

The Trial & Triumph of Faith

SERMON 16

By Rev. Samuel Rutherford

But he answered, and said, It is not right to take the children's bread, and to cast it to the dogs. And she said, Truth, Lord, yet the dogs eat of the crumbs that fall from the master's table. And Jesus answered, and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith, be it unto thee even as thou wilt: and her daughter was made whole from that very hour.—MATTHEW 15:26-28.

And when she came to her house, she found the devil gone out, and her daughter laid upon the bed.—MARK 7:30.

THE dispute between Christ and the woman goeth on: Christ bringeth a strong reason, (verse 26,) why he should not heal her daughter; because she, and all her nation, not being in covenant with God, as are the Jews, the church of God, are but dogs, and profane, and unworthy of Christ, which is the bread ordained for the children.

When Christ humbleth, he may put us in remembrance of our nation, and national sins: "Look to the rock whence ye were hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye were digged," (Isa. 51:1). "I alone called Abraham, he was an idolater," (Hos. 9:10). I found Israel like grapes in the wilderness; they should have been wild grapes rotting in the wilderness, had I not put them in my basket. "Son of man, cause Jerusalem to know her abomination," (Ezek. 16:2). How? Make them know the stock they came of, 'And say, Thus saith the Lord unto Jerusalem, thy birth and thy nativity is of the land of Canaan; thy father was an Amorite, and thy mother an Hittite,' (verse 3). When the Jew was to offer the first fruits to the Lord; "And thou shalt speak and say before the Lord thy God, A Syrian ready to perish was my father, and went down to Egypt to sojourn there," (Deut. 26:5). Thus, the forgetting what we are by nature, addeth to our guiltiness: "And in all thine abominations, and thy whoredoms, thou hast not remembered the days of thy youth, when thou wast naked and bare, and wast polluted in thy blood," (Ezek. 16:22). So the Ephesians must be told how unfit they were by nature for Christ, being the very workhouse and shop of the devil, in which he wrought, (Eph. 2:1-3).

National sins have influence in their guilt and contagion on believers: (1.) When they mourn not for them: God's displeasure should be our sorrow. (2.) When they

stand not in the gap to turn away wrath, (Ezek. 22:30). There were godly men that departed from ill, (Isa. 59), but God's quarrel was, that there was no intercessor, (verse 15). In fasting, believers, though pardoned, may have on them a burden of the sins of three nations, and be involved in that same wrath with them. National repentance is required of every one, no less than personal repentance. Who sorrows for the blood of malignants and rebels?—for their oaths, mocking, scoffing, massing? The sins of the land, idolatry, superstitious days, vain ceremonies, etc., have influence on a believer's conscience in his approach to God. But we are here to consider, that Christ doth two great and contrary works at once: (1.) He humbleth the believing woman, in reproaching her as a profane dog, unworthy of the children's bread, that the will may be more broken for believing; And (2.) He trieth and tempteth her, to see if she can, by reproaches, be taken off from Christ. A broken will is a broken heart, for will is the iron sinew in the heart: (1.) account merit and conceit of any good in thyself, but the uncleanness of a dog; and (2.) break will, that that proud thing may fall in two pieces at Christ's feet: and (3.) believe, stick by thy point, that though a dog, yet thou art one of Christ's dogs, and then all is well. The best way to break the will, is, (1.) To offer hell, and the coals of everlasting burning to it; yea, and when the soul is humbled, to humble it more. Christ knew, that this woman was lying in the dust; but he will have her below the dust, when he trieth her with such a humbling temptation. Many think, the troubled conscience should not be further humbled. They say, 'There is nothing for such a soul, but the honey and sweetness of consolations in the gospel.' Nay, but often that which troubleth them, is subtle and invisible pride; he'll not believe for want of self-worthiness:—'Oh! I dare not rest on Christ, nor apply the promises, because of my sinful unworthiness.' Now, if this be humility, it is the proudest humility in the world; for the soul thus troubled, saith, 'I am not good enough, nor rich enough for Christ and his fine gold.' And the truth is, he is not a good enough Papist, to give a ransom of self-worth, for that great ransom of blood which cannot be bought. But though thou shouldst buy Christ, the Father will not sell him. Christ is disposed to a sinner as a free gift, not as a wage or a hire. There is a difference between down-casting and saving humiliation. Down-casting may exceed measure, in the too much apprehension of the law-curses, and may be conjoined with much pride and self-love: but right and saving humiliation conjoined with faith, cannot overpass bounds; it ariseth often from the sense of grace rather than from the law; God giveth grace to the humble, and he giveth humility to the gracious, under the sense of rich grace, (1 Tim. 1:15; Eph. 3:8; Titus 3:3-5; 2 Tim. 1:9). Nothing humbleth us more than an opinion of the power and excellency of grace. Grace known and apprehended in its worth, layeth down proud nature on the earth. Christ's grace, was Christ's account book to Paul; "But by the grace of God I am that I am," (1 Cor. 15:9,10). A borrowed garment, though of silk, will make a wise man humble: many sins pardoned, made much love to Christ, and much humility in the woman, (Luke 7:44,) and made her lay head and hair, yea, and heart also, under the soles of Christ's feet. No doubt, she thought basely of herself and her hair, remembering that grace put these feet to a sad and tiresome journey, to come into the world to seek the lost, and to be pierced with nails for her. There is

