

# Unknown Depths and Heights

by C.H. Spurgeon

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*C.H. Spurgeon reveals the profound depths of human sinfulness and the boundless heights of Christ's mercy as expressed in His plea for forgiveness on the Cross.*

**Scripture:** Luke 23:34, Job 9:30-31, Psalm 2:4, Isaiah 53:4-6

**Topics:** "Sinfulness of Sin", "Divine Mercy", "Christ's Atonement"

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## Description

In this powerful sermon, C.H. Spurgeon explores the profound depths of human sinfulness and the astonishing mercy of Christ as He prays for forgiveness on the Cross. Spurgeon expounds on the blindness of sinners who do not comprehend the eternal consequences of their actions and reveals the intense hatred God has for sin. Through vivid imagery and biblical insight, he calls listeners to repentance and trust in the cleansing power of Christ's sacrifice. This sermon challenges believers to grasp both the seriousness of sin and the greatness of divine grace.

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## Transcript

"Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." Luke 23:34.

[Other Sermons by Mr. Spurgeon upon Christ's cries from the Cross (in addition to those mentioned later) are as follows: #2562, Volume 44—CRIES FROM THE CROSS; #2803, Volume 48—THE SADDEST CRY FROM THE CROSS; #2344, Volume 40—CHRIST'S DYING WORDS FOR HIS CHURCH; #2311, Volume 39—OUR LORD'S LAST CRY FROM THE CROSS and #2644, Volume 45—THE LAST WORDS OF CHRIST ON THE CROSS.]

IT needs a tongue as eloquent as that which uttered these words to fitly describe the scene before us. Christ, the King of kings, and yet the sorrowful Substitute for sinners, has been stripped naked. The mocking soldiers have unconsciously fulfilled the Scripture which said, "They parted My raiment among them, and for My vesture they did cast lots." He has been thrown roughly to the ground. His legs and arms have been stretched out upon the transverse wood. Rough hands have grasped the cruel nails. Stern blows have been dealt with the heavy hammer—He now begins to know the physical sufferings of crucifixion. He looks down to the faces of the men who have been putting him to exquisite torture and to bitter shame and utters not a single word of complaint, much less of accusation or of vengeance. And He breathes a prayer, "Father, forgive them"—My murderers, the rough men who have stripped Me, the cruel men who have nailed My hands and pierced My feet—"Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

Brothers and Sisters, the sayings of Christ upon the Cross have a deeper meaning than that which appears upon the surface. They were texts of which His eternal life should be the sermon—they were no common words. As no Word of Scripture is of private interpretation, no Word of the Savior upon the Cross loses its force and significance in later times. What He said then, He is saying now. What He said then was but the utterance of a sentence which shall roll through the ages and which shall prevail with God through time and throughout eternity. "Father, forgive them," was the prayer of a dying Man, but it was not a dying prayer. "They know not what they do," was the plea of lips that were about to be closed, but it was no plea which was doomed to silence—it is heard in Heaven today, as much as when Jesus first offered it on Calvary from His Cross!

The text seems to me to be of great depth. I shall not attempt to fathom it tonight, but reserve it for some future sermons, only tonight exploring two of its parts, rather flitting like a swallow across its surface, than like the leviathan stirring its depths. [Mr. Spurgeon carried out this intention with Sermons #897, Volume 15—THE FIRST CRY FROM THE CROSS and #2263, Volume 38—

#### CHRIST'S PLEA FOR IGNORANT SINNERS.]

There are two things in the text, the unknown depths of sin—"They know not what they do." And the unknown heights of mercy, as manifested in Christ's dying plea—"Father, forgive them." May God grant His blessing while I shall endeavor to set forth both, according as the Spirit of God shall enable me to do so!

I. And first, my Friends, it appears from the text that THERE ARE UNKNOWN DEPTHS IN HUMAN INIQUITY. "They know not what they do."

You will tell me, perhaps, that Christ applied this remark to His murderers who did not know that He was the Son of God, for if they had known Him to be the Messiah, "they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory." And it might have been said to them, "You did it ignorantly in unbelief." I grant you that this was the immediate meaning of Christ's words, but I think, to return to what I have already affirmed, this saying is true of the entire human family—whenever any of us sin, we know not what we do. Do not misunderstand me. There is no man in the world who has not enough perception left to teach him the difference between right and wrong. Even upon the natural conscience of man there is

engraved so much of the Law of God that his conscience either accuses or excuses him. I can scarcely think that there is any race of bushmen, or that there is a single tribe of aboriginal savages who have altogether lost that "candle of the Lord which searches all the inward parts of the belly." They know enough to leave them without excuse, so that if they perish, they perish through willful sin. Yet I must admit, at the outset, that it is possible for the conscience to become so blind through prevailing customs, so seared through lengthened habit and so preserved through absolute ignorance, that men may sin and yet know not what they do. There may be some in whom the judgment has left its seat—they have become maniacs so far as any moral judgment is concerned. They sin with both their hands and, perhaps, write down that very sin as being righteousness, and their obscenity as being a sacrifice acceptable to God! There are none such, however, here. I think in a land like this, with an open Bible, with a preached Gospel, with the Presence of the Spirit of God, I need not address such an assembly as this as not knowing what they do in that sense. If you sin, my Hearers, you sin against light and knowledge. You sin knowing that you do wrong. You put out your hand to touch the accursed thing knowing that it is accursed. You sin willingly and many shall be your stripes, seeing that you know your Master's will and do it not! But

still, of the whole human race it is nevertheless true that when they sin, "they know not what they do." Let me show you, as briefly and forcibly as I can, how this is the fact.

