

THE DRAWINGS OF LOVE

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“The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore, with loving-kindness have I drawn thee.” — Jeremiah 31:3.

From the connection it is clear that this passage primarily refers to God’s ancient people, the natural descendants of Abraham. He chose them from of old, and separated them from the nations of the world. Their election fills a large chapter in history, and it shines with resplendent lustre in prophecy. There is an interval during which they have experienced strange vicissitudes, been visited with heavy chastisements, and acquired an ill-reputation for the perverseness of their mind and the obstinacy of their heart. Yet a future glory awaits them when they shall turn unto the Lord their God again be restored to their land, and acknowledge Jesus of Nazareth as the King of the Jews, their own anointed King. Without abating, however, a jot or tittle from the literal significance of these words as they were addressed by the Hebrew prophet to the Hebrew race, we may accept them as an oracle of God referring to the entire church of his redeemed family, and pertaining to every distinct member of that sacred community. Every Christian, therefore, whose faith can grasp the testimony may appropriate it to himself. As many a believer has heard, so every believer may hear the voice of the Holy Spirit sounding in his ear these words, “Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore, with loving-kindness have I drawn thee.”

There are two things of which we propose to speak briefly to-night — the unspeakable boon, “I have loved thee with an everlasting love” and the

unmistakable evidence, “therefore, with loving-kindness have I drawn thee.”

How exceedingly great and precious this assurance, how priceless this blessing, to be embraced with the love, the everlasting love of God? Our God is a God of infinite benevolence. Towards all his creatures he shows his goodwill. His tender mercies are over all his works. He wisheth well to all mankind. With what force and with what feeling he asserts it! “As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live” (Ezekiel 33:11). And whosoever of the whole human race, penitent for past sin, will turn to Jesus, the Savior of sinners, he shall find in him pardon for the past and grace for the future. This general truth, which we have always steadfastly maintained, which we never saw any reason to doubt, and which we have proclaimed as widely as our ministry could reach, is not at all inconsistent with the fact that God hath a chosen people amongst the children of men who were beloved of him, foreknown to him, and ordained by him to inherit all spiritual blessings before the foundation of the world. As an elect people, they are the special objects of his love. On their behalf the covenant of grace was made; for them the blood of Christ was shed on Calvary; in them the Spirit of God worketh effectually to their salvation. Of them and to them it is that such words as these are spoken, “I have loved thee with an everlasting love;” a love far superior to mere benevolence — towering above it as the mountain above the sea; love kindlier, deeper, sweeter far than that bounty of providence which gilds the earth with sunshine, or scatters the craps of morning dew; a love that reveals its preciousness in the drops of blood distilled from the Savior’s heart, and manifests its personal, immutable favor to souls beloved in the gift of the Holy Spirit, which is the seal of their redemption and the sign of their adoption. So the Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God. Now think for a little while of: —

I. THIS INESTIMABLE BOON.

Let us consider the text word by word. “I have loved thee,” Who is the speaker? “I”; the great “I am,” Jehovah the Lord. There is but one God, and that God filleth all things. “By him all things were made, and through him all things consist.” He is not far away, to he spoken of as though he were at an infinite distance from us, though heaven is his throne; for he is here with us. We live in him, move in him, and have our being in him.

