

The Doctrine Which Drops as the Rain, and the Speech Which Distills as the Dew

by J.C. Philpot

Moses' doctrine and speech, which refer to the gospel, will drop as the rain and distill as the dew because they ascribe greatness unto God and proclaim the name of the Lord.

Scripture: Deuteronomy 32:2, Psalm 72:6, Isaiah 44:3, Isaiah 45:8, Hosea 14:5, Amos 4:7, 2 Timothy 3:16, Hebrews 3:5, 2 Peter 1:5

Topics: "Spiritual Growth", "Gods Sovereignty"

Description

J.C. Philpot preaches on Deuteronomy 32:2, highlighting the consequences of unbelief and rebellion as seen in the Israelites' 40 years of wandering in the wilderness. He emphasizes Moses' delivery of blessings, curses, and the gospel in the Book of Deuteronomy, focusing on the doctrine that drops as rain and speech that distills as dew. Philpot explains the doctrine as teaching received from God, emphasizing the greatness of God, the proclamation of the Lord's name, Jesus as the Rock with perfect work, and the preaching of human corruption. He delves into the spiritual meanings of rain, dew, small rain, and showers, illustrating the various degrees of spiritual blessings. Philpot also discusses the tender herb representing a tender conscience and the grass symbolizing the graces of the Spirit. Lastly, he connects the dew, rain, and showers to the production of good thoughts, words, and actions for God's glory and the sanctification of the soul.

Transcript

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"My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distill as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass." Deuteronomy 32:2

Forty years were the children of Israel sentenced to wander in the wilderness as a justly deserved punishment for their unbelief, rebellion, and disobedience. Provoked by their murmurings when the spies brought back an evil report of the land, the Lord declared that of all which came up out of Egypt, from 20 years old and upward, not one should enter the promised land but Caleb and Joshua (Numb. 14:29, 30). Therefore, to use the striking and emphatic language of the Holy Spirit, "Their carcasses fell in the

wilderness." Now, when the rebels and unbelievers had died off, according to the word of the Lord, Moses, at the end of the 40 years, summons the children of Israel who survive into his presence, and recapitulates in their ears the blessings and the curses which he had set before them 40 years before. It is therefore called the Book of Deuteronomy, which signifies literally a 'second law', or the 'law recapitulated'. But in two sublime and beautiful chapters, just towards the close (32, 33), he puts, so to speak, a crown upon the whole; for, dropping all mention of the law with its curses, he proclaims in them the glorious gospel of the grace of God, mingling, however, with its promises and blessings, solemn warnings and suitable admonitions.

He opens the chapter before us in a very sublime and solemn manner, by calling upon "the heavens to give ear"- for he was about to speak of things that came from heaven and would lead to heaven- and "the earth to hear the words of his mouth," for they were addressed to those who were still in the flesh. And to show by what Spirit he was speaking, and by whose inspiration he was addressing them, he adds, in the words of our text:- "My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distill as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass."

In endeavoring, with God's blessing, to open up these words, I shall show-

I. First, what the "doctrine" and the "speech" were which Moses under this holy inspiration delivered.

II. Secondly, how this doctrine and this speech are to "drop as the rain," and "distill as the dew"- no more, to fall "as the small rain, and as the showers."

III. Thirdly, upon what the rain, the dew, the small rain, and the showers were to fall- "upon the tender herb," and "upon the grass."

IV. And fourthly, what would be the fruit and effect of this dropping as the rain, this distilling as the dew, of the small rain thus falling upon the tender herb, and the showers upon the grass.

I. First, what the "doctrine" and the "speech" were which Moses under this holy inspiration delivered. Moses speaks in our text of his "doctrine" and of his "speech;" and says of the first "it shall drop as the rain," and of the second "it shall distill as the dew." What is this doctrine and what is this speech?- for, we consider them to mean one and the same thing.

There is no greater mistake or more fruitful parent of error than to limit to one narrow meaning the full and comprehensive language of the Holy Spirit. I shall therefore endeavor to explain what the word "DOCTRINE" means in our text.

