

Two Arguments Against Sin

by C.H. Spurgeon

C.H. Spurgeon passionately argues that sin is inherently abominable and deeply hated by God, urging believers and sinners alike to recognize its nature and God's intense aversion to it.

Scripture: Jeremiah 44:4, 2 Corinthians 5:20, Philippians 3:19

Topics: "Sin", "Idolatry"

Description

In 'Two Arguments Against Sin,' C.H. Spurgeon delivers a heartfelt and urgent message about the nature of sin and God's profound hatred of it. Drawing from Jeremiah 44:4, Spurgeon exhorts ministers to speak boldly and compassionately as God's representatives. He vividly illustrates sin's degrading character, especially idolatry, and calls sinners to repentance while encouraging believers to maintain a tender conscience and pray for the ministry of the Word.

Transcript

"However I sent unto you all My servants the Prophets, rising early and sending them, saying, Oh, do not do this abominable thing that I hate!" Jeremiah 44:4.

THIS verse portrays what a minister should be and the picture is a burden upon my heart and conscience, for it shows that the true preacher, or Prophet, or man of God, should be one whom God sends early to do His work. It is, as it were, as though his Master were up early in the morning, bidding him make haste to go to His service and not let the grass grow under his feet, for men are sinning—and to suffer them to continue in sin unrebuked, even for an hour, is truly dreadful. It is as though one were to leave a house burning without giving an alarm and calling the firemen, or to see a person in imminent peril in the street without immediately attempting to do something for his rescue. Notice that in this verse God represents Himself as rising early, to show how He realized the greatness of man's danger and the importance of his being speedily delivered from it. The Lord said that He rose early in order that He might send His Prophets—of course that they might go early, that they might go at once and waste no time—but be instant in season and out of season to warn men not to do the abominable thing which God hated! A minister, then, is one who should be diligent in his Master's business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord by endeavoring to warn men of the terrible nature and consequences of sin.

He is also to be one who speaks as God's representative. Not only speaking God's Truth, but, as it were, speaking it with God's mouth, for these Prophets were not to say, "Oh, do not this abominable thing that God hates," but they were to personify God, to put themselves into His place and to say as though He said

it, "Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate!" What a responsible and privileged position is this for any man to occupy, to have to speak for God in this fashion! Paul referred to it when he wrote to the Corinthians, "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be you reconciled to God." It is a high honor but a tremendous responsibility to have to do Christ's pleading, to be intercessors for the Intercessor, and to stand up and speak God's thoughts as though He had set us to be His spokesmen for a time—to plead with the sons of men on His behalf. As I have realized this responsibility, I have sometimes dreaded my office with an unutterable dread, though I would not change it to become ruler of all the empires of earth, or even to be an archangel in Heaven, for I reckon that to be even first among the angels is nothing compared with being an instrument, in the hand of God, of saving the souls of men! Yet how awful and how solemn a thing it is for any man to be called to stand and speak as though God did speak by him and say, "Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate!"

There is another lesson to be learned from this picture—not only that the minister should rise up early to meet an early God, and should speak in God's name, but he is also to speak in God's style—that is, pleadingly and pathetically. I count it an easy thing to proclaim the Truth of God as one might do it from the desk of a classroom, or to be oratorical and to wax eloquent over the great themes we have to make known. But it is quite another matter to plead with men, to be pathetic and to speak as God does here, "Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate!" This is the work and this is the difficulty which often burdens our spirits. You remember that the disciples said to Christ, on one occasion, "Lord, teach us to pray," for they felt as if the strong desires that burned within His heart might well burn in theirs, and that

they had even greater necessities than He had. But when they heard Him preach, they felt at once that He outsoared them all. When they saw the tears of pity stream from His eyes and listened to His lament over the doomed city of Jerusalem, then they realized that He overmatched them and they felt, if they did not say it, "Never man spoke like this Man!" And they did not cry, "Lord, teach us to preach as You do!"

They could not hope to rise to that great height and we feel just as they did. Oh, that these lips could use language borrowed from the lips of the Well-Beloved! Oh, that these eyes could run with tears like those that welled up from the great heart of the loving Savior of sinners! His sermons show us what true preaching is—it should be the highest form of persuading, it should be really, only in a better sense than that in which the term is generally used, peilpleading—a pleading with men, by weighty arguments, that they would leave their sins and turn to God! Christ's sermons show us a pleading in which God the Holy Spirit exercises His own supreme office and works upon the minds of the hearers through the utterances of Him who speaks to them. As this is what a minister ought to be, may God help us poor creatures to attain to this high standard! You who are His people can also help us by your prayers, which we greatly need.

