

Gospel Fear

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or

*The Heart Trembling at the Word of God
Evidences a Blessed Frame of Spirit*

*Delivered in Several Sermons from
Isaiah 66:2 and 2 Kings 22:19*

Jeremiah Burroughs

Edited by Don Kistler



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Gospel Fear

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AN INTRODUCTION TO THE
20TH CENTURY EDITION OF

Gospel Fear

Jeremiah Burroughs (1599–1646) was a man who exemplified, in a remarkable way, the strengths of the Puritan movement in the first half of the seventeenth century. He received his training at Emmanuel College in Cambridge, a veritable beehive of Puritanism. He graduated M. A. in 1624.

After a period of activity in the rectory of Tivetshall, the policies of Bishop Wren and Archbishop Laud were so oppressive that he took the road to exile in 1637 and became “teacher” to an English congregation, where his fame as a preacher grew. When the “Long Parliament” was constituted, it was safe for Burroughs to return to England (1641), and he entered a preaching ministry to two of the largest congregations about London, Stepney and Cripplegate. He was nominated to the Westminster Assembly of Divines, and there was an eloquent but gracious representative of the Independent minority. His name appears with those of Thomas Goodwin, Philip Nye, Sydrach Simpson, and William Bridge as the authors of the *Apologetic Narration* (1643), a vigorous pamphlet airing out the controversy between Presbyterians and Independents in the Assembly. Richard Baxter is quoted as saying that if all Presbyterians had been like Stephen Marshall and all Independents like Jeremiah Burroughs, their differences might have been easily composed. In fact, the last treatise that he published was *Irenicum, to the Lovers of Truth and Peace, Heart-divisions Opened in the Causes and Evils of Men* (London, 1646). This title was reprinted by Soli Deo Gloria.

Jeremiah Burroughs died of consumptive illness on November 14, 1646. In the introduction to the present work, Thomas Brooks calls him a “prince of preachers.” As such he was invited to preach before the Commons (September 7, 1641 and August 26, 1646) and the House of Peers (November 16, 1645). Apart from a few polemic pieces, his works are almost entirely sermons which constitute veritable treatises on the subjects preached.

They had an immense success in the 17th century, several of them appearing in multiple editions (as high as ten for *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment*) before 1700. They have become very rare, indeed.

After 1646, all publications were issued posthumously by friends of Burroughs who desired to make his sermons available to posterity. We may note particularly the group of Thomas Goodwin, William Green-hill, Sydrach Simpson, Philip Nye, William Bridge, John Yates, and William Adderly, who started with a plan for three volumes, later extended it to six, and finally issued no less than sixteen!

This treatise of Burroughs, first printed 28 years after his death, is extremely scarce. Many of the world’s great libraries do not have a copy of it. It is a great service to the Christian public that it should now appear in rejuvenated form. May God use it to cause many to tremble aright at the Word of God.

Roger Nicole
Orlando, Florida
June, 1991

TO THE CHRISTIAN READER

*T*hese following sermons are the labors of that prince of preachers, Mr. Jeremiah Burroughs, who is now a shining sun in that upper world; but they that are taken out of the valley of Baca and carried up by troops of glorious angels into the highest heaven stand in no need of the praises of men, having the fruition of the eternal God; and therefore, I shall wheel about to these choice sermons that are here presented to your eyes. In the first three, you will find this great and glorious truth (that a heart trembling at God's Word is very precious in God's eyes) clearly opened, fully proven, and sweetly and faithfully improved so that, by a blessing from on high, it may contribute greatly to the internal and eternal welfare of your precious and immortal soul. Concerning the Word, premise with me that in these six following instances the Word is taken in the blessed Scriptures (1) by the Word is sometimes meant the whole Scriptures, Old and New Testament; (2) by the Word is meant our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the Spirit, life, and soul of the Word (John 1); (3) by the Word is sometimes meant the commands of the Word (Hebrews 1); (4) by the Word is sometimes meant the threatenings of God; (5) by the Word is sometimes meant the precious promises, as in Psalm 119:49: "Remember the Word unto thy servant, upon which Thou hast caused me to hope." God is not unrighteous to forget, yet we must as His remembrancers put His promises in suit; (6) and by the Word is sometimes meant those holy prophecies which are scattered up and down in the Scriptures (Jude 14). The Word thus considered occasioned one Baldufgar, a famous minister in Germany, to say, "Let the Word of the Lord come, let it

come. We will submit to it if we had many hundred necks to put under it.”

The design of the worthy author in this little piece is to win and work the reader to submit to the Word, to be guided by the Word, and to live out the Word in a conduct becoming the gospel. The Jewish Rabbis were wont to say that upon every letter of the law there hangs mountains of profitable matter. I am sure in the following discourse you will find mountains of heavenly matter hanging upon all the main particulars that this blessed author offers to your serious consideration in this small treatise. Here you have Homer's *Iliad* in a nutshell, much choice matter in a little room. It is said of Caesar that “he had greater care for his books than for his royal robes,” for swimming through the waters to escape his enemies he carried his books in his hand above the waters, but lost his robes. But what are Caesar's books to God's books, or to this little book that is now put into your hand? Surely the Word of the Lord is very sweet to all those gracious souls who make conscience of trembling at it. Luther said he could not live in paradise without the Word, but with the Word he could live in hell itself. The philosopher gave thanks that he was born in the time of the true philosophy. Ah, how happy are we who are born in such a time wherein the Lord pours forth His spirit, not by drops as in the time of the Law, but showers down His gifts and graces, as was most evident in the author of this following piece, not only the “Day-Star,” but the Sun of Righteousness was risen upon that people who once had the happiness to sit under the author's ministry. Neither is it a small part of this world's happiness that they are blessed with his most excellent labors to this very day. One cannot say of any divine thing that it is his own property till it is in his heart. I can say of a bird that 'tis my own when in my hand, but I cannot say God is mine till in my heart, or that Christ is mine till in my heart, or that the Spirit is mine

till in my heart, or that grace is mine till in my heart, or that the Word is mine till in my heart. "I have kept thy Word in my heart, that I may not sin against Thee," said David in Psalm 119:11. Therefore, reader, it highly concerns you to get that Word into your heart that is here presented to your eye. Ah, Christians, your hearts are never in so good a frame, so safe a frame, so sweet a frame, so happy a frame, so gospel a frame as when they are in a trembling frame; and therefore make this little piece your delightful companion until your hearts are brought into such a blessed frame.

OBJECTION. But may not reprobates and devils tremble at the Word? Did not Belshazzar tremble at the handwriting? Did not Felix tremble at the Word preached by Paul? And is it not said that the devils believe and tremble?

ANSWER. Wicked men and devils may tremble at the judgments denounced in the Word but they do not tremble at the offense committed against the Holy commandments of God as sincere Christians do. In Ezra 10:3 Shecaniah said, "We have trespassed against our God, let us make a covenant with our God according to the counsel of my Lord of those that tremble at the commandments of God." The commandments revealing their sin, they tremble who before were hardened in their practice of marrying with the Canaanites; but we hear nothing, we find nothing of this in Belshazzar, Felix, or the devils.

But, second, I answer that the wicked tremble but never mend their ways. Pharaoh trembles but never mends. Saul trembles but never mends. Belshazzar trembles but never mends. Felix trembles but never mends, and devils tremble but never mend. But Paul trembles and cries out, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" And the jailor trembles and cries out, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

But, third, the trembling of the wicked drives them further and further away from God and away from duty. You see this in Saul who, under his tremblings, runs to a witch; but gracious tremblings draw the soul nearer and nearer to God, as you see in Jehoshaphat, who feared and set himself to seek the Lord, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah. The saints, under all their holy tremblings, follow after God as the people followed after Saul's trembling.

But, fourth, the godly tremble and mourn and tremble. Their trembling hearts are broken hearts, and their broken hearts are trembling hearts. They look upon sin and tremble, and they look upon sin and mourn. Jeremiah 13:17: "But if ye will not hear it, my soul shall weep in secret places for your pride, and mine eyes shall weep sore and run down with tears." The wicked tremble, but under all their tremblings their hearts are as dry and hard as rocks, yea, harder than the very rocks. Jeremiah 5:3: "They have made their faces harder than a rock, they have refused to return." Pharaoh trembled but yet was hardened; the devils tremble but yet are hardened. If one penitent tear could purchase heaven, hell could not afford that tear. Repenting tears are precious. They are, said Gregory, the fat of the sacrifice and, as Basil said, the medicine of the soul, and, as Bernard said, the wine of angels. But these are only to be found among those choice souls who make conscience of trembling at God's Word, and who enjoy that choice tenderness of heart that is in this little treatise drawn to the life. Verily we cannot meet on this side of hell with a worse temper of spirit than that which inclines a sinner to drop counterfeit tears, to despise the forbearance of God, and to kick against the bowels of His goodness, as that profane Arian did who was executed at Harwich, concerning whom Mr. Greenham acquaints us with this strange and prodigious narration:

This hellish heretic (for so were the deniers of Christ's divinity accounted of in those days, whatever thoughts men have of them now), a little before he was executed, afforded a few whorish tears, asking whether he might be saved by Christ or not? When one told him that if he truly repented he should surely not perish, he breaks out in to this speech, "Nay, if your Christ is so easy to be entreated indeed as you say, then I despise Him and care not for Him." Oh, horrible blasphemy, and desperate wickedness! For a man to draw himself back from repentance by that very cord of love whereby he should have been drawn to it.

But, fifth, and last, the hearts of wicked men and devils only tremble upon the account of some punishment and the judgment to come, as a malefactor trembles before the judge, and under the sense of his doom. But a child of God trembles under the sense of God's goodness and kindness to him. Hosea 3:5: "And shall fear the Lord and His goodness," or, as some sense it, they shall fear the Lord because of His goodness. The Hebrew is, "they shall fear to the Lord," that is, trembling, they shall make haste to Him (as frightened doves do to their columbaries. See Hosea 11:11). Look, as holy tremblings and gladness are consistent with each other (Psalm 2:11), and as a holy fear and joy are consistent together, as you see in those good women who went from Christ's sepulchre with fear and great joy (Matthew 28:8)—which was a strange composition of two contrary passions, but frequently found in the best hearts—so a holy love and trembling are consistent together. A child whose heart is full of love for his father, when he looks upon him as offended or grieved, he trembles. That poor woman in Mark 5:33, fearing that she had offended Christ in

approaching Him, came trembling, but yet with a heart full of love for Christ.

So when a child of God fixes one eye upon the holiness and justice of God he trembles; and when at the same time he fixes his other eye upon the patience, the goodness, the graciousness, and readiness of God to forgive as a Father, he loves and joys. But all the tremblings of the wicked are from apprehensions of wrath to come and from a token of hell in their consciences on this side of hell. These five things I thought to hint at so that the reader may be the better able to grapple with the same objection when he meets with it in this little piece.

The dew of heaven has richly fallen among many, and yet, like Gideon's fleece, they are dry when all the regions about them are wet. And is it not so with many in these days who sit under gospel droppings, and who have the labors of many famous men put every day into their hands? And yet how are their souls like the mountains of Gilboa, upon which there fell neither dew nor rain? This is and this must be reason for lamentation. If the books of the law chance to fall upon the ground, the Jews' custom is presently to proclaim a fast. Ah, friends, what cause have we to fast and mourn when we see the Word preached, printed, and offered to fall upon the ground, and to be trampled upon as it is this day by atheists, Papists, Socinians, and other vain persons? The Jews have a law which enjoins them to take up any paper which they see lying on the ground, and the reason is lest perhaps the Word of God is written on the paper and ignorantly trodden under foot. Though Christians ought to be free from such superstitious curiosities, yet they ought to be very careful that the least tittle of the Word, the least truth revealed in the Word, is not trodden under foot by either themselves or others, considering its excellency and usefulness as a guide, a light to lead us through the wilderness of

the world to the heavenly Canaan. Proverbs 6:22: "When thou goest it shall lead thee, when thou sleepest, it shall keep thee, when thou awakest, it shall talk with thee." That is (according to the gloss of the Rabbinical interpreters), when in your passage through this world, when you sleep it shall keep you, viz., when you lie down in the grave and when you awake it shall talk with you, when you are awakened at the glorious resurrection.

But that I may not make the porch too large, I shall hasten to a close. There are three sorts of persons above all others to whom I would seriously recommend this treatise:

First, those who do tremble at the Word, and those who have soft and tender hearts. For these will find choice comforts, special encouragements, and singular supports to cheer and bear up their hearts in the greatest trials, inward or outward, or in the worst of times.

Second, those who are bold sinners, secure sinners, stupid sinners, or insensible sinners, for these will find a variety of arguments to awaken them, to startle them, to soften them, and to work them into a trembling frame and a tender frame, with singular directions and counsel how to obtain those spiritual frames which are infinitely more worth than all those crowns and kingdoms that men are this day contending for in blood.

Third, those who are under many fears and doubts and disputes in their own hearts, whether they tremble at this Word or not, and whether they have a tender heart or not. For I dare say that such persons will find in this treatise those blessed truths that will, by a blessing from on high, scatter their fears, resolve their doubts, and put a happy issue to *all their disputes.

Reader, when you have seriously read over this little treatise, I can't but judge that you will readily conclude with me that the two special points here handled (our tremblings at God's Word and a tender heart) are (1) two great and weighty points, (2) two

very noble and necessary points, which all should labor to know and understand who would be blessed here and happy hereafter, (3) two seasonable and suitable points to the days and time wherein we live which abound with all sorts of sins, and which are attended with the sorest of spiritual judgments, such as blindness, hardness, insensibleness, (4) two important points that have singular other points wrapped up in the womb of them, and that are dependent upon them, and (5) two points that are not every day handled in the pulpit, nor sent unto the press.

Reader, the importunity of a worthy friend has prevailed with me to give you the trouble of reading this epistle. And now I shall conclude with a few words of counsel. Let him who casts his eye upon this book not borrow it, but buy it. Seriously read it. Highly prize it. Earnestly pray over it. Endeavor to have your heart and life made conformable to the matter contained in it. Lay it among your choicest treasures, and, when you are on the mount, remember him who unfeignedly and earnestly desires that this little piece may be highly blessed to the writer, reader, and hearer, and so I shall take leave and rest,

Your real friend and soul's servant,

Thomas Brooks

SERMON 1

(Preached November 19, 1643)

*A Heart That Trembles
at God's Word Is Precious
in God's Eyes*

“ . . . and that trembleth at My Word . . . ”

ISAIAH 66:2

*T*he scope of the Holy Ghost in the beginning of this chapter is to take the hearts of these people from resting in the glorious temple that they had, and in the outward duties of worship that they performed. The first he does by these two arguments in the beginning of the chapter: “Thus saith the Lord, ‘The heaven is My throne, and the earth is My footstool.’” “What great matter is it, then, that I have such a glorious temple built for My honor? I have no need of it, for I have the heaven for My throne and the whole earth for My footstool.” “Where is the house then that ye build unto Me? And where the place of My rest?”

Second, He has not only His throne in heaven and the earth for His footstool, but all these things His hands have made. "I have made the whole world. You have built the temple, and you think it a great matter. Why, I have made all the world and could have made a thousand worlds if I had so desired!"

And for outward performances, He would take their hearts off from resting in them. He tells them, therefore, that while they rest in outward duties and yet live wickedly, it is no more unto Him than the slaying of a man. He has four expressions to show that He abominates all outward services where there is a wicked life. First, he who kills an ox, as if he slew a man. Second, he who sacrifices a lamb as if he cut off a dog's neck. Third, he who offers an oblation, as if he offered swines' blood. Fourth, he who burns incense, as if he blessed an idol. These are four strong expressions, and I know of no place in all the book of God wherein we have God so fully, in a few words, express His hatred of the services of wicked men while they live in their sin. Yea, He gives the reason: "They have chosen their own way." And while they do so, let them do what they will, they are all abominable in the eyes of God. God will have no regard in respect of their temple, nor all their sacrifices.

What is it, then, that will please Him? He tells you in this second verse: "But to this man will I look, even to him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at My Word." It is as if God should say, "As for this glorious temple and all your sacrifices, what are all these as long as you choose your own ways? But is there any poor soul, any contrite heart, who is sensible of his own sinfulness? Is there any broken-hearted sinner among you who trembles at My Word? This is more than all your sacrifices that can be offered to me."

Here we have three qualifications of one whom God will look at and have regard unto. "Will you know what I respect?

Him who is poor, of a contrite spirit, and trembles at My Word. Here is one whom I look to, with whom I delight to dwell, and in whom I take pleasure. First, in a poor spirit, second, in a contrite one, and in him who trembles at God's Word.

It is the third that I intend to pitch upon, trembling at God's Word. Men of the world live bravely and have jolly spirits. Malachi 3:15: "And now we call the proud happy." Your brave, jolly, gallant, proud spirits are the only men in the eyes of the world; but if you would know who is precious in God's eyes, it is the poor, contrite spirit who trembles at the Word that men despise. Who are more despised among men than those who are of poor and contrite spirits, whose hearts shake and tremble at God's Word? The brave and jolly spirits in the world scorn to be troubled at the Word. "But," says God, "is there anyone who trembles at My Word?" Where He sees such great congregations as these are, He looks through all to see if He can find any poor soul who trembles at the Word. Here's an object that God has special regard to. Now God grant many such objects in this congregation and at this day, for God does look among you. Oh, that He might have objects to look upon, who may be delightful in His eyes! And such are those who shall tremble at His Word.

The point of doctrine is this:

DOCTRINE: A heart that trembles at God's Word is very precious in God's eye.

"To him will I look." It is translated by some, "To that thing I will look." "Oh, that's the thing that I love indeed to look upon, a trembling frame of heart at My Word." All the beautiful objects in the world are not so lovely in the eye of God as a heart that trembles at the Word. The Lord accounts nothing in all the

world worthy of looking at in comparison to this object. But at this the Lord looks with abundance of delight. He does not say here, "To him will I look who does My Word," or "who obeys My Word," but "who *trembles* at My Word." One commentator wrote upon this passage: "There's more godliness many times in the trembling of the heart than in the work of the hand. For there may be many things that may hinder a true, gracious heart from doing God's Word." Perhaps the heart entertains the Word in uprightness and would fain do it, but there may be many things that come between the heart and the action that will hinder one who has a sincere heart from doing it. But as long as there is a trembling frame of heart at the Word, this is that which God looks at.

Physicians say that the trembling of the heart is a disease. But this trembling of the heart is the excellency of the heart, and it is the happiness of the soul where it is. In 2 Kings 22:19, Josiah was a king, and he did but hear the Word of God read and immediately his heart fell a-trembling. His heart melted before the Lord. Oh, what a happiness would this be, for kingdoms to have their kings to have such tender hearts! If God would be pleased to give the great ones of the world such tender hearts that, upon the reading or hearing anything out of the Word of God, their hearts would fall and tremble in the presence of God, it would be a great mercy. It becomes the greatest in the world to tremble at the Word of God whenever they hear it.

In the opening of this point there are these four things to be done:

The first is to show you briefly how the heart is affected when it trembles at God's Word, what it is to have the heart to tremble at God's Word.

Second, what it is that a gracious heart sees in God's Word that makes it tremble.

Third, the difference between the trembling of a gracious heart and the trembling that there may possibly be in one who is but a hypocrite, for we find that Felix himself trembled; and the Scripture tells us that the devils tremble.

Fourth, the reason why God so accepts such a heart, why it is so acceptable unto God that He so looks unto it. These are the four things wherein the point is to be presented, and these will make full way unto the applications.

1. We will first examine the working of the heart that trembles at God's Word, or to set out unto you the frame of heart trembling at the Word of God. (I'll pass briefly over this because I'll dwell most upon the second.) If you would have it set out unto you what the manner of frame of heart is in trembling at the Word, here it is.

First, it is such a heart as has high, honorable, and reverent thoughts of God's Word, howsoever before it was lightly esteemed. The Word of God was no other than other words are; it was but as wind that passed away. But now the soul comes to have very high and honorable and reverent thoughts of the Word of God, reverent apprehensions of it; it looks upon the Word with more solemn thoughts than it ever had before. "Oh, now I see it to be indeed my very life!"

Second, upon this trembling the soul, with all reverence, attends when it is either read or preached. Howsoever it is delivered, the soul attends upon, and sets its heart unto the Word. As Moses said unto the people in Deuteronomy 32:46: "Set your hearts unto all the words which I testify among you this day, which ye shall command your children to observe to do, all the words of this Law." Why? "For it is not a vain thing for you, because it is your life."

Before this, such a one would come to hear the Word in an ordinary way, merely to spend so much time, or to hear what

a man could say; but when God works this gracious frame into the heart, the soul sets itself unto it as unto its life, and not as a vain thing. "I see my life in it, and there is reverent attention unto the Word of God." Fear fastens the eye. When one has a fearful apprehension of a thing, it causes the eye to be fastened upon that thing. So when a congregation comes to have many among it who tremble at God's Word, it fastens the attention, and their thoughts are bent unto it in a more solemn way. They dare not give liberty to themselves, no, not to the wandering of their thoughts, much less of their eyes up and down; but they are watching to hear what God has to say unto them.

Third, when such a one has heard the Word, it dares not cavil against it. It's true, you may examine the Word that you hear preached, but not cavil against it. Before the heart is brought to this trembling frame, it will be ready to rise against the Word and to entertain cavils, and vain objections against the Word; but when the heart is brought to tremble at the Word, it dares not cavil and object as before.

Fourth, the heart that trembles at the Word accounts it a most dreadful condition to have the Word to speak against it. "Oh, it is the greatest evil that can befall me, that the Word of God should speak against me; that when I come to hear it, I hear it speaking against me and pronouncing threatenings against me! Oh, this is a restless condition! How can I eat, drink, or sleep quietly when the Word of God speaks against me!"

Fifth, a heart that trembles at the Word receives, with all reverence and humility, every command of the Word and submits itself unto it; it dares not resist any part of the Word, neither a commanding part nor a threatening part, but opens itself to receive it. It was a speech of one: "Oh, let the Word of the Lord come, and we will submit if we had six hundred necks to lay under it." So a heart that trembles at the Word dares not

resist it, but opens itself to receive whatever the Lord has to give it.

Sixth, it receives with trembling even the promises that are in God's Word, that is, upon apprehension of the infinite distance that there is between God and it, and its own infinite unworthiness of the mercy that is reached out in the promise. The heart, though it takes hold of it, yet takes hold of it with reverence and fear. Now then, such a heart as trembles in this manner at the Word of God, this is the heart that is so precious in God's eye, and that God looks upon. That's the main thing.

Now, what is it that a gracious heart sees in God's Word to make it tremble? This being rightly understood, I hope this sermon may help you to sanctify the name of God in many sermons afterwards. God requires of you all that, when He sends His Word among you, your hearts should not swell against it, but that you should entertain it with a trembling frame of heart. Oh, the honor that would come to God, and the advantage to your own souls, if you entertained it with a trembling frame of heart! I'll show you what reason a gracious heart has to thus tremble at God's Word, what he sees in it, for he does not do it out of weakness of spirit, but when the Lord reveals that in His Word unto the heart, it cannot do otherwise. In Judges 3:20, Ehud comes to Eglon the king of Moab, a heathen king, and he makes that his preface, "I have a message from God unto thee." Mark how he was taken with that: "And he arose out of his seat" in reverence unto the word that was the Word of God. When he did but say that he had a message from God for him, he stood up immediately. You should look upon all the ministers of God who reveal his truths unto you with great reverence. God cannot but take it ill to see every vile person who dares not behave himself irreverently to his master, yet cares not what irreverence he shows unto the Word of God. Jeremiah 13:15: "Hear

ye, and give ear; be not proud, for the Lord hath spoken." If it is the Word of God, there must be no swelling of heart against it. It is the greatest and vilest pride of all for men's hearts to swell against the Word. Many of you think that there is pride in clothes and apparel, but the greatest pride is in swelling against the Word. Many of you think you have no pride in your hearts, but how have you behaved yourselves against the Word of God that has come against your nearest corruptions?

First, that trembling soul sees that it is the Word of God. He sees God in it.

Second, he not only sees that it is God's Word, but he sees an abundance of the glory, the majesty, the greatness, the excellency of God that shines in His Word. The Lord reveals unto this heart that there is an abundance of divine luster and glory that shines in the Word at which he trembles, and that makes it to tremble. Above all things in the world, the Word of God has the most of the glory of God in it. Though it's true, a soul for a long time, while it is in darkness, sees nothing of this, but when God's good time has come to work graciously upon the heart, God opens to this heart such a divine luster shining in the Word that it never saw before, which makes the heart now to stand in awe of it more than ever it did before. Psalm 138:2: "For Thou hast magnified Thy Word above all Thy name." Or as some read it more fully according to the original, "Thou hast magnified above all Thy name Thy Word" [Henry Ainsworth's *Annotations Upon the Pentateuch and the Psalms*]. That is, the name of God is magnified above all things. Oh, the Word of God has more of God's name in it than all the world besides! Take heaven and earth, the whole creation altogether has not as much of the name of God as the Word of God has. There is more of God, there is a greater and more divine luster in the Word of God, than there is in heaven and earth.

Therefore you may be convinced of a great deal of ignorance and darkness that has been in you all this while. If we believe this truth—that in God's Word there is more divine luster than there is in all the creatures in heaven and earth—surely you have been in the dark. I appeal to your consciences: have you seen this divine luster now? We know there is much of the glory of God in all His works, in the heavens, the sun, the moon, the stars. We behold the glory of God shining there, and in the seas. Those who go down into the deeps behold the wonders of the Lord, and in the earth all creatures cry unto us to fear the Lord and to tremble before the Lord. It is an argument of a stout, wretched, vile hard heart that does not tremble before the Lord as He appears glorious in His great works. Every creature cries out unto us, "Oh, will you not fear that God who has made me!" Every creature calls, though you have had a deaf ear hitherto, "Will you not fear that God who has made me?" Yea, God Himself wonders that man does not fear Him upon the consideration of the glory that shines in some pieces of His work. Jeremiah 5:22: "'Fear ye not Me?' saith the Lord? 'Will ye not tremble at My presence?'" God speaks in a way of admiration. "What!" says God. "It is a strange thing that men should have such hard hearts. What, will you not fear Me who has placed the sand for the bound of the sea by a perpetual decree that it cannot pass it; and though the waves thereof toss themselves, yet they cannot prevail; though they roar, yet they cannot pass over it."