By the word we certainly cannot understand, the Law, because that, as delivered from Mount Sinai, most certainly did not "drop as the rain," nor "distill as the dew." It is called by Moses himself, in the very next chapter, "a fiery law;" and was given amid lightnings and thunders and earthquake. It contained, unalterably attached to it, a tremendous curse for its non-fulfillment; and God in it so declared his holiness and terrible majesty, that all the people trembled, and besought that they might never hear that awe-inspiring voice again.

Nor does the word "doctrine" here contain any such meaning as we sometimes attach to that word- truth as it stands in the bare letter of Scripture, or a cold, hard, dry doctrinal preaching of the truth, dissociated from a vital experience of its power.

But the word "doctrine," both in the Old and New Testament, usually signifies TEACHING. As we read- "The Scripture is profitable for doctrine;" that is, teaching (2 Timothy 3:16). So we read of those who "labor in the word and doctrine"- that is, in preaching and teaching. Paul bids Timothy "give attendance to doctrine;" that is, to teaching, that being the office of a minister. In fact, there is scarcely a passage where the term occurs in which it does not mean "teaching;" and that word may be nearly always substituted for it.

The word "doctrine" here, however, is taken from a Hebrew root, that means to receive; so that if we gave the word its literal meaning, it would be- "My reception"- that which I have received of God. And thus it points out something that God himself had communicated by his Spirit to Moses, and which he had received feelingly, believingly, and obediently, that he might communicate it to the people. This doctrine, then, which Moses had received from the Lord and taught to the people- to take a wider and larger view of it- was THE GOSPEL; for this is that which God the Spirit specially reveals and the believing heart receives.

But it will help us to understand more clearly what this "doctrine" is if we take a glance at the context, where Moses goes on to unfold what he had to teach. There are four things which he specially mentions as constituent parts of which he had received from God.

1. For instance, he says- "Ascribe greatness unto our God." Therefore, to ascribe greatness unto our God is a part of that doctrine which, falling from his lips, dropped as the rain; an integral portion of that speech which, as he uttered it, distilled from his lips as the dew. And in fact that teaching and preaching which ascribes greatness unto God will always be suitable to the child of God. His own conscience, so far as it is enlightened by the Spirit of God, tells him what a great God he has to deal with- how great in power, in glory, in majesty, in justice, in holiness; how great in surrounding him day by day with his heart-searching eye, his supporting presence, and his upholding hand. Nor can any doctrine "drop as the rain," nor any speech "distill as the dew," which does not "ascribe greatness unto our God." For any doctrine that ascribes greatness to man- that speaks of any good in the creature, and thus robs the Lord of his glory to put that crown upon the head of a fallen sinner, will neither "drop as the rain" nor "distill as the dew" upon any believing heart; for it is not a doctrine that God ever owns, nor a speech that the Holy Spirit ever impregnates with life-giving unction and power. But that doctrine and that speech which ascribe greatness unto our God and represent him in his true character, not only, as infinitely great, glorious, and holy in the Law, but merciful beyond all conception and beyond all utterance of men or angels in the Gospel, will be so owned of himself that it will ever "drop as the rain" and "distill as the dew," as the Holy Spirit is pleased to bless and apply it to the awakened conscience.

But the words "our God" here, if we look a little more closely at the context, will be found chiefly applicable to the Lord Jesus Christ, who, in covenant relationship, is especially "our God." We find, therefore, that Thomas, when the Lord so graciously removed his unbelief, at once worshiped and adored him with the words- "My Lord and my God." He there owned and acknowledged the deity of Jesus Christ, which he saw shining through the veil of his humanity. We therefore ascribe greatness unto our God when we show the greatness of the Lord Jesus Christ as "God over all, blessed forever," and proclaim that in consequence of his being the great God of heaven and earth, co-equal and co-eternal with the Father and the Holy Spirit, all that he said and did is invested with all the greatness of God; in a word, that there is a divine greatness in his Person, as Immanuel God with us; a divine greatness in his blood, as being emphatically the blood of the Son of God; a greatness in his righteousness, as being a righteousness wrought out by God, in flesh; a greatness in his mercy as the mercy of God; in his love, as the love of God; and in his faithfulness,

as the faithfulness of God.

