

Ordered Steps

by C.H. Spurgeon

C.H. Spurgeon teaches that true Christian life is marked by complete submission to God's Word, careful watchfulness in daily conduct, comprehensive obedience, and a humble dependence on divine guidance to overcome sin.

Scripture: Psalm 119:133, Psalm 119:132, 1 Peter 1:15, 1 Corinthians 10:31, Colossians 3:17, 2 Timothy 2:19

Topics: "Christian Obedience", "Sanctification"

Description

In this devotional sermon, C.H. Spurgeon explores the heartfelt prayer of the Psalmist asking God to order his steps according to His Word and to keep sin from having dominion. Spurgeon emphasizes the necessity of complete submission to God's will, vigilant care over daily conduct, and comprehensive obedience to God's commands. He encourages believers to cultivate a holy fear and dependence on divine guidance as they walk the narrow path of holiness. This sermon is a timeless call to live a life fully surrendered to God's authority and grace.

Transcript

"Order my steps in Your Word: and let not any iniquity have dominion over me." Psalm 119:133.

NOTICE, in the previous verse, how the Psalmist expresses his longing desire to be treated as one of the Lord's family—"Look upon me, and be merciful to me, as You used to do to those that love Your name." We, also, dear Friends, wish to be treated as God treats all the rest of His children. I am sure that every humble Believer will be quite content with that arrangement. There was a time when you would have been willing that He should make you one of His hired servants, but you have seen the mistake of such a desire as that and now your prayer is, "Deal with me, O Lord, as one of Your children; treat me according to Your custom with Your redeemed! I do not ask anything different from the lot of the rest of the heirs of Heaven. If they are poor, I would be poor with them. If they suffer reproach, I would be reproached with them. If they carry a cross, I would carry a cross, too. Whatever is the appointed portion of the Lord's children, I am prepared to share and share alike with them. If You chasten them, I hope to have Your chastening. If You smile upon them, I shall delight to be smiled upon as You are known to smile on them." Brothers and Sisters, we feel a sweet kind of communism in the Church of God—we, none of us, desire to have anything more than this common lot of the redeemed family.

It seems to me that my text may suit all of us who are in this assembly. I am sure that it suits me. I have prayed it before I have preached from it and I desire to be praying it while I am preaching concerning it. I

commend it to those who are just beginning the Divine Life and I suggest it as equally appropriate to those who may have wandered somewhat out of the way of holiness. Yes, and I suggest it to those who are venerable and full of wisdom. I suggest it even to my elders, to the beloved fathers in our Israel, that this is a prayer which may last all of us right up to the gates of Heaven! "Order my steps in Your Word: and let not any iniquity have dominion over me." You, too, who are just beginning to seek the Savior, should be told that this is the kind of spirit to which you will have to come—and if the Lord brings you to be His own, this is the kind of prayer that you will pray. And if you cannot pray it and will not pray it, you will bear witness against yourselves that you are not the children of God. I am sure that I am not too severe when I say that.

I. As the Holy Spirit shall enable me, I want to bring out four things in this text which are well worthy of your earnest consideration. The first is the COMPLETE SUBSERVIENT to the will of God of the man who thus prayed, "Order my steps in Your Word: and let not any iniquity have dominion over me."

You see, he begins his prayer with the word, "order." He is a man who wishes to be under orders. He is willing to obey the Lord's commands and he is anxious to receive them and to be made to carry them out. Now this is not the way of the world—worldlings say, "Who is the Lord, that we should obey His voice? We are our own masters! Who is Lord over us?" Free thinking and free living—these are the desires of ungodly men. But when the Grace of God has renewed the heart, the soul finds its true freedom in obedience to Christ's commands, and its best thinking while sitting at the feet of Jesus to observe His gracious Words.

"Order my steps in Your Word." Beloved, once we lived without any order or plan, or method, but the Grace of God makes us method-ists in the highest possible sense. It makes us live according to God's method—and our prayer is that we may never be disorderly, but that in all things, just as the universe is arranged by God, and all the stars keep their appointed courses, so we may be made to take our proper places, and may be kept in them—joyfully obedient to the will of the Most High! It is one of the marks of the Grace of God when we ask God to order us and willingly put ourselves under His command.