Imagination's utmost stretch fails to grasp any true conception of what God is. The strong wing of reason, though it were stronger than that of the far-famed albatross, would utterly fail if it should attempt to find out God. Incomprehensible art thou, O Jehovah! thy Being is too great for mortal mind to compass! Yet this we understand — thy voice hath reached us; from the excellent glory it has broken in tones distinctly on our ears: "Yea, I have loved thee." Believer in Christ, hast thou heard it? The love of any creature is precious. We prize the love of the beggar in the street. We are flattered by it. We cannot estimate it by silver or gold. Most men court the acquaintance or esteem the friendship of those among their fellow creatures who are in anywise distinguished for rank, for learning, or for wealth. There is a charm in living in the esteem of those who themselves are estimable; but no passion of our nature will supply me with an adequate comparison when I ask, what must it be to be loved with the love of God; to be loved by him whose dignity is beyond degree, whose power to bless is infinite, whose faithfulness never varies, whose immutability standeth fast like great mountain to be loved by him who dieth not, and who will be with us when we die; to be caressed by him who changeth not in all our cares, to be shielded by his love when we stand at the judgment-seat and pass the last dread ordeal that responsible creatures have to undergo! Oh! to be beloved of God! Had ye the hatred of all mankind, this honey would turn their gall into sweetness. It were enough to make you start up from the dungeon of wretchedness, from the chamber of poverty; ay, or from the bed of death. How like an angel you might feel; and know that such thou art, a prince of the blood Imperial. If this be true of thee, my friend, in joy unspeakable thou mayest emulate the bliss of spirits blest, who see Jehovah and adore him before his throne. Who is loved? "I have loved thee." Drink that in if thou canst, Christian. Come to that well-head; here is joy for thee indeed. Repeat the words to yourself with fitting emphasis, "Yea, I have loved thee." Is it not a wonder that the Mighty God should love any of the race of Adam — so insignificant, so ephemeral, so soon to pass away? Did an angel love an emmet creeping on an ant-hill, it were strange, though the disparity is comparatively trivial between these twain; but for the eternal God to love a finite man is a marvel of marvels! And yet had he loved all men everywhere, save and except myself, it had not so amazed me as when I grasp the truth in relation to myself that he has loved me. Let me hear his voice, saying, "Yea, I have loved thee," and forthwith I sit down abashed with humility and overwhelmed with gratitude, to exclaim with David, "What am I, and what is my father's house, that thou haste brought me

hither? Why hast thou loved me?" Surely there was nothing in my natural constitution, nothing in my circumstances, nothing in my transient career, that could merit thy esteem or regard, O my God! Wherefore, then, best thou spoken thus unto thy servant, saying, "I have loved thee!" Oh! how well I could imagine his having rather said to one and another of us, "I have despised thee!" Thou wast, perhaps, once a drunkard, yet he loved thee; a swearer, yet he loved thee; thou hadst a furious temper, yet he loved thee; and thou hast, even now, infirmities and imperfections that make thee sometimes loathe thyself and lie down in shame, weary of life, chafed with the conflict in which you have to fight with such besetting sins day by day — evil thoughts and evil desires, so degrading to thy nature, so disgusting to thyself, so dishonoring to thy God. Still, he saith, "Yea, I have loved thee." Come, brothers and sisters, hear the word, and heed it; do not fritter away the sweetness of the text with vexation questions. Here it is. In large and legible letters it is written. Come to this well-head and drink. Take your fill and slake your thirst with this love divine. If you believe in Jesus, what though you be poor, obscure, illiterate, and compassed with infirmities, which make you despise yourself, yet he who cannot lie saith, "I have loved thee." These words have been said to a Magdalen; they have been spoken to one possessed with seven devils; they were whispered in the heart of the dying thief within the tenfold darkness of despair itself they have sounded their note of cheer. Blessed be the name of the Lord, you and I can hear the voice of his Spirit, as he bears witness with our spirit, "Yea, I have loved thee." What a disparity by nature, what a conjunction by grace between these two, the "I" and the "thee" — the infinite "I" and the insignificant "thee" — the first person so grand, the second person so paltry!

Whenever I attempt to speak about God's love, I feel that I would rather hold my tongue, sit down to muse, and ask believers to be kind enough to join me in meditation, rather than wait upon my feeble expressions. If the love of God utterly surpasseth human knowledge, how much more a mortal's speech? What is it he bestows? That God should be merciful to us is a theme for praise; that he should pity us is a cause for gratitude; but that he should love us is a subject for constant wonder, as well as praise and gratitude. Love us! Why, the beggars in the street may excite our pity? and towards the criminals in our jails we may be moved with compassion; but we feel we could not love many whom we would cheerfully help. Yet God loves those whom he has saved from their sins, and delivered from the

