

Exposition of the Gospel of John CHAPTER 62

CHRIST BEFORE ANNAS

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Transcript

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John 18:12-27

Below is an Analysis of the second section of John 18: — 1. Christ bound and led to Annas, verses 12-14. 2. Peter follows and is admitted to the palace, verses 15, 16. 3. Peter's first denial of Christ, verses 17, 18. 4. Annas questions Christ, and His reply, verses 19-21. 5. Christ smitten and His remonstrance, verses 22, 23. 6. Annas sends Christ to Caiaphas, verse 24. 7. Peter's second and third denials, verses 25-27. In the passage before us John again supplies details which are not given by the other Evangelists. The Synoptics describe our Lord's appearing before Caiaphas: in the fourth Gospel this is passed over, and in its place we have His arraignment before Annas. As in the Garden, so in the high priest's palace, two of the Savior's perfections are prominently displayed: His lowliness and dignity: His immeasurable superiority over all who surrounded Him, friends or foes, and His complete submission before those in the seat of human authority. As the Son of God we see Him exposing the wickedness of all with whom He comes into contact; as the Son of man He carried Himself meekly before those who acted more like fiends than humans. The structure of our present passage is quite complex. From Christ being led away to Annas, the Holy Spirit pauses to notice Peter following and then entering the high priest's house. After recording Peter's first denial, he is left warming himself at the fire, and then a brief account is given of what passed between Annas and Christ. Following the announcement that Annas sent Jesus bound to Caiaphas, the Spirit returns again to Peter and describes the second and third denials. The central thing is plainly Christ's appearing before Annas and afterwards before Pilate, but the narrative is interrupted again and yet again to tell of the apostle's awful fall. Most vividly does this point a solemn lesson. God is not the author of confusion: it is sin which produces disorder and hinders the Spirit from taking the things of Christ and showing them unto us! It is this which is written large across John 18 if attention be paid to its structure and order of narrative. But why is it that the Holy Spirit has made so prominent the sin of Simon in this portion of Scripture? Why has He broken into His account of what befell the Savior, by mentioning the threefold denial? Why, especially, after having previously recorded the same in each of the Synoptics? Ah, is it not to emphasize the need of Christ's atoning death, by showing us the character of those for

whom He died! Was it not His design to show how fearfully sin had "abounded" before He portrayed the super-abounding of grace! Was it not suitable that He should first paint a dark background, so that the perfections of the Holy One might be brought into sharper relief! What comes out so plainly all through John—never more so than in these closing incidents—is Christ glorifying the Father in a scene where the ruin of sin was complete and universal. "Then the band and the captain and the officers of the Jews took Jesus, and bound him" (John 18:12). Behold here the amazing hardness of unconverted men. The company of those who arrested the Savior was made up of men of marked differences; it was composed of Gentiles and Jews, soldiers and servants of the priests and Pharisees, heathen and those who belonged to the covenant people of Jehovah. But in one respect they were all alike—they were blind to the glories of Him, whom they apprehended. Both parties had witnessed a signal exhibition of His power, when by a word from His lips He had thrown them all to the ground. Both parties had witnessed His tender mercy, when they saw Him heal the torn ear of the first to lay rough hands on Him. Yet, both remained insensible and unmoved, and now proceeded to coolly carry out their odious business of binding the incarnate Son of God. Terrible indeed is the state of the natural man. Let us not wonder, then, at the unbelief and hardness of heart which we see on every side to-day; these things were manifested in the presence of the Savior, and will continue until He returns in judgment. "Behold also the amazing condescension of our Lord Jesus Christ. We see the Son of God taken prisoner and led away bound like a malefactor—arraigned before wicked and unjust judges—insulted and treated with contempt. And yet, this unresisting Prisoner had only to will His deliverance, and He would at once have been free. He had only to command the confusion of His enemies, and they would at once have been confounded. Above all, He was One who knew full well that Annas and Caiaphas, and all their companions, would one day stand before His judgment-seat and receive an eternal sentence. He knew all these things and yet condescended to be treated as a malefactor without resisting. One thing at any rate is very dear: the love of Christ to sinners is 'a love that passeth knowledge.' To suffer for those who are in some sense worthy of our affection, is suffering that we can understand. To submit to ill-treatment quietly, when we have no power to resist, is submission that is both graceful and wise. But to suffer voluntarily, when we have the power to prevent it, and to suffer for a world of unbelieving and ungodly sinners, unasked and unthanked—this is a line of conduct which passes man's understanding. Never let us forget that this is the peculiar beauty of Christ's sufferings when we read the wonderful story of His cross and passion. He was led away captive, and dragged before the high priest's bar, not because He could not help Himself, but because He had set His heart on saving sinners—by bearing their sins, by being treated as a sinner, and by being punished in their stead" (Bishop Byle). "Then the band and the captain and the officers of the Jews took Jesus, and bound him." The first word ought to be translated "Therefore," not "Then:" the words of the previous verse explaining its force: "Then said Jesus unto Peter, Put up thy sword into the sheath: the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" Having rebuked Peter for offering resistance, He bowed to the Father's will. "Therefore" they "took Jesus and bound him"—like savage beasts they sprang upon their prey. We believe it was to this the Savior referred when, speaking by the Spirit of prophecy, He declared, "Many bulls have compassed me: strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round. They gaped upon me with their mouths, as a ravening and a roaring lion... dogs have compassed me, the assembly of the wicked have enclosed me." We doubt not that they bound Him with heavy chains, for of him who furnishes, perhaps, the fullest type of Christ it is written, "Joseph was sold for a servant: whose feet they hurt with fetters: he was laid in iron" (Ps. 105:17, 18). Is not the antitype of this more than hinted at in Isaiah 53:5, where we are told not only that He was "wounded for our transgressions" but "bruised for our iniquities"!—was it not when they "bound" His wrists and ankles with handcuffs and fetters! Why did they "bind" Him? Four historical reasons we may give: because Judas had bidden them hold Him fast

