

KEPT FROM INIQUITY

NO. 2432

**INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING,
SEPTEMBER 29TH, 1895,**

DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

ON THURSDAY EVENING, SEPT. 22ND, 1887.

“I kept myself from mine iniquity” — Psalm 18:23.

In our reading we had a very wonderful description of God's delivering mercy towards his servant David. He was very peculiarly tried in the court of Saul; he deserved so well of the king that it was doubly hard for him to be treated so ill. He had been the deliverer of his country when he slew Goliath, yet he was hunted as if he had been the grossest of malefactors. He had to fly for his life, like a partridge upon the mountains, and all the while, no doubt, Saul and his partisans accused him of all manner of evil. There was scarcely any bad thing which they did not attribute to David; but he was upright before God, and he dared to challenge the investigation of the Most High, for he was sincere and true to the core. He proved by his conduct that he was so; for when Saul was in his hands, on two memorable occasions when he might readily have taken his life, he disdained to do so. He would not put forth his hand against the Lord's anointed, and in great grace, in his own good time, God was pleased to deliver his servant. If men blow out the candle of a Christian's reputation, God will light it again; if he does not do so in this life, remember that at the resurrection there will be a resurrection of reputations as well as of bodies: “Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.” It is, after all, of very small account what is said by men whose breath is in their nostrils. “They say. What do they say? Let them say.” Let them say till they have done

saying; it little matters what they say; yet, to a sensitive spirit, like that of David, the tongue is a very sharp instrument, it cutteth like a razor, and pierceth even to the bones. He felt, therefore, the slander of many, and was sometimes greatly troubled by it. However, God was pleased to work a very marvelous deliverance for him. It seemed as if the Lord would sooner shake the earth to atoms, and crush the arches of heaven, than fail to deliver his servant. He will do so still, depend upon it. "He shall never suffer the righteous to be moved."

David attributes his providential deliverance to the mercy of God by which he had been kept clear in his conduct: "I kept myself from mine iniquity." Whatever you do, if you do right, God will see you through; but, whoever you may be, if you turn aside to crooked ways, you will soon fall into a bog. If you try to carve for yourself, you will probably cut your own fingers. He who thinks that he can do better by suppressing truth, or by speaking falsehood, or by acting contrary to the dictates of his conscience, will find that he has made a great mistake. Do thou so trust in God as to hold to thine integrity. "Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee." Ponder the path of thy feet, and God will bring thee through as surely as he is alive, which is saying much more than if I said as surely as thou art alive; for, as the Lord liveth, before whom we stand, he will not forsake the righteous, nor cast off them that serve him faithfully.

This is the passage we have to consider, "I kept myself from mine iniquity." Here is, first, a personal danger: "mine iniquity." And, secondly, here is a special guard: "I kept myself." And then, thirdly, here is a happy result. David could say, as he looked back upon his life, "I kept myself from mine iniquity." There was no boasting in this declaration; but as his enemies accused him falsely, like an honest man he defended himself, for he was able truthfully to say, "I kept myself from mine iniquity."

I. Well now, here is, first, A PERSONAL DANGER: "mine iniquity."

This is a dreadful possession to have in the house; a man had better have a cage of cobras than have an iniquity, yet we have each of us to deal at home with some special form of sin. It is said that there is a skeleton in every house. I do not know whether that is true; but I do know that there is something very much allied to a skeleton, that is, the body of this death with which we all have to deal; and it takes a special shape in each good man. There is some particular sin which he may call "mine iniquity." Not

only is there the general iniquity which affects the whole race, but each man has his own particular form of it: "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way." There is a general sin, but there is a particularity in it, too; each man has his own way of sinning, so that he can speak of "mine iniquity."