Who among us knows, to the full, the real meaning and nature of sin? I can give some description to you of what sin is, but I question, Brothers and Sisters, whether even the most enlightened of us know the whole of the exceeding sinfulness of sin. Sinner, I address myself pointedly to you. Do you know that when you sin, you call God a fool? You say that His Law is not the best thing for you, that He has made a mistake and has asked you to do that which would not conduce to your happiness. You call God a fool—is that nothing? Do you know that when you sin, you call God a liar? He tells you that sin is a bitter and an evil thing. You say, "No, it is sweet. It is pleasant. At any rate, I will taste it." You give the lie to the Eternal God! Is that nothing? Whenever you sin, you call God a tyrant. You do, in fact, avow that He has given Laws which are hard and arbitrary, which He ought not to have given and which you are determined to break because you feel that they are not for your happiness—they do not promote your comfort! And is this nothing? Is this nothing—to call the all-wise God a fool, the truthful God a liar and the good and generous God a tyrant?

But there is more than this in your sin. Every time a man sins, he aims a blow at the crown of God. He refuses to let God be the King but puts his hand, his wicked hand, upon the diadem of Deity and would dash the crown from God's head if he could. No, more! He aims a blow at God's very existence. The language of sin is, "No God!" And every time a sinner sins, he tries to get rid of God—and his aim and drift is to stop the Eternal One and to put the King of kings out of His own universe. Is this nothing? Is this nothing? Does not even this, feeble though the explanation is, make sin to be exceedingly sinful? Verily, when we sin, we know not what we do! I can hardly believe that there is a man or woman in this assembly who would, in cold blood, stand up and say, "I defy God! I will do my best to drive Him from His throne. Yes, and to drive Him from existence!" And yet, Sinner, every time you curse, or lie, or swear, or break God's Law in any way whatever, you do, in fact, do all these things and I think I may say you know not what you do.

Let us now shift the kaleidoscope and get another view of this great and solemn Truth of God. Some of us know what we do if we judge of sin by its loathsomeness in God's sight. There is no man living who knows how much God hates and abhors sin! You may detest the loathsome toad. You may give way to a wicked disposition and hate some enemy till you cannot live till that enemy is slain. But you cannot loathe the toad, you cannot hate your foe so thoroughly as God abhors and hates sin! Wherever sin is, there is God's utmost hate, anger and ire. He cannot endure it! His eyes cannot light upon it without burning it up and His hand is always longing to smite it to the death. Why, look Sirs, God had a choice archangel—a glorious being whose wings were like the beams of the rising sun, whose stature was like a great snow-clad mountain and whose beauty was as a fair field girt with flowers. He sinned and God spared neither him nor the angels that followed him in his rebellion, but cast them down to Hell and reserved them "in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day." Angelhood could not save an angel—angelic stature, a seraphic voice and a cherubic flight could not save Satan and his hosts when the stain of sin had fallen on them! How much, then, must God hate sin?

When God had made the world, He smiled and said, "It is good." The morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy, for the world was very good and God's own heart was glad at the sight of the new-made world. But when Adam sinned, God did not spare Eden, with all its perfections of beauty! And later, when the iniquity of man

was fully ripe, He did not spare the round world itself, but bade the floods leap up from their cavernous darkness and bade the clouds burst their swaddling bands, and the earth was covered with a flood, for "it repented the Lord that He had made man on the earth, and it grieved Him at His heart."

No, if we still want to see more clearly how God hates sin, let us see how sin came upon His own Son, His only-begotten, His well-beloved Son. It came there, not by any deed of His own, but because He took our iniquities upon Himself and, therefore, was numbered with the transgressors. And did His Father spare Him? Far from it! He smote Him with the rod, He scourged Him with the lash, He pierced Him to the heart with His sword. He gave up His darling to the power of the dog, and "Lama Sabachthani?" was a sorrowful proof that God hates and loathes sin, let it be wherever it

may. [See Sermon #2133, Volume 36—"MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?"] Now, Sirs, would you go and press to your bosom and dandle and pamper and pet that thing which God loathes and hates? I think not. If we ever had, before our eyes, God's hatred of sin and this were revealed to our heart by the Holy Spirit, we would long to be rid of it and, therefore, I say that when we take hold of it and embrace it, we know not what we do.

