and fierceness in his case; and in my case also, as one with him; sin, in all its guilt and terrible doom. Only by this process of purging with hyssop, and through this experience of the breaking of your bones, can I have cleansing and healing; a full washing, and a perfect joy. But in that way of submission to his righteousness; his judgment and his grace; I have a sure standing in the sight of my God.

II. (Ver. 9, 10.) God is holy as well as sovereign; and in the light of his awful holiness, I have to consider my sin. First, I would have its offensiveness covered from the sight of the Holy One; "Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities." And, secondly, I would have more than that. I would have such a change wrought upon me and in me as may make me, not an object of offence, but an object of complacency, to the Holy One; "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me."

First, How exceeding sinful is my sin in his sight! how loathsome! how abominable! Can it be hidden? Can it be blotted out? It is a bold request. And yet nothing short of that can reassure my soul in the presence, and under the eye of the Holy One! It was not always so with me. Once I could dream of the recording angel dropping a tear on my wayward or unwary word, and blotting it out for ever. Now, "my sin is ever before me." And it is ever before me as a sin against thee only; "In thy sight have I done this ill." And yet I cannot say to



thee, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" I cannot call to the mountains and rocks to fall on me and hide me from thy face! Nor can I clothe myself with any righteousnesses of my own, any barren fig-leaves in the forfeited garden, to cover my nakedness. But I flee to thee, Lord, to cover me; to cover me from the searching glance and scrutiny of thine own pure eye. That eye is upon me; piercing me; burning me; that ever open and ever pure eye of thine. Take it away, Lord! Hide thy face from my sins! It is a bold petition. Have I warrant to present it? May I ask the all-seeing God to become blind to my sins?

Yes! For he has himself made provision for that very thing. He asks me to appear before him as consenting to be one with his own beloved Son. He invites me to present myself as one with his own beloved Son. He sends forth the Spirit of his Son in my heart to secure that I shall appear before him, and present myself before him, as one with his own beloved Son. On that footing, and in virtue of that oneness with his own beloved Son,—a oneness of his own creation, by the Spirit of his Son,—I may ask the Father to hide his face from my sins. For it is asking him to hide his face from them as imputed to him with whom I am one; and as answered for by him in my stead. Look not on my guilt but on his righteousness! In his blood, "blot out all my iniquities!"

Secondly, The prayer for implanted righteousness comes in here, following upon the prayer for an interest in the benefit of righteousness imputed. And it comes in thus, rightly, seasonably, safely. For, much as the soul whom the Spirit is convincing of sin, may value and welcome the assurance that, without the need of his fulfilling any previous condition, or having any previous grace of repentance or renewal consciously wrought in him, he may at once, just as he is, freely appropriate the righteousness of Christ, and on the ground of it, offer the believing prayer, "Hide thy face from my sins and blot out all mine iniquities,"—still, if he is in earnest, he cannot be content with that. That may indeed suffice, so far as the question of his right standing with God is concerned. It does most

fully suffice, and it alone can suffice, for his being no more condemned, but justified. And without such a rectifying of his position, any renewal of his nature is impossible. But a really earnest soul will prize the first of these benefits chiefly as a step to the second. For he longs, not merely to be on a right footing with God, as the Holy One and the Just; not merely to have his sins hidden and his iniquities blotted out, through the imputation of atoning blood and justifying righteousness; but to be walking with God thenceforth, as of one mind, and heart, and character, with him.

In that view, I ask the Lord, not merely to shut his eye to what in his sight is evil in me, but to work in me what in his sight may be good. It is doubtless a great matter for me that the evil I have done, the evil that is in me, should be hidden from the face of my God; that he should regard that in me which must awaken his wrath and his abhorrence, as covered and cancelled. But still I long for there being something good in me; something on which he may look with complacency as being congenial to his own holiness; some cleanness of heart; some rightness of spirit, towards him. I long for a clean heart; a heart freed from malice and guile; a heart no longer selfish; but bent simply and sincerely on loving and serving God. I long for a right spirit; a "constant" spirit; a spirit steadfast, patient, persevering, in the walk of faith.

III. God is not only the sovereign Lord and the Holy One; but the Righteous Judge, "justified in speaking, clear in condemning." Hence the prayer, deprecating deserved judgment, on the one hand; asking unmerited but needed favours, on the other hand.

First, The judgment deprecated is twofold; "Cast me not away from thy presence, and take not thy Holy Spirit from me" (ver. 11). There is an acknowledgment here, both of my liability to such sad visitations, and of the perfect justice of my being so visited.

1. Justly mightest thou cast me away from thy presence; and that for ever. I have forfeited all title to thy favour. I have provoked and

incurred thy righteous displeasure. I could almost find it in my heart to say, Leave me to perish as I deserve. Has it come to this, that I who have preached to others should be myself a castaway? Be it so. I dare not complain. I will not impugn the sentence. Let me be cast away from thy presence. It is my merited, let it be my inevitable, doom. But no. I can scarcely acquiesce in that. Once, indeed, I might have cared little about that aspect of the punishment of my sin. Nay, for that matter, it was only yesterday that I would rather have thy absence, if that were possible, than thy presence. I would fain have been,—virtually I was,—outside of thy presence. I sought a hiding-place from thee. I longed to be, and thought I was, out of thy sight. But, all thanks to thee and thy grace, I cannot acquiesce in that banishment now. Thou hast broken my bones. Thou hast made me feel that nothing short of a new creation can meet my case. Thou hast convinced me that thy favour alone is life. In thy presence alone is fulness of joy. Cast me not away from thy presence! Thou justly mightest; but mercifully thou wilt not.

For, secondly, thou puttest it into my heart to pray "Take not thy holy spirit from me." That consummation would make my case hopeless indeed. Were I to be so far left to myself in my sin against thee as to become insensible to the hazard of being cast away from thy presence; and, blinded by passion, or absorbed in pleasure, or hurried on by lust of gain, were I to stifle conscientious convictions; and obstinately keep silence from confession to thee; and thus harden my heart in opposition to gracious movements and gracious relentings; what can be the issue but the taking of thy holy spirit from me?

"My Spirit will not always strive." "Ephraim is joined to idols; let him alone." That is the last and worst disaster, in the line of God's dealing with me, that I can have to deprecate on this side of the grave. Is it a disaster even now impending over me? Is the spirit even now all but ready to depart? Is he hovering on the wing? Resisted, grieved, vexed, quenched, is he even now waiting for a moment? reluctant, hesitating, halting, ere he take his final leave? Let me fall down and

own that that would be but just. And let me be very thankful that I may yet plead for his remaining; not as of right, but as of grace. O my God, take him not from me. Is he not willing to abide? True! Thou who art the righteous judge hast said that thy spirit shall not always strive with men. Lord I believe this; help thou mine unbelief But now, through thy grace, I would give up all resistance to his gracious movements. Seeing him even now raising his wings to fly away, I yet venture to cry; as against the last, the fatal, step in the line of apostasy;—"Take not thy holy spirit from me."

Secondly, From deprecating the worst woe, to realising the highest blessedness, may seem to be an abrupt and strange transition; and yet the explanation is not far to seek. For the negative prayer, "Cast me not away from thy presence, and take not thy Holy Spirit from me," can be answered only in the line of the positive prayer; and in fact can only be offered in the line of the positive prayer; "Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me with thy free spirit." It is a bold prayer. For a sinner so sorely stricken, a backslider with bones so sadly broken,—it is indeed a very lofty request to make. Not salvation only, but its joy, to be restored. Not the spirit of God to remain simply; but to remain as a free spirit to uphold.

"Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation." It is, I repeat, a bold prayer, a very lofty request from one who has been, and is, at the very moment, deprecating, as instantly impending over him, the worst inflictions of eternal doom.

For the contrast and coincidence here must be noted as very strict and close. When I pray for the restoration to me of the joy of God's salvation, it is in the very same breath in which I deprecate his casting me away from his presence and taking his holy spirit from me. Simultaneously with my doing that; in the very act or exercise of my doing it; realising the very utmost that wrath can inflict, I ask the very utmost that grace can give. Would it not be enough to put in a plea for arrest of judgment? Might I not be contented with a hesitating petition that the sentence should not at once be summarily

and finally executed?—Let me not be cast away from the presence of the judge. Let not all remedial measures be given up as hopeless. May there not still be room and time for some such milder treatment of my case as may yet obviate the need of a fatal termination?—No! It is a case in which there can be no such temporising; it admits of no compromise; no transition state or process. From condemnation to salvation; from the terror of the one to the joy of the other; there is but one step. Hence the concurrence, in one and the same experience, of two opposite elements; a deep and awful sense on the one hand, of the lowest misery of hell; my being cast away from God's presence, with his holy spirit taken from me; and on the other hand, some realizing of the highest blessedness of heaven; the restored joy of God's salvation. The two are apprehended together; and in proportion to one another. The one corresponds to the other. The deeper I go into my guilt and condemnation, as justly exposing me to the doom of being cast away and having God's holy spirit taken from me, the higher I rise into the conception of the joy of his salvation, which I must have restored to me. And thus more and more the two elements of this experience blend and become one. I cannot be anything else than a castaway, and spirit-forsaken, unless I have restored to me the joy of God's salvation. And I repeat, the deeper I go into the gulf of the conviction that God might cast me away from his presence and take his holy spirit from me; the higher I seek to rise, to a sense, not of salvation merely, but of its joy.

For it is in thy salvation, O Lord, that I would rejoice; not in salvation anyhow and by any one accomplished; but in salvation that is thine, and thine only. To thee be all the glory! To me the joy! "Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation."

"And uphold me with thy free spirit." It is not so clear and certain here, as it is in the preceding verse, that it is the divine spirit personally that is indicated. But it is at any rate his influence, with its result, that is here recognised. It is a subjective frame of mind, wholly spiritual, that is meant. Uphold me with spiritual freedom.

Let me have, to uphold me, a free spirit. That must imply thine own holy spirit, O Lord, working, or himself becoming, a free spirit in me.

"Free." This adjective, as used here, may be very widely and variously interpreted and applied. "A governing or commanding spirit;" "a spirit wielding power;" "a spirit having principality;" "a brisk or alert spirit, a spirit of alacrity;" "a spirit of magnanimity, or greatness of mind;" "a plentiful effusion of the spirit;" i. e. the spirit plenteously effused; "a glorious spirit; a royal spirit; a frank spirit." These are some of the approved renderings of this significant epithet "free." Perhaps what I have given last is not the worst; "frank." For it may be fairly held to cover and comprehend all the rest. A frank spirit is commanding, powerful, princely. It is lively also, and quick. It has in it the essential element of magnanimity. And it flows out in exuberant truthfulness. It breathes a boundless atmosphere, and has a royal port. It may be identified with the charity or love which Paul commends as so manifold and many-sided, yet so completely one (1 Cor. 13)

With that free spirit I would be upheld. It is indeed only thus that I can be upheld. In the depths of my self-conviction and self-condemnation; all but a castaway;—from whom God's holy spirit is on the very point of being taken away;—I find no security but in restored joy and freedom of spirit. The joy of the Lord alone is my freedom and my strength. There is no need of any intermediate step; as if I must, through penitence, confession, and absolution, under an ordeal of priestly inquisition, reach some doubtful platform, on which the experiment of fall and recovery may be tried over and over again. From the deepest dread of hell I grasp the highest blessedness of heaven. Deprecating, almost in despair, the doom of one cast away from God's presence and forsaken by his holy spirit, I can pray for nothing short of joy and freedom; the joy which God's salvation implies and imparts; freedom of spirit, the freedom which his own spirit inspires into mine.

It is the joy of thy salvation that I would have. It is not, I repeat, the mere joy of deliverance in any way or by any one, from impending disaster and death. That joy, the imagination of mere indulgence and impunity might give. It must be thy salvation if I am to taste any joy in it. The deliverance must come from thee; from thee, against whom I have sinned. And in another view it must be thy salvation. It must be salvation worthy of thee, as well as suited to me; salvation in full harmony with thyself; thy name and character; thy government and law. There can be no joy in it for me, unless it is a salvation that not only secures my safety, but redounds to thy glory. I can rejoice in the salvation, only if it is thy salvation; salvation wrought out by thee alone; and so wrought out by thee alone as to make it a salvation for thee, as well as for me. For thee,—as thyself needing it? Forgive the blasphemous thought! No! But for thee, as making thyself one with us who need it! Thy salvation! A salvation that meets all thy claims, as well as all our wants!

And freedom of spirit; the freedom of the spirit flowing from the restored joy of thy salvation, I ask thee to give. And I ask it not merely that I may be relieved from uncomfortable bondage, for my ease and quiet repose, but that I may thereby be upheld. A free spirit! The spirit of freedom! That, in some sense, all would desire and welcome. But my prayer for it here is only with a view to my being upheld; not set loose from the obligation of law and duty; but upheld in the discharge of it. In that line, a free spirit,—freedom of spirit associated with joy,—the joy of a glad emancipation,—is a great upholder.

It is so always, in whatever sphere any movement has to be made. In worldly business even; in political affairs; to have experienced a sudden and satisfactory deliverance, so as to be set free from embarrassments and have an open and unencumbered path ahead, is a great strengthening of one's hands and nerving of one's brain for future toils and trials. How much more should it be so in the region of grace; where all is of the Lord! The salvation for whose restored joy I pray, is his; the free spirit, the spirit of freedom, is his also. And



it is his to sustain and comfort me by these helps. To him I look for making the joy and the freedom effectual to uphold me. Yes! it is thou who must uphold me. At every stage, in every step, I must rely on thee to uphold me. I cannot reckon on past experiences, or on any strength I may have acquired through them. I have no fund to draw upon, but only thyself, good Lord! It is thou who must uphold me in the line of joy and freedom.

For the joy by which I am to be upheld in freedom must be thine; thine, not merely as given by thee; but thine as shared in fellowship with thee; not merely the joy which thou givest in thy salvation; but the joy which thou thyself hast in thy salvation. In that joy and its freedom, I would have communion with thee, O Saviour of sinners. It is a high aspiration;—to aim at such sympathy and communion with the Lord in the joy he has himself in his own salvation! It lifts me above the outer movements and results of his action, and places me alongside of him, in the chamber within, where he sits as planning, superintending, and consummating. The whole method of delivery from evil and restoration to good is viewed from his standpoint. And viewed in that light it is seen and felt to be joyous and free: a source of gladness and liberty. To such elevation I seek to rise; as not only a lofty object of ambition, but my best and only security for being upheld.

Yes, and so upheld as to be safe from the risk of being cast away from his presence, and having his holy spirit taken away! For that risk I keep always steadily in view; not as marring my joy and freedom, but as chastening the joy of his salvation with a salutary remembrance of my sin against him: and keeping my freedom of spirit always under the rule of law, the law of love. I walk at liberty, having respect to all his commandments.