God does but instance in this one work of his. "Oh, is there any bold, desperate sinner who will not fear such a God as I am, who does such a great work as this?" And then again in verse 24, the Lord instances in another work of His. God wonders that men should not say in their hearts, "Oh, let us fear God that giveth rain!" We depend upon that God who gives rain.

Oh, therefore, let us fear Him! Now God expects that all His creatures who see His glorious work should reason thus: “Oh, what a glorious God is this at whose mercy we lie! Oh, let us fear this God!”

Well, then, if God so wonders that men do not fear Him upon the sight of His glory in these two works of His, then much more may God wonder that men do not fear Him in regard of all those glorious names of His that appear in His Word. Now a gracious heart begins to see what it did not see before and, therefore, trembles at His Word.

Third, it sees more. It sees not only a divine luster, but a most dreadful authority in the Word of God. Not only greatness and luster and glory causes fear, but authority. If we should see a prince in his greatness, in his pomp, it causes some fear. But when we consider the authority that he has over us, this causes fear. And, therefore, we read in Jeremiah 10:6–7: “For as much as there is none like unto Thee, O Lord, Thou art great and Thy name is great in might. Who would not fear Thee, O King of Nations? For unto Thee doth it appertain.” See how fear is grounded upon authority.

“Oh, Lord, Thou hast the absolute and supreme authority over all nations of the world. Who would not fear Thee?” Certainly the reason why the hearts of men are so vain and slight before the Word of God is because they do not apprehend the dreadful authority there, that authority which has potentates under it as well as the poorest who live upon the face of the earth, that authority which is over all authority, that authority that is over the heart and the soul.

Nothing in the world has authority over men’s consciences but the Word of the Lord, and that has authority. It has authority to bind consciences, to awe and terrify men. So a gracious heart sees the great seal of heaven stamped upon every truth in God’s

Word and, therefore, dares not trifle with it as it did before. It comes to the Word either as to a sovereign to receive laws, or as to a judge to receive the sentence of condemnation. That soul now looks upon the Word as backed with such authority that either it must yield unto it or else it binds that soul over to eternal death by such bonds that all the power of all creatures in heaven and earth cannot loose it again. When a soldier hears his fellow soldier rebuke him, he does not much care. But if the general speaks who has his life in his hand, then he trembles. So while people come to hear the Word as from a minister, one whom they look upon as equal with themselves, they do not much regard it. But a gracious heart, whoever the minister is, yet he looks upon the Word as being above him. Cyprian calls it "the Tribunal of the Church," because from thence men receive the sentence of death upon them. Now when the soul comes to see this, it cannot but tremble at whatsoever truths are revealed unto it. That's the third particular.

But, fourth, a gracious heart trembles at God's Word because it sees an infinite justice in the Word of God. The justice of God is very dreadful in itself, that threatens an eternal curse to every soul that does not obey it in everything. In Deuteronomy 33:2 it is called "a fiery law." That's part of God's law, the fiery law of God. And we know how the Law was given, with what dreadfulness, as you may see in Exodus 19. The mountains shook and trembled when the Law of God was given. And God expects that the hearts of sinners should tremble when they hear the Law of God at any time.

QUESTION. But you will say, "We are delivered from it, and therefore why should we do so?"

ANSWER. But though we are delivered, yet there is cause to tremble in regard that once we were under it and we deserved

to be under it. We read of Moses himself that he was a godly man. He was one in Christ, yet you shall read in Hebrews 12:21 that the sight was so terrible that Moses, the servant of God, a godly man who did not have so much guilt in him as any of you have, yet said, "I exceedingly fear and quake." And this is true especially if the soul does not understand thoroughly that it is thoroughly delivered from the guilt of sin. For the conscience will tell it that the Word of God has it at an abundant advantage. When Samuel came to Bethlehem, the elders of the town trembled at his coming. So in Ezra 10:9 it is said that "the people sat trembling because of the matter." They had much guilt in them, and knew that the Word had the advantage and, therefore, they trembled. It concerns all to tremble in some degree or other.

Fifth, a gracious heart sees the Word of the Lord backed with an infinite power. Ecclesiastes 8:4: "Where the word of a king is, there is power." So where the Word of the Lord is, there is power to make it good. In Matthew 28:18 Christ says, "All power in heaven and earth is given unto Me." What follows? "Go therefore and preach." What may we observe from the connection? It is as if He should say, "Know that all the power in heaven and earth that is given to Me shall go along with you while you are preaching My Word, to make good that Word of Mine that you preach." So whenever you hear any truth of God preached out of His Word, you must know that all power in heaven and earth is sent forth to assist it and make it good. If it is a threatening, to make it good that way; if it is a promise, to make it good that way. In Isaiah 55:11, the Lord says that His Word will not be a vain thing; it will not return unto Him void, but one way or another, it shall perform the work that God sends it for.

What God's end has been in sending the Word to you, we may hope it has been in mercy, but it shall accomplish some special end that God has had among you. In Ezekiel 6:10 God

says, "They shall know that I am the Lord, and that I had not said in vain that I would do this evil unto them." God will have every sinner to know that He is the Lord, and that He does not speak in vain. It is as if God should say, "Then My Word shall prevail, shall take hold upon them, all the power that I have shall go along with My Word to make it good."

The Scriptures tell us in Matthew 5:18 that heaven and earth shall pass away, but not one jot or tittle of God's Word. By this statement we may see how God is set upon His Word. He will first withdraw His power from heaven and earth than withdraw His power from assisting His Word. Is there any one little truth (as you esteem it) that has come near to your conscience, and you have had some thoughts, "Oh, if this is true, what shall become of me?" Look to it, for heaven and earth shall pass away rather than the Word shall not be made good. The Lord will lose all the world before He will lose His Word.

Sixth, it sees the luster of God's holiness and, being conscious to itself of impurity, that makes it to tremble. In Psalm 99:3 we read, "Let them praise Thy great and terrible name, for it is holy." The name of God is great and terrible and, great and terrible in that it is holy. So in Psalm 111:9 we read, "Holy and reverend is His name." God's name is reverend because it is holy. Now the Word of God is nothing other than the very glass of God's infinite holiness, and, when the luster of that appears, oh, what fear will it strike into their hearts! We read in Isaiah 6 that when the prophet heard the Seraphim crying, "Holy, holy, holy," the text says that even the blessed prophet cried out, "Woe unto me, for I am undone." When the glory of God's holiness was but named, how the heart of the prophet shook and trembled!

Now if a godly man thus trembles, oh, how should the hearts of those who are impure and corrupt tremble at the

Word, when they come to see that it is the glass of the holiness of the infinite God!

Seventh, there is another thing which must not be forgotten, and that is those glorious, high, and divine mysteries that are revealed in God's Word that make a gracious heart tremble. In the Word of God there are wonderful, high, glorious, amazing mysteries that are revealed, mysteries to be trembled at. It rather becomes poor creatures to receive them with trembling rather than to search into them by inquiring. Oh, the mysteries of salvation are so infinitely above us that they cannot but cause trembling in the hearts of those who come to understand the glory of them. There's the mystery of election, of redemption, of the hypostatic union, of the death of the Son of God, of justification, reconciliation, adoption, sanctification, and glorification. They are mysteries to be trembled at in respect of the infinite depth, length, height, and breadth of them.

Junius was that famous divine whose works we have as a great blessing to the church. He reports that before his conversion he was an atheist, but, on a rainy day, "I came home to my house and saw a New Testament lying before me. I took it up, and there I met with that first chapter in John (which is a chapter that is as full of majesty as any), and I took the book and fell a reading: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.'" And indeed, if you read the chapter you shall find that chapter goes on with an abundance of majesty. "Upon reading this," he says, "my body trembled, my soul presently was amazed, and for all the day I did not know where I was. I was struck with such horror and amazement that it shook every joint of me and my heart trembled within me, and I knew not where I was all the day long."

This was the means of the conversion of that famous divine, when God let out a few beams of the gospel of His Word. His

heart was struck with trembling, and it was the means of the conversion of his soul. Oh, how often have you read that chapter, and heard other mysteries of the gospel, and never were so affected! When the Lord has a purpose to do good unto a soul, the Lord lets out something of the greater mysteries that are revealed in the Word.

I heard of a godly man, a great scholar, who was in his study and was very seriously contemplating the glory of God as it shone in the arts and sciences. For indeed, various arts are no other than different beams of God's wisdom. Considering that, he was so taken that he fell upon his face. Surely, now, these glorious mysteries are far more dreadful to make us to fall down and adore and tremble before the Lord.

It will be the great work of the saints and angels in heaven to stand and admire those glorious mysteries of the gospel. The soul not only trembles at the strictness that is in God's Word, but at the dreadful mysteries that are contained in the Word of God.

Eighth, a gracious heart trembles at the Word because it finds it very full of efficacy and quickness. It is a Word that is a two-edged sword, very lively wherever it comes. We read in Hebrews 4:12 and following: "For the Word of God is quick and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."

The Word of God is lively in operation. It works the soul with an abundance of quickness one way or the other, to heaven or hell, and that makes it a Word to be trembled at. Things are not the same with people after the Word comes with power to them as they were before. In the days of ignorance God winks, and therefore you shall find, in the very first commission that Christ gives unto His apostles to go and preach, that He says,

“Go and preach the gospel to every creature; he that believeth shall be saved; he that believeth not shall be damned.” You see how vigorous Christ is: “If they will come in and believe, they shall be saved, the greatest sinner of all. Go to the most wicked sinner. If he will come in, he shall be saved; if not, he shall be damned.”

The Lord deals with an abundant quickness with those who live under the powerful ministry of the Word. Therefore, when John the Baptist comes to preach he says, “Now is the axe laid to the root of the tree.” Why now? Why not before? Why now comes John the Baptist among the people, now they have their natural condition opened to them, and now they feel the Word speaking to their very consciences. And if they do not submit, the axe is laid to the root of the trees. They must not think to go as long as they did before. Perhaps they were old drunkards, old swearers, and they escaped a long time; but they must not think to escape so long now. And, therefore, the apostle said that the Word is either the savor of life unto life or else the savor of death unto death (2 Corinthians 2:16).

This passage seems to have some difficulty in it, and, therefore, we shall explain it to you a little. He does not say that death comes to one and life to another, but the savor of death and the savor of life. The meaning is that it is taken from those things that are so full of spirit and efficacy that the very savor is enough to work life or death. If one should see a medicine that the very savor of it was enough to raise one from death to life, we would say it was a very lively thing; it was very full of spirits. Why, the Word is so full of life that, if it is relished, it brings the very savor of life. If not, it is the savor of death unto death.

Ambrose, writing upon this text, had this phrase: “They receive the Word as the plague; they do not obey it.” The very savor of the plague is enough to bring death. So the Word of

God, if it is not obeyed, turns out to be the plague to wicked and ungodly men, and the very savor of it destroys them. We need to understand that when we come to hear the Word, we come to hear that which has so much life in it that every sermon we hear we must expect to be nearer heaven or nearer hell. "I have come to hear a sermon and have gone away carelessly, making no account of it, nor calling myself to an account. What, am I nearer heaven for this sermon I have heard this day than I was before?" Certainly, if you are not, you are nearer hell.

Ninth, that soul trembles at the Word because it sees that the Word casts all men regarding their eternal estate. If you want to know how it shall be with you for all eternity, if you would look into the Word and attend upon that, you may know it. The Word has in it that which casts every child of man for eternity.

Now there is a great deal of reverence to be given to the Word. If a prisoner comes to be sentenced for his life, he looks upon those who are in power with a trembling heart, though he knows himself not to be guilty, and hopes the jury will give a good verdict. Aye, but when he looks upon the jury and thinks, "These are the men who must sentence me for my life," he cannot but tremble. So if you understand what the infinite consequence of an eternal estate is, you cannot but tremble at it. When you take up the Book of God, this is the book that must cast you for your eternal estate. Therefore, it is a Word to be trembled at.

Tenth, not only does it cast us here for eternity, but it is a searching Word that comes to search and examine us here; it searches into the inward and secret parts of the heart. It divides between the marrow and the bones, and discovers the very inward thoughts of the heart. A man who is wounded, if a surgeon comes to search his wound, he looks upon him with a trembling heart.

And many speak of it from their own experience. "Oh, how often have I come to the Word of God, and have found God's Word searching my very heart, getting to the quick, to my soul, beyond all the dead flesh. And I have found all things revealed in my soul before the Lord." Oh, what shaking falls upon men for a long time afterwards. 1 Corinthians 14:25 says, "And thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest, and so falling down on his face he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth." It's spoken here of a poor, ignorant man who shall come into a congregation, and who looks about and admires what the matter is, but at length finds that the secrets of his heart are made manifest. Upon that, he falls down with reverence for God, worships God and says, "Verily, God is among this people."

So it is with many a man and woman's heart. When they come to hear the Word, they come with carnal and vain hearts; but when they have found that the Word comes to ransack them, and gets into them and grapples with them, meeting with all the inward and secret distemper of their spirits, they are made to fall down before this Word and say, "Verily, God is in this Word." This will make the sinner to fall down, and a gracious heart has found this effect upon the Word.

Eleventh, and last, a gracious heart trembles at God's Word because it sees it is the Word that must be opened to judge it at the Great Day. It casts the soul here, searches the inwards of the soul here, and it will be one of the books that must be opened at the Great Day to judge all flesh. John 12:48: "He that rejecteth Me, and receiveth not My Words, hath one that judgeth him; the Word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day." The words that you hear now shall be called all over again, and every sermon that you have heard, every truth that God has caused to come to your consciences, shall be called over again, and shall judge you at the Great Day. Now if you

look upon the Word as that which shall judge you at the Great Day, it cannot but make you to tremble. Oh, now, if a gracious heart sees as much in the Word of God as has been opened, surely there is cause enough that it should tremble at the Word of God. We must not condemn those who tremble. You do not, but others do. Do not wonder. God has made them to see that which He has not made you to see, but when the time of God's love comes to your soul, you shall see it, too.

APPLICATION

First, this being so, then you may see first how little of the Word of God you have understood all this while. "Oh, how little have I seen of all this that has been opened!" But there are some who see, whether you do or not. Sometimes great scholars do not see this, men of great parts. Aye, but perhaps some poor servant does. Christ said, "I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of Heaven and Earth, that Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent and hast revealed them unto babes."

Now if you find that God has wrought these things upon your hearts, and your hearts tremble at His Word, bless God for it. And this may greatly help you with other fears that you have. Oh, we fear what malicious men can do! Aye, but if you fear God's Word, you need fear nothing else. "Oh, but I have a great deal of sinfulness and wickedness in my heart, and find that I do not do what God's Word requires." This may help you with comfort against all your weaknesses. Though you do not do what God's Word requires, yet God knows you have a heart that obeys His Word in one thing as well as another. The Lord accepts your trembling, though you do not have the ability to perform. "Those that feared the Lord spake often one

to another.... Then there was a book of remembrance before God, and God said, ‘I will spare him as a man spareth his only child that serves him’” (Malachi 3:16–17). Do you fear God? Now you have a promise that though you have many weaknesses, yet God will spare you as one spares his only child that serves him.

Second, there are a great many branches of consolation. Certainly, if you tremble at God’s Word, you shall be comforted. Though perhaps you do not yet find comfort, yet if the Word of God can make your heart to tremble, it will comfort you. Wait for it. There is as much comfort in the Word of God for your soul as there was terror; and for that look to the chapter where my text is. Verse 2 of our text: “I will look to him that trembles.” Well, what shall become of them? Verse 5: “Hear the Word of the Lord, ye that tremble at His Word.” God comes over it again because He so loves it.

Are there any poor creatures whose conscience can witness, “Now the Lord knows, though I have many weaknesses, yet the Lord has struck the awe and fear of His Word into my heart”? Your brethren who hated you, who cast you out for His name’s sake, said, “Let the Lord be glorified”—but He shall appear to your joy and they shall be ashamed. Why does He speak of this comfort? Why does He speak thus: “Your brethren who hated you, who cast you out for My name’s sake, said, ‘Let the Lord be glorified’”? There were some among these people who were very tender of conscience, and dared not do such things as others did. Therefore their brethren hated them and cast them out, and not only notorious wicked men, but they said, “Let the Lord be glorified. We desire God’s glory as well as you.” They said, “Let the Lord be glorified,” and yet they cast out their brethren. Aye, but the Lord would comfort those who were cast out, who trembled at His Word, and dared not yield to those things that others did.

Is it not so, my brethren, at this very day now? There were some who would yield to anything to save their estates, and that they might not be brought to trouble. Aye, but there were others who trembled at God's Word and would venture anything rather than go against the Word of God in any one particular. Now these were cast into prison, and under this pretense: "Let God be glorified." Now hear this: "He shall appear to your joy, and they shall be ashamed." Oh, how this has been fulfilled!

Those proud persons were so cruel in their oppression and cast out their brethren, those who were faithful, who gave up all and committed their cause to God. But within a little time how has God appeared to our joy and to their shame? The fulfilling of this one Scripture should make us fall in love with the Word of God. How many of our forefathers trembled at God's Word and suffered much persecution? If they were but alive now to see this one thing fulfilled, it would be enough to make them stand amazed, acknowledge the goodness of God, and cry out, "Oh, the Word of the Lord is good; the Lord is faithful in all His promises."

And whatever hereafter should be imposed upon you (if you should have anything imposed upon you) that the Word of God will not make good, have a care. One who trembles at God's Word dares not do anything but what God's Word bears him out in. This will not be enough for you to say hereafter at the great Day of Jesus Christ, "Such and such great men did so and so; they commanded me and persuaded me, and I followed their commands and examples." But now one who trembles at the Word of God will not do so. And surely the Lord has some subjects in this congregation who tremble at the Word. I see that serious intention of yours unto the Word of the Lord which is delivered; it apparently shows it. Well, God looks upon those families, and those men in a parish who will give such

good examples, that shall make it appear to others that their hearts are taken with the authority of the Word of God.

Whenever you come to hear, do not hear it as the word of men, but as the Word of God. Though it seems to be harsh to you, oh, it comes to your good. And there is cause why you should do so. It is the Word from whence you had your life. That's the immortal seed of the Word by which you are begotten. If your souls are begotten to God, it was by the Word. I appeal to you, either you are begotten again or not. If you are begotten, it is the Word that has begotten you, and it is that which is the object of your faith, for your souls, and eternal estate. Surely that must be revered by you.

Again, the Word is that which must be the ground of all your prayers. Whenever you pray to God and do not ground your prayers upon the Word, it is to little purpose. David said, "Have mercy on me according to Thy Word."

Again, the Word is that which must be your comfort in affliction and, therefore, you need to reverence it now.

Yea, if ever your souls are to be saved, it must be the Word that saves you. Therefore take heed how you despise it. Oh, it will lie upon your conscience most dreadfully, upon both your sickbed and death bed! Oh, fear the Word of God now!

OBJECTION. "Yea," you will say, "we will fear the Word of God; but is everything that a minister speaks the Word of God? If we were sure that it was God's Word, then we would yield unto it. But we know that one man is of one opinion and another is of another opinion."

ANSWER. When anything comes in God's name, do not slightly cast it off, but try it and examine it. Suppose one should come to you with the broad seal; will you say, "I do not know it to be the broad seal, and therefore I will not yield obedience to it?"

It may cost you your estates then, yea, that which is near and dear unto you. So do not lightly cast off that which comes in the name of God, but yield so far unto it as to examine it. Search the Scriptures; test whether it is according to the divine rule or not.

I know a gentleman who, when he came home once from a sermon, said, "Well, if it is true what this minister says, we are in an ill case." Now woe to that man whose chief comfort lies upon this false ground, that he hopes that which he hears out of the Word is not the Word. Oh, that man is in a miserable case who has no other ground for his comfort.

QUESTION. But you may say, "Will you have us take in all that is delivered?"

ANSWER. No, not so. The Bereans are commended in Acts for searching whether those things were so or not which Paul delivered unto them. And it is a very good and commendable thing for a people to examine whether that which is delivered by a minister is the Word of God or not.

OBJECTION. But you will say, "Many of us are poor, ignorant people."

ANSWER. I would therefore speak to the most ignorant of all, to tell them how they may come to know what is the Word of God and what is not.

First, if you would know, be willing to come with a heart willing to yield to what you do know. John 7:17: "If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself." If there is a heart resigned up to God to yield obedience, you shall know the doctrine that is delivered, whether it is of God or man. There is a promise, oh, make use of it!

Then, in the second place, plead this promise before the Lord; get alone and cry to God, and entreat the Lord that He

would make it known to you. Oh, go and pray to God, "Lord, I hear such and such things spoken, and I think they begin to come to my heart; but I am weak and ignorant. Lord, if it is Thy Word, cause it to come home to my heart."

Another rule may be this. You who can read, search the Scriptures and go to your neighbors; come to the ministers, and labor to know the reason of things that are delivered to you. Thus it should be with the most ignorant men and women, and they cannot make any plea unless they do this, unless they come with hearts resigned up to God, and make use of all the means they can to understand the Word of God. And when you come to sermons to hear the Word of God, oh, labor to keep your hearts in a constant, trembling frame, and the Word that you now tremble at will forever hereafter comfort your heart.

SERMON 2

(Preached May 26, 1644)

*What True Sanctified
Trembling Is*

“ . . . and that trembleth at My Word . . . ”

ISAIAH 66:2

*G*od looks upon the heart that trembles at His Word with affection. That heart is very lovely in God’s eye.

OBJECTION. “Aye,” you will say, “but the devils believe and tremble” (James 2:19). And herein they go beyond many wretched, bold sinners, of whom we shall speak later in the application. We read likewise that Felix, who was a notoriously wicked man, trembled at the Word. Acts 24:25: “And as he [Paul] reasoned of temperance, righteousness, and judgment to come, Felix trembled.” Felix was a judge who sat upon the bench, and Paul was a poor prisoner at the bar, but preaching of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come he made the judge tremble upon the bench. You see what a power there is in the Word.

It is observable in the previous verse: "Felix came with his wife [Drusilla] which was a Jewess; he sent for Paul and heard him concerning the faith in Christ." It is strange why his wife is here named. I find that interpreters refer to the Jewish story of those times which tells us that this Drusilla, Felix's wife, was the wife of another man, and because Felix was a great man in honor, she left her other husband and her religion, too, to marry Felix. Well, says the text, "And as he reasoned of righteousness (because he was a corrupt judge), and temperance (because he was a whoremaster, and Drusilla, who was present; was a vile, wicked, unclean woman, and therefore he reasoned of temperance, and spoke of those things that might come nearest to their consciences), and of judgment to come." He told the judge and his Delilah that they must both stand before the great God to answer one day. As he must answer for his injustice, so both he and she must answer for that filthiness in which they lived. This shows the boldness of this apostle, though he was a prisoner, yet to speak those things that would go to the quick of both those to whom he would speak, and he could not but know that he would provoke them both.

It is said that Felix trembled. We do not read so of his wife. For indeed that gender, if they are given up to uncleanness, are the more hardened. He is forced to tremble at Paul's preaching, though he is a wicked and ungodly man.

QUESTION. You will say, "If the devils tremble, and a Felix can tremble, then how is the point made that the heart that trembles at God's Word is so acceptable in God's eye? Oh, a poor trembling heart may say, 'I am afraid that all my trembling and fear are only at the threat of God's Word. I hear of judgment that is to come, and I fear and tremble at that, and what's that? That's nothing.'"

ANSWER. That nothing is yet something. First, it is a sign that the Word has some power over your hearts that it did not have before.

Second, it is something, for it is the right setting of fear upon the right object, and that's something; but it must be set upon the right object, though there is not a gracious principle to act it in that manner as it should be upon the object.

Third, it is something to tremble so, for it may prevent a great deal of evil. It may keep you free from many temptations; this trembling of your heart may even strengthen you against temptations.

Fourth, it may be a preparation for more good that God may intend towards them.

OBJECTION. Aye, but you will say, "This may be, and yet no more than this."

ANSWER. Aye, but first know that there is none who has grace who can be without this in some measure; though some who have this have no grace, yet there is no one who has grace but he has this.

OBJECTION. You will say, "Yes, some may be brought to Christ and never have tremblings."

ANSWER. When the soul is brought to Christ, why does the soul close with Christ when it believes in Him and upon Him? Is it not that the dreadful breach between God and it may be made up in Christ the Mediator? And is the soul sensible of this and yet does not tremble? Certainly it cannot but tremble. There-fore, though it may be where grace is not, yet where there is grace, this is.

Second, know that this is the temper of heart (and even thus far you have come) that God uses to work in those in whom He intends to work good in at last.

OBJECTION. Aye, but you will say, "Some may have this and yet never are saved. They may perish at last, and yet have so far a trembling at God's Word as to be afraid of the threatening there."

ANSWER. It's true that there may be some trembling at the threats in the Word of God, and yet the soul may miscarry, and not only not for the present have saving grace, but it may never come to have saving grace. But yet know that there is a great deal of difference between the trembling that God will bring to good and that which comes to nothing at last.

I shall show you that, and then come to show you what a true sanctified trembling at God's Word is. But, first, even in trembling at God's threats there is a great deal of difference. If you put but these four or five things together that I am now speaking of, you shall see a great deal of difference between the fear that comes to nothing and the fear that God brings to something at last. Those, therefore, who have these five notes, put them all together. It is such a trembling as I believe there can never be shown an example of it but that it has come to good at last.

When the trembling (though for the present at the threats of God's Word) is the greatest fear of all, it swallows up all other fears, I mean in regard to the greatness of it. There are two things that cause greatness of fear in the heart. First is the greatness of an evil, and, second, that this evil is hard to overcome.