Let us think of the particular form of iniquity with which some of us have to do. It takes its speciality, perhaps, from our natural constitution. He who judges all men alike does them an injustice. There are some who have but little tendency to a particular form of evil, but they have a very great inclination towards some other sin. Some are sanguine; they are expecting great things, and they fall into the sin of expecting to drink sweet waters from the cisterns of this world. There are some of quite another temperament, who are inclined to despondency, perhaps to suspicion; they may fall into mistrust, or various forms of unbelief, and even into despair, which will be very grievous to the God who is ever gracious. There are some men who, from their very parentage, are inclined to drunkenness or to unchastity. There are others, favored by God with a godly ancestry who, if they were left to themselves, would not probably fall into either of these forms of sin, yet they might be proud of their own integrity, and proud of their own uprightness; and is not pride as great a sin as those more open transgressions? Depend on it, my dear friend, thou hast some tendency peculiar to thyself, and there is a special point where thou liest open to the attacks of temptation. Happy will that man be who so knows himself that he sets a double watch against that postern gate through which the adversary is apt to creep in the dark. Peculiar constitutions may lead to special forms of sin, and it behoves the godly man to keep himself from his own iniquity.

Our tendency is to decry the particular form of sin that we find in others. We hold up our hands as if we were quite shocked. Better look in the looking-glass than look out at the window. Looking out of the window, thou seest one for whom thou art not responsible; but looking in the glass, thou seest one of whom thou must give account to God, and thou wilt do well to ask God to keep that one. Thou wilt, likely enough, within a day's march, not see a much worse man than he is, if thou dost know him well. I remember Mr. Berridge's quaint joke. He had, hanging round his room, the portraits of many ministers; and he would say to his friend, "Here is Whitefield, here is Wesley, here is So-and-so;" and then, leading his visitor to a looking-glass, he would say, "Here is the devil." Yes, he is somewhere

about there where thou art looking. If thou lookest long enough, thou mayest detect some of his handiwork at any rate, for there is something of his work about us all. Sin, therefore, may be something peculiar to constitution.

But any man may also know that “mine iniquity” may be engendered by education. How impressible we are in childhood! We bear the print of our mother’s fingers when we are fifty years of age, and it is not gone from us even when we are old and grey-headed. Things that were done at our father’s home are likely to be done in our own home. Things that we saw, things that we heard, when we were very young, may abide with us, and help to shape our whole life. May God help us so to look back upon our early training as to discover the defects of it, and, not laying the sin upon others, which would be a wicked perversion of the truth, yet let us recollect that, as we lived in a sinful generation, we have acquired some taint therefrom, and we have need to watch against the sins which were taught us when we were young, especially any of you who have been rescued by grace out of homes of drunkenness and debauchery! I bless the Lord that there are many here who have been brought by sovereign grace out of very dens of iniquity. There are some here who are, so far as they are aware, the only ones of all their household who know the Lord; and when they go home to-night, it will be a great pain to them, as they cross the threshold, to think how very different the atmosphere will be from that in the house of God where they have worshipped. Well, my dear brother or sister, we sympathize with you in your trial, and pray the Lord that you may carefully watch and that you may be kept from your iniquity.

No doubt there are certain forms of iniquity which grow out of our particular condition. The young man has his iniquity; it is not the iniquity of the aged. The young man is tempted to sinful pleasure, the old man to covetousness. Each period of life has its own special snare. Pray, I beseech you, young people, middle-aged people, old people, pray the Lord that you may be kept from the peculiar iniquity of that part of the life-passage through which you are going. He who quits the shores of England for Australia may ask the guardian care of God while yet the white cliffs of Albion have scarcely melted from his view. Let him ask God’s blessing as he passes through the middle passage of the Suez Canal; but let him not forget to pray when the captain tells him that, within a few days, he will come in sight of the southern shore. No, all along we need keeping.

It is so with our condition of life as to our outward circumstances. The rich man has his temptations. Few know how great they are, or they would not be so eager after riches. It is as hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven as for a camel to go through the eye of a needle. It is a natural impossibility, for so many difficulties surround the possession of riches; but with God all things are possible. Yet the poor man will not find that he has a much larger hole to go through. His straitened circumstances will not materially help him. Agur did well to pray, "Give me neither poverty nor riches." There are peculiar trials in each condition; and even the middle way between the two is not without its own special temptations; so that, whether thou hast much or little, pray God that thou mayest keep thyself from thine iniquity.

There are iniquities which come through prosperity. I have never yet prayed to God to preserve me in going up in a balloon, for I have never had any idea of entering one; but whenever you prosper very greatly, and especially when you prosper very fast, you are very like a man going up in a balloon. If people knew the danger, they would send in prayers to the Monday night prayer-meeting, asking that the Lord would have mercy upon the man who is greatly prospering, for there are very peculiar trials surrounding that condition. Oh, that men might be kept from that cleaving to the world and letting the Savior go, which so often follows upon great success in life!

