

The Cast-Off Sash

by C.H. Spurgeon

C.H. Spurgeon teaches that believers are like a linen sash bound to God—intimately united and honored for His service—but warns against the spiritual decay that comes from unfaithfulness and impurity.

Scripture: Jeremiah 13:1-11, Romans 8:35, 1 Peter 2:9, Romans 12:1, Psalm 89:5-6

Topics: "Sanctification and Holiness"

Description

In "The Cast-Off Sash," C.H. Spurgeon expounds on the prophetic symbolism of Jeremiah's linen sash as a vivid metaphor for God's people. He highlights the intimate union between God and believers, their honored role as priests and instruments of His work, and the grave consequences of spiritual unfaithfulness. Spurgeon passionately calls Christians to embrace holiness and faithful service, reminding them of the glorious future that awaits the redeemed. This sermon blends rich biblical exposition with heartfelt application, encouraging believers to cling closely to God.

Transcript

BY C. H. SPURGEON,

"Thus said the Lord unto me, Go and get a linen sash, and put it around your waist, and put it not in water. So I got a sash, according to the word of the Lord, and put it around my waist. And the word of the Lord came unto me the second time, saying, Take the sash that you acquired, which is around your waist, and arise, go to the Euphrates, and hide it there in a hole of the rock. So I went, and hid it by the Euphrates, as the Lord commanded me. And it came to pass after many days, that the Lord said unto me, Arise, go to the Euphrates, and take the sash from there, which I commanded you to hide there. Then I went to the Euphrates, and dug, and took the sash from the place where I had hid it: and, behold, the sash was marred, it was profitable for nothing. Then the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Thus says the Lord, After this manner will I mar the pride of Judah, and the great pride of Jerusalem. This evil people, who refuse to hear My words, who follow the dictates of their hearts and walk after other gods, to serve them, and to worship them, shall even be as this sash, which is good for nothing. For as the sash clings to the waist of a man, so have I caused to cling unto Me the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah, says the Lord; that they might be unto Me for a people, and for a name, and for a praise, and for a glory: but they would not hear." Jeremiah 13:1-11.

GOD'S servants, in olden times, were very anxious to be understood when they spoke. They were not content because the people listened to them, or because they were to their hearers as "a very lovely song

of one that has a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument." They reckoned the people's approval of their style to be proof of its failure. Had it wounded their hearts, it would not have gratified their tastes. They wanted the Truth of God to go home to men, so that they could no longer discuss modes of speech, or methods of action, but would be compelled to remember the message and feel its force. They reckoned that they had done nothing unless they riveted attention, excited thought and impressed the heart.

Oh that all preachers were as solemnly in earnest in all their addresses as Jeremiah was—we might then hope to see more true conversions and less of the flimsy religion of the day! The people of Israel and Judah were so sunk in thoughtlessness that it was absolutely necessary to do something more than speak. Prophet after Prophet had spoken, "but they would not hear." Even though Jeremiah, the most plaintive of all the Prophets, spoke in such melting tones that it must have been difficult to turn away from him with indifference, yet they remained so hardened that God described them as, "this evil people, who refuse to hear My words, who follow the dictates of their hearts."

Though the Prophet wept, entreated and persuaded, yet they regarded him not, but turned on their heels and went, each one, his own way to his merchandise, to his idolatry, to his adultery, or to his oppression. Therefore the Lord bade His servants add to their speech certain symbols which the people would see with their eyes, which would be talked about as strange things and so, would excite attention and command consideration. Perhaps, by this means the Lord would extort from some of them a deeper thought, and bring them penitently to their knees. It is better for preachers to do odd things than for men to be lost!