Again, what man among us knows sin in its awful consequences? Is there a mother here who would go home tonight and ask herself the quickest way to damn her child's soul? Is there a father here who would take counsel with his own wickedness as to the readiest method of sending his son to Hell? I think not. And yet, when the father is a drunk or a swearer, what does he do but do his worst to ruin his child? And when the mother is prayerless, Godless, Christless, does she not do her utmost to murder her child's soul? Verily, we in our relationships, when we go into sin, know not what we do! What master could sit down wantonly to undermine the spiritual health of his workmen? What citizen would wish to become the deadly upas tree dropping poison from all its branches? What man of influence would wish to be the basilisk whose eyes should tempt men to their destruction? Not one! And yet when you commit iniquity—and especially those of you who occupy the responsible position of parents, or masters, or ministers, or employers in any way—you do your best to destroy the souls of others! So I can truly say, "Surely you know not what you do."

Do you know, Sinner, that every time you sin, your sin affects the whole world? Let me not stagger you. It is only our finite vision which prevents us seeing the effect of even one thought upon the entire universe. The word I am speaking, just now, sets in motion a wave in the air which reaches your ears. It will abide in your memory, to a certain degree, throughout eternity. In limiting the sphere of my voice to your ears, I have set eternity pulsating—you shall think these things over either in the waves of fiery Hell, or in the fields of glorious Heaven. Eternity has been affected by the speech of a man! And so it is with what you do—there is an effect produced on earth, in Heaven, in Hell by whispered blasphemy or by an unseen lust—you cannot sin alone! You are part of a universe—you cannot disentangle yourself from the meshes of the net of society. You are in the ship of the universe and you cannot get out of it. You cannot even be thrown out of it, as Jonah was cast out of the ship into the sea. Your sin is dragging other men down to Hell, or else the Grace that is in you is helping to lift up others towards God and Heaven. Mind that when you sin, for from this day on I think that you will hardly be able to say as, perhaps, you may have done before, that you know not what you do.

But Sinner, let me speak to you solemnly—to you—about something in which no imagination is needed. Do you see that man yonder? What is he doing? I see a pearly gate within which I mark the splendors of unutterable bliss and hear the hymns of the Paradise of God! What is that man doing? He is putting bolts

and bars upon that gate to shut himself out. Do you call him a madman? Sinner, that madman is you! Your sins are shutting you out of Heaven. Do you see yonder man? He is carrying wood on his weary shoulders and stooping to the very ground as he bears his burden. For what purpose is he carrying that fuel? It is to make a bed of fire on which he shall lie and swelter in flames forever! Do you call him a madman? Sinner, that madman is yourself! What is Hell but the laying on upon your back of a whip whose knots you have yourself tied? What is it but the drinking of a cup of gall, every drop of which was distilled from your own sin? These are awful things to say, but I feel that when I look at what Hell is, in all its horrors, and what the loss of Heaven is, with all its dreadful darkness, I must say to you when you sin, surely you know not what you do! The man who puts himself to death with the halter, or drives the knife into his heart, or throws himself into his watery grave may have some present griefs which may, to him, though not to us, seem to be an excuse for fleeing from them. But you, when you sin, are a suicide without excuse because you flee from good that stands before you to an evil that has no mixture of benefit or mercy! You leap into the fire yourself—a fire which you have yourself kindled and which your own blasphemous breath has fanned! Oh, may God teach us, when we sin, what we have really done, that we may not do it again and that, by His Grace, we may be led to the precious blood of Christ to have the guilt of it washed away!—

"There is a fountain filled with blood, Drawn from Emmanuel's veins. And sinners plunged beneath that flood Lose all their guilty stains."

Only once more upon this point and then I will leave it. "They know not what they do." Sinner, do you know that when you sin, eternity is involved in every act? Faith binds me to eternal bliss—sin and unbelief fetter me to everlasting woe. I think I hear the voice of a spirit which has been these last ten years in Hades. Listen! Listen! There is a cry, a groan, but now the words are audible—"Fool that I was to come here! Here I am tortured in indescribable agony that is to go on forever—and for what? For a few hours of giddy mirth, for a few silly jokes that I might indulge my pride rather than submit to the Free Grace of God. Why am I here? Because I would serve Satan—and God knows that it was a bitter service and what little sweet it had is all forgotten now." Do you hear this man as he speaks to himself? "Oh, if I could ever escape from this dreadful dungeon, it would be a Heaven to me! If these awful fires could be quenched, if this gnawing worm would but die, then I would be content! If after ten thousand, thousand, thousand years I could hope to make my escape from this pit of woe, it would set all the bells of my heart a-ringing for very joy at the bare possibility that, at last, I might escape! But what is it that I see written before me? Forever! Forever, on my chains! Forever, branded on my limbs of pain! Forever, on yon waves of fire! Forever, in the angry gaze of an incensed Deity! Forever, in those hungry depths which seem to yawn to suck me into deeper woe! Forever, forever, forever, forever!" O drunkard, swearer, whoremonger—when you sin the next time, remember that the deed you do entails everlasting consequences which will run on forever, forever, FOREVER! Surely, when you have sinned in the past, you must have been ignorant of this overwhelming Truth of God—you could not have known what you were doing!

