

SURREY TABERNACLE PULPIT.

SIXTH CHAPTER OF HEBREWS.

A S E R M O N

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, MAY 14TH, 1865, BY

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AT THE SURREY TABERNACLE, BOROUGH ROAD.

"If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame."—Hebrews vi. 6.

Now when a man makes no profession of religion at all, that certainly is a proof that that man is a graceless man. Therefore let none try to shield themselves under the idea that they cannot be deluded in religion, for they make no profession; and they cannot be hypocrites, for they make no profession. But if you make no profession, that is a proof that you are dead in trespasses and in sins; for if you were delivered from the state you are in by nature, it would be by your being made to feel the wretchedness of that state, and you would then come into a full and a real profession of religion. Nevertheless when a natural man assumes by human persuasion, or by any other means takes up a profession, and it is not real, then that man's condition is worse than it was when he made no profession at all, because, if he should die in this new condition, he will be condemned as a common sinner, in common with others; but in addition to that he will be condemned as an offender in Zion, as an intruder in Zion, and the Lord will say unto such, "Friend, how camest thou in hither, not having on a wedding garment? and he was speechless. Take him, bind him hand and foot, and cast him into outer darkness." Then if this said professor should apostatize from this profession which he does make, and become an open, bitter persecutor and ridiculer of the truth of the blessed God, and of the people of God, then his state is worse still; for he will be condemned trebly then; because he will be condemned as a sinner in common with others; he will be condemned as not having the covering of God's Spirit, not having on a wedding garment, and he will be condemned also, in addition to this, as an apostate professor, and a practical enemy against the truth and cause of the blessed God. You will at once perceive, perhaps even from these remarks, that we have before us this morning one of the most solemn subjects; and that requires in the treatment thereof the greatest possible care: for if we make a profession, either our religion is real or it is not; either it is right or it is wrong; it must be one or the other. And the word of God is clear upon it, that "many shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able;" that many shall seek, and shall never find. If I were speaking this morning—instead of speaking in the main

to a congregation of real Christians, if I were speaking to persons who were somewhat careless, in that case, however offensive it might be to them, I should feel bound, from the solemnity, vast and eternal importance, of the subject, to deal faithfully with their souls, and with God's truth, that when I depart this world I may be free from the blood of all men, not having shunned to declare the whole counsel of God, so far as that counsel has been made known to my own soul.

There is a threefold view, then, I will this morning take of the subject before us. Here is, first, *a deficient religion*. Second, *a fatal apostasy*. Third, *the impossibility of restoration*.

First, then, we have here *a deficient religion*. Though before I enter upon the subject I may just observe that the first part of the text, "If they shall fall away," may be safely rendered—for all modern scholars, and I see that the New York American Bible Union Society render these words, and I certainly will not take the responsibility upon myself, but it does appear to me to be more consistent with the original than is our translation, they render the words thus—"And have fallen away," so that they do away with the subjunctive mood, and put it in the positive, that "they have fallen away," "seeing that they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame." I am perfectly astonished that some men should take such a scripture as this to prove therefrom the impossibility of the saints falling away. If that were the apostle's meaning he would not have gone to work in such a circumlocutive way, he would have at once plainly declared it, as he does in other passages; "He that hath begun the good work will perform it unto the day of Jesus Christ;" and that nothing can be laid to the charge of God's elect, and that not anything can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus. That is not the apostle's argument; his argument is here, that a person shall have all that is here described, and yet ever liable to fall away into that dreadful apostasy here delineated. And as I go through the several items that characterize the mere professor, we shall recognize, I think, as we go along, wherein the deficiency lies, and leave it with your own consciences to judge whether your religion has in it this deficiency, or whether, on the other hand, you can say that you know something beyond what is here described.