If the evil is light, the heart disregards it. Now if it is a great evil, yet if it may easily be avoided, the heart of a man will slight it. But put these two together, a great evil and one that is very hard to avoid, and now the heart fears. Now the soul that is thus brought to trembling, to apprehend the breach between God and it and the evil of sin as the Word

reveals it to be the greatest evil of all, and now has other manner of thoughts of the difficulty of making up of peace with God than ever formerly it had, the Word reveals to it that it is a thing of infinite difficulty to make up peace with God. And upon this ground it so fears and trembles that it is above all other fears and trembling.

Second (for we must not take any of these signs alone), it is possessed with great fear as it justifies God. And here comes a special difference indeed, for if you take the greatness of it alone, perhaps it may be in some who perish. But if you put it to the other that in this great fear, when the soul thus trembles at what things the Lord has revealed to it in His Word, the soul shall justify God and His Word in all things. Though the Word speaks dreadful things against me, yet the Word of God is just, and God is righteous in His Word. The soul falls down and justifies God in all the severity that He reveals in His Word against those sins that this soul is conscious of. When the heart comes to this, it indeed comes to be in a hopeful condition. There are many who are forced to tremble, aye, but they fret against God and repine against the justice of God and of His Word; but when the Lord strikes the heart with fear, and causes the soul to justify Him and His Word, then the soul is in a good way, indeed.

Third, this heart not only fears the threats of God's wrath, but fears the evil of departure from God, and the loss of the presence of God, the loss of the enjoyment of communion with God, to be forever cast out from the Lord, never to see His face or to enjoy any good in Him. This the Word reveals, and this the soul trembles at as well as at hell. Many a carnal heart may tremble when it hears of the threats of hell and of eternal fire, but for the heart to tremble at the apprehensions of God's departing from it, and of its rejection from the

holy and blessed God, oh, it's a very good sign when the heart trembles at this.

Fourth, the heart so trembles at the Word of God that nothing can quiet it; nothing can ever satisfy it but reconciliation with God. When there is nothing that can satisfy the heart that is struck with this fear and trembling but reconciliation with God Himself, whatsoever God propounds unto it, it can never satisfy it. Some, perhaps, in time of sickness may tremble at God's Word, aye, but if they have health, then they are quiet. In afflictions they tremble, but in prosperity they are quiet. But the heart that is struck with the fear that God intends to bring it to good will never be quiet with anything but reconciliation with God.

Fifth, this fear is that which does not drive the heart from God, nor make it go out to any shifting courses, nor fly in despair from God. But it is a fear that brings the heart unto God, that drives it to God powerfully. The fear and trembling that causes despair in the heart, or however not to come into God's presence, that's fear that some reprobates have and may have. But the fear that drives the heart to God, the greater the fear, the more strongly is the heart driven to God. This is a good sign that this fear and trembling is right.

So, then, put these five together: that this fear is the greatest fear that swallows up all other fears; that you justify God in your fear; that you fear the departure from God as well as the wrath of God; that nothing can quiet you but reconciliation; that this does not drive you from God, but drives you to God. I say, where can ever be shown any example of any soul that miscarried in this case? Though I will not say that this very thing is saving grace, I will say that there is no example that can be shown in Scripture where this work has been but the Lord has gone further with the soul. But still we have not shown you what

the trembling is that is for the present so acceptable in the eye of God, what is the true, sanctified trembling at the Word of God that only a gracious heart has in him.

To that I shall answer in these particulars, and indeed there is much in this point for our edification, to understand the true, sanctified work of fear in the heart when the soul fears God and His Word.

1. It is a fear that the soul is active in. I beseech you to observe it. I mean that it is not a forced fear, a forced trembling, but the Lord goes further with the heart than this. The soul has an inward principle in it that acts from this fear. I mean this: "The Lord has caused my heart to see that in the Word which makes me tremble, and I am glad for it. I am glad that I know the Word, that it ever was revealed to me, and that God made me ever so apprehensive of it." The heart now acts according to this, and accounts it a mercy that this Word which causes it to fear and tremble was revealed to it. It does not think it an evil and a misery as many people do. When they hear the Word, it makes their hearts to tremble. They look upon it as a plague to them. They cry out against the Word, and perhaps against the ministers of it, as those possessed once cried out of Christ, "Are you here to torment us before our time?" They labor all they can to put off those thoughts that may work this fear upon their hearts, and they think that if they can but get the Word out of their consciences, that the Lord has been pleased to dart into them by His ministry, then they are safe. But they vex and fret that they cannot sleep quietly since they heard such a man, nor eat and drink, nor go about their business quietly. Therefore, they account it their bondage and misery that their hearts are as sensible of the Word of God as they are.

But it is otherwise with a gracious heart. The Lord is pleased to cause fear and trembling in a heart that is gracious, and this

heart blesses God who has made it sensible of His Word, and thinks it as a favor of God towards him. That heart therefore labors to maintain this fear and trembling within, and gathers what arguments it can to maintain this fear in the heart.

“Unite my heart to the fear of Thy name.” You know it is the prayer of David and of the church, “Lord, Thou hast been pleased to begin to cause me to see the authority and majesty of Thy Word. I am afraid I shall lose this fear. Lord, unite my heart to the fear of Thy name. Lord, implant this fear of Thee in my heart.”

It was said of Daniel (7:28): “My cogitations much troubled me, and my countenance changed in me, but I kept the matter in my heart.” Aye, this was a sign of a gracious heart in this case; though the case was otherwise than we are now speaking of, yet it may be useful to us. How few are there in this congregation (almost in any congregation) who do this? It may be you come to hear what is delivered, and you cannot deny the truth of those things. They are spoken convincingly to you, and, upon that, your cogitations trouble you and your very countenance is changed. Do you keep the matter in your heart? No. Is it not rather your endeavor to put the matter out of your heart?

I remember once hearing of a very carnal, wretched man who accidentally heard a sermon and, the Word coming very close to him, said, “I profess I could not get the Word out of my conscience for a whole week.” That is what the man said. Now a gracious heart keeps it in its conscience. Here’s the right trembling: when the heart is active it is not a forced work, but the soul gathers in those truths.

2. As the soul is active in it, so the soul is made active by it. And there is very much in this point. A hypocrite who has fear upon hearing the Word struck into it is sunk with fear

ordinarily. If he does not despair, yet he is discouraged and dulled with his fear and has no heart to do anything. But now the fear of the godly is such a fear as enlarges their souls unto God and makes their hearts active for God; it makes them fit for duty, not unfit as the fear of the hypocrite does. And for that you have a very notable text in Ezra 9:3: “And when I heard this thing, I rent my garment, and my mantle, and plucked off the hair of my head and of my beard, and sat down astonished.”

See how the good man was troubled because the Word of the Lord was disobeyed. The man was astonished and extremely troubled. Then verse 5: “And at the evening sacrifice I arose up from my heaviness, and having rent my garment and my mantle, I fell upon my knees, and spread out my hands unto the Lord my God,” and then he makes a gracious prayer. So here is the note that is of marvelous use: souls which in a gracious manner are struck with the fear of God and of His Word are not hindered in their duty by this fear, but it rather enlarges them. It enlarges the heart and makes the heart so much the more active for God, more active than it was before. For those two may stand together, fear and enlargement. Jeremiah 33:9: “And they shall fear and tremble for all the goodness, and for all the prosperity that I promise unto it.” But in Isaiah 60:5 we have both expressions together, fear and enlargement. Now when these two are together, when the heart is struck with the fear of God and yet it has enlargements at the same time, and by it is made active and fit for service, this is a sign of a gracious trembling that God so accepts. God does not so much regard the horror that is in men’s spirits that makes them dull, sink them, and make them unfit for service, but that which enlarges them and makes them fit for service is what God accepts.

3. This gracious trembling at God's Word is joined with love. It is a fear, and yet a love, a mixture of fear and love together. It trembles at the Word, and yet it loves the Word. It will not be taken off from hearing the Word though it trembles at it. It will join sides with the Word if any man speaks against it. It is ordinarily among men that those who are most feared are never most loved. They hate those whom they fear, but indeed an ingenious disposition desires to be loved as well as to be feared. Now a hypocrite may be brought to fear and tremble at the Word of God, but he never loves it. First, fear and love do not join together in them. They fear God's Word, but they hate it. They wish that there were no such Word of God, and that it was not so strict and holy as it is. And that's as much as to say that God were not so holy, which is as much as to say, "I wish there were no God at all." And yet a wicked heart is so in love with his lusts that, rather than that he should not have his lusts, he would have no God at all.

We read of Ahab that he was brought to tremble, and yet he hated the Word of God and the prophet. That place is very famous concerning Ahab in 1 Kings 22:8, where we have the story of Ahab when he was going to Ramoth Gilead: "And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, 'There is yet one man by whom we may inquire of the Lord, but I hate him; for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil.' And Jehoshaphat said, 'Let not the king say so.'" I name this place that I might compare it with the temper of Ahab's heart in chapter 21. Here Ahab professes that there is one prophet of the Lord, but he says that he hates him. Now mark in the latter end of the chapter, when the prophet came into him to speak the Word of the Lord. He was struck with fear and trembling, for the text says: "When Ahab heard those words, he rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his flesh and fasted and went softly." Is this the

Ahab who was struck with the Word of God and put on sackcloth, and went softly, shaking at trembling at God's Word, and yet in the next chapter says, "There is one prophet of the Lord, but I hate him"? Ahab trembled before the prophets of God and yet hated them. But a gracious heart trembles at the Word of God and yet loves it, and he rejoices at it as a good word in particular unto him.

4. True fear and trembling at the Word is that which will settle the heart and strengthen the heart against all other fears. It will swallow up other fears that are greater (as we said before). But that it has a virtue in it to strengthen the heart, to make it stand out against all other fears, this is that which is the gracious trembling at the Word. For instance, a heart that trembles at the Word; though he was afraid then, yet when it comes to outward losses and afflictions in the world such a heart is not much afraid there.

That place is famous in Habbakuk 3. There you have a prophet who had a very trembling heart at God's Word when he heard it, for so you shall find in verse 16: "When I heard, my belly trembled; my lips quivered at the voice; rottenness entered into my bones, and I trembled in myself." Here you see trembling, quivering, and rottenness entering into his bones. You will say, "Surely Habbakuk was a very timorous man," but mark, you shall find that he was not. He was a man of a stout and strong spirit. And this trembling at God's Word strengthened his spirit and made him stout against all outward afflictions in the world. Verse 17: "Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines, the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat, the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls." That is, there shall be a dreadful famine, and all things shall be in a dark, dreadful condition. His heart

that was taken with so much fear before now fears none of these things!

There's many of you who will not tremble at God's Word, but you will tremble at the fear of any loss. You will tremble at men, though not at the Word of God. But a true, gracious trembling at God's Word strengthens the heart against other fears. And so it was with David in Psalm 119:161. See how he was strengthened by fearing the Word of God: "Princes have persecuted me without a cause, but my heart standeth in awe of Thy Word." It is as if he should say, "This is that which shall help me. Princes set themselves against me, and they shall persecute me without cause; but my heart shall stand in awe of Your Word. The fear that there is of Thy Word in my heart shall make me so that I will not fear all the persecutions of the great ones in the world."

It is as if David should say, "There are a company of base-hearted, white-livered wretches who seem to be stout in other things; but when it comes to the case of persecution, they will yield to anything. But what is it that makes them so? It is because their hearts were never struck with the fear of God's Word. But I do not much fear. Why? Because I have another fear in my heart that strengthens me against that fear." So this trembling at God's Word is that which will help the soul against all other tremblings.

And therefore, by the way, do not think it is a hard lesson to teach you to tremble at God's Word. What, does He bring fear to us? He brought you peace at first. No, it is the way to cure you of all base fears. If you will never fear man, nor losses, nor any affliction, nor trouble, then fear the Word of God and tremble at that. The more fear there is of God's Word, the less fear there will be of any creature in the world. It is the only way to free you from all fears whatsoever.

5. The true, gracious trembling at God's Word is joined with joy. It is joined with love (as before), but joy is a higher degree. There is, in sanctification of the heart, a blessed mixture of love and joy. As in curious works there are gold and silver and pearls together, and all make it beautiful, so the grace of sanctification is an enameled work. Thus it is with fear and joy. You know the passage in Psalm 2:11: "Rejoice with trembling." The soul trembles at the Word, and yet is glad that there is such a Word of God; and he accounts the Word of God to be the inheritance of the soul. We have an excellent Scripture for that, that though the Word of God is that which strikes trembling, yet the heart rejoices in it. Deuteronomy 33:2 says, "From His right hand went a fiery law." But mark what follows in verse 4: "Moses commanded us a law, even the inheritance of the congregation of Jacob." What, a fiery law and yet an inheritance? Yes, though it has never so much severity in it. Mark verse 3. He commanded a fiery law, and yet He loved the people. You must not think ill of a minister who preaches things that seem dreadful to you, whereas he only preaches against such things you should account as your enemies. You may not think that he loves you. Mark here, God gave a fiery law and yet He loved them. They shall set with all meekness and quietness and humility "at Thy feet and receive of Thy words," though it is a fiery law.

And then verse 4: "Moses commanded us a law, even the inheritance of the congregation of Jacob." Oh, though the law is a fiery law, yet we account our inheritance to be in our law. And, therefore, those who would altogether take away our law from us would take away part of our inheritance. Therefore, trembling and joy may go together. And a place, though not so full, yet more express than this we have in Psalm 119:162: "I rejoice at Thy Word as one that findeth great spoil." It may be

that if you are travelling and meet with some great booty, you would rejoice at that. Why, a gracious heart can rejoice at God's Word as much as any man in the world can who finds great spoils. Therefore, when we put you upon fearing God's Word, we are not enemies to your joy; but, the truth is, the only way to have true joy is to tremble at the Word of God.

6. A gracious trembling is a habitual trembling, a trembling of heart that is habitual in the heart, not all of a sudden only. Many times God strikes some sudden flashes of terror into the hearts of men and women, but they vanish and come to nothing. But the trembling at God's Word that the Lord so highly esteems is a constant, habitual disposition of soul. It is not, therefore, only at some apprehensions of God's displeasure, but let God speak peace to the soul (I beseech you to observe this point); let God speak peace never so much to this soul, yet still it continues trembling at the Word of God. Many men will tremble at God's Word in time of their sickness and affliction, but let them have quiet and outward peace and ease and their trembling is gone. But a gracious heart trembles at the Word of God even when it has a most quiet conscience. It is an excellent argument of truth and peace, indeed, if you can find this: when your consciences are most quiet, yet then your hearts tremble at the Word of God.

There is an excellent Scripture for this in Daniel 10:11: "O Daniel, a man greatly beloved, understand the words that I speak unto thee, and stand upright." Here was a message of abundant mercy to Daniel, and the Lord, by an angel, professed that Daniel was one who was greatly beloved. And the Lord sent His angel to instruct him in His will, for mark it: "For unto thee am I now sent. And when he had spoken this word unto me, I stood trembling." For all this, though, he had this testimony from God at this very time that he was a man greatly

beloved, and the angel was sent to tell him that his prayer was heard—yet, notwithstanding, he stands trembling. He stands with reverence and fear before the Lord to attend upon His Word. Thus it will be with a gracious heart when there is the greatest testimony of God to it for acceptance; when it has the most quiet in its spirit, yet it comes to the Word and stands trembling before it.

7. Last, it is such a fear as subdues the heart to the power of the Word, subdues the thoughts, the opinion, the conscience, the will, and the affections to the power of the Word. Such a fear was struck in the heart of Saul at his conversion in Acts 9:6. Here's a true trembling: "He, trembling and astonished, said, 'Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?' Whatsoever my opinions have been heretofore, whatsoever my ways have been heretofore, whatever stubbornness and stoutness there have been in my heart heretofore, Lord, no more, no more. Thou hast struck my heart with fear."

When God, by His Word, smites down the heart of a man or woman and makes them thus to tremble as Saul did here, and cry out, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?"—this is a gracious trembling, and such as the Lord has a special eye to and regard for. Oh, such a one who thus trembles at the Word of God is dear and precious in God's eye.

QUESTION. But you will say, "Why does the Lord have such a special regard to this trembling heart?"

ANSWER 1. Why? First, because here's a disposition that glorifies God's Word. When men come and hear it with slight and vain spirits, and can, perhaps when they go away, make jests of it and speak lightly of it, these dishonor the Word of God. But when the Lord sees a company of poor creatures coming to hear His Word and tremble before it at the apprehension

of those particulars that I opened to you, the Lord loves to see His Word to be honored, and God loves to put much honor upon His Word Himself. And therefore He loves those who also shall put much honor on His Word. We read in Isaiah 42 that He loves to make His law honorable. Verse 21: "The Lord is well pleased for His righteousness' sake. He will magnify His law, and make it honorable." Let men make it as despicable as they will, yet God will make it honorable. Why, the Lord loves to have His law magnified and made honorable. I confess by "law" is meant all God's Word, not the law in opposition to the gospel. Now as the Lord loves to magnify His Word and make it honorable Himself, so He loves to see His creatures do it.

And are you one who trembles at God's Word? You help, as it were, God in the great thing that He delights to do. When a company shall glorify God's Word (as in Acts 13:48: "They glorified the Word of God"), oh, the Lord loves that! Now this disposition of heart glorifies the Word of God, that is dearer to Him than anything but His Son. "Heaven and earth," said Christ, "shall pass away, but not one jot or tittle of My Word shall pass away." Now you who put honor upon God's Word, oh, you are acceptable in God's eye.

ANSWER 2. This puts a great deal of honor upon God. His name is much sanctified in this disposition of heart. Here is honor put upon the wisdom, sovereignty, majesty, authority, and holiness of the great God.

Now the truth is that the Lord is more honored by a heart trembling at His Word than by a heart trembling at any manifestation of Himself in all His works. For example, suppose the Lord should come and appear from heaven in glory with thunder, lightning, and earthquake, and then should appear to you as He will at the Great Day of judgment with the heavens

departing like a scroll and the firmament melting with fervent heat. Now perhaps all of you would tremble at the great day of judgment. But certainly, my brethren, for a soul to tremble at God's Word glorifies God more than the glory that God shall have by men's trembling at His glorious manifestation at the Great Day. Why? Because that is such a manifestation of God as cannot but force it from us. But this trembling comes from a gracious, sanctified frame that there is in the heart of a man. And, by this, God accounts Himself more glorified than by what He shall do at that Day.

Therefore, you who would not tremble at that Day with horror and despair, tremble now at God's Word and you will not need to fear that at that Great Day all those glorious manifestations of God shall daunt your hearts with any horror. Why? Because God has had the glory of His name already by your fearing Him more than He would have had by any horror that He should strike into you at the Day of Judgment. God says, "What need do I have to force out My glory from these poor creatures by striking horror in them by such a glorious manifestation? For I manifested Myself to them in My Word, and their hearts trembled and gave glory to Me."

In Psalm 29:3 the psalmist said that "the voice of the Lord was as thunder," and so speaks of the voice of God most dreadfully. God has a great deal of glory by thunder and lightning, and causing the mighty oaks to quake and tremble. In Joel 3:16 it says, "The voice of the Lord shakes the heavens and the earth." God, when He would manifest His glory, manifests it by His powerful voice; but now God has more glory by shaking an immortal soul by His Word than He has by shaking the heavens and the earth. 'Tis true, if God spoke but one word He could shake this building, and all of heaven and earth. Aye, but He would not have as much glory by shaking them as He has

by one immortal soul who trembles in that manner as I have opened to you. Oh, it is no wonder that God looks to such a one when His Word, yea, and He, Himself, are so honored and glorified by them.

SERMON 3

(Preached June 2, 1644)

*The Application
of the Doctrine*

“ . . . and that trembleth at My Word . . . ”

ISAIAH 66:2

*T*he Lord has a special eye to a trembling heart. Why? Because, as His Word is honored, His name is sanctified. So the Lord sees this heart to be a broken heart, a serious heart, and a teachable heart. Therefore, it must be accepted by God. It is a broken, humble heart. Therefore is added, “A contrite and broken heart that trembles at God’s Word.” They are put together.

Now the Lord takes much delight in a broken heart. That’s the rise, indeed, of trembling at the Word of God; and the reason why men do not fear and tremble at the Word of God is from the pride in their hearts. But a humble and broken heart being so precious, and the rise of this must be precious before God.

And then it is a serious heart, and God loves a serious disposition. When the creature has to deal with God, and that in serious things, it needs to be serious. God cannot endure a slight and a vain heart; it is a dreadful curse of God upon men's spirits. But when the heart begins to be serious, to mind God and His truths in a serious way, then there is a great deal of hopes for such a one.

A heart that trembles at the Word of God is a teachable heart. In Acts 13:16 we read: "Ye that fear God, give audience." It is as if Paul had said, "I know you will regard what is said." There are none fit, indeed, to hear the Word but such as have the fear of God upon them. They will be taught. You know the Scripture says that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Men and women begin to have wise hearts when the fear of God is upon them. They begin to understand God's Word when their hearts begin to fear before the Word of God. As long as men have bold and presumptuous hearts, they will come to the Word and go away from it, understanding nothing; but when the heart comes to tremble, then it comes to understand, and then it is teachable. And therefore, before the Lord would instruct Job, He first struck him with fear. Proverbs 15:33: "The fear of the Lord is the instruction of wisdom." Observe that it is not only as in other texts, "the beginning of wisdom," but "the instruction of wisdom." This notes that wisdom will never instruct a soul that does not have the fear of the Lord; it begins that way first.

Unless the Lord causes the heart to fear Him, it will not be instructed, no, not by wisdom, for the fear of the Lord is the instruction of wisdom, and such a heart is a teachable heart. The jailor who was rude and rugged beforehand in Acts 16:29, being instructed with fear, "he came trembling and fell down before Paul and Silas and brought them out, and said, 'Sirs,

what must I do to be saved?” The jailor was in a teachable disposition when he came trembling and said, “What must I do to be saved?” When men ask questions in a trembling way, then they are in a teachable disposition. Oh, here is a precious frame of spirit because it is an argument of a serious and teachable heart. We proceed now to the application.

APPLICATION

1. If this is such a gracious disposition, that God so much regards the trembling at His Word, hence first we learn that God does not judge as men judge. That which is precious to men is not precious to God, and that which is not precious to men is precious to God. Men are always for bold spirits, and jovial and brave hearts that are full of mettle. But as for those who are trembling and afraid of whatsoever the Word speaks, and are ready to be troubled in conscience, who are of poor, broken, and troubled spirits, they cannot do away quickly enough with such men. They call the proud happy, but God calls the trembling heart the happy man. That's the blessed heart in God's esteem. The world despises such a one who stands shaking and trembling at the Word. That soul cannot stand with the bravery of the spirits of the men of the world; but is there any poor soul that shakes and trembles before God at His Word? “To this man will I look,” says God. “There is no object in heaven or on earth that pleases Me more than such a one who trembles before Me.”

2. If this is such a disposition that God so looks at, it should teach the ministers of God who have to deal with God's Word that when they speak it, they must speak it in such a manner that it may gain fear and trembling, that the hearts of people

may be struck with fear and trembling. They must not come to dally and to play with men's fancies, nor with their own wit; but when they come to speak the Word of God, in God's name, they should labor to speak it so that the hearts of their listeners may be struck with fear and trembling. For, indeed, there is such a way of speaking the Word of God that will bring it with majesty to the hearts of the people to whom we speak.

In 1 Corinthians 2:4, the apostle says there, concerning the ministry of the Word, "My speech and preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power." See here two sorts of preaching. There is preaching that is with enticing words of man's wisdom, upon which a preacher may be commended as being a brave man, a witty man, a curious man, or any of a hundred other such epithets. "But," says Paul, "we preach in the demonstration of the Spirit." And look what follows: "and of power." So that the power of the Word follows upon the demonstration of the Spirit. When people apprehend a minister preaching only with his wit and his gifts, the heart of a man will condemn it. It may commend the man, but condemn the Word, for it has no power over the conscience; but when a minister of God comes in God's name, and preaches in the demonstration of the Spirit, then he preaches with power, such power as prevails with the consciences of men: the demonstration of the Spirit and of power.

It is said of Christ in Matthew 7 that He did not preach as the Scribes and Pharisees, but as one who had authority, as one who spoke to the consciences of men. So the ministers of Christ ought to speak in the name of Christ as being backed with the authority of Christ, as men who have to deal with men's consciences and not with men's fancies. And certainly it is the best commendation of a sermon that the hearts of the people are

struck with it. Those who write of Basil and Chrysostom, those two famous preachers in their time, tell us that these men did not account their honors to be in the hums of people, in their applause, but in their crying out, "What shall I do to be saved?" Here's the commendation of a minister. And ministers should labor that their ministry be such a ministry because the Lord has such a high esteem of a heart that trembles at His Word. There is matter enough in the Word of God to make any heart to tremble if it is delivered *as* the Word of God. What's the chaff to the wheat? 1 Peter 4:11: "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God." If any man undertakes to speak God's Word, it must be as the Word of God, the oracles of God.

I remember reading of a man named Tully, who spoke so powerfully that he made Caesar's book fall out of his hands. And, certainly, if Tully could do so with his eloquence, there is that power and eloquence in the Word of God as will make the lusts of men to fall out of their hearts. The weapons of our warfare are mighty through God, to the casting down of strongholds, and proud imaginations that cast themselves against God and His truth. There is a power in God's Word; men are mighty through God. Not being carnal according to the flesh but spiritual, they come to be able to cast down the proud imagination and to make them tremble before the Lord.

3. From this gracious disposition of heart, trembling at the Word, you may learn why the servants of God are so obedient to God's Word and dare do nothing against it. God has put into them a trembling at His Word. They see in God's Word what others do not see. You wonder why some men are strict in their way, why they will suffer anything in the world rather than go against any one sentence in the Word. You wonder at it. Why, because you do not see so much majesty and authority in God's Word; your hearts have not been struck with fear and

trembling. But they see such a majesty and fear in the Word that they dare not go against it. They would rather endure any evil in the world than go against the Word. They dare not do as you dare.