courtesy in free grace, being the marrow and flower of unhired love, to kill high thoughts of a self-destroying sinner.

Observe, also, that not to dare to come to Christ, and believe and pray, because of unworthiness, such as is in dogs that are without the new city, (Rev. 22:15,) is but a very temptation. And Christ, under the notion of tempting and trying, offereth that to the woman, that she was too daring and bold, being a dog, to presume to ask for the children's bread. Hence have we to consider, how far the conscience of sin ought to stand in our way toward Christ. Hence these considerations; (1.) Conscience of sin is to humble any; that is, to make out for Christ. "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" spoken by Christ brought Paul down off his high horse, and laid his soul in the dust. "Now we know, that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God." (Rom. 3:19.) It is a speech taken from a malefactor, arraigned and paneled upon his head. When the judge objecteth, 'What say you? This and this treason is witnessed against you.' Alas! the poor man standeth speechless and dumb; his mouth is stopped, "That thou mayest remember thy old shame, and be confounded, and never open thy mouth any more, because of thy shame." (Ezek. 16:63.) Christ, then, hath the sinner's neck under his axe. What justice and law may do, that Christ may do. The captive taken in war, may be killed by the laws of war, if he refuse to submit. (2.) No sin is unpardonable treason, but the sin against the Holy Ghost, and final impenitence. The gospel is a treaty of peace between parties in war; none are excepted but these two. (3.) But what then, if a soul come to this,—'I have either sinned against the Holy Ghost, or certainly am on the borders of it, because Christ knocked long: and a year ago, or a long time from this, I remember of his farewell rap, when Christ knocking, took his last good night, with this word, 'He that is filthy, let him be filthy still,' and said, he would never come again. I grant an ill conscience can speak prophecy; (Exod. 10:28,29). So Pharaoh did prophesy, and Cain also, (Gen. 4:13,14). But [2.] I can yield, that there be some farewell knockings of Christ, after which, Christ is never seen or heard at the door of some men's hearts. Paul speaketh so to the Jews, "But seeing you put the gospel from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles." (Acts 13:46.) The like is Christ's language to them: "Then said Jesus to them, I go my way, and ye shall seek me, and shall die in your sins; whither I go, ye cannot come." (John 8:21.) I doubt if any can sin the sin against the Holy Ghost, and the sinner only, and no other complain of it; that sin breaketh out in prodigious acts of wickedness, as blood and persecution. Though it were true, that you were upon the borders of hell, yet the gospel, though it except you from actual mercy, yet excepts you not from the duty of believing and coming to Christ; and though such think and imagine, that they believe Christ is able to save and redeem them, only they doubt of his will, yet the truth is, the doubt of unbelief is more of the power of mercy and infinite grace in Christ than of his will; and my reason is, "that whosoever believeth, hath set to his seal that God is true;" (John 3:33;) and "He that believeth not God, hath made him a liar, because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son."