(Matthew 26:48), this because he remembered what is recorded in Luke 4:29, 30; John 8:59, etc.; because they would heap shame upon Him, treating Him as a lawless character; because they deemed Him worthy of death, thereby prejudicing His sentence. But behind these we may see a typical reason: God overruling for the fulfillment of it. All that befell Christ was to fulfill the types and prophecies that went before of Him. The most eminent type of Christ in His sufferings was Isaac, and the first thing that Abraham did to him, when about to offer him up as a sacrifice, was to take and bind him (Gen. 22:9)! So it was with the animals which were offered: "bind the sacrifice with cords, unto the horns of the altar" (Ps. 118:27). But deeper still, there was a mystical significance to this binding of the Savior: we were sin's captives, therefore was He theirs! Our sins were the cause of His binding, therefore did He, as our Substitute, cry, "innumerable evils have taken hold upon me; mine iniquities (ours, made His) have compassed me about" (Ps. 40:12)! He was bound that we might be set free. "It is a certain rule that what should have been done to us, something correspondent was done to Christ; and the virtue of His person was such, though it was done to His body, it brought us freedom from the like due to our souls; and by Him being thus bound and led, He Himself afterward, when He ascended, led captivity captive" (Mr. Thomas Goodwin). How ready, then, should we be to be bound for Christ (in Hebrews 13:3 afflictions for His sake are called "bonds"); and how little ought we to be moved by the vileness of those who persecute us, when we remember Him! "And led him away to Annas first" (John 18:13). The Savior was neither "driven" nor "dragged," but led: thereby the Holy Spirit informs us, once more, of His willing submission. He offered no resistance. With infinitely greater ease than Samson of old, could He have burst His bonds "as a thread when it toucheth the fire"; but as prophecy had announced, "he was led as a lamb to the slaughter"—gentle and tractable. Here also He fulfilled not only prophecy but type: each animal that was to be offered in sacrifice was first led to the priest (Lev. 17:5), so Christ was first brought to Annas. The road followed from the Garden to the house of the high priest was also significant. Gethsemane was at the foot of Olivet, on the east side of Jerusalem, beyond the brook Cedron. In journeying from there to the city, the gate through which they would pass was "the sheep gate" (Nehemiah 3:1, 32; Nehemiah 12:39; John 5:2, and see our notes on the last). The "sheep gate" was nigh unto the temple, and through it the sacrificial animals passed (first having been fed in the meadows adjoining the Cedron); so also went the true Lamb on this occasion! Note a striking contrast here: Adam was driven out of the Garden (Gen. 3:24); Christ was led! "And led him away to Annas first; for he was father-in-law to Caiaphas, which was the high priest that same year" (John 18:13). John is the only one who tells of the Savior being brought before Annas; the Synoptics describe His appearance before Caiaphas. Both Annas and Caiaphas are called "high priests." The fact that there were two high priests shows the confusion which prevailed at that time. Much has been written on the subject that provides neither information nor edification. So far as our own limited light goes, we take it that the Roman rule over Palestine supplies the key. In view of John 11:49 it seems that the Romans elected a high priest for Israel each year (compare Acts 4:6, which mentions no less than four, all living, who had filled that office), but in the light of Luke 3:1 it is dear that sometimes they were re-elected. According to the Law of God the high priest retained his office till death (Ex. 40:15; Numbers 35:25, etc.), therefore in the eyes of the Jews, Annas, not Caiaphas, was the real high priest: Caiaphas was formally acknowledged in a civic way, but Annas took precedence over him in ecclesiastical matters. This, we believe, explains why the Savior was brought first before Annas. "Now Caiaphas was he, which gave counsel to the Jews, that it was expedient that one man should die for the people" (John 18:14). The reference here is to what is recorded in John 11:49-52. Caiaphas apparently, was the first man to make the motion that Christ be put to death. The reason he advanced being a political one, with the evident intention of currying favor with the Romans. The callous selfishness of the man comes out plainly in his "consider that it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people" (John 11:50). He