When we thus ascribe faithfulness unto the Lord Jesus Christ as our covenant God, that doctrine will ever "drop as the rain," and that speech will ever "distill as the dew," because the Holy Spirit will honor it, power will attend it, and it will be blessed to the hearts and consciences of those who fear God. Nor has the Holy Spirit ever owned any doctrine which has not clearly set forth the glorious deity and suffering humanity of the Lord Jesus.

2. But Moses also gives another reason why his doctrine should "drop as the rain and his speech distill as the dew," in the striking expression- "Because I will publish the name of the Lord;" the word "because" clearly showing what the doctrine is that will ever so drop and distill. The office of a minister of the gospel is to "publish the name of the Lord;" in other words, to proclaim salvation through Jesus Christ. The "name of the Lord" in Scripture means and comprehends all that which in this time state can be known of God. It is, therefore, the manifestation of the character of God in the Scripture, or, to speak more correctly, the revelation of what God is in Christ. As by the name of a man we may understand all that can be known of an individual man, so by the name of the Lord we understand all that can be known of God, and therefore all that can be believed, hoped in, loved, and admired of the great and glorious Jehovah. Whatever, therefore, God is to man; whatever Christ is to his church; whatever the Holy Spirit manifests of a Trinity of Persons in the Unity of the divine Essence, as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; whatever the Scripture unfolds of the beauty and blessedness of this three-one Jehovah; all, all that the Scripture reveals; all, all that faith receives, hope anchors in, and love embraces, may be comprehended in the expression- "the name of the Lord."

Moses published this name; he proclaimed it on high. His delight as well as his privilege was to set forth to the utmost of his power, with the highest of his spiritual faculties, the glory of that great name, that men might believe in it, hope in it, and love it; that it might be enshrined in their hearts' warmest and tenderest affections; and be so endeared to their soul by the testimony of the Holy Spirit, that they might publish that name abroad as a name ever worthy to be admired and adored by all the suffering saints on earth and all the glorified spirits in heaven.

Now it is impossible for any one who has ever felt anything of the goodness of God, and of the preciousness of the Lord Jesus Christ, to keep silence. It is with him as the Lord said of his disciples, "If these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out." Whatever strong resolution the child of God may have inwardly formed to keep secret the dealings of God with his soul, fearing either that he might be deceived, or if he opened his mouth that he might speak beyond what a tender conscience might sanction; yet when he is in any measure blessed with a sense of the Lord's goodness, he is obliged to speak; he cannot but tell how good the Lord has been to him, and what he has felt of his mercy and love.

And thus with Moses. He published the name of the Lord, because that name had been revealed to his soul when the Lord put him into a cleft of the rock, "descended in the cloud, stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord." And what was that name which the Lord himself proclaimed when he passed by before him, but this, "The Lord, the Lord God merciful, and gracious, long suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin?" (Exodus 34:5, 7.) It was the publishing of this name, and of this name only, which made his doctrine "drop as the rain," his speech "distill as the dew." Nor will any other doctrine so drop, or any other speech so distill.

The preaching of the gospel is the Lord's own ordinance. As we read- "It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." It is, therefore, "the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believes;" and the Lord himself has promised of it that "As the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and returns not there," so "his word shall not return unto him void." It is, therefore, declared to be "not the word of men," which may perish and come to nothing, but "the word of God, which effectually works in those that believe."

3. But Moses also, as the man of God, assigns another reason why his "doctrine should drop as the rain, and his speech distill as the dew." He says (verse 4) "He is the Rock, his work is perfect." The delight of Moses was to testify of Jesus, for he is "the Son over his own house," in which Moses was but "a servant," though faithful in all things (Heb. 3:5, 6). When, therefore, he says of the Lord that he is "the Rock," we cannot doubt that by it he means Jesus. This is Paul's express testimony. "They drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ." So also testifies the prophet Isaiah- "In the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength," (margin), "the rock of ages." Christ is called "the Rock" because God had laid him "in Zion for a foundation, a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation," that on him the Church may safely stand and the gates of hell may not prevail against it.