Job speaks of washing himself with snow water and trying to make himself clean. And this he speaks of right earnestly. However far from the hot plains in which he lived, Job might have to send for snowy water—whatever quantity of soap (for in the Hebrew there is an allusion to soap in the second clause)—however much nitre and soap he might have to take in order to wash himself perfectly clean, it was worth all the expense and trouble if only it could be accomplished.

And, dear Friends, we must be clean in the sight of God. We must desire to be clean in the sight of God for, if not, we are the objects of His continual displeasure. 'God is angry with the wicked every day.' This is a solemn Truth of God which is far too much forgotten in the present day. Many have tried to put the

thought of it right on one side and held forth only the Doctrine of the Divine Benevolence. But while that Doctrine is blessedly true, these solemn declarations are equally true, "The wicked shall be turned into Hell, and all the nations that forget God." And, "He that believes not, is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God." Now, if we were right-hearted towards God, this would seem to us to be a very dreadful thing. We little know how exceedingly hateful sin is to

God. [See Sermon #3068, Volume 53—UNTOLD DEPTHS AND HEIGHTS.] You

know that there are some things which you and I sometimes see which are very disgusting and loathsome to us. I went into a railway station in Italy once, where I saw a man who had lost his arm and who by way of begging, exposed to us the stump of it and also a horrible ulcer from which he was suffering. I turned away sick at the sight and dreaded to go to that station again, for fear that I should be met inside the door of the waiting room by that horrible spectacle! But, depend upon it, no mutilation and no disease of man's body was ever so sickening to the most delicate taste as sin is sickening to God! He loves purity and, therefore, He must loathe impurity. He delights in those who are just and true and upright—and He cannot endure those who are unjust, false, or unrighteous. His holy soul abhors them as that strong expression of His in the prophecy of Zechariah proves—"My soul loathed them and their soul also abhorred Me." The sinner does not dislike God more than God dislikes him as a sinner. The sinless God cannot look with complacency upon him who is sinful—he is loathsome to the holy mind of God. So, surely, if we are right-hearted, we shall feel that anything and everything that we can do in order to get right with God and to become clean in His sight, we ought to do at once!

Let us also remember that as long as we are unclean, we are in daily danger of the fires of Hell. Do any of you know what Hell is? It is the leper colony of the universe! Just as in the olden times when the "black pest," or some other terrible epidemic ran through a town or village, they would build a house some miles away from the place and call it the pest house where they would put away all those who had the pest or plague—such is Hell, only a million times worse than any earthly pest house ever was! Hell is the pest house of the moral universe. You know that in countries where leprosy prevails, they shut up the lepers in a place by themselves, lest the terrible disease should pollute the whole district. And Hell is God's leper colony where sinners must be confined forever when they are incurable and past hope! And what are the pains of Hell? They are the natural result of sin. Sin is the mother of Hell. The pains and groans of lost spirits in Hell are simply the fully-developed flowers of which their sins were the seed. Bitter is the fruit, sour is the vintage of that vine of Sodom and Gomorrah which some men set themselves so diligently to plant—and so industriously to water. Sin bears its own sting within itself. The torments that are to come are the stings of conscience and the inevitable effects of remorse upon the soul and body of the man who will continue to be unclean in the sight of God! Lest, therefore, any of you should ever be shut up in that place of "everlasting destruction from the Presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power," I do beseech you to awaken yourselves and diligently seek to find out how you may be made clean in God's sight—

"You sinners, seek His Grace, Whose wrath you cannot bear! Fly to the shelter of His Cross, And find salvation there. So shall that curse remove, By which the Savior bled And the last awful day shall pour His blessings on your head."

Once more, every man will feel that it is worth his while to endeavor to be clean before God if he wants a quiet conscience, for a truly quiet conscience is never possessed by any man until he has been washed in the precious blood of Jesus and so made "whiter than snow." Does anyone ask, "Can that be done?" I

answer in God's own words. "Come now, and let us reason together, says the Lord: though your sins are as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though

they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool." This great miracle of mercy can be worked and nobody's conscience will ever be perfectly at peace till it is accomplished. There is a way of silencing conscience without that miracle being worked, but it is like the way in which cruel tyrants sometimes silenced the martyrs. "Hold your tongue," the tyrant has said, "I will not listen to your heresy." But the brave man has still gone on speaking—he would not be silenced. And then the tyrant has cut his tongue out. I think I have known men cut out the tongue of their conscience, so that it could no longer speak. Perhaps some here have done it—torn it right out by the roots by going to the drink shop, by frequenting evil company, by taking up infidel ideas when they knew better. They knew that they could not, with a clear conscience, do what they wanted to do, so they resolved that they would tear out its tongue, so that it could no longer rebuke them!