If plain talk fails, we may even use emblems and signs, for we cannot let the careless ones perish without another attempt to get at them. Oh that by any means we might save some! In many instances the Prophets were told to do singular things and among the rest was this—Jeremiah must take a linen sash, put it about his waist and wear it there till the people had noticed what he wore and how long he wore it. This sash was not to be washed—this was to be a matter ob-

served of all observers—for it was a part of the similitude. Then he must make a journey to the distant river Euphrates and take off his sash and bury it there. When the people saw him without a sash, they would make remarks and ask what he had done with it, and he would reply that he had buried it by the river of Babylon.

Many would count him mad for having walked so far to get rid of a sash—250 miles was certainly a great journey for such a purpose! Surely he might have buried it nearer home, if he must bury it at all. There was the Jordan—he might have gone to its bank, dug a hole and hid the garment there, if he thought it well to do so. There would be a good deal of talk about Jeremiah's eccentric conduct, but the more thoughtful would endeavor to spell out his meaning, for they would feel sure that he meant much by it. Soon the Prophet goes a second time to the Euphrates and they say one to another—The Prophet is a fool! The spiritual man is mad! See what a trick he is playing. Nearly a thousand miles the man will have walked in order to hide a sash and to dig it up, again! What will he do next?

Whereas plain words might not have been noticed, this little piece of acting commanded the attention and excited the curiosity of the people. Blame us not if we sometimes dramatize the Truth of God—we must win men's hearts—and to do so we dare even run the risk of being called theatrical! Jeremiah might have been ridiculed as an actor, but he would not have fretted much under the charge if he saw that he had

succeeded in teaching the people the Truth which God would have them learn. When our young folks cannot learn by books, we try the kindergarten method, and we will sooner teach them by toys than leave them ignorant! Even so was it with the old Prophets. They would use emblems rather than leave the people in the dark.

The record of this singular transaction has come to us and we know that, as a part of Holy Scripture, it is full of instruction. Thousands of years will not make it so antique as to be valueless! The Word of the Lord never becomes old so as to lose its vigor—it is still as strong, for all Divine purposes, as when first of all Jehovah spoke it! This Bible is the oldest of instructors and yet it wears the dew of its youth! Like the sea, it is ancient as the ages, but time has written no furrow on its brow. It is always venerable, yet ever novel—eternal, yet always fresh. Even the symbol of Jeremiah, which was so strikingly adapted to his age and time, is quite as well suited to this present year of Grace. May the Holy Spirit give us all instruction thereby.

I. And, first, in our text we have AN HONORABLE EMBLEM of Israel and Judah. We may say, in these days, an emblem of the Church of God. I say it is an honorable emblem. I hardly know of one which is more so except when the Church is called a Crown of Glory, or a Royal Diadem, or, better still, the Bride, the Lamb's Wife. The people were compared to a linen sash with which the Prophet, in the type, girt himself, but which God explains to be His sash, "for as the sash clings to the waist of a man, so have I caused to cling unto Me the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah, says the Lord."

Notice first, then, that God had taken this people to be bound to Himself. He had taken them to be as near to Him as the sash is to the Oriental when he binds it about his waist. The eastern merchant or worker does not go out without his sash—it is an essential part of his dress, keeping all the rest together—and so the Lord declares that He had taken His people and had bound them about Himself to be near to Him and fastened about Him, so that He would not go forth without them. Often He speaks of them as "a people near to Me." Had they acted as they should have done, so as to be not only the natural but the spiritual seed of Israel, they would have enjoyed what every true Believer may enjoy, namely clinging unto God as a sash clings unto a man, for the Lord's own sanctified ones are bound unto God by God, Himself, so as never to be torn away from Him.

I invite you, beloved of the Lord, to consider your choice privilege in thus being, as it were, girt about the waist of God. It is a wonderful metaphor. In infinite condescension the Lord has put it so—the Believer's place is near his God in intimate, continuous, open fellowship. What can be more intimately associated with a man's most vital parts than his belt? What can be nearer to the life of God than His living people? The traveler in the East takes care that his sash shall not go unfastened—he girds himself securely before he commences his work or starts upon his journey, and God has bound His people round about Him so that they shall never be removed from Him. "I in them," says Christ, even as a man is in his belt.