(1 John 5:10.) Now, it is not God's testimony, nor any gospel truth, that such as sin against the Holy Ghost shall be pardoned; yea, the contrary is said, (Matt. 12:31,32). Yet these that sin against the Holy Ghost are condemned for unbelief, as all other unbelievers are. (John 3:18,36.) Then such as fall in this sin, though they say infinite mercy can pardon them (but infinite mercy will not pardon them), should not belie God, by unbelieving these truths, for they are gospel truths: then must the unbelief of those that sin against the Holy Ghost, put a lie upon some gospel truth, and this can be only on the power of infinite mercy; and so they must say, Christ cannot save, though he would, for there is a power of Christ in mercy, no less than a will. If Francis Spira go for a despairing reprobate (which I dare not aver), yet, when he said, he believed Christ was able to save him, but he doubted of his will, he must not be so understood, as if it were so indeed. Unbelievers know not all the mysterious turnings of lying and self-deceiving unbelief. Unbelief may lie to men of itself, when it dare not belie the worth of that soul-redeeming ransom of Christ's blood. If he that sinneth against the Holy Ghost, could believe the power of infinite mercy, he should also believe the will and inclination of infinite mercy, for the power of mercy is the very power of a merciful will. I shall not then be afraid that that soul is lost, which hath high and capacious apprehensions of the worth, value, dignity, and power of that dear ransom, and of infinite mercy. It is faith to believe this gospel truth, which is, "That Christ is able to save to the utmost all that come to him." (Heb. 7:25.) If I believe soundly what free grace can do, I believe soundly what free grace will do. It is true, Christ can save many, whom he never will save; but the faith of the power of mercy, and of his will to save, is of a far other consideration. It must then be the prevailing of a temptation, not to dare to come to Christ, because I am a dog, and unworthy, (1.) Because sin is no porter put to watch the door of Christ's house of free grace: mercy keepeth the keys. Sin may object my evil deserving, but it cannot object Christ's rich deserving. (2.) That which maketh me unworthy, and graceless, and unfit to be saved, may make Christ worthy, and gracious to save; my sin may be Christ's rich grace. Though sin maketh me unworthy of Christ, yet it maketh me a fit passive object for the physician Christ to work on, and maketh not Christ unworthy to save. If I feel sin, it then saith, Thou art the very person by name that Christ seeketh. Therefore is the sense of sin required as a condition in all that come to Christ, whether it be before conversion, or after conversion, when acts of faith are renewed.

Objection.—'But we find by experience, that true poverty of spirit, and sense of sinful wretchedness, doth kill and destroy any sight of guilt and wickedness in myself: if I rightly see Christ, I shall not also see any unworthiness in myself.'

Answer.—This experience is not warranted by the word of truth. These may well consist together. (1.) That felt and apprehended wretchedness of a sinner, may stand with a sight of Christ's riches of grace, is as evident, as the felt pain of the sting of the fiery scorpion, may stand with looking up to the brazen serpent, and being saved; yea, when the poor man said, "Lord, I believe, help my unbelief," (Mark 9:24,) he both was sensible of faith and unbelief. (2.) Yea, the converted