wrath to come. Between that great heart in heaven and this poor throbbing, aching heart on earth there is love established — love of the dearest, truest, sweetest and most faithful kind. In fact, the love of woman, the mother's love, the love of the spouse, these are but the water; but the love of God is the wine; these are but the things of the earth, but the love of God is the celestial. The mother's love mirrors the love of God, as the dewdrop mirrors the sun, but as the dewdrop compasseth not that mighty orb, so no love that beats in human bosom can ever compass as no words own express the height, length, and breadth of the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. "Yea, I have loved thee." Oh! come thou near then, Christian. Thy Father, he that chastened thee yesterday, loves thee; he whom thou forgettest so often, and whom thou has offended so constantly, yet loves thee. Thou knowest what it is to love. Translate the love thou bearest to thy dearest friend, and look at it and say, "God loves me better than this." Think you there are some thou couldst die for cheerfully, whose pain thou wouldst freely take if thou couldst ease them of it for a while, upon whose weary bed thou wouldst cheerfully lie down if a night of suffering could be spared him; but thy Father loves thee better than that, and Jesus proves it to thee. He took thy sins, thy sorrows, thy death, thy grave, that thou mightest be pardoned, accepted, and received into divine favor, and so mightest live and be blessed for evermore.

Passing on with our meditation, let us observe that there is incomparable strength, as well as inexhaustible sweetness in this assurance, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love." That word "everlasting" is the very marrow of the gospel. Take it away, and you have robbed the sacred oracle of its divinest part. The love of God is "everlasting." The word bears three ideas within it. It has never had a beginning. God never began to love his people Or ever Adam fell; ere man was made, ere the mountains were brought forth, before the blue heavens were stretched abroad, there were thoughts of love in his heart towards us. He began to create, he began actually to redeem, but he never began to love. It is eternal love which glows in the bosom of God towards every one of his chosen people. Some of our hearers, strange to say, take no delight in this doctrine; but if you know that everlasting love is yours, you will rejoice to hear it proclaimed again and again. You will welcome the joyful sound. Ah! God's love is no mushroom growth. It sprung not up yesterday, nor will it perish tomorrow; but, like the eternal hills, it standeth fast. You were loved of your God before he had fashioned Adam's clay, or ever this round world was

rolled from between his palm to spin in its mighty orb, long ere the stars began to shine, ere time was, when God dwelt in eternity all alone, he loved you then with an everlasting love.

The second idea is that he loves his people without cessation. It would not be everlasting if it came now and then to a halt; if it were like the Australian rivers, which flow on, become dry, and flow on again. The love of God is not so. It swells and flows on like some mighty river of Europe or America, ever expanding, mighty, joyous river; returning again into the eternal ocean — from whence it came. It never pauses. Christian, thy God loves thee always the same. He cannot love thee more; he will not love thee less. Never, when afflictions multiply, when terrors affright thee or when thy distresses abound, does God's love falter or flag. Let the rod fall never so heavily upon thee, the hand that moves, like the heart that prompts the stroke, is full of love. Judge not the Lord by feeble sense, but trust him for his grace. Whether he brings thee down into the depths of misery, or lifts thee up into the seventh heaven of delight, his faithful love never varies or fluctuates; it is everlasting in its continuity.

And, being everlasting, the third thought is, it never ends. You will grow grey soon, but the love of God shall still have its locks bushy and black as a raven, with the verdure of youth. You will die soon, but the love of God will not expire. Your spirit will mount and traverse tracts unknown, but that love shall encompass you there; and at the bar of judgment, amidst the splendours of the resurrection morning in the millennial glory, and in the eternity that shall follow, the love of God shall be your unfailing portion. Never shall that love desert thee. A destiny how splendid! For thy soul an heritage, how boundless! Stand thou to night on thy Pisgah, and lift up shine eyes to the north, and the south, to the east and the west, for the infinite prospective that lieth before thee is all thine own inheritance. God began not to love thee, nor will he ever cease to love thee. Thou art his, and thou shalt be his when worlds shall pass away and time shall cease to be. There is infinitely more solace and satisfaction here than I can bring out. I must leave it with you, and commend it to your meditation. Sure I am there is no more delightful manna for the pilgrims in the wilderness to feed upon than this doctrine applied to the heart. The love of God towards us personally in Jesus Christ is an everlasting love. Now we come to the second point, which is: —