was addressing the Sanhedrin, the Supreme Court of Judaism, and in saying "for us," rather than "for them," he shows that he cared more for his office than for his nation. "Now Caiaphas was he, which gave counsel to the Jews, that it was expedient that one man should die for the people." Why is this mentioned here? To show on what ground (from the human side) our Savior was crucified: it was out of political considerations, and those imaginary at best—lest perchance "the Romans take away our place and nation." The Holy Spirit has premised all the other sufferings of Christ thus, in order to show us that no equity is to be expected from all their proceedings against Him. They had resolved, before they took Him, to put Him to death, and that for State considerations, therefore they would be sure to keep to their resolutions whether He were innocent or no, whether they could convict Him or not. The judge had given his verdict and determined the sentence before the trial took place! Here then is one of the Spirit's reasons for introducing this reference to the words of Caiaphas—to show us that in what follows we must not expect to find any favor shown to the Lord Jesus, nor must we be surprised if His trial was simply a farce, a glaring travesty of justice. In addition to this, we believe that God saw to it that there should be a plain testimony from the legal head of the nation as to the purpose and character of His Son's death: He was dying "FOR the people!" "And Simon Peter followed Jesus" (John 18:15). Matthew tells us that he "followed afar off" (Matthew 26:58). In following Christ at all on this occasion Peter was clearly acting in the energy of the flesh, for Christ's will as to His disciples had been plainly expressed in the "let these go their way" (John 18:8). "Lovingly anxious to see what was done to Him, yet not bold enough to keep near Him like a disciple. Anyone can see that the unhappy Peter was under the influence of very mixed feelings—love made him ashamed to run away and hide himself; cowardice made him ashamed to show his colors, and stick by his Lord's side. Hence he chose a middle course, the worst, as it happened, that he could have followed" (Bishop Ryle). "And Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple: that disciple was known unto the high priest, and went in with Jesus into the palace of the high priest" (John 18:15). There has been much discussion and speculation as to who this "other disciple" was. A few of the old commentators and most of the modern believe that he was the writer of this Gospel; but whoever he may have been, it is almost certain that he was not John. In the first place, John was a poor fisherman of Galilee—far removed from Jerusalem—therefore it is most unlikely that he was on sufficiently intimate terms with the high priest as to enter his house, and have authority over the door-keeper so as to order her to admit Peter. In the second place, John, being a Galilean, would have been recognized and challenged as was Peter (Matthew 26:69, 73). In the third place, whenever John refers to himself in this Gospel it is always as "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20). Finally, Acts 4:13 makes it very plain that the high priest was not personally acquainted with either Peter or John! Who, then, was this "other disciple"? The answer is, We do not know. It may have been Nicodemus or Joseph of Arimathea, but we cannot be sure. "But Peter stood at the door without" (John 18:16). How significant and suggestive is this little detail—the door was shut! Was it not by God's providence that the door was now closed? Happy for Peter had he remained on the outside. The Lord had plainly warned him to "watch and pray lest he enter into temptation." But Peter disregards His admonition, and knocks for admission—why else should the other disciple have gone out? There is a practical lesson for us right here: God in His mercy put an impediment in Peter's way, stopping him from going on to that which should be the occasion of his sin; so does He, oftentimes, with us. Therefore, when we find God, in His providence, placing some barrier in our path, it behooves us to pause, and examine well our grounds for going further along the same path we are in. If our way is warranted by the Word and our conscience is clear as to a certain line of duty, then obstacles are to be regarded only as testings of faith and patience; but otherwise they are warnings from God. "Then went out that other disciple, which was known unto the high priest, and spoke unto her that kept the door, and brought in Peter" (John 18:16). Ah! says the reader, does not this conflict with what has