Moreover, the Psalmist prayed, "Order my steps in Your Word." He was perfectly satisfied with God's Revelation. He had not so much of it as we have but there was room enough in it for all his steps. "Order my steps in Your Word." He needed no greater liberty than the Bible gave him, no wider range than he found in the commands of the Most High. His prayer was like that verse we sang just now—

"Make me to walk in Your commands, 'Tis a delightful road. Nor let my head, or heart, or hands, Offend against my God."

Are you satisfied, dear Hearer, to keep within the compass of the Divine command? If so, take it as an evidence that God has changed your heart! But oh, my dear Hearer, if you live outside of that Book. If you never get inside it at all. If you never care what it says, what it promises, what it commands—then take it as certain that you do not know the Lord! Let us, each one, at this moment breathe this prayer to God, "Order my steps in Your Word. Make me to live as a man who is under authority—one who finds directions for his living in the Law of his God, and who makes it his desire and his delight to be conformed thereto."

So you see the complete subservience of the man of God—his earnest desire that he might be cleared from every kind of iniquity. I may mention that in the Hebrew, the prayer, "Order my steps in Your Word," may mean, "Make my steps firm in Your Word." The Psalmist would be kept from all vacillation, hesitation, or wandering, but he wants, when he is right, to be firmly right, to be distinctly, decidedly right, so he

pleads, "Make my steps firm." Oh, how we often stagger along! We do what is right, but we quiver and shake while we are doing it! Have you not known, dear Friends, what it was to seem to be wavering? Your feet had almost gone, your steps had well-near slipped. But the Psalmist's prayer is that his obedience may be firm, decided, steady obedience. You young beginners will do well to pray that this experience may be yours. It is often given to God's saints, when they have been long in His ways, to get confirmed in habit of righteousness so that they are not carried about by every wind of temptation. And it should be the prayer of all God's servants that they may be so established in righteousness that they can say with the Apostle Paul, "From henceforth let no man trouble me." It is no use for them to try it, for they cannot entice me away from my dear Master's service. "I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus." I bared my back to be branded as Christ's slave so that the mark shall never be removed as long as I live! I have given my arm to be tattooed with the Cross, so that never, while I have an arm to move, should it belong to anybody but to Christ Himself!

It is a blessed thing when you reach this point and say, "I cannot and I will not listen to your temptations, O sinful world! You may call, but I will not answer. You may invite, but I will not listen. The time of parleying is past, the hour for making my choice is over. I belong to God and my prayer is that my footsteps may always be confirmed in obedience to His mind and will."

I leave this prayer with you as to its complete subservience. Do you kick against it? Do you want to be something other than God would have you to be? My dear Hearer, I am sorry for you! But if, on the other hand, you yield to Him and desire to be like wax under the seal, that God may stamp upon you His own Image—and no other then the Lord is dealing with you in a way of Grace—then you may confidently hope that you belong to Him.

II. Now, secondly, I call your attention to the CAREFUL WATCHFULNESS of this prayer, the detailed watchfulness of it—"Order my steps in Your Word: and let not any iniquity have dominion over me."

You see that the Psalmist enters into detail when he presents this petition. He does not say merely, "Order my life," but, "Order my steps." Godly men desire to be kept right by God even in the little things of life. It is often in little things, such as steps, rather than in long periods of running, that the good or the evil may be most plainly seen. Blessed is that man to whom there exists no such thing as a trifle, who desires to serve God even in the jots and tittles, for he shall not fall by little and little, as so many have done. He shall not have gray hairs upon him here and there, and yet not know it, for his careful watchfulness shall enable him to detect the slightest defection from the right way and so shall he be able to hold to the straight path of integrity. Brothers and Sisters, the old proverb is, "Take care of the pence, and the pounds will take care of themselves," which I will translate into the language of our text, "Take care of the steps, and the day's walking, as a whole, will take care of itself." True Christians want the Lord to bless them in everything, yes, even in those plain and simple words which drop from their lips almost without a thought. We do more wrong, perhaps, by lack of thought than by any will to do evil and, therefore, the necessity of crying to God, "Order my steps; take care of the little things in my life, that I sin not against You."

"Order my steps." That prayer means, "Order my ordinary daily life." Do not many think that religion is only something for Sundays? They put it on with their best hat and put it away when they put that hat back into the box. Believe me, that the religion which is taken up only once a week and dropped during the rest of the week is neither fit to live with nor to die with! It is like a bad bank-note—if you find such a counterfeit, you had better lay it down and run away from it—and not let anyone suspect that it ever belonged to you!

