

A PROMISE AND A THREATENING

A SERMON

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“The ways of the Lord are right, and the just shall walk in them: but the transgressors shall fall therein.” HOSEA 14:9

THE ten commandments are expressive of one order of the ways of the Lord; all the commandments of the old covenant are expressive of another order of the ways of the Lord, and the great truths of the everlasting gospel are expressive of another order of the ways of the Lord. And if these ways be right, then anything contrary to them is infinitely wrong. So that sin, being against an infinite Being, is objectively infinite. Herein is the greatness and weightiness of sin. It does, by the object against whom it is committed, acquire an infinity and an eternity of weight. “Is not your wickedness great, and your iniquities infinite?” And the man that is convinced of this soon sees his need of a mediator that is also infinite. David seems to allude to this all-sufficient mediator in the 147th Psalm. When he teaches a sinner what sin is objectively, that sinner immediately drops in self-despair, broken-hearted before God, humbled down. He says, If sin be thus against the infinite God, and has thus acquired an infinity of weight and power, what can I do? For the law of God is the law of an infinite God, and that law is the strength of sin. David brings in the greatness of Jesus Christ. He says, “Great is our Lord, and of great power; his understanding is infinite.” So, that Jesus Christ came thus in his deity, in the infinity of his understanding; and if he had not had this infinity of understanding, he could not have comprehended or understood the magnitude, nor the weight, nor the awfulness of sin; much less could he, if he had not been God as well as man, have compassed sin in its objective evil. There was, then, in him infinity; he was God as well as man, and that he alone could compass sin. He alone, in his complex person, could so bear the weight of sin and its penalty as to put an end to that sin, an end to that penalty, and bring in everlasting life and everlasting light. No man that is taught of God, and made to see and know what sin is, can be a Socinian, and so deny the deity of the Savior; nor does it strike me that such a man will be anything very long but a believer in the dignity of the person of Christ and in the perfection of his work. I say, then, if the ways of the Lord are right, everything contrary thereto is infinitely wrong. May we not, then, this morning bless the Lord our God that while we are in this awful condition, while we are in this guilty, lost, and dreadful state as sinners considered, having nothing before us but an infinity and eternity of woe, there is One that never thought, that never spoke, and that never did one thing contrary to the ways of the Lord? Have not the words sometimes charmed you when he who is truth itself, he who could

not lie, and he who spoke as never man spoke, could stand in the presence of fallen angels, in the presence of the world, in the presence of the angels of the Lord, in the presence of a heart-searching God, and say, "I do always those things that please him?" And remember, this wonderful Person is to be our refuge from the storm, he is to be our covert from the tempest, he is to be unto us as rivers of water in a dry place, he is to be unto us as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land. "The ways of the Lord," then, "are right;" and we cannot be saved unless we are brought vitally into those ways. And I am sure the more we are acquainted with the ways of the Lord, the more we shall be satisfied with his goodness, the more we shall cleave to him, and the more we shall feel that there is laid upon us a debt of gratitude which eternity itself will not enable us to pay.

Now our text lies before us, strictly speaking, in a threefold form. Here are first, the ways of the Lord; here is, secondly, the path of the just; and here is, thirdly, the destiny of the transgressors. But I will take it up in a twofold form. I will first notice *the ways of the Lord*; and then, secondly, *the contrast*. "The just shall walk in them, but the transgressors shall fall therein."

First, then, just a sample, and it can be but a sample of *the ways of the Lord*. And I will commence with the singular, the way of the Lord. The way of the Lord is the way of holiness. "An highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called the way of holiness." Some of the learned tell us that the word there rendered "highway" may be rendered "lifting up," "there shall be a lifting up and a way." And it is called "the way of holiness" because it at once brings us to the Lord Jesus Christ. We are represented in our state by nature as being in a pit wherein is no water. And happy is the man that finds out that he is in that pit, and that the pit is so deep, and that he is in such a state that he has no right to get out, and he has no power to get out; indeed, if we trace it further, he is spiritually dead. Now, "By the blood of your covenant I have sent forth your prisoners out of the pit wherein there is no water." So, then, it is the revelation of the Savior to us that gives us a hope in God's mercy, and lifts us up in hope above our sins; and that must be to be lifted up very high; it gives us a confidence in Jesus Christ, by which we become lifted up above condemnation, by which we become raised up to sit together, as the apostle has it, in heavenly places in Christ Jesus; raised up from sin to hope in God's salvation, raised up from his wrath to rest as it were, in his everlasting love; raised up from the dust and from the dunghill of our state by nature to inherit the exceeding great and precious promises of the gospel; and those promises may, in a sense, well be called the throne of glory. Now it is said that this lifting up is connected with a way. "There shall be a way," which of course means Jesus Christ; he is the lifting up and he is the way; "and it shall be called the way of holiness." How shall I speak upon this? Only think that by a grain of faith in our soul receiving Jesus Christ as your sanctification, there you stand, not in yourself, not in the flesh, but in your faith in him, there you stand as free from sin as Christ himself is; and all his consistency imputed to you, covers your daily infirmities, faults, and inconsistencies. "Blessed is the man whose transgression is forgiven; whose sin is covered; blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin." But what can cover us from avenging justice but the one great propitiation, Christ Jesus the Lord? "The way of holiness." The man that thus knows something of the cleansing blood of the Lamb, something of what he has done, how the soul rushes to him! It may well say,