The Lord Jesus, in his Person, his work, his blood, his obedience, his love, his faithfulness, is no changing or changeable foundation- not a quicksand or a mud-pool on which no building can be erected, or none that can endure the storm. He is a Rock, unmoved, immoveable; which made David cry, "Lead me to the Rock that is higher than I." To build upon him is to be like the wise man of whom the Lord speaks- that "he built his house upon a rock;" and therefore though "the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house, it fell not, for it was founded upon a rock." He is the rock of which he himself said; "Upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

Moses, therefore, when he says "He is the rock," would, as it were, invite us to build for eternity upon Jesus. He would say to all who feel lost and perishing in themselves, yet long to be saved- "He is the Rock." Oh, build not upon yourselves! Look not to your own works or worth, goodness or righteousness. Rest not the weight of your immortal souls for eternity upon anything found, or fancied to be found, in the creature. Before your eyes is a rock upon which you may safely build; a foundation which God himself has laid in Zion. Here is rest and peace, if once you get your weary soul upon the Person, the blood, and the obedience of Jesus. That alone will stand upon a dying bed and in the great day; and if you are led to it and build upon it, no storm can shake you off but such a hurricane as shall move the rock itself from its place. And as all the storms of divine wrath, and all the tempests of hell, could not move that rock when upon earth, what can now displace it in heaven?

But Moses adds, "His work is perfect." What are our works- our best works? Imperfect; tainted and defiled with original and actual sin. Has ever a good thought, a good word, or a good work, passed from you which sin has not, in the conception or in the execution, more or less defiled? Any man who knows the movements of sin in his own heart will bear me witness that he has never conceived a thought, spoken a word, or done an action, in which sin has not in some degree intermingled itself, and, by intermingling itself, has defiled and polluted that thought, word, or work. Therefore Moses, speaking of Christ as "the Rock," says- "His work is perfect." The humanity of Jesus was perfect: it was conceived without sin. No taint, or spot, or speck of sin ever infected that holy humanity which the Lord Jesus Christ took into union with his intrinsic and eternal deity. Therefore, "his work,"- that is, the work which he performed in the flesh- "is perfect." Every thought of his heart, which is a part of his work, was perfect. Every word of his lips, which is a part of his work, was perfect. Every action of his hands, which is a part of his work, was perfect.

So that his work in itself is perfect, because it sprang out of as it was performed by, a perfect nature.

Besides which, deity was stamped upon every part of that perfect work. On every thought that issued from the Redeemer's heart, on every word spoken by the Savior's lips, on every action performed by the Mediator's hands, divinity was stamped. Therefore, not only was there in it the perfection of a pure humanity, but there was also in it the value of intrinsic deity. And not only was his work perfect, but it was a meritorious, and as such a vicarious, work; that is, a work accomplished for the benefit of others. It was the perfection and the merit of his work, which made it acceptable to God; nor can the tongue of men or angels express the infinite delight and complacency with which God the Father ever views it. Search and look into the actions of men; examine and weigh all your own actions, and see whether you can find anything of this character attached to them. Are they perfect? Are they meritorious, even as viewed by yourself? On what foundation, then, will you build for eternity? Upon your own works, which are inherently imperfect, besides being defiled and stained by sin? Or upon a Rock, whose work is perfect?

The Lord will teach, as the Lord will enable his dear children to build upon the Rock. In fact, they have no alternative. They are driven off every other foundation. The storms of sin, the curses of a broken law, the fears of death and hell, the accusations of their own guilty conscience, the temptations of Satan, will all conspire to beat them off the quicksand- will all conspire to blow them upon the Rock; and the Spirit of God, whose office it is to take of the things of Spirit and to glorify him, will lift them, so to speak, up out of their own miserable selves and land them upon the Rock of ages, build them upon it and into it, and thus fix them upon a foundation which will stand forever and forever.