In Revelation 6:9, it is said of some there that when the fifth seal was opened, "I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the Word of God, and for the testimony which they held." That is, they would rather be slain than go contrary to the Word of God. They would keep themselves close to the Word whatever became of their lives and of their estates. "I saw the souls of those and they were under the altar, they were under God's protection." Oh, surely they were such as trembled at the Word of God—and God looks at such souls. The soul of such a one shall lie under the altar, shall be in God's eye. That soul so trembles that it would rather lose life and all than do anything against God's Word.

4. The fourth use is a use of comfort and encouragement unto all those who are of such a blessed disposition that they tremble at the Word. "To him will I look that trembles at My Word." The very text is full of marrow, and full of comfort unto such. In nature they say that the trembling of the heart is a disease. But in divinity it is no disease, but a very gracious disposition. And such as have such a blessed disposition may have much comfort from it. The comfort may flow unto their souls in these several streams. There are these seven streams of consolation flowing into the hearts of such as tremble at God's Word:

(1) Surely God has begun to enlighten your soul in that He has begun to make you see His glory in His Word. This is a great mercy. There was a time when you saw nothing more in the Word of God than in the word of man or in other things. But has God begun to show you His majesty and glory in His Word?

Oh, this is a rich mercy. It is a sign that God is beginning to do great things for your soul.

(2) But, further, if you have a heart that trembles at the Word, know that all the threats that are in God's Word have the glory of them already upon your soul and, therefore, you do not need to fear any evil from them. You need not, I say, fear the execution of any threats that are in God's Word. Why? Because God has the glory that He would have from His threats already in and upon your heart. Why is it that the Lord in His Word so threatens sinners? It is that He might have glory, that sinners might fear Him. But now, if you fear before Him and give glory to Him, God has His end in His threats and, therefore, they have nothing further to do with you. It is a great comfort to a soul to know that there's never a threatening in God's Word that has to do with him, to bring any evil upon him. Why? Because they have had their end in him already, though not in execution.

There is a twofold end of threatenings. Either God fetches out glory to His name by the execution, or, second, by the heart trembling before Him. Now if God may have His glory by your trembling, He will never desire His glory by execution. When He takes His glory by execution, it is not that He delights to crush under feet the prisoners of the earth. Indeed, God has pleasure in His own glory. He is resolved that He will have glory to His name from every creature. But God would rather have His glory from our souls in an active way than to force glory from us in a passive way. And, therefore, if you have a heart to give glory to Him in an active way, you need not fear that God will force out His glory in a passive way.

(3) If you have a heart that trembles at the Word, know that very word of salvation God intends to you in a special manner.

When God at any time brings a word of life and salvation to any congregation, God has a special aim at your soul, and intends you in speaking a word of life and salvation. For that, take that forenamed Scripture in Acts 13:16: "Men of Israel, and ye that fear God give audience." But mark what he says in verse 26: "Men and brethren, children of the flock of Abraham, and whosoever among you feareth God, to you is the word of this salvation sent." Is there a soul who fears the Lord, who trembles at His presence? To that soul is the word of salvation sent. When at any time you come to hear in the ministry of the Word anything spoken of life and salvation, know that God aims at your soul in particular. To you is the word of this salvation sent.

(4) Certainly, if you tremble at God's Word, you shall be comforted. There is as much matter in the Word of God to comfort a soul as to make it tremble and fear. And for that I might give you many promises in Scripture. Take these three. The first is in a verse or two after my text that heretofore I have also made use of: "Hear the Word of the Lord, ye that tremble at His Word." You who tremble at His Word, hear it. What must I hear? "Your brethren that hated you, that cast you out for My name sake, said, 'Let the Lord be glorified.' But he shall appear to your joy, and they shall be ashamed." It is as if He should say, "You trembled so as you dared not do as others did, especially in My worship. You dared not venture as they did and, therefore they cast you out, but here's a promise to such: The Lord shall appear to your comfort, and they shall be ashamed." The Lord has fulfilled this Word many a time.

Another promise you have in Proverbs 13:13: "Who so despiseth the Word shall be destroyed, but he that feareth the commandment, shall be rewarded." God will reward you for this. Do you come before the Lord with a heart trembling at His Word? When you hear His Word, do you receive it with

a trembling heart? He who fears the commandment shall be rewarded. It is opposed to the other threatening.

A third promise is that one in Isaiah 50:10: "Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeys the voice of His servant, that walketh in darkness and hath no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God." That is, where is this soul who has such a trembling frame of heart, who dares not but obey the voice of God in His Word? It may be there is someone in this place who sits in darkness and can see no light, who has walked with a trembling disposition at God's Word, and is able to appeal to God and say, "Lord, Thou who knowest all things, Thou knowest that I would not for a world but obey Thy voice, that my heart stands in awe of Thy Word," and yet perhaps this soul is in darkness for the present and sees no light. At such a soul the Lord looks this day, and says, "Let such a soul trust in the name of the Lord, and stay himself upon his God, for there is mercy indeed for such a soul." And that's a fourth stream of consolation to such as tremble at the Word of God, that this Word of God shall certainly comfort them.

(5) This disposition of your heart in trembling at God's Word is accepted instead of obedience. Though you cannot obey God's Word as you would, yet the Lord will spare you. That soul who finds many weaknesses, and is not able to obey many truths of God that it hears revealed in the Word, yet, if it trembles at it, peace be to that soul. I say, the Lord accepts this trembling disposition instead of obedience and, indeed, *rather* than obedience. The very act of obedience does not have so much in it as this. For a hypocrite may perform the act of obedience, but he has none of this trembling. In Malachi 3, it appears plainly what is spoken of such a disposition as this, for in the 15th verse: "And now we call the proud happy, yea, they that work wickedness are set up. Yea, they that tempt God are

even delivered.” But in the 16th verse: “Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another, and the Lord hearkened and heard it; and a book of remembrance was written before Him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon His name.” Mark how God loves to repeat this and, as it were, to roll it under His tongue, as we often do with things that are sweet. He does not only say “for them,” but “for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon His name.” And the text also says, “They shall be Mine in that day when I make up My jewels, and I will spare them as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.” So God does not say, “To him will I look who *does* My Word,” but to him who trembles at My Word. A learned man said of this text, “There’s more godliness in the trembling of the heart than in the work of the hand.” God accepts it, and therefore you can be comforted in this.

(6) Another stream of comfort is this: the Lord will reveal Himself to this soul. Of all dispositions in the world, the Lord loves to manifest Himself to such a one as this. Though for the present perhaps He does not do it, yet wait upon Him and the Lord will make known the most glorious things to you. You shall know the mind of God rather than any other. I shall give you a notable text for this purpose, that they who have trembling hearts at God’s Word come to know the mind of God sooner than any other men in the world. Ezra 10:3: “Now therefore, let us make a covenant with our God, to put away all the wives, and such as are born of them, according to the counsel of my Lord, and of those that tremble at the commandment of our God.” “Come,” he says, “let us go and do.” How? “According to the counsel of my Lord, and according to the counsel of those that tremble at the commandment of our God.” It is as if he should say, “Certainly they know God’s mind; let’s follow their counsel and advice.”

Those who come before God and tremble at His Word are the men and women who understand the nature of God more than any others. He does not say, "Come, let us do according to the counsel of my Lord, and of the wise, learned, and understanding men among us," but "of those who tremble at His Word. They know the mind of God."

And indeed, my brethren, it is better taking counsel from them who tremble at God's Word than from any men in the world besides. Learned men who have bold spirits, and are licentious and wicked, do not understand the secrets of God as do those who tremble at the Word. There is a gracious promise to His elect in Psalm 25:14: "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him, and He will show them His covenants." Those people shall understand God's secrets. Other men may understand some outward things of God's, but for the secrets of God and the covenant of God, only those who fear the Lord have the promise of this.

(7) Such as fear and tremble at God's Word may be comforted. Why? Because the Word that you now tremble at is the Word that God will force all the world to tremble at one day. God will honor His Word before men and angels, and consider, oh, what inconceivable joy must that be to the heart of a man or woman when God shall come to magnify His Word before all the world. To think that this is the very Word that I saw the dreadful authority of God in before when I lived in the world; this is the Word that I saw so much in before and that I obeyed and honored; now God has come to make it good before men and angels; now I see those who did not regard it stand trembling, indeed, when it will do them no good. Oh, therefore, blessed be God that while I lived I trembled at the Word, that the Lord has now come to make so glorious before men and angels.

Be sure that there is a time coming when the Lord will make His Word honorable before all the world, and, therefore, happy are those who tremble at it now in reverencing it. Surely their hearts will be filled with comfort when God shall come and honor it before all the world.

5. If this is such a disposition that the Lord so looks at, you must give me leave, my brethren, to speak a word of rebuke unto those who are far from such a disposition of heart as this is. God, indeed, looks to him who trembles at the Word, but where has God objects to behold? God now looks at this great congregation at this time to see where there is one who trembles at His Word. But, O Lord, though we hope that God has some objects that He beholds, yet over how many souls sometimes does He look before He can see any such object? Oh, no, it is the Word that the angels desire to pry into! It is the Word that there are many thousands of souls blessing the name of God that ever they knew it, and yet you do not mind it, as if it were nothing.

A second sort are farther off than these, and they are such as take liberty to cavil against the Word, as if the Word were their equal. It is enough that you may wrangle together when you are among your equals, but know that, though the man who speaks it may be your equal, the Word of God is above you. James 4:11: "If thou judge the Law: thou art not a doer of the Law, but a judge." These men do not come to be doers of the Law, but to be judges of the Law.

Certainly, if God humbled the hearts of men, they would not have so many objections against the truths of God that are delivered in His Word. But look how God charges them in His Word. They will be ready to charge their own hearts. There is a notable Scripture for this if you compare it with another. The first is Job 38:2: "Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words

without knowledge?” Here God speaks to Job, whose heart was not thoroughly humbled. Mark now, when God had humbled him, in Job 42:3: “Who is he that hideth counsel without knowledge?” It is as if Job should say, “Who is the man? Why, I am he.” He speaks in a way of charging himself as God did before. And that’s a sign that the heart is humbled, when the objections against the Word vanish and the heart is ready to charge upon itself what the Word charged.

Third, those are to be rebuked who go on in a constant way of disobedience against the Word of God, in a way of rebellion against the Word. You know that your ways are against that which you hear in the Word, and yet you go on and continue. O bold heart, I say, that dares presume to go on in those ways that you know are against the Word of God. Why, did you expect to receive no good from God’s Word? Do you not fear any evil that is threatened in God’s Word? Is it nothing to venture all the loss of all the good revealed there? And are you willing, or will you dare, to lie under all the evil that is threatened there? Is it not the Word that must save your soul if ever you are to be saved? Any of you who go on in a bold way of sin against what you hear revealed in the Word, I put this one question (and it is a daunting question) to such a one: do you expect to be saved by God’s Word, yes or no? “Receive with meekness the engrafted Word that is able to save your souls.” Now can you think to be saved by that Word that you go on in constant rebellion against? Oh, it is the pride of your heart that you even venture it.

Consider Jeremiah 13:15: “Hear ye, and give ear: be not proud, for the Lord hath spoken.” So I say to such as go on in a constant way of rebellion against the Word, “Hear ye and give ear.” Do not only hear and let it pass away. “Be not proud for the Lord hath spoken.” When you hear and will not regard what is said, but go on in a way of rebellion against the truth

that you hear revealed, it is a sign that your hearts are proud. It is the Lord that has spoken and, therefore, it is fitting for the creature to yield and submit.

Fourth, there are others who not only go on contrary to the Word, but they live under the condemning sentence of God's Word. They come and hear God's Word condemning them for their sin; yea, and their consciences tell them that they are the sins that they are guilty of, for which God's Word condemns sinners, yet they can sit senseless, stupid, and hard-hearted notwithstanding. This is not to tremble at God's Word. Certainly it is more, for it is more for one sentence of God's Word to condemn a sinner than if all the angels in heaven and men upon the earth should pronounce a sentence of condemnation—and yet some of you can sit day after day under the condemning sentences of God's Word. If God's Word is true, you are a condemned soul for the present.

I make no question but there are many who come to hear the Word who conclude thus with their own hearts: "If this is true that is spoken, I am in a woeful case. I am condemned if this is true."

I knew a man once who, being wild and naughty with another, yet came together to hear sermons. He would go home and say to the other person, "Madam, if this is true that the minister speaks, you and I are in a bad condition." So certainly, many men say, "If it is true, I am a most miserable man."

I would put this to you, one by one throughout this congregation. Suppose all the threats that are in God's Word are true, and are the Word of God indeed. And suppose that they must all be made good. What would you think of your condition then? I make no question but many a man's conscience would answer, "Certainly my condition would in no way be rested if this is so, but I hope things will not prove so bad."

Well, then, it comes to this issue: that all the foundation of your peace and present rest and comfort depends upon this, that you *hope* things will not prove as bad as they are revealed in the Word. Is not this the rest and comfort of your soul? If you were sure they would prove so bad, you would say to yourself, "I will never go on in my wicked course any more. I would never be able to sleep at night quietly." So that if those things were true, you could not sleep. I say, cursed be that peace, that comfort, that sleep, that ease that has no other ground for it but to hope God's Word is not true. But this is all the foundation of the comforts of many a man's soul that he lives upon all the days of his life. I am afraid that if God should call out men and inquire of them what is the foundation of their lives, they would be forced to say, "It is, Lord, out of hopes that things are not as bad as ministers preach out of the Word." Cursed, I say, is the hope that is grounded upon no other ground. Look to yourself. You have a bold heart that dares venture your soul and eternal estate upon such a hope as this, that if God's Word proves true you are a lost and undone creature to all eternity. You dare venture? This is a bold venture. Oh, consider this, you who can sit under the condemning power of God's Word and yet not have your hearts struck with all. Oh, learn to tremble at it.

Fifth, there is yet another sort of people who are to be rebuked from this point, and that is those men who have their hearts rise against God's Word. They do not tremble at it, that is, such as when the Word of God comes home to their consciences and strikes fear. All their desire and endeavor is to get it cut out of their hearts again, and they wish they had not been at the sermon. Oh, they are troubled at it, and get into wicked company so they may get out of the fear of God's Word. These are far from trembling. O poor creature that you are,

how much better were it for you to follow on that work of God that may be for the good of your soul. Hereafter it may be you will see cause to curse yourself for your folly. Oh, you will have cause to say, "What a happy thing had it been for me if I had followed on that work of God that God began to work upon me at such a time."

Sixth, there are another sort that rage at the Word of God, as we read of that wicked King Jehoiakim in Jeremiah 36. When the roll was brought into him and read before him, he cut it with a knife and cast it into the fire. I knew one who read the Scripture passages against adultery, and tore out those pages. But mark, this king's father's heart melted at the reading of the Word, and his son took a knife and cut it and threw it into the fire! Now this was so great an evil that the Jews kept a fast once a year to bewail this sin of their king.

Seventh, how far are they from trembling at God's Word who scorn at it? When Christ Himself preached against covetousness in Luke 16, those who were covetous derided Him. It was the same with Isaiah and Paul. Oh, this is also a most dreadful evil, for any to be guilty of such a height of impiety! When the Lord expects trembling at His Word, they scorn at it.

Eighth, there is another sort, though not quite so bad, who jest at God's Word. But take heed, my brethren, of meddling with Scripture by way of jests. There are two things that wise men should never jest at: those who are in misery and holy things. Now when you have to do with God's Word, and make jests out of Scripture, you meddle with edged tools. And know that it is a high degree of taking God's name in vain for any man to make a jest out of Scripture. I remember Luther saying, "If a man would play and jest, let him jest with his children, with his boys, but," he said, "as soon as he comes to hear the Word, see that you obey without any dispute at all."

Jest with other things, but not with this one. In another place he said, "It is no play to hear God's Word, but when the Word comes to touch the soul, it is as thunder which casts down the strongest things by its power." It is no matter of jesting to hear the Word, but is it a matter of trembling? Why, who are you that either you slight the Word or object against the Word? Who are you that either you rebel against the Word or wrangle at it? Who are you that darkens knowledge thus? Who are you that you can raise your heart against the blessed Word of God? The Word of the Lord shakes the heavens and the earth (Psalm 104:32). God merely looks upon the earth and it trembles, but God speaks to you and you will not tremble. Job 26:11: "The pillars of heaven tremble and are astonished at His reproof." Mark the text. If God but reproves, the pillars of heaven are astonished at God's reproof. How often has God reproved you out of His Word and you have not trembled? God reproves you for your Sabbath-breaking, for your swearing, for your keeping bad company, and for the neglect of His worship in your family. God reproves you for your atheism. And in Job 9:6 we read: "Which shakes the earth out of her place, and the pillars thereof tremble." The pillars of earth and the pillars of heaven tremble, and who are you to stand boldly before the Word of God?

Holy men tremble when they hear the Word, as we read in Jeremiah 23:9: "My heart within me is broken because of the prophets, all my bones shake. I am like a drunken man, and like a man whom wine hath overcome because of the Lord and because of the words of His holiness." The saints tremble, as did Habbakuk in Habakkuk 3:16: "When I heard, my belly trembled, and my lips quivered at the voice." Yea, the very angels in heaven attend with reverence to the Word of the Lord. Psalm 103:20: "They do God's commandments, hearkening to the

voice of His Word,” that is, with reverence and respect to God’s Word; and as soon as they hear God’s Word, they immediately obey it. What are you doing all this while? When God speaks, the pillars of the earth and of heaven tremble. The saints of God tremble, the holy prophets tremble. The very angels hear God’s Word with reverence, and you? All this while you stand before God’s Word without a trembling heart? Then let me speak but these two or three things to you.

First, know that the Lord cannot but with judgment look upon such an object as this. The Lord looks from heaven upon him who trembles at His Word with acceptance, but it is impossible that the Lord should look upon such a hard, stony heart as yours is without detestation. “What a poor, vile wretch! The least word of My mouth would have sent him down to the bottomless pit, and yet, when I speak, he regards it not.”

Oh, it is impossible that the Lord should look upon you without destruction, and especially if you are full of base fears. If your master speaks, or a man in a high place or office speaks, you are ready to fear them; but when the infinite, eternal, dreadful God speaks, you do not fear. Know that the Word that you do not fear is working your destruction, and know that God will work fear out of your heart and you shall tremble one day. Isaiah 51:17: “Awake, awake, stand up, O Jerusalem, which hast drunk at the hand of the Lord the cup of His fury; thou hast drunk the dregs of the cup of trembling, and wrung them out.” There is a time that God has for sinners who will not tremble at His Word, to cause them to drink the dregs of the cup of trembling. Oh, the dregs of it may be your portion.

And, further, when God shall force trembling, it may be that God will as little regard you in your fears as you regard Him in His Word. Proverbs 1:26 is most dreadful: “I will laugh at your calamity, I will mock when your fear cometh.”

I shall conclude all with a word of exhortation. Let us all learn, then, to labor for such a blessed disposition of heart. Hosea 13:1 uses the phrase, "When Ephraim spake trembling." This is spoken to the honor of Ephraim, according to some interpretations, that when Ephraim merely spoke, all the people around him trembled.

Surely it must be to the honor of the great God that, when He speaks, all the people should tremble. The voice of the Lord is full of majesty; the voice of the Lord is gracious; and, therefore, it becomes us all to tremble before Him. Let us lay upon our hearts the meditation of how much there is in the Word, and consider the majesty of God that is there.

And consider thus how God has made His Word good from time to time. The Word of God has overwhelmed many thousands upon thousands of souls, cast them upon their backs, and now they are undone forever by the power of God's Word. Therefore, it is fitting that they should tremble.

Entreat God that He would show unto your soul the glory that is in His name. In Deuteronomy, the Lord speaks it as a curse, that He will give unto the people a trembling heart, but you entreat it of God as a blessing.

And do you manifest that God has put this disposition into your hearts by reverent attention? If men's and women's hearts trembled at the Word, they would not sleep at it, but they would attend. Oh, that the Lord would go on and keep your hearts in awe of His Word.

You will say, "Indeed, if it were spoken by Him from heaven, then we would; but as it is we cannot."

Divers things I should have spoken about that. Only remember that which Christ says, "He which despises you despises Me, and he which despises Me despises Him that sent Me." Only one more Scripture I will give you to take away that objection so

it may never again prevail. 2 Chronicles 36:12: “And he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord his God, and humbled not himself before Jeremiah the Prophet, speaking from the mouth of the Lord.”

SERMON 4

(Preached June 9, 1644)

A Tender Heart

*“Because thine heart was tender [or melted],
and thou hast humbled thyself before the Lord, when thou
hearest what I spake against this place, and against the
inhabitants thereof, that they should become a desolation and
a curse, and hast rent thy clothes, and wept before Me,
I also have heard thee,’ saith the Lord.”*

2 KINGS 22:19

*T*here are two gracious dispositions of the soul whereby the name of God is sanctified in the hearing of His Word: first, a trembling heart; second, a melting heart. The first we finished the last day, and we have chosen this text to handle the second.

The words read unto you are a part of that famous story that shows us how Josiah, a gracious and godly king, was affected with hearing God’s Word; how he was moved at hearing of God’s displeasure, partly against himself and partly against the people. The summary of the story is this: in the 18th year of his reign,

there was a great deal of care taken to repair the temple of the Lord. And in the repairing of the temple, there was found the Book of the Law which, it seems, they had not seen for a long time. It was read in the presence of Josiah the king. Upon hearing the book read, his heart immediately melted and he began to be very much troubled, so that he could not be satisfied until he knew further the mind of God concerning what was read in that book. He sent to Huldah, the prophetess, to know God's mind. Huldah sent him an answer that concerned the people partly, and partly the king. And the words of Scripture I read to you are the special part of the answer of God concerning the king: "Because thine heart was tender, and thou hast humbled thyself.... Therefore I have heard you," said the Lord, "and you shall die in peace."

Now in this story there are these four queries that are very useful for the opening of it:

1. What is this same Book of the Law that was read unto Josiah?
2. How did it come to pass that he sent for Huldah rather than for Jeremiah the prophet, for he was alive in those times?
3. What was the reason for the severe answer the Lord made by her against the people? Though they were in a hopeful way of reformation, yet God professed that evil should be brought upon them.
4. How was that fulfilled which God promised to Josiah, that he should die in peace? In the latter end of the chapter, you shall find that Josiah died in war. I shall only speak to these four things to give a little light to the history, and then we will come to the words read.

QUESTION 1. What is this Book of the Law that was read unto Josiah?

ANSWER. Regarding the book that here was found, the text plainly says that it was the Book of the Law. It is strange that they should not have the Book of the Law, that the Book of the Law should be kept from the people of the Jews, and that they should not have it now. That is a very strange thing, indeed. It is one of the strangest passages that we read in Scripture, that it should be accounted such a wonderful thing in Josiah's time to find the Book of the Law. There is a great deal of discussion among interpreters about this. Some say it was burned in Ahaz's time, that he burned all the copies he could find so that they might not be testimonies against him for departing from the true religion. It has been the way of wicked princes to burn Scripture. Dioclesian sought to burn all that he could of Scripture, yet God has miraculously preserved the Scripture to this day. There was never any book that had so much opposition, and that was sought to be utterly obliterated and destroyed, as this book of the Scriptures; and yet God has preserved this book above all books, for it is the most ancient book in the world. It was long before any book that was ever written that we have extant in the world, and yet there is none more opposed (which is a good argument that God owns it).

But it cannot be imagined that in Ahaz's day the copy was burned and that they should not have it, because between these two reigns there was that gracious reign of Hezekiah. So it seems that it may be in Ahaz's time many of the copies were burned so that they had but a few in Hezekiah's time. Then came Manasses after Hezekiah, who was a wicked prince and reigned fifty-five years. It is likely that almost all his time he continued in wickedness and set himself against God and all godliness. Then his son, Ammon, came after him, and he was, for a time, as wicked as his father! So in these two wicked kings' reigns it is likely that there were very few Books of the Law to be found.

Chrysostom, in his sermons upon Matthew and Corinthians, thinks it was only the book of Deuteronomy. And so many, I find, think that it was some part of the Law, at least, that was not extant at that time, and especially it is thought to be the 27th and 28th chapters of Deuteronomy that were read before Josiah at this time that so moved his heart.

Now, we may learn what cause we have to bless God that we not only have the Book of the Law, but the Book of the Gospel, and the Prophets; not only most, but all the history of the Kings and Judges, and the Psalms and Prophets, the Gospels, the Epistles, and the Revelation. We have all these books in our houses that we may read continually. It seems in Josiah's time that it was a strange thing to have some places of the Book of the Law read, and that before the king.

When Josiah heard this book read, and those chapters most likely, his heart was mightily affected; for there he saw he had gone on in sin against God, though in ignorance—but he knew that would not excuse him. Indeed, he did not understand before. It appears by his being so affected now that he did not understand the danger of those sins in which he and his people had continued. But for all that, as soon as he came to know what sins they were, and in what danger they were, his heart was exceedingly troubled.

This teaches us that we should not think that our ignorance excuses us from our sins, but as soon as God brings His Word among us to reveal the danger of our sin, God expects that our hearts should be humbled before Him for our sin. And Josiah was so humbled that he could not be at rest. Indeed, a heart truly sensible of the evil of sin cannot be at rest until it knows further God's mind towards it, but it will be inquiring by all means possible to further know the mind of God concerning it. "How can I sleep quietly when I perceive that wrath is out

against me, until I know whether God is reconciled to me or not?" This was the case of Josiah.

QUESTION 2. Why did he send for Huldah and not Jeremiah? Jeremiah was a prophet in Israel at the same time. Why did he not send for Jeremiah, who was a famous prophet? Jeremiah began his prophecy in the thirteenth year of Josiah.