"Lo, glad I come, and you, blest Lamb,
Shall take me to you as I am;
Nothing but sin I you can give;

Nothing but love shall I receive.”

“It shall be called the way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it.” Why not? Because in the nature of things it is not possible, for no soul can be brought thus, convinced thus of its need of Christ; no soul can receive Christ with all earnestness as the end of sin, but the soul that is born of God. There is no way into this way but by the washing of regeneration. And, therefore, with all the evils we feel in our nature, if we are brought into this way, then we are reckoned clean; our enmity is slain; we are reconciled to God. “Now you are clean through the word I have spoken unto you.” The man that can testify something of soul-trouble, something of soul-struggles, something of soul-darkness, something of soul-conflict, something of soul-trembling, something of lying under wrath, something of fearing the threatening’s, by and by the Lord breaks in upon that soul, and reveals to him Christ as the end of sin, the end of the law for righteousness. Ah, he says, this is indeed the right way. Here I see that God maintains his character as a God of justice, a God of holiness, a God of integrity; yes, more than this, these attributes of the Most High shine forth by Jesus Christ in a way they do nowhere else. Therefore, it may well be said that “he is just, and the justifier of him that believes in Jesus.” Now this is the right way, and the Savior says, “No man comes unto the Father, but by me.” It may well be called the right way, for it is the right way for every possible purpose that is good. There is not a promise that is not fulfilled in this way; for the man that thus receives Christ receives him as having all the sworn yea and amen promises of the blessed God. Also, it is said that “no lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon; it shall not be found there.” This must be understood strictly in the spiritual sense, and the meaning is that this holiness which you have in Christ cannot be reached by Satan, or by any of his agents; and that the righteousness that you have in Christ cannot be touched by sin, by Satan, or by any of his agents; and that the life which you have in Christ is hidden with God, hidden in God, and cannot be touched. Hence John says of the Christian in this spiritual life that “he abides”, that is, in this life, in this way, “and the wicked one touches him not.” Touch you he may in yourself, as he did John and as he touches all the people of God more or less, for he is the accuser of the brethren, going about seeking whom he may devour; but touch you as you stand in this way he cannot. So, then, here we have a life that is beyond all danger; here we have holiness, righteousness, and strength, a kingdom, an inheritance, that is beyond all danger. Does not the Savior himself say, “These things have I spoken unto you, that in me you might have peace”?

But we have great enemies to our seeking that peace and being satisfied with that peace that is in God. The flesh cannot inherit that peace, stands opposed to it, and longs for worldly possessions. Sin in us rises against that peace, and tries to make us dissatisfied with what we are in Christ, or the goodness of God, and would prompt us to take up our expectation and hope in something else. Satan also throws in ten thousand suggestions to hinder us from entering into and being satisfied with that peace. The world, false doctrines, circumstances, ten thousand things, stand opposed to us here. But, nevertheless, if we are in earnest, we shall see that Jesus Christ is thus the right way, and that all that are brought experimentally to know their need and to receive the testimony, they are clean, they are justified, they are saved, and saved forever. No power can harm us as we stand there. Hence it is said, “The ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs;” no laxity about it, no hesitating, no carelessness, but “they shall come to Zion with songs” When in our right minds we are, and it is right we should be, delighted beyond description with the thought that our faces are turned to Zion ward, and that we are hastening on to Zion with pleasure, with gladness. There is nothing, when in our right minds, we so eagerly and so earnestly run after as we

do the blessings of the everlasting gospel. “Everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.” This is one sample, then, of the ways of the Lord; and it is right in every sense of the word. Oh, how vitally essential we should be brought into this way.