"Who shall separate us?" says Paul. Who shall ungird us from the heart and soul of our loving God? "They shall be Mine, says the Lord." They are His and always shall be His! Neither shall any tear them away from Him, for by Covenant and by promise are they bound up with the life of God. Yet remember that there are many who, like the Jewish people,

bear the name of Israel, but they are not the true Israel. They are bound about God nominally, as it were, but yet they are not spiritually united to Him. And concerning such, this parable tells us much that is worthy of solemn consideration. May the Holy Spirit warn all professors by this instructive image! If we are,

indeed, what we profess to be, then we shall cling to God forever, as it is written, "I will put My fear in their hearts, and they shall not depart from Me." Our faith will encompass Christ our Lord! Our love will embrace Him! Our patience will surround Him! Our hope will encircle Him world without end!

"Loved of our God, for Him again

With love intense we burn!

Chosen of Him before time began,

We choose Him in return."

And, as nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord, so nothing shall separate our love from God whom we love in Christ Jesus our Lord!

What a privilege this is—that the Lord should cause us to cling to Him, to be to Him for a people, for a name, for a praise and for a glory! Pardon me if I speak feebly, my heart loses utterance in contemplating the gracious imagery here set before us. But Jeremiah's sash was a linen one—it was the sash peculiar to the priests, for such was the Prophet. He was "the son of Hilkiah, of the priests that were in Anathoth." Thus the type represents chosen men as bound to God in connection with sacrifice. The people of the Lord are the very sash of the Most High in this sense, that if there is priestly work to do, He puts us about Him and makes us to be the instruments of this hallowed service.

For us, our blessed Lord girt Himself with a linen sash! For us, He, even now, is girt about the paps with a golden sash and now, for Him, we, also, become priests and kings unto God and His continued priestly work among men is done by us. I mean, not by ministers, alone, but by all the inheritance of God—by all the blood-washed ones, by all the regenerate ones—for you are "a royal priesthood, a peculiar people." God has made His people to be "a nation of priests" and it is ours to offer sacrifice to God continually, the sacrifice of prayer and thanksgiving. We know of no order of priests, save the whole body of the faithful, who present their bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

That is why a linen sash was specified rather than any other. We are bound to the Most High, for solemn priesthood, to minister among the sons of men holy things. The Lord Jesus is now blessing the sons of men as Aaron blessed the people—and we are the sash with which He girds Himself in the act of benediction by the Gospel. The sash is also used by God always in connection with work. When eastern men are about to work in real earnest, they gird up their loins. Our garments in this country are close-fitting and convenient, but the Oriental's robes would always be in his way whenever he had work to do if he did not tightly strap them around him.

Whenever we read of earnest work to be done we read of this sash—so when God comes to do work among the sons of men, we always hear of this sash, which sash we are, or may be, if we are unto God what we ought to be. When the Lord works righteousness in the earth, it is by means of His chosen ones. When He publishes salvation and makes known His Grace, His saints are around Him. When sinners are to be saved, it is by His people. When error is to be denounced, it is by our lips that He chooses to speak. When His saints are to be comforted, it is by those who have been comforted by His Holy Spirit and who, therefore, tell about the consolations which they have, themselves, enjoyed. The sash of the Lord's workday robes is His people!

He says, "Gather My people unto Me; those that have made a covenant with Me by sacrifice." When He comes—not to Judgment, for that is His strange work—but for mercy and salvation, then He comes girt about with His redeemed! Blessed are they whose happy lot it is to be connected with God in His sacred acts and in all His glorious work of salvation! I cannot explain my deep emotion, but my heart would utter weighty words if it could talk without my lips, for I am awe-stricken at the bare idea of our being used as the sash of the Divine Strength, clinging unto God as a sash cleaves unto the waist of a man! How blessed a thing it is to be bound to God, bound for hallowed service, being set apart for the

Master's most personal and honorable use! Blessed are you who were once worthless and useless, but are now made so precious in His sight that you are bound around Him for His use in the highest exercises of His Grace among the sons of men!

