

What Self Deserves

by C.H. Spurgeon

C.H. Spurgeon teaches that true Christian mercy humbles the believer, leading them to loathe their past sins and themselves while embracing the grace and love of God.

Scripture: Ezekiel 36:31, Psalm 51:4, Isaiah 64:6, John 3:3, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Romans 9:11, John 10:11

Topics: "Grace and Mercy", "Christian Humility"

Description

In this devotional sermon, C.H. Spurgeon explores the paradox of Christian self-loathing that accompanies true forgiveness and grace. He explains how genuine conversion leads believers to loathe their past sins and themselves, not with despair but with humility and gratitude toward God's mercy. Spurgeon warns hypocrites and backsliders of the bitter remorse that awaits them if they turn to Christ. This message encourages believers to embrace their new nature and live in continual repentance and worship.

Transcript

"Ye shall loathe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities, and for your abominations."—Ezekiel 36:31.

IT HAS been the supposition of those who know not by experience that if a man be persuaded that he is pardoned, and that he is a child of God, he will necessarily become proud of the distinction which God has conferred upon him. Especially if he be a believer in predestination, when he finds that he is one of God's chosen, it is supposed that the necessary consequence will be that he will be exceedingly puffed up, and think very highly of himself. This however, is but theory; the fact lies quite another way; for if a man be truly subjected to the work of grace in the heart, and if he be then brought to trust in Jesus, and to see his sin put away by the great sacrifice, instead of being lifted up, he will be exceedingly cast down in his own sight, and as he goes on to perceive the singular mercy and peculiar privileges which God's grace has bestowed upon him, instead of being exalted, he will sink lower and lower in his own esteem, until, when he shall make a full discovery of divine love, he will become nothing, and Christ will be all in all. Mercy never makes us proud. As mercy is given to the humble, it has a humbling effect. Wherever it comes, it makes a man lie low before the throne of the heavenly grace, and leads him to ascribe all honour and glory to the God from whom the mercy comes.

It appears from our text that when Israel shall be forgiven her long years of departure from God, one of the effects of the mercy will be that she will loathe herself, and that same effect has already been produced in some of us, to whom God's abounding mercy has come. In fact, in every man here who has tasted that the

Lord is gracious, there has been one uniform experience upon this matter—we have been led to loathe ourselves in our own sight for all the sin we have done before the Lord our God. I shall try to go into this matter, trusting to be rightly guided to say fitting and useful words at this time.

First, my brethren, what is it that we have come to loathe in ourselves?; secondly, why do we loathe it?; and thirdly, what is the necessary result in us, or should be, of this self-loathing? First, then:—

I. WHAT IS IT THAT THE PARDONED SINNER LOATHES?

You will perceive that he is a pardoned sinner. The verse is inserted here in a position where it plainly belongs to those whom God has renewed in heart, whose sins are forgiven, who are fully justified and accepted. It is consistent with the full enjoyment of salvation to loathe yourself. This is the strange paradox of the Christian faith. He who justifies himself is condemned, he who condemns himself is justified. He who magnifies himself, God breaks down and casts in pieces; he who throws, himself prostrate before the throne of God's justice, he it is that God lifteth up in due time. What is it, then, that we loathe in ourselves to-day?

Our reply is, first of all, we loathe every act of our past sin. Look back, ye that have been brought to Jesus; look back upon the past. Your lives have differed. Some here have, by God's mercy, been kept from gross outward sin before their conversion; others have run wantonly into it to great excess of riot. Whichever may have been our pathway before conversion, we do now unfeignedly loathe all the sin of it, whether it were the open sin or the sin of the heart. Especially do we loathe to—night those sins which we excused at the time (which we did excuse afterwards). because we said, "Others did so," because we could not see we did any hurt to our fellow-men thereby. We loathe them because, if they did not relate to man, but only to God, it was the more vicious of us that we should rebel altogether against him. "Against thee thee only, have I sinned," is a part of the bitterness of our confession to-night. There were some sins that were sweet to us at the time: we rolled them under our tongue, poisonous though they were. and we called them sweet morsels. We would revolt against them to-night with abhorrence. Begone, ye damnable sins! By your very sweetness to me, I detect you. Fool that I must have been that such a thing as thou, could have been sweet to me. What eyes must I have had to have seen any beauty in thee! How estranged from God to love the things so foul and vile! We would recall to-night those greater sins of our life, sins perhaps which entangled others. sins which we perpetrated in the face of knowledge, after many warnings, desperate. atrocious sins. Oh! what mercy that we were not cut down while we were living in them! We turn them over and remember them, not, I trust, as some do, I am afraid, when they speak of their past lives, as if they were talking about their battles and they were old soldiers—never mention your sins without tears. Do not write much about them, if at all; it is best to do with them as Noah's sons did with their father's nakedness, go back and cast a mantle over all. God has forgiven them. Remember them only that you may repent, and that you may bless his name, but never mention them without loathing them—utterly loathing them as if they were disgusting to your spirit, and you could not speak of them without the blush mantling on your cheek.