True godliness concerns the ordinary actions of daily life. Do not tell me what you can say at a Prayer Meeting. What do you do in the parlor? What do you do in the kitchen? How do you behave yourself towards your wife? How do you act towards your children? "He is a very good man," said one to me, "he is a very good man, indeed, but his children are all afraid of him." "Then," I thought, "he is not a good man, but a very bad man, indeed." I could not conceive him to be good—I would rather believe Rowland Hill's saying that a man was not truly converted if his cat and his dog were not the better off for it! It ought to be a blessing and it must be a blessing to everybody round about him if the Grace of God enters into his soul. "Order my steps in Your Word," means, "Help me to turn the common actions of my ordinary life into a hallowed service." When I put on my weekday clothes, may I be even as when a priest in the olden times put on his holy vestments and ministered before the Lord. And may everything that I do be the exercise of a sacred priesthood to the living God. The Apostle Peter's exhortation is still in force, "As He which has called you is holy, so be you holy in all manner of conversation." So are Paul's injunctions, "Whether, therefore, you eat, or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." "And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him."

Thus the watchfulness included in the text concerns the little things and the ordinary things of our lives. And following the Psalmist's example, we shall especially pray about all our advances. It is by steps that we go forward. This is the age of progress—everybody is crying out, "Forward!" Well, then, here is a prayer for those who wish to progress wisely "O Lord, order my steps in Your Word! So shall my progress be a progress toward Yourself, a progress within the compass of Your sacred Truth." He who outruns Scripture will have to come back again. He who goes beyond the boundaries of the right road will lose his way and the more progress he makes the greater will be the distance that he will have to return if he is to reach his journey's end in peace. Pray this prayer, young man, if you want to be safe, "O Lord, order my steps in Your Word!"

There is great temptation, nowadays, to take up with anything that is new. A man buttonholes you and tells you of a new discovery that he has made. Well, hear what he has to say if you think well. "Prove all things," but, "hold fast that which is good." And be this your continual prayer, that your steps, when you take any steps, may always be ordered according to the Word of God. "Well," says one, "you tie us up pretty tightly." No, my Friend, I do not want to tie you up at all! You can roam where you like, but I know that the tighter I am tied, the better it is for me, and the happier I am. There is a prayer in the 118th Psalm which I always like to pray, "Bind the sacrifice with cords, even to the horns of the altar." Lord, hold me fast from morning till night, and through the night as well! I long that You should fill my very dreams with thoughts of You! Lord, bind me fast, both winter and summer, and every day in the year! I would not have a single hour in which You did not order me and command me! Lord, bind me as to every step I take, and every advance I make, for where may I not go if I ever advance beyond Your Word? And what can be good for me if You do not count it good, and what will You withhold from me if it is really good for me?

So I commend this prayer to you, dwelling much on these two points—first, complete subservience to the Divine will, and then careful watchfulness about all the details of your life. Only turn them both into prayers! Do not say, "I am going to order my steps." Are you? Do not say, "I am going to obey God in everything." Are you? This holy road is not fit for such feet as yours while you talk like that! Until you are shod with a simple dependence upon God you will never take to this narrow way. And unless the Lord holds you up in it, you will soon either fall in it or fall from it. So make no resolutions in your own strength, but offer the prayer of our text in the name of Jesus—and the Lord will hear you.

III. In the third place, I call your attention to the COMPREHENSIVE OBEDIENCE which is desired in this text.

It has two clauses, the positive and the negative. "Order my steps in Your Word." That is, "Lord, make me positively to do the right thing!" Then, "Let not any iniquity have dominion over me." That is, "Lord, preserve me from any thought or word or deed which would be contrary to your mind and will!" He is the right sort of Believer who is an all-round Christian, one who is positive for doing right, but who is equally determined not to do wrong. We have some very active professors who are not, at the same time, watchful on the negative side. And we have a great many negative professors who might offer the Pharisee's prayer, "God, I thank You that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican." They look to some extent to the negative side, but then there is nothing positive for the right, there is nothing that they are really doing to please the Lord. We need to have a Divine amalgam of the two parts of our text, "Order my steps in Your Word" and, "Let not any iniquity have dominion over me."