just been said on the first part of the verse? Would not the coming forth of the other disciple, his speaking to the door-keeper (unasked by Peter), and his bringing him in, indicate that God's providences were working in favor of Peter's entering the palace? Did it not look as though God were calling Peter to enter? The difficulty seems real, yet it is capable of a simple solution. Peter had disregarded the warning of God—the shut door; he had persisted in having his own way—knocking for entrance; now God removes His providential barrier. How solemnly this speaks to us; may the Lord grant to each the hearing ear. When we disregard both the Word and warning providence of God, we must not be surprised if He then sets a snare for us. When we insist on having our own way, we must be prepared if God gives us up to our own heart's lust (Ps. 81:12). Jonah chafed against God's word, therefore when he fled from going to Nineveh and set his heart on Tarshish, he found a ship all ready for him to sail in! Here, then: is another most important practical lesson pointed out for us: the outward providences of God must not be taken for our guide when we have refused His Word and His warnings! "Then saith the damsel that kept the door unto Peter, Art not thou also one of this man's disciples? He saith, I am not" (John 18:17). That the door-keeper was a maid rather than a man was obviously overruled by the providence of God: He would humble the pride of Peter in this way, that his weakness might stand out as a lasting warning against self-confidence. It was neither by one of the Roman soldiers nor one of the Jewish officers that the apostle was first challenged, but by a young woman! Why she should ask him the question she did, we are not told; whether she was moved by idle curiosity, or detected that he was a Galilean, or whether his countenance bore marks of agitation and fear, or whether—as is more likely—she concluded from Peter being a friend of the "other disciple" that he "also" was a follower of Christ, we cannot be sure. Note how mildly she framed her question: not, Are you a follower of this Insurrectionist, this Enemy of Judaism, this Blasphemer against God, but simply, "this man"! Yet, notwithstanding the sex of his questioner, and the mild form of her question, Peter told a downright lie. He said, "I am not." "The betrayal by Judas, though more dreadful, is almost less startling than the denial by Peter. We are less prepared for the cowardice of the one, than for the covetousness of the other. That the one should turn timid seems less natural, so to say—was less to be expected—than that the other should prove a traitor. 'Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall' (Mr. Geo. Brown). "And the servants and officers stood there, who had made a fire of coal, for it was cold: and they warmed themselves: and Peter stood with them, and warmed himself" (John 18:18). What we have here is introductory to the second and third denials, recorded in John 18:25-27. Peter was cold. How profoundly and solemnly significant! The Christian who follows Christ "afar off" will soon be chilled and grow cold spiritually; then will recourse be had to fleshly stimulants for warmth and comfort. And the enemies of Christ—the world, the flesh, and the Devil—will provide their "fire"—their places and means of cheer! "And Peter stood with them." Ominous words are these. Of the traitor it was said "And Judas also, which betrayed him, stood with them"; now we find Simon in the same evil company! "The apostle stood among the crowd of his Master's enemies, and warmed himself like one of them, as if he had nothing to think of but his bodily comfort; while his beloved Master stood in a distant part of the hall, cold, and a prisoner. Who can doubt that Peter, in his miserable cowardice, wished to appear one of the party who hated Christ, and sought to conceal his real character by doing as they did? And who can doubt that while he warmed his hands he felt cold, wretched, and comfortless in his own soul?" (Bishop Ryle). How true it is that "The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways" (Prov. 14:14)! Some have pointed out that the Holy Spirit has here told us "it was cold" in order to impress us the more with the bloody sweat of Christ only a short while before! "The high priest then asked Jesus of his disciples, and of his doctrine" (John 18:19). The gross injustice of such a mode of procedure is glaringly apparent. Instead of preferring a charge against the Savior, and then summoning witnesses to prove it, Annas acted after the manner of the Inquisition, asking questions so as to ensnare the One before him.