Walking in that liberty, strong in that joy, I will not consent to be brought under the power of anything within or without that might subject me again to bondage. I will stand fast in the liberty with which Christ makes me free.

Yes! Blessed Jesus, my Lord and my God! I cleave to thee! I would lean on thy bosom and look up to thee; into that open eye of thine. I have sinned against thee. I have pierced thee. Thee only have I pierced. For it is thou alone who hast borne the deadly stroke of my guilt. And how vile am I in thy pure sight; unclean; unholy. And how am I condemned in thy judgment. But from thy very side which I have pierced I see blood and water flowing; blood of infinitely atoning virtue; water of thoroughly cleansing and sanctifying power. It is the stream of thine own redeeming blood and thine own water of regeneration. Let it be applied to me, good Lord! There is hyssop at hand; the hyssop of thy most gracious promises; warranting the fullest and freest appropriation. Purge thou me with that hyssop, and I shall be clean. I have pierced thee! Thou art pierced for me! Let me not only see, but feel, thy wounds. Let my bones be broken. Not otherwise would I now expect, or even welcome, any joy or gladness. It must not, it cannot, come through mere substitution on thy part, and mere immunity or impunity on my part. No. I accept the breaking of my bones. I consent to be crucified with thee. And only as one with thee in thy cross do I venture to look into thy face at thy table.

And not even thus, good Lord! thou blessed Jesus! the holy one of God! I dare not look into thy face, conscious as I am of uncleanness as well as guilt in thy sight! But thou thyself coverest my uncleanness, even as thou answerest for my guilt.

Now, therefore, leaning on thy breast at the supper, I venture to converse with thee, as to all that communion with thee on my part for which thy communion with me opens up the way! The joy of thy salvation I long to share. May I dare to aspire to a share in that joy as thine own joy in thine own salvation? Thou art permitting me to sit beside thee as thou puttest into my hands the symbols of that salvation. May I venture to see a smile of joy on thy face?—and to share in that joyous smile? May I have the joy of this salvation as thy salvation? May I rejoice in it not merely as designed and suited for me, but as meant for thee, and wrought out by thee;—not from my

point of view, but from thine;—not merely as good for me, but also and chiefly as glorifying to thee.

Oh! that it may be so, Lord Jesus! Oh! that I may thus have given or restored to me the joy of thy salvation! The joy of being one with thee in it! Not merely one with thee, as reaping the fruit and getting the benefit of it; but one with thee in its whole essence and spirit; one with thee through participation with thee in the entire process and self-crucifying love of its acceptance and its accomplishment! Then I may hope to be one with thee in thy liberty of spirit; in thy power and right to defy all the principalities of earth and hell; and thine unreserved and unembarrassed submission of thyself to the Father; whose service, from one truly his son as thou art, is indeed perfect freedom!

### **III.—ITS PURPOSE OF REPARATION**

Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee. Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation; and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness. O Lord, open thou my lips; and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise. -PSALM 51:13–15

THE conclusion of the Psalmist's inward penitential exercise of soul brings forward its connection with the outer world. He has been confessing his sin, without reserve or guile. He has been seeking a thorough cure for a deep disease. He has been considering his case in all the views of it which a spiritually awakened conscience can suggest. His sin is ever before him; as now really painful and offensive to himself. It is seen in the light of the glory of God; his

glory as—first, the sovereign Lord; secondly, the Holy One; and thirdly, the righteous Judge. Sin is rebellion against his sovereignty. It is loathsome in his sight. It is righteously judged and condemned. Nor is this all. In its source and essence, this sin is original; birth-born; natural; inherent in the fallen constitution which he inherits. In all these views of it, he is enabled to pray for deliverance. He asks to be purged, cleansed, quickened.

And now, with the restored joy of God's salvation, giving me the confidence of being upheld by a free spirit, I ask if anything can be done by me; if anything lies before me; that may prove my penitence for the past, and occupy my recovered strength of joy and liberty for service now? My own case might well engross, and must engross, my attention when I first awaken to a sense of what it really is; a case all but desperate; critical for weal or woe; and that for ever. But having spread out my case before God; and accepted his manner of dealing with it; I may now look more abroad. I have leisure now to think, in my new character, of the claims of my fellow men (ver. 13–15); and of my God (ver. 16, 17); and of his church (ver. 18, 19).

To the first of these particulars I confine this discourse.

I think of my fellow-sinners; my companions in crime and guilt. I would fain make some suitable amends to them. And what can be more appropriate in that view than the resolution, with reference to them, and all my fellow men,—“I will teach transgressors thy ways, and sinners shall be converted to thee” (ver. 13). This is, and should be,—it must be,—the immediate and instinctive purpose of one who has himself known the ways of God, so as to be himself converted to him. Can any one who has really been thus taught and thus changed, refrain from the cry,—“Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul?” Can he even be content with such audience, meet and few? Will he not, moved by his own experience, feel his heart burn within him for souls not fearing God; souls all but perishing? Have I been snatched as a brand from the burning? And can I resist the imperative impulse to sound a general

alarm? Have I discovered the hidden treasure; gained the pearl of great price? Can I fail to utter the ejaculation, given forth by the philosopher of old, on the solution of his problem, the discovery of his secret, "I have found it, I have found it"?

That is the force of the connecting particle here, "Then." It is not a condition or qualification of the promise or profession. It is not meant to make its fulfilment contingent on the previous prayers being consciously answered. It simply implies these two things—first, that it is only such experience of the Lord's gracious dealing with me personally, that can make it possible for me to enter upon any course of dealing, in like manner, personally, with any of my fellow-creatures and fellow-sinners around me; and secondly, that if I have experienced such personal dealing with me on the part of God, I cannot but try to bring it to bear on all within my reach.

But I am still hampered and straightened. Two considerations, or consciousnesses, embarrass me, and disconcert me. The first is that I am blood-guilty. How can I speak of God's righteousness? The second is that my lips are closed. How can I show forth God's praise?

## PART FIRST

As regards the first of these two causes of embarrassment, I am encouraged to pray for a full and complete remedy, "Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation."

This is the prayer of David. He had added murder to lust. And now, when he thought of becoming a teacher of others, by word or deed, by precept or example, a teacher of righteousness, the recollection of the blood which he had caused to flow might well unnerve and unhinge his soul. The cutting, sarcastic taunt, "Is Saul among the prophets?" was as nothing in comparison with the hollow whisper that might ring like a death-knell in David's ear, as, rising from their bloody graves, the victims of his cold cruelty, his martyred friend, his butchered host, might seem to point the slow finger of scorn,—as

each echoed the note of wonder and amazement,—Our murderer among the preachers! What a vision to haunt him! what a voice to paralyse him! whenever he undertakes or attempts to speak of holy things, or to lead a holy life, to live as a holy man! How can he meet the very glance of the eyes of those whose hearts he would fain win to God!

Possibly they may not be aware of all his guilt and all its aggravations. They may have been ignorant of the full extent of their Monarch's criminality. And when he comes before them as a teacher and pattern of righteousness, there may be none among them disposed or ready to cast in his teeth so foul a charge as bloodguiltiness. "Thou didst it secretly," is Nathan's word. But his own heart condemns and convicts him. And that is enough to disconcert him.