4. But there was another subject that Moses preached, as we gather from the context, which also made his doctrine "drop as the rain, and his speech distill as the dew;" but it is a doctrine not very agreeable to the pride of man. It was this- "They have corrupted themselves, their spot is not the spot of his children; they are a perverse and crooked generation." In other words, he preached the corruption of man; no, he told them plainly that "they had corrupted themselves, and that they were a perverse and crooked generation." This doctrine of human corruption- of the total fall of man- of the innate wickedness and perverseness of his heart, will always be acceptable to the child of God, because he has in his conscience an inward witness to its truth. Nor can he excuse or justify himself by casting his sin upon the shoulders of Adam, for he knows that he has corrupted himself; he feels that not only unclean thoughts lodge within him; but that he has given way to and indulged in them. Thus he is condemned by sin actual, as well as sin original- by sin in the fruit, as well as sin in the root. Ever since he had light to see, life to feel, and a conscience to bear witness, he knows that in many flagrant instances he has corrupted himself. We speak of seducers and corrupters with just abhorrence; but a man's worst corruptor is his own heart. Can you say that you have never indulged in secret or open sin, and that in so doing you have never sinned against the light of conscience, or, what is worse, against mercy and love? If so, you cannot throw the blame upon Adam, or upon Satan, but must take to yourself all the sin and shame, and say with Deer-

"That mariner's mad part I played,

Who sees, yet strikes the shelf."

There is no greater source of inward condemnation and guilt, than when a man is obliged to confess he has corrupted himself- made his own heart worse than it really is, by pandering to its lusts and heaping fuel upon its smouldering flame. This has made many a one fear that his "spot is not the spot of God's children," that his sins are too great to be pardoned, and that he has done inwardly or outwardly what no

truly regenerated child of God ever could have been guilty of.

We have seen, then, what four main truths formed a part of Moses' preaching, and which, pervading his ministry, made his "doctrine drop as the rain and his speech distill as the dew." These four are-

1. Ascribing greatness unto our God;
2. Publishing the name of the Lord;
3. Declaring of Jesus that he was the Rock, and that his work was perfect;
4. Not sparing the creature or sacrificing to human pride and self-righteousness, but preaching boldly the corruption of man, and thus laying the axe to the very root of the tree.

II. But we pass on to our second point, which is to open up the spiritual meaning of the words- "My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distill as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass." Four different emblems are here made use of to describe the way in which this doctrine drops and this speech distills. These are- the rain, the dew, the small rain, and the showers. These several emblems are employed by the Holy Spirit to set forth the light, life, and power which accompany the truth of God when he is pleased to bless it to the soul. Each of them we will, with God's blessing, now endeavor to unfold.

A. First, "the RAIN." In eastern climates the rain is a most acceptable benefit- a most precious gift of heaven. In Palestine, rain usually fell at but two seasons of the year- autumn and spring; and was thence called the former and latter rain. The former rain fell in October, when the seed was committed to the ground, to make it germinate; and the latter fell in April, to fill the ear and carry the crop on to harvest. But viewed as an emblem, rain in Scripture generally signifies the blessing of God; for as the rain falls from heaven to water the earth and make it fruitful, so does the blessing of God fall from heaven upon the soul, and more especially upon the preached gospel, to make it take root and bear fruit in the hearts of the saints of God. There are several points of resemblance between the natural and spiritual rain.

1. The falling rain is sovereign. We read in Amos- "I have withheld the rain from you, and I caused it to rain upon one city and caused it not to rain upon another city; one piece was rained upon, and the piece whereupon it rained not withered." How powerless we are as regards the rain that falls from the sky! Who can go forth when the sun is shining in its brightness and bid the rain to fall? Or when rain is falling, who can go forth and restrain the bottles of heaven? He who gives us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness, also turns a fruitful land into barrenness for the wickedness of those who dwell therein.