Now, first it is said of them that they were "once enlightened." While we are careful to note what the Holy Spirit doth say by his servants, we must be at the same time careful to note what He doth not say. Now you observe here that such persons were enlightened, not quickened; they were so enlightened as to be converted from heathenism to Christianity, from a non-profession of religion into a profession of religion. But just mark one thing—enlightened as they may be, so as to understand the Christian religion in the history of it, that Christ came into the world to save sinners, and that eternal life is by faith in him, yet the great deficiency of this department is this; here is intellectual or mental enlightenment, but there is no downward experience, there is no conviction of the depravity of their nature, there is no real, deep conviction of the solemn necessity they are under of the grace of God, of the Christ of God, and of the Spirit of God. Now, do not misunderstand me here. It is not your depravity I am speaking of. I do not want that. It is the consciousness of it I want. It is not the evil thoughts and propensities which the human heart contains that I should wish to treat of, for I loathe that corruption system that is everlastingly setting before the people those gross and revolting evils of fallen nature, and putting into our minds thoughts we should never think of but for their evil suggestions. Therefore, when I speak of downward experience I mean a consciousness of what you are in your nature before the living God; brought to feel that nothing, no, nothing but the blood of Christ can save you from the wrath to come, that nothing but the righteousness of Jesus Christ can save you or exempt you from

the sentence, "Depart, ye cursed;" and that none but the Holy Spirit of God can give you such a realization of mercy as shall satisfy your soul. Now I would ask you this question,—When a man is thus brought to deeply and solemnly feel his need, how can a man willingly give up what he feels he cannot do without? One reason, therefore, that the people of God do not give up the truth is because they know their need of it. But if it is a mere mental enlightenment, and this poverty is not felt?—for it is the poor in spirit that are blessed; it is the poor prisoner of hope that shall ultimately praise the name of the Lord. Now here is this deficiency,—a man is enlightened, he can come before a church and can say a few things in accordance with the creed of the church he is about to join, and a people that are anxious to fill the church with something, not caring much what it is, he can creep very easily into the church. But where there is a living minister and a living church, they must have downward experience; they must know what that man knows of the word of God being to him quick and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword, dividing asunder soul and spirit, and the joints and marrow, and laying open the secret thoughts of the heart, as was the case with Saul of Tarsus—"The law entered, sin revived, I died." He became dead to all his former religion, and felt his need of that amazing grace which he preached. Now if you have not this, if you have only the light and not this solemn, downward experience, then I cannot say when you may apostatize. Second,—it is said of such that "they tasted of the heavenly gift." But while they tasted the heavenly gift, Christ Jesus, the deficiency is that they did not understand it. Hence the Israelites of old, they did, it is true, taste the manna, and live upon it, but they never felt really conformed to it; their hearts were never with it; they were ever seeking an opportunity to get away from it. And so this mere professor. Well, he says, yes, Jesus Christ is very benevolent; yes, I love Jesus, the dear Jesus, the meek and lowly Jesus. And when the minister can preach in a very entertaining way, there is a sort of an intellectual treat, and such an one goes away, and he has tasted of this heavenly gift, and he is quite pleased; but at the same time, like the stony-ground hearer, he realizes a little pleasure from it, but he does not understand this heavenly gift in its new covenant order. The new covenant is hidden from him; he does not understand the value of Jesus Christ—that is, as the Mediator of the new covenant; and when the time comes for him to be put to the test he gives it up. Whereas those of you that do understand the Saviour's position as the Mediator of the new covenant, you see and feel that he is a Priest after the power of an endless life; you understand it: "Those on the good ground hear the word and understand it." And you understand that the testimony of his new covenant Mediatorship is so essential to your eternal welfare that you could not for a thousand worlds give it up, and if you had ten thousand mortal lives they would be but a toy in comparison of that eternal life and eternal glory you have by the new covenant Mediatorship of the Lord Jesus Christ. Here again, then, these professors are deficient. Third,—they "were made partakers of the Holy Ghost." Where is the deficiency there? Here it is,—they were made partakers of the Holy Spirit in his moral influence; ministers, true men of God, preach the vitalities of the Holy Spirit, and those vitalities which they preach to the living have a moral influence upon the others, and will sometimes convert a man morally, and that man becomes disposed to be holy; the unclean spirit is gone out, there is a spirit of morality infused into the man: whatever his vices or wrong practices were, he leaves them, reforms, and becomes everything outwardly that we could wish even the Christian to be. But at the same time, while he is a partaker of the Holy Spirit morally, he is not a partaker of the Holy Spirit vitally. There is no groaning, the man being burdened; there is no longing after a realization of the blessedness of the