For it is not the fear of man's reproach that unnerves him, when he would be a preacher of righteousness; it is the misgiving of his own guilty conscience. Paul (Acts 22:18–21) felt and owned the first of these difficulties, when he ventured to plead with Christ, whom "he saw saying unto him; make haste and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem; for they will not receive thy testimony concerning me." With some natural reluctance, perhaps, he acquiesces. True, Lord! "They know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on thee. And when the blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting to his death." Like David, Paul felt that the guilt of blood, the blood of saints, was upon him; and that this might well disqualify him for bearing testimony for Christ; "teaching transgressors God's ways; that sinners might be converted to him."

In so far as the disqualification consisted in the prejudice which his former manner of life might raise against the new witness for the truth, suddenly improvised into a preacher of righteousness;—it is got over, in the case of Paul, by his large and wide mission, "He said to me, Depart, for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles." And

in David's case, the risk may be held to have been partially obviated by the prestige of his royal station and surroundings, and by his general character of godliness. But that is not the worst view of the disqualification. That is not what the repenting soul, longing to do good, finds it most difficult to get over. It is not the rumour or reputation of bloodguiltiness that the psalmist feels to be his chief hindrance. It is the blood-guiltiness itself that troubles him. It is his own sense of bloodguiltiness that paralyzes him. Even if his criminality is known to himself alone, and to God,—if all around him have been giving him credit for unblemished sanctity, or at least have been ascribing to him far less blame than he deserved; still, his own consciousness of the wrong which he has been doing, is enough to make his trumpet give a very vacillating and uncertain sound. Having the damning stain of blood-guiltiness upon his conscience, how can he teach transgressors God's ways, so that sinners may be converted unto him?

It is here and thus that the feeling of my offence, as committed against my fellow-men, comes in chiefly to distress me. In my first awakening, I dwell on the thought of my offence as being committed against God; against God only. He alone is the person entitled to deal with it; to resent it as an affront; to loathe it as offensive, and me on account of it; to judge and condemn me for its guilt. Then again, he alone can be asked to dispose of it; so as,—first, to condone it; secondly, to cancel and cover it, clothing me with his own righteousness, and making me a new creature; and thirdly, to put me on a right footing, as not cast away from his presence, but having his Holy Spirit. Thus far I am brought into contact with God alone. All else is ignored; all else, excepting only my relation to him, and my position in his sight. I have to transact with him alone; to be humbled, and to be reconciled. It is when I come to feel the impulse prompting me to go and tell my brethren what great things the Lord has done for me, that I am abruptly and sternly arrested by the withering and chilling thought of the offence I have given, the wrong I have done, to my generation. It is thus that I am made to realise the evil of my sin as affecting my power to do good.



For who am I that I should teach transgressors God's ways? I! A transgressor like them; a transgressor more than most, than all, than the very worst, of them! An adulterer; a murderer! What right have I to occupy high ground, and set myself up as their censor and reprover, or even as their teacher and example? I feel the inconsistency, the utter incongruity. I seem always to hear an upbraiding voice, to see a sarcastic taunting eye. I quail under it. I am tempted to be dumb; to suppress remonstrance, and consent to compromise. For it looks like a sort of impious absurdity that such a one as I should affect to be better than my neighbours; to teach them God's ways,—and seek their conversion to him,—with their blood on my head!

For that is the condition in which, even after forgiveness and renewal, a repenting sinner may feel himself to be. Even if I have met and been reconciled to my God, the sense of blood-guiltiness may make me afraid, or ashamed, to face my brethren. And that, too, although neither they, nor the world, can bring up against me any overt act. In my secret conscience there is blood upon me. And that is enough.

For I call to mind that terrible definition of blood-guiltiness; "Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer" (1 John 3:15). Whosoever hateth his brother; loveth him not as a brother; loveth not his neighbour, every man, with a brotherly love; a love that would fain have him as a brother, and treats him accordingly as a brother; a love which has a true regard to his soul as well as his body, his spiritual interests as well as his outward estate;—whosoever does not thus love every man as his brother; whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause; whosoever calls his brother Raca, or a fool, uses him as a worthless, perishable thing; not immortal, not redeemed; whosoever so acts, or so feels, is a murderer!

Is not that my case? Have I not thus wronged my neighbour; ministered to his sin; perhaps taken advantage of it? Have I not dealt with him as an alien rather than a brother; spoken to him, or acted

toward him, in an unbrotherly way; neglecting brotherly offices on his behalf? Have I not had intercourse with him on merely worldly considerations, without regard to his having, like myself, a Judge to call him to account, and a Redeemer able and willing to save? And is not all that blood-guiltiness?

How then, I may well ask, with what face am I to meet transgressors and sinners, so as to teach them thy ways, O Lord? I, who have blood, the blood of souls, upon my conscience? Guilty of such blood, how may I hold up my head, or open my mouth to speak for thee, O Lord? To speak for thee, it may be, to the very souls of whose blood I have been guilty? It is a terrible thought; fitted to daunt and disconcert the boldest!

Still, brother, let us not shrink from our duty.

For, first, even from blood-guiltiness our God delivers us. He is "the God of our salvation." The salvation which but now we thought of as his, when our prayer was, "Restore unto us the joy of thy salvation," we now claim as ours. And we make it the ground of our appeal to him for "deliverance from blood-guiltiness."

It is "thy salvation." I desire to look at it as such; to see it from thy point of view; and so to enter into thy joy, in its full accomplishment, to thy entire satisfaction. But when brought face to face with my blood-guiltiness, I lay hold of it as "my salvation." I look at it from my point of view. I apprehend it as suitable to me; as meant for me; meant to be appropriated by me as mine.

It is the salvation wrought out by the shedding of blood; in the shedding of which I have a part; for which I feel as if I alone were responsible.

That blood-guiltiness; my being thus the crucifier of the Lord of Glory; I confess and own. I am crucified with him. All the sin of the blood-guilty crime on Calvary, I take to myself. The blood-guiltiness of it all is now mine; accepted by me as mine. And thus accepted, it is

"my salvation." To the "God of my salvation;" mine through such acknowledged blood-guiltiness; I appeal for deliverance from all other blood-guiltiness. I face the very men whose blood I have shed; saved by the blood of him whom I have pierced.

Yes; I go among my fellows now as having my deepest blood-guiltiness answered and atoned for; even my concern in the shedding of the blood of God's dear Son. God is the God of my salvation. And saved by him, I can stand before my brethren. If he justifies, who can condemn? I may go forth among men with unabashed front, and speak with unfaltering tongue. Whatever they might allege against me, even to the extent of being guilty of their blood,—in whatever sense, literal or spiritual,—is answered for, cancelled, and disposed of, through a higher blood-shedding which washes all that guilt away. I appear before them on a new footing,—in a new character; delivered from blood-guiltiness; rejoicing in God's salvation as mine; rejoicing in him as the God of my salvation! Old things are passed away. The sense of my blood-guiltiness need embarrass me no more; for "God is my strength and my song, he also is become my salvation."

Then, secondly, as another reason for not shrinking from this duty, consider what it really is. It is to "sing aloud of God's righteousness."

It is not your own righteousness that you have to commend to transgressors, but the righteousness of God. It is that very righteousness of God through faith in which you yourself are delivered from blood-guiltiness, and God becomes to you the God of your salvation. Your complete justification in the sight of God,—the perfect righteousness in virtue of which you are justified,—with no concession of his supreme authority, his sovereignty and law, but, on the contrary, with the fullest vindication of all his just and holy claims,—places you on a high ground of advantage. You occupy, I repeat, a new position.