Moreover, the sash was intended for ornament. It does not appear that it was bound about the priest's waists under his garments, for if so, it would not have been seen and would not have been an instructive symbol—this sash must be seen, since it was meant to be a type of a people who were to be unto God, "for a people, and for a name, and for a praise, and for a glory." Is not this wonderful beyond all wonder, that God should make His people His Glory? Yet so it is, for true Believers become an ornament unto God, adorning the doctrine of God, their Savior, in all things. Is it not written, "You shall also be a crown of glory in the hands of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hands of your God"? Like as when a man puts on his jewels, or a prince puts on his royal attire, so does God regard His elect "as the jewels of a crown," and to prove His value of them, He arrays Himself with His people as with a sash!

Can it be so, that God is glorified in His saints? Is it so that Christ, Himself, is admired in them that believe as well as by them that believe? Do we, after all, illustrate the magnificence of God and show to principalities and powers in the heavenly places what God can do? Yes, it is so! You can easily perceive what true glory God has in us if we are sincere. Is it not to His honor that we, who were disobedient and obstinate and hard-hearted should, by His love, be subdued to the obedience of the faith? Does not this show His Glory—that we creatures, possessed of the very dangerous possession of a free will, nevertheless, without violating that will, are led to obey His commands with pleasure and delight?

Is it not to the praise of His Grace that we, who are, under some aspects, the meanest of His creatures, seeing that we have been guilty of such gross sin, are, nevertheless, set next to Himself and made to be His dear children? Next to God, the Redeemer, comes man, the redeemed! Yes, God and man are united—wondrously united in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. What can more grandly set forth the adorable love and goodness of Jehovah!? What great things God has done for us, already, in having taken us up out of the horrible pit and out of the miry clay! Let this stand as His beautiful sash—that He passes by transgression, iniquity and sin. Let this be His Divine adornment—that He is the Lord God, merciful and gracious. Hallelujah!

But how much greater things He will yet do for us! I know that He has taken us from the dunghill, but then it follows that He has set us among princes, even the princes of His people. We are not always sitting among princes, yet, but we shall be elevated to the throne before long! Our spirits, rid of this clay, shall rise up among spiritual dignities and powers, not second to the most exalted of them—and then shall an astonished universe behold the mercy of the Lord! Yet once more, when the blast of the archangel shall have awakened the sleeping dead, even these poor material bodies, made like unto Christ's glorious body, shall share the glory of the Son of Man. Truly "it does not yet appear what we shall be" for there are great things, yet, for men—and the race of men to whom God has had a special favor shall yet be highly

exalted and have dominion over all the works of His hands and He shall put all things under his feet.

II. But now, alas, we have to turn our eyes sorrowfully away from this surpassing glory! These people who might have been the glorious sash of God, displayed in their own persons A FATAL MISSION. Did you notice it? Thus says the Lord unto Jeremiah, "Go and get you a linen sash, and put it around your waist, and put it not in water." Ah, me! There is the mischief—the unwashed sash is the type of an unholy people who have never received the great cleansing. God is pure and holy and He will wear clean garments, but of this garment it is said, "Put it not in water." The priests of Jehovah were continually washing, but of this sash, we read, "Put it not in water."

Now, when a man seems to be bound to God, and to be used of God, if he has never undergone the great cleansing, he will sooner or later come to a terrible end. "If I wash you not, you have no part with Me," is a very solemn word from the Lord Jesus, Himself. Oh, my Brothers and Sisters, I invite you to meditate upon this for a moment! No nearness to God can save you if you have never been washed by the Lord Jesus! No official connection can bless you if you have never

been washed in His most precious blood! No matter though you may seem to be an ornament of the Church and all men may think so, and even good men may bless God for you—if you have never been washed—you are not Christ's!