And this was the religious head of Israel, acting altogether against and without law, no indictment having been drawn up, no evidence brought forward to support it; nothing but a cowardly attempt to overawe the Prisoner by browbeating Him, so that he could obtain something which might be used against him. "The high priest then asked Jesus of his disciples, and of his doctrine." The fact that Annas referred here to our Lord's "disciples" at once indicates the malevolent character of his questioning: it was an ironical reference to those who had forsaken Him and fled! The high priest "asked Jesus of his disciples"—With what design did you gather them round you? Where are they? How many have you in reality now? He asked of them; he did not call for them: none were allowed to testify on His behalf! "And of his doctrine"—not for edification, but to see if it were a new teaching of His own, so that they might have wherewith to accuse Him. It is plain that at this stage they were at a loss for a charge. "The disciples are mentioned as His dependents, His followers, His party, His sworn confidants; the doctrine is inquired into as novelty, heresy, dangerous misleading error; both together pointing to the two charges which afterwards were urged—Insurrection against the Roman power, error or blasphemy against the Jewish" (Stier). "Jesus answered him, I spake openly to the world" (John 18:20). Not before, but to, "the world." Why did He not say "to the multitudes"? why "to the world"? It was the first hint of the universality of His message—note how the "Jews" are referred to separately, later in the verse! "I spake openly to the world": truth is bold and fears not the light. It is the emissaries of Satan who hide the leaven in the meal (Matthew 13:33); it is the servants of the Prince of darkness who haunt the "secret chambers" (Matthew 24:26). In saying that He spake openly to the world the Lord was indirectly rebuking Annas and his co-conspirators for their injustice of refusing Him a trial in open court. "I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the temple, whither the Jews always resort" (John 18:20)—there is no article before "synagogue." In affirming that He taught in the established places of public worship, the Lord gave proof that He was no lawless separatist, clandestinely proselytising, but honoring the institutions of God and acting as became His Prophet. "Whither the Jews always resort." "He describes His cause and doctrine as properly national, for all the Jews. There is in the background of both question and answer, though the Lord put it directly not in words, the meaning that the main point in His teaching was the testimony to Himself as the Messiah:—thus where all the Jews as Jews are assembled in their national religion to worship God, there have I testified that which applies to all the Jews, that they all should be 'My disciples' and ought to acknowledge and join themselves to Me!" (Stier). "And in secret have I said nothing" (John 18:20). This does not mean that He had never instructed His disciples in private. The Lord was giving a general description of His public ministry. Moreover, His confidential communications to His own were but explanations or amplifications of what he had taught in the open. He had not two doctrines, one exoteric for the multitudes, and another esoteric for His intimate friends. In secret He had said nothing. In like manner, the badge by which His messengers may always be identified is described in 2 Corinthians 4:2: "not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God." In saying "in secret have I said nothing" the Savior unhesitatingly appropriated to Himself the identical declaration of Jehovah of old—"I have not spoken in secret, in a dark place of the earth: I said not unto the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me in vain: I the Lord speak righteousness, I declare things that are right" (Isa. 45:19). It is also blessed to observe that while Christ here gave a full, if brief, answer to Annas concerning His "doctrine," not a word did He say about His "disciples." As the Shepherd He protected His sheep! He alone was to suffer, therefore He alone assumed all responsibility! "Why askest thou me?" (John 18:21). Mark the quiet dignity of Christ. So far from being cowed, He turned and challenges the judge: "Why," or better, "Wherefore askest thou me?" It was one of those questions of the Lord which never failed to pierce the heart. Why, do you, the high priest, pretend to be ignorant of what is common knowledge among the people! You have had many opportunities to hear Me yourself! You have expelled