And as it is a position implying no compromise on God's part in his dealing with you, so also it is a position requiring no compromise on your part in your dealing with other men. You may "sing aloud of God's righteousness." You are no longer constrained to feel as if you had given them a handle against you; as if somehow you stood at their mercy, and could not venture to take too high a tone, or strike too strong a note. You might feel this if it were of your own righteousness that you were to testify, as that in which you stood yourself. But plant your foot on the righteousness of God, the God of your salvation; the saving righteousness which he has himself provided, in the person and work of his own beloved Son. Take your firm ground as being righteously accepted in the beloved. Then lay all hesitancy and false shame aside. Let no remembrance of former sin, nor any consciousness of unworthiness now, hamper or hinder you. Through grace you are emboldened and enabled to appear erect and fearless before God. The same grace will make you bold in the presence of men. Then fear not. Shun not to declare to all men the whole counsel of God. So in the end yours may be satisfaction of saying humbly with the greatest of persecutors, "I take you to record, I am pure from the blood of all."

## **PART SECOND**

But how may I sing aloud of God's righteousness? My lips are closed. This is a second source of embarrassment. Besides the sense of past blood-guiltiness, and even when that is got over, there remains the feeling that I really know not what to say. Fain would I teach transgressors God's ways, and be instrumental, by voice and walk, in converting sinners to him. But how to set about the good work is what perplexes me. It seems so difficult and delicate an affair. There are so many considerations of prudence and propriety to be taken into account; so many snares into which I may fall, or mistakes which I may commit; so much risk of doing more harm than good;—I am so sensitively alive to the charge of ostentation and hypocrisy, or the appearance of hypocrisy, and see so clearly how worldly friends may be offended by injudicious zeal and the unreasonable intrusion

of spiritual topics; I have such an impression of the sacredness of the ark of God, and such a shrinking dread of handling it, with the best intentions, unworthily or unwisely;—that I am rather disposed to keep silence, and leave it to more advanced Christians, experienced veterans, to vindicate God's ways, and rebuke men's sins, and win their souls!

Who has not been haunted with such scruples as these? Who would judge harshly the hesitation which they cause? Who would not rather sympathise with it? Who would not seek to have it overcome in himself,—and in some dear friend whose needless fear and trembling his own hesitation may be aggravating?

For alas! how much guilt is contracted, how much evil is done, how much good left undone, how much sin suffered in a brother, how many souls allowed to go on in the broad way, through professing Christians, and even true believers, yielding to such timid reasoning!

Ah! what urgent need is there of the prayer, "Open thou my lips?" For if the lips be once opened, "the mouth will show forth God's praise."

It is the first step that really costs effort. If a beginning is made, all is gained. If only, by the Spirit given in answer to that prayer of faith, you get over the shyness, the awkwardness, of a first trial, or of two,—if only you break the ice, and force yourself to let your lips be unsealed,—you will soon find that there really are no such formidable difficulties in the way as you were apt to anticipate; that it is not so hard a task after all to show forth God's praise.

For may you not, in this connection, appropriate the command and promise of our Lord himself;—"Take no thought how or what ye shall speak; for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak; for it is not you that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you" (Matt. 10:19).

You may confidently plead this promise, not only when you shall be brought before governors and kings for Christ's sake, to testify of him; but wherever you are; before whatever audience you are brought; in whatever circumstances and in whatever company you find yourself; if only you are honestly and in good faith there, for Christ's sake, to testify of him. Your Father, who is also his Father, will not withhold or take away from you his Spirit. The Spirit of the Father will be in you when you speak of and for the Son. He is in you as the spirit of supplications, making intercession for you inwardly with those groanings of yours which you cannot utter, but which he turns into prayers. And he is in you, the same spirit of your Father, witnessing in and through and with you for Christ; nerving your stammering tongue, and "giving you a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay or resist."

Settle it therefore in your hearts not to "meditate beforehand what ye shall answer; what ye shall say." Take no thought, be not anxious or concerned, about how or what you shall speak. Plead the Lord's promise when you pray to him, "Open thou my lips." Proceed upon the faith of its being fulfilled in testifying for him. You may cast all this care upon the Lord. He will care for you. The cause you advocate is his. The end you seek is his glory. He will not,—for his own name's sake he will not,—leave you to yourself, or suffer you to be at a loss. Out of the abundance of the heart in which his spirit is moving, the mouth will speak freely.

Let but the lips be opened. Speak out, act out, frankly, honestly, manfully, what is, so to say, on the tip of your tongue. Obey the promptings, the suggestions, the impulses, of the spirit of your Father speaking in you. "Open thou my lips," O my Father!

For again I say that is what you really and chiefly need; not that you should be enabled to speak wisely, but that you should be moved to speak at all; to say something, to say anything, for Christ to souls.

You may conjure up reasons for caution. You may affect to be afraid of committing yourself, or committing the good cause, by professing more than you can hope to realise. You may have real anxiety lest your shortcomings and inconsistencies, if you say too much, or aim too high, should discredit your sincerity and give occasion of reproach against that worthy name by which you are called. But beware of unbelief; of prayerless unbelief. Let none of these sources of apprehension influence you. The Lord will charge himself with the care of them all. Trust him. Pray in faith, "Open thou my lips." O Lord, "Open thou my lips!"

But having so prayed in faith, be very sure that, with singleness of eye, you pay your vow, and fulfil your resolution;—"My mouth shall show forth thy praise." For there is a subtle and dangerous snare here.

One of the first fruits of the opening of my lips may be such a sense of new power, new facility, new enlargement, new success, in showing forth God's praise, as may be dangerous to the cultivation of a meek and quiet spirit; apt to puff me up; and let in doubtful motives and suggest doubtful methods. After a first, or second, or twelfth experiment, perhaps, I find myself inspired with fresh ability and energy; able to speak out on religious matters with a fluency, and force, and fervour, not hitherto experienced. I have less fear of the face of man, and less regard for adverse human criticism or opinion. My mouth sings aloud; showing forth God's praise.

But let me beware! The tendency to have regard to my own credit and character; my reputation and influence; is very strong. Is it really God's praise that, with the very lips which he has opened, I desire to show forth, and am, with his help, showing forth? May I not be tempted to use, almost unconsciously, my new-born, new-implanted, gift of free and fearless speech on sacred subjects, in a spirit of ostentation; or of rude intolerance; or of unseemly defiance of customary etiquette?

By all means, beware of any such unnecessary insults to society. But be not too much afraid of the imputation of them.

I do not ask you to go against your nature in your way of teaching transgressors God's ways, and showing forth his praise. On the contrary, your whole power and influence must depend on its being your natural way; whatever it may be. There are differences of individual temperament, as there are differences of national temperament, in the department of religious experience and its expression.

Our Scottish type of personal Christianity, for instance, may be charged with a certain costiveness and secretiveness, unfavourable to such a flow of genial confidence and mutual brotherly unbosoming, as is not uncommon among Christians in warmer climes, and under warmer influences. One would not like to see our national habit of reverential reserve rudely invaded; nor the freer outcome of sentiment and sensibility in other developments of evangelical experience elsewhere coldly quenched. Let both work together, helping one another, if only the joint "mouth is showing forth the praise of God."

So also, as regards individual believers. The opening of the lips must be the same for all and in all. But the manner of the mouth's showing forth God's praise may be indefinitely varied. Constitution and circumstances, temper, time, talents, opportunities; all must be taken into the reckoning. No martinet or formal rule can be laid down. None may prescribe to his brother. None may judge his brother. Every one acts for himself. Only let every one,—all the more for this discretionary allowance,—be sure that his eye is single; that when he offers the prayer, "Open thou my lips," and awaits the reply, it is really that "his mouth may show forth God's praise." Let him be purged of malice and partial counsel. Let him be conscious of no personal considerations creeping in upon him. Then, let him be "strong in faith, giving glory to God."