But equally must he pray who is in adversity. Oh, the ills of adversity! The worst ill of all is the tendency to doubt God, and to put forth your hand unto iniquity in order to remove the heavy load. Pray the Lord, thou who art losing everything, that he will keep thee from thine iniquity. Thou needest not pray, like Pharaoh, "Take away the frogs;" but pray like David, "Take away mine iniquity." That is the prayer of the true child of God.

I may be speaking to some who have great talents. Well, you have need to pray, "Lord, keep me from mine iniquity," for great talent is a very dangerous thing for a man to possess, a charge which needs great grace. And, if thou hast but one talent, thine iniquity may be to wrap it in a napkin, and hide it in the earth. There is a temptation in the one talent as well as in the five. Therefore, pray the Lord to keep thee from that iniquity which is often the accompaniment of the particular condition in which thou art found.

Brothers, there are some of you who have need to pray this prayer in reference to your calling. I do not think that any calling is free from temptation, but there are some positions in which the temptation is very terrible. I need not go into those which surround many of you in trade, when everybody seems to “cut the thing fine,” as they say, and to cut the truth much finer than anything else, and say a great deal that is not true, under the notion that somehow or other it will help his business. If there be customs in your trade which all others follow, and which you know to be wrong, do not adopt them; but say, “Lord, keep me from mine iniquity.” You need not begin to say, “Those grocers, those milk-dealers, those publicans, all have their iniquities.” Think about your own; quite enough iniquities may crowd into your shop without your thinking about the shops of other people. Pray the Lord that you may be kept from your iniquity.

And, O beloved, what iniquities there are which surround us all in daily life! Into what company can you go without being tempted? In this city, at the present time, the position of a Christian is very much like that of Lot in Sodom. I speak what I do know; I do not exaggerate the conditions which surround the lives of some Christian working-men and Christian working-women who are not able to let their children go into our streets by reason of the filthiness of the language that they would hear. Even round about this house of prayer is a very cauldron of iniquity, so that many say, “We cannot live there, and we do not know where to live to keep our children out of the temptations which now surround them.” I say not that one age is worse than another, but I do say that the peculiar trials of to-day should make Christians walk very near to God; and, instead of loosening and relaxing the lines of our religious profession, let us tighten them as much as ever we can, and seek to be thoroughly Nonconformist, not conforming to the world, to be out and out Dissenters, dissenting from the ways of this ungodly generation.

Still, to help you to find out your iniquity, I will make one or two more remarks. It is likely to be that iniquity which thou hast oftenest fallen into in thy previous life. What has been thy sternest struggle? Against quickness of temper? Then, that is thine iniquity. Doubt and mistrust? That is thine iniquity. Has it been covetousness? Has it been slowness to forgive any who have offended you? Has it been gossiping and mixing untruth with your talk? That is your iniquity. Whatever it is which hitherto has stained thy life, that is probably the thing which will stain it again unless thou dost watch, and call in the power of the Holy Spirit for thy protection. That sin

which you find yourself readily committing, which you drift into without any effort, ay, which you drift into when you are making a great many efforts not to do it, that is your iniquity. That which you have returned to after having smarted for it, that which you have vowed you would never be guilty of again, and which yet has in a moment, like the bursting forth of some hidden spring of water, carried thee away with a rush, — that is thine iniquity. Oh, how canst thou keep thyself from it unless God shall keep thee? Cry unto the Most High to enable thee to keep thyself from thine iniquity. That is thine iniquity which has overtaken thee even after thou hast prayed against it, and labored against it, that thou hast concluded that surely thou wilt never do it again, and yet thou hast done it.