O foolish Man, you could not have done a worse thing for yourself than that, for he who quiets his conscience after that fashion is like one of whom I have heard who, one night, was unable to sleep because a faithful dog kept on howling under his window. He called out to it and bade it lie down, and went back to bed and tried to sleep, but still the howling continued. And at last, when the creature would not be quiet, he took his gun and shot it, in his anger. He ought to have known that the dog wanted to tell him that there were burglars who were trying to enter his house and that the faithful animal was doing its best to preserve its master's life. After the dog was dead and the man had gone to sleep again, the burglars entered his bedroom, stole everything of value that they could find and ended by staining their hands with the blood of the foolish man who had killed the poor creature that warned him of his peril! The devil is trying to destroy your soul and your conscience, like that faithful dog, gives the alarm, but you cry to it, "Lie down!" It does not lie down, however, and perhaps this very sermon is helping to wake it up, but you are determined that it shall be quiet and you will even kill it if you can! Well, if you do, you will then have sealed your own destiny by that very deed. The only proper way of quieting conscience is the method that a wise owner would have taken of quieting his dog. Supposing that man had gone downstairs and patted his dog on the head and praised it for being a good dog? Suppose that he had loosed its chain and taken it round the yard with him? Suppose, too, that he had taken that gun, with which he so foolishly killed his dog, and when, at last, he had discovered the villains who had come to rob him, he had set his dog on them, or even leveled his gun at them? That would have been far wiser than killing his dog and losing his own life! In such a fashion as that, go and lose your conscience and let your sins be destroyed—otherwise they will assuredly destroy you! The quieting of an awakened conscience can only be rightly done by getting rid of sin—and there is but one way to get rid of sin—of which I will speak before I have finished my discourse.

Thus much on the first point—to be clean in the sight of God is worth any and every effort.

## II. Now secondly, ALL EFFORTS OF OUR OWN, MADE IN OUR OWN WAY, WILL CERTAINLY FAIL.

It is very curious what efforts people will make to get rid of their sins. Some try to get clean by ceremonies. Ah, Mr. Priest, is that good soap that you are bringing with your bowl of water? "Yes," he replies, "the best Roman soap, or you can have a cake from Canterbury or Oxford if you would prefer it. How beautifully white your hands will look if you only use enough of this patent soap." So you say, but if you had your eyes opened, you would see that after all your washing, they are as black as night! The soapsuds get in your eyes, Sir, and therefore you do not see the dirt that is still on the sinner's hands. That is all that ever

comes of mere ceremonies—they blind, but they do not cleanse.

Another thinks that he can obtain cleansing by religious observances. His form of washing with snow water is attendance at his usual place of worship. He goes there regularly. He would never be away if he could help it! When the proper time for service comes and having done that, he asks, "Will not that take away my sin?" No, Sir, not a spot, nor even half a spot! Some have given away large sums of money with the hope of thereby cleansing themselves from sin. But all the gold in the world can never form a golden ointment with which to cleanse iniquity. There are many who have tried to get cleansing by their moralities and their charities, but their efforts have all been in vain. Mr. Legality and Mr. Civility are said to be great hands at washing Blackamoors white, but I have very grave doubts as to whether the Blackamoors are not blacker after the washing than they were before!

Men have had the strangest notions as to how they might be cleansed from sin. Read John Bunyan's *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*—which is, as you know, a record of his own experience—and you will see some very curious ideas of his concerning the way in which he hoped to wash himself from sin. Yet, his ideas are not any more curious than those of people who are now living. The other day I read a letter from a young farm laborer, describing the way in which, at one time, he hoped to get saved. He said that in the village where he lived, there were some young men who went to the Patagonian Mission and there got what he called, "massacreated." Of course, he meant to say that they were massacred. And he further wrote, "I thought that if the Patagonian Mission would have taken me and the natives would only have killed me, I would have gone joyfully and gladly, for I heard that they were all saints who died in that way and I would willingly have gone if I could have got to Heaven by that method." Yes, and so would I, and so would most of us when we were under the burden of sin. We would not have minded being killed and eaten if we might in that way have entered into eternal life, for a man who really feels the burden of sin is willing to try all sorts of extraordinary methods of getting rid of it! Look at the methods adopted by the heathen in order, as they hope, to get rid of sin. Go to India and look at the great car of Juggernaut, and see by what cruel means the people there hope to get rid of sin! And there are many other equally useless methods which the spiritual quacks are vainly puffing as unfailing ways of getting rid of sin!

But on the authority of the Word of God, we confidently declare that all human methods of seeking the cleansing of sin which men may practice must end in failure, even as Job's did when he said, "If I wash myself with snow water, and make my hands ever so clean; yet shall You plunge me in the ditch, and my own clothes shall abhor me." Yet, if God really means to save you, He will never let you be satisfied with any human plan of salvation, but He will, to use Job's expression, plunge you in the ditch and make you feel even blacker than you did before! How will He do that?