With regard to this comprehensive obedience, notice that the Psalmist desires that no sin of any kind should be tolerated within his heart—"Let not any iniquity have dominion over me." Some men have their pet sins and some women have their darling sins. They cry to the evil things within, "Out with you, out with you all, except this one." There is a winking of the eye, or a lifting of the finger which means to some iniquity, "You may stay behind." "But, my dear Sir," says one, "have we not all some besetting sin?" Possibly it is so, but what is a besetting sin? If I were to go across a common at dead of night and half-a-dozen men met me and gathered round me, crying, "Your money or your life!" I should be beset by them. Suppose that I had to cross Clapham Common tonight and that I was thus surrounded and robbed—I should be beset by the thieves.

But suppose I went that way again tomorrow night? And on Tuesday night, and on Wednesday night, and Thursday night, and Friday night, and Saturday night? Do you think that I should be able to say that I was "beset" by the robbers? People would naturally ask, "Why did you go that way? If you are attacked and robbed once, we can understand that, but what do you mean by going that way again?" Here is a man who says that drinking is his besetting sin. Well, my Brother, I can understand that you were led on, by degrees, from glass to glass till you lost your balance and were overcome. You call that your besetting sin and yet you still go to the public-house! Well, that is what I call going across a common on purpose to be robbed! And I do not believe your excuse about besetting sins.

I think that I have heard many things of that character, whereby people try to excuse themselves on the ground that some sin besets them. The Black man said that drunkenness was an "upsetting" sin much more than a "besetting" sin. I think he was quite right in saying so, and there are many other upsetting sins of that kind! Men open the door and say to some iniquity or other, "Come in, you are my besetting sin." They put themselves in the way of it! They indulge themselves in it and then they talk as if they could not help it! Down on your knees and cry, "Let not any iniquity have dominion over me. Lord, save me from it, for my desire is to obey You completely in everything without leaving anything out from under the dominion and sway of the Laws of Christ!"

IV. Now, lastly, this prayer commends itself very much to me, not only for its comprehensiveness, but because of a certain CAUTIOUS APPREHENSIVENESS which seems to lie in it.

I like the holy fear which glows within the Psalmist's prayer like the fire within an opal. He says, "Order my steps in Your Word." He means, "Lord, I am afraid to take a single step without Your orders. I am afraid to

put one foot before another for fear I should go wrong!" "Happy is the man that always fears." He that was too bold was never too wise. He that leaped before he looked, looked very sadly after he had leaped. He shall go right who knows where he is going, is careful about the road and afraid lest he should go astray. He is the man who prays, "Order my steps in Your Word."

Then notice, especially in the latter sentence, "Let not any iniquity have dominion over me," how the Psalmist seems to say, "Lord, I feel that I am liable to the very greatest iniquity. Let not any iniquity have dominion over me!" Is this David praying? I think it was the man after God's own heart who wrote this Psalm—and he proved in his life that the very worst iniquities might assail him and that he might become their prey for a time. O child of God, you must pray against the blackest sin! You do not know what you may yet become if the Grace of God does not preserve you. I am always afraid of people who are so very good in their own esteem—superfine, hot-pressed perfectionism is generally very poor stuff. I had an old friend who was very cautious upon this point. He was met, one day, by a man who had been many years the deacon of a church and who said to him, "Friend So-and-So, I want you to lend me 50 pounds." He knew him right well and he was quite prepared to write a check for the amount at once but the venerable deacon said, "You know you can trust me. I am not a man of yesterday, I am not like young people who are easily led astray to do foolish and wicked things. I am perfectly safe."

My wise old friend then said, "I cannot lend you any money." The other man asked, "Why not?" "I never lend money to people who are so good as you are, for I should never see it again if I did." That man was head over heels in debt and failed, soon after, for an enormous amount! Yet there he stood, as bold as brass, pleading what a good man he was! So the man who says that he cannot sin and that he is beyond the power of temptation—well, the Lord have mercy upon him! He is already in the snare of the devil and it may not be long before he will have sorrowfully to find it out. No, Sir, pray, "Let not any iniquity have dominion over me," for, unless you are kept by God's Grace, there is no form of iniquity which may not prevail against you! The Psalmist feels himself liable to fall into the greatest transgression, so he prays, "Let not any iniquity have dominion over me."