Let me tell you one thing more; that which you do not like to hear condemned, that which you do not like the preacher to mention, that which makes you to wriggle in your seat, and feel, “I wish he would not say that, he is coming too closely home,” that is your iniquity. And if thou canst not bear that thy wife should speak to thee about it, or that thy brother or thy sister should give thee a friendly word of advice concerning it, that which thou art most loth to hear, probably has to do with thine iniquity. We may often judge ourselves by this test. It is that which thou art most loth to hear that thou hast most need to hear; instead of being angry with him who points it out to thee thou shouldst be willing to pay him for doing it. When you go to your doctor, and ask him to examine you, if he says, “There is something a little amiss with the heart, or with the lungs,” do you knock him down? Do you get into a passion with him for telling you the truth? No, you give him his guinea, and thank him even for imparting evil news. And should we not thank those who rebuke us, and tell us of our faults? When God sendeth thee not a faithful friend, I pray him to send thee an honest enemy, who will deal straightly with thee, and let thee know where thy weakness is, that thou mayest then cry to God, “Lord, keep me from mine iniquity.”

II. Now, secondly, in our text there is A SPECIAL GUARD: “I kept myself from mine iniquity.”

Someone may perhaps say, “I have a special temptation, but I am going to set a guard against it.” Let me ask you first who you are; are you a child of God? Have you passed from death unto life? If you say, “No,” I am not referring to you in this part of my subject. You must be born again, you must go by faith to Jesus Christ, and ask for cleansing in his precious

blood, and renewal by the Holy Spirit; but I am now talking to the child of God, the man who has spiritual life. I speak to you, my dear brother, because you can, by God's grace, keep yourself from your iniquity. How are you to do it?

Well, first, you must find out what it is. You must get a clear idea of your own iniquity. Ask the Lord to search you, and try you, and know your ways. When you have found out what that iniquity is, then endeavor to get a due sense of its foulness and guilt in the sight of God. Ask the Lord to make thee hate most that sin to which thou art most inclined. Remember that thou art a child of God; it ill becomes thee to be friendly with any of the King's enemies. Remember that Christ has bought thee; thou belongest to him, thou shouldst not be the slave of any sin, thou must not be such if the life of God be in thee. The life of God in the soul hates sin; thou canst not take pleasure in any sin if thou art indeed a regenerate man or woman. Therefore, I say to thee, seek to get a sight of the heinousness of thy particular sin and the danger which attends it, that, as thou hast an extraordinary horror of it, thou mayest set that over against thy tendency to it.

Then, be resolved in the power of the Holy Spirit that this particular sin shall be overcome. There is nothing like hanging it up by the neck, that very sin, I mean. Do not fire at sin indiscriminately; but, if thou hast one sin that is more to thee than another, drag it out from the crowd, and say, "Thou must die if no other does. I will hang thee up in the face of the sun." Strive against thine anger; strive against thy covetousness; strive against thine envy; strive against thine evil temper, thy malice, if that be thy fault; for there are some who are very slow to forgive. Strive against it till thou gettest thy foot upon its neck. "I cannot do it," says one. Why, the Lord has said that he will bruise Satan under our feet shortly! Surely, if you are to have the devil under your foot, you can get all sin under your feet by God's help; and you must do it. It is a part of that work that must be wrought in us to bring every thought into captivity to divine grace. You are not able to subdue the least sin apart from Christ; but, by the help of the Holy Spirit, there is nothing that can master thee. I tell thee that, if thou let any sin master thee, thou wilt be lost. If any sin should remain unconquered, thou art ruined; for this is the way of salvation, the absolute conquest of every sin through the grace of the Holy Spirit. It must be so with thee ere thou canst enter heaven, and thou art able to overcome it in the power of Jesus Christ. If thou hast an iniquity that more than another

haunts thee, then keep away from all that tempts thee to it. Is there a house where thy company is much liked, but where thou art never able to come away without having fallen into sin? Keep away from that house. It is often one of the most essential things in young converts that they should quit the company in which they once sported. You may go into some company to do good; but mind that you are strong enough to resist the evil, for it does not always do for those who have but little strength to attempt to pull others out of the fire; they may be themselves pulled into it. No, come ye out from among them, be ye separate; touch not the unclean thing. You have no business to be in that place where it becomes almost necessary that you should sin; that necessity should warn you not to go there.

The true path of safety is to pray and believe against all sin. We conquer sin by faith in Christ. This is the axe that will cut down the upas tree, and there is no other that will do so. Believe thou in Jesus Christ the Savior, who died for thee; and then believe in him as living again, and willing to help thee in every conflict against sin. Go thou, having Christ crucified with thee, and ask him to crucify thy sin, and nail it up to his cross. So thou shalt be helped to overcome; but there must be care, and prayer, and watchfulness, and trust, and continual looking up to the Lord for grace. Only so can you say, "I kept myself from mine iniquity."