from the synagogue those who believe in Me; what meanest thou, then, by this questioning! It was the Light exposing the "hidden things of dishonesty." It was the Holy One condemning the high priest for attempting to make a prisoner incriminate himself and supply evidence to be used against him. "Ask them which heard me what I have said unto them: behold, they know what I said" (John 18:21). By thus appealing to those who had heard Him, the Lord still further rebuked the malicious secrecy which had induced them, through fear of the people, to take Him by night. The direction in which Christ pointed Annas is very striking. He did not say, Summon the deaf, the lame, the blind, the lepers I have healed. He did not say, Send for Lazarus of Bethany and question him! But, "Ask them which heard me." It was "the Word" challenging them! "Survey the dignity, the clearness, the gentleness, the supremely measured rightness and wisdom of this answer! In the full and perfect consciousness that He was no founder of a sect, deserving inquisition, He began with I openly, continued with I, and closed with profound feeling who He was, yet not expressing it with 'what I have said.' But, with the most proper discretion of one arrested and charged, more righteous than Annas and his foolish questioning: —I may not and will not now, My life and doctrine lying before you, testify for Myself, or defend Myself—let all be investigated! Let the testimony of all bear witness!" (Stier). "And when he had thus spoken, one of the officers which stood by, struck Jesus with the palm of his hand (margin with a rod'), saying, Answerest thou the high priest so?" (John 18:22). How fearfully does this exhibit the enmity of the natural man against God, here manifest in the flesh! Meekly and mildly had our Lord replied to questions which deserved no answer, and all that He received in return was a cruel and cowardly blow. There is no hint of any remonstrance from Annas, nor have we any reason to suppose that he made any. And what shall be thought of a judge who allowed a bound prisoner to be treated in this fashion! Unable to meet the convicting and condemning truth, resource was had to force. It was might attempting to crush the right. This was the first blow which the sacred body of our Savior received from the hands of sinners, and this came not from one of the Roman soldiers, but from a Jew! The Greek word signifies "gave a blow on the face," whether with his hand or with a stick is not determined; personally, we believe it was with the latter, and thus fulfilled Micah 5:1—"They shall smite the judge of Israel with a rod upon the cheek." "Jesus answered him, If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil: but if well, why smitest thou me?" (John 18:23). There was no hot surging of the flesh here, no angry retort, no spirit of resentment. Under all circumstances the Lord Jesus manifested His perfections. But He only was "without sin": contrast the apostle Paul in Acts 23. When the high priest Ananias commanded them that stood by him to strike their prisoner in the mouth, Paul said, God shall smite thee thou whited wall. Yet it is beautiful to see how grace in him triumphed over the flesh: as soon as they asked him, "Revilest thou God's high priest?" he answered, "I wist not, brethren, that he was the high priest, for it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people" (Acts 23:2-5). But He who is fairer than the children of men never had to retract a single word! O that we may learn of Him who was meek and lowly in heart. "But if well, why smitest thou me?" The Savior still acted as became the Son of God: He questioned His questioner! He judged the one who had so unrighteously condemned Him. If the smiter had any sense of justice he must have felt keenly our Lord's calm rebuke. "Now Annas had sent him bound unto Caiaphas, the high priest" (John 18:24). The word "had" here is misleading and is not warranted by the Greek. It was following what we read of in John 18:19-23 that Christ was turned over to Caiaphas. Annas had heard sufficient. He saw that to prolong the uneven contest would damage himself rather than his Prisoner; so, ignoring Christ's piercing question, the blow of the officer and our Lord's rebuke, he sends Him bound to his son-in-law, that the specious judgment might proceed as prudently as possible, but with the "If I have spoken (not 'done') evil, bear witness of the evil" ringing in his ears. "And Simon Peter stood and warmed himself. They said therefore unto him, Art not thou also one of his disciples? He denied it, and said, I am not" (John 18:25). The first clause here is repeated from John 18:18