Equally sovereign is the blessing that God gives to the preached gospel. He holds the blessing in his own hand; it is his to give, and his to withhold. If he blesses, it is because he has promised it; but when, where, and to whom it shall come, is in his own sovereign disposal. Yet what do we naturally desire when the earth is parched up for lack of rain? Knowing that there is rain stored up in the clouds above, and that when it does come it will produce beneficial effects, desires, if not prayers, go up that it may fall. In fact, the earth itself, parched and dried up by heat- the very ground itself, by the fissures and clefts which are made in the soil by a burning sun, silently, mutely, but still imploringly calls upon the rain to fall. Every crack you see in July is a silent mouth asking the rain to come down. The withered herbage, the cattle lowing in the field, the dried up ponds and brooks, are all imploring, though not a word is uttered, that rain

may fall.

So in grace. The parched, withered, dried up feelings of the soul are all so many mute mouths imploring God's blessing to come down. No, the very hardness, barrenness, and sterility felt in our heart when the blessing of God does not rest upon the word, are so many mute appeals to the God of all grace that his blessing would attend the word to our conscience. I say this because you may think sometimes that you are not praying for the blessing of God to rest upon the word, because you may not be using vocal prayer, or are not favored with a Spirit of grace and supplication. God sees your needs, and to those needs he has a kind regard.

The babe need not, and indeed cannot ask in so many words for food. The cry of hunger is enough. Or even if too weak to cry, the mother knows the child is hungry by its restless movements; and she is as pleased to give the nutritious food as the babe is to receive it. So you must not always measure the strength of your prayers by the mere vocal utterance you may give to them. The heart-searching God reads your needs, knows your desolate case, and sees your barren condition. As in the kingdom of his providence he views from his holy throne the parched ground, and sends down showers because he sees its need; so in the kingdom of his grace he looks upon the parched condition of his people, and gives the spiritual rain because he knows they need it.

2. The gospel also resembles the rain in a second point. It is specially adapted to the needs of the people of God. Is there not a natural agreement between the parched ground and the rain that falls upon it? Is not the ground as naturally adapted to receive the rain, as the rain is adapted to fall upon it? So in grace. A needy soul, parched and withered by the law, is as much adapted to receive a blessing from the gospel, as the gaping earth is adapted to receive the rain.

3. The rain is only suitable to the earth as under cultivation. The rain that falls upon the sea, on the top of a barren mountain, or on the Arabian desert, does no good. There must be a suitable soil for it. So in grace. It is the blessing of God attending the preached gospel to a heart under its own culture ("You are God's husbandry") that makes it fruitful. He will ever own his truth, but it will ever be to the heart which he has previously ploughed up by conviction and trouble.

4. But there is another point of resemblance. What is the effect of rain? It softens the clods. So does the blessing of God falling upon the gospel. It softens hard hearts. Nothing but rain will penetrate. You may break the clods to pieces, or roll them small and fine; but that will not soften them, and the seed will lie useless in the furrow. But the rain softens both seed and soil. So it is with the blessing of God upon the gospel. Not only does it soften a hard heart, but it makes the word of truth to take root in the conscience thus made tender in God's fear.

B. The DEW I have now, with God's blessing, to explain. In eastern climates, where the sun shines with greater heat and power than with us, the dew is proportionately greater. In fact, in those burning climates vegetation would be utterly destroyed were it not for the copious dews that fall by night. The dew that fell on Gideon's fleece when wrung out filled a bowl full of water. "My head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night." There again the dew is spoken of as falling so copiously as in a short time to saturate the locks of the head. But what resemblance is there between the natural and the spiritual dew?

1. First, the dew generally follows a clear, bright, and shining day. It does not fall in cloudy weather, not when the wind is blowing with violence. So with the dew of God's grace. The Sun of righteousness shines in a pure, bright, and clear atmosphere- the heaven of the gospel. From this pure, bright, clear atmosphere

of gospel grace, does the dew of God's blessing descend. Not from the cloudy Law, not from the blackness and darkness and tempest, does the dew distill.