Now, turning from my text as it especially related to the Jews in Jeremiah's day, I want to apply it to you, dear Friends, who are still unconverted. In this verse God tells certain people that He had risen early and sent unto them His servants, the Prophets, one after another, to plead with them on His behalf. Will you, if you can, kindly recollect when your consciences were first touched? Can you remember when that happened? It is highly probable that the sweet tones of your mother's voice were associated with your first religious thoughts, or, perhaps, there was a godly man—your father—since passed into the skies, who pleaded with you, his son, in Christ's name. These were your Prophets sent from God—could there be any better messengers from Him than a gracious mother or grandmother, or a godly father?

Why, some of you were plied with the Gospel almost before you knew anything else! Before you had committed any overt act of sin, you heard of Jesus' wondrous Grace and dying love! And, since then, you have not been without messengers from Heaven who have brought you loving entreaties and invitations. How have you treated them? If you are still unconverted, I am sure that you have not dealt with them as they ought to have been received—you have turned a deaf ear to the voice of love and mercy, or else you would not now be without God, without Christ and without hope! So I come once more, in my Master's name, as His messenger—will you slight me and reject my message? If you do, I must sorrowfully endure it and cry, with others of my Master's servants, "Who has believed our report?" Yet I pray you, do not do it, for, though I speak but feebly, no man more sincerely or more heartily desires the good of his hearers than I do. And I ask you who do know the Lord to join me in pleading that God, the Holy Spirit, will bless the message I am about to deliver in Christ's name.

In our text there are two arguments against sin. What God has to say to unconverted men is here put in very few words—"Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate." This short sentence contains the two arguments against sin upon which I am going to speak. The first is, from the nature of sin itself—this abominable thing." and the second is, from the feeling of God towards sin—"this abominable thing that I hate."

I. The first argument in our text against sin is DERIVED FROM THE NATURE OF SIN ITSELF—"this abominable thing."

The particular sin of which the Prophet was speaking was that of idolatry. Those Jewish people would make idol gods in some form or other and they would bow down before them and neglect the worship of the one invisible Jehovah. And God calls their idolatry "this abominable thing." It is rightly so called, for it is abominable ingratitude. That a man should not worship his Maker, that he should refuse obedience to his Creator, that he should say to Him who made the heavens and the earth, and who also made him and keeps him in being, "I will not worship You! I refuse to bow down before You. I choose to adore another god—Baal, Ashtaroth, Venus, Bacchus, anything but the one true God—and I will not worship You, O Jehovah, the Creator of all worlds!" This, I say again, is shameful ingratitude!

It is also an abominable thing because it is so degrading and debasing. Everybody ought to be able to see that for a man with intellect and mind to bow himself down before a carved image is most degrading. That he should worship that which is made of wood, or stone, or metal is practically to make himself inferior to the dead thing which he worships! I know of no act in which a man seems to bring himself lower than when he prostrates himself before a material object and says, "This is my god," or, "This is what I worship." So God truly calls idolatry an "abominable thing." And it will appear to you all the more so when you recollect the kind of gods that these people's images represented. They did, in effect,

say to Jehovah, the Maker of Heaven and earth, the good and gracious God, "We will not worship You, but we will worship that golden calf, or those images that have eyes but see not, and hands but feel not, and ears but hear not. We would sooner bow down to these dull dead blocks of wood than worship You." Oh, this is abominable! I know no more appropriate word than that which God has here used—"this abominable thing." An immortal being prostrating himself before a piece of wood! A man, created by Jehovah, bowing down before an image which he has, himself, made! This is indeed loathsome! It is insulting to God and provokes Him to the highest degree.

"We are all agreed about that," you say. I am glad to hear you say so, yet you may be idolaters, for all that. Have you never heard of those concerning whom Paul wrote to the Philippians, "whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things"? Did you ever hear of "the self-made man who worships his creator"? I have heard of him and seen him, too! And I confess that I have more respect for a man who worships a god shaped out of the filth of the kennels than for the one who worships himself because, to worship one's own self seems to me to be the nethermost depth of degradation! For the Israelites to say of the golden calf, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt," was degrading—horribly so! But for a man to say to himself, practically, if not in so many words, "I am my own god"—surely this sinks him still lower!