If Jesus Christ, your Lord and Master, has never enabled you to say, "We have washed our robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb," then, the great cleansing having been omitted, you will be shut out of the marriage supper of the Lamb. Oh the terror of that sentence—"Put it not in water"! Surely, this is what Satan desires—his malice cannot exceed the wish that we may never be cleansed from our iniquities! How accursed are those of whom Solomon says, "There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet is not washed from their filthiness." If that one, first, perfect washing has never exercised its purifying influence upon you, my Brothers, it is all in vain for you to bear the vessels of the Lord and to be thought to be great and to be eminent in His house, for you must be put away!

On the spot let each one of us pray, "Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." God loves purity and will not keep unholy men in nearness to Himself. Here is the alternative for all professors—you must be washed in the blood of Christ, or be laid aside—which shall it be? The Prophet was bid not to put it in water, which shows that there was not only an absence of the first washing, but there was no daily cleansing. Take heed, Beloved, that you omit not those after-washings which must follow the washing in the blood of the Lamb. When our blessed Lord took a towel and a basin and went to wash the disciples' feet, He did not perform a superfluous action! Peter was misguided when he said "You shall never wash my feet." It is necessary that we be washed every day. Even "if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin."

We are constantly defiling our feet by marching through this dusty world and every night we need to be washed. There is sin within us as well as sin outside us and even if we do not leave our chamber, but have to lie upon a sickbed all day long, impatience is quite enough to defile our feet—and we greatly need to be cleansed. The first grand washing is never repeated—that great bath does its work so effectually that the putting away of guilt is perfected once and for all and forever! When our Lord bowed His head and gave up the ghost, He offered an effectual Atonement by which all the guilt of His redeemed was eternally put away. "This Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high"—and he that has that one washing needs not except to wash his feet.

But the foot-bath is always necessary. Stains of pilgrimage, stains of service, stains of grief, stains of pleasure, stains of our holy things—these must still be put away. What with pride, or doubt, or ill-desire, or imagination, or anger, or forgetfulness or error, we are always being defiled and always need to be put in water to undergo that washing in water by the Word of God of which the Apostle speaks. If, dear Friends, you and I live without washing, we live in a way that renders us unfit for Divine service! And have you not found it so? I know this, that if you suffer a sin to lie on your conscience, you cannot serve God aright while it is there. If you have transgressed as a child and you do not run and put your head into your Father's bosom and cry, "Father I have sinned!" you cannot do God's work.

The external part of it you may perform, though there will often be a great weakness even there. But as for the spiritual and vital part, it will be sadly deficient. If you try to write the epistle of life with an unwashed hand, it will tremble and every line you write will be in the shaky handwriting of paralysis. "He that has clean hands shall wax stronger and stronger," but the foul hand shall wax weaker and weaker! There must be this washing or there cannot be abundant working. If you do not know yourself to be "accepted in the Beloved." If you do not know yourself to be clean every whit, you will not be happy with God! And when you are not happy with Him, your mind will be taken off from work for Him to work for yourself. You will be thinking about your own imperfection rather than His perfection—the sin of any single day, though it will not destroy you, will grieve you.

A stone in your shoe, though almost invisible, will spoil a day's journey. It is not a great rock to grind you to powder. It is only a little stone, but your foot will blister before you have walked many miles. Ah me, how great the pain of a single unconfessed sin! The best thing you can do is to take off your shoe at once and remove the stone before you, again, put down your foot. So it is with every little sin—if it is only a thought, if it is only a look the wrong way—go to your Father and get rid of it! Do not live a day out of fellowship with God, no, nor an hour under the Lord's frown! You know how it is with your dear child when he has done wrong. He does not expect that you will turn him out of doors and say, "You shall not be my child," but he does expect you to be grieved with him!