My brethren, in addition to loathing every act of sin, I think I can hope, if our acts are right, we do, through God's mercy, loathe all the sins of omission. I will put them in this form. The time we wasted before our conversion. Perhaps some of you were not brought to Christ until you were thirty, or forty, or fifty years of age. It is a very, very happy circumstance to be saved while yet you are younger—a case for eternal thankfulness but let us think of the time we wasted, precious time, in which we might have served God, time in which we might have been learning more of him, studying his Word, and making ourselves more fit

to be used by him in after years. How much of our time ran to waste! I would especially loathe wasted Sabbaths. Some of us wasted them at home in idleness; some wasted them abroad in company. Others of us wasted them in God's house. I would loathe my elf for having wasted Sabbaths, under sermons, hearing as though I heard them not—joining in devotions in the posture, and not in the heart. And what is this but to break the Sabbath under the very garb of keeping it—thinking other thoughts and caring for other things while eternal matters were being proclaimed in my hearing. Oh! let us loathe ourselves to think that even twenty years should have gone to waste, much more thirty, or forty, or fifty years even sixty—should have been suffered to glide by, bearing nothing upon their bosom but a freight of sin, carrying nothing to the throne of God that we would wish to have remembered there. Those of us who have been converted to God would this night loathe every refusal which we gave to Christ. In those days of our unregeneracy. Dost thou remember, my brother in Christ, those early knockings at the door of thy heart by a gentle mother's word, or was it a father, or was it perhaps a Sunday School teacher, or perhaps some dear one now in glory? Oh! that ever I should have refused the Saviour, had he but presented himself to me but once! Infatuation not to be excused, to close the heart against even one of these! But many times! Some of us were very favourably circumstanced. Our mother's tears fell thick and fast for us when we were children. She would pray with us; when we read the Scriptures with her she talked to us. Her words were very faithful, very tender, and her child could not help feeling them, but waywardly he pushed aside the tears, and still forgot his mother's God. Then you know with many of us the entreaties of our youth melted into the instructions of our riper years. Do you not remember many sermons under which Christ has knocked with his pierced hand at the door of your heart? You that sit here from time to time, I know the Lord does not leave you without some strivings of heart; at least, I hope he does not. I do pray the Master to help me to put the word so that it may disturb you, and not let you make a nest in your sins, but as yet you have said "No" to Christ, and given him the go-by, even until now. As for such as are now saved, I am sure they have among their most bitter pangs of regret this, that they should ever at any time, and that they should so often and so many times have said to the Saviour, "Depart from me; I will not know thee, neither do I desire thy salvation." And if, my brethren, in addition to having refused Christ, we have come into actual collision with him by setting up our own Pharisaic estimate of ourselves, we ought to loathe ourselves to-night. We did say in our heart, "I am good enough." The filthy rags of our own righteousness have had the impertinence to compare with the fair white linen of Christ's righteousness. We thought we could put away our own sins by some method of our own, and that cross, which is heaven's wonder and hell's terror, are despised so as to think we could do without it. We might well loathe ourselves for this, if we had never committed any other transgression than this. Oh! foul pride, oh! base and loathsome pride that can make a sinner think he can do without a Saviour, and so presumptuously imagine that Christ was more than was needful, and the cross was a work of supererogation.