There are some who worship strong drink and who offer themselves as a sacrifice at its shrine. There are many who immolate upon the altar of Bacchus, wife, children, home, character and life itself—and they go down to their dishonored graves, not burnt in the arms of Moloch, but drowned in their own cups. When you talk of idolaters and abominable things, is there any worse form of idolatry than this? Then look at the various forms of covetousness which the Apostle Paul says, "is idolatry." Think of the guilt of the men who grind the faces of the poor and, perhaps, even pinch themselves so that they may amass more gold and have it written concerning them at the last, "He died worth so much," when he was really utterly worthless! He who worships the little round images of the Queen is as gross an idolater as the man who bows down before Juggernaut or Baal! The sin of idolatry is still abundant everywhere and it is always, in its nature and essence, a degrading thing to man and an insult to God and, therefore, He continues to say to all idolaters, "Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate!"

There are many other sins, besides idolatry, which are abominable in the sight of God. And there is one point about them that hampers a preacher very much. That is, he cannot bear witness against them, because even to speak of some sins is to help to spread them. It is dangerous work to handle gunpowder and, even when we need to move it from the magazine, we feel that we must do it with great fear and trembling. Alas! Alas, there are abominable sins that are terribly common in this awfully guilty London—sins of unchastity that defile the body and pollute the mind. I fancy that I can see God standing by some young man who is about to go into this kind of sin and I seem to hear Him say, "Oh, do not this abominable thing!" I think I also hear God crying out to some woman who has turned aside from the paths of purity— "Oh, do not this abominable thing!" It may not appear at the time, when the mind is under the spell of the serpent's fascination, to be so abominable as it really is, but, soberly thought of, what a curse it is to this city and what a curse it is to each individual who is contaminated by it! Young man, keep far away from the house of the strange woman—yes, I must say it plainly—God would have me say it, for He, Himself, says, "Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate!"

There are other abominable sins besides these fleshly lusts which war against the soul, such as the tempting of others to sin. It is an awful fact that there are some people who seem to set themselves deliberately to instruct others in vice and transgression. They will defile the imagination and the heart of children and of growing young men and women—this is a dreadful thing. If any of you are in the habit of singing low songs, or of talking ill-savored language, I would have you hear my God say to you through my lips, "Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate," for it is a horrible evil for you to be spoiling these fair flowers while yet they are in the bud! Then there is the habit of using profane and filthy language which is so common in this city—I think more prevalent than ever it was. It is a most senseless as well as wicked practice. There is nothing to gain in it. George Herbert quaintly and wisely wrote—

"Take not His name, who made your mouth, in vain— It gets you nothing, and has no excuse. Lust and wine plead a pleasure, avarice gain— But the cheap swearer, through his open sluice, Lets his soul run for naught, as little fearing. Were I an Epicure, I could bate swearing."

There are many who sin greatly by slandering others. They lie against their neighbors' characters and they are never better pleased than when they can, by exaggeration, make some little flaw into a grave fault. God says to all who slander, and lie and speak not the truth, "Do not this abominable thing that I hate!" Then there is hypocrisy which is always far too rife—the making of a profession when there is nothing at the back of it—the pretending to be gracious when there is no Grace in the heart, and to be faithful when there is no faith in the soul. O Sirs, if you will be lost, I pray you, do not be lost as hypocrites! If you are determined to perish, choose some other way of perishing than that which Judas took when he joined himself to the Apostles and yet sold his Master for 30 pieces of silver. God says to you, with a special emphasis, "Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate!"

Another aspect of the abominable character of sin will be apparent if I remind you that there are some persons in whom sin—any sin—is peculiarly abominable. If you were privileged, as I was, to be born into a Christian family, having had a grandfather and a great-grandfather and other ancestors all walking in the ways of God, and having a father and a mother whose first and chief desire was to train you in the fear of God, you know that for you to do wrong under such circumstances is, indeed, an abominable thing! Poor gutter children and persons who dwell in the worst dens and slums of London—and who have never been taught as you and I were—cannot sin to the same extent as we can who have so long known better and who have been trained aright from our earliest days. O you children of godly parents, I pray you look well to your walk and hear the Lord say especially to you, "Do not this abominable thing that I hate!"

