

THE FOURTH BEATITUDE.

NO. 3157

In the year 1873, Mr. Spurgeon delivered what he called “a series of sententious homilies” on the Beatitudes. After an introductory discourse upon the Sermon on the mount and the Beatitudes as a whole, he intended to preach upon each one separately; but either illness or some other special reason prevented him from fully carrying out this purpose. There are, however, eight Sermons upon the Beatitudes, three of which have already been published in the *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, — No. 422, “*The Peacemaker;*” No. 2,103, “*The Hunger and Thirst which are Blessed;*” and No. 3,3065, “*The Third Beatitude;*” — the other five will now be issued in successive weeks, and will form the Monthly Sermon Part for August, price Fivepence. Mr. Spurgeon’s Exposition of each of the Beatitudes and of the whole Sermon on the Mount also appears in *The Gospel of the Kingdom* (now sold at 3s.6d.), the volume upon which he was at work at Mentone up to a little while before his “home-call” in 1892.

A SERMON PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY, AUGUST 12TH, 1909,

DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

ON LORD’S-DAY EVENING, DEC. 14TH, 1873

“Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.” — Matthew 5:6.

I REMARKED, on a former occasion, that each of the seven Beatitudes rises above the one which precedes it, and rises out of it. It is a higher thing to hunger and thirst after righteousness than to be meek, or to mourn, or to be poor in spirit. But no man ever becomes hungry and thirsty after

righteousness unless he has first passed through the three preliminary stages, and has been convinced of his soul poverty, has been made to mourn for sin, and has been rendered humble in the sight of God. I have already shown that the meek man is one who is contented with what God has given him in this world, that he is one whose ambition is at an end, and whose aspirations are not for things beneath the moon. Very well then, having ceased to hunger and thirst after this world, he is the man to hunger and thirst after another and a better one. Having said farewell to these gross and perishing things, he is the man to throw the whole intensity of his nature into the pursuit of that which is heavenly and eternal, which is here described as "righteousness." Man must first of all be cured of his ardor for earthly pursuits before he can feel fervor for heavenly ones. "No man can serve two masters;" and until the old selfish principle has been driven out, and the man has become humble and meek, he will not begin to hunger and thirst after righteousness.

I. Proceeding at once to consider our text, we notice here, first, THE OBJECT WHICH THE BLESSED MAN DESIRES; he hungers and thirsts after righteousness.

As soon as the Spirit of God quickens him, and really makes him a blessed man, *he begins to long after righteousness before God*. He knows that he is a sinner, and that, as a sinner, he is unrighteous, and therefore is condemned at the bar of the Most High; but, he wants to be righteous, he desires to have his iniquity removed, and the defilement of the past blotted out. How can this be done: The question which he asks again and again is, "How can I be made righteous in the sight of God?" and he is never satisfied until he is told that Jesus Christ is made of God unto us "wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification and redemption." Then, when he sees that, Christ, died in the sinner's stead, he understands how the sinner's sins are put away; and when he comprehends that, Christ has wrought out a perfect righteousness, not for himself, but for the unrighteous, he comprehends how, by imputation, he is made righteous in the sight of God through the righteousness of Jesus Christ. But until he knows that, he hungers and thirsts after righteousness, and he is blessed in thus hungering and thirsting.

After he has found Christ to be his righteousness so far as justification is concerned, this man then *longs to have a righteous nature*. "Alas!" says he, "it is not enough for me to know that my sin is forgiven. I have a fountain

of sin within my heart, and bitter waters continually flow from it. Oh, that my nature could be changed, so that I, the lover of sin, could be made a lover of that which is good; that I, now full of evil, could become full of holiness!" He begins to cry out for this, and he is blessed in the crying; but he never rests until the Spirit of God makes him a new creature in Christ Jesus. Then is he renewed in the spirit of his mind, and God has given him, at least in measure, that which he hungers and thirsts after, namely, righteousness of nature. He has passed from death unto life, from darkness to light. The things he formerly loved he now hates, and the things he then hated he now loves.

After he is regenerated and justified, he still pants after righteousness in another sense; *he wants to be sanctified*. The new birth is the commencement of sanctification, and sanctification is the carrying on of the work commenced in regeneration; so the blessed man cries, "Lord, help me to be righteous in my character. Thou desirest truth in the inward parts; keep my whole nature pure. Let no temptation get the mastery over me. Subdue my pride; correct my judgement; keep my will in check; make me to be a holy man in the innermost temple of my being, and then let my conduct toward my fellow-men be in all respects all that it should be. Let me speak so that they can always believe my word. Let me act so that none can truly charge me with injustice. Let my life be a transparent one; let it be, as far as that is possible, the life of Christ written over again." Thus, you see, the truly blessed man hungers and thirsts for justification, for regeneration, and for sanctification.