man whose transgression is forgiven, and whose sin is covered. If he can keep his outside pretty clean, and have a good name in the church, and especially in the world, where his business is, that he may somewhat profit by his religion, he goes no further. He is a partaker as king Saul was; he was a partaker of the Holy Spirit morally for a time; by-and-bye that morality went off, and then king Saul turned murderer of the saints of God, slew the priests of the Lord, and would have slain David if he could have reached him. Thus, then, it is one thing to be a partaker of the Holy Spirit so as to be disposed to moral holiness, and thus become a moral man, and live in his moral influence; this is one thing; it is another thing to be a partaker of his vitality; so that the Holy Spirit not only infuses into you a moral feeling, but he dwells in you, and at times rolls in the waves of eternal mercy into your soul in such a way that you seem, as it were, overwhelmed with the mercy and goodness of God. And possessing the Holy Spirit thus not merely morally, but vitally, such can never give it up; but the others, that possess the Holy Spirit only morally, they will by-and-bye; their dry morality is hard work; they will see one pleasure and another pleasure, one advantage and another advantage pass by, and Satan will say, What a fool you are to forgo all this! and so by-and-bye it all gives way together. But where there is vitality there is a pleasure in the love of God with such persons that can be found nowhere else; where there is vitality there is a pleasure in Christ Jesus that cannot be equalled elsewhere; those that have vitality, unto such there is a pleasure in the ways of the Lord that they can find nowhere else; there is a peace to such that passeth all understanding. And such would say, For me to turn away from this river of God's pleasure; for me to turn from those pleasures that for ever roll at his right hand! When a man makes a profession of being a real Christian, and deceives himself, there is the evil; but as far as the softening moral influences are concerned, we bless the Lord for them. Again, "And have tasted the good word of God." So the word of God is good to the man; he says, That is a good word, that is a good sermon; the man preached it well, divided it well, arranged it well, expressed it well, interspersed it with anecdotes well, brought in scriptures well, sublime ideas, pathetic ideas, grand ideas; why, really I was quite delighted. And the same shall go the next evening to hear a lecture on philosophy, or on some foolery or other, and enjoy it just as much. And thus the word of God is good to him just so far as it entertains, amuses, and pleases; and thus he tastes the good word of God; it is good to him; but let that cease, as in the case of the stony-ground hearer, and away he will go. Now, say you, where is the deficiency here? The deficiency here is that the man is not waiting or listening to what the Lord shall say to his soul. The man whose religion is vital looks to what the Lord shall say; that is to say, if the name of Christ be set forth, the living soul says, Now can I lay hold of that name? Do I realize its preciousness? Or whatever the minister may be upon, such an one, where vitality is, will, when he is at all in his right mind, and at all possessed with attentiveness, compare what the minister says with his own experience; and if it seem to run along nicely with that, and the Lord attend the testimony with power, why, then it is food to him; he lives upon it, it is just to his taste.

It is not the minister's gifts, but the minister's grace; it is not the man, but the man's Master; it is not the man's preaching, but the gospel he preaches; it is not the creature, but the Creator, by which the living soul lives; whereas the other lives upon the gifts of the minister. Hence we have seen instances where ministers have been highly gifted with speaking powers, when they have died, the religion of one half of their people has died; just showing what they were living upon. But while the minister is to be owned and honoured, and held in high esteem and repute for his work's sake, still at the same time he is not the life of the people; no, it is