Children are believers in the "final perseverance" of parental love—they expect always to be your children—but if you are a wise father, they do not feel happy when they have done wrong. You have not, perhaps, found out their disobe-

dience, but the kiss at night is not half as warm as usual, for they are afraid that Father will soon know of their fault and will be angry. When God deals with us as a father who has seen his child's naughtiness, there is no peace or rest in our spirit. Even chastisement, however, is better borne than a sense of having offended. If you gave your naughty child a good whipping at once, it would comfort him, for your displeasure would be over—but as long as you do not chastise him, but only say, "No, my Child, I cannot have dealings with you while you act so. I have no word of love for you, for you are so wicked"—then the dear child will be sorely troubled until your anger is over. He will be ready to break his little heart until you forgive him and comfort him, saying, "I shall put the matter away this time, for I see you are sorry, and I hope you will not behave so badly again."

Brethren, this holy, filial fear of the Lord is not servitude under the Law; it is not trying to be saved by what we do—it is the discipline of the Father's house and that is what we attend to when we ask for daily washing. There was a fatal flaw about this sash—it had never been washed—and it is a fatal thing if you and I can go from day to day without being cleansed by our blessed Lord. Oh Lord, purge me by Your continual pardon! Cleanse me this day from every spot, for Your sweet mercy's sake! But observe, once

again, that the more this sash was used, the more it gathered great and growing defilement. It was a Prophet that wore it, but even with such wear the unwashed sash began to be spotted and stained. And as he might not put it into water, the more often the Prophet went out to his daily work—the more the sash was used—the more service it performed, the more worn and dirty it became.

It will be just the same with us if no water is applied and there is no application of the cleansing blood of Christ. Without the Atonement, the more we do, the more we shall sin. Our very prayers will turn into sin! Our godly things will breed evil! We shall be preaching and when we preach we shall preach our condemnation! We shall gather our class about us and talk to them of good things—and all the while there will be in our consciences the thought that we are not acting as we talk, or living as we tell them to live—and we shall be growing blacker and more defiled from hour to hour. Oh, Lord, deliver us from this! Save us from being made worse by that which should make us better! Save us from turning even our service into sin, our prayers into abominations and our Psalms into mockery! Let us be Your true people and therefore let us be washed that we may be clean, that You may gird Yourself with us.

III. Very soon that fatal flaw in the case here mentioned led, in the third place, to A SOLEMN JUDGMENT. It was a solemn judgment upon the sash, looking at it as a type of the people of Israel. First, the sash, after Jeremiah had made his long walk in it, was taken off and put away. It is an awful thing when God takes off the man that has once appeared to be on Him and lays him aside, as He did Saul when He finally gave him up and took the kingdom from him. Yes, and it is a solemn thing, also, when the Lord takes off the man that has been really bound to Him and, for a time, lays him aside and says, "I cannot use you. I cannot wear you as Mine. I cannot work with you. You can be no ornament to Me—you are defiled." He puts away the spoiled sash—in other words, He works no longer with the backsliding professor.

This is a terrible thing to happen to any man. I would rather suffer every sickness in the list of human diseases than that God should put me aside as a vessel in which He has no pleasure, and says to me, "I cannot wear you as My sash, nor acknowledge you as Mine before men." That would be a dreadful thing! Is there one here who has come into that condition? Has the Lord left you to your backsliding? Learn the lesson of my text! What you need, my Friend, is to be cleansed in the double stream which John of old saw flowing from the Redeemer's riven side! You need spiritual cleansing before the Lord can put you on, again, and use you, again, and be one with you, again—and before you can be, again, unto Him a praise and a glory. While you are unclean you are dishonoring Him and He must set you aside.

After that sash was laid aside, the next thing for it was hiding and burying. It was placed in a hole of the rock by the river of the captivity and left there. Many a hypocrite has been served in that way. God has said to His servants, "Put Him out of the Church. He is defiled." And there has been nothing heard of him any more. He may have been offended at being put aside and have gone into the world altogether—and though he once seemed to be as the very sash of God, yet he has rotted and decayed into corruption and open transgression, for the raw material of hypocrisy soon decays and turns into loathsomeness. The worst things are frequently the rot of the best things and so the worst characters grow out of those who apparently were once the best.