There are also some persons who are gifted by Nature, or by that Grace which God sometimes intertwines with Nature, with a tender conscience. Some seem, from the very first, to be more callous and hardened than others, but there are some of us who, from our very childhood, remember how we could not sleep unless we had said our prayers, or, if we had told a lie, we could not rest till we had confessed it. And if we had disobeyed our parents, we were tormented with remorse even though they did not know what we had done! Chastening was not needed to bring us to repentance, for we chastened ourselves. It is a great mercy to have a tender conscience—but to sin against it is a peculiarly abominable thing.

Mind, my young Friend, you who are sorely tempted just now, I charge you not to do violence to your conscience! Whatever you do, be sure to keep it tender, for it is one of your best friends and it will, by God's Grace, be the means of guiding you to Heaven! Do not trifle with its warnings. Do not sear it with the hot iron of even an occasional transgression, but, at once, obey the Savior's call and trust to Him for the salvation only He can give! It is an abominable thing for any man to sin, but it is a hundred times worse in some than it is in others because they have clearer light and a plainer perception of what sin really is.

And, sometimes, sin becomes an especially abominable thing to a man who has previously committed it and smarted from it, and who has escaped as by the skin of his teeth—and yet goes back to indulge in it again. Have you ever tried to save a poor moth, on a summer's evening, when you have been sitting at work or reading by the light of the gas or a candle? It comes dashing towards the light and sings its wings—and there it lies, helpless, on the table. You have taken it up very tenderly and put it away from the light in the hope that it might, perhaps, escape. But the very first thing it has done, when it has recovered even the partial use of its wings, has been to fly back into the flame again! You have said, "There is no saving you, poor silly thing, for you are determined to die by your own folly. You will not let me rescue

you." And it is just so with some sinners whom we try to rescue—they will go back to the very thing that has already burnt them!

Perhaps I am addressing one who, but a little while ago, was on a bed of sickness and, as you were lying there looking into eternity, you cried, "Lord, save me. If You will but spare me, I will turn from sin and I will seek the Savior until I find Him." Yet you are not doing anything of the kind though the Lord did spare you! Peter's solemn words might be repeated to you, "You have not lied unto men, but unto God." Remember what happened to Ananias and Sapphira when they sinned thus. I pray God not to visit you in judgment, but, in His great mercy, to lay all your sin as a heavy burden upon your conscience that you may feel the evil of having broken your vows and your promises, for this is, indeed, an abominable thing in the sight of God—and also an abominable thing in the judgment of all honest, right-thinking men!

Thus might I continue to point out various circumstances which increase the guilt of sinners, but I will only say one more thing and then I shall have finished the consideration of this first part of our subject. The observation I wish to make is this. There are some of us to whom sin has become such an abominable thing that we can honestly say we would

sooner suffer every pain of which the body is capable than we would willfully commit sin. There are various things in this world which are loathsome to all our tastes, but we would be willing to have them all around us, however distasteful they might be, rather than be in the presence of moral evil. It grates upon our ears, it galls our mind, it frets our heart, it aggravates all our spiritual senses to be brought into contact with sin! Sin is to us more horrible than death, more diabolical than the devil, more hellish than Hell, itself, for the pains of Hell would lose their sharpness if it were not that sin is the undying worm that causes them. Sin, transgression, iniquity, evil in all its forms, untruth, every violation of God's Law—all this is an abominable thing which every right-minded man is bound to hate, to loathe, to detest with all the energy of his being! One great reason why we implore men to forsake sin, and pray the Holy Spirit to enable them to do so, is because it is an abominable thing.

"Oh," someone says, "sin is a sweet thing!" No, no, it is an abominable thing! "It is a delightful thing," says another. No, it is an abominable thing! "Oh, but it is a fashionable thing—you can see it in courts of kings and princes— and the great men of the earth love it." Even though they do, it is an abominable thing! Though it should crawl up to a monarch's throne and spread its slime over crown jewels, it would still be an abominable thing. It once entered Heaven, itself, and befouled and defiled a mighty angel and all who followed him—and you can see what an abominable thing it is when you realize how it degraded them and cast them down from their high estate to be, "reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day."