may well see grace and holiness in himself, (else how shall he be thankful to Christ the giver?) and also see Christ, and believe in his righteousness? For holy walking cometh under a threefold consideration. [1.] As a duty. [2.] As a mean ordained of God that we should walk in, (Eph. 2:10). [3.] As a promise, or a thing promised in the new covenant. And in this threefold consideration, we may know how far we may build our peace upon any duties, as upon evidences of our state of grace. [1.] As holy walking as a duty coming from us, is no ground of true peace, believers often seek in themselves, what they should seek in Christ; this is natural merit. Often we argue from the measure of obedience, to deny grace altogether; this is a false way, especially, it is a false way of logic, to argue negatively, from want of such and such a measure of obedience, to deny you are in Christ: how we may argue affirmatively, we shall hear hereafter. [2.] The duty is Christ's mean, not enjoined in a strict law way, but in a gospel way, as the commandment is oiled with a gospel spirit of love. Law and love are not contrary, as Antinomians do imagine; Christ has united, not only persons, but also graces and virtues. This way, the duty is a mean, and a way, not to the right of salvation, but to the actual possession of it; and as it is, or standeth stated before us in the letter of the gospel, in a moral commanding, or a doctrinal, or directing way, without the efficacy of grace, it can be nothing but a doctrinal mean, no more than the law way is; for all gospel precepts without grace, are as little available to us as the law. But, in the [3.] third notion, holy walking, as performed by that efficacious grace promised in the covenant of grace, is an argument on which we may build our peace, not as a cause, or a merit deserving peace, but as a grace threaded upon the free promise of God. So the saints have builded upon their sincere walking, as on a fruit of the covenant of grace promised to us, (Jer. 31:33; 32:38); for so duties speak the mercies promised in the covenant, 'And I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear me for ever.' (verse 39.) See Ezek. 36:27; Isa. 54:13. Upon this ground Hezekiah, pleadeth with God, when he heard the sentence of death: 'Remember now, O Lord, I beseech thee, how I have walked before thee in truth, and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight;' (Isa. 38:3;) and David putteth his faith upon this, as a gracious fruit of grace promised in the covenant of grace. So David pleadeth, and in faith, "Preserve my soul: (Psalm 86:2:) here is a prayer in faith—and upon what ground? "for I am holy." Now, this would seem pharisaical, and merit-like, if holiness did not relate to the free promise of the covenant of grace, in which God hath promised, and tied himself by covenant, to make his own children holy; and also, is resolved upon a proposition of the covenant of grace. God hath both promised to cause his covenanted ones walk before him in truth, as did Hezekiah; as we have it in Ezek. 36:27, and he has promised to save and deliver the upright in heart, as is clear in Psalm 50:23; 34:15; 1 Pet. 3:12; Psalm 145:18,19.

So all the peace we can collect for our comfort, from holy walking, is resolved on a promise of free grace; and the duty as performed by the grace of the covenant, may, and doth lead us to the promise, and so, no ways from Christ, but to Christ. Holy walking is a faithful witness, and a true witness may lead any accused man

to law-right. Holiness may lead me to the promise, and that is good law-right. If we cannot gather any assurance of our spiritual estate, from holy duties in us, such as are universal obedience, sincerity in keeping close to Christ, and love to the saints, because they may deceive us, and may be in hypocrites, as Doctor Crispe saith, then may faith also deceive us; for there be as many kinds of false faiths, as there be of counterfeit loves to the saints; and there is somewhat of Christ peculiar to the regenerate in their love, obedience, and sincerity, which they may discern to be a saving character, and badge of Christ, no less than in faith. (2.) But here's the mystery: [Objection.] neither faith, nor anything inherent in us, can yield us certainty that we are in Christ, or any peace with God, in regard that all grace, all evidences of our good estate are without us in Christ; inherent holiness and duties are but fancies. [Answer.] When we then refuse the comforts of God, and peace from holy walking, as it is threaded and linked to the promise, we refuse Christ; especially under desertion, we bid Christ look away from us; and there is a willfulness of unbelieving sorrow, so that Rachel will not be comforted. But when we refuse Christ's comforts, we refuse himself. She who refuseth to accept of a bracelet, or a gold ring, from him who suiteth her in marriage, she refuseth both his love and himself, in that she refuseth his love token.

Observe also, that Christ bringeth himself in, as a great householder in the gospel. In his house there be divers children, servants, dogs, and the house is broad, and open to all that come: there is bread in our Father's house for all. What bread? A great marriage supper: Here is a king's son married, (Matt. 22; Luke 14,) and many excellent dainties, and (1.) all dainties is Christ, the marrow of the gospel, that bread of life; "I am that bread of life," (John 6:48). He was the wheat that dieth and rotteth in the earth, and then taketh life, and bringeth forth fruit, (John 12:24). He is the wheat that suffered the winter frosts and storms, rain and winds, and went through the millstones of God's wrath, and was "bruised for our iniquities," (Isa. 53:5;) "For it pleased the Lord to bruise him," (verse 10): DAKEO, is contundere, to grind as in a mortar, or mill; and he went through the oven and fiery furnace of the anger of God, before he could be bread for the king's table, and the children. (2.) Every bread, is not the bread of children: Christ is not a loaf, nor a feast for the man that wanteth his wedding-garment: such a friend was never invited to the banquet, (Matt. 22:11,12): and of those that loath Christ, and love their lusts better than him, Christ saith, "None of these men that were bidden, shall taste of my supper," (Luke 14:24).