Did any of us go further than this? And did we ever commit persecuting acts against Christ and his people? Perhaps some of you did, and now you are his servants. You laughed at that Christian woman; why, you would go down upon your knees now if you could find her, to beg a thousand pardons, now you know her to be a child of God. You did then act very harshly and severely towards one who was a true lover of the Saviour. Perhaps you spoke opprobrious words, or did worse. As Cranmer put his hand into the fire and said, "Oh! unworthy right hand," because it had written a recantation of Christ and his truth years before. I am sure you would say it now if you have written one unkind word, or said one ungenerous word concerning a believer in Christ. And oh! if you have ever openly blasphemed, I know you loathe yourself, standing here to-night, to think those lips once cursed God, and, joining in the prayer-meeting with your prayers, to think that those lips once imprecated curses upon your fellow-men. I know your feeling must be one of very deep prostration of spirit. And even if we have not gone so far, we feel, as you

do, that we loathe ourselves for our iniquities and for our abominations. Thus might I continue to speak to your hearts, but I trust, my brethren, it will be needless to do so, for you do already loathe yourselves for your sins.

Let me close this first part of the subject by just remarking that there are some persons here who, if the Lord should ever convert them, would ever have a strong loathing for themselves. I mean, first, hypocrites. There are such in this church, there never was a church without them. They come to the communion table, and yet have no part nor lot in the matter. We know of some that have been here Sabbath after Sabbath, and they are habitual drunkards, undiscovered by us—who intrude themselves into the assemblies of the faithful, and yet at the same time make much mock and sport of our holy religion. Oh! if you are ever saved, what heart-breakings you will have! How you will hate yourselves! I shall not say one hard word about you, but I do pray God's grace will make you feel a great many hard things about yourself, and while you look up into the dear face of the crucified, and find pardon there, may you afterwards cover your face with shame, and weep to think of the mercy you have found. So, too, those who once professed Christ and have gone away altogether—they may be here. I should not wonder but what in this throne there are some that used to be religious people—put on an appearance and did run well. Now for years they have neglected prayer. That woman, once a church member, married an ungodly husband, and many a bitter day she has had since then, and to-night she has strayed in here. Ah! woman, may God bring thee back and thou wilt loathe thyself for having given up Christ for the love of a poor dying man. And others that have gone into the world for Sunday trading, or for some sort of gain, given up Christ, like Judas, who betrayed him for thirty pieces of silver. Oh! if you are ever saved, you will hate yourselves. I am sure this will be your cry within yourself, "Saviour, thou hast forgiven me, but I shall never forgive myself; thou hast blotted out my sins like a cloud, but I shall always remember them, and lay very low at thy feet all my praises while I think of what thou hast done for me." Yes, and you there have a dear one that is a persecutor, a blasphemer, an opposer of the gospel, an infidel; may you become one of those who shall abundantly loathe yourself when you shall taste of the rich, free mercy of God. Thus I have set forth what it is that a man loathes; but let me remark it is not merely his actions he loathes, but himself, to think that he could do such things. He loathes the fountain to think that it could yield such a stream; he loathes his own evil nature, the deep corruption and depravity of his heart, to think he should be so ungrateful and treat the Lord of mercy in so ungenerous a way. But now we must turn to the second part of the subject.

II. HOW IS IT, AND WHY, THAT PARDONED SOULS DO LOATHE THEMSELVES?

Reply first. Their nature is changed. God, in conversion, makes us new men. We are not altered, improved, or mended, but a new life is given us; we become new creations in Christ Jesus. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to make us to be born again, and as that which is born of the flesh is flesh, so that which is born of the Spirit is spirit, and it hates the old corrupt nature, loathes it, and fights against it to the death. And further, the moving cause for loathing ourselves is the receipt of divine mercy. "Oh!" saith the soul when it finds itself forgiven, "did I rebel against such a God as this! What! has he struck out all my sins from the roll, cast them all behind his back, and does he declare that he loves me still? Then wretch that I am that I should have revolted and rebelled against such a God as this." It is just as John Bunyan puts it. There is a city besieged, and they determine that they will fight it out to the last. They will make every street to run with blood but what they will hold it out against the king who claims the city for himself; but when his troops march up and set their ranks around the city, and it is all surrounded, the trumpet sounds for a parley, and the messenger comes forward with the white flag, and they find to their surprise that the conditions offered are so honourable, so generous, so much to their own advantage, that the king appears