II. Now, for a little while, I will speak to you upon the second reason why sin should be repented of and forsaken. That is because of THE FEELING WHICH GOD HAS TOWARDS IT. Note how strongly He puts it. "Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate!"

God hates all evil, all injustice, all wrong-doing, all immorality, all sin of every kind. He hates it! He is not indifferent to it, nor tolerant of it, but His whole soul goes out in righteous indignation against it. And He hates it, first, because He is infinitely pure. If He were not, Himself, perfectly pure, He might tolerate or excuse sin, but the delicate, matchless purity of His Nature causes His holy anger to burn with a fierce flame against everything that is unrighteous. A pure and holy God must hate sin.

He hates it, too, because it is such an injury to you, His creatures, and, therefore, He says to you, "Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate!" He hates it because it so grievously mars what He made perfect. Sin has spoiled all the beauty of God's highly-favored creature, man. I cannot tell what a perfectly lovely being Adam was before he fell, but I am sure that both Adam and Eve, in their unfallen state, must have had about them a matchless grace to which their loveliest sons or most beautiful daughters cannot now attain. And this also I know, that if you have a face most exquisitely fashioned and well proportioned, yet when evil passions rage behind it, it looks positively diabolical! On the other hand, a man who is truly converted to God and living to bless his fellow men, even though he has only ordinary features, has real beauty about him which we can all perceive. I have seen a very plain woman who has been full of love to Christ and who has consecrated herself to His service, look quite lovely when the Grace of Christ has shone through her face and illuminated her whole life.

But God hates sin because it spoils men and women, not only in face, but especially in heart. Men and women, as God sees them, are rendered ugly through sin. Any beauty that the sinner may possess is marred in the sight of the Most High and He cannot look upon it except with abhorrence. Besides, where does the sweat on our brow come but from our sin? Where do these aches and pains come but from our sin? Where do the thorns and thistles come, which we must dig up with hard toil, but from our sin? Where do yon hillocks in the churchyard come, those graves that cause so many hearts to break, but from our sin? And because sin works such havoc upon the creatures He has made, God hates it.

God hates it, too, because it drives Him to do what He dislikes doing. Isaiah tells us that judgment is, "His strange work," a work at which He is not so much at home as in His works of mercy and Grace. and His own words confirm the Prophet's testimony—"As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked." Though He must smite the guilty, it is, as it were, with His left hand that He smites, for He would far rather that they turned to Him and lived. Yet God must be just, for He would cease to be God if He were not just—and if He did not punish sin. But, in effect, it is sin that has put the sword into God's hand and made the chains that men must wear forever, and lit the eternal fires that never can be quenched. O Souls, God hates sin for your sakes and He cries to you, "Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate!"

To me, the most touching thing in my text is God's pleading with men—"Oh, do not do it; do not do it. Do not live any longer in sin. 'Do not this abominable thing that I hate!'" It is such wondrous condescension on God's part to thus plead with sinners. It is the act of a king to command, but here it is more like a father who persuades, expostulates, implores, entreats. "Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate!" It is God solemnly dealing with men in earnest—a Suppliant to them, as it were, saying to them, "Oh, do not this abominable thing!" This kind of language is suitable for us to use towards God. We may well cry, "Oh, do not smite me! Do not condemn me!" But, here, God takes the Suppliant's place and cries to us, "Oh, do not destroy yourselves! Do not force Me to punish you! Do not reject My love! Do not despise My Son! Do not refuse My mercy! Do not neglect My call! Do not continue in sin—'this abominable thing that I hate!'"

It is as though God had such sympathy with men that He stood and pleaded with them, as a man's own mother or father might with him. Have you ever heard a mother or a father, when a child has seemed to be determined to follow an evil course, saying, "Do not so, my child! I pray you, do not so"? Will such wrong-doing hurt the father? Not personally. Will it injure the mother? No, not in her own person, but, somehow, parents so identify themselves with their children that they suffer when their children sin—and they say to them, "Do not so! Oh, I beg you, do not so, lest, in injuring yourselves, you also bring my gray hairs with sorrow to the grave." It is amazing that God, whose thunders shake the heavens, should say to

His fallen, rebellious creatures, "Do not so." I wish I knew how to repeat these words, but my tongue may not even attempt the impossible task, for I cannot speak as God did when He said, "'Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate!' I hate it for your sake. I hate it for its own sake. Do not grieve Me. Do not vex Me. I grieve because it injures you and I am vexed because of the misery and woe it will surely bring upon you unless you repent."