the Lord, and the Lord alone. So, therefore, as the dear Saviour said, "Ye shall see a man bearing a pitcher of water;" but say nothing to him, but go where he goes, and "say to the good man of the house," get access to the master. So the minister is the servant to bring the pitcher of water to help the sheep; that is all. Fifth, "the powers of the world to come;" they are affected by them. This is necessarily included. Of course, all profession of religion is professedly for the world to come. And what are the powers of the world to come? The testimonies of the Bible; they are the authoritative powers of the world to come. How do I know there is a hell? The Bible has it in its power to assure me of it. How do I know the kingdom of heaven? The Bible has it in its power to assure me of it. And thus the testimonies of the Bible are the powers, the authorities, for concluding that there is a world to come. Now a man may know thus far, and where is the deficiency here? The deficiency here is that he does not enter into the world to come, does not enter into the kingdom of Christ; he does not enter in; and our last idea, if time permit, will be the clearest illustration of that. Such an one doth not enter into the order of Christ's kingdom. Hence we generally find professors set their bits of morality above the Holy Spirit, and above spiritual things, above the people of God; and because the people of God, while they love morality, and have the moral influence of the Spirit, but because we see something infinitely beyond that, and we dwell chiefly upon the superior, they turn round upon us, because we do not worship with them in the open plain of Dura; a little dry morality, which they are everlastingly thrusting into the place of Christ and the testimonies of the gospel.

Now, then, these fall away. But perhaps I had better just remark here, suppose that such, that have this mere form of religion, with none of its reality—suppose they should not fall away; for that is a fair question, and I will answer it;—suppose they should not fall away; if they die in that religion they will not be saved; and therefore, where is the evil of falling away? No, but I am one of those that believe that God is not unrighteous, and that while he condemns the lost for all they have done, he will not condemn them for what they have not done. And, consequently, there are degrees of suffering in hell. You never read of a greater salvation, but you do read of a greater condemnation. Now, then, if this man go on to die in that religion, he will be condemned as a common sinner, and as an intruder in Zion; but he will not be condemned as one who has turned round and become an apostate and a murderer of the saints; he has avoided that sin, and consequently escapes its punishment. That is my view of that. Well, then, say you, you would advise the man to go on. No; if the man came to me for advice, and he gave me an account of his religion, and it appeared to me of this kind, I should say, Now, friend, do not make any profession at all; live as an honest man, read the Bible, go to hear the word of God, and if it be the Lord's will to open your eyes, and to show you what you are as a sinner, then you will come into real profession. But if you throw off your profession, do not turn round and be an enemy; do not hate the saints; do not ridicule the Saviour and these things; for if you do you will bring upon yourself a swift and utter destruction; for God will resent every injury done to his truth, his dear saints, or his dear Son; he that toucheth one of these toucheth the apple of his eye. But I will now look at this apostasy very concisely. Now, "they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh." The word "falling away" here in the original, is used only once in all the New Testament. Parkhurst—some of you that have his lexicon can consult—says that the Greek word here translated "falling away" answers to a Hebrew word which always means "apostasy;" and he gives four scriptures from Ezekiel, where the Hebrew word to which this word answers is used, as proving that it does not mean any of the sins of which the children of God are the subjects, but that it means that apostasy I will presently describe.