2. Again: it falls when a million stars are spangling the sky, all of which may be considered as so many bright promises studding the skies of grace. When the promises glitter, the dew falls.

3. Again: it falls imperceptibly. No man can see it fall. Yet its effects are visible in the morning. So it is with the blessing of God upon a preached Gospel. It penetrates the heart without noise; it sinks deep into the conscience without anything visible going on; and as the dew opens the pores of the earth and refreshes the ground after the heat of a burning day, making vegetation lift up its drooping head, so it is with the blessing of God resting upon the soul. Heavenly dew comes imperceptibly, falls quietly, and is manifested chiefly by its effects, as softening, opening, penetrating, and secretly causing every grace of the Spirit to lift up its drooping head. Whenever the Lord may have been pleased to bless our souls, either in hearing, in reading, or in private meditation, have not these been some of the effects?- silent, quiet, imperceptible, yet producing an evident impression; softening the heart when hard, refreshing it when dry, melting it when obdurate, secretly keeping the soul alive, so that it is not withered up by the burning sun of temptation, or dies for lack of grace!

Nothing but the gospel ever produces these effects. The law, with all its terrors, threatenings, and alarms, the fears of death and hell, the pangs and stings of a guilty conscience, the temptations of Satan,- may all cause great and deep distress; they may sink a man very low and bring him almost to despair; but no rain will ever fall or dew distill upon any other doctrine or any other speech than the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is this alone which God honors, which the Spirit owns, and the soul enjoys.

C. But we read in the text of "the small rain." The Holy Spirit, in the words before us, has selected emblems all of the same character and yet of different degrees. Rain falls abundantly; dew imperceptibly; small rain rather more visibly; showers often profusely. We have sometimes what is called "drizzling weather"- no great drops; no heavy rain; no copious showers but a gently falling mist, that is just sufficient to moisten the soil, to refresh vegetation, keep the crop growing, and forward it on to an abundant harvest, but not penetrating the ground to any depth or extent.

"Small rain" then, viewed spiritually, seems to describe those gentle operations of the Spirit of God upon the soul that soften, revive, and keep the heart alive, the conscience tender, and the affections lifting themselves upward, without any great manifestations of the Lord's goodness and love.

D. The last emblem used in our text is that of "the showers." These fall more copiously, especially in eastern climates, where, in the rainy season, the whole watery heavens seem to precipitate themselves upon the earth. They are therefore more visible than dew or small rain, and their effects proportionally greater and more manifest. They reach to a far greater depth; soak the ground more effectually, and penetrate to the lowest roots of the herbage.

Spiritually viewed, therefore, "showers" point to great, powerful, and blessed manifestations of the love of God, of the Person of Christ; of his blood and obedience, agonizing sufferings, and dying love. The Lord promises that he will "pour water upon him that is thirsty and floods upon the dry ground." These "floods" are "the showers" of which David speaks: "You water the ridges thereof abundantly, you settle the furrows thereof; you make it soft with showers." So that we have in our text a regular scale: the dew, the small rain, the rain, and the showers. And this graduated scale of heavenly moisture shows that there are degrees of spiritual blessing.

We must not expect all to be blessed to the same extent, nor all to receive the same measure. Yet all are of the same nature. Examine "the dew"- it is water; the "small rain"- it is water; the "rain"- it is water; "the showers"- they are still water. You cannot find any difference between the water of the dew, of the small rain, of the rain, and of the showers: they are all alike pure water, distilled from the alembic of the sky. So it is with the blessing of God upon the soul. It may fall upon one as the dew, upon another as the small rain, upon a third as the rain, on a fourth as the showers: yet all equally and alike, spiritually and divine. It is the same God that gives; through the same Jesus it comes; by the same Spirit it is communicated. All produce more or less the same effect- to soften, to moisten, to fertilize, and to revive; and all descend from the heaven of Christ's Gospel; all fall from the same skies of grace, mercy, and truth, love, blood, and salvation.