But the prayer seems to me, also, to intimate that he felt fearful of the least evil There is here, to my mind, a very sweet apprehensiveness concerning little sins, if there are such things. "Let not any iniquity have dominion over me. Perhaps, Lord, I shall never be a drunkard, for You have given me reason, thought and the love of sobriety, but then, Lord, what use is it if I should be guilty of covetousness, which is idolatry? Let not that iniquity have dominion over me. And if I should escape from covetousness, perhaps I may fall prey to some secret lust. Lord, if there is a leak in the ship, the ship will go down. Even if there is not a leak in the stern of the vessel, yet if there is a leak in the prow, or anywhere in her hull, that will suffice to sink her. Lord, let not any iniquity have dominion over me!" Suppose that I do not fall by any of these known sins, yet if I do not walk with God, if I neglect secret prayer, if I have not yielded myself fully up to the working of the Holy Spirit upon me, the result will be the same! This prayer is necessary for every one of us—"Let not any iniquity have dominion over me."

Brothers and Sisters, I am not afraid for the most of you, that you will become the prey of any overt scandalous sins, but I am afraid that some of you may be eaten up with dry rot—that the termites may secretly eat through you and yet leave all the skin and outside of everything just as it used to be. We have heard travelers tell that when they have gone into their rooms which they had left for some time, there stood their boxes, their sets of drawers, and their tables, just as when they left—but as soon as they have touched them, they have dropped into so much dust—for the insects had eaten all the heart of the wood away! Is it not possible for us to get into that state—to seem everything that is good, and yet the very heart

of us may be eaten out? Pray, then, this prayer, "Let not any iniquity have dominion over me."

O children of God, you who really know and love Him, be concerned about yourselves that you be not mistaken and that you do not fall under the supremacy of any evil and false thing! Cry mightily to God about this matter! Search and try yourselves and make sure work for eternity. I say this especially to myself and to all ministers, for there are so many ways in which ministers may deceive themselves. We may preach to others and yet be, ourselves, castaways. I say this, also, to you Church officers and to you revered members of the Church who have grown gray in your profession. Take heed to yourselves and everyone of you breathe this prayer, "Let not any iniquity have dominion over me."

Then what shall I say to you who have never believed in the Lord Jesus Christ? If the righteous are scarcely saved, where will you be found? "Oh!" says one, "I never made a profession of religion." You are proud of that, are you? Suppose you were brought before a magistrate and charged with being a thief and you said to him, "I never made a profession of being an honest man." "Oh!" he would say, "take that fellow to prison! He is convicted out of his own mouth." You never made a profession of fearing God? You never made a profession of believing in Christ—is that so, Sir? Then the Day of Judgment is almost a superfluity to you, for you have judged yourself and condemned yourself! And before long my Lord's sheriff will lay his skeleton hand upon you and arrest you in the name of that Divine Justice which you have despised! There will be no resisting him and you will have to go with him to prison and to death.

Before that dread event happens, I entreat you, by the very reasonableness of the thing, to consider, repent and turn to the Lord! Look to Jesus Christ upon the Cross, for He is the only way of salvation! Find in Him the power to hate sin and the power to conquer it, for there is no power anywhere but that which comes from His dear streaming wounds and from His ever-living Spirit. Look to Him—and when you have done so and have trusted Him—then pray this prayer to the Lord, "Order my steps in Your Word: and let not any iniquity have dominion over me, for Jesus Christ's sake! Amen."

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON: PSALM 119:129-144; MATTHEW 15:1-13. Psalm 119:129. Your testimonies are wonderful: therefore does my soul keep them. It is very wonderful that God should speak to us at all, but still more marvelous that He should write to us such a book as this Bible. The Book itself is full of wonders and one of those wonders is that it reveals Him whose name is "Wonderful." Observe that the Psalmist, having said to the Lord, "Your testimonies are wonderful," does not add, "Therefore do I sit down and wonder at them." No, his appreciation was practical, let ours be the same—"Your testimonies are wonderful: therefore does my soul keep them."

130. The entrance of Your Words gives light. Those who are most ignorant and have least confidence in their own abilities will, nevertheless, become very wise if they study God's Word.