II. THE UNMISTAKABLE MANIFESTATION, the manifestation by which this love is made known. Good people often get puzzled with the doctrine of election. In their simplicity they sometimes ask, "How can we know whether we are the Lord's chosen, or ascertain if our names are written in the Lamb's book of Life?" You cannot scan that mystic roll, or pry between those folded leaves. Had you an angel's wing and a seraph's eye, you could not read what God has written in his book. The Lord knoweth them that are his. No man shall know by any revelation, save that which, the Holy Spirit gives according to my text. There is a way of knowing, and it is this: "Therefore, with loving-kindness have I drawn thee." Were you ever drawn? Have you been drawn with loving-kindness? If so, then there is evidence that the Lord loved you with an everlasting love. Be ready, therefore, to judge yourselves. You are challenged with this pointed question: Were you ever divinely drawn? Say now, beloved, have you experienced this saved attraction that made you willing in the day of his power? Were you ever drawn from sin to holiness? You loved sin once; in it you found much pleasure; there were some forms and fashions of vice and folly which were very dear to your heart. Have your tastes been changed and your track been turned by the sovereign charm of this divine loving-kindness? Can you say, "The things I once loved, I now hate; and what gave me pleasure, now causes me a pang"? Is it so? I do not ask you whether you are perfect and upright. Alas! who of us could answer this question otherwise than with blushes of shame? But I do ask, if thou dost hate sin in every shape, and desire holiness in every form? Wouldst thou be perfect if thou couldst be? If thou couldst live as thou wouldst list, how wouldst thou list to live? Is thy answer, "I would live as though it were possible for me to serve God day and night in his temple, without a wandering thought or a rebellious wish"? Ah! then, if you have been thus drawn from sin to holiness by the way of the cross, no doubt he loved you with an everlasting love, and you need not discredit it. You may be as sure of it as if an angel should come and drop a letter into your hands on which these words should be inscribed. Yea, surer still; for the angel might have missed his way, but God's Word cannot err. If thou art thus drawn, he has loved thee with an everlasting love.

Harken again. Hast thou ever been drawn from self to Jesus? There was a time when thou thoughtist thyself as good as other men. Had the bottom of thine heart been searched, there would have been found written there, "I do not see that I am so great an offender as the most of my neighbors; I am

respectable, upright, moral; I should hope it would speed well with me at the last, for if I am not now all that I should be, I shall try to be good, and by earnest endeavors, joined with fervent prayers and repentance, I hope to fit myself for heaven." Oh! that you may be drawn away from all such empty conceit, and led to rest your hope solely on that blessed Man who sits at the right hand of God, crowned with glory, though he was once fastened to the tree, despised and rejected of men, and made to suffer as a scapegoat for our sins This, beloved, would be a sure sign that you had renounced yourself and closed in with Christ. You must have been loved with an everlasting love. It is as impossible for any of the elect of God to come to Christ and lay hold on him without divine drawing, as it would be for devils to feel tenderness of heart and repentance towards God. If thou canst say from thy heart: —

*“Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to thy cross I cling.”*

then his drawing may suffice as the proving that he loved thee with an everlasting love.

Have you ever been drawn from sight to faith, from consulting your creature faculties to confidence in God? You used to depend only on what you called your common-sense. You walked by the judgment of your own mind. Do you now trust in him who truly is, though he is invisible; who speaks to you, though his voice is inaudible? Have you a sense, day by day, of the presence One Supreme whom you cannot hear nor see? Does the unseen presence of God affect you in your actions? Do motives drawn from the next world influence you? Say whether do you, in the day of trouble, lean upon an arm of flesh, or cry, and pray, and make supplication to the Almighty? Have you learnt to walk in dependence upon the living God, even if his providence seem, to fail you, and give a lie to his promises? Know, then, that a life of faith is a special gift of God; it is the fruit of divine protection; so as thou art enabled to walk with God, and he deigns to befriend thee, thou mayest humbly but safely conclude that, in the records of the chosen, thy name, stands inscribed. To be drawn into a life of faith is a blessed evidence of Christ's love.