Thus, this sash is put away, hidden and left. God will have nothing to do with it! He has put it aside. And now the sash spoils. It was put, I dare say, where the dampness and the wet acted upon it, and so, when, in about 70 days, Jeremiah came back to the spot, there was nothing but an old rag instead of what had once been a pure white linen sash.

He says, "Behold the sash was marred; it was profitable for nothing." So, if God were to leave any of us, the best men and the best women among us would soon become nothing but marred sashes instead of being as fair white linen. Alas, for certain goodly professors that did appear to be very fine, once, what rotten old rags they come to be when they are put into the hole and left to themselves!

We have seen it. They have only been fit, at last, to be put upon the dust heap with useless things. They have fallen into such a horrible condition of mind that they can do evil without check of conscience—they have forgotten how to blush! The same persons who did run well (what hindered them?) are now found, not only sleeping in the harbors of sloth, but rioting in chambers of wantonness! The glorious sash of God, as the man seemed to be, becomes a mass of rottenness! What does the text say? Let me read the words, for I should not like to say them of myself—"Behold, the sash was marred, it was profitable for nothing." And again in the 10th verse—"Which is good for nothing." So may men become who have not been washed! So will they become unless God, in His infinite mercy, gives them speedily expiation through His Son, renewing by His Spirit.

I desire to profit you all and so I want to notice how true this is of the real children of God. I could speak this even weeping. There are certain real children of God whom God greatly honored at one time, so that they were as His sash. But they were proud and were soon defiled with other sins. And so the Lord has laid them aside from His service. They are still His, but He has put them under discipline—and as a part of that discipline He has banished them from His public service. They were once everywhere in the Lord's battles, but now they are nowhere. He knows where He has put them and they will remain there till their pride is quite gone.

When the Lord has effected this purpose, His wandering servant will come back with an altered tale, and you shall hear him as he laments himself and cries—"I do not feel fit to be in God's Church! I have walked in such a way that if I were cast off altogether it would be my just deserts. Oh that I may be forgiven." The deep repentance of returning wanderers makes you feel that they are the children of God though they have dishonored Him—and you welcome their return, saying, "Come with us, and enjoy the means of Grace." Alas, they answer—

"The saints are comforted, we know, Within the house of prayer; We often go where others go, And find no comfort there."

One man sighs, "I have a Sunday school class, and I teach it, but I do not feel tenderly for the children as I once did. There is no power about me. I am a branch of the tree that appears to have no sap in it. I bear no fruit. Alas," he cries, "I do not enjoy private prayer and when I pray, and pour out my soul before God, I do not obtain a comfortable answer! I am as one that is forgotten." Is it at all amazing that God frowns when we disobey? The Lord will not hear those who decline to hear Him! If we are deaf to His Commandments, He will be deaf to our prayers. You have become defiled, for you have not watched your steps, and now the Lord cannot be in communion with you. You have not been careful and so the sash has become foul with public spots and private foulnesses!

And the Lord says, "I cannot use that man; I cannot be in fellowship with him. If I would, it would ruin him." If God were to be kind and tender to His children when they are living in sin, it would encourage them in evil and they would go from bad to worse! If a Believer grieves God, he must be grieved, himself. The heavenly Father takes down the rod and though it is more pain to Him than it is to us, He will not spare us for our crying. Just because He loves us He will lay on His strokes thick and heavy, one after the other,

perhaps in sharp affliction, but very often in a continuous and growing loss of all that made us happy and useful.

Alas! Alas! The sash is marred and the Lord has hid it out of His sight! Oh, what a mercy it is that the Lord can take that sash and wash it and make it as good as new, and even better than at the first! He can give back to the man his old joy with an added experience which will make him humble and tender. He can restore his former usefulness and even increase it by teaching him to deal gently with others that err and, by enabling him to prize and value the mercy of God. Did you ever get into a corner and sing that verse, "Love I much? I've more forgiven. I'm a miracle of Grace"? Those sweet lines have often charmed my inmost heart. I have wanted to love my Lord infinitely! I have wished that I could love Him as much as seven million hearts put together could love Him!