Let me now, in the next place, look at some of the advantages of being brought into this way, as set forth in the word of the Lord. “Happy is the man that finds wisdom” and he that thus finds Jesus Christ finds true wisdom, for Christ is the wisdom of God, “and the man that gets understanding” and he that gets Christ gets understanding. You can understand nothing without him. The reason that men give such wretched interpretations of the Scriptures, and so mangle and secularize the prophecies of the Bible, creating imaginary earthly millenniums, a kind of Mahometan heavens, and I do not know what besides, is because they more or less shut out the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, “happy is the man that finds wisdom” that is, that finds Christ, for he is the wisdom of God; in him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, and he is understanding: if you find him, you then have by him understanding; you can understand nothing without him, but you can understand everything you need to understand in having Jesus Christ. “For the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold. Your lawful vocations are good and proper, and divinely appointed. God has placed you in your calling, and may he grant you wisdom, grant you prudence, grant you everything you need, and that you may see his hand towards you from time to time in providence. I am not going to be such a hypocrite as to run down silver and gold in their proper place, that is to say, the providential bounties, and mercies, and favors of the Lord; but still it is well to remember that while silver and gold, that is, providential things, are good, yet they must soon leave us, and we must soon leave them; we have not a very firm hold on them, I was going to say; and if we do not, they will soon let go of us. And therefore, while we acknowledge the goodness of the one, it is well to remember and be delighted with the thought that there is another kind of revenue or income better than these; “the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold.” Silver and gold do great things for us by the Lords providence, but they cannot redeem our souls. “We are not redeemed with corruptible things, such as silver and gold; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.” Men in general give proof that they think that the merchandise of silver and gold is the best merchandise in existence; they do not see the goodness of the merchandise of those durable riches, and they care not therefore. “She is more precious than rubies, and all the things you can desire are not to be compared unto her.” Look at the position of a gospel minister. He has to come forward and defy the people to desire anything that can bear comparing with eternal life, this eternal liberty, that is by Jesus Christ. What is like our God? What is like our Jesus Christ? What is like his promise? What is like his kingdom? What is like the inheritance that we have before us? There is none like unto him. “Whom have I in heaven but you? and there is none upon the earth I desire beside you.” And not only are these ways advantageous, but they are very pleasant. Wisdom’s ways are very pleasant. One of her ways is to love us with an everlasting love. “How fair and how pleasant are you, O love, for delights!” Another of wisdom’s ways is to choose us; he has chosen us, and what a very pleasant thing to be chosen in Christ Jesus! Another of wisdom’s ways was to appoint us to obtain salvation by Jesus Christ. What a very pleasant way! Another of wisdom’s ways was to impute every one of our faults to the person of Christ, and that Christ should bear the whole away, putting away sin by the sacrifice of himself, and bringing in everlasting righteousness. What a very pleasant way! Another of wisdom’s ways is to reconcile us in the manifestation thereof, experimentally, to God, that we

may from day to day walk with him and talk with him, cast our care upon him, and feel that no people, like his people, I mean the people he thus reconciles to himself, God is so near unto them that they have in Him, all they call upon him for. Another of wisdom's ways is to take care of us every moment. This wisdom is so perfect it will not trust us a moment. As the Lord lives, ever since I was born, he has not forgotten me a moment; and ever since he called me by his grace he has not trusted me one moment. He waters the work every moment. Wisdom is too wise to trust us out of its hands one moment. Another of wisdom's ways is to fit us at the resurrection for that glory that awaits us, and make us everlastingly happy. "Everlasting joy shall be unto them." I might take advantage of this part to speak of the Lord's ordinances, but I shall not do so this morning, though they are very pleasant. Time will not permit us to speak of the essentials of order; we must keep to the essentials of salvation. "Length of days is in her right hand, and in her left-hand riches and honor. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her; and happy is every one that retains her." To retain her is to retain God's truth. Hold that fast. If you let that go, you let the tree go; and if you let the tree go, you let the fruit go, and you let everything go. No man possessed anything yet worth having until he possessed God's truth. Give that up, you give everything up; for therein lies everything, the promise of God, by which he has given us all that we need.