Are you, moreover, day by day being drawn from earth to heaven? Do you feel as if there were a magnet up there drawing your heart, so that when you are at work in your business, in your family with all its cares, you cannot help darting a prayer up to the Most High? Do you ever feel this

onward impulse of something you do not understand, which impels you to have fellowship with God beyond the skies? Oh! if this be so, rest thou assured that it is Christ that draws. There is a link between thee and heaven, and Christ is drawing that link, and lifting thy soul forward towards himself. I love that sweet hymn, and I hope you love the sentiment of it: —

*“My heart is with him on the throne.
And ill can brook delay;
Each moment listening for the voice,
‘Make haste and come away!’”*

If your heart is here below, then your treasure is here; but if your heart is up there — if your brightest hopes, your fondest wishes be in the heavenly places, your treasure is manifestly there, and the title-deeds of that treasure will be found in the eternal purpose of God, whereby he ordained you unto himself that you might show forth his praise. Thus have I tried to show you that those who are thus drawn may be assured that they were loved with an everlasting love. And now will you, further, observe that it is with loving-kindness they are drawn.

Some people are frightened into religion. Beware of any religion that depends upon exciting your terror. Some people’s religion consists entirely of doing what they think they must do, though they do not like it. They are afraid of punishment, or they are anxious for a reward. Such is not the religion of Jesus Christ. It is said that the soldiers of Persia were driven into battle, and that the sound of the whips of the generals could be heard even while the battle was raging, lashing on the unwilling ranks to fulfill their part in the fray. Not so went the Greeks to battle. They rushed like lions amidst a flock of sheep to tear their prey. They fought for their country, for their temples, for their lives, for all that they held dear, and right cheerily from such an impulse within did they engage in the war. The difference between the Greeks and the Persians is just the difference I want to describe among the professed followers of our Lord. The genuine Christian serves God because he loves him; not that he fears hell, for he knows that he has been delivered from condemnation, being washed in Jesus’ blood; not that he expects to earn heaven; he scorns the idea. Heaven is not to be merited by our poor paltry works. And besides, heaven is his inheritance, since Christ has given it to him, having made his title sure. But he serves God because he loves him. He is drawn by a sense of the love of God towards him to love God in return. Who is the best

servant? Not, surely, the man who only does what he is paid for; who serves you for his wage, and who would betray your interest to benefit himself; rather is he the true servant who would cling to you in all your fortunes or misfortunes, through good or through evil report. Some of the old-fashioned servants were so attached to their masters, that they were reckoned on and regarded as members of the family. Those are the true servants of Christ who love him, and render him their services, not menially for the pay they count upon, but loyally, because their hearts are faithful and true to him; they love him so that they could not turn aside from him, or seek another Lord. Say now, are you thus drawn with loving kindness? What a lovely word this “loving-kindness” Is! “Kindness,” seems to be like some huge opal or some sparkling diamond, a Koh-i-noor; and love seems to be like fine gold to encircle it. Methinks I could stand and look at that word “loving-kindness” till with sacred enchantment I burst into a song. There is such a charming sweetness, and yet such an immutable stability in the grace of God which it reveals, that our rapture is kindled as often as we review it. Of that loving-kindness I have tasted here below, and of that loving-kindness I hope to sing in yonder skies in worthier notes than this weak voice can compass now. The loving-kindness of the Lord, as it beams from his eyes, as it is communicated by his helping hand, as it is expressed by his gentle, tender voice, quickens the soul in the path of duty, and restrains it from falling into sin. How can I do this great wickedness, how can I sin against so almighty a Friend, whose kindness to me is so gratuitous, so constant, and so exceedingly generous?