Once more, therefore, in closing, let me return to the prayer, "Open thou my lips." Let me beseech you again and again so to pray. And do as you pray. Act according to your prayer, and in terms of your prayer. For it is a precept as well as a prayer. You must take it to be so if you believe that God hears and answers it.

Then open ye your own lips; at once; now; this very day. Wait not for any sign, or any impulse; any favourable opportunity; any pressing call. Begin now. Let some friend, or neighbour, hear you, ere the sun goes down, speaking a word in season; a word of admonition; a word of comfort; telling something of what the Lord is doing for your soul, and of his willingness to do the same for theirs. I call upon you thus to prove the earnestness of your repentance, and the strength of your resolution.

And turning now to those here who must be conscious of their being still transgressors, still sinners; still unpardoned and unrenewed; impenitent and unbelieving. Fain would I speak to you; not authoritatively, from the elevation of this chair; but affectionately, from the deep self-abasement of my own experience. Fain would I appeal to you, as myself a transgressor, a sinner; scarcely saved, by richest, freest grace; by special miracle of mercy, as it were. Fain would I thus, as not above you, but among you, one of yourselves, tell you of God's ways; his ways of dealing with me; and also, dear friends, with you;—his bearing long with us; his waiting long for us; his plying us with all faithful warnings, and tender expostulations, and loving calls; his graciously receiving us, his not upbraiding us; his casting all our sins behind his back; his giving us his own blessed Spirit. Beloved brethren, hear his own voice,—"Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die."

## IV.—ITS PRESENT SACRIFICE AND FINAL PROSPECT

For thou desirest not sacrifice, else would I give it; thou delightest not in burnt-offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise. Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion: build thou the walls of Jerusalem. Then shalt thou be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt-offering, and whole burnt-offering: then shall they offer bullocks upon thine altar. - PSALM 51:16-19

THE first impulse of the restored penitent, when the case as between him and his God is settled, is to go forth from his closet, the secret place of his God,—where the covenant of peace through atoning blood has been ratified as a personal transaction,—and tell what great things the Lord has done. That should and must be your immediate instinct. Many motives may prompt such action. You long to give vent to your emotions; and it is a relief to you to impart to others your sorrows and your joys; your late dismal fears, and your present blessed hopes. There is pleasure also in the communication of good tidings. And surely there is an earnest and eager desire to save the lost. For you cannot, if you are yourselves taken from the horrible pit, look with indifference on the state of your companions who are still sinking unconsciously in its miry clay.

But over and above all these, there is a paramount consideration. It is the conviction that you owe it to the "God of your salvation," to "show forth his praise."

This last consideration suggests the question, whether you may not, in some more direct way, testify your gratitude. True, you are assured that, while he has been resenting the wrong done to your fellow-men as an offence against himself, he is also willing, on the same principle, to accept what you do in the way of reparation; on

the principle, I mean, of his final award in the day of judgment,—"Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." Still, the longing inquiry of love returns. Can I do nothing in a less circuitous way to please God or to praise God?

## PART FIRST

The first answer is generally, that there are "sacrifices of God;" sacrifices directly offered to him; and accepted by him. "Thou desirest not sacrifice, else would I give it; thou delightest not in burnt-offering." Sacrifice and burnt-offering of an expiatory kind is indeed superseded; desired, delighted in; never chiefly; now not at all. Still there are sacrifices of God. These are sacrifices of thanksgiving and praise; not sacrifices presented with a view to atonement and reconciliation; but sacrifices proceeding on the faith and in the assurance of atonement already accomplished, and reconciliation now secured. God has such sacrifices. They are distinctively "his sacrifices."

In one view they are manifold. Some of them are described, especially in the New Testament. I point to two passages.

There is, in the first place, the fundamental passage,—"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service" (Rom. 12:1). The material of the sacrifice is here said to be your bodies; yourselves, as presented to God; living and holy; living in Christ's life, holy as partaking of Christ's holiness; and therefore acceptable unto God, and, on your part, a reasonable service.

There is, secondly, the outcome, or working out of that fundamental thought,—"By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually; that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to his name; but to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such

sacrifices God is well pleased" (Hebrews 13:15, 16). On the footing, and in the faith, of Christ's one great atoning sacrifice, by which he "sanctified the people, suffering without the gate," we are to offer continually the sacrifice of praise; consisting, first, of the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to his name; teaching transgressors his ways, and with our mouths showing forth his praise; and, secondly, of doing good and communicating; for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.

Similar sacrifices of thanksgiving are recognised in the Old Testament; as, for instance, in the fiftieth Psalm; "paying our vows to the Lord; and calling upon him in the time of trouble" (ver. 14, 15).

Here, all these sacrifices of God are reduced to one. "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit."

To the soul coming out of the dark and deep despair of bloodguiltiness into the light of God's salvation; but yet still having his sin ever before him; this merging of the plural in the singular is indeed most welcome;—"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O Lord, thou wilt not despise." For indeed what else has he to offer? He feels that it is for him, and in his circumstances, the one only sacrifice. Let us look at it accordingly, in the light of the experience with which it stands connected.

A broken spirit! A broken and a contrite heart! I am at once carried back to the prayer, that "the bones which God hath broken may rejoice" (ver. 8). It is broken bones there. It is a broken spirit,—a broken and a contrite heart,—here. The meaning I take to be the same. And the lesson I gather is this: that the brokenness is a continuous affection, so to speak; a state of mind and feeling persistently pervading all really spiritual soul exercise,—from first to last.

It is the underswell of ocean, settling itself after a storm into a great calm; and so lengthening out the calm. It is the sad and solemn note

of a prolonged minor strain of subdued melody, accompanying, and as it were, hallowing, the louder and more varied music which it subdues.

All through this penitential exercise of soul, the idea of brokenness of bones, of spirit, of heart, runs. It underlies the whole experience. It is not destructive of the graciousness and gladness of that experience, as an experience of purging with hyssop, and of a new creation; of a clean heart and a right spirit. It is not inconsistent or incompatible with joy and gladness; with rejoicing; with the sense of God's presence, and the joy of his salvation, and a free spirit upheld by his Holy Spirit. Nay, it is at the root, and of the essence, of all that.

It is like what good king Hezekiah felt, when, upon his providential and miraculous recovery from his sickness, and the promised prolongation of his life, he said, "I shall go softly all my years, in the bitterness of my soul" (Is. 38:15). It would have been well for him if he had been able to keep that resolution. But alas! he forgot it, or failed to fulfil it. The crafty message from the king of Babylon,—ostensibly volunteered to congratulate him on the restoration of his health, but really meant to serve a deeper purpose, and spy the resources of the country,—seduced the unwary monarch into such a vainglorious display of his magnificence and wealth as could not fail to whet the appetite for plunder in the rising potentate of the east. And so the way was prepared for that invasion of Judah which ere long resulted in the years of exile by Babel's streams. Would that Hezekiah had held by the first purpose of his penitential and trembling thanksgiving, "I shall go softly all my days, in the bitterness of my soul!"

David, as it would seem, by God's grace, continues to realise, even under an experience of great comfort and revival, the deep original consciousness and conviction of the intimate connection between the "breaking of his bones" and their "rejoicing."