The greatest wonder of it all is—and with this I must close—that God not only pleaded thus with men, once, but He did it many times, for He sent Prophet after Prophet and this was always the message He gave to each of them, "Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate!" I can conceive of a prince, in very great pity to an erring subject, saying to him, "Do not so! Do not so!" But I cannot conceive of a great potentate again, and again, and again, and again, and again, with tears, coming to a subject and saying, "Oh, do not break my law! Do not this abominable thing!"

But hear it, O you heavens, and be astonished, O earth, as this strange story is told to you! God has pleaded with some here for 20 years—twenty years of patience—twenty years of rejected love! Twenty years, did I say? With many of you it is thirty, or even 40 years! You know it is so. Forty years was the Lord tried by the children of Israel in the wilderness and 40 years has He been tried by many who are still alive! Would you have had patience with anybody who had vexed you for 40 days? Some of you cannot keep your tempers for 40 seconds! Certainly you boil over in less than 40 hours! Yet God has had patience with you for 40 years! Yes, and all that while some of you have been hearers of the Gospel or, if you have not regularly gone to hear it, you might have done so, for it has been preached quite close to you. The most of you have been living in a city that is well provided with the means of Grace. I said 40 years, but in some cases it is 50 years—and there is one, over yonder, with whom it is now 60 years of slighted love and Divine compassion. Is there one with whom it is 70 years? Seventy-five years? Eighty years? Perhaps it is even so and yet you are still despising your God and neglecting your own soul!

How I wish that I knew how to say to you, in God's name, "Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate!" Come, Friend, give up your sin! Renounce your folly! Trust in Christ—ask God to receive you. Say, "I will arise and go to my Father and will say to Him, Father, I have sinned." If you go to Him with that confession, you may be sure that He will receive you! Otherwise He would never have sent you tonight's pleading message. He would not have spared you to be here if He had not meant to accept you when you seek His face! Remember, the way of salvation is by trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ. You trust Him and then, by His Grace, He helps you to overcome sin! He gives you a new nature and you become saved. Trust Him now! The service is almost over and the clock has struck the hour for closing, but Mercy's hour has not yet struck. God still waits to be gracious! "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved." Trust Him now. May He enable you to do so by His infinite mercy! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON: JEREMIAH 1.

Verses 1-3. The words of Jeremiah the son of Hilkiah, of the priests that were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin: to whom the word of the LORD came in the days of Josiah, the son of Amon, king of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign. It came also in the days of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah, unto the end of the eleventh year of Zedekiah the son of Josiah king of Judah, unto the carrying away of Jerusalem captive in the fifth month. Jeremiah was a young man when he was called to the prophetic office and he was sent of God, as a young Prophet, to help the young king, Josiah. His public life, therefore, opened somewhat happily. But, after the death of Josiah, wicked kings sat upon the throne and it was the painful lot and yet, in some respects, the choice privilege, of this weeping Prophet to be sent

upon his Master's errand, time after time, to a disobedient and gainsaying people who repaid him only evil while he sought their good. The Holy Spirit, you see, is careful to note important dates in the history of God's servants—and you and I should also keep a record of the times when God sets us to work and when He gives us special Grace for the service to which He has called us.

4-6. Then the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Before I formed you in the belly I knew you; and before you came forth out of the womb I sanctified you, and I ordained you a Prophet unto the nations. Then said I, Ah, Lord GOD! behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child. He was but young and, when young men are called to be ambassadors for God, it behooves them to feel the weight of the responsibility that rests upon them—and to be conscious of their lack of experience and of their need of fitness for the work. In that consciousness of unfitness, there often lies the evidence of their fitness for the task entrusted to them! Perhaps out of weakness they shall be made strong, but if they do not feel their weakness, they are not likely to cry to God for help, or to receive it from Him. "Ah, Lord God!" said young Jeremiah, "behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child."

7. But the LORD said unto me, Say not, I am a child: for you shall go to all that I shall send you, and whatever I command you, you shall speak. Now, even a child can often speak anything that has been said to him. To repeat what he is told to say is not beyond his capacity and, after all, this is a Christian minister's principal work! Somebody says, "We need thinkers." Yes, so we do, but we need men whose thoughts shall be subordinate to the thoughts of God—ministers who do not come to utter their own thoughts, but to deliver their Master's message—to tell to us what He has told them. Is that sermon merely what you think, Sir? Then, what do I care what you think? What is that to me anymore than what I think may be to you? If, however, you can come to me and say, "Thus says the Lord," I will give diligent heed to your message and I am bound to receive it—but woe be to that minister whose word shall be other than this!

8. Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with you to deliver you, says the LORD. When a king sends an ambassador to a foreign court, he cannot usually go with him, but God's ambassador always has his King with him. Oh, what courage he ought to have with such a Companion!

9. Then the LORD put forth his hand and touched my mouth. For you young Brothers who are to be preachers of the Gospel, I cannot wish anything better than that the Lord may touch your mouth in this way. In the old times that some of us remember, godly men used to pray that the Holy Spirit would be "mouth, matter and wisdom" to the preachers of the Word. It was not at all a bad prayer, for it was a petition that He would give to His servants the right subject, the right spirit and the right utterance—that He would teach them how to speak, what to speak and in what spirit to speak it.

9. And the LORD said unto me, Behold, I have put My words in your mouth. That is a true picture of a Spirit-sent preacher of the Gospel—a man who has God's words in his mouth. I said before that the minister must not utter his own thoughts, but here we see that he must not even utter his own words! God's thoughts are best delivered in God's words—and the more of Scripture there is in our teaching, the more true, the more Divine and the more powerful will it be.

10. See, I have this day set you over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant. What a mysterious power rested on this God-sent messenger! Poor Jeremiah was often in prison, frequently at death's door, yet he was the master of nations and kingdoms and the Lord gave him authority to root them up or to plant them, to throw them

down or to build them up! What wondrous power God gives to those who faithfully preach His Word! Well might Mary, Queen of Scots, say that she was more afraid of John Knox's preaching than of all the armies that came against her!

11-14. Moreover the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Jeremiah, what do you see? And I said, I see a branch of an almond tree. Then said the LORD unto me, You have seen well: for I will hasten My word to perform it. And the

word of the LORD came unto me the second time, saying, What do you see? And I said, I see a boiling pot; and the face thereof is toward the north. Then the LORD said unto me, Out of the north an evil shall break forth upon all the inhabitants of the land. The Chaldeans and the Babylonians were like a great cauldron, boiling and seething, sending forth smoke and steam over the nations and ready to scald Jerusalem to its destruction!

15, 16. For, lo, I will call all the families of the kingdoms of the north, says the LORD; and they shall come, and they shall set, everyone, his throne at the entering of the gates of Jerusalem, and against all the walls thereof round about, and against all the cities of Judah. And I will utter My judgments against them touching all their wickedness, who have forsaken Me, and have burned incense unto other gods, and worshipped the works of their own hands. God tells Jeremiah that He was about to destroy Jerusalem because of the people's sin. Jeremiah was not merely to foretell their doom, but he was also to tell the reason of it—that it was the result of their sin and especially of the sin of idolatry, to which mankind is always exceedingly prone. It is most difficult to keep men to pure spiritual worship—the worship of the unseen God in spirit and in truth. They will get away, if they can, to some outward form or another. They will take the very bread of communion and worship it! Or the image of the bleeding Savior and make an idol of that. Somehow or other, they will have something visible, or tangible, as the object of their adoration. Men will fall into idolatry of one kind or another even to this day—and this is a God-provoking offense from which may the Lord, in His mercy, graciously preserve all of us perfectly clear!

17. You, therefore, gird up your loins. 'You have a hard task before you, Jeremiah, a stern life's work cut out for you—therefore gird up your loins.'

17. And arise. "There must be no waiting, no idleness—'Arise.'"

17. And speak unto them all that I command you. "Do not trim it at all, or pare it down, or omit distasteful portions, but, 'speak unto them all that I command you.'"

17. Be not dismayed at their faces, lest I confound you before them. We ought to be so afraid of God that we are afraid of nobody else—

"Fear Him, you saints, and you will then Have nothing else to fear."

Send all your fears to Heaven and there let them stay there!

18, 19. For, behold, I have made you this day a fortified city, and an iron pillar, and bronze walls against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, against the princes thereof, against the priests thereof, and against the people of the land. And they shall fight against you; but they shall not prevail against you; for I am with you, says the LORD, to deliver you.

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