*“Now for the love I bear his name,
What was my gain, I count my loss;
My former pride I call my shame,
And nail my glory to his cross.”*

*“Yes, and I must and will esteem
All things but loss for Jesus’ sake.
Oh! may my so be found in him
And of his righteousness partake!”*

Thus clearly and thus surely may ye judge for yourselves whether ye are God’s chosen or not. Are you drawn, and how are you drawn? Is it with loving-kindness? These are the two points that melt and fuse in experience. As before that God whose eyes of fire search you through and through, I do conjure you to judge, and righteously judge, now as to your own condition. Be not satisfied to rest peacefully until you can say, “Thanks and

praise to God's eternal love, I am drawn; by grace, by grace divine, I am constrained. Henceforth, I freely yield myself up to Christ to be his servant, his disciple, his friend, his brother, for ever and for ever. The Lord hath appeared unto me, saying, 'Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love.'

Do I hear a sigh come up from some in this assembly; a sigh which, being interpreted, would say, "Alas! for me, this sacred solace was never mine; I never was drawn; I feel no love, no such melting favors as your description of loving-kindness ever dawned on me; but, ah! I wish I were drawn; that I had a part amongst that blessed throng who shall for ever see his face. Oh! that I could believe that I, though the meanest of them all, should find my name written in the Lamb's book of life! "Why friend, with thee, it would seem, the drawing has begun. Surely God's loving-kindness hath made thy mouth water. I rejoice exceedingly over those who hunger after the bread of life, for they shall speedily be filled. Right well I know my Master will give it to them. If thou desirest Christ, depend upon it, Christ desireth thee. No sinner ever was beforehand with Christ. When you are willing to have him, he is evidently willing to have you. You had not put out one hand towards him, if he had not put two hands on you already. Oh! if thou wilt but trust the bleeding lamb; believe that he can save thee, and trust in him to save thee with unfeigned confidence, then thou art already drawn. This is proof positive that God has loved thee from before the world's beginning. Oh! how I would that some might be drawn to-night; some who have been great and grievous sinners. There be many such among the chosen vessels of mercy. God grant some of you young people may be drawn. And you who, though no longer young, are still without the blessing, I cannot bear the thought that you should tarry longer uncalled by sovereign grace. May the Holy Spirit attract you! May you feel in your heart the wish to belong to Christ; the desire to be counted among them when he maketh up his jewels. Turn that wish into a prayer. Bow your head now, and pray with this petition. God will hear your secret sighs. He does not reject sincere prayers, however badly they may be worded. If you can get no further than a sigh, it has its value in his kind esteem. The tear that fell just now upon the floor of the pew was not lost; for an angel tracked and treasured it, and carried it on high. God will accept thee if thou wilt accept Christ. If thou trustest Jesus now, 'tis done!

Thou art saved. The moment a sinner believes and trusts in Christ, he is saved—saved for ever. In that moment his iniquity is blotted out, and he is accepted in the Beloved. From that moment he might sing: —

*“Tis done, the great transaction’s done;
I am my Lord’s, and he is mine;
He drew me, and I followed on,
Glad to obey the voice divine.”*

The Lord appear to you, speak to you, and bless you, saying to you, “Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore, with loving-kindness have I drawn you.” Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

MATTHEW 7:13-23.

13, 14. *Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.*

Be up and on your journey. Enter in at the gate at the head of the way, and do not stand hesitating. If it be the right road, you will find the entrance somewhat difficult, and exceedingly narrow; for it demands self-denial, add calls for strictness of obedience, and watchfulness of spirit. Nevertheless, “enter ye in at the strait gate.” Whatever its drawbacks of fewness of pilgrims, or straitness of entrance, yet choose it and use it. True, there is another road, broad and much frequented; but it leadeth to destruction. Men go to ruin along the turnpike road, but the Way to heaven is a bridle-path. There may come other days, when the many will crowd the narrow way; but, at this time, to be popular Ode must be broad — broad in doctrine, in morals, and in spirituals. But those on the strait road shall go straight to glory, and those on the broad road are all abroad. All is well that ends well: we can afford to be straitened in the right way rather than enlarged in the wrong way; because the first endeth in endless life, and the second hastens down to everlasting death.