One more sample here, amidst the number that press upon my mind, and that is the superiority of the ways of the Lord. The Lord says to the poor returning sinner, that is just convinced of his state, that is going to make himself holy, righteous, and good; the man who says, Ah, I see what a sinner I am, and I will be good, I will be righteous, I will do that which is lawful and right. Well, that is very good so far. And that is the way I will get to heaven. Ah, you will not; you will not get to heaven that way, for "by the works of the law no flesh can be justified." Now the Lord says to such, "Your thoughts are not my thoughts, and your ways" at present "are not my ways;" but you will think as I do by and by, as though the Lord should say, and my ways shall be your ways. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." Let us substitute two other words for the word "higher" here, and that will give great emphasis to that scripture. "As heaven is superior to earth, in so much are my ways superior to yours, in so much are my thoughts superior to yours. As heaven is better than earth, by so much are my ways better than your ways, and my thoughts are better than your thoughts." You may imagine a poor sinner saying, Well, Lord, If it be so, and I am wrong in my ways, and wrong in my thoughts, what are your thoughts, Lord? Well, the Lord says, these are my thoughts; and in this you will see that my way is a way of infallible certainty; in this you will see that the thoughts of my heart stand to all generations; in this you will see that my servant was perfectly right when he said, "How precious are your thoughts, O God, unto us!" "For as the rain comes down" no creature power here; it is entirely at the Lord's command, "as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven;" is that it, Lord? is your promise free as the rain? is your promise pure as the snow? Do you make your people, as it were, whiter than the snow? ah, is it thus free "and returns not thither, but waters the earth, and makes it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater; so shall my word be that goes forth out of my mouth; it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." If I say to you, I will bless you, and I do say it to you, if you have a grain of faith in your heart, for "they that be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham;" and what the Lord said to Abraham he said to all the spiritual seed of Abraham, if I say I will bless you, my word shall not return unto me void. Why, even a false prophet was constrained to say, "Has he said, and shall he not do? Has

he spoken, and shall he not make good?" "I shall accomplish that which I please." Yes, whatever mercies I have for you, I will bring you into possession of them. You see all through the Scriptures what the word of the Lord has accomplished. What millions of souls has it brought from death to life, from darkness to light, from condemnation to salvation and in what, I was going to say, an infinite variety of ways his blessed word instructs, soothes, sympathizes, bears us up! so that we may well sing of his word that "it is sweeter than honey and the honeycomb." "It shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it;" not where to men sent it, but "whereto I sent it." Well, says the poor sinner, that just suits me, for I am helpless, destitute, wretched, and miserable. Now I do see that the Lord's thoughts are better than mine, so I will give up my thoughts and my ways, and the Lord's thoughts shall be my thoughts, and his ways shall be my ways. Well, then, the Lord says, "You shall go out with joy;" You shall go out of all your troubles with joy; Jesus opens the prison house. "You shall go out with joy and be led forth with peace; the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands," a poetic form of expression to denote the welcome that poor sinners have to the blessings of the promised land. The mountains and the hills breaking forth before them into singing denotes the abundance of the promised land; the promised land personified to express its gladness to see you come; and the Lord does delight in receiving sinners. Ah, but, Lord, I am a poor thorn, I am nothing but a brier, fit only for the fire of hell. But "instead of the thorn you shall be a fir tree, and instead of a brier you shall be a myrtle tree; and it shall be to the Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be out off."

Secondly, I notice *the contrast*; and I will notice the last clause first. The first thing is to find out what kind of transgressor is here intended. It is a transgressor that is professedly in the ways of the Lord, but shall nevertheless fall; and we shall presently see what throws him down. The transgressor is one that is come into the ways of the Lord without any real conviction of his state, and consequently he cannot understand God's new covenant truth, but lives and dies an enemy to it, as I fear millions do. In the 2nd of Galatians, we read there were persons that said, You must keep the law, or else you cannot be saved. Now, says the apostle Paul, "If I build again the things which I destroyed" that is, which I have renounced; and you know what Saul of Tarsus renounced, he thought he was living a holy life, but he found out that it was a very unholy life; he thought he was living a righteous life, but he found out that it was a very unrighteous life; he thought he was living a divine life, but by the grace of God he found out that he was living a devil's life, a life of enmity against God; he thought he was on the way to heaven, but he found out he was on the way to hell, and he would never cease to wonder that he was not left to continue in that way. Now, said he, I have renounced all that; and "if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor;" if I now bring in my old law works, and thereby set aside a part of God's truth, I should in the worst sense sin against God; and to say that the Lord is author of this lying doctrine of salvation being partly by works, would be to make Christ the minister of sin; I should thus be a sinner in Zion, a transgressor in Israel. The transgressor, therefore, is the man that is come into a profession of religion, is falsely converted, has found peace, and is made happy, but carries with him a secret and sometimes openly expressed enmity against the new covenant, he being ignorant thereof and blind thereto. Now how shall such fall? First, when they are put to the test of God's truth, they shall fall short of that experience and of that knowledge of the truth that distinguishes the people of God, and thereby they shall fall, and prove that they are but transgressors. See how Cain fell. He fell short of a conviction of his state, fell short of faith in the ultimate sacrifice, fell short of faith in the new covenant promise; and then, when he saw God's approbation of Abel, he