not to be their enemy at all, but, in fact, to be their best friend. He will enlarge their liberties far above what they were. He will beautify their city—it was mean before. He will come and dwell in it; he will make it the metropolis of the country; he will give it markets; he will give it all it wanted. "Why," saith John Bunyan, "whereas before they were going to fortify the walls and die to a man, they fling open the gates, and they are ready to tumble over the walls to him, they are so glad to find that he treats them so generously." And it is, even so with us when we find that he blots out our sin, that he is all love and all compassion, we yield to him at once, and then shame comes, to think that it should ever have been needful for us to yield, that we should ever have taken up arms against him at all. It is a beautiful incident in English history when one of our kings was carrying on war against his rebellious son. and they met in battle, and the son was, just about to kill the father, when the father's visor was lifted up and he saw that it was his father whom he was about to kill. So the sinner, fighting against his God, thinks he is his enemy, but on a sudden he beholds it is his own Father that he has been fighting against, and he drops the weapon of his rebellion, feeling ashamed that he should have rebelled against such mercy and such favour. That is why we are ashamed, and I do pray that some here may be ashamed in the same way, for I think I hear Jehovah bewailing himself to-night. "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth; I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. The ox knoweth his owner and the ass his master's crib, but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider." Your God is good, be ready to repent and be forgiven; rebel no more.

Now after the receipt of divine mercy has brought in this feeling, the feeling is continued and promoted by everything that happens to us. For instance, every doctrine a Christian man learns after he is converted makes him loathe himself. Suppose he learns the doctrine of election. "What!" saith he, "was I chosen of God from before the foundation of the world, and did go after filthiness and uncleanness with this body? Was I dishonest and a liar, and yet loved of God before the stars began to shine?" That doctrine makes a man loathe himself. Then he learns the doctrine of redemption, and he reads, "These are they that are redeemed from among men"—a special and particular redemption. Did Jesus then die for me, as he did not die for all? Had he a special eye to me in that sacrifice of himself upon the cross? Oh! then I will smite my breast to think there ever should have been such a hard heart towards a Saviour who loved me so. There is no doctrine but what, when the heart learns it, the spirit bows down with deep shame to think it ever should have rebelled. So it is with every fresh mercy the Christian enjoys. Surely he wakes up every morning with a fresh mercy, but especially at peculiar times when our prayers have been heard, when we have been rescued out of deep distress, we lift up our eyes to heaven, and an we bless God for all his favours to us we say, "And can it be that I was once a rebel, in arms against such a God as thee? My God, my Father, did I ever blaspheme thy name? Did I ever read thy Book as a common book? Did I ever neglect thy mercy, Saviour? Then shame on me when thou hast ever been so good, so kind to me." And as the Christian grows in grace and mounts to more elevated platforms of experience, this self-loathing gets deeper when the spirit bears witness with him that he is a child of God. When he rises as a child to feel that he is an heir, and that, being an heir, he claims his heritage to sit with Christ in the heavenly places, the more he sees of God's marvellous kindness to him, the more he looks back to his past life and to the depravity of the heart within, and he says, "Shame on thy head; cover thy face with confusion; silence me before thee, oh! thou Most High, to think that after such mercy as this I should have remained so ungrateful to thee." And I suppose that as long as the Christian lives, and the further he goes in the grace of God, the deeper he goes in a disestimate of himself; it will ever be so until, as he gets to the gates of heaven, among all his joys and the growing sense of divine favour, there will be a still deeper sense of repentance for all the transgressions of his heart.

And now I shall need your attention still a few moments longer while I dwell upon the third and last point. When a soul is thus made to loathe itself:—

III. WHAT FOLLOWS?

Well, there follows, first of all, self-distrust. A man who remembers what he has been, and has a due sense of what his sin was, will never trust himself again. He thought at one time that he could resist sin; he imagined that it would be possible for him to fight against iniquity, and by daily perseverance to make something of himself. Now he has fallen so often, he has proved his own weakness so thoroughly, that all he can do now is just to look up to God, and ask for strength from on high. He cannot by any possibility rest in himself; his own weakness is so thoroughly proved. A man who knows what he used to be is conscious of what his former estate was, and will by no sort of means rely upon his own strength for a single hour. "Lead us not into temptation" will be his constant prayer, and "Deliver us from evil" will follow close upon it. When I see a man going into sinful company, a Christian professor going on to the verge of sin and saying, "I shall not fall, I can take care of myself," I feel pretty certain that that man's experience is a very flimsy one, and that it is altogether a very grave question whether he ever was pardoned and has tasted of divine grace; for if he had, he would have known what it was to loathe himself a great deal more, and to distrust himself more.