ANSWER. Some say that Jeremiah was but a young prophet, for he began his prophecy in the thirteenth year of Josiah. He had been in the ministry only five years, and he said himself that he was but a child and could not speak. Therefore, they think that Josiah did not think it as fitting to send for him as for Huldah, who had more experience, though she was a woman. But I cannot conceive that to be the cause of his not sending for Jeremiah. Rather, I think it was because Jeremiah was not at hand like Huldah was. The town where Jeremiah dwelt was not at Jerusalem; he dwelt at Anathoth. Now the good king was so earnest to know God's mind that he was willing to learn it from anyone, be they never so lowly. Let them be what they will be, so long as we may come to know what the mind of God is by them.

QUESTION 3. What was the reason for the severe answer the Lord made by her against the people? Though they were in a hopeful way of reformation, yet God professed that evil should be brought upon them. Was not the country in a good and hopeful way of reformation? Did not the king have his heart melt, and did he not fall down weeping upon the apprehension of God's displeasure for the sins of which he was convinced before? As soon as he was convinced, he fell down weeping, and he was very desirous to know God's mind. Were they not now in a mighty hopeful condition for Reformation? And yet for all this, this answer is sent: "I will bring upon this place, and

upon the inhabitants thereof, all the words of the Book which the King of Judah hath read.”

ANSWER. This holds forth unto us very sad instruction: a people may be in such a condition that all the reformation and all the repentance in the world shall not keep them from temporal affliction from the hand of God, in the sense of temporal evils. For if you read afterwards in the chapter, you shall find that there was a mighty reformation. And yet all the words of this Book must be fulfilled.

We see what sin is. It may make such a breach between God and us that, let us do what we can, it will not keep us from temporal afflictions here in this world. We know that all the repentance of Moses could not keep Moses from that sad affliction of being cut off before he came to the Land of Canaan. The Lord would not hear Moses. Yet there is no question but that Moses repented of that sin by which he provoked God, yet God would not hear him. He would not let him go into the land of Canaan. But now, because the Lord does not reveal this particularly concerning a people now as He did then, we have no cause to determine this against ourselves, but only to make use of this so that we do not dally nor trifle with God lest the decree comes forth against us and there is no help for us.

QUESTION 4. This answer that the Lord made concerning Josiah has a great deal of difficulty in it, and that is that the Lord would be merciful to him and promised him that he should die in peace, and yet, in the progress of the story, we find that Josiah was killed in war. He was killed in the battle. How can this be true, then, that he would die in peace?

ANSWER. Josiah died in peace because his peace was made with God. His sins were pardoned and there was peace between God and his soul. Therefore, let a man die how he will, yet,

if there is peace between God and him, he dies in peace. Let there be never such tempests and storms abroad in the world, yet he dies in peace as long as there is peace between God and his soul.

But I think there is a great deal more than this. We must make this Word of God to be true with a further answer, and that is that he died in peace, namely the peace of the kingdom. And indeed, that was as peace to him. For the war that he died in was not a war that came against the kingdom, as you may read after in the story about his going to war. The kingdom did not suffer those dreadful evils that were threatened. Before Judah was carried into captivity, the Lord took him away so that, when he died, he left the kingdom in a good condition for the present, and he left the ordinances of God among them. So it was accounted as dying in peace with regard to the kingdom. This seems to be interpreted in 2 Chronicles 34:28, where you have this story repeated again: “Behold, I will gather thee to thy fathers, and thou shalt be gathered to thy grave in peace; neither shall thine eyes see all the evil that I will bring upon this place, and upon the inhabitants of the same.” So that he was gathered to his fathers in peace because his eyes did not see the evil that came upon the kingdom after his days.

And indeed, let a man die how he will, as long as the kingdom where he lives and the church be in peace, and enjoy their liberties and God’s ordinances, this man may be said to die in peace. It is peace to me that I leave the church in peace and the kingdom in peace. Especially knowing that not long after grievous duties shall befall the kingdom (he dying before that time), he is here said to die in peace. But enough for giving a little light to this notable and famous story.

We come now more closely to the words. The answer of the prophetess concerning the king begins in verse 18: “But to the

King of Judah which sent you to enquire of the Lord, thus shall ye say to him, ‘Because thine heart was tender.’” God is saying, “As for the people, I will not be entreated for them. They shall certainly feel My stroke, and shall have all the words written in the Book to come upon them.”

From hence note that when the Lord is bringing public calamity upon a people, He usually makes His “buts” His exceptions. But to the King of Judah He says, “What? Is there any tender, broken heart that is broken for the sins of the nation? I will have an eye upon them.” It’s true, sometimes, that godly ones may be taken away in the judgments of a nation, but it is when God has some special work to bring about by their deaths.

But we do not find that God has His “buts” now, for godly ones are taken away as well as others. Surely, my brethren, it is to make us all tremble and to make us so that we do not rest upon anything, neither fasting nor prayer, but to lie at the goodness of the Lord to do with us what He pleases. And that God does not make His “buts” now. It is for some great work that God has to bring about that yet is kept hidden from us. But this we must be confident of: God will have as much glory from their deaths as He would have had from their lives, and however the ways of God are so dark towards us for the present, yet there is a time when God will make His “buts,” when there shall be known a difference between him who fears God and him who does not.

There are very few (though they are hunted for the sins of the nation still) who have a faith for deliverance from temporal judgments, and that might be one cause. Though the Lord promised deliverance, yet He would have our faith to reach unto that promise at least, to roll our souls upon it more than we do—though it is very hard for any to have such a faith so as to be able to conclude certainly and fully that they shall be delivered from a temporal affliction. We are to admire God’s

dispensations in this, and to wait for further revelation of what God intends towards us. Well, He makes His “but” concerning the King of Judah.

Oh, it becomes the greatest ones in the world, kings and princes, when God threatens to make their hearts melt before Him, no man is too great to humble himself before the great God. Though it is true that we have a vile, wretched generation of men who many times, though they will quake and shake at the threatenings of one who is their superior, yet every vile wretch thinks himself good enough to sin against the Lord and to stand out against God’s Word. But he did not do so.

Aye, but you will say, “Perhaps he was but a child.” No, he was a king in his full vigor and strength. He was 26 years of age, and that time is the time of the greatest lustiness that can be, especially for courtiers and great men. Yet King Josiah, at 26 years of age, in the midst of his nobles, though he was not in any immediate danger to the outward view, yet, upon hearing the Word of the Lord humbled himself and wept before the Lord. And therefore, this is the answer that came from God concerning him: “Because thine heart was tender...I have accepted thee, and thou shalt have peace.”

So in the words there are four things to consider:

1. What was it that wrought upon the heart of Josiah? What were the occasions of Josiah’s heart being made tender?
2. The frame and disposition of Josiah’s heart: it melted.
3. The fruit of this: first, he humbled himself; second, he tore his clothes; and, third, he wept before the Lord.
4. Last, God’s gracious acceptance of this: “ ‘I also have heard thee,’ saith the Lord.”

1. I shall not at this time handle the disposition of Josiah in this melting frame. All that I shall be able to go through shall be a point or two about the occasion of this, for so we have that in the text: his heart was tender. "And you have humbled yourself before the Lord when you heard what I spoke against the inhabitants."

How did he hear it? By the scribes bringing a few old torn, rotten papers, as it is likely they were, for they had been hidden, it may be, in some hold of the wall of the temple among the rubbish for many years. And it is likely that they were very old papers, were brought before the king and read. The text says: "Josiah's heart was tender, and he did humble himself when he did hear what God spake." God did not speak to him by a prophet, nor from heaven. If God had spoken by an audible voice from heaven to him, and had told him of the sins of his court and kingdom, then it would have been something for him to have his heart melt. Or if the Lord had raised up some extraordinary prophets to come and pronounce dreadful threatenings against him, it would have been something; but it was only upon hearing a few papers that had been found among the rubbish in the temple, from whence there are these observations:

First, when the Lord is pleased to humble any soul, He can do it with very little pains.

Second, it is very acceptable to God for the souls of people immediately to relent and yield and humble themselves as soon as they hear God's displeasure made out against them. These are the two notes from the cause of the disposition of Josiah's heart.

The first is a very sweet and excellent point. When God is pleased to work upon the heart of a sinner, a very little matter will make his heart relent and yield to God. You have some who will stand out against it very much, and some again yield upon it very little. What a difference there is between Josiah and Pharaoh. Here are two kings. God sends to Pharaoh an

extraordinary messenger. He comes in the name of God and works miracles before him, many miracles such as none in his nation could do. And, besides the miracles, he brings more fearful judgments upon the whole kingdom, and upon Pharaoh himself, such hideous judgments as would make a man's hair almost stand on end to hear them related to them. And he follows them with ten judgments, one after another; and yet his heart will not yield to God. And Josiah does but hear a little out of some old papers and his heart yields immediately.

Oh, when God shall work it is no great matter what the means are. The means may be very little, weak and poor, and yet the heart shall be brought to yield to God in a gracious and holy manner. We read in 1 Kings 19:19 (a very observable history): "So he departed thence and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen before him, and Elijah passed by him and cast his mantle upon him." That was all he did. Now Elisha was a man of very good rank. Though he was plowing, his twelve yoke of oxen were his own. Elijah merely came by and cast his mantle upon him and, the text says, he left the oxen and ran after Elijah, saying, "Let me, I pray thee kiss my father and mother, and then I will follow thee. And he said unto him, 'Go back again, for what have I done to thee?'"

Aye, but there was a secret virtue that went together with the casting of the mantle of Elijah upon Elisha, and then his heart was towards him so that none could hinder him from going along with him. So, when the Lord's time comes to gain the heart of a man or woman, the least thing in the world will do then. He will come in immediately.

It is just like what is said concerning Peter in Luke 22:61. Peter had sinned exceedingly against Christ and, the text says, that Christ did but look upon him, and upon that Peter went

out and wept bitterly. "He threw himself out," that's the proper meaning of the word. He cast himself out with a kind of violence. He had enough of himself. The Lord Christ did but give him a look and he went and wept bitterly. Oh, there are many whom the Lord Christ speaks to again and again, and their hearts are not stirred; but when the Lord is pleased to work upon the heart, it is but God's giving a look to a soul.

It may be that some of you are going on in sinful ways, and you have heard much against them, but your hearts are not stirred. But if the Lord's time has come, it takes but one look upon you to open your eyes; you need but one view of that God whom you have sinned against, and the thing will be done. In Song of Solomon 5:4 the church says, "My Beloved put in His hand by the hole of the door, and my bowels were moved for Him." The church being secure, she reasons against coming out to Christ and says, "I have put off my coat, how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet, how shall I defile them? Oh, it will be a great deal of trouble!" She was loathe to be put to any trouble.

But mark this fourth verse: "My Beloved put in His hand by the hole of the door, and my bowels were moved for Him." He merely put His hand at the hole of the door, and her heart was moved. Why was that more than knocking? For He knocked before, aye, but the time had not come. So it may be with many a soul. The Lord may stand knocking at the door of your soul again and again, from time to time, and yet you may have one excuse or another to put Him off. But when God's time comes, He gives but one touch to your heart and the thing is done. A little labor will do it when God's time has come. In Isaiah 11:6, it is prophesied there of the times of the gospel that they shall be so yielding to the truths of God that a child shall lead them. Any truth of God that is delivered by the meanest, by the weakest, by a child, shall lead them.

Isaiah 30:21 is very famous: "And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, 'This is the way, walk ye in it,' when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left." What follows? "Ye shall defile also the covering of thy graven images of silver, and the ornament of thy molten images of gold; thou shalt cast them away as a menstruous cloth; thou shalt say unto it, 'Get thee hence.'" These people were greatly set upon their idolatry, and the prophet found it a very hard thing to take their hearts off from their idolatrous ways. But now the Lord promises a time when they should hear a word, and that behind them, an inkling, and what shall the effect be? "Thou shalt take away the covering of thy graven images of silver." For they were used to having their images clothed very richly, but they should take all that rich and glorious work and cast it away as a menstruous cloth, and with indignation say, "Get thee hence." What a change is here with simply hearing a word behind one!

And when God's time has come for poor souls, who have heard many sermons and yet have stood it out against God and His Word, I say, when the time of God is come and they hear a voice behind them saying, "O sinner, O sinful soul, your ways are not good. Look around you," some such think that God is but hinting into their mind, perhaps working more in their hearts than all the sermons they ever heard when it says, "They shall hear a voice behind them."

John 1:48-49 is as observable concerning Nathaniel. When Christ was about to call Nathaniel to Him, what a poor thing was it that worked upon Nathaniel's spirit. "Nathaniel said unto Him, 'Whence knowest Thou me?' Jesus answered and said unto him, 'Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the figtree, I saw thee.'" Mark what follows. "Nathaniel answered and said unto Him, 'Rabbi, Thou art the Son of God, Thou art the King of Israel.' Jesus answered and said unto him,

‘Because I said, “I saw thee under the figtree,” believest thou? Thou shalt see greater things than these.’” A little thing will work upon the heart when the Lord is pleased to call the sinner. And you know concerning Matthew that Christ did but say, “Come and follow Me,” and with Zebedee’s sons He did but say, “Come and follow Me,” and they immediately left the ship, and their father and nets. Matthew left his receipt of custom and followed Him.

Think of the story (which I suppose you who are acquainted with Scripture know) of Zacheus. He was a very vile, covetous wretch, and very few of those are wrought upon. Well, he had heard of the fame of Christ, of such a strange kind of man who was abroad in the world, and he felt the need to see Him because people were flocking after Him. He, being so short, climbed up into a tree. Christ, passing by and looking up, said unto him, “Zacheus, come down. Salvation is come to thy soul.” Zacheus came down immediately and cried out, “Behold, the two parts of my goods I will give to the poor, and, if I have wronged any man, I will restore fourfold.” For a covetous man to be willing to part with two parts of his goods to give to the poor, and to make restitution fourfold of all the wrong that he had done! What a business we have to do to work upon Zacheuses, not to give two parts of their goods, but a little to the poor people of God who are in distress at this time! But now a little will do the business when the time of the Lord has come.

How is this so? The first reason is the power of the truth. The truths of God that concern God and our own souls are of a mighty efficacy. If the truth can get to the heart, it is no matter what the means are. For example, some medicine is very strong and operative if it can only get into the body. If it can set in, it will work. So the truths of God have such an abundance of efficacy that, if they but get into the heart, they will be

working. If the broad seal of the kingdom, you know, is brought unto a man, let the messenger that brings it have never such a weak hand and be never such a poor and contemptible man, yet it carries authority with it because it is the broad seal. So the truths of God have a great deal of authority, and let them but come to hearts, they will work exceedingly. Indeed, let the means be what they will be, it is not the means that works, but God in the means. Asa said concerning the Lord in 2 Chronicles 14:11: "It is easy with Thee, O Lord, to be seen by few as well as by many." So it is all one with God to strike by little and weak means as by strong ones.

OBJECTION. You will say, "What need do we have, then, for so much preaching, and for such arguments to work upon our hearts?"

ANSWER. Yes, we are bound to do what befits creatures to do, and to leave God to do what pleases Him. Though the Lord may sometimes take weak means, yet the Lord would have us to make use of all the means that we possibly can. Let us attend upon the Lord in all the means that we possibly can. When the Lord is pleased to come and work, let the means be what they will be, the thing will be done because there is the power of God put forth anytime the means work.

Suppose one came and preached the most powerful sermon that ever was. Yet, unless God was pleased to go out with the Word, it would never work savingly to humble your souls; you will be hard-hearted for all that. And, on the other side, let any hint of a word be spoken, though from a child, yet if God is pleased to put forth His arm it shall break the most stout heart upon the earth when the Lord is pleased to put forth His arm.

Another reason is because the Lord is pleased sometimes to put the heart into a better preparation for receiving the

truths than at other times. And that's the reason sometimes why weaker means do good when stronger will not.

QUESTION. You will say then, "Are there preparatory works that can prepare us for grace?"

ANSWER. Truly thus far, so prepare as to take away many things that hinder and prepare the heart for taking in of the truths. But they cannot be preparatory works so to prepare as either of congruity to merit, or that God should be engaged to come in with His grace, but to prepare to take away the hindrances. For example, it is thus in many men's hearts as it is in wood: sometimes you have wood that is very knotty, and a great many blows will not split it asunder. Other wood, one little knock will do it. It is so with the ground. When the ground is dry and hard after a drought, if you put the plow in it will break; but when the ground is softened by rain, the plow will go in easily then. Jeremiah 4:3: "The work of humiliation is compared to the plowing up of the fallow ground of the heart." A little medicine, you know, will work sometimes when a great deal will not work at other times.

So the soul is in a disposition sometimes to be wrought upon by lesser means than at another time, yet still the power is all from God. But God is pleased still to work suitably to the disposition of men and women, and God is pleased to take the hints and the advantages of men's and women's hearts, for they are not always in the desperate opposition against the truth. When the Lord comes with the storm and rain of affliction upon the hearts of men and women, how soft and pliable are they to anything that God shall say to them! The Lord is pleased now to take hints and advantages of such a condition that men are put into.

I should have shown you some special dispositions that are wrought upon more easily than others. I do not speak now of

those that are wrought upon for conversion, but to be humbled before God for sin sooner than others. For example, the more fear of God there is upon a heart, the more easily will such a heart be wrought upon. In Proverbs, the fear of God is opposed to the hardness of man's heart. If the fear of God is there, it will not be hardened; but if the fear of God is not there, then it is hardened. And so, where the heart is a humble heart, a little matter will work upon it. As my text, Isaiah 66:2, says, trembling at God's Word is joined with a contrite heart and being poor in spirit.

So where there is a meek heart, it is wrought upon by little means (James 1:21). If your heart is froward and perverse, it will cast off the Word; but let it meddle with a meek and quiet heart, and it easily receives the Word into it. So one who has been ignorant a long time, when the Lord is pleased to reveal Himself to the soul, the soul is ready to take hold of the Word of the Lord. Though Saul was ignorant, when the Lord did but say, "I am He whom thou persecutest," then Saul feared and said, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?"

So when the heart is not hardened by the custom of sin, less means ordinarily work upon them more than upon old ones. For example, on young ones, a little hint of God will work upon them. The hearts of men and women who are not hardened in sin, when God pleases to work upon them, a less matter does it and brings them over to the will of God.

APPLICATION

1. It may be a use of a great deal of encouragement to all the ministers of God to preach to people. It may be that sometimes even they are discouraged, and think to themselves, "Lord, how

hard are the hearts of men, and how difficult it is to work upon the hearts of men! I have labored with all my might. I have studied and sought to invent all the arguments I possibly could, the most moving arguments that I could possibly imagine. When I have been in my study, I have thought to myself, 'Surely if the Lord is pleased to bless these truths that I am to deliver, they will work upon the hearts of people.'" And when it comes to the preaching of that sermon, perhaps the minister finds that they are not at all stirred one whit. "Why, Lord, what shall I do then? I cannot think ever to speak things that are more powerful than those that I have spoken, and those have done no good. Therefore I am afraid I shall never do good."

Oh, no, do not say so and do not think so. The Lord is pleased sometimes to show us our vanity this way, and to rebuke us. Many times the Lord will not go along with the ministry of the Word when it comes with the greatest power and the strongest arguments and, yet, at another time, the Lord will be pleased to bless a word that you only speak in passing. It may do more than all the others. There is scarcely any one faithful minister in the world who observes the work of God upon his ministry who does not find this to be true. Yet this is no argument why a minister should not labor with all his might and come with the strongest arguments. He is bound to do his duty. Aye, be not discouraged. He may afterwards prevail, and God, I say, may bless many things that come from him. And therefore, I would exhort those who are to speak to such an audience with the words of Ecclesiastes 11:6: "In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thy hand; for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be a like good."

Therefore, let ministers go on and sow their seed and preach still. That which they have spoken (perhaps they have

been delivering arguments that they thought would have moved the heart of a devil) has been opening the miserable condition of men and opening the riches of Jesus Christ. Well, there must be no discouragement; go on and sow your seed in the morning, and in the evening withhold not your hand. Go on and preach again and again, and let the Word of God be presented before the hearts of people. Though it has not wrought at one time, yet it may work at another time. Yea, though you should grow weaker and weaker, yet for all that the Lord may do good to you, even when you are at your weakest. In 2 Timothy 2:25 the apostle says to Timothy, "In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves, if God peradventure will give them repentance." Peradventure this day a truth may be handed from God to a soul—peradventure this text, peradventure that text, and so the soul may be brought in.

2. One use more shall be by way of encouragement to those who feel their hearts wrought upon by little means. When God but hints a truth to you, when you are reading a chapter, or when you are at your table conversing one with another, and especially when you come to hear the Word, you hear but some droppings of God's Word, and they work very powerfully upon the heart. Are there any such here? Be encouraged, the Lord accepts this disposition.

Therefore, for your comfort, know first that this is a sign of a very child-like disposition in you. For example, a father will be very pleased when he but holds his finger up to his child and the child immediately comes and falls down upon his knees. A slave would fall down if you came with blows to him, but a child will do so with the least look. Proverbs 17:10: "A reproof entereth more into a wise man than an hundred stripes into a fool." Indeed, those who are fools, and of base, slavish dispositions, a word does not work upon them. Do you find your heart so

tender that a word works upon you? This is a sign of the wisdom of God that is in your soul.

Second, know it is a sign that God is in His Word, and that God accompanies what is said to you. And that's a very comfortable meditation to think on. "Blessed be God. When I hear His Word, any little thing comes to my heart." And if you find your heart to be of this temper, if you find that everything that is said almost sticks to you, you may have this comfort, that the Lord does not absent Himself from you in His Word.

Third, certainly you may have this comfort: you can not go far from God. Why? Because if a little thing will work upon you, you must be wrought upon every day. And if you have a tender heart and are wrought upon by a little, I say there is no fear that you should ever go far from God. Indeed, souls who have stout and stubborn hearts go far off from God. "Hearken unto Me ye stout-hearted, that are far from righteousness," says Isaiah 46:12. Stout hearts are far from righteousness, but now your pliable hearts can never be far from righteousness. A man who has a stout spirit may be gone from God a great distance before he is aware, but one who is of a yielding disposition never needs to fear that he shall ever go far off from God. Indeed, I may daily fall as others, but I have this hope: I shall never go far from God.

Fourth, does your heart yield to God upon a little? Oh, be of good comfort. The Lord has great things to make known to your soul. The Lord will make known great things to the soul that is moved at a little. That place which is named before in John 1:49 and following is remarkable for this. You know what Christ said to Nathaniel, "Dost thou believe because I said, I saw thee under the figtree? Thou shalt see greater things than these." So I say to your heart, does your heart relent and come in and submit to God upon hearing any little that is made

known to you? Oh, be of good comfort, soul. You are a soul that the Lord intends to do great things for, and to reveal great things unto. "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him, and He will show them His covenant." Is there a soul who has the fear of God so that everything works upon that soul? The secret of the Lord is with that soul, and the Lord will reveal His covenant to that soul.

Make much of this disposition of heart, and when you see other men have hard and stout hearts, bless God that He has given you such a disposition of heart that a little will serve the turn.

SERMON 5

(Preached June 15, 1644)

Use and Application

“ . . . Because thine heart was tender. . . ”

2 KINGS 22:19

*T*here is another use remaining on this point, and then we shall briefly come to the other that we may make some entrance into that which is the main point of the text.

When God’s time has come, a little will work upon the heart. Then here the perverseness and stubbornness of the hearts of most people are rebuked, hearts that stand out against God. It is not a hint of a thing that will work upon them. How many from this may be rebuked who have stood out against great means to work upon them! It may be that many of you have had godly parents who labored with you. Your father and mother have labored with all their power to show you the evil of your ways. They have been dropping in admonitions, counsels, exhortations, and none of that will do.

Perhaps you have come into other families, and all that you

see there, and the encouragements that you might have there, have done nothing to you. You have been brought under a powerful ministry, and there you have heard that which might have made a devil to tremble. You have heard the terrors of the Law, and that has done nothing. Yea, you have heard those heart-melting mercies of Christ opened to you which might, had they been offered to devils, have melted the very heart of a devil, yet they have not worked upon you. You have had the work of God's providence, which has been mighty upon you. You have often been chastised by God, and that has done nothing. You have received an abundance of mercies, and they have done nothing.

Nay, God has set conscience upon you, and that has been terrifying for you. He has hauled you before the very seat of God's judgment, and there has been pleading against you for your sin, and that has done nothing. But you shall continue, notwithstanding all these means, as the rock does in the midst of the water. The water goes by, but the rock stands where it always has. Oh, how far is your heart from the heart of King Josiah who, upon the hearing of some old papers, immediately had his heart melt before the Lord and humbled himself before Him. Well, you who have a heart upon which it is so difficult to work that there must be a great deal of work to do, know these things:

First, those things that have left you, and have wrought no good upon you, are such things for which many in heaven are now blessing God. They have found the good of them. You have been at the Word, and it has passed you by and never touched your heart; but many in heaven are blessing God that they were at that time hearing the Word which you heard so unprofitably.

Know that this disposition is very wearisome to the Spirit of God, when there is such ado with men's hearts that one means

after another must be used. We know that it is wearisome to us, especially when we come to men and women and speak to them for their own good, and they will not be persuaded. Oh, know that you have a heart that is of a very wearisome disposition to God, when God speaks to you for your own good, and there must be a great deal of fuss and stir before anything will do you any good.

Know also that it is a dangerous sign of a reprobate if such means do not work. You are far from the disposition of such a one who is here spoken of in the text. Jeremiah 6:29–30 is helpful: “The bellows are burnt, the lead is consumed of the fire, the founder melteth in vain, for the wicked are not plucked away. Reprobate silver shall men call them, because the Lord hath rejected them.” They are compared here to metal that the refiner would melt and purge. Now, says the text, “the bellows are burnt.” There’s blowing and puffing to make the fire hotter and hotter, yet all this will not do. The lead is consumed.