1. The children are parts of the house, and are more than children, heirs, even joint heirs with the eldest heir, Christ, (Rom. 8:17), because Christ and the younger heirs divide heaven (to speak so) between them. And (1.) The Spirit that raised Christ from the dead, dwelleth in them, (Rom. 8:11). (2.) They have one God, and one Father; Christ and we are Father's children; "Go to my brethren, and say to them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God," (John 20:17). (3.) We must be together in one place; all the children must be in one house together, (John 17:24). "And if I go, (it is not an if of

doubting,) and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also," (John 14:3). "And where I am, there shall also my servant be," (John 12:26). (4.) One resurrection, "Because I live, ye shall live also," (John 14:19). Every believer is raised in Christ, but in order; "Every man in his own order, Christ first, as the first fruits," (1 Cor. 15:23). (5.) One heaven, and one kingdom, and one throne, (Luke 22:29; Rev. 3:21).

2. There be great odds between the spirit or mind of an heir or a son, and a servant. The heir will do much for the birth-right; take his life from him, ere you take his heritage from him. Esau's face dried, he wept no more, when his father blessed him with the dew of heaven, and the fatness of the earth. A servant will not contend to be an heir.

3. "The servant abideth not in the house for ever, but the son abideth ever." (John 8:35.) The son's reward is all hope, as some courtiers attend princes upon hopes; servants have hand-payment, and present wages. Let every professor try his spirit and nature: if the spirit bend toward the inheritance, and heavenward, it is right: see who looketh to the last year of nonage and minority, and hath not an eye and heart on time. There is a latent hope in all troubles, in sons, as in a king's heir in a far country where he is not known, not honoured as one of a prince's blood, but neglected, injured—yea, in want and necessity; yet when he casteth his eye upon his over-sea hope, it cometh home to his heart with ease, "One day I shall be a king, in honour and wealth." (2.) Try the free and ingenuous spirit of a son toward the father: there is not a nature, or an instinct in the servant, nor such an inward principle toward the lord of the house, as in a son: blood and nature is strong and prevalent; blood-bonds, nature-relations are mighty.

"But Jesus said unto her, Let the children first be filled," (Mark 7:27). Christ denied not, but the woman and the Gentiles have a right to the bread of Christ's house, only, grace must keep an order; let the Jews first have the loaf broken to them, and then, let the Gentiles have the by-board, or the second table of Christ. Hence, observe Christ's wise attemperating of the temptation in these particulars: (1.) That temptations are measured by grains and scruples to the saints. There is a seed of comfort and hope in Christ's glooming and frownings: he would say, When the children are filled with bread first, then, you that are dogs, shall also have your portion of the children's bread. There is a kiss, and bowels of compassion, under the lap of that covering and cloak of wrath, with which he is covered; for "in wrath, he remembers mercy," and moderateth anger; "Fury is not in me," (Isa. 27:4). (2.) Gospel trials and temptations are for a merciful end, that Paul may not be puffed up, or as he saith, "Lest I should be like a meteor lifted up in the air above measure," (2 Cor. 12:7). "But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, (as condemned malefactors,) that we should not trust in ourselves," (2 Cor. 1:9). (3.) God will not have them above our strength, but the burden and the back are proportioned, (1 Cor. 10:13). It is good that we know Christ breweth or mixeth our cup; he can sugar the salt and bitter wine with mercy. There is no desertion of the saints that we read of, but there is as much of Christ in it, as

giveth it some taste and smell of heaven. Heaven is stamped upon the hell of the saints, life is written on their death: their grave and dead corpse are hot, and do breathe out life and glory; their ashes and dust smell of immortality and resurrection to life. Even when Christ is gone from the church, he leaveth a pawn or a pledge behind him, as love-sickness for the want of him, (Cant. 3:5). When Christ is nothing but an empty grave, and he himself is away, yet weeping for the want of him, without care of angels or apostles, when the beloved himself is gone, is somewhat of Christ; yea, he sendeth before him a messenger, to tell that the King himself is coming, as in a great summer drought, little drops go before the great shower, to make good report that the earth shall be refreshed.

(1.) Longings for him, (2.) Waiting after him, (3.) Christ in you seeking after Christ, are messengers of heaven sent before, to dress and adorn the lodging for the prince, who is on his journey coming to thee.

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