III. Thirdly, I conclude with A HAPPY RESULT.

David says, "I kept myself from mine iniquity." He does not say that he could not sin, but that he would not, and he did not. When a wicked man gets old, he may say, "I do not sin like those young people." No, because you cannot; it has been well said that there is many an old man who, if you could put young eyes in him, would look the same way as he used to do. That is not what we want; it is not the failure to commit a sin because your passions have grown colder, or your strength has left you; it is a change of heart that is wanted. "I kept myself from mine iniquity;" that is, "though it would try to tempt me, and did so, and I might have yielded to it, yet by the grace of God I would not yield."

I do pray, my brothers and sisters, that, if we live ten, twenty, thirty, or fifty more years, we may be able to say, without any boasting, but in deep humility before God, "By his great grace, by trust in Jesus, I kept myself from mine iniquity," because, if we do so, see what a blessing it will be to us, for it will be to us a reason for our being brought out of the trouble. If when you are in need, if when you are under temptation, God helps you to

keep straight, you will come out all right at the last. What a number of stories I might tell here of young men, who were great losers at first by being godly; but they kept themselves right, and they had to thank God for it ever afterwards. I know, at this present moment, a personal friend who was a banker's clerk. On a certain day, he was told to do something which he judged to be, speaking plainly, dishonest; and he told the manager that he could not do it, whereupon he received a month's notice. It was a country bank, and he was not sent about his business at once; and he had to turn the matter over. He had a wife and children; and when he went home, it was not easy to tell the wife that the excellent situation that he held would be vacated within a short time. But he stood fast in his integrity, he said that he was sure God would bring him safely through, and he never had even the slightest thought of doing other than he had said he would do. It was within twelve months that he obtained the situation of manager for that very bank, and it belongs to him at this moment; he very speedily became a man in a much better position than he could have expected to have obtained, simply from the fact that it had been proved that he could be trusted. It is not always so; some people have to be a long time under a cloud; but, in the long run, if thou as a child of God wilt but stand fast, God will not let thee be a loser. If he does, it shall be thy glory to lose everything sooner than tarnish thy character. Thou shalt find it a greater joy to lose all things for Christ than it would be to gain the whole world by doing anything that was wrong. If you are able to say, "I kept myself from mine iniquity," then you shall also be able to say with David, "I will love thee, O Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer I will call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised."

Next, if you act thus, it will be a triumph of divine grace. Brethren, we want to show the world what grace can do, and every member of the church ought to feel that he is put upon his behavior to prove what the grace of God has done in him. What credit is brought to Christ by professed Christians who are so like worldlings that, if you put them under a microscope, you could not tell the difference between them? If you can do what worldlings do, you shall go at last where worldlings go. If grace does not make you to differ from them, it is not the grace of God, it is all a sham. We ought to feel that Christ's honor is in danger by our ill behavior, and so live that we can glorify our Father who is in heaven by our good works, keeping ourselves from our iniquity.

For again, this will be our best testimony to others. It is well to preach as I do, with my lips; but you can all preach with your feet, and by your lives, and that is the most effective preaching. The preaching of holy lives is living preaching. The most effective ministry from a pulpit is that which is supported by godliness from the pew. God help you to do this!

And, lastly, what a sweet peace this will give to your conscience! Though we know we are saved by grace, hear this, ye ungodly. There is no way of salvation for you, or for us, but by the grace of God through Jesus Christ; yet when we are saved, the evidence to our own soul of that work of grace upon our nature is very sweet when we can say, "I have kept myself from mine iniquity." A well-spent life, a life that is pure, a life that has been consecrated to usefulness, a life in which there has not been a turning aside to the right hand or to the left, helps us to lie down with comfort upon our dying bed, and bid farewell to all our dear ones and feel that we are leaving behind us the legacy of a gracious example in which we do not glory, but for which we give God the glory, and thank and praise his holy name. Begin at the cross; there is the source of your salvation. Then go, and live like the living Savior. God help you to do so, for Christ's sake!