Refiners used to mingle lead with other pure metal. Aye, but that is consumed and no good is done to the metal. The founder melts in vain. Their hearts are compared to metal that will not be melted. What then? “Reprobate silver is what men call them because the Lord has rejected them.” The Lord at length rejects such hearts as these which require such a great deal before it will work upon them. Wherefore, my brethren, labor to get such dispositions of heart so that a little will work upon you. Remember this text. Surely when we consider what a God we have to deal with, how infinitely great above us He is, we must be convinced that this God should expect from us that any hints of His will should prevail with us, even if it is only a word!

And know that it is a mercy of God that you have even a hint of His will, that you have any word from Him at all to make His

mind known unto you of those things that concern the good of your soul.

God expects that you should catch every hint. If a minister lets some words fall by the way that closely concern your soul, though it is not the great argument that he is preaching upon, the Lord expects that you should catch hold of it and never leave until you get your heart affected with it. In 1 Kings 20 we read of the servants of Benhadad who were entreating the King of Israel for the life of their master. Verse 33: "Now the men did diligently observe whether any thing would come from him, and did hastily catch it." So when we come to the Word, we are to come before the great King of heaven and earth for our lives. We should diligently observe whether God speaks anything to our hearts, and then hastily catch it. And blessed are those who have their hearts wrought thus upon by a little, for though God is pleased to use great means for the good of some, yet for others, if a little will not do it, they shall never be wrought upon.

The next point is that, upon the hearing of the Book of the Law, Josiah's heart was immediately turned. He did not put it off, as did Felix who said, "I will hear more of this another time," but immediately yielded. The point is that it is very acceptable to God for the sons of people to immediately relent and yield and humble themselves as soon as they hear God's displeasure made out against them.

Sometimes God is pleased to dart in a truth that does not work immediately, but lies a long time in the heart, perhaps many days, weeks, months, sometimes years. I have known some who, upon hearing the Word, have not been wrought upon while they have been hearing, but the Lord has cast it into their consciences and, upon their sickbed, then it has worked upon them. And so it is with some admonitions and exhortations that are given to people. It may not stir them

every time, but it may be that God blesses them a great while afterwards.

The seed that is cast into the ground does not come up immediately if a drought follows; but, if a rain follows, then, though you thought they were dead, they will come up. And so it is with the seed of the Word. We sow it and a sunshine of prosperity follows. We think it is dead, but God sends some afflictions a great while afterwards and the Word springs up. It is well that the Word of God may work at any time in the hearts of men and women, but it is more acceptable to God when the heart yields immediately upon the very first hearing.

It was this way with David. He had a heart like Josiah's. In 2 Samuel 12:12 we read that the prophet Nathan came to David to tell him of his sin. In verses 7–8 he said unto him, "Thou art the man," and goes on to tell him of his sin. But mark in the 13th verse, when David answered Nathan's charge, David said unto Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord," and so was humbled before the Lord immediately upon Nathan's message to him. He did not tell Nathan to go away and that he would think about it later or consider it afterwards. Instead he said, "Oh, I have sinned against the Lord. I have been the wretch who has thus provoked the Lord against me. I have sinned. Oh, what shall I do?"

So it was with those in Acts 2. As they were hearing, their hearts were pricked. Before they went out from the presence of God, as the very sound of the Word was in their ears, the prick of God was upon their hearts. And indeed, when the Lord is pleased to come upon the hearts of His people, to draw them to Himself by His Word, the Word will work immediately. The Lord can, when He will, set the key to the heart so that it shall immediately open.

Many men's hearts are like rusty locks. It takes a great deal

of work to open them, especially if the key is not the right key and fitted to every notch. But now come to a lock where the key is fitted to every notch fully and a child may turn it. You can turn it with one of your fingers. So the Lord sometimes, indeed, so speaks the Word to many men's hearts which are like rusty locks, so that the Word does not fit. There are many notches in their hearts. Many objections lie in their hearts against the Word so that the Word does not fit them, and so their hearts are not opened. But at another time, the Lord is so pleased to direct His Word that He makes the key as fit for such a man's heart as can be, and then He opens it immediately. In an instant, the heart of this man is opened that has been shut against God all the days of his life.

There are divers reasons why the hearts of men should open and yield immediately to God. First, the creature owes submission to God. Why? You expect that your children should yield immediately to you. It is not enough that they yield to you after a great many blows and words. You account that to be the part of a stubborn child. But when a child yields immediately to you, that pleases you. Well, the Lord expects that we should yield immediately to Him, not to stand out long, to have many words and blows, but that we should immediately come in and yield to Him.

Second, this immediate yielding to God prevents an abundance of evil. An abundance of sin is prevented by an immediate yielding unto God. Perhaps at length the Lord, in His infinite mercy, may convert souls who have stood out against Him. Aye, but what an abundance of evil you have committed since that time that God first began to stir you! Let any man look back to his former time and think to himself: "Did I not hear this Word of the Lord before this time? Oh, how happy had it been with me if I had yielded at first; but, by standing out, what an abundance of sin I have committed since that time!"

I would like to have shown you what it is that a soul sees in God's Word that makes it immediately yield to Him, but I will rather come briefly to some application of this.

APPLICATION

From all that has been said, it may first be a use of consolation unto such whose hearts have come in immediately. I hope there are some whose hearts have been like Lydia, whom the Lord has fitted the key of His Word for, and whose hearts, upon the first hearing of the Word, have come in immediately before the Lord. Oh, what great ease of spirit you may have in this, that you can be able to say before the Lord, "It's true, indeed, there was a time when I went on in blindness, ignorance, profaneness, and ungodliness. But, blessed be God, ever since God has made His will known unto me, my heart has yielded to Him."

Can you say this? Oh, what a happy thing it would be if many of you were able to say this: "Lord, indeed I was a wretch in the days of my ignorance. I lived profanely and ungodly because I knew no better, but as soon as Thou didst reveal Thy mind to me, my heart came in and yielded to Thee."

There are many men whom God is now working upon, and they are coming to seek God's mercy; but this temptation comes upon them. Aye, but you have stood out against God all this while. This is that which has augmented your sins, and will God have mercy on such a wretch as thus stood out against Him? This temptation lies so heavy upon many that they would give a thousand worlds to be delivered from it. But now you are delivered from such a temptation as this is. Oh, blessed are you who immediately yield to the Word of God. In Revelation 4:1, John said of himself

that he heard the voice, as it were, of a trumpet talking with him. Then he says, in the second verse, "And immediately I was in the Spirit, and behold, a throne was set in heaven."

You have heard, sometimes, the voice of the Word as a trumpet; and can you say that you were immediately in the Spirit, or that immediately the Spirit was in you? I say, peace be to you in this thing, for this is very acceptable before the Lord, and it is a sign of an ingenious spirit. And know that the Lord will be as immediate in the ways of mercy to you as you are immediate in hearing Him. Are you wrought upon immediately in the hearing of the Word? Immediately, I say? The Lord will be immediate in His mercy towards you. He will make as much haste to do you good as you make haste to yield obedience to Him. Therefore, such people as these are may expect comfort sooner than others. There are a great many held under the terrors of the Law a long time. Why? Because the Lord deals with them as they deal with Him. God was calling, perhaps, upon you many years before you hearkened to Him; and, therefore, you may be willing to stay for comfort, seeing that you made God stay so long and did not come in to Him.

But now, you young ones, if you come in immediately upon the very first notice of the dangerous condition you are in, you may find comfort very soon. At the beginning of Daniel's supplication, the Lord heard. Oh, the Lord would not have His mercy stay towards Daniel.

But there are many who are to be rebuked from this point, who stand out against God and do not immediately come in and yield. As with the other, a little thing will not work upon them. There must be much ado. So these, whether little or much, yet for the present they are not wrought upon.

Well, know that every time God speaks to you and your heart is not touched, you lose an opportunity for eternal life,

and a large opportunity at that. Your eternal life is lost every time God speaks to you and you do not yield to Him, and is that not a great loss?

Second, know that it is more unlikely that, if you do not yield at first upon hearing the Word, you will yield afterwards. If the corn does not sprout and rise up in a certain time, it will never rise up. And so, if the heart stands out long, it may prove to be too late for the Word to work upon it.

Further, know that you who stand out long against God, though God should not at length work upon you, you will have more trouble in your heart and conscience, a great deal more. It is like an old sore, you know: there is more trouble in healing it. So when hearts stand out long against God, there is more pain and trouble.

Oh, that the Lord, therefore, would work immediately upon your hearts. And that's the exhortation from God when you hear His Word. Entertain it immediately and yield immediately to it without any ado. Whatever truth you hear, be convinced of it. Whatever admonition you hear, embrace it immediately. I will give you these reasons:

REASON 1. Certainly that will be true hereafter. It is truth now, and there's none of you but will wish hereafter that you had yielded and submitted to the Word. Oh, then, if you will wish hereafter that you had done it, certainly, then, there is reason why it should be done now. What, will the Word be true when you come upon your sick bed or deathbed? Then it is true now.

REASON 2. For all you know, whatever God speaks to your heart, He speaks to you for the last time. The very first speaking may be the last for all you know. It's true, sometimes it is otherwise, but it is more than any of you can promise yourselves—and therefore yield immediately to the Word.

REASON 3. God may put you immediately into such a condition that, if He does not immediately grant mercy to your soul, you are undone forever. Sinners are in such a condition many times that all eternity lies upon the present moment. And you may be put into such a condition that either God must hear you immediately or you are lost forever. Therefore, be willing to hear God.

REASON 4. Consider the infinite patience of God. Already you have stood out so long, and has God cut off your life? Oh, then, you have need to take heed of standing out anymore.

Yea, how often have you listened to temptations that come to wickedness? You can immediately embrace them. Oh, then, when the Word comes so near your heart and speaks to your conscience, why can you not embrace that as well? Or when the Word comes close, and especially so near that you can but say, "Certainly the Lord intended this for me this day," then yield and submit immediately to Him.

QUESTION. "But I have stood out a long time, Lord. What shall I do?"

ANSWER. It is a dreadful evil, and you should be willing to suffer much in regard that you have stood out so. Aye, but what do you say? If God should yet speak one word to you, what's your resolution now? I put this into the consciences of everyone in this congregation. If God shall speak this day anything that concerns you in particular, are you resolved in your heart that you will now fall down before Him, yield, and submit? If you should hear any threat in God's Word against your sin, are you resolved now with what lies in you to renounce that sin? I put this to you, will you do this or not? What answer would you give to God? "If the Lord should this day (seeing I am come by His providence) speak anything out of His Word that shall

concern my sin, I will this day, without any further putting off until sickness or deathbed, I am resolved (God enabling me), I will do what I can to renounce those things which the Word of God condemns." Do you have such a resolution?

I would be willing to present some Scriptures to some of you, especially to those of the ignorant sort, though perhaps some of you know them, but whether you know them or not, yet I shall present them now in the name of God unto those who, to this day, have lived in those sins and have not been humbled before God upon the hearing of this Word that I shall now speak to you.

Consider Romans 1:18, and let God speak to your soul now: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness." This is the Word of God to you this day. Does not your conscience tell you now that there are some ways of ungodliness and unrighteousness that you live in? Now God from heaven tells you that His wrath from heaven is revealed against your soul if you do not repent. Oh, hear this Word, and let your soul be humbled and melt before God. And you who hold the truth of God in unrighteousness, that is, you who have convinced consciences, you know what your duty is and yet go against your conscience, you are those who hold the truth in unrighteousness, and the wrath of God from heaven is revealed against you.

But particularly as regards swearers, why, let them consider these two texts of Scripture and see whether their hearts will yield to them. Jeremiah 23:10: "For the land is full of adulterers, for because of swearing the land mourneth." This day we know that the land mourns, and would you know the cause? You may attribute it to this and that, but the Scripture says it is because of swearing that the land mourns. Aye, because of oaths. They

are a part of all the cause of the misery of the kingdom at this day. Oh, the Lord tells you this, and, if your heart were tender, you would humble yourself before the Lord because of this, and go away with a heart resolved against your sin.

Zechariah 5:3 is against this sin as well as the sin of stealing: "Then said he unto me, 'This is the curse that goeth over the face of the whole earth, for every one that stealeth shall be cut off, as on this side, according to it, and every one that sweareth, shall be cut off as on that side.'" Here's a great flying roll, the length whereof is twenty cubits and the breadth thereof is ten cubits, and this flying roll is the curse going over the face of the whole earth for everyone who steals and for everyone who swears. Oh, this Word now has as much power in it to work upon your heart as the Word that wrought upon Josiah's. Are you resolved against those sins or not? This God declares unto you this day. Therefore, if your heart is tender, you will go home and humble your soul before God in your closet for your sin.

Ezekiel 20:13 deals with the sin of Sabbath breaking. I desire to make an experiment this day whether it may not be so with some of your hearts. "But the house of Israel rebelled against Me in the wilderness; they walked not in My statutes, and they despised My judgments, which if a man do he shall live in them, and My Sabbaths they greatly polluted. Then I said, 'I would pour out My fury upon them in the wilderness to consume them.'" God renews this to you this day. Either you are resolved to continue in this way of breaking God's sabbaths or not. If you are resolved, this is the text that concerns you. And you should expect to have it made good upon you that the Lord shall pour out His fury upon you to consume you. But if, upon reading this text, your heart falls and yields, and you are humbled before the Lord, then well and good. The Word has the true fruit of that at which it

aims. Surely, if Josiah had heard such a word as this, his heart would have melted.

Regarding the sin of uncleanness, I will give you two texts out of God's Word and read them to you. They are dreadful ones, and I truly believe Josiah had no such word read unto him as that I shall read to you against this sin. The first is Proverbs 22:14: "The mouth of strange women is a deep pit; he that is abhorred of the Lord shall fall therein." Here's a text now for all the unclean wretches who are enticed by the mouths of strange women. Mark what God says to your soul this day: that man who is abhorred by God falls into this pit. Oh, dreadful expression! Is it possible for any man to speak more dreadfully than this, that the man who is abhorred by God shall fall into the pit of the whore? And how often have some of you fallen into her pit? Either you must acknowledge the Word of God or not. If not, you are atheists. And if this is not God's Word, then there is nothing in God's Word that you can lay your salvation upon. What do you rest upon to be saved by if not upon the Word? And if upon any part of it, why not upon this? Certainly there is as much authority and strength in this to humble as there is to save. And this is that which I, in the name of God, do not just read, but speak to you from God's Word. The man who is abhorred by God falls into the pit of the whore. Now either go away with a resolution to slight and disregard the Word and continue in your ways, or stop your sin. Which of these two will it be? Either slight and disregard what is said and yet resolve to venture, or be humbled before God because of the evil that the Word of God so dreadfully speaks against.

Oh, it would be a dreadful thing if anyone in this congregation should go away with either slighting or resolving to continue to venture! Oh, that the Lord would accompany the reading of this to you as He did the reading of the book

to Josiah, that the Lord might have some soul who might fall down and tremble before Him this day and give glory to Him!

The other Scripture is 2 Peter 2:9–10: “The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation, and to reserve the unjust unto the Day of Judgment to be punished, but chiefly them that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness.” The Lord knows how to reserve all wicked men to the Day of Judgment, but chiefly those who walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness. Now it may be that some of you may put this off by saying that you have not been notoriously wicked in the actual sin of uncleanness. But mark the Word of the Lord in Romans 8:13: “For if you live after the flesh, you shall die,” that is, perish eternally. If you make the comforts of your lives to consist in making provision for the flesh and to satisfy the flesh, though it is not in such wicked days of uncleanness, you shall die.

Aye, but notwithstanding all this, yet some may go away as guilty and hardened in their sin as they came. Therefore I will but read you one more word, and that is from Deuteronomy 29:19–20: “And it came to pass that when he heareth the words of this curse, that he bless himself in his heart saying, ‘I shall have peace though I walk in the imaginations of my heart, to add drunkenness to thirst.’ The Lord will not spare him, but then the anger of the Lord, and His jealousy shall smoke against that man, and all the curses that are written in this book shall lie upon him, and the Lord shall blot out his name from under heaven.”

Those who shall yet bless themselves in their wickedness and say, “For all that the minister speaks, I shall have peace,” oh, that the Lord would settle this word upon you! I read this because I am afraid that there are many in this place who never read Scripture in their families; and, therefore, I desire that they might meet with such texts of Scripture now in this ordinance

of God. It may be this one text was one of the texts that Josiah heard read. You hear it read over and over again. Oh, that the Lord would bless these few sentences of Scripture that are read to you out of His Word so that you may go away with tender hearts, humbled before the Lord and resolved against your sin.

But I come to the next point, which is that a tender heart is very acceptable to God: "Because thine heart was tender." This is that which I had thought to spend most of the time in. That which the Scripture calls a tender heart is elsewhere called by other names, such as a contrite heart and a broken heart, but especially that which we have in Ezekiel, a heart of flesh. That's the very same as this is. David is said to be a man after God's own heart, and this in a more special manner because he was a man of a very tender, melting heart.

Now in handling this point, I shall first endeavor to open to you what a tender heart is, which is to be done in two ways: either by showing wherein it consists, or the differences of a tender heart from the softness of nature, from those flashes that some meet with in the Word or from the terrors of the Law—but that may be referred to the application.

The philosopher's description of a soft thing is that which easily gives way to touch, and a hard thing is that which only yields to touch with much effort. So here is the first: a tender heart is such a heart as easily yields to God, yield's to God's touch. For example, we know that if you lay your finger upon wool it yields, but lay your finger upon a stone and it will not yield. Lay your finger upon flesh and flesh will yield, but lay your finger upon iron and it will not yield. So a heart that yields to God is the soft, tender heart, and the heart that stands out against God is the hard heart. When a man will easily yield to the touch of God's Word, he shall easily be convinced by God's Word and not stand objecting against the Word of God. When

this happens, conscience will easily yield to what is said and apply the Word to itself, and the will shall fall down before the Word. Although before the heart went after wickedness, yet now, when the Word comes to oppose it, the will of a man gives way to God's Word. "Let God's Word take place and not my will," says such a soul.

Likewise the affections, when they shall give way to the Word of God, this is a sign of a tender heart. Yea, it will not only yield to God, but to men too. For the tenderness of a heart will be displayed in easily yielding to men. If there is anything that is offensive justly to his brethren, he yields to it. He will not stand out to maintain anything to satisfy his own will; but if he sees it may be justly offensive to his brethren, he yields.

Second, as there is a yieldableness in a tender heart, so there is a sensitivity. A tender heart is such a one as is full of sense. You know that if you but prick the flesh with a pin, the flesh feels it. The heart of flesh is such a heart as is sensitive to what is said to it; it is sensitive to God's displeasure. Oh, the apprehensions of any displeasure of God goes to the very heart, indeed, that the infinite God should be displeased by it.

Third, it is also sensitive to its own vileness and wretchedness, so that it even loathes itself before the Lord. It is sensitive to the Word when the Word speaks to it; it is very sensitive to that. Yea, it is so sensitive to anything of God, any displeasure of God, to its own sin and to what the Word says that, indeed, it faints before God so as there is no creature comfort in the world that can keep it from fainting. A tender heart does not consist merely in being suitable of any degree, but so sensitive that it would certainly faint under the sense of this displeasure of God, if God did not come in with His own hand to support and help that soul. Hence, in Deuteronomy 20:3, the word that is translated there "a fainting heart" is the same word that is in

my text, "let not your heart be made tender or faint." So the right tenderness is when there is such a softness of heart, when the heart is so sensitive to God's displeasure and its own vile-ness, when the heart is so sensitive to the Word, that it would faint before the Lord if the Lord did not uphold it by His Spirit.

Yea, likewise it is sensitive to all of God's mercies, sensitive to all its unkindnesses against God, and all the kindness it receives from God. The kindness of God breaks this heart and melts it. It is as the sunshine that thaws the ice, and so the beams of God's mercy do evermore melt the heart of one who is of such a tender disposition as we are speaking of. The heart of a man or woman that is the less affected the less he is afflicted, certainly such a man or woman has a hard heart. But now the heart that is soft and tender is not only affected with its sin and God's displeasure, but with God's mercy also, and the heart melts as well upon the apprehension of mercy as it does upon the apprehension of sin.

Likewise, this heart is very sensitive to the mercy of others. "Why should some of our brethren be in a harder condition than we are? We are as unworthy as they!" That is how a tender heart reasons, and their hearts even melt before God upon the apprehension of the misery of others, and that they who are so unworthy should rather enjoy peace, liberty, and comfort while their brethren suffer such hard things. But hard hearts do not care. They may be at home and lie warm and have their tables spread. What do they care? But a tender heart is a sensitive heart.

Yea, a tender heart is both yieldable and searchable without any great noise. This is true tenderness and melting of heart. You know a tender thing yields and the flesh is sensitive. Metals melt, yield, and fall, and that in a still way. They make no noise. And so a true, tender, melting heart is very yieldable to God, and is sensitive to its own sin without any great noise. Those

men and women who are humbled for their sin and make a great deal of disturbance in the family where they live, who behave themselves in such a violent way so as to make disturbances where they live, this is not the right gospel tenderness. This is not the melting of spirit. Cast some things into the fire and, as soon as they feel the heat, they make a great deal of stir; but when the metal feels the heat of the fire, it falls down and yields without any noise. And so when God makes a true, tender, melting heart to be sensitive to sin, it is so sensitive that it makes no great noise, but carries things in a quiet way.

You will say, "How can we be quiet when we apprehend so much danger for our sin?"

Yes, my brethren, and this is the mystery of godliness in true gospel humiliation. Lay this up, you who do not yet understand. Lay it up against such times as the Lord shall affect your hearts for your sin.

Fourth, it is such a heart as will take any impression from God or be cast into any mold that God would have it. For example, take a piece of wax and you may put what impression you will upon it. But if you should take a seal and put it upon a stone, it will make no impression there, only upon a tender thing. So the heart that is tender is immediate before the Lord and is ready to take any stamp that the Word of God shall put upon it. See what holiness is in God's Word. According to the capacity of it, it takes the very impression of God's holiness. So after they have heard the Word, there will appear the very print of those truths upon the heart. As it is with casting a mold, you know that soft things are easily molded. When the metal has been melted, you may put it into any mold and it will take the fashion of the mold. But hard things will not do so.

Thus it is with a tender heart. It is cast into whatever mold God would have it, into the very mold of the Word. We have a

notable Scripture for this in Romans 6:17 (of any translation in the New Testament, I wonder at the translation of these words): “Ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered to you.” It should be translated thus: “that form of doctrine into which you were delivered,” or “into which form of doctrine you were delivered.” So that you have, from the heart, obeyed that form of doctrine into which the Spirit of God delivered you. So the form of doctrine is compared to a mold, and the heart of man compared to metals that are melted. The Spirit of God is the founder who takes metal that is melted and pours it into the mold; and, although the metals were of such and such fashions before, yet now they come now to be of the same fashion as the mold.

So it is with a tender, melting heart. A sinner who has lived a long time in such and such courses of sin and wickedness comes to the Word of God, and the heat of God’s Word works upon him so as to melt his heart. And then the Spirit of God comes and takes the heart of this old sinner and puts it into the mold of the Word and makes him a vessel of honor.

Now these things may open to you wherein lies the nature of a tender heart, and whereby in part you may examine whether or not your hearts are tender.


SERMON 6

(Preached June 23, 1644)

*The Preciousness
of a Tender Heart*

“ . . . *Because thine heart was tender . . .*”

2 KINGS 22:19

 All that I shall do at this time is to show unto you the preciousness of this tender heart and how God accepts it, and then conclude by way of comfort to them who have such tender spirits.

For the first, the preciousness of this tender heart, “I have heard thee,” said God. Oh, it is a disposition that I prize a great deal! Is your heart tender?

First, know that it is very precious because it is a special fruit of the covenant of grace wherever it is. Does your heart begin to melt to God? Surely this comes from God’s heart melting towards you first, and that in the way of the covenant of grace. Those heart-melting means in the covenant of grace begin to flow in upon you when your heart begins to melt towards God.

That passage in Ezekiel 36 is a clear text, interpreted by all divines as dealing with the promise of the covenant of grace, and as a special fruit of it. In verse 26 there is a promise: "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit I will put within you, and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh, and I will put My Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes, and ye shall keep My judgments and do them." A new heart! Everyone naturally has a hard heart. Though some men's and women's hearts may seem to be softer than others, yet everyone in the world has a hard heart. What is this new heart that God promises to give? "I will take away the stony heart and I will give a heart of flesh."

Here's the fruit of the covenant of grace. Whoever, then, has this tender heart is certainly one who has been received into the covenant of grace. And this shows a great deal of the preciousness that there is in it; for all things that are proper to the covenant of grace are precious things, for the covenant is a precious covenant and the treasures of the riches of God's grace in the covenant are very precious indeed. And God gives you this choice jewel out of the treasures of the covenant of grace when He gives you a tender heart.

Certainly, if God should give you kingdoms to possess, if He should give you all the possessions of the world, it would be nothing compared to this gift. For God may give the possessions of this world unto one whom He will never receive into covenant with Himself. God may give all this world out of His general bounty and patience. I remember what Luther said of the whole empire of the Turks, "It is only a crumb, that great household, the Lord casts to His dog the whole empire." But now this tenderness of heart is a fruit of the covenant of grace, and to have the least fruit of the covenant of grace is a greater mercy than to have all the fruits of God's general bounty and patience.

Second, a tender heart is very precious because it has in it so many graces for ingredients. For, indeed, the heart of man is supple and made tender by the composition and mixture of many of the graces of God's Spirit. The oil that supple the heart of a sinner is an oil that is composed of an abundance of graces. Indeed, all the graces of the Spirit of God are but the ingredients into this composition that supple the heart of a sinner. There you may see humility, faith, wisdom, and patience. Add whatever grace you can name, it is in this composition. God sees all graces.