Now, first, they crucify the Son of God,—not literally; you cannot take this literally, you must take it figuratively, in the relative sense. And we will go to another part of this same epistle to explain it; and the real child of God must recognize the fact that there is an impossibility of his doing such a thing. The apostle in the 10th chapter says, “If we sin wilfully.” Now mind, the sin there does not mean any common sin of the flesh, but the deadly sin of apostasy—“If we sin wilfully;” as though he should say, If you are misled by the cunning craft of men, and do not know you are misled; and if you are led as the Galatians were, to sin against God’s truth without knowing what you are about;—“My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you.” That is very different from that I presently have to state, “There remaineth no more sacrifice for sins.” If you wish to set aside that covenant in its perfection, the eternity of his priesthood, “there remaineth no more,” that is, no other “sacrifice for sins; but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries;” these persons become adversaries. Now come to the man that has real religion; is there anything under the canopy of heaven—I cannot think of one thing more remote from the mind, and feeling, and thought of the Christian than that of setting aside the atonement of Christ. Why, I believe there are ten thousand evils the Christian would think of before he would think of such a thing as that. Oh, he says, I am ready to die for the Lord Jesus; his atonement is my only hope, my only plea, for time and eternity. It is at an infinite distance from the feeling of the real Christian thus to apostatize. So it may be at present with the man who shall by-and-bye apostatize; but then with this difference—the one receives it from necessity, the other as a matter of opinion; and when it is received as a matter of opinion, it will be parted with as a matter of opinion. But when received as a matter of necessity, it can never be parted with; for the longer we live the deeper our necessities grow; that makes the Bible say, “Grace and peace be multiplied.” We shall not want less mercy, but more. “He that despised Moses’ law,”—mark that! despised the Levitical law, representing the substitutional priesthood of Christ,—“died without mercy.” Now that phrase is very suggestive. Why are they said to die without mercy? Because their sin consisted in setting aside the only law by which mercy came. Just so here, if you set aside this atonement, you set aside the only law by which mercy came, and therefore you have placed yourself in a position where mercy cannot come; you must therefore die without mercy. But the apostle reminds us that the punishment here is greater than that under the Mosaic law,—“Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God?” Trample upon his truth, and you trample upon him; trample upon his cause, and you trample upon him. “And hath counted the blood of the covenant.” I know not how to express myself upon the next point, lest I should be misunderstood. I do really entreat the Lord that he may give you close attention for a minute or two to what I am going to say. “And counted the blood of the covenant.” Now mark, it does not say, “counted the blood of Christ an unholy thing.” Well but, say you, it was the blood of Christ. Yes, but it does not say that. Why not? For a reason as solemn as any that I can name; and it is this, that the covenant—mark, it is the blood of the covenant,—that the covenant of which Christ is the Mediator is an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure; and that the blood of Jesus Christ accords with that covenant. And this is what professors call a high, Calvinistic, dangerous, ungodly doctrine. There it is, to this day. If you simply say the blood of Christ, thousands will be pleased; but set it forth as it is in truth and indeed—the blood of the new covenant the blood of the everlasting covenant,—they cry out, “He is a high doctrine man, a dangerous man; his doctrine leads to sin, his doctrine

sanctions sin." So the Saviour himself; they called him by every awful and blasphemous epithet they could think of. Beware, then, ye mere professors, how ye trifle with the testimony of the blood of Christ as the blood of the covenant, as the blood of an eternal and immutable covenant. Is it not remarkable that it should be put into that form to instruct us? And God grant that it may be the means of opening the eyes of some that think but light of this new covenant, or that know it not. There is a reason, therefore, for these clauses being recorded after such a careful form. "And hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace." Mark that; here is the offensiveness of the Holy Spirit. When the Holy Spirit is set forth in his sovereignty, taking up the isles as a very little thing; and that he waiteth not for man, nor tarrieth for the sons of men; that all nations before him are as a drop in the bucket—nothing, and less than nothing: how does this sort with the doctrines of men, that the Holy Spirit would quicken you, but you won't let him; that the Holy Spirit flees from the realms of noise and strife? There is plenty of this twaddle in the dead professing world. Whereas the Holy Spirit is as almighty as is God the Father, as discriminating and certain in all his operations as was the dear Saviour in walking as it was written of him, and accomplishing the great mission for which he appeared on our sin-blasted planet. Thus, then, they crucify the Son of God afresh to themselves. What a mercy they cannot do it to others! We have had some few—I bless the Lord not many—in our place; they have turned round, and crucified the Son of God to themselves, trodden him under foot, counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and done despite unto the Spirit of grace. I recollect one who thus turned round and left us; and he sent for me when he was dying; and as soon as I entered the room—I shall never forget it—it looked to me to be hell depicted on his countenance, and he could not endure the sound of these testimonies. I began to speak of them. He said, "I hate them; I see I have no hope without that which you used to preach; but I cannot receive them; hell is my home, and to hell I shall go." It made a deep impression upon my mind. Ah, when you get into this enmity it is not easy to get back again; when they put him to an open shame, openly ridicule him, openly despise him, make it their very glory to despise his truth. "I have done with those *hypers*. Ah, if you did but know what I know of them, sir." For their enlightenment enables them to do what without it they could not. Judas was so enlightened that he knew where the Saviour often resorted, and that enlightenment enabled him to betray him. Ananias and Sapphira were enlightened, or else they could not have devised the cheat for which they were put to death. And so professors now. And whenever I hear a person's mouth full of other people's sins, and other people's faults, I regard it as this:—in the first place, such persons themselves are not good, for I never will believe, as long as I live, that a person really right-minded will be everlastingly finding fault with others, his mouth eternally full of the sins of others; secondly, take it for granted that such persons are not far from apostasy; they are on the way; they are coming round by slow degrees, and by-and-bye down they go, openly ridicule the truth of God and the people of God, and everything that pertaineth to the truth.