fell into the deadly crime of slaying his brother. Esau was the first born, and by right priest of the family, but he could not abide God's truth, and therefore he fell. Ishmael thought he was an heir of promise, but he mocked at the child of promise, hated God's truth, and so he fell. The Pharisees of old took delight in approaching to God in their way, and they said that God was their Father, but you all know that they set God's truth aside; and when the Savior put them to the test of that truth, down they went. Now you must not wonder that they hated him, not only for the truth's sake, but for his faithfulness in telling them what they really were. Why, he said, "you are of your father the devil." And what is he? Why, a liar and a murderer, and you are the same. This threw them down. "The transgressors shall fall therein," fall short of the truth, fall short, of the promise, fall short of salvation, fall short of heaven. Will you have some individual cases? Here is the Pharisee, a transgressor against God's truth. He comes and says, "I fast twice a week, and pay tithes of all I possess." The poor publican belonged to another class; he became a just man; became justified, and did not fall short, but the Pharisee did. Again, a number of people assemble at the feast, and the king came in to see the guests. He says to one, Why, how is this? You have fallen short of the wedding garment. "How came you in here?" Well, he did not like to say how he came in, so he took the wisest course he could, and said nothing. I did not know I was among that high doctrine people. They have all got a wedding garment; poor wretches, they have not a rag to call their own, and so they are glad to appear in the robe provided for them. "Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Here, then, are the transgressors, setting God's truth aside; who, when put to the test of that truth, fall down in the ways of the Lord. Oh, what a falling down there would be in our day if all professors could unite and hear, not a mock, but a real gospel sermon! Ah, what numbers of them would drop their countenances, drop their heads, and go away, thereby proving themselves transgressors against God's truth!

Now, "the Just shall walk in them," in wisdom's ways, in God's ways. Who are the just? Those that are justified by faith. There is nothing can stop them, no. They go on from strength to strength by the righteousness of Jesus Christ; they go on from strength to strength by the renewing of the Holy Ghost; they go on from strength to strength according to what is written, "The Lord will perfect that which concerns you."

Now, my hearer, how is it with you? Can you bear the test of God's truth? Can you say you know your need of such a Mediator as I have pointed out this morning? Can you say that wisdom's ways, gospel ways, are pleasant to you, and that you have, through grace, found out the superiority of the Lord's ways? If so, then you are not a transgressor; you would not hurt and you would not destroy in all God's holy mountain; no. You will say, I like to go around about Zion, to mark her bulwarks, not to find fault with them; to tell the towers thereof, not to find fault with them; and to rejoice that this God is our God for ever and ever, and will be our guide even unto death. So, then, our walking in the ways of the Lord is by faith in Christ Jesus, and the completeness we have in him. This is the same truth a savor of death unto death unto the one, and a savor of life unto life to the other; but in both cases the truth is always a sweet savor unto God. That is that the truth of God shows that those who receive that truth in the free spirit and love of it have everlasting life, and that those who receive the word of God only in the letter of it, ever learning, but never able to come to a vital knowledge of the truth; those dying in that state are appointed unto death, those received see the way to eternal life without the truth; that is, they search the Scriptures, and in them they *think* they have eternal life, but they have not; for as they see, or rather, think they see their

way to life without an experimental acquaintance with the truth, therefore it is that their sin remains; and as they come short of a right knowledge of the truth here, they will come short of heaven hereafter; and so it will be proved that their sin remains. And sin, of all things, is the worst thing that could remain; for if sin remains, then everlasting punishment remains. Such, however they may make light of or despise the truth now, will find it then a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. Is not the proposition solemn and weighty where the apostle says, "Let us therefore fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it;" if our faith comes short of the love, the practical love of the truth, comes short we must of mercy hereafter. These will, indeed be of all men the most miserable, and will be reckoned nothing but transgressors; their sin remains; but he who receives the truth in the love of it, his sin does not remain, his sin may be sought for, but shall not be found. Such a one knows the truth, the truth has made him free, and he shall be presented holy, unblameable, and unreprouceable, with exceeding joy. He is by faith justified, and shall be glorified. He does not come short of the everlasting covenant of sure mercies now, and these mercies are sure mercies, and so shall all Israel be saved. Amen.