For the connection here is not one of sequence merely. It is not that the bones are first broken; and then, the breaking being over, they rejoice. Their being broken might thus issue in their rejoicing; having that as its native and proper fruit. But it might be simply as standing in the relation of a cause to an effect; the cause ceasing to act or operate when the effect is produced. That, however, is not the bond of union here. These are not two separate states or experiences. The breaking of the bones is prolonged, continuous, uninterrupted, and unending; going on simultaneously with their rejoicing; being, indeed, all throughout the condition of their rejoicing. The two processes go on together as one; so long as there are bones to be broken and to rejoice.

For this breaking of the bones is not like an abrupt agony of alarm, or sudden paroxysm of remorse; which, violent for a time, exhausts itself, and passes off when the crisis is over. Nor is the joy in which it issues like "the laughter of fools, which is as the crackling of thorns under a pot." It is not a mere hilarious and exuberant outburst of gladness, as transient as it is wild. It cannot be. For it is Christ's own joy; the joy which he has in his own salvation; in its accomplishment, and in its blessed fruits, so glorifying to his Father, so rich in grace for his people. "That my joy might remain in you and that your joy might be full," is his desire and prayer on your behalf. It is a full joy; but calm and deep, and therefore constant. It is the joy of receiving out of his fulness of grace and truth. It is the joy of sympathy with him as he "sees his seed." It is your entering into his rejoicing in the Spirit when he said, "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and of earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight." Such joy is consistent with a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart. That is indeed inseparable from it, and is a part of it. And therefore the free spirit of a believing penitent may be, as Paul speaks, "sorrowful, yet always rejoicing;" sorrowful always, but yet rejoicing always.

I say emphatically, the free spirit of a believing and repenting soul. For it is only as having the joy of the Lord's salvation restored to you, and as being thereby upheld in a free spirit, that you can have such sacrifices, or such a sacrifice, to present; and can so present it as to be sure that it will not be despised but welcomed. There is a sphere in which such sacrifices can have no place. If it is the question of your acceptance in the sight of God that is to be settled, there is no more efficacy in a broken spirit to take away sin than there is in the blood of bulls and of goats. And if the contrite heart is presented as a plea for pardon, it will most assuredly be despised.

Plainly, however, I repeat, it is not sacrifices with a view to reconciliation that are here meant, but sacrifices proceeding on the footing of reconciliation, through faith in the one great sacrifice of propitiation. In truth, there can be no such thing as a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart, if it is made the condition, or the preliminary, of peace with God. The free remission of sin, through the sprinkling with hyssop of the blood of atonement, is essential to the genuineness of that blessed grace. Without that free remission of sin, what kind of contrition can there be? Abject, and servile humiliation there may be perhaps; or desperate self-mortification and laboured prostration of soul and body; like the cowardly crouching of a guilty slave, smarting or trembling under the rod, and begging in whining groans indulgence from his tyrant. But at bottom, there will be pride still; and bitter hatred and resentment; and a sullen sense of degradation. The very necessity of such mean and unmanly abasement will irritate and fret the hard and haughty spirit, the yet unsubdued heart. It is when you experience the fatherly love of God, as in his Son Jesus Christ he opens to you his great fatherly heart, and by his gracious Spirit draws you to himself; when he sees you afar off, and runs to meet you, and without one word of upbraiding or look of reproach, takes you into his arms, and clasps you in his embrace, and falls upon your neck, and kisses you; it is then that the heart is truly broken, and the spirit becomes contrite. And then it is a sacrifice worthy of a recovered child; acceptable to a reconciled and reconciling Father.

"I will establish unto thee an everlasting covenant. Then thou shalt remember thy ways and be ashamed; thou shalt know that I am the Lord; that thou mayest remember and be confounded, and never open thy mouth any more because of thy shame, when I am pacified toward thee for all that thou hast done, saith the Lord God."

It is, indeed, a humble sacrifice; a sacrifice which none but one thoroughly and spiritually humbled will be disposed to offer as "the sacrifice of God," or will be apt to think that "God will not despise." The natural mind, impatient of subjection to God, especially of subjection unconditional and unreserved, would rather present gifts of such a sort as may be numbered and weighed and measured; so as to be, in some more or less ascertainable scale, made available for striking a balance of accounts, and effecting a settlement, by compromise, of God's claims upon us, and our obligations and responsibilities to him. For such an end, outward acts and tangible forms and observances are evidently and eminently suitable. They may be calculated and reckoned up, and set off against faults and failings; so that what God requires may be paid off, as it were, at once, or at least by definite instalments; and credit may be taken for what is done or what is given. Even really good words and good works may thus come to be regarded by us as sacrifices profitable and acceptable to our God. Our teaching transgressors his ways; our tongue singing aloud of his righteousness; our mouth showing forth his praise; even that may become a sacrifice,—if it is relied on as recommending us to God or satisfying ourselves,—such as God desires not, and does not delight in.

To put, instead of all such outward acts, an inward habit; instead of external and formal doings, a spiritual disposition, as alone well-pleasing to God; is to disconcert the entire scheme of self-righteousness. It cuts up by the root every plea of self-justification. Especially it does so, if that habit, that disposition, is humility of soul; brokenness of spirit; brokenness and contrition of heart; the relenting of a subdued and softened son towards a generous and gracious father. That is a kind of sacrifice which none but one resting



on free grace will be pleased to offer, or will believe that God can be pleased to accept. To others it may appear unworthy, and such as only to be despised. But to you who feel the love of God in his special and close dealing with your own souls—to you who, being forgiven much, love much, it must become day by day, more and more, a blessed exercise and closet discipline of conscience and memory, quickened by that love,—to find out, to be ever more and more finding out, how much has been and is forgiven you, that you may love the more, and see the more cause for loving. So you will long and strive to have your spirit more broken and your heart more contrite. For your desire is, that having nothing else to offer in the way of a sacrifice of thanksgiving to God, you may offer that at least guilelessly, whole and entire.

## PART SECOND

Under all this deeply personal experience of the Lord's dealing with your own soul, you are enabled to connect your individual case with wider prospects and vaster results;—"Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion; build thou the walls of Jerusalem; then shalt thou be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt-offering and whole burnt-offering; then shall they offer bullocks upon thine altar."

The Psalmist, being a prophet, sees in his own experience that of the Church down to the end of time. His broken bones, his broken spirit, his broken and contrite heart, symbolise to him God's displeasure against Zion, and the overthrow of Jerusalem's walls; as well as good to be done to Zion in God's restored good pleasure, and the favourable rebuilding of Jerusalem's ruined ramparts. And his own restored joy, in the experience of God's salvation, is to him a bright foretaste and anticipation of the universal jubilee of the completed Church.

What may be the manner of keeping this jubilee, I am not able to say, nor careful to inquire. Some have made the text one of the grounds of their belief that at the second coming of Christ, which they hold to be

premillennial, there is to be a revival of the Levitical ritual, with all its ceremonial observances, evangelised and spiritualised; just as others have inferred from the terms of the prayer, "Build thou the walls of Jerusalem," that the whole psalm must be relegated, for its date, to the Babylonian captivity. Surely it is not needful to resort to such ultra-literal interpretations. The spiritual relevancy of the prayer, as fitting into the Psalmist's present frame of mind, and in view of his prophetic insight and foresight, is sufficiently clear.