Sometimes the Lord does this by bringing to a man's memory his old sins.' 'There,' says the self-satisfied man, "I am getting on now—how clean I am after that last wash!" And just then he recollects some sin he committed as a boy, or some foul deed which he can never wipe completely off the tablet of his memory. "Oh!" he cries, "that dreadful past sin of mine has not gone as I vainly hoped that it had—it is still there." So he is again plunged in the ditch and all his beautiful washing counts for nothing!

At another time, the Lord permits the man to be greatly tempted. He gets up in the morning and says to himself, "Now I really feel a great deal better than I have felt for a long time. I have firmly resolved to make a man of myself and I know that my resolutions are much stronger than they used to be." So he starts out very confidently. But presently there comes to him something that is stronger than his resolutions—and over goes the boastful man, generally failing in the very thing in which he fancied himself to be strongest!

He soon discovers that he was only powerful as long as he had not a powerful adversary to contend with him. That is the way in which many a man has been plunged by God in the ditch.

Sometimes God will do it in another way—by opening a boastful man's eyes to see the imperfection of his work. He thinks, "I did that piece of work well. I am sure I did and I do not see how any Christian could do it better." When any man begins to talk like that, the Lord often makes him sit down and closely examine that work of which he is so proud. And as he looks at it, he sees that it is full of flaws. It is a beautiful vase, but just try to fill it with water. Ah, it leaks! The man looks at it and says, "Well, I never thought it was as faulty as this. It seemed to me to be perfect! Yet this beautiful vase that appeared to be so fair, leaks like a sieve." The man says to himself, "That good action of mine was done with a bad motive, so it is like a leaky vessel. While I was doing it, I was as proud as Lucifer over it. So it leaks—and after I had done it, I went away and boasted about it, so the vase kept on leaking." In that way the man gets plunged into the ditch and he sees himself to be blacker than he was before he had thus washed his hands with snow water!

Very frequently men have been plunged into the ditch by being made to see the spirituality of the Law. A man says, "I have not broken the Law. I have kept all the Commandments from my youth up. I never killed anybody. No one can say that I ever did." But where he finds it written, "Whoever hates his brother is a murderer," he cries, "Ah then I have been a murderer!" A man says very boldly, "I have never committed adultery! Who dares to say that I have?" But when he reads the words of Jesus, "I say unto you, that whoever looks on a woman to lust after her has committed adultery with her already in his heart," then the man says, "I must admit that I am guilty, for I see that I have broken these commandments by my thoughts and looks, although I knew that I had not broken them by my actions. I did not know that the Law concerned itself so closely with looks and thoughts as well as with acts and words." But, indeed, that is the very thing with which the Law is concerned—and for which it condemns men! And when the self-satisfied man learns this solemn Truth of God, he says, "Then I am plunged in the ditch, and my own clothes abhor me, although I had washed myself quite clean."

Others are plunged in the ditch in this way—they are made to realize the supreme holiness of God. It had been the habit of a certain man to say, "I am as good as my neighbors, and better than most of them. Don't talk to me about Christian men and women—there's many a professing Christian not half as good as I am! Why, was I not kind to my neighbor when he was in distress? Did I not give a guinea to such-and-such a charity? Am I not ready at all times to stand up for the right?" So he talks. But when he gets a view of God, then, like Job, he abhors himself and repents in dust and ashes! And he says, "I thought I could compare myself with man, but I cannot compare myself with God! And as God and not man, is the standard of holiness, I am indeed plunged in the ditch. Yet I thought I had washed myself perfectly clean—that snow water and patent soap did seem to take the dirt off beautifully—but now I find that in the sight of God I am just as filthy as I can be." And when the Lord, the Holy Spirit, convinces a man of sin, the words of Job are none too strong—"My own clothes shall abhor me." You may sometimes have abhorred your clothes because they were so dirty that you were ashamed to be seen in them. But you must be dirty, indeed, when your very clothes seem ashamed to hang upon you! This is what the convicted sinner feels—that he is so foul that his very clothes seem to be ashamed of him, as if they would rather have been on anybody else's back than on the back of such a filthy sinner as he is!

"Ah," says someone, "you are exaggerating now." No, I am not exaggerating, at least as far as my own personal experience is concerned. I can well remember—though I did not then know that John Bunyan had used somewhat similar expressions—I can well remember when I was under deep conviction of sin,

wishing that I had been a frog or a toad rather than have been a human being because I felt myself to be so foul in the sight of God. I felt that I was such a great sinner that the bread I ate might justly choke me and that the air I breathed might have righteously refused to give life to the lungs of such a sinner as I was. I felt, at that time, that if God spared me, it was only because He was boundless in compassion—and if He cast me into the hottest Hell, I could never murmur against the justice of His sentence, for I felt that I deserved any punishment that He might award me. When the Holy Spirit brings sinners to feel like this, it is a proof that He is leading them on the way by which He brings them to Christ. Oh, that the Lord would make every guilty sinner here long to be clean in His sight! And also make each one feel what is certainly the truth—that all the means in a man's own power of making himself clean will turn out to be dead failures—for though he should take snow water and wash himself ever so clean, yet would he again be plunged in the ditch and his own clothes would abhor him!