The doctrine, therefore, that testifies of Jesus, and the speech that proclaims him to be a Rock and his work to be perfect, and no other teaching, "drops as the rain and distills as the dew." There is a power in truth, when God is pleased to apply it to the heart; and whether it comes in large or in small measure, whether it be in dew or shower, it is equally a proof of his mercy and love, and equally a proof that his power attends his own divine truth to our soul.

III. But I pass on to our third point, which is to show the spot on which the dew, the rain, the small rain, and the showers fall. This is said to be "the tender herb and the grass."

1. By the "tender herb" we may understand spiritually a conscience made tender in God's fear; by "the grass," the graces generally of the Spirit in the soul. We read of "a band of men whose hearts God had touched." The touch of his finger it is that makes the heart tender. By nature man has no tenderness of heart or conscience towards God. He is hard, obdurate, unfeeling, equally regardless of heaven and hell. "They made their hearts as an adamant stone," says the prophet. Like Leviathan, their "heart is as hard as a piece of the nether millstone"- the hardest and flintiest of all stones. But if man's heart be such- a heart of stone, of adamant, harder than the nether millstone- surely, grace alone can produce the change indicated in the words before us, where the heart of the child of God, under the doctrine that drops as the rain and the speech that distills as the dew, becomes as soft and yielding as the tender herb which drinks in the April dew.

The feelings, the conscience, the affections of those who fear God are tender just in proportion to the dew and rain which fall from heaven upon them. As hardness and obduracy are specially hateful, so is this spiritual tenderness especially acceptable to the Lord. How tender was Jesus! How "he grew up as a tender plant," abhorred by men, but oh! how pleasing to God! The Lord specially noted this in Josiah- "Because your heart was tender." He was therefore gathered unto his grave in peace. Anything like hardness or obduracy either to God or man is wholly foreign to the Spirit of God and of the gospel, and to what his operations will ever produce in a living conscience.

But without the rain, the tender herb would perish from its very tenderness. The small rain and the gentle dew are specially suitable to the tender herb. A violent thunderstorm, a sweeping shower, a terrific hail and snow storm from the frozen north, would tear up, chill, and freeze the tender herb. But dew, and the small rain that fall so quietly and softly upon it, do not bruise, or chill, or freeze it; but, being suitable to its tenderness, gently nourish it to make it take a deeper root and spring up into a more vigorous growth.

Nothing is so suitable to a tender conscience as the dew that falls upon it, through the truth of God. The blessing of God upon his own word heals the wounds that guilt has made, softens the heart that the law

has hardened and as it makes the truth strike a deeper root downward, so it causes it to bear a more vigorous stem upward, and eventually to ripen into a more productive harvest.

2. The graces of the Spirit seem signified here by the emblem "grass" for as the grass clothes the ground with herbage pleasing to the eye, and ministers food to the sheep that crop it; so it is with the graces of the Spirit. They are pleasing to the sight of God; they are agreeable to the eyes of his discerning saints; no, they are pleasing to our own eyes when we can recognize them as produced by the operation of the blessed Spirit. And as the Lord is pleased to bring them forth, they feed the soul that can feel in them so many marks of the Lord's mercy and love, and they feed too the sheep of Christ, who derive nourishment and edification to themselves from the grace that they see in others.

IV. To come to our fourth and last point- thus is produced everything which is for the glory of God and the salvation and sanctification of the soul. By the dew, the rain, the small rain, or the showers, every good thought is produced in a man's heart, every good word is uttered by his lips, and every good action is performed by his hands. As earth without the dew, the rain, and the showers, could never bring forth either fruit or flower, but would be one vast wilderness, a wild desert uninhabitable by man or beast, so with the soul of man- without the dew of God's grace and the showers of his favor, it could never bring forth anything pleasing or acceptable in God's sight. And do not forget that it is through the gospel that his Spirit and grace are communicated. Oh may this Gospel ever "drop as the rain and distill as the dew" upon our heart, and make it fruitful in every good word and work! Then shall we have all the comfort and God all the glory.

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