Lord, deliver me from the temptation to be “broad,” and keep me in the narrow way, though few find it!

15. *Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.*

We have need of our judgments, and we must try the Spirits of those who profess to be sent of God. There are men of great gifts who are "false prophets." These affect the look, language and spirit of God's people, while really they long to devour souls, even as wolves thirst for the blood of sheep. "Sheep's clothing" is all very fine, but we must look beneath it and spy out the wolves. A man is what he is inwardly. We had need beware. This precept is timely at this hour. We must be careful, not only about our way, but about our leaders. They come to us; they come as prophets; they come with every outward commendation; but they are very Balaams, and will surely curse those they pretend to bless.

16. *Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?*

Their teaching, their living, and their effect upon our minds will be a sure test to us. Every doctrine and doctrinaire may thus be tried. If we gather grapes of them, they are not thorns; if they produce nothing but thistle-down, they are not fig-trees. Some object to this practical method of test; but wise Christians will carry it with them as the ultimate touchstone. What is the effect of modern theology upon the spirituality, the prayerfulness, the holiness of the people? Has it any good, effect?

17, 18. *Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.*

Every man produces according to his nature; he cannot do otherwise. Good tree, good fruit; corrupt tree, evil fruit. There is no possibility of the effect being higher and better than the cause. The truly good does not bring forth evil; it would be contrary to its nature. The radically bad never rises to produce good, though it may seem to do so. Therefore, the one and the other may be known by the special fruit of each. Our King is a great teacher of prudence. We are not to judge; but we are to know, and the rule for this knowledge is as simple as it is safe. Such knowledge of men may save us from great mischief which would come to us through associating with bad and deceitful persons.

19. *Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.*

Here is the end to which evil things are tending, The ax and the fire await the ungodly, however fine they may look with the leafage of profession. Only let time enough be given, and every man on earth who bears no good fruit will meet his doom. It is not merely the wicked, the bearer of poison berries, that will be cut down but the neutral, the man who bears no fruit of positive virtue must also be cast into the fire.

20. *Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.*

It is not ours to hew or to burn, but it is ours to know. This knowledge is to save us from coming under the shadow or influence of false teachers. Who wants to build his nest upon a tree which is soon to be cut down? Who would choose a barren tree for the center of his orchard? Lord, let me remember that I am to judge myself by this rule. Make me a true fruit-bearing tree.

21. *Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven: but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.*

No verbal homage will suffice: "Not every one that saith." We may believe in our Lord's Deity, and we may take great pains to affirm it over and over again with our "Lord, Lord"; but unless we entry out the commands of the Father, we pay no true homage to the Son. We may own our obligations to Jesus, and so call him "Lord, Lord"; but if we never practically carry out those obligations, what is the value of our admissions? Our King receives not into his kingdom those whose religion lies in words and ceremonies, but only those whose lives display the obedience of true discipleship.

22, 23. *Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.*

An orthodox creed will not save if it stands alone, norther will it be sure to do so if accompanied by official position and service. These people said, "Lord, Lord," and, in addition, pleaded their prophesying or preaching in his name. All the preaching in She world will not save the preacher if ha does not practice. Yes, and he may have been successful — successful to a very high degree — "and in thy name have cast out devils," and yet, without personal holiness, the caster-out of devils will be east out himself.

The success boasted of may have had about it surprising circumstances of varied interest — “and in thy name done many wonderful works”; and yet She man may be unknown to Christ. Three times over the person is described as doing all “in thy name”; and yet the Lord, whose name he used so freely, so boldly, knew nothing of him, and would not suffer him to remain in his company. The Lord cannot endure the presence of those who call him “Lord, Lord,” and then work iniquity. They professed to him -that they knew him, but he will “profess unto them, I never knew you.”

How solemn is this reminder to me and to others! Nothing will prove us to be true Christians but a sincere doing of the Father’s will! We may be known by all to have great spiritual power over devils, and men, and yet our Lord may not own us in that great day, but may drive us out as impostors whom he cannot tolerate in his presences.