In his own broken bones, I say again, he sees and feels the breaking down of the walls of Jerusalem. In his own broken spirit, his broken and contrite heart, he realises what Zechariah more clearly foretold: "I will pour upon the house of David and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem the spirit of grace and of supplications; and they shall look on him whom they have pierced; and they shall mourn for him." And in his own broken bones rejoicing; in the clean heart created in him and the right spirit renewed within him; in the restored joy of God's salvation, and in the liberty and enlargement of his mouth showing forth God's praise;—he anticipates, with liveliest sympathy, under old phraseology, the song that celebrates the consummation of the entire gospel dispensation, "Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb."

"Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion." I have done her grievous wrong. I have shaken the faith of her children, and given occasion to her adversaries to speak reproachfully. My shameful sin, my sad fall, has hurt many a tender conscience, and proved a snare to many an unstable soul. It has caused many to hang their heads and falter in their walk. It has opened the mouth of scandal, encouraging the sceptic in his distrust of all truth, and the scoffer in his contempt for all piety. Undo, Lord, the evil I have done. Let not thy people suffer damage for my fault. "Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion."

"Build thou the walls of Jerusalem." I have given them a rude and terrible shock. I have brought lust and bloodshed into the royal palace. Thou hast said that the sword shall never depart from my

house; and thou hast made me see a dark picture of domestic profligacy and crime along the line of my posterity. Nor is it merely my own position, and that of my children after me, that I have put in peril. I have weakened the hold which the chosen nation has of thee, and of thy covenant with our father Abraham. I have exposed them to thy righteous judgment and the visitations of thy wrath. I have shaken the throne and the kingdom. I feel as if already the foundations were destroyed, and the ramparts of the holy city were tottering to their ruin. I cannot arrest the tide which I have let in, and which may ere long prostrate all this goodly structure in the dust. I cannot recall the past. All my tears of godly sorrow, all my holy lessons, all my songs of praise, can avail little to avert the impending crash and crisis. "But build thou the walls of Jerusalem." Turn thou the captivity of thy people. Take thou thine own work into thine own hands. Plead thou thine own cause. Let "the man whose name is the BRANCH grow up out of his place." He "shall build the temple of the Lord." Let this be thy word to that Zerubbabel, "Not by might, not by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts."

"Who art thou, O great mountain," standing in the way, and hindering my servant's triumphant progress? Who indeed is it? I tremble as I rejoice. Lord, is it I? Is it I, the backslider? I the unfaithful professor? I the unsteadfast believer? Is it I, with my lips closed and my mouth shut and silent? Is it thou, O barren fig-tree in the garden, fit only to be cursed? Is it thou, O Prince of darkness, to whom and to whose legions my sin, and such sins as mine, have given so ill-omened an advantage? Who art thou? I cannot cope with thee. But whoever and whatever thou art, O great mountain, "before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain." Thou shalt be cut down. Thou shalt wither. Thou shalt cease to withstand; with thine own consent;—O let it be so!—if not, by God's strong hand carrying thee away. Before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain. He shall build the walls of Jerusalem. "He shall bring forth the headstone of the temple with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it."

Then shalt thou, O Lord of heaven and earth, who art his God and Father, and ours in him—then "shalt thou be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt-offering and whole burnt-offering. Then shall they offer bullocks upon thine altar."

In closing, let me offer two observations.

I. How instructive is the view here given of the place which the Church should occupy in the view of a spiritual man. It is not through the Church that he reaches God; it is, on the contrary, through God that he reaches the Church. When the sinner, the backslider, is spiritually awakened, it is with God—with God directly and immediately—with God alone, that he has to deal. And he has to deal with him personally, in an individual capacity. No Church interposes between him and the Searcher of hearts. No Church may intercept his approach to the throne of God, or God's sovereign appeal to his conscience. The Church cannot stand between me and my God, to answer for my guilt, to make my peace. Alone, and face to face, I meet him; I, a miserable offender, meet him, my Maker, my Lord, my Judge, my Saviour. The transaction is exclusively between him alone and me alone. Before him I stand, charged with sin against him only. From him only I hear the voice, "I have put away thy sin." In this settlement of the great controversy which God has with me, I have no concern with the Church, nor the Church with me. I have no eye for any third party. God; God in Christ; accusing, convicting, acquitting, saving; God is all in all. In truth, it is this very settlement of the controversy personally, by God himself alone, which brings me into contact with the Church, and moves me to feel an interest in its prosperity. And whereas too often the Church would have men to deal with God as if God was hers, the Psalmist's method is the very reverse He cares for the Church, because the Church is God's.

For look again at the progress of this spiritual exercise of soul. First, as an individual, I am roused to a consideration of my state before God, and in the sight of God. I remember God, and am troubled. Again, I believe in God, and find rest. Impelled by what I have myself

seen and tasted of the loving-kindness of the Lord, I feel an irresistible call to go and tell all my friends and neighbours. Still it is as an individual—nay, it is as if I were the only individual in all the world who had made the glorious discovery, and heard the joyful sound. The case of my fellow-sinners perishing around me moves me to teach them God's ways, that they may be converted to him; and the honour of my God, now dear to me, demands that I should show forth his praise. I would fain have suitable sacrifices, worthy offerings, presented in abundance to him. But I, a single, isolated sinner, saved myself by grace, sinning still, and needing grace more and more, what can I give but this broken spirit of mine, this broken and contrite heart? Ah! here comes in the welcome thought that God has a Church, an elect and holy Church, in which he is to be suitably and worthily glorified. The whole world is lying in wickedness; and I, what can I do? I said that I would teach transgressors, and convert sinners. Alas! I am stained with blood, and I am slow of speech. My testimony, how feeble and uncertain! And who receives my message? who believes my report? Is the prospect, then, all dark and dreary? Is there no adequate service and sacrifice of praise yet to be found on earth for my God? Let me think of Zion; let me remember Jerusalem. There God has placed the honour of his name. There he will gather trophies and be crowned with glory manifold. The Redeemer shall see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied. "When the Lord shall build up Zion, he shall appear in his glory."

II. Observe how the deeply exercised soul is fitted for divine service; being first, warmed and excited; then secondly, subdued and chastened; and thirdly, elevated and enlarged.

The impulse prompting him, under the sense of his own narrow escape, to tell what the Lord has done, might become a sort of blind enthusiasm; high minded, but scarcely safe; were it not for its being blended with the humbling apprehension of his own continual and increasing indebtedness to grace, and the impossibility of his ever having anything but broken bones to give to God. While that conviction again might become almost too depressing, were it not

that he is enabled to enter with lively sympathy into the vast design of God as unfolded in the history and prospects of his universal Church. But when compacted and welded together,—these three becoming one,—they form the one holy principle of Christian duty, zeal, and love. It is a principle having all the intensity of personal feeling; for it springs from the deep source of personal experience. I speak because I believe. I believe and therefore speak. It is a principle having all the sobriety, simplicity, and chastened earnestness, of the most child-like submission, the most entire and absolute self-renunciation; for it flows continually through the channel of a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart, ever realising its own emptiness and dependence. It is a principle, finally, having all the enlargement and elevation of the divine love itself; for it grasps the mighty plan of God in all its comprehensive fulness of grace and glory. Springing up in your own bosom, out of your own personal experience, it rises to the bosom of God, and becomes associated, united, identified with his eternal purpose! Your aim and his are now the same. Your desire and his are now the same. Your hope and his are now the same. You and he alike, you and he together, find satisfaction in the prospect of that blessed day, when "incense and a pure offering shall be offered unto his name, from the rising of the sun even to the going down of the same."

THE END

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