130-131. It gives understanding to the simple. I opened my mouth, and panted: for I longed for Your commandments. What a wonderful verse that is! The Psalmist cannot describe his longing for God's commandments except by going to the brute creation for a suitable metaphor! He had probably seen the hunted stag stand still and pant to get its breath, all the while longing for the water brooks. So he says, "I opened my mouth, and panted." "I could not put my prayer into words, so I panted. My heart, my breath, my lungs, my very soul panted, for I longed for Your commandments."

132. Look upon me—That is all the Psalmist needs and all that we need, too. If a look from us to God will save us, what must a look from God to us do for us? "Look upon me"—

132-134. And be merciful to me, as You used to do to those that love Your name. Order my steps in Your Word: and let not any iniquity have dominion over me. Deliver me from the oppression of man: so will I keep Your precepts. Some of you, perhaps, may hardly be able to do as you would if you were perfectly free to act, for you are, to a certain extent, under the government and power of ungodly persons. Well, here is a prayer for you to present to the Lord. "Deliver me from the oppression of man: so will I keep Your precepts."

135. Make Your face to shine upon Your servant. That is the best sunshine for us! Let us but have the light of God's Countenance and nothing can put us out of countenance! If the Lord will smile, men may frown as much as they please. So we pray with the Psalmist, "Make Your face to shine upon Your servant."

135-136. And teach me Your statutes. Rivers of waters run down my eyes because they keep not Your Law. The Psalmist felt for others as well as for himself. It was not enough for him to be holy—he would have others to be the same. Sin in other men brought sorrow to his heart. "Rivers of waters run down my eyes, because they keep not Your Law."

137. Righteous are You, O LORD, and upright are Your judgments. After having wept over the sin of men, the Psalmist turns with sweet calmness of spirit to the goodness of God.

138. Your testimonies that You have commanded are righteous and very faithful. "Very faithful." You who have tried and proven God's promises must have found them so—not only faithful, but very faithful, faithful to the letter, faithful to the moment. God seems rather to exceed His promise than ever to fall short of it.

139-140. My zeal has consumed me, because my enemies have forgotten Your Words. Your Word is very pure.— Just now the Psalmist said, "Your testimonies are very faithful. Now he says, "Your Word is very pure." There is no adulteration in this blessed Book—it is the pure Truth of God. You cannot add to it or take from it without making it imperfect! "Your Word is very pure."—

140. Therefore Your servant loves it. It is only a pure heart that loves the pure Word of the Lord! So, if you love the Word of God because of its purity, it is an argument that your heart has been renewed by Grace!

141. I am small and despised: yet I do not forget Your precepts. In verse 139, the Psalmist complained that his enemies had forgotten God's Words. He does not complain of the fault in others and then fall into it, himself, but he says, "Yet I do not forget Your precepts." There are some people who seem to think that it does not much matter what they do. If they were persons of influence, they think that they would be very careful of their example. "But," says one, "I am only a feeble woman—a poor mother with a few children." "Oh," exclaims another, "I am only a child as yet, I cannot influence others!" "Oh," cries a third, "I am simply an ordinary working man, nobody notices me." Listen to what the Psalmist says, "I am small and despised: yet I do not forget Your precepts. I do not make an excuse out of my littleness, that I may be careless in my living." Take that message home, dear Friends, and learn its lesson, for it applies to many of you!

142. Your righteousness is an everlasting righteousness—What a wonderful sentence! Just now, the Psalmist said, "Your testimonies that You have commanded are righteousness." (See the marginal reading of verse 138). Now he advances another step and says, "Your righteousness is an everlasting righteousness."

142. And Your Law is the truth. That is what I believe this Book of God is—"the truth." I know of nothing Infallible but the Bible. Every man must have a fixed point somewhere—some believe in an infallible pope, and some in an infallible church, but I believe in an Infallible Book, expounded by the Infallible Spirit who is ready to guide us into all truth—"Your Law is the truth."

143. Trouble and anguish have taken hold on me: yet Your commandments are my delight. What a curious mixture this verse describes! Here is a man full of trouble and anguish, and yet full of delight at the same time! Little do they understand human nature and especially gracious human nature, who cannot comprehend this paradox. There are many seemingly contradictions in the Christian life and this is one of them. "Trouble and anguish have taken hold of me"—as dogs lay hold of their prey—"yet Your commandments are my delights." The Apostle Paul pictured another such a case as this when he wrote, "We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed. We are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed." And he also described the Christian paradox, "As unknown, and yet well known, as dying and, behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things." May we all understand these paradoxes in our own experiences!