The next result in a man will be that he will not serve himself any longer. Before, he could have lived for his own honour, but now he has such a disestimate of himself that he must have a different object. Spend my life for my own honour and glory? "No," saith he, "I am not worthy of it. I, who could blaspheme heaven, or could live so long an enemy to God—I serve such a monster as myself! No! By God's grace, I will serve him who has changed my nature, forgiven my sin, and made me to be a new creature in Christ Jesus. Self-loathing is quite sure to make a man have a better object than that of seeking to honour myself."

And then a man who has once loathed himself will never loathe his fellow-men. He will be free from that pride which is found in many, which disqualifies them for Christian service, because they do not know the hearts of sinners, and do not enter into communion with them. I have known some who fancy there ought to be a great distance between themselves and what they call common people; who talk of sin as though it were a strange thing, in which they had no participation, they themselves having been highly elevated above ordinary folks. Oh! we know of some that would scorn the harlot, and look down upon a man whose character has been once destroyed, and think he never ought to be spoken to again. The Christian loathes himself for not having had pity on others. He knows how readily his feet might have gone in the same way; how easily, too, he might have fallen. even to the same extent, if circumstances had been the same with him as with them, and, as far as he can, he seeks to uplift them. The man who is once as he should be, thrusts his arm to the elbow in every mire to bring up one of God's precious jewels. He has put off the kid gloves of self-sufficiency, so he works like a true labourer. He knows what Christ has done for him—how Jesus poured out his very heart's blood for his redemption—and he feels he cannot do too much, if by any means he can pluck a single firebrand from the flame. Brethren, it is good to loathe ourselves. for it makes us have sympathy with others.

Yet, once again, this self-loathing in every case where it comes makes Jesus Christ very precious, and makes sin very hateful. Whoever bath loathed himself at all sees how Jesus Christ has been a great Saviour, and he admires and adores him. You know you measure the height of the Saviour's love by the depth of your own fall. If you don't know anything about your ruin, you won't be likely to prize much the

remedy. A man that has got a desperate disease, and is dealt with by the physician, if he does not know what the disease is, is not able to feel the measure of gratitude, even if he is healed, that another man would, who knew how fatal the disease was in itself. If I think I am not poor, if I be befriended, I shall not have that gratitude which a bankrupt would have had if he had nothing left, to whom someone had generously given a large estate. No! a sense of need helps us to glorify God. Amongst the saints, and when on earth, the sweetest voices are those that have been made sweet by repentance. Amongst those that sing in heaven, and sing with the most sweet and lofty praise to God, are those who bless the grace that lifted them up from the horrible pit and out of the miry clay, and set their feet on a rock and established their goings. This blessed shamefacedness, which Christ gives us, is not to be avoided; may we have it more and more, and it shall be a fit preparation for the service of God on earth and the enjoyment of his presence in heaven.

And now, dear friends, it will be a very suitable season for every Christian just to look back and let his shame for many things mantle on his cheeks. Oh! how little progress have we made in the divine life through all the years! We call each year a "year of grace," but we might call it a year of sorrow. "The year of our Lord," we call it! Too often we make it the Year of ourselves. God save us for not living to him, working more for him, and growing more like him! Let us close every year with repentance, not because the sin abides, for, blessed be God, it is all forgiven—we are saved. Before the sin was perpetrated, Christ carried it into the sepulchre where he was buried; he, cast it there; it cannot be laid against us to condemn us, yet do we hate it, and yet do we loathe ourselves to think we have fallen into it. But would not this also be an admirable opportunity to show how we hate sin by seeking to bring others to Christ? Do watch for other souls. As you prize your own, seek the conversion of others, and God grant that you may bring many to Jesus.

And you that are not saved, oh! suffer not this occasion to pass, let not the days go by without your seeking for that mercy which God so fully gives through his only-begotten Son. Then when you receive it you will be ashamed, and you, too, will magnify the grace that pardoned even you. God bless you, dear friends, very richly, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

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