When he has all of these, *he longs for perseverance in grace*. He thirsts to be kept right. If he has overcome one bad habit, he thirsts to put down all others. If he, has acquired one virtue, he thirsts to acquire more. If God has given him much grace, he thirsts for more; and if he is in some respects like his Master, he perceives his defects, and mourns over them, and goes on to thirst to be still more like Jesus. He is always hungering and thirsting to be made right, and to be kept right; so he prays for final perseverance, and for perfection. He feels that he has such a hunger and thirst after righteousness that, he will never be satisfied until he wakes up in the image of his Lord, that he will never be content until the last sin within him is subdued, and he shall have no more propensity to evil, but be out of gunshot of temptation.

And such a man, beloved, *honestly desires to see righteousness promoted among his fellow-men*. He wishes that all men would do as they would be

done by; and he tries, by his own example, to teach them to do so. He wishes that there were no fraud, no false witness, no perjury, no theft, no lasciviousness. He wishes that right ruled in the whole world; he would account it a happy day if every person could be blessed, and if there were no need of punishment for offenses because they had ceased. He longs to hear that oppression has come to an end; he wants to see right government in every land. He longs for wars to cease, and that the rules and principles of right, and not force and the sharp edge of the sword, may govern all mankind. His daily prayer is, "Lord, let thy kingdom come, for thy kingdom is righteousness and peace." When he sees any wrong done, he grieves over it. If he cannot alter it, he grieves all the more; and he labors as much as lieth in him, to bear a protest against wrong of every sort. He hungers and thirsts after righteousness. He does not hunger and thirst that his own political party may get into power, but he does hunger and thirst that righteousness may be done in the land. He does not hunger and thirst that his own opinions may come to the front, and that his own sect or denomination may increase in numbers and influence, but he does desire that righteousness may come to the fore. He does not crave for himself that he may be able to sway his fellow-men according to his own imaginings, but he does wish that he could influence his fellow-men for that which is right and true, for his soul is all on fire with this one desire,-righteousness,-righteousness for himself, righteousness before God, righteousness between man and man. This he longs to see, and for this he hungers and thirsts, and therein Jesus says that he is blessed.

II. Now NOTICE THE DESIRE ITSELF.

It is said that he hungers and thirsts after righteousness,-a double description of his ardent desire for it. Surely it would have been enough for the man to hunger for it, but he thirsts as well, all the appetites, and desires, and cravings of his spiritual nature go out towards what he wants above, everything else, namely, righteousness. He feels that he has not attained to it himself, and therefore he hungers and thirsts for it; and he also laments that others have not attained to it, and therefore he hungers and thirsts for them; that they too may have it.

We may say of this passion, first, *that, it is real*. Hungering and thirsting are matters of fact, not fancy. Suppose that, you meet a man who tells you that he is so hungry that he is almost starving, and you say to him, "Nonsense, my dear fellow, just forget all about it; it is a mere whim of

yours, for you can live very well without food if you like;" why, he knows that you are mocking him. And if you could surprise some poor wretch who had been floating away in a boat cast away at sea, and had not been able for days to moisten his mouth except with the briny water which had only increased his thirst, and if you were to say to him, "Thirst! it is only your fancy, you are nervous, that is all, you need no drink," the man would soon tell you that he knows better than that, for he must drink or die. There is nothing in this world that is more real than hunger and thirst, and the truly blessed man has such a real passion, desire, and craving after righteousness that it can only be likened to hunger and thirst. He *must* have his sins pardoned, he *must* be clothed in the righteousness of Christ, he *must* be sanctified; and he feels that it will break his heart if he cannot get rid of sin. He pleases, he longs, he prays to be made holy; he cannot be satisfied without this righteousness, and his hungering and thirsting for it is a very real thing.

And not only is it real, *it is also most natural*. It is natural to men who need bread to hunger; you do not have to tell them when to hunger or when to thirst. If they have not bread and water, they hunger and thirst, naturally. So, when the Spirit of God has changed our nature, that new nature hungers and thirsts after righteousness. The old nature never did, never could, and never would do so; it hungers after the husks that the swine eat, but the new nature hungers after righteousness; it must do so, it cannot help itself. You do not need to say to the quickened man, "Desire holiness." Why, he would give his eyes to possess it. You need not say to a man who is under conviction of sin, "Desire the righteousness of Christ." He would be willing to lay down his life if he could but obtain it. He hungers and thirsts after righteousness from the very necessities of his nature.

And this desire is described in such terms that we perceive that, *it is intense*. What is more intense than hunger? When a man cannot find any nourishment, his hunger seems to eat him up; his yearnings after bread are terrible. I have heard it said that, in the Bread Riots, the cry of the men and women for bread was something far more terrible to hear than the cry of "Fire!" when some great city has been on a blaze. "Bread! Bread!" He that hath it not feels that he must have it; and the cravings of thirst are even more intense. It is said that you may palliate the pangs of hunger, but that thirst, makes life itself a burden; the man must drink or die. Well now, such is the intense longing after righteousness of a man whom God hath blessed.

He wants it so urgently that