144. The righteousness of Your testimonies is everlasting: give me understanding, and I shall live. Now let us read what the Lord Jesus said to those who professed to reverence the Scripture, but who really made it void by their traditions.

Matthew 15:1. Then came to Jesus scribes and Pharisees, which were of Jerusalem, saying.—They had taken a journey to come and attack Him. Perhaps they had been sent as a deputation to try to thwart the Savior. What a vexation of spirit it must have been to His pure and holy mind to come into conflict with these triflers, these self-righteous, self-confident men! Why did they come to Christ? To plead with Him for the poor people who were perishing for lack of knowledge, or to ask Him how souls could be saved and how God could be glorified? Oh, no! They came to ask the Savior about a very different subject—

2. Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they wash not their hands when they eat bread. Would you have thought that full-grown men could have made it a matter of business to come from Jerusalem down into the country to talk to Christ about the fact that His disciples did not always wash their hands before they ate their breakfasts? Yet we have men, nowadays, who make a great point of what is to be done with the so-called "consecrated" bread that is left, and who are much concerned about what kind of a dress a "priest" ought to wear when he is engaged in the performance of certain duties! How sad is it that such trifles as these should occupy the minds of immortal beings while men are dying and God is dishonored!

3. But He answered and said to them, Why do you, also, transgress the commandment of God by your tradition? He answered their question by asking another, in which he drew the contrast between transgressing the tradition of the elders and transgressing the commandment of God!

4-6. For God commanded, saying, Honor your father and mother: and, He that curses father or mother, let him die the death. But you say, Whoever shall say to his father or his mother, It is a gift, by whatever you might be profited by me; and honors not his father or his mother, he shall be free. Thus have you made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition. Whatever might be said about regarding the tradition of men, God's commandment must be regarded! That stands first and, therefore, our Lord demanded of these scribes and Pharisee an answer to His charge that they had overridden and overlaid a

commandment of God by a tradition of their own. If a father and mother, in great need, said to their son, "Help us, for we need bread," and he answered, "I cannot give you anything, for all I have is dedicated to God," the Rabbis taught that he might be exempted from relieving his parents, although they also said that the next day he might undo the dedication of his property and employ it exactly as he pleased. He might use the fact that he had said, "That shekel is for God," as a reason for not giving it to his father who was in need—and then, the very next day—he might take that shekel and spend it exactly as he chose. So God's commandment to honor, and love, and aid our parents was set aside by their tradition.

7-9. You hypocrites! Well did Elijah prophesy of you, saying, This people draws near to Me with their mouth, and honors Me with their lips; but their heart is far from Me. But in vain do they worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. Our Lord never flattered anybody! See how honestly and in what plain terms He addressed these scribes and Pharisees! Yet these were the great teachers of His day and thought themselves the bright light of the age, the very leaders of the people in all that was good! But Christ addressed them as, "You hypocrites," and gave them a text of Scripture which clearly applied to them. They had all manner of outward forms of worship. They talked very much about the Bible—they studied every Word of it and even counted the letters in every chapter—but they had no regard to the real meaning of God's Word! And their heart was not right with the Lord. The Savior patiently talked with them, but He also sternly rebuked them and denounced them as hypocrites.

10. And He called the multitude. As much as if He had said to the scribes and Pharisees, "I cannot waste My time arguing with you. I am going to talk to these poor people who are perishing and I shall have more hope of doing good among the multitude than among you, though you consider yourselves the aristocracy of the church."

10, 11. And said to them, Hear, and understand: not that which goes into the mouth defiles a man; but that which comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man. This was not very clear at first, it needed to be thought over and well considered. The Savior dropped it into the popular mind, like a seed, and left it to grow and develop in due season.

12. Then came His disciples, and said to him, Do You know that the Pharisees were offended, after they heard this saying? The wonder was that they were not offended before! It certainly was not a matter of concern to Christ whether they were offended or not—He would not tone down the Truth of God in order to please them.

13. But He answered and said, Every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted shall be rooted up. Every teacher whom God has not sent will find his teaching contradicted by Christ. The Truth of God is like a spade—it turns up the soil for that life to grow in it which should grow—and it is also the means of killing the weeds. "Every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted shall be rooted up." May we all be plants of His right-hand planting! Amen.

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