so as to connect the history. The "therefore" informs us why it was that these men should challenge Peter. He was standing "with them" (John 18:18), as one of them, and no doubt it was the flames from their "fire" which lit up his face and caused them to recognize him. He was warming himself—more concerned about his body than his soul. He was listening to their blasphemous talk about his Master, too timid to speak up and witness for Him. And it is written "Be not deceived, evil communications corrupt good manners" (1 Cor. 15:33). So it proved here, for when these men asked the apostle if he were one of Christ's disciples, he denied it. This gives additional force to the "therefore": Peter's being in the company of these enemies of the Lord was the occasion of his being challenged, and that became the occasion of his greater sinning! What a solemn warning for us to avoid the company of the ungodly! How urgently we need to heed the command! "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers"! But note it carefully that Peter did not deny that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God, or the Savior of sinners—which, we think, none indwelt by the Holy Spirit ever did—but only that he was one of His "disciples"! "One of the servants of the high priest, being his kinsman whose ear Peter cut off, saith Did not I see thee in the garden with him?" (John 18:26). What a rebuke was this! Peter was standing "with them" (John 18:18), and now one reminds him that, only a little while before, he had stood "with him." How this should have searched his conscience; how it ought to have opened his eyes to the place he now occupied. But poor Peter had boasted, "Although all shall be offended yet will not I . . . I will not deny thee in any wise" (Mark 14:29, 31); and so God left him to stand alone, to show him and us that except omnipotent grace upholds us we are certain to fall. Alas, what is man. What is our boasted strength but weakness, and when we are left to ourselves how our most solemn resolutions melt like snow before the sun! "Peter then denied again: and immediately the cock crew" (John 18:27). "If any of his companions had been asked at what point of Peter's character the vulnerable spot would be found, not one of them would have said, He will fall through cowardice. Besides, Peter had a few hours before been so emphatically warned against denying Christ that he might have been expected to stand firm this night at least. Perhaps it was this very warning which betrayed Peter. When he struck the blow in the garden, he may have thought he had falsified his Lord's prediction, and when he found himself the only one who had courage to follow to the palace, his besetting self-confidence returned and led him into circumstances for which he was too weak. He was equal to the test of his courage which he was expecting, but when another kind of test was applied in circumstances and from a quarter he had not anticipated his courage failed him utterly. "Peter probably thought he might be brought bound with his Master before the high priest, and had he done so he would probably have stood faithful. But the Devil who was sifting him had a much finer sieve than that to run him through. He brought him to no formal trial, where he could gird himself for a special effort. The whole trial was over before he knew he was being tried. So do most of our real trials come; in a business transaction that turns up with others in the day's work, in the few minutes' talk or the evening's intercourse with friends, it is discovered whether we are so truly Christ's friends that we cannot forget Him or disguise the fact that we are His. In these battles which we must all encounter, we receive no formal challenge that gives us time to choose our ground and our weapons; but a sudden blow is dealt us, from which we can be saved only by habitually wearing a coat of mail sufficient to turn it, and which we can carry into all companies" (Mr. M. Dods). Many are the lessons which we ought to learn from this sad fall of Peter. First, in himself the believer is as weak as water. Only two hours before, Peter had partaken of the Lord's Supper, had heard the most touching Address and Prayer that ever fell on mortal ears, and had received the plainest possible warning—yet he fell!! Second, it shows us the danger of self-confidence. "It is a beacon mercifully set up in Scripture, to prevent others making shipwreck." Third, it warns us of the consequences of prayerlessness: had Peter watched and prayed when the Lord bade him, he would have found grace to help in time of need. Fourth, it reveals to us the perils of companioning with the wicked. Fifth, it shows us the disastrous influence of the

fear of man—"the fear of man bringeth a snare" (Prov. 29:25), making us more afraid of the face of those we can see than the eye of God whom we cannot see. Sixth, it should prepare us against surprise when our familiar friends fail us in the crucial hour—God often permits this to cast us back the more on Himself! Seventh, did not God permit Peter to sin more grievously than any of the Eleven because He foreknew the extravagant regard which should afterwards be paid to him and his self-styled "successors"! "After all let us leave the passage with the comfortable reflection that we have a merciful and faithful High Priest, who can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and will not break the bruised reed. Peter no doubt fell shamefully, and only rose again after heartfelt repentance and bitter tears. But he did rise again; he was not cast off forevermore. The same pitiful Hand that saved him from drowning, when his faith failed him on the waters, was once more stretched out to raise him when he fell in the high priest's hall. Can we doubt that he rose a wiser and better man? If Peter's fall has made Christians see more clearly their own great weakness and Christ's great compassion, then Peter's fall has not been recorded in vain" (Bishop Ryle). The following questions are to help the student on the dosing section of John 18:— 1. Compare the Synoptics for what happened ere Christ appeared before Pilate. 2. What does verse 30 prove? 3. What does the second half of verse 31 go to show? 4. What did Christ mean by verse 36? 5. What is the force of the last clause of verse 37? 6. Why did God cause Pilate to say verse 39? 7. What is the deeper significance of verse 40?

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