III. The last point on which I have to speak is the best. It is this—THERE IS A RIGHT WAY OF GETTING CLEAN IN GOD'S SIGHT.

First, it is an effective way. He that believes on the Lord Jesus Christ shall be made clean. He shall be cleansed from all the foulness of the past—God will wipe it right out. He shall be cleansed as to his heart and his nature. To him God repeats that ancient promise, "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you." "How is this to be had?" By trusting to the Divine method of cleansing the filthy, for the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses from all sin everyone who believes in Him. There are millions upon the earth now whom the blood of Jesus Christ has completely cleansed—and there are millions more now hymning His praises in Glory who have had every spot of sin taken out of them by the application of His precious blood! O sinful Souls, if you could ever have made yourselves clean, Christ would not have needed to pour out His life's blood that you might be washed in it! If the cleansing bath could have been filled with human tears, or could have been filled by means of the incantations of a so-called priest, there would have been no need for Your wounds, O Emmanuel, and no need of Your indwelling, O regenerating and sanctifying Spirit! But because we could not be cleansed by any other means, the water and the blood flowed freely from the pierced heart of Jesus, the Divine Son of God! And now the ever-blessed Spirit waits to be gracious and to change the heart and renew the nature and make us fit to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light!

This effective way of getting cleansed is also an immediate way. We have often sung—

"There is life for a look at the Crucified One! There is life at this moment for you"—and it is true, for there is instant cleansing for anyone who looks to Jesus Christ. A sinner may have committed more sins than he could count in a million years and yet, as soon as he gives one believing look at Jesus Christ, all those sins are gone forever! You know that when a bill is paid, the receipt is written at the bottom and that puts an end to the whole debt. So, Sinner, the name of Jesus at the bottom of the whole roll of your indebtedness to God puts an end to it all! The man who thinks he has only a few sins may bring his little bill—and you who know that you have many sins may bring your big bill—but Christ's receipt avails for one as much as the other! Even if the roll of your guilt should be many miles long, it makes no difference to the efficacy of the blood of Jesus! If the list of your sins should be long enough to go right around the world—and just one drop of the blood of Jesus should be put upon it—all that is written there would at once disappear and be gone forever! And the sinner would be saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation!

Further, this effective and immediate way of cleansing is also an attainable way of cleansing. To preach to sinners a salvation which they cannot obtain would be to tantalize them. We do not so, but to every person in this Tabernacle tonight and to everyone anywhere else whom this message may reach, we have to say this, "If you will confess your sin to God and then put your trust in Jesus Christ, His Son, you shall be saved—even you, whoever you are, and whatever sin you may have committed!" Your confession is to be made, not to your fellow creature, but to Him against whom your sins were committed. Go to your home, or seek some quiet spot where you can commune with your God. Tell Him that you have sinned, and ask Him to have mercy upon you. Tell Him that Jesus died in the place of sinners—plead the merit of His precious blood and say, "Lord, I believe that You can save me and I trust in You to save me, for Jesus' sake." If you will do this, you shall be forgiven! You shall be renewed in heart, you shall be made clean!

I have been talking to you in a very simple, homely way, for I have been afraid lest anybody should by any possibility not know what the Gospel really is. I always think that if my net has small meshes, the big fish can get in and the little fish cannot get out, So I have put small meshes to my net and talked in a homely style with simple illustrations which all can understand. The Lord knows that I have done this out of love to your souls. I would bring you all to Jesus if I could—but I cannot do that. Oh, that the Spirit of God would do it! Why do you need so much urging to come to Christ? You are filthy with sin and here is a free bath in which you may be washed spotlessly white! Come and bathe in Jesus' blood and that will make you fairer than the lilies, and lovelier than all the glories of Solomon! If you do but wash in this Fountain, you will scarcely know yourself when you come up out of it! And if you happen to meet your old self, the next day, you will say, "Ah, Self! I don't want to be on speaking terms with you anymore. I never knew that you were so ugly! I never knew that you were so filthy! I never knew that you were so abominable till I had gotten rid of you by being made a new creature in Christ Jesus."

The Lord bless you and bring you to trust in Jesus Christ, His Son, and He shall have all the praise and glory forever and forever! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON: MATTHEW5:13-26.

Verse 13. You are the salt of the earth. The earth would go putrid if there were no salt of Divine Grace to preserve it. So, dear Friends, if God's Grace is in you, there is a pungent savor about you which tends to preserve others from going as far into sin as otherwise they would have done. "You are the salt of the earth."

13. But if the salt has lost its savor, wherewith shall it be salted? If the God-given Grace could be altogether taken from you. If you had no sanctifying power about you at all, what could be done with you? You would be like salt that has lost its savor.