I would love Him as much as the whole universe could love Him! I wish I had His Father's love to Him, for what do I not owe Him for all His wonderful mercy to me? And do you not feel the same? Are you not, also, great debtors to Sover-

eign Grace? If you do not at any time kindle love and gratitude, I am afraid that you are put in the hole with the sash and that you are rotting away. Sad case for you! Certain of God's people are marvelously high-minded—they cannot sit anywhere but in the big armchair, or at the head of the table. They cannot mingle with any of us common Christians at all because they are perfect—and we are a long way from making any claim to such a degree of excellence. Some of the hymns that we are glad to sing are not good enough for them, for they cry, "We hate hymns of this style! They are so below our experience."

These are the dons and grandees of the Court of Arrogance! When I see fine professors coming in with the seven league boots on, I am always afraid that they are not God's children at all because I have never read of any true saints who said much in praise of themselves and I have read of so many gracious persons whose tone and temper were the very reverse of this lofty boasting! I have seen God's poor little child like Moses in a basket on the Nile with crocodiles all round ready to devour him—and when I have looked at him, I have always noticed that which the Holy Spirit took pains to record—"Behold, the babe wept." This was the real Moses—those crystal drops are the tokens of a goodly child! The tears of God's babes are wonderfully precious and they have great power with Him.

The dragons of Nilus cannot devour a weeping Moses. "When I am weak, then am I strong." When you are so weak that you cannot do much more than cry, you coin diamonds with both your eyes! The sweetest prayers God ever hears are the groans and sighs of those who have no hope in anything but His love! There is music in our moaning to His kind and tender ears. He can restore you, even though you are as the marred sash. And when He once puts you on again, you will cling to His waist more closely than ever, praying that He will bind you fast about Him. But the worst part of it—and this I finish with—is that this relates undoubtedly to many mere professors whom God takes off from Himself, laying them aside and leaving them to perish.

And what is His reason for doing so? He tells us this in the text—He says that this evil people refused to receive God's words. Dear Friends, never grow tired of God's Word! Never let any book supplant the Bible! Love every part of Scripture and take heed to every Word that God has spoken. Let it all be a Divine Word to you, for if not, when you begin to pick and choose about God's Word, and do not like this, and do not like that, you will soon become like a marred sash—for the base-hearted professor is detected by his not loving the Father's words.

Next to that, we are told that they walked in the dictates of their hearts. That is a sure sign of the hypocrite or the false professor. He makes his religion out of himself, as a spider spins a web out of his own bowels! What sort of theology it is, you can imagine, now that you know its origin! This base professor grows his theology on his own back as the snail produces her shell! He is everything to himself—his own savior, his own teacher, his own guide! He knows so much, that if the world would only sit at his feet, it would become a wonderfully learned world in a very short time, so great a Rabbi is he! When a man is so puffed up that his own imagination is his inspiration, and his obstinacy holds him fast in his own opinion, then he has become as the sash which was taken from the Prophet's waist and put into a hole to rot away.

Upon all this there followed actual transgression—"They walked after other gods to serve them and to worship them." This happens, also, to the base professor. He keeps up the name of a Christian for a little while and seems to be as God's sash. But by-and-by he falls to worshipping gold, or drink, or lust. Bacchus, or Venus becomes his deity. He turns aside from the infinitely glorious God and so he falls from one degradation to another till he hardly knows himself! He becomes as a rotten sash "which profits nothing." Neither God nor man are benefited by him. The Lord save you, dear Friends, from being found insincere in the day when He searches the heart. May He also save us from failing to be washed in the most precious blood. Is not this a fit subject for immediate and continuous prayer? See to it! The Lord bless you for His name's sake. Amen.

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