Now it says, "it is impossible to renew them again." Where, then, lies the impossibility? There is the question. I cannot think it lies with God. Why, the worst of crimes he has pardoned, the worst of sinners he has restored. And I, in opposition to some of my dearest friends, do not happen to believe that any one sin, let it be what it may, is unpardonable, except those sins the Lord is not pleased to pardon. I do not think that the Lord must be looked upon as unable to pardon any sin, let it be what it may; and, therefore, for me to say that God Almighty himself could not regenerate such an apostate, could not quicken him from the

dead; that Jesus Christ could not do it; that the Holy Spirit could not do it—I should not like to say so. The Bible says “whosoever;” that makes no exception. If every one of the thirteen or fourteen hundred people here this morning were just such characters as here described, I would preach the gospel to you all. I would not tell you that you could not be restored, that God Almighty could not regenerate you, and bring you back, not into such a profession as you had before, but into a real profession. I will have a scripture upon it, and then close. I think the impossibility lies here:—this apostate has gone into a disbelief of the truth; mark that! Now all the time that man is in that disbelief of the truth he cannot be renewed to repentance. Hence it says, in the 11th chapter of this same book, “Without faith it is impossible to please God.” Aaron shared very partially the spirit of apostasy; it got hold of him; but Aaron did not lose his faith; that faith led him to give up the golden calf, and righted him again. Solomon was led away in his old age to give an outward sanction to idolatry; but Solomon did not lose his faith; therefore his faith reinstated him before he died. Peter began to apostatize, and to anathematize the Lord; but he did not lose his faith; he still remained in the belief of the very thing which with his lips he denied. “I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not.” So the Galatians, the right-minded among them, they lost their freshness, lost in part their liberty; but they did not lose their faith. So with the Corinthians, 1st epistle; they had lost a good deal of their order, and made the house of God the scene of drunkenness; perhaps a more disgraceful thing is not on record; but still they did not lose their faith; therefore, when the apostle wrote to them, as we learn from his second epistle, that epistle righted them. But the apostate of our text has lost his faith; he has given up all belief, and therefore it is impossible to renew that man again, until he shall become so convinced as to become a believer. But who can give him that faith? Therefore I think the impossibility lies in his having lost his faith; that is, not saving faith he has lost, mind that, only natural, in his having become a disbeliever. “They could not enter in because of unbelief.” Let the man be once convinced that that which he has given up is God’s truth; let him once begin to believe it; as soon as that belief begins to act, he will then say, “What a monster have I been! Is there any hope for me?” Then in come the scriptures, “Whosoever believeth.” “Come,” saith Jehovah, “let us reason together: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.” Let us, then, despair of no man who is so convinced as to have a grain of faith in God’s truth.

I do not pretend to be infallible in my interpretation; but I do pretend to sincerity, I do pretend to earnestness, and to honesty. And thus I have, to the best of my humble ability, tried to set before you what is a mere profession as contrasted with a real possession; secondly, wherein the apostasy herein described consisteth; thirdly, wherein the impossibility lies,—that it does not lie with God, as though he could not quicken the dead soul, but it lies in the fact that such are unbelievers, in an infidel state; until a man be brought to believe the truth he will never, of course, seek the Lord.