13. It is therefore good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. Mark this, then— either the saints must persevere to the end, or else the Grace of God has effectually done nothing for them. If they do not continue to be saints and to exercise a saintly influence, there is no hope for them! There cannot be two new births for the same person. If the Divine work has failed once, it will never be begun again. If they have really been saved, if they have been made the children of God and if it is possible for them to lose the Grace which they have received, they can never have it again. The Word of God is very emphatic upon that point—"If they shall fall away, it is impossible to renew them again unto repentance" Falling may be retrieved, but falling away can never be. [See Sermon #75, Volume 2—final

PERSEVERANCE—Read/download the entire sermon, free of charge, at <http://www.spurgeongems.org>.]

There are countries where there is found salt from which the pungency has completely gone. It is an altogether useless article and if there are men who ever did possess the Grace of God, and who were truly God's people, if the Divine life could go out of them, they would be in an utterly hopeless case. Perhaps there are no powers of evil in the world greater than apostate churches—who can calculate the influence for evil that the Church of Rome exercises in the world today?

14. You the are light of the world. The Bible is not the light of the world, it is the light of the Church! But the world does not read the Bible, the world reads Christians! "You are the light of the world."

14. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. You Christians are like a city built upon a hilltop—you must be seen. As you will be seen, mind that you are worth seeing.

15. Neither do men light a candle and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick and it gives light unto all that are in the house. God's intent is, first, to light you. And, secondly, to put you in a conspicuous position where men can see you.

16. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in Heaven. Let the light of your purity and your good works be as bright as possible, yet let not the light be to your own praise and glory, but let it be clearly seen that your good works are the result of Sovereign Grace for which all the glory must be given to "your Father which is in Heaven."

17. 18. Think not that I am come to destroy the Law, or the Prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, Till Heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the Law, till all are fulfilled. See how the great Lord of the New Testament confirms the Old Testament? He has not come to set up a destructive criticism that will tear in pieces the Book of Deuteronomy, or cut out the very heart of the Psalms, or grind Ezekiel to powder between His own wheels. But Christ has come to establish yet more firmly than before all that was written aforetime and to make it stand fast as the everlasting hills.

19. Whoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the Kingdom of Heaven: but whoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven. A true man may make mistakes and so he may teach men to violate someone or other of the Divine Commandments. If he does so, he shall not perish, for he was honest in his blunder. But he shall be among the least in the Kingdom of Heaven. But he who earnestly, perseveringly and conscientiously teaches all that he knows of the Divine Will, "the same shall be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven."

20. For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall in no case enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. Christ does not teach a lower kind of morality than the Pharisees taught. They were very particular about little things—jots and tittles—but we must go further than they went! We must have more righteousness of life than they had, although they seemed to their fellow men to be excessively precise. Christ aims at perfect purity in His people and we must aim at it too. And we must really attain to more holiness than the best outward morals can produce.

21. You have heard that it was said by them of old time, You shall not kill; and whoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment God had said, "You shall not kill." But the remainder of the verse was the gloss of the Rabbis—a true one, yet one that very much diminishes the force of the Divine Command.

22. But I say unto you, That whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment And a far higher judgment than that of men.

22. And whoever shall say to his brother, Raca. A word of very uncertain meaning, a kind of snubbing word, a word of contempt which men used to say to one another, meaning that there was nothing in them. "Whoever shall say to his brother, Raca."

22. Shall be in danger of the council: but whoever shall say, You fool, shall be in danger of Hell fire. Christ will not have us treat men with anger, or with contempt, which is a very evil form of hate, akin to murder, because we as good as say, "That man is nobody." That is, we make nothing of him, which is morally to kill him. We must not treat our fellow men with contempt and derision, nor indulge any angry temper against them, for anger is of the devil, but "love is of God."

23, 24. Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has anything against you; leave there your gift before the altar, and go your way; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Note that this injunction is addressed to the man who has offended his brother Why is this? Because he is the least likely to try to make up the quarrel. It is the man who has been offended who usually exhibits the nobler spirit—the offender is almost always the last to seek a reconciliation and therefore, the Savior says to him, "If your brother has anything against you, it is but right that you should be the first to seek reconciliation with him. Leave your gift, go away from the Prayer Meeting, turn back from the Lord's Table and go and first be reconciled to your brother."

25. Agree with your adversary quickly. Always be ready to make peace—not peace at any price—but, still, peace at any price except the sacrifice of righteousness.

25, 26. While you are on the way with him, lest at any time the adversary deliver you to the judge, and the judge deliver you to the officer, and you be cast into prison. Verily I say unto you, You shall by no means come out from there till you have paid the uttermost farthing. And there are some debts of which we cannot pay the uttermost farthing! And there is a prison out of which no man shall come, for the uttermost farthing demanded there shall never be paid. God grant that we may, none of us, ever know what it is to be shut up in that dreadful dungeon!

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