I remember Chrysostom expressing what I am now preaching, of tenderness of spirit and the excellency of it. He said, "When the Spirit of God works this tenderness, it is like a lady who is making some precious compound, some sovereign balsam; and she has all her maidens of honor attending upon her, and she calls to one to fetch this ingredient and to another to fetch the other. She takes these ingredients and makes a sovereign balsam or oil, or whatever she has a desire to do." So the Spirit of God calls all graces to come in to make the compound of this oil to supple the heart of a sinner. And the truth is, therefore, though you, poor, tender spirit, are not able to see the distinct workings of those graces, yet they are there in you. A physician might prescribe such and such an oil to you, made of such ingredients, and you must take this if you would be cured. Upon this he goes to the apothecary and carries the bill. Now the apothecary gives him only a little oil in a glass, but it is made up of all those ingredients, though he is not able to distinguish them as he looks at it.

So it is here with a soul. The Scripture requires several graces: faith, humility, patience, heavenly-mindedness and the like. Now a poor sinner who has this tenderness of spirit is troubled, many times, because it cannot find the exercise of such

and such particular graces. Aye, but if you have a tender spirit you have them all. They are all there; they are all in the oil that suppld your heart. If there had been any one grace of God's Spirit lacking, that is, a saving grace, your heart never would have been brought to this tenderness—and that shows the preciousness of a tender spirit.

A third thing that shows the preciousness of a tender spirit is this: it is a disposition that puts the soul into a fitness for mercy. It fits the soul for any mercy that the Lord has to bestow upon it. Bernard said, "God does not pour the oil of His mercy but into a contrite heart." And so it is certain. But now if the heart is contrite and tender, then the Lord immediately pours the oil of His mercy into such a one. It is in a fit frame to receive any mercy, and the Lord, who delights in mercy, surely will not lose the glory of it when He sees a subject capable of it and fitted for it.

Now the soul is made fit to receive any mercy that the Lord has to bestow, and the Lord is infinitely willing to bestow mercy. There is no other reason why any man or woman in the world lacks mercy but because their vessel is not fit for it. You will say, indeed, "God might make them fit." Aye, but God is not pleased to put forth His almighty power to make every vessel fit; but once it appears that God has such a love to such a soul as to make fit such a vessel for mercy, such a soul may fully conclude that there is mercy enough for it. Perhaps you do not have it for the present, but this is certain: there is as much for you as you can hold.

I may say to you, as the Lord does to His people in another case, "I know the thoughts that I have towards you, thoughts of peace and love." Perhaps you are afraid. Yet the Lord says to you, "I know the thoughts that I have toward this sinner, thoughts of love and mercy." I might give you many Scriptures

to show how this disposition puts the soul into a fitness for mercy. A notable one is Zechariah 12:10: “I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and supplication; and they shall look upon Me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for Him, as one mourneth for his only son. I will pour out the Spirit.” What Spirit? The same that was promised before in Ezekiel, and so he describes the manner of their mourning in the beginning of the thirteenth chapter, “In that day there shall be a fountain opened,” a fountain of mercy opened, and it shall flow in upon their hearts when they have such a spirit as this poured out upon them. Here you have the spirit of grace and mourning put together. A tender heart is called a spirit of grace not only because of the free grace of God in it, but because of the many graces of God that are poured into the heart.

A fourth thing in which the preciousness of this appears is this: it makes the soul fit for a kindly work of all ordinances, and of all the ways of God towards it. For example, it fits the soul to hear the Word, as it did Josiah’s. How Josiah sanctified the name of God in hearing God’s Word at this time!

As for receiving the sacrament, there’s nothing more suitable than this tenderness of spirit. Why, for then you come to have communion with Jesus Christ, and, says the text, “Of His fullness we receive, and grace for grace.” That is, as the print of the seal is in the wax, there is print for print. Look what there is in the seal, and the same is in the wax.

So the soul has grace for grace, that is, suitable to the grace in Christ. There is the print of that grace upon the heart. Now when we come to receive the sacrament, we come to have communion with Jesus Christ so that we might receive of His fullness—and especially we come to have the seal of the covenant of grace set upon our hearts, for that’s the nature of

a sacrament. It is the seal of the righteousness of faith. Now what fitter disposition of heart for a seal could there be than a soft heart?

When you come to the sacrament, you should have great care that you come with soft hearts, that you bring this tender heart with you, for there you bring your hearts to have the seal of the covenant of grace set upon them. Oh, this is a precious disposition! The Lord loves it well when He sees a company come to receive the sacrament who have softened their hearts before they come, and so prepared the soul to have the seal set upon it. All God's ways work good upon a tender heart. If there is but the least mercy of God, any beam of God's love melts a tender heart; and, therefore, it is very precious in the eye of God.

It much honors God and lifts up His name. No disposition in the world honors the name of God more than a tender heart. No disposition reverences Him more, or fears Him and acknowledges His sovereignty and power, and gives Him the glory of His justice and mercy. Here's a disposition that glorifies God. As I told you that a trembling heart glorifies God, so a tender heart much advances the name of God.

It is a disposition that commends all our services to God and makes them acceptable. Without this, no service that we can perform is in any way acceptable to God. That famous place I suppose you cannot help but take notice of is in Psalm 51 where the prophet said of a contrite spirit in verse 17: "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise." Mark it: a broken and contrite heart is all one with that in the text, and this tender heart is the "sacrifices" of God. It is "sacrifices" in the plural number. Now that's to note the choice of all sacrifices. The choice of all sacrifices is a tender heart. It's that which God requires above all sacrifices.

Second, it is that which is *instead* of all sacrifices. If you cannot offer anything else to God, yet if you can offer this sacrifice God is well pleased. Many poor sinners complain and are troubled that they can do very little for God. But can you offer up to God a tender heart and a contrite spirit? I say, this is instead of all sacrifices whatever before Him.

Third, the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit. That is, here's a disposition that commends any other sacrifice. Let this sacrifice be put in and it is as if all other sacrifices were there. Anything must be acceptable where this is, and nothing is acceptable without it. In Isaiah 66:2 we read: "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at My Word." One who is not of that contrite, humble, and tender spirit, all his sacrifices are cast off as if he slew a man or cut off a dog's neck. Now what an excellent disposition is this that it commends all our sacrifices, and is instead of all sacrifices whatsoever before the Lord!

Further, it is a precious disposition, for such a one who has a tender heart cannot but keep close to God and cleave to Him. It is a disposition that keeps the heart continually close to God, for if there is but the least declining in the soul that has a tender heart, he quickly perceives it and cannot be quiet until he gets to God again. And if the Lord withdraws Himself ever so slightly, one who is of a tender heart is sensible of that. It is a precious disposition because it keeps the heart of a sinner close to God.

Last, a tender heart is a disposition that makes a man or woman a very useful member in the church or commonwealth. It makes them a useful companion, for one who is of a tender spirit is always one who is very harmless. A sour spirit is one who is very troublesome where he lives, but a tender spirit yields to anything, if God shows him the reason. He is of a quiet and gentle disposition. Such a one is very sensible of the public good

or public evil. One who is of a tender spirit is as sensible of the good of others many times as of his own. Come and propound anything to him that concerns the glory of God or the public good, and you will make him immediately sensible of it because he is of a tender spirit. Whereas if you come to someone else and propound anything to him that does not concern their flesh and the satisfying of it, you cannot make them sensible of it. But a tender spirit is sensible of anything you propound to him for God or for the good of others. That's the excellency of a tender spirit.

The Lord manifests a great deal of high esteem of this tender spirit. First, here's the object that draws God's eye in all the world; the Lord looks towards him. "But to this man will I look," says God. There is no object, then, upon the face of the earth that draws the eye of God more to it than this one does.

Second, the heart of God is much towards such a one. That place we have concerning Ephraim is full for that in Jeremiah 31:18: "I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus, 'Thou hast chastised me and I was chastised.'" Ephraim sat alone and was bemoaning himself. His heart began to break, and he was lamenting his condition all alone. Mark, how God's heart is affected to him in verse 20: "Is Ephraim My dear son? Is he a pleasant child? For since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still; therefore My bowels are troubled for him. I will surely have mercy upon him." Is there any soul that shall get alone, bemoaning itself and its sin out of a true sense of the evil of it, and the dishonor God has had by its sin? The Lord looks upon such a one with His heart towards him. His inward parts yearn towards such a one.

Third, which is a principal point to consider, Jesus Christ is anointed by God the Father in special purpose to be the Comforter of such a heart. I say, wherever there is such a tender,

broken, contrite heart (for they are the same expressions of the same disposition), let such a one know that God the Father has appointed His Son to be the Comforter to such a soul. That appears clearly in Isaiah 61:1: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me because He hath anointed Me to preach good tidings to the meek; He hath sent Me to bind up the broken-hearted.” And then in verse 3: “To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness, that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord that He might be glorified.” The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Jesus Christ, and has anointed Jesus Christ to preach good tidings to those who are of broken spirits, to appoint unto them who mourn in Zion, and to give unto them beauty for ashes, and so on. Surely the soul cannot lack comfort when Jesus Christ is, by God the Father’s design, appointed to comfort it. He is a Christ for that soul that He might comfort it. For when it is said, “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me because He hath anointed Me,” it is as if He had said, “The Lord God, the Father, has made Me Christ (for so the word “Christ” signifies nothing but “anointed”) that I might preach good tidings to broken-hearted sinners.” Here’s God’s acceptance of a tender spirit: when He will send His Son out of His bosom and bid Him go into the world and take it to be a principal part of His office to be a comforter to such tender spirits, to pour the oil of joy to supple their hearts and make them tender.

Fourth, the many precious promises that are in Scripture are especially directed unto these. Every one of them is worth a kingdom. The Scripture calls the promises “exceeding great and precious promises,” and the saints account their riches to consist in the promises. That one promise in Psalm 34:18 is one that a tender spirit would not be without for a world: “The Lord

is nigh to them that are of a broken heart, and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit.” And there’s that promise in Isaiah 57:15 that is even more full than this: “For thus saith the high and lofty one that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is holy, ‘I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.’”

My brethren, though heaven is God’s glorious mansion, yet it will not serve His turn. God does not think that to be enough unless He has a dwelling also in a tender, broken, humble spirit. That’s the dwelling the Lord prizes as well as the dwelling in heaven. As you know, great princes have various palaces in different countries. So the great King of all the world keeps His court in heaven and in a contrite heart. Those are the two principal palaces. Though princes have houses of their own in the several places they like to go, yet commonly they have some two or three principal places for the court. So, though the Lord has all the world where He is, and fills heaven and earth, yet the two great places where He keeps His court are in the highest heavens and in the lowest heart. Mark it, He is said to “dwell” with them. You know that when a man passes by he may be bountiful in passing by, but in the place of his residence, there he is most useful.

A man who is travelling may do some good to some, but he is most useful where he dwells. So the Lord, though He may bestow some common favors in passing to others, lets out His mercy most where He dwells. God dwells in the heart. God abides there in a constant way to communicate Himself unto them. And to what end? He dwells with the contrite heart to revive them. The living God is always dwelling with them. Let your dwelling be never so lowly, never such a poor, dark hole that you are fain to hide your head in, yet if you have a contrite heart know that there is a glorious palace for the great King of

heaven and earth to dwell in. Many promises we have: “Blessed are those who mourn,” and “Blessed are the poor in spirit,” and the like. Time would quickly be gone if we should name the various promises, and look in Scripture at what the Lord said of this disposition of a tender spirit. And that’s another thing wherein God manifests His high respect unto them.

Fifth, the Lord is exceedingly tender towards one who is of a tender heart in the time of his affliction. If there is any burden upon one who is of a tender spirit, the Lord knows such a one is sensible of it, and therefore He is sensible of their condition. The Lord is as sensible of your condition as you are sensible of your burden. And the great care of God is that such a one should never fail Him. So we have it in Isaiah 57 where He said that He dwelt with him who is of a humble and contrite spirit, for, He said, “I will not contend forever, neither will I be always wroth: for the spirit should fail before Me, and the souls which I have made.” God says, “I will not allow burdens to always be upon them; though I may, for some special end that I have, manifest for the present some displeasure, yet I will not always be angry. I know they are sensible of the least displeasure of mind and, therefore, I will be tender over them who have such tender hearts lest their spirit should fail before Me.”

Their spirits are ready to fail before the Lord if the Lord comes out against them in anger. Therefore, in Isaiah 27:4, the Lord says, “Fury is not in Me... but if anyone will set briars and thorns before Me I will go through them.” God says, “As for My own people, I will be tender over them and will manifest no fury towards them. But as for your hard hearts that are as the briars and thorns, let them be set before Me, those who are of rugged and sour spirits; let them be set before Me and My fury shall go through them and burn them up together.” But the Lord is tender over those who have such tender spirits.

Sixth, He seals such up for mercy in time of public calamity. In Ezekiel 9, you may find that those who mourned for the sins that were committed, the Lord gave a command that the seal of preservation should be set upon them before the city should be destroyed. So certainly, wherever there is any tender spirit, the Lord sets a seal of mercy upon them; and so, then, whatever calamity comes upon the place where such a one lives, he shall be marked out for mercy. We know it was thus with Josiah. That was one of the special evidences that the Lord would show of His mercy to Josiah, that he should not see the calamity that was to come, but he should be delivered before it came.

That lets out a further expression of God's love to a tender spirit, and that in case the Lord sees that there are calamities coming upon kingdoms, and He sees such a man or woman's heart, being so tender, will not be able to bear those calamities, the Lord, in much love, takes them away to Himself before they come, and that is most proper in the example of Josiah.

Where the Lord sees men and women of such tender spirits that they are not able to bear the sight of the grievous calamities that God intends to some where the Lord will manifest His sore displeasure, in much love God takes them away. Josiah was taken away, but not by the war of his own country or of his kingdom, but it was the war of one king against another. The war against the kingdom was not come until God took away Josiah, and so I make no question but that the Lord has shown mercy to many of our forefathers who, in their time, lamented the sins of the kingdom. Some the Lord removed away from us and others the Lord took away by death who were men and women of tender spirits, because the Lord saw that they could not bear to see and hear the dreadful things that we are reserved to see and hear. But, indeed, the truth is that the Lord has reserved us, a hard-hearted generation.

We now can hear of dreadful things, but because they are at some distance from us we are not sensible at all of the dreadful things that others suffer, so that it seems the Lord has reserved this generation to see and hear and feel dreadful things. The Lord has taken away the tender-hearted generation. If a mother's breast is to be cut off, having a cancer or some such disease in it, the father will get away the tender young children he knows are not able to bear such a sight, and to hear and see her to be in such pains as she must be in. Even so God the Father takes away His tender-hearted servants when their mother, the church, must have, as it were, her breasts cut and lanced, nay, cut and seared. When grievous afflictions are coming upon the church, the Lord ordinarily takes away such tender spirits beforehand because they are not able to bear such a sight, nor are they able to hear such dreadful things as they must hear. And in this God shows a great deal of respect for His servants. Many of His servants who have spent much time lamenting the sins of the nation are now taken away from the evil that was to come, and the Lord has taken them up to Himself. If their hearts were thus affected lest the sword should come, oh, how would they be able to bear if they had seen and heard such things as we see and hear at this very day!

APPLICATION

Now, then, I shall endeavor to wind up all in a word or two of application. I had thought to have shown how God reveals Himself to them and how they prevail most with God in prayer. The Lord hears the prayer of the poor. He prepares their hearts and inclines His ear to hear their prayers.

Hence, then, if a tender heart is very precious and so highly valued by God, it is a very dangerous thing for anyone to wrong one who is of a tender heart. Therefore, let men take heed of it, for God will right it. God has a mighty high esteem of such as those are and, it may be, because they are of tender and humble spirits you may venture upon it. They will not give you blow for blow, perhaps, but they get themselves alone and make their moans to their Father, and tell Him of all the wrongs that you have done to them; and so they open their hearts to God and ease themselves that way.

Many of you, when you are wronged by others, have no other way to ease your hearts but this: you must rail again and give them as good as they give you. Aye, but one who is of a tender spirit has a better way to ease himself. He can go alone and get his heart to melt before the Lord, and there he has ease. Now it is likely to go very badly with you, for you would be better off to have wronged a hundred other men than those. Suppose you had a child who you knew to be of a soft and tender spirit, one who does not fight. And suppose that another child wronged him, upon which he came to you with tears in his eyes and complained to you. Would it not stir up your spirit to right the wrong done to your child? And all the more because you know your child is of a soft and tender disposition? Certainly it is so with God. God will right that wrong. I remember that I heard of a great woman in Scotland who protested that she was more afraid of the fasting and prayer of John Knox, and those who followed him, than she was of an army of a hundred thousand men. Always be afraid to do those men and women of tender spirits any hurt, for God has a high esteem of them.

And for you who are of tender spirits, oh, that you would take what has been said as your portion and rejoice in it. It may

be that God has not given you much of this world, aye, but He has given you a tender heart, and that is infinitely more. It may be you have weak memories and weak abilities; you cannot do as others do. Aye, but has God not given you a tender, melting heart? That's more than all the gifts in the world.

This may comfort you against the weaknesses of your graces. They are weak, but they are made up in this tenderness. And it is a great question whether God accepts one who is very eminent in all graces and less in brokenness of heart, or more eminent in brokenness of heart, though very weak in other graces. For though brokenness of heart is made up of other graces, yet brokenness of heart may be very eminent where other graces are but weak because, besides the mixture of other graces, there is the spirit of God; and the Spirit of God may actuate the soul, and some particular grace in the soul it may activate more than others. So one who is weak otherwise may be eminent in this, and, being eminent in this, you have an excellency that is as excellent as others who are of greater graces.

So though, perhaps, you are of such a temper that you cannot hear profitably nor obey the Word as you desire, yet can you feel? Do you have tenderness of spirit? Certainly there is life in you. As long as there is the sense of feeling, there is life.

Likewise, it may be a comfort to you against all your fears. You fear God's wrath, but do you have a tender heart? The Lord will be careful that you shall never know what much displeasure means, for you have sanctified the name of God already and you are sensible of the least manifestation of His displeasure. Oh, then surely you shall never have much manifestation of the displeasure of God to you!

And be comforted in this: Jesus Christ's sorrows are for you. You have your portion in the sorrows of Jesus Christ. You are of

a mournful spirit yourself, but know that you must not rest in the tenderness of your heart, but rather look up to Christ who was of a tender spirit.

And the tenderness that is in your heart, if it is true, is but as the oil that came from Aaron's head down to his garments, from Christ your Head down to His members. Christ was one who was of a very tender spirit, and the tenderness that was in Christ is yours. He was tender upon earth, and He is as tender now, and will be at the Day of Judgment, of as tender a heart as ever. In this your soul should rejoice and be comforted.

“But, O Lord, did I but know that those comforts belonged to me, is it not possible to apply them too soon and be presumptuous?”

I shall give you but one note that you may infallibly come to know whether these shall belong to you or not: Does the hearing of these things and the applying of these things upon your heart make your heart more tender, and mollify your heart the more towards God? Do you find that, upon hearing this, you can have your heart made more tender by it, and not go away more hardened? Do you find that upon this you can feel your heart to be so affected as to be more humbled, and the more to loathe and abhor yourselves before the Lord, the more you hear that the Lord looks upon you with an eye of acceptance? Certainly, then, it belongs to you. It is your portion and you may take it safely.

I will give you a Scripture for this so that you may take it in the comfort of it safely to your souls. In Ezekiel 36:26, the same place where the Lord promised a tender heart, God promised to take away the stony heart and to give a heart of flesh. Now mark one special fruit of this heart of flesh. After the Lord had made divers gracious promises to such that He would save them from all their uncleanness and give them many mercies,

the text says: "Then shall ye remember your own evil ways, and your doings that were not good, and shall loathe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities, and for your abominations." Why, can this be applied this very day? Can you say, "I heard such a sermon of a tender heart opened to me, how precious it was and how God accepted it. And then, at that time, I felt my heart breaking. Oh, I remember my evil ways against God! Oh, that I should walk so unworthy of all these mercies from God and so wretchedly before the Lord! I find my heart more broken by my unworthy walking than by an argument that the Lord has applied to me for a long time."

Can you say this, that at that time, at that sermon it was so? Why, then, peace be to you, for it is all your portion and it may do you much good. Oh, go away and embrace it, and make much of your tenderness of spirit. Maintain it. If you would maintain your comfort, maintain your tenderness of spirit.

SERMON 7

(Preached June 30, 1644)

*Maintaining a
Tender Heart*

“ . . . *Because thine heart was tender . . .* ”

2 KINGS 2:19

OBJECTION. Aye, but some may say, “This is the great thing that I find lacking in me, a tender spirit. Could I find my heart tender, I could be comforted indeed, although I had many crosses. Oh, but the hardness and insensibleness of my heart!”

ANSWER 1. Are you sensible of your hardness? Then certainly there is some kind of tenderness. We cannot be sensible of hardness without tenderness. Do you account the lack of tenderness to be one of the great evils that comes upon you? Many complain of hard times. “Oh, we have had hard times,” says this man or the other man. “Oh, but I have a hard heart,” says a poor soul, “and the hardness that is in my heart is a greater evil than all the hardness of the times.” Surely it is an argument that there is tenderness in the heart that is so sensible of hardness.

For you know that where the flesh, by a disease, is made brawny and hard, it is not sensible at all, no, not of its own hardness; but once you become sensible of hardness, God has begun to work tenderness.

ANSWER 2. There is a twofold hardness. There is the hardness of a stone and the hardness of ice. God said He would take away the heart of stone. A stone, you know, though the beams of the sun shine never so hot upon it, it never yields. But though ice is very hard, yet, when the warm beams of the sun shine upon it, the ice melts and thaws. So, though you feel your heart hard for the present, when the beams of God's love shine upon your heart, when the beams of God's grace manifested in the gospel shine upon you, how do you find your heart working then? "Oh, then my heart begins to yield, then my heart gives in to God." That's a sign that it is not the hardness of a stone if the beams of God's love and the grace of God in the gospel to your soul can melt it. Yea, if you find in your heart that if God would but reveal His grace to you in His Son, and shed abroad His love in your heart, you think your heart would yield and would melt before Him, this is not the hardness of a stone, which is the hardness of heart so opposite to the covenant of grace. It is possible for one's heart, for the present, to occasionally be hard, but yet, if it is so, it will melt by the warm beams of the Son; but it is the heart of stone that is so contrary to the covenant of grace.

ANSWER 3. You feel in your heart that you cannot mourn for your sin, for that is what you mean when you say your heart is so hard. But now I put this to you: at the time when you cannot mourn as you desire, is not your heart averse from sin, set against sin, and would rather choose (if it were put to your choice) all the miseries in the world than willfully to commit

any sin against God? And that not only because of the absolute necessity of it, but this comes from such a disposition in your heart that is opposed to your sin. You have such an opposition unto sin as you would rather turn from it than from all other evils and afflictions in the world. Then peace be unto you if this is so. When you think that your heart is so hard that you cannot mourn for sin, yet there is comfort to you notwithstanding the fact that you cannot find that mourning you desire, and that is upon these two grounds:

First, it is an argument of a great deal of love to God that, though the Lord does not make you so sensible in regard of your affections of the bitterness and evil of sin, yet your heart is strongly opposed to it. It is not such an argument of grace when the Lord fills the heart full with anguish and sorrow and bitterness for sin, and then the heart turns from it. But for the heart to turn from the evil of sin more than from the evil of any affliction, even at that time that it does not feel so much of the bitterness of sin, nor of the displeasure of God for sin, aye, indeed this argues much grace.

Second, this is comfort because you have that which God most especially aims at in making men's hearts sensible of sin and to mourn for their sin. What does God aim at in the mourning of men and women's hearts but that thereby they might turn from their sin and prize His mercy? God does not delight to grieve the children of men. He does not so much care for your mourning except as far as it may turn your hearts from sin and cause you to prize His grace. Now if you are so sensible of the evil of your sin that it turns your heart from it and makes you prize the grace of God, then certainly you have that tenderness of heart the Scripture calls for, that which is the substance of it, and the main part of it that God accepts.

Suppose that there are two sick men. One of them cries out

of his pain and is in grievous agony. He roars and shrieks out from the extremity of his pain, and sends for the physician to come. The other man is sick and is not in as great a pain. He does not roar and cry out so much as the other, but he apprehends the evil and danger of his sickness to the extent that he is willing to do all that he possibly can to send for the physician. He is willing to part with all his estate that he might have help. Now, though he does not cry out as much as the other man, yet if he is so sensible as to be willing to do anything he can, and would prize his healing more than he would all his estate, this man may come to be healed as soon as the other, and he may have the physician come to help as soon as the other.

So, some the Lord makes so sensible of the evil of their sin that they lie under the weight of their sin, and lie and roar under it in a dreadful manner. And the most that these can do is to pursue Christ, to seek Him above all things, to be willing to part with all for Christ. Then you have another who, though not in that extremity of sorrow, yet apprehends Christ and prizes Him above all. Now I say, you have the tenderness of heart that God works in the covenant of grace in those for whom He has a love and whom He intends to save everlastingly. Now, therefore, comfort yourself in what you have heard concerning the excellency of a tender spirit. And seeing that it is so precious, labor to maintain it.

If God has given you any tenderness of spirit, it is a jewel. It is more than if He had made you an emperor or a queen. As you heard the last day, therefore, maintain it in your heart. Oh, labor to maintain your tenderness, for know that, though the Lord works tenderness in our hearts, unless we are careful, we are in a great deal of danger of growing hard again. Have you never experienced this? Have you never had your hearts yield and melt before God for a time, and yet within a little time you have

felt your hearts more hardened? Certainly, if you are acquainted with your own hearts you will feel this. And therefore, while you feel God working tenderness, labor to maintain this, and desire the Lord to preserve this in your hearts. "O Lord, keep this in the thoughts and purposes of my heart forever."

QUESTION. "How should we maintain a tenderness in our spirit?"

ANSWER 1. Search much into the riches of God's grace in the covenant. Labor much to understand the glorious riches of the covenant of grace. There's nothing that works tenderness more, nor preserves tenderness more, than the glorious mercy of God in Jesus Christ. Those heart-blood-bowel mercies of God in Christ, those tender bowels of God's mercies and compassions in Christ, are those that both work and preserve tenderness of heart. And the more any man or woman converses in the meditation of those mercies, in laboring to dive into those mercies, the more they will get and preserve the tenderness of their heart.

ANSWER 2. Take heed of falling into any known sin. There's nothing that will harden the heart more than falling into any known sin or any gross sin. They do not harden, but if they fall into any great sin, this usually exceedingly hardens their hearts for a long time, and it takes a great deal of work to regain that tenderness. It was so with David. He fell into a great sin, and his heart was hardened for almost an entire year! And he did not have that tenderness which he had before. He said he would confess his sin, but he lay in his sin and did not confess it until Nathan came to him, and it was three-quarters of a year before Nathan came to him, all of which time he lay in his sin while his heart was much hardened from the fear of God in his soul. Take heed of gross sins. We read that manna, though the beams

of the sun would melt it, yet the fire would bake and harden it. So the heart of a Christian is like manna in this. Indeed, the beams of God's grace in Christ, and the mercies of the covenant, melt the heart. Therefore, you should keep your hearts under those beams. But the fire of any lust bakes and hardens the heart. Take heed of falling into gross sins.

And indeed, that one argument might be enough, one would think, to keep a gracious heart from the strength of temptation. There comes such a temptation for the commission of such a sin. It may be that the sin would be very suitable to your flesh. Well, some men perhaps have some arguments against it, others have other arguments. Perhaps you are struck with horror and fear and your consciences would fly in your face if you should commit it, but a gracious heart should have this thought very prevalent in its mind: "If I should give way to this sin, I will lose my tenderness. My heart would be hardened by this means." And one who knows what the sweetness of tenderness is will be loath to lose his tenderness, not for the whole world. "Whatever becomes of me, let me keep my tenderness," says a gracious heart.

ANSWER 3. Not only gross sins that a Christian may fall into, but formality in duty will harden your heart. You will lose the tenderness of your heart if you grow to be formal in duty. It must be your care, therefore, to maintain your communion with God in holy duties, not to be satisfied in a duty unless you find your heart working towards God in that duty. Men and women sometimes perform duties merely in a formal way, out of slavery to conscience; because conscience puts them upon those duties, they must do them. Now they may do them, but their hearts will grow harder and harder, and, in time, they will stop doing them. These people, who have no other principles to perform duty but the fact that they must do them, will stop doing them in time.

But when a heart finds that it was used to enjoying communion with God in duty, it thinks thusly: "Duties are such as I was used to having sweet converse with God in them, and therefore I perform them. And I cannot be satisfied in the performance of any unless I feel God coming into my soul." Aye, this is the soul, indeed, that will keep a tenderness of heart. When grace is kept in exercise, then the heart will stay tender.

ANSWER 4. Take heed of heart-hardening company, of slight company, of frothy company, of going into the company of those who have slight and vain spirits, and especially those who have been and are professors of religion, and yet have slight and vain spirits. They mightily harden the heart. But keeping the company of such as have broken spirits and tender hearts before the Lord is greatly efficacious to maintain the tenderness of your heart. Many times, when a heart begins to be somewhat hardened, yet when by God's providence you come into the company of a soft, broken-hearted Christian whose heart melts before the Lord, it will set your heart to melting too. Keep company, therefore, with broken and melting-hearted Christians.

In the company of Christians, there is much power to preserve a tenderness of spirit. To that end the apostle exhorts in Hebrews 3:12: "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God, but exhort one another daily, while it is called today, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." Exhort one another, that is, get together into the company of spiritual Christians who are lively and active and stirring and exhort one another. Why? "Lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." When Christians get together and are conversing of the goodness of God in Christ, of the great mysteries of the gospel, and of the work of God upon their hearts, everyone telling of the work of God upon their hearts and the

dealings of God with them, it is a marvelous help to keep the heart in a gracious tenderness.

ANSWER 5. Take heed of earthliness and worldliness, of letting your heart go too much after lawful things. It will harden your heart. Though the things themselves are lawful, yet, if you let out your heart immoderately after them, you will in time grow earthly, stupid, and senseless. As earth will be quickly hardened to a stone, so when the heart goes out after earthly things, though in themselves lawful, you will quickly lose the tenderness of your heart. A worldly Christian can never be a tender-hearted Christian.

Now seeing that being tender-hearted is this precious before the Lord, in the next place we have occasion to bewail, and that bitterly, the lack of this generally not only among men, but among Christians. Oh, how little tenderness of spirit can the Lord find even among the children of men! Oh, the hardness of heart that is even come upon us! God's name is fearfully dishonored, His Law is wickedly violated, and His wrath is dreadfully revealed, His sore displeasure with all severity is threatened, His judgments are inflicted, ruin and destruction are to be feared, and yet men's hearts are hardened. Yea, the bowels of compassion of God are yearning, the heart-blood-mercies of the Lord are offered, the most sweet gracious promises are revealed, and heart-melting promises and overcoming goodness is manifested. Yea, the grace of God is abundantly shed abroad in the world and yet the hearts of men are hardened. The hearts of men are generally likened unto the hearts of that creature of whom we read in Job 41:24: "His heart is as firm as a stone, yea, as hard as a piece of the neither millstone." Truly, the hearts of most men and women are like the heart of that creature spoken of there, like the blacksmith's anvil. Though we strike them again and again, yet they are never a

whit softer, but are harder still. They are like the blacksmith's dog that lies under the anvil: though sparks fly about his ears, yet he can lie and sleep securely.

Thus it is with many. Though the wrath of God is never so dreadfully revealed from heaven and the sparks even fly about their ears, yet their hearts are hardened before the Lord, so hardened that they cannot repent (Romans 2:5). Oh, woe, woe unto us who have sinned against the Lord, but more woe unto us whose hearts are hardened in our sin!

Where's the spirit of Elijah, the spirit of David, the spirit of Hezekiah, the spirit of this Josiah? Where's the spirit of Jeremiah and Daniel and other melting hearts of whom we read in Scripture. They seem to be gone from the world as if that spirit had left the world.

The hearts of men are not only as hearts of iron, hard, but as stones. There is a difference between the hardness of iron and that of stone. Iron, though it is very hard, yet if you put it into fire it will yield and you can have the fire hot enough to melt it. But if you put the stone into the fire, it will never yield, but will rather burst and fly in your face. And so many are not only as hard as iron, but they are as stone. They are in the fire, even then they will not yield, but are ready to fly in the face of God in a desperate manner when they are in the fire, and will rather complain of God and the hardness of His ways and severity than of the wretchedness of their own hearts.

The hearts of men are not only as iron, but as stone, yea, worse than stone. For we read that the stones split asunder at the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Bonaventure, though he was a papist, had a meditation on this and cried out, "Lord, Thou hast said that Thou wilt take away the heart of stone and give a heart of flesh. But, Lord, give me a heart of stone, that is, that I may be sensible of the glorious things of Christ, for I read that

the stones broke asunder as if they were sensible of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. But I cannot be sensible when I hear and read of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Therefore, Lord, give me a heart of stone.”

There is a great deal of hardness in the hearts of men, and this is a sore and great evil. Luther had such an expression: “As the contrite heart is the sacrifice that is so acceptable to God, so the hard heart is the sacrifice that is so acceptable to the devil.” And that I might show you a little of the evil of a hard heart and some convictions of it, here is the evil of hardness of the heart.

1. Certainly, if you have a hard heart, you are a wicked man. Proverbs 1:29: “A wicked man hardeneth his face, but as for the upright, he directeth his way.” So the hardening of the face is only an expression of the hardness there is in the heart, which is opposed to the uprightness of man.

2. Yea, know that it is one of the most dreadful judgments that can be inflicted upon a sinner in this world for the Lord to give them up to a hard heart. Of all the judgments that are in the world of which a Christian is capable in this life, one of the greatest is for the Lord to give him up to a hard heart. When God would manifest His wrath upon Pharaoh, the text says that “He hardened his heart.” He gave him up to a hard heart. And so John 12:39: “Therefore they could not believe, because that Isaiah said again, ‘He hath blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted; and I should heal them.’” These things Isaiah said when he saw His glory and spoke of Him. This place is quoted out of Isaiah 6, and in the gospel it is quoted two or three times as a most dreadful judgment of God upon sinners, for the Lord to give them up to hardness of heart.

It is a grievous misery to be sick of a gall or kidney stone. Oh, how dreadful are the shriekings of men who have a stone

in the bladder or kidneys; but to have a stone in the heart is a great deal worse than to have a stone in your bladder. And if you were acquainted with the things of God, you would account a hard heart even a greater misery. If the stone were in the bladder, and you had all the pain of it, if it might be a means to soften your heart, you would rather rejoice in it and bless God for it. But this stoniness, this hardness of heart, is the most dreadful judgment of God that can be upon a man or woman here unless they should be sent immediately down to hell. Yea, it may prove to be a greater judgment, for by this means you may be heaping up wrath against the day of wrath; that's the third thing of the evil of a hard heart. Those who have their hearts hardened all the course of their lives, it is nothing but heaping up wrath against the day of wrath (Romans 2:5). Those men and women who live in the world with hard hearts are continually treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath. Oh, how dreadful will their condition be at the end!

3. All the Word of God and the ordinances of God do not prevail with those whose hearts are hardened. Whatever they hear, whatever is revealed to them, all the heart-melting mercies of God in the gospel, all those heart-breaking truths that reveal the evil of sin and the like, all these do them no good, but only serve to increase their sin and condemnation if they continue in the hardness of their hearts. And it is a sad condition for a man or woman to be in, that all those heart-breaking mercies of God in Christ, all those heart-breaking truths that are revealed in the Word, and all those that God uses to sanctify for so much good to some should serve to aggravate their sin and their condemnation.

The text tells us that all those who saw all the miracles of Christ in Mark 6:52 did not consider them. They did not work

upon their hearts because of the hardness of their hearts. Nothing works upon a hard heart. You think that if Christ were alive now and was on the face of the earth again, and we saw Him work miracles, then our hearts would be brought in. No, if you had been alive among those Jews and had seen Christ and the miracles that He did, they would never have worked upon you with this heart. A hard heart will stand out against all means of grace whatsoever.

4. A heart that is hard makes preparation for any kind of sin whatsoever. It is prepared for any kind of sin. If you are kept from any sin, it is only because you do not have a fitting temptation. It is not out of the fear of God that you are kept from it. If your heart is hard, you are liable to all temptations, and to the grossest sins in the world. Thus you have it in Ephesians 4:19: "...who, being past feeling, have given them-selves over to lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness." Mark how "being past feeling" is laid as the foundation of lasciviousness. It is impossible that they would be so greedy of their lust unless they were past feeling. But when a man is past feeling, he grows quickly (if temptation comes) to be lascivious, to work uncleanness, and that with all greediness—and this all because he is past feeling. And as it is a preparation to the greatest sin, so indeed, when men shall go on in great sins, it is a sign that they are past feeling. Wanton, unclean persons who go on in their sins give evidence that they are past feeling.

5. Another evil of a hard heart is that it makes way for great misery, for great afflictions, and for great judgments. Whoever you are who has a hard heart, you who are upon the brink of some vile sin or some fearful judgment (or, it may be, you are upon the brink of both), you have this in Proverbs 28:14: "Happy is the man that feareth always, but he that hardeneth his heart shall fall into mischief." And in Proverbs 29:1 we read:

“He that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.” When your heart can give the rebound to God’s Word and to the admonitions of your peace, and when you harden yourself against those who admonish you, oh, tremble before the Lord; for the Lord says here that you shall suddenly be destroyed, and that there shall be no more remedy.

6. Know further that the Lord has sworn the destruction of a hard-hearted sinner. Hebrews 3:8: “Harden not your hearts as in the provocation in the day of temptation in the wilderness.” A special aim of the apostle is to exhort them so that their hearts are not hardened. Then he goes on in verse 11: “So I swear in My wrath that they shall not enter into My rest.” The Lord swears against a hard-hearted man. The Lord has sworn your destruction if your heart continues hard. You are in such a condition that, for all you know, your ruin and destruction is sworn by the Lord. Oh, therefore, take heed of continuing so in the hardness of your heart, lest God’s oath comes out against you particularly.

7. Know further that when your time of destruction comes, if your heart is hard, the heart of God will be hardened against you when you come to be under His stroke. As the Lord will be froward with those who walk frowardly (according to the Scripture phrase), so the heart of God is hardened against a hard heart. You have a hard heart, so when God calls you by His Word, when God reveals those truths unto you that might even melt the heart of a devil, yea, your heart is hardened. God calls upon you to beware of such and such sins, and your heart is hardened. Well, is your heart hardened when you come to the Word of God? Then it is just with the Lord, when you should be in the sorest affliction and are crying to the Lord for His mercy, that the Lord might harden His heart against you. And, indeed,

He threatens to turn like for like to those who harden themselves against Him. Those in Zechariah 7:12 made their hearts “as an adamant stone.” And verse 13: “Therefore it is come to pass that as he cried out and they would not hear, so they cried and I would not hear.” God is saying, “They hardened their hearts against Me, and I hardened My heart against them.”

Indeed, when the heart is hardened against the Word of the Lord, when He comes in His wrath, He in just judgment hardens His heart against them. We have a suitable Scripture for that in Lamentations 3:65: “Give them sorrow of heart, thy curse unto them.” The word that is translated “sorrow of heart” is a word that signifies a covering. “Give them covering of heart,” is how Arias Montanus terms it. And so interpreters of this passage tell us that this word here sometimes signifies a disease in the body, a disease of the heart. When there is a hard film covering the heart, it keeps all kinds of medicine, nourishment, or whatever should come to comfort the heart from it. Give them such a disease in the heart and Thy curse with them.

Those now who have that hardness of heart which will keep the commands of God from them, and will keep the truths of God from working upon them, it is just with God to give them such a covering upon their hearts in the time of their affliction that no comfort shall come in to them. You are in health and prosperity, and you hear those truths that God expects your hearts should be melted by, but you are not affected. Well, when you come to your affliction, the Lord may send such a curse that you may have that brawniness round about your heart so that whatever is said for your comfort will never reach your heart, just as whatever is said now for your contrition never reaches your heart. And is this anything else but justice? Oh, this would be a fearful curse of God upon men if it should be so!

You know further that God has a time to make men sensible in spite of their hearts. One way or another they shall have their hearts brought to some kind of tenderness so as to be sensible of the evil of sin and of the greatness of that God with whom they have to deal.

There is a twofold kind of tenderness, that which comes from a right temper of the flesh and that which comes from the soreness of the flesh. The saints of God have a sensibleness, but their sensibleness is the sensibleness of a right temper of their hearts, and that does them no hurt at all. They are sensible of God's threats and sensible of the promises, but there is a joy in their sensibleness.

But for wicked men who are not now sensible, the Lord has a time that He will make them sensible. The Lord will make their hearts sore, and then they shall be sensible. Ezekiel 21:7: "And it shall be when they say unto thee, 'Wherefore sighest thou,' that thou shalt answer, 'For the tidings, because it cometh'; and every heart shall melt, and all hands shall be feeble, and every spirit shall faint, and all knees shall be weak as water. 'Behold it cometh, and shall be brought to pass,' saith the Lord God." Every heart shall melt.

We have here in my text an example of a gracious, melting heart that God accepts; but if your hearts do not melt by the Word, God will melt your hearts hereafter by some dreadful tidings of some fearful judgments of His. So you have it in Jeremiah 9:7-8: "Therefore thus saith the Lord of Hosts, 'Behold, I will melt them and try them, for how shall I do for the daughter of My people?'" If when you hear the Word your hearts do not melt, the Lord has a time, in spite of your hearts, to melt you. And therefore, to conclude this, to show you the evil of a hard heart, look at Job 9:4: "Who hath hardened his heart against Him and hath prospered?" So I say to every man or woman who has a

hard heart, who has hardened his heart against the Lord and has prospered? You may go on and please yourself in your own ways, thinking that you will have your will, and you will do thus and thus. Let them say what they can, but know that there was never anyone who hardened his heart against the Lord who has prospered. What's become of all hard-hearted sinners who have ever lived in former times? Give me any one example of any man who ever has hardened his heart against the Lord and has prospered. No, ruin, misery, and eternal destruction are his end.

But you will say, "I hope that we do not have hard hearts. We acknowledge that it is a fearful judgment to have a heart hardened against the Lord."

No? Are your hearts not hardened against the Lord? Then how is it that you are so quiet in your sin? Certainly that man or woman has a hard heart who can be so quiet in any way of known sin. You are conscious of such and such sins as you live in, and yet you can eat and drink, and go with company and be merry. O hard-hearted sinner, hardened in your sin! If your heart were tender, if you have fallen into any sin (as it's true we are all sinners), that sin must be acknowledged. But, certainly, it would be as a mote in your eye. There may be a great deal of dirt upon one's hand and that may not trouble one, but a little mote in one's eye will trouble one very much.

Again, men have hard hearts or else the Word and works of God would gain their hearts unto the Lord—but it does not. We see this day those blessed truths of God that are more clearly and fully revealed than they ever were since the world began, and yet they gain but very few men. And the great works of God wherein God appears most glorious yet do not gain men's hearts. Surely those hearts are very hard.

Surely men's hearts are hard because their hearts are proud. A proud heart is always a hard heart. As much pride is there,

so much hardness is there in the heart. Daniel 5:20: "But when his heart was lifted up, and his mind hardened in pride." Proud men and stout men who are set upon their wills, men who are willful in their ways, proud and stout, are men and women of hard hearts.

Again, surely the hearts of men are mighty hard. This appears in that they can so easily come into God's presence, confess their sin before God, and judge themselves worthy to be destroyed for their sin, and yet go away and live in their sin after all this. Here is the most dreadful hardness of heart, and how ordinary is this at this time! We have many days of fasting and prayer, and there we come and tell God, as it were, stories of sin. We make confession of sin at large and, when we have confessed such and such sins of which we are guilty, we judge ourselves for our sins. And yet, after all this, what sins are amended? Let any family come in and say, "O Lord, since these fasting days, such and such sins have been confessed, and we have judged ourselves for them and, through Thy grace, they have been amended." I am afraid that there are but few souls who are able to say this in the presence of God. Certainly, in the day of a fast, either you do this or you do not.

If the minister meets with you, then you join with him and say "Amen" to his confessions. If the minister does not meet with your particular sins, then, if you have a heart to sanctify a fast to God as you ought, you will get alone in private and confess those sins that were not confessed in public. I appeal to you as if it were from the Lord, have you kept such fasts? Have you observed in the minister's prayer whether he has met with your particular sins or not? And, if he has not, have you gone alone and examined your hearts in private to see what sins you are guilty of? Have you been judging yourselves for them and yet not reformed them? Certainly, if you have not done this, you

have not known what it is to keep a fast; and, if you have done this and continue still in the same sin, this shows a fearful hardness of heart! What! Come into God's presence and open our sins, and yet not set ourselves against them with all our might? Surely, our hearts are very hardened before the Lord.

Again, the very mercy of God hardens men. The more men have the shine of God's mercy, the more they are hardened in their sin. You have many who, in times of affliction, are like iron that seems to be yieldable; but as soon as their afflictions are over they are as hard as before. Their hearts are like clay that the beams of the sun hardens.

Yea, certainly, it's a sign that we have hard hearts in that we are not more sensible of the miseries of our brethren in other parts. They cry to us for help. We hear of their doleful complaints and cries. They are spoiled of their goods, their wives ravished before their eyes, and they are cast out of all, and yet our bowels of mercy toward others are little because our tables are full and we lie soft and at ease. We do not take unto heart the miseries of our brethren, nor the public calamities of the church.

I dare to appeal to this congregation, to every particular soul. How far have you taken to heart the public affairs of the church at this time? We know that the Church of God suffers much. Now do these things go to your heart? Can you get alone and bewail in the sorrow of your spirit? Can your heart melt and dissolve into tears when you hear of the miseries of your brethren and the public calamities of the church? But now, when these things do not touch you, you are not sensible of them at all, but can go on and be merry and follow the world. Because there is nothing upon your skin for the moment, therefore you are sensible of the miseries of no other person. Surely you are a hard-hearted man or woman. Therefore, tremble before the Lord.

And you who are like this, all the comfort that was said concerning a tender heart the last day, it is to be feared that you have no lot or portion in that business.

But it may be that some of you may say, "I bless God that my heart is not this hard. I find a sensibleness in my heart of these things."

Aye, but this may be far from the sensibleness of spirit that was here in Josiah. Therefore, that should have been the next use of examination as to whether our hearts are tender in a spiritual way. That is a work of the Holy Ghost in sanctifying our hearts.

There may be a softness of heart that may come from softness of nature. There may be some flashy workings of heart by hearing the Word. There may be some sensibleness of the heart by the knowledge of the Law.

As for the first, a plum or a cherry may be soft without, but hard within. Second, we know that ice may be thawed in the day and frozen again in the night. And, third, for the terrors of the Law, we know that the marblestone may melt in wet weather and, as it were, trickle down with tears, but be a stone still.

Finis

THE LIFE OF
Jeremiah Burroughs

(1599–1646)

*T*his very amiable divine was born in the year 1599. He was forced to leave the university, and afterwards the kingdom, on account of his non-conformity. After he later finished his studies at the university, he entered the ministerial work and was chosen colleague to Edmund Calamy at Bury St. Edmunds. In 1631 he became rector of Tivetshal in the county of Norfolk, but upon the publication of Bishop Wren's articles and injunctions, in 1636 he was suspended and deprived of his living. He sheltered himself for some time under the hospitable roof of the Earl of Warwick, but, on account of the intolerant and oppressive proceedings of the ecclesiastical rulers, the noble Earl, at length, found it was impossible to protect him any longer. Shortly after, to escape the fire and persecution, he fled to Holland and settled at Rotterdam, where he was chosen teacher to the congregational church of which Mr. William Bridge was the pastor.

Upon his arrival, he was cordially received by the church, and continued to be a zealous and faithful laborer for several years, gaining a very high reputation among the people. After the commencement of the civil war, when the power of the bishops was set aside, he returned to England, says Granger's *Biographical History*, "not to preach sedition, but peace, for which he earnestly prayed and labored."

Mr. Burroughs was a highly honored and esteemed person, and he soon became a most popular and admired preacher.

After his return, his popular talents and great worth presently excited public attention, and he was chosen preacher to the congregations of Stepney and Cripplegate, London, then accounted two of the largest congregations in England. Mr. Burroughs preached at Stepney at seven o'clock in the morning, and William Greenhill at three in the afternoon. These two persons, stigmatized by the historian Anthony Wood as notorious schismatics and independents, were called by Mr. Hugh Peters, one "the morning star," the other "the evening star of Stepney."

Mr. Burroughs was chosen to be one of the Westminster Assembly of Divines, and was one of the dissenting brethren, but a divine of great wisdom and moderation. He united with his brethren, Messrs. Thomas Goodwin, Philip Nye, William Bridge, and Sydrach Sympson, in publishing their own "Apologetical Narration" in defense of their own distinguishing sentiments. The authors of this work, who had been exiles for religion, to speak in their own language, "...consulted the Scriptures without any prejudice. They considered the Word of God as impartially as men of flesh and blood are likely to do, in any juncture of time; the place they went to, the condition they were in, and the company they were with, affording no temptation to any bias."

They asserted that every church or congregation has sufficient power within itself for the regulation of religious government, and is subject to no external authority whatever. The principles upon which they founded their church government were to confine themselves in everything to what the Scriptures prescribed, without paying any attention to the opinions or practices of men; nor to tie themselves down too strictly to their present resolutions, so as to leave no room for alterations upon a further acquaintance with divine truth. They steered a middle course between Presbyterianism and Brownism: the former they accounted too arbitrary, the latter too rigid, deviating from the spirit and simplicity of the gospel.

These are the great principles of the Independents of the present day.

Richard Baxter, who knew his great worth, said, "If all the Episcopalians had been like Archbishop Usher, all the Presbyterians like Stephen Marshall, and all the Independents like Jeremiah Burroughs, the breaches of the church would soon have been healed." The last subject on which Burroughs preached was his *Irenicum*, an attempt to heal the divisions among Christians. This title has been published by Soli Deo Gloria Publications. His incessant labors, and his grief for the distractions of the times, are said to have hastened his end. He died of tuberculosis on November 14, 1646, at the age of 47. The historian Granger says, "he was a man of learning, candor, and modesty, and of an exemplary and irreproachable life." Thomas Fuller has classed him among the learned writers of Emmanuel College, Cambridge. Williams' *Christian Preacher* says that his *Exposition of Hosea* is a pleasing specimen, to show how the popular preachers of his time applied the Scriptures in their expository discourses to the various cases of their hearers. He published several of his writings while he lived, and his friends sent forth many others after his death, most of which were highly esteemed by all pious Christians.

A Summary of the Gospel

by Jeremiah Burroughs

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The gospel of Christ in general is this: It is the good tidings that God has revealed concerning Christ. More largely it is this: As all mankind was lost in Adam and became the children of wrath, put under the sentence of death, God, though He left His fallen angels and has reserved them in the chains of eternal darkness, yet He has thought upon the children of men and has provided a way of atonement to reconcile them to Himself again.

Namely, the second Person in the Trinity takes man's nature upon Himself, and becomes the Head of a second covenant, standing charged with sin. He answers for it by suffering what the law and divine justice required, and by making satisfaction for keeping the law perfectly, which satisfaction and righteousness He tenders up to the Father as a sweet savor of rest for the souls that are given to Him.

And now this mediation of Christ is, by the appointment of the Father, preached to the children of men, of whatever nation or rank, freely offering this atonement unto sinners for atonement, requiring them to believe in Him and, upon believing, promising not only a discharge of all their former sins, but that they shall not enter into condemnation, that none of their sins or unworthiness shall ever hinder the peace of God with them, but that they shall through Him be received into the number of those who shall have the image of God again to be renewed unto them, and that they shall be kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.