

# THE GREATEST FIGHT IN THE WORLD

by C.H. Spurgeon

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*C.H. Spurgeon's address to ministers on proclaiming the Gospel, emphasizing the importance of earnest prayer, careful preparation, and reliance on the Holy Spirit in spiritual warfare.*

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## The Greatest Fight in the World

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### The Greatest Fight in the World

By C. H. Spurgeon

ALTHOUGH one of the smallest of the Spurgeon volumes, this is among the most notable of his publications. It consists of the inaugural address which he delivered at the Pastor's College Conference in April 1891. Taking "the good fight of faith" as his theme, he exhorted his audience to do their very best "in our great Master's service."

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## Introduction

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"Fight the good fight of faith"— 1 Timothy 6:12.

Introduction May all the prayers which have already been offered up be answered abundantly and speedily! May more of such pleading follow that in which we have united! The most memorable part of past Conferences has been the holy concert of believing prayer; and I trust we are not falling off in that respect, but growing yet more fervent and prevalent in intercession. On his knees the believer is invincible.

I may say to you, as speakers, that I am persuaded we should prepare ourselves with diligence, and try to do our very best in our great Master's service. I think I have read that when a handful of lion-like Greeks held the pass against the Persians, a spy, who came to see what they were doing, went back and told the great king that they were poor creatures, for they were busied in combing their hair. The despot saw things in a true light when he learned that a people who could adjust their hair before battle had set a great value on their heads, and would not bow them to a coward's death. If we are very careful to use our best language when proclaiming eternal truths, we may leave our opponents to infer that we are still more careful of the doctrines themselves. We must not be untidy soldiers when a great fight is before us, for that would look like despondency. Into the battle against false doctrine, and worldliness, and sin, we advance without a fear as to the ultimate issue; and therefore our talk should not be that of ragged passion, but of well-considered principle. It is not ours to be slovenly, since we look to be triumphant. Do you work well at this time, that all men may see that you are not going to be driven from it. The Persian said, when on another occasion he saw a handful of warriors advancing, "That little handful of men! Surely, they cannot mean fighting!" But one who stood by said, "Yes, they do, for they have burnished their shields, and brightened their armour." Men mean business, depend upon it, when they are not to be hurried into disorder. It was the way amongst the Greeks, when they had a bloody day before them, to show the stern joy of warriors by being well adorned. I think, brethren, that when we have great work to do for Christ, and mean doing it, we shall not go to the pulpit or the platform to say the first thing that comes to the lip. If we speak for Jesus we ought to speak at our best, though, even then, men are not killed by the glitter of shields, nor by the smoothness of a warrior's hair; but a higher power is needed to cut through coats of mail. To the God of armies I look up. May He defend the right! But with no careless step do I advance to the front; neither does any doubt possess me. We are feeble, but the Lord our God is mighty, and the battle is the Lord's, rather than ours.

Brethren, I am telling some of my private thoughts to you, because we are alike in our calling; and having the same experiences, it does us good to know that it is so. We who lead have the same weaknesses and troubles as you who follow. We must prepare, but we must also trust in Him without whom nothing begins, continues, or ends aright.

Happily the themes are such that I can exemplify them even in this address. As a smith can teach his apprentice while making a horseshoe; yes, and by making a horseshoe; so can we make our

own sermons examples of the doctrine they contain. In this case we can practise what we preach, if the Lord be with us. A lecturer in cookery instructs his pupils by following his own recipes. He prepares a dish before his audience, and while he describes the viands and their preparation, he tastes the food himself, and his friends are refreshed also. He will succeed by his dainty dishes, even if he is not a man of eloquent speech. The man who feeds is surer of success than he who only plays well upon an instrument, and leaves with his audience no memory but that of pleasant sound. If the subjects which we bring before our people are in themselves good, they will make up for our want of skill in setting them forth. So long as the guests get the spiritual meat, the servitor at the table may be happy to be forgotten.

Three things are of the utmost importance just now, and, indeed, they always have stood, and always will stand in the front rank for practical purposes. The first is our armoury, which is the inspired Word; the second is our army, the church of the living God, called out by himself, which we must lead under our Lord's command; and the third is our strength, by which we wear the armour and wield the sword. The Holy Spirit is our power to be and to do; to suffer and to serve; to grow and to fight; to wrestle and to overcome. Our third theme is of main importance, and though we place it last, we rank it first.

## Our Armoury

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### Our Armoury

WE WILL begin with OUR ARMOURY. That armoury is to me, at any rate—and I hope it is to each one of you—THE BIBLE. To us Holy Scripture is as "the tower of David builded for an armoury, whereon there hang a thousand bucklers, all shields of mighty men." If we want weapons we must come here for them, and here only. Whether we seek the sword of offence or the shield of defence, we must find it within the volume of inspiration. If others have any other storehouse, I confess at once I have none. I have nothing else to preach when I have got through with this book. Indeed, I can have no wish to preach at all if I may not continue to expound the subjects which I find in these pages. What else is worth preaching? Brethren, the truth of God is the only treasure for which we seek, and the Scripture is the only field in which we dig for it.

As for us, we cast anchor in the haven of the Word of God. Here is our peace, our strength, our life, our motive, our hope, our happiness. God's Word is our ultimatum. Here we have it. Our understanding cries, "I have found it"; our conscience asserts that here is the truth; and our heart finds here a support to which all her affections can cling; and hence we rest content.

Try not to cast anything forth from the perfect volume. If you find it there, there let it stand, and be it yours to preach it according to the analogy and proportion of faith. That which is worthy of God's revealing is worthy of our preaching; and that is all too little for me to claim for it. "By every word of the Lord doth man live." "Every word of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him" Let every revealed truth be brought forth in its own season. Go not elsewhere for a subject: with such infinity before you, there can be no need that you should do so; with such glorious truth to preach, it will be wanton wickedness if you do.

How often we have seen the Word made effectual for consolation! It is, as one brother expressed it in prayer, a difficult thing to deal with broken hearts. What a fool I have felt myself to be when trying to bring forth a prisoner out of Giant Despair's Castle! How hard it is to persuade despondency to hope! How have I tried to trap my game by every art known to me; but when almost in my grasp the creature has burrowed another hole! I had dug him out of twenty already, and then have had to begin again. The convicted sinner uses all kinds of arguments to prove that he cannot be saved. The inventions of despair are as many as the devices of self-confidence. There is no letting light into the dark cellar of doubt, except through the window of the Word of God. Within the Scripture there is a balm for every wound, a salve for every sore. Oh, the wondrous power in the Scripture to create a soul of hope within the ribs of despair, and bring eternal light into the darkness which has made a long midnight in the inmost soul! Often have we tried the Word of the Lord as "the cup of consolation", and it has never failed to cheer the despondent. We know what we say, for we have witnessed the blessed facts: the Scriptures of truth, applied by the Holy Spirit, have brought peace and joy to those who sat in darkness and in the valley of the shadow of death.

Especially we have seen and tested the efficacy of the Word of God when we have been by the sick bed. I was, but a few days ago, by the side of one of our elders, who appeared to be dying; and it was like heaven below to converse with him. I never saw so much joy at a wedding as I saw in that quiet chamber. He hoped soon to be with Jesus; and he was joyful in the prospect. He said, "I have no doubt, no cloud, no trouble, no want; nay, I have not even a wish. The doctrine you have taught has served me to live by, and now it serves me to die by. I am resting upon the precious blood of Christ, and it is a firm foundation." And he added, "How silly all those letters against the gospel now appear to me! I have read some of them, and I have noted the attacks upon the old faith, but they seem quite absurd to me now that I lie on the verge of eternity. What could the new doctrine do for me now?" I came down from my interview greatly strengthened and gladdened by the good man's testimony; and all the more was I personally comforted because it was the Word which I myself had constantly preached which had been such a blessing to my friend. If God had so owned it from so poor an instrument, I felt that the Word itself must be good indeed. I am never so happy amidst all the shouts of youthful merriment as on the day when I hear the dying testimony of one who is resting on the everlasting gospel of the grace of God. The ultimate issue, as seen upon a dying-bed, is a true test, as it is an inevitable one. Preach that which will enable men to face death without fear, and you will preach nothing but the old gospel.

Moreover, we shall evermore keep to the Word of God, because we have had experience of its power within ourselves. It is not so long ago that you will have forgotten how, like a hammer, the Word of God broke your flinty heart, and brought down your stubborn will. By the Word of the Lord you were brought to the cross, and comforted by the atonement. That Word breathed a new life into you; and when, for the first time, you knew yourself to be a child of God, you felt the ennobling power of the gospel received by faith. The Holy Spirit wrought your salvation through the Holy Scriptures. You trace your conversion, I am sure, to the Word of the Lord; for this alone is "perfect, converting the soul." Whoever may have been the man who spoke it, or whatever may have been the book in which you read it, it was not man's Word, nor man's thought upon God's Word, but the Word itself, which made you know salvation in the Lord Jesus. It was neither human reasoning, nor the force of eloquence, nor the power of moral suasion, but the omnipotence of the Spirit, applying the Word itself, that gave you rest and peace and joy through believing. We are ourselves trophies of the power of the sword of the Spirit; he leads us in triumph in every place, the willing captives of his grace. Let no man marvel that we keep close to it.

Brethren, we have had experience of the elevation which the Word of God can give us—upliftings towards God and heaven. If you get studying books contrary to the inspired volume, are you not conscious of slipping downwards? I have known some to whom such reading has been as a mephitic vapour surrounding them with the death-damp. Yes; and I may add, that to forego your Bible reading for the perusal even of good books would soon bring a conscious descending of the soul. Have you not found that even gracious books may be to you as a plain to look down upon, rather than as a summit to which to aspire? You have come up to their level long ago, and get no higher by reading them: it is idle to spend precious time upon them. Was it ever so with you and the Book of God? Did you ever rise above its simplest teaching, and feel that it tended to draw you downward? Never! In proportion as your mind becomes saturated with Holy Scripture, you are conscious of being lifted right up, and carried aloft as on eagles' wings. You seldom come down from a solitary Bible reading without feeling that you have drawn near to God: I say a solitary one;

for when reading with others, the danger is that stale comments may be flies in the pot of ointment. The prayerful study of the Word is not only a means of instruction, but an act of devotion wherein the transforming power of grace is often exercised, changing us into the image of him of whom the Word is a mirror. Is there anything, after all, like the Word of God when the open books finds open hearts? When I read the lives of such men as Baxter, Brainerd, McCheyne, and many others, why, I feel like one who has bathed himself in some cool brook after having gone a journey through a black country, which left him dusty and depressed; and this result comes of the fact that such men embodied Scripture in their lives and illustrated it in their experience. The washing of water by the Word is what they had, and what we need. We must get it where they found it. To see the effects of the truth of God in the lives of holy men is confirmatory to faith and stimulating to holy aspiration. Other influences do not help us to such a sublime ideal of consecration. If you read the Babylonian books of the present day, you will catch their spirit, and it is a foreign one, which will draw you aside from the Lord your God. You may also get great harm from divines in whom there is much pretence of the Jerusalem dialect, but their speech is half of Ashdod: these will confuse your mind and defile your faith. It may chance that a book which is upon the whole excellent, which has little taint about it, may do you more mischief than a thoroughly bad one. Be careful; for works of this kind come forth from the press like clouds of locusts. Scarcely can you find in these days a book which is quite free from the modern leaven, and the least particle of it ferments till it produces the wildest error. In reading books of the new order, though no palpable falsehood may appear, you are conscious of a twist being given you, and of a sinking in the tone of your spirit; therefore be on your guard. But with your Bible you may always feel at ease; there every breath from every quarter brings life and health. If you keep close to the inspired book, you can suffer no harm; say rather you are at the fountain-head of all moral and spiritual good. This is fit food for men of God: this is the bread which nourishes the highest life.

We are resolved, then, since we have this arsenal supplied for us of the Lord, and since we want no other, to use the Word of God only, and to use it with greater energy. We are resolved—and I hope there is no dissent among us—to know our Bibles better. Do we know the sacred volume half so well as we should know it? Have we laboured after as complete a knowledge of the Word of God as many a critic has obtained of his favourite classic? Is it not possible that we still meet with passages of Scripture which are new to us? Should it be so? Is there any part of what the Lord has written which you have never read? I was struck with my brother Archibald Brown's observation, that he bethought himself that unless he read the Scriptures through from end to end there might be inspired teachings which had never been known to him, and so he resolved to read the books in their order; and having done so once, he continued the habit. Have we, any of us, omitted to do this? Let us begin at once. I love to see how readily certain of our brethren turn up an appropriate passage, and then quote its fellow, and crown all with a third. They seem to know exactly the passage which strikes the nail on the head. They have their Bibles, not only in their hearts, but at their fingers' ends. This is a most valuable attainment for a minister. A good textuary is a good theologian. Certain others, whom I esteem for other things, are yet weak on this point, and seldom quote a text of Scripture correctly: indeed, their alterations jar on the ear of the Bible reader. It is sadly common among ministers to add a word or subtract a word from the passage, or in some way to debase the language of sacred writ. How often have I heard brethren speak about making "your calling and salvation" sure! Possibly they hardly enjoyed so much as we do the Calvinistic word "election", and therefore they allowed the meaning; nay, in some cases contradict

it. Our reverence for the great Author of Scripture should forbid all mauling of his words. No alteration of Scripture can by any possibility be an improvement. Believers in verbal inspiration should be studiously careful to be verbally correct. The gentlemen who see errors in Scripture may think themselves competent to amend the language of the Lord of hosts; but we who believe God, and accept the very words he uses, may not make so presumptuous an attempt. Let us quote the words as they stand in the best possible translation, and it will be better still if we know the original, and can tell if our version fails to give the sense. How much mischief may arise out of an accidental alteration of the Word! Blessed are they who are in accord with the divine teaching, and receive its true meaning, as the Holy Ghost teaches them! Oh, that we might know the Spirit of Holy Scripture thoroughly, drinking it in, til we are saturated with it! This is the blessing which we resolve to obtain.

We should resolve also that we will quote more of Holy Scripture. Sermons should be full of Bible; sweetened, strengthened, sanctified with Bible essence. The kind of sermons that people need to hear are outgrowths of Scripture. If they do not love to hear them, there is all the more reason why they should be preached to them. The gospel has the singular faculty of creating a taste for itself. Bible hearers, when they hear indeed, come to be Bible lovers. The mere stringing of texts together is a poor way of making sermons; though some have tried it, and I doubt not God has blessed them, since they did their best. It is far better to string texts together, than to pour out one's own poor thoughts in a washy flood. There will at least be something to be thought of and remembered if the Holy Word be quoted; and in the other case there may be nothing whatever. Texts of Scripture need not, however, be strung together, they may be fitly brought in to give edge and point to a discourse. They will be the force of the sermon. Our own words are mere paper pellets compared with the rifle shot of the Word. The Scripture is the conclusion of the whole matter. There is no arguing after we find that "It is written." To a large extent in the hearts and consciences of our hearers debate is over when the Lord has spoken. "Thus saith the Lord" is the end of discussion to Christian minds; and even the ungodly cannot resist Scripture without resisting the Spirit who wrote it. That we may speak convincingly we will speak Scripturally.

We are resolved, then, to use more fully than ever what God has provided for us in this Book, for we are sure of its inspiration. Let me say that over again. WE ARE SURE OF ITS INSPIRATION. You will notice that attacks are frequently made as against verbal inspiration. The form chosen is a mere pretext. Verbal inspiration is the verbal form of the assault, but the attack is really aimed at inspiration itself. You will not read far in the essay before you will find that the gentleman who started with contesting a theory of inspiration which none of us ever held, winds up by showing his hand, and that hand wages war with inspiration itself. There is the true point. We care little for any theory of inspiration: in fact, we have none. To us the plenary verbal inspiration of Holy Scripture is fact, and not hypothesis. It is a pity to theorize upon a subject which is deeply mysterious, and makes a demand upon faith rather than fancy. Believe in the inspiration of Scripture, and believe it in the most intense sense. You will not believe in a truer and fuller inspiration than really exists. No one is likely to err in that direction, even if error be possible. If you adopt theories which pare off a portion here, and deny authority to a passage there, you will at last have no inspiration left, worthy of the name.

Do you see why men would lower the degree of inspiration in Holy Writ, and would fain reduce it to an infinitesimal quantity? It is because the truth of God is to be supplanted. If you ever go into a

shop in the evening to buy certain goods which depend so much upon colour and texture as to be best judged of by daylight; if, after you have got into the shop, the tradesman proceeds to lower the gas, or to remove the lamp, and then commences to show you his goods, your suspicion is aroused, and you conclude that he will try to palm off an inferior article. I more than suspect this to be the little game of the inspiration-depreciators. Whenever a man begins to lower your view of inspiration, it is because he has a trick to play, which is not easily performed in the light. He would hold a séance of evil spirits, and therefore he cries, "Let the lights be lowered." We, brethren, are willing to ascribe to the Word of God all the inspiration that can possibly be ascribed to it; and we say boldly that if our preaching is not according to this Word, it is because there is no light in it. We are willing to be tried and tested by it in every way, and we count those to be the noblest of our hearers who search the Scriptures daily to see whether these things be so; but to those who belittle inspiration we will give place by subjection, no, not for an hour.

Two sorts of people have wrought great mischief, and yet they are neither of them worth being considered as judges in the matter: they are both of them disqualified. It is essential that an umpire should know both sides of a question, and neither of these is thus instructed. The first is the irreligious scientist. What does he know about religion? What can he know? He is out of court when the question is—Does science agree with religion? Obviously he who would answer this query must know both of the two things in the question. The second is a better man, but capable of still more mischief. I mean the unscientific Christian, who will trouble his head about reconciling the Bible with science. He had better leave it alone, and not begin his tinkering trade. The mistake made by such men has been that in trying to solve a difficulty, they have either twisted the Bible, or contorted science. The solution has soon been seen to be erroneous, and then we hear the cry that Scripture has been defeated. Not at all; not at all. It is only a vain gloss upon it which has been removed. Here is a good brother who writes a tremendous book, to prove that the six days of creation represent six great geological periods; and he shows how the geological strata, and the organisms thereof, follow very much in the order of the Genesis story of creation. It may be so, or it may be not so; but if anybody should before long show that the strata do not lie in any such order, what would be my reply? I should say that the Bible never taught that they did. The Bible said, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." That leaves any length of time for your fire-ages and your ice-periods, and all that, before the establishment of the present age of man.<sup>1</sup> Then we reach the six days in which the Lord made the heavens and the earth, and rested on the seventh day. There is nothing said about long ages of time, but, on the contrary, "the evening and the morning were the first day", and "the evening and the morning were the second day"; and so on. I do not here lay down any theory, but simply say that if our friend's great book is all fudge, the Bible is not responsible for it. It is true that his theory has an appearance of support from the parallelism which he makes out between the organic life of the ages and that of the seven days; but this may be accounted for from the fact that God usually follows a certain order whether he works in long periods or short ones. I do not know, and I do not care, much about the question; but I want to say that, if you smash up an explanation you must not imagine that you have damaged the Scriptural truth which seemed to require the explanation: you have only burned the wooden palisades with which well-meaning men thought to protect an impregnable fort which needed no such defence. For the most part, we had better leave a difficulty where it is, rather than make another difficulty by our theory. Why make a second hole in the kettle, to mend the first? Especially when the first hole is not there at all, and needs no mending. Believe everything in science which

is proved: it will not come to much. You need not fear that your faith will be over-burdened. And then believe everything which is clearly in the Word of God, whether it is proved by outside evidence or not. No proof is needed when God speaks. If he hath said it, this is evidence enough.

Brethren, this advice is villainous, and murderous; we will escape these wolves with everything, or we will be lost with everything. It shall be 'the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth', or none at all. We will never attempt to save half the truth by casting any part of it away. The sage advice which has been given us involves treason to God, and disappointment to ourselves. We will stand by all or none. We are told that if we give up something the adversaries will also give up something; but we care not what they will do, for we are not in the least afraid of them. They are not the Imperial conquerors they think themselves. We ask no quarter from their insignificance. We are of the mind of the warrior who was offered presents to buy him off, and he was told that if he accepted so much gold or territory he could return home in triumph, and glory in his easy gain. But he said, 'The Greeks set no store by concessions. They find their glory not in presents, but in spoils.' We shall with the sword of the Spirit maintain the whole truth as ours, and shall not accept a part of it as a grant from the enemies of God. The truth of God we will maintain as the truth of God, and we shall not retain it because the philosophic mind consents to our doing so. If scientists agree to our believing a part of the Bible, we thank them for nothing: we believe it whether or no. Their assent is of no more consequence to our faith than the consent of a Frenchman to the Englishman's holding London, or the consent of the mole to the eagle's sight. God being with us we shall not cease from this glorying, but will hold the whole of revealed truth, even to the end.

One more word. We accept the obligation to preach all that is in God's Word, definitely and distinctly. Do not many preach indefinitely, handling the Word of God deceitfully? You might attend upon their ministry for years and not know what they believe. I heard concerning a certain cautious minister, that he was asked by a hearer, "What is your view of the atonement?" He answered, "My dear sir, that is just what I have never told to anybody, and you are not going to get it out of me." This is a strange moral condition for the mind of a preacher of the gospel. I fear that he is not alone in this reticence. They say "they consume their own smoke"; that is to say, they keep their doubts for home consumption. Many dare not say in the pulpit what they say sub rosâ,<sup>2</sup>("misc/gfw.htm" \\ "note2") at a private meeting of ministers. Is this honest? I am afraid that it is with some as it was with the schoolmaster in one of the towns of a Southern state in America. A grand old black preacher, one Jasper, had taught his people that the world is as flat as a pancake, and that the sun goes round it every day. This part of his teaching we do not receive; but certain persons had done so, and one of them going to a schoolmaster with his boy, asked, "Do you teach the children that the world is round or flat?" The schoolmaster cautiously answered, "Yes." The enquirer was puzzled, but asked for a clearer answer. "Do you teach your children that the world is round, or that the world is flat?" Then one American dominie answered, "That depends upon the opinions of the parents." I suspect that even in Great Britain, in some few cases, a good deal depends upon the leaning of the leading deacon, or the principal subscriber, or the gilded youth in the congregation. If it be so, the crime is loathsome.

We have nowadays around us a class of men who preach Christ, and even preach the gospel; but then they preach a great deal else which is not true, and thus they destroy the good of all that they deliver, and lure men to error. They would be styled "evangelical" and yet be of the school which is really anti-evangelical. Look well to these gentlemen. I have heard that a fox, when close hunted

by the dogs, will pretend to be one of them, and run with the pack. That is what certain are aiming at just now: the foxes would seem to be dogs. But in the case of the fox, his strong scent betrays him, and the dogs soon find him out; and even so, the scent of false doctrine is not easily concealed, and the game does not answer for long. There are extant ministers of whom we scarce can tell whether they are dogs or foxes; but all men shall know our quality as long as we live, and they shall be in no doubt as to what we believe and teach. We shall not hesitate to speak in the strongest Saxon words we can find, and in the plainest sentences we can put together, that which we hold as fundamental truth.

"Thus I have been all this while upon my first head, and the other two must, therefore, occupy less time, though I judge them to be of the first importance.

## Our Army

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### Our Army

NOW we must review OUR ARMY.

Yes, we believe that there ought to be a church. But churches are very disappointing things. Every pastor of a large church will own this in his own soul. I do not know that the churches of to-day are any worse than they used to be in Paul's time, or any better. The churches at Corinth and Laodicea and other cities exhibited grave faults; and if there are faults in ours, let us not be amazed; but yet let us grieve over such things, and labour after a higher standard. Albeit that the members of our church are not all they ought to be, neither are we ourselves. Yet, if I went anywhere for choice company, I should certainly resort to the members of my church.

"These are the company I keep:

These are the choicest friends I know."

O Jerusalem, with all thy faults, I love thee still! The people of God are still the aristocracy of the race: God bless them! Yes, we mean to have a church.

But is this church to increase, or is it to die out? It will do either the one or the other. We shall see our friends going to heaven, and, if there are no young men and young women converted and brought in and added to us, the church on earth will have emigrated to the church triumphant above; and what is to be done for the cause and the kingdom of the Master here below? We should be crying, praying, and pleading that the church may continually grow. We must preach, visit, pray, and labour for this end. May the Lord add unto us daily such as are saved! If there be no harvest, can the seed be the true seed? Are we preaching apostolic doctrine if we never see apostolic results? Oh, my brethren, our hearts should be ready to break if there be no increase in the flocks we tend. O Lord, we beseech thee, send now prosperity!

We ought to have our churches all busy for God. What is the use of a church that simply assembles to hear sermons, even as a family gathers to eat its meals? What, I say, if the profit, if it does no work? Are not many professors sadly indolent in the Lord's work, though diligent enough in their own? Because of Christian idleness we hear of the necessity for amusements, and all sorts of nonsense. If they were at work for the Lord Jesus we should not hear of this. A good woman said to a housewife, "Mrs. So-and-so, how do you manage to amuse yourself?" "Why", she replied, "my dear, you see there are so many children that there is much work to be done in my house." "Yes", said the other, "I see it. I see that there is much work to be done in your house; but as it never is done, I was wondering how you amused yourself." Much needs to be done by a Christian church within its own bounds, and for the neighbourhood, and for the poor and the fallen, and for the heathen world, and so forth; and if it is well attended to, minds, and hearts, and hands, and tongues will be occupied, and diversions will not be asked for. Let idleness come in, and that spirit which rules lazy people, and there will arise a desire to be amused. What amusements they

are, too! If religion is not a farce with some congregations, at any rate they turn out better to see a farce than to unite in prayer. I cannot understand it. The man who is all aglow with love to Jesus finds little need for amusement. He has no time for trifling. He is in dead earnest to save souls, and establish the truth, and enlarge the kingdom of his Lord. There has always been some pressing claim for the cause of God upon me; and, that settled, there has been another, and another, and another, and the scramble has been to find opportunity to do the work that must be done, and hence I have not had the time for gadding abroad after frivolities. Oh, to get a working church! The German churches, when our dear friend, Mr. Oncken, was alive, always carried out the rule of asking every member, "What are you going to do for Christ?" and they put the answer down in a book. The one thing that was required of every member was that he should continue doing something for the Saviour. If he ceased to do anything it was a matter for church discipline, for he was an idle professor, and could not be allowed to remain in the church like a drone in a hive of working bees. He must do or go. Oh, for a vineyard without a barren fig-tree to cumber the ground! At present the most of our sacred warfare is carried on by a small body of intensely living, earnest people, and the rest are either in hospital, or are mere camp followers. We are thankful for that consecrated few; but we pine to see the altar fire consuming all that is professedly laid upon the altar.

We want also churches that know the truth, and are well taught in the things of God. What do some Christian people know? They come and hear, and, in the plenitude of your wisdom, you instruct them; but how little they receive to lay by in store for edification! Brethren, the fault lies partly with us, and partly with themselves. If we taught better they would learn better. See how little many professors know; not enough to give them discernment between living truth and deadly error. Old-fashioned believers could give you chapter and verse for what they believed; but how few of such remain! Our venerable grandsires were at home when conversing upon "the covenants." I love men who love the covenant of grace, and base their divinity upon it: the doctrine of the covenants is the key of theology. They that feared the Lord spake often one to another. They used to speak of everlasting life, and all that comes of it. They had a good argument for this belief, and an excellent reason for that other doctrine; and to try to shake them was by no means a hopeful task: you might as well have hoped to shake the pillars of the universe; for they were steadfast, and could not be carried about with every wind of doctrine. They knew what they knew, and they held fast that which they had learned. What is to become of our country, with the present deluge of Romanism pouring upon us through the ritualistic party, unless our churches abound in firm believers who can discern between the regeneration of the Holy Spirit and its ceremonial substitute? What is to become of our churches in this day of skepticism, when every fixed truth is pointed at with the finger of doubt, unless our people have the truths of the gospel written in their hearts? Oh, for a church of out-and-out believers, impervious to the soul-destroying doubt which pours upon us in showers!

We are rowing like lifeboat men upon a stormy sea, and we are hurrying to yonder wreck, where men are perishing. If we may not draw that old wreck to shore, we will at least, by the power of God, rescue the perishing, save life, and bear the redeemed to the shores of salvation. Our mission, like our Lord's, is to gather out the chosen of God from among men, that they may live to the glory of God. Every saved man should be, under God, a saviour; and the church is not in a right state until she has reached that conception of herself. The elect church is saved that she may

save, cleansed that she may cleanse, blessed that she may bless. All the world is the field, and all the members of the church should work therein for the great Husbandman. Waste lands are to be reclaimed, and forests broken up by the plough, till the solitary place begins to blossom as the rose. We must not be content with holding our own: we must invade the territories of the prince of darkness.

We must also be examples to the flock. He that cannot be safely imitated ought not to be tolerated in a pulpit. Did I hear of a minister who was always disputing for pre-eminence? Or of another who was mean and covetous? Or of a third whose conversation was not always chaste? Or of a fourth who did not rise, as a rule, till eleven o'clock in the morning? I would hope that this last rumour was altogether false. An idle minister—what will become of him? A pastor who neglects his office? Does he expect to go to heaven? I was about to say, "If he does go there at all, may it be soon." A lazy minister is a creature despised of men, and abhorred of God. "You give your minister only £50 a year!" I said, to a farmer. "Why, the poor man cannot live on it." The answer was, "Look here, sir! I tell you what: we give him a good deal more than he earns." It is a sad pity when that can be said; it is an injury to all those who follow our sacred calling. We are to be examples to our flock in all things. In all diligence, in all gentleness, in all humility, and in all holiness we are to excel. When Caesar went on his wars, one thing always helped his soldiers to bear hardships: they knew that Caesar fared as they fared. He marched if they marched, he thirsted if they thirsted, and he was always in the heart of the battle if they were fighting. We must do more than others if we are officers in Christ's army. We must not cry, "Go on", but, "Come on." Our people may justly expect of us, at the very least, that we should be among the most self-denying, the most laborious, and the most earnest in the church, and somewhat more. We cannot expect to see holy churches if we who are bound to be their examples are unsanctified. If there be, in any of our brethren, consecration and sanctification, evident to all men, God has blessed them, and God will bless them more and more. If these be lacking in us, we need not search far to find the cause of our non-success.

PRIVATE "TYPE=PICT;ALT= "I have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now, because the time is long and you are weary. I desire, however, if you can gather up your patience and your strength, to dwell for a little upon the most important part of my triple theme. Here suffer me to pray for his help, whose name and person I would magnify. Come, Holy Spirit, heavenly Dove, and rest upon us now!

## Our Strength

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### Our Strength

GRANTED that we preach the Word alone; granted that we are surrounded by a model church, which, alas, is not always the case; but, granted that it is so, OUR STRENGTH is the next consideration. This must come from THE SPIRIT OF GOD. We believe in the Holy Ghost, and in our absolute dependence upon him. We believe; but do we believe practically? Brethren, as to ourselves and our own work, do we believe in the Holy Ghost? Do we believe because we habitually prove the truth of the doctrine?

We cannot succeed in supplication except the Holy Ghost helpeth our infirmities, for true prayer is "praying in the Holy Ghost." The Spirit makes an atmosphere around every living prayer, and within that circle prayer lives and prevails; outside of it prayer is a dead formality. As to ourselves, then, in our study, in prayer, in thought, in word, and in deed, we must depend upon the Holy Ghost.

Furthermore, we must depend upon the Spirit of God as to our results. No man among us really thinks that he could regenerate a soul. We are not so foolish as to claim power to change a heart of stone. We may not dare to presume quite so far as this, and yet we may come to think that, by our experience, we can help people over spiritual difficulties. Can we? We may be hopeful that our enthusiasm will drive the living church before us, and drag the dead world after us. Will it be so? Perhaps we imagine that if we could only get up a revival, we should easily secure large additions to the church? Is it worth while to get up a revival? Are not all true revivals to be got down? We may persuade ourselves that drums and trumpets and shouting will do a great deal. But, my brethren, "the Lord is not in the wind." Results worth having come from that silent but omnipotent Worker whose name is the Spirit of God: in him, and in him only, must we trust for the conversion of a single Sunday-school child, and for every genuine revival. For the keeping of our people together, and for the building of them up into a holy temple, we must look to him. The Spirit might say, even as our Lord did, "Without me ye can do nothing."

What does the Holy Ghost do? Beloved, what is there of good work that he does not do? It is his to quicken, to convince, to illuminate, to cleanse, to guide, to preserve, to console, to confirm, to perfect, and to use. How much might be said under each one of these heads! It is he that worketh in us to will and to do. He that hath wrought all things is God. Glory be unto the Holy Ghost for all that he has accomplished in such poor, imperfect natures as ours! We can do nothing apart from the life-sap which flows to us from Jesus the Vine. That which is our own is fit only to cause us shame and confusion of face. We never go a step towards heaven without the Holy Ghost. We never lead another on the heavenward road without the Holy Ghost. We have no acceptable thought, or word, or deed, apart from the Holy Spirit. Even the uplifting of the eye and hope, or the ejaculatory prayer of the heart's desire, must be his work. All good things are of him and through him, from beginning to end. There is no fear of exaggerating here. Do we, however, translate this conviction into our actual procedure?

But do you know the opposite condition? I hope you do not. It is death in life. I trust you have never, in your scientific experiments, been cruel enough to put a mouse under an air pump, and gradually to exhaust the receiver. I have read of the fatal experiment. Alas, poor mouse! As the air gets thinner and thinner, how great his sufferings, and when it is all gone, there he lies—dead. Have you never yourself been under an exhausted receiver, spiritually? You have only been there long enough to perceive that the sooner you escaped, the better for you. Said one to me the other day, "Well, as to the sermon which I heard from the modern-thought divine, there was no great harm in it; for on this occasion he kept clear of false doctrine; but the whole affair was so intensely cold. I felt like a man who has fallen down a crevasse in a glacier: and I felt shut up as if I could not breathe the air of heaven." You know that arctic cold; and it may occasionally be felt even where the doctrine is sound. When the Spirit of God is gone, even truth itself becomes an iceberg. How wretched is religion frozen and lifeless! The Holy Ghost has gone, and all energy and enthusiasm have gone with him. The scene becomes like that described in the Ancient Mariner, when the ship was becalmed:—

"The very deep did rot,

Alas, that ever this should be!

Yea, slimy things did crawl with legs

Upon the slimy sea."

Within the ship all was death. And we have seen it so within a church. I am tempted to apply Coleridge's lines to much that is to be seen in those churches which deserve the name of "congregations of the dead." He describes how the bodies of the dead were inspired and the ship moved on, each dead man fulfilling his office in a dead and formal fashion:—

"The helmsman steered, the ship moved on;

Yet never a breeze up blew;

The mariners all 'gan work the ropes,

Where they were wont to do;

They raised their limbs like lifeless tools—

We were a ghastly crew."

All living fellowship was lacking, for the Ancient Mariner says:—

"The body of my brother's son

Stood by me, knee to knee:

The body and I pulled at one rope,

But he said nought to me."

It is much the same in those "respectable" congregations where no man knows his fellow, and a dignified isolation supplants all saintly communion. To the preacher, if he be the only living man in

the company, the church affords very dreary society. His sermons fall on ears that hear them not aright.

"Twas night, calm night, the moon was high;

The dead men stood together.

All stood together on the deck

For a charnel-dungeon fitter:

All fixed on me their stony eyes,

That in the moon did glitter." Have we received the Holy Ghost? Is he with us now? If so it be, how can we secure his future presence? How can we constrain him to abide with us?

See to it that you act in conformity with his working. The mariner to the East cannot create the winds at his pleasure, but he knows when the trade winds blow, and he takes advantage of the season to speed his vessel. Put out to sea in holy enterprise when the heavenly wind is with you. Take the sacred tide at its flood. Increase your meetings when you feel that the Spirit of God is blessing them. Press home the truth more earnestly than ever when the Lord is opening ears and hearts to accept it. You will soon know when there is dew about, prize the gracious visitation. The farmer says, "Make hay while the sun shines." You cannot make the sun shine; that is quite out of your power; but you can use the sun while he shines. "When thou hearest the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees, then thou shalt bestir thyself." Be diligent in season and out of season; but in a lively season be doubly laborious.

There are a few things which I would have you remember, and then I have done. Remember that the Holy Spirit has his ways and methods, and there are some things which he will not do. Bethink you that he makes no promise to bless compromises. If we make a treaty with error or sin, we do it at our own risk. If we do anything that we are not clear about, if we tamper with truth or holiness, if we are friends of the world, if we make provision for the flesh, if we preach half-heartedly and are in league with errorists, we have no promise that the Holy Spirit will go with us. The great promise runs in quite another strain: "Come ye out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord God Almighty." In the New Testament only in that one place, with the exception of the Book of Revelation, is God called by the name of "the Lord God Almighty." If you want to know what great things the Lord can do, as the Lord God Almighty, be separate from the world, and from those who apostatize from the truth. The title, "Lord God Almighty" is evidently quoted from the Old Testament. "El-Shaddai", God all-sufficient, the many-breasted God. We shall never know the utmost power of God for supplying all our needs till we have cut connection once for all with everything which is not according to His mind. That was grand of Abraham when he said to the king of Sodom, "I will not take of thee,"—a Babylonish garment, or a wedge of gold? No, no. He said, "I will not take from a thread even to a shoe latchet." That was "the cut direct." The man of God will have nothing to do with Sodom, or with false doctrine. If you see anything that is evil, give it the cut direct. Have done with those who have done with truth. Then you will be prepared to receive the promise, and not till then.

Note, next, that he makes no promise to cowardice. If you allow the fear of man to rule you, and wish to save self from suffering or ridicule, you will find small comfort in the promise of God. "He that saveth his life shall lose it." The promises of the Holy Spirit to us in our warfare are to those who quit themselves like men, and by faith are made brave in the hour of conflict. I wish that we were come to this pass, that we utterly despised ridicule and calumny. Oh, to have the self-oblivion of that Italian martyr of whom Foxe speaks! They condemned him to be burned alive, and he heard the sentence calmly. But, you know, burning martyrs, however delightful, is also expensive; and the mayor of the town did not care to pay for the fagots, and the priests who had accused him also wished to do the work without personal expense. So they had an angry squabble, and there stood the poor man for whose benefits these fagots were to be contributed, quietly hearing their mutual recriminations. Finding that they could not settle it, he said: "Gentlemen, I will end your dispute. It is a pity that you should, either of you, be at so much expense to find fagots for my burning, and, for my Lord's sake, I will even pay for the wood that burns me, if you please." There is a fine touch of scorn as well as meekness there. I do not know that I would have paid that bill; but I have even felt inclined to go a little out of the way to help the enemies of the truth to find fuel for their criticisms of me. Yes, yes; I will yet be more vile, and give them more to complain of. I will go through with the controversy for Christ's sake, and do nothing whatever to quiet their wrath. Brethren, if you trim a little, if you try to save a little of your repute with the men of the apostasy, it will go ill with you. He that is ashamed of Christ and his Word in this evil generation shall find that Christ is ashamed of him at the last.

What is more, the Holy Ghost never sets his signature to a blank. That would be unwise on the part of man, and the holy Lord will not perpetrate such a folly. If we do not speak clear doctrine with plainness of speech, the Holy Ghost will not put his signature to our empty prating. If we do not come out distinctly with Christ and him crucified, we may say farewell to true success.

Remember, again, that he will never encourage idleness. The Holy Ghost will not come to rescue us from the consequences of wilful neglect of the Word of God and study. If we allow ourselves to go up and down all the week doing nothing, we may not climb the pulpit stairs and dream that the Lord will be there and then tell us what to speak. If help were promised to such, then the lazier the man the better the sermon. If the Holy Spirit worked only by impromptu speakers, the less we read our Bibles and the less we meditated on them the better. If it be wrong to quote from books, "attention to reading" should not have been commanded. All this is obviously absurd, and not one of you will fall into such a delusion. We are bound to be much in meditation, and give ourselves wholly to the Word of God and prayer, and when we have minded these things we may look for the Spirit's approbation and co-operation. We ought to prepare the sermon as if all depended upon us, and then we are to trust the Spirit of God knowing that all depends upon Him. The Holy Ghost sends no one into the harvest to sleep among the sheaves, but to bear the burden and heat of the day. We may well pray God to send more "labourers" into the vineyard; for the Spirit will be with the strength of labourers, but he will not be the friend of loiterers.

Consider, again, that the Holy Ghost will not dwell where there is strife. Let us follow peace with all men, and specially let us keep peace in our churches. Some of you are not yet favoured with this boon; and possibly it is not your fault. You have inherited old feuds. In many a small community, all the members of the congregation are cousins to one another, and relations usually agree to disagree. When cousins cozen their cousins, the seeds of illwill are sown, and these intrude even

into church life. Your predecessor's high-handedness in past time may breed a good deal of quarrelling for many years to come. He was a man of war from his youth, and even when he is gone the spirits which he called from the vasty deep remain to haunt the spot. I fear you cannot expect much blessing, for the Holy Dove does not dwell by troubled waters: he chooses to come where brotherly love continues. For great principles, and matters of holy discipline, we may risk peace itself; but for self or party may such conduct be far from us.

This is all I have to say to you at this time; but, my dear brethren, it is a great all if first considered, and then carried out. May it have practical effect upon us! It will, if the great Worker uses it, and not else. Go forth, O soldiers of Jesus, with "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." Go forth with the companies of the godly whom you lead, and let every man be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. As men alive from the dead, go forth in the quickening power of the Holy Ghost: you have no other strength. May the blessing of the Triune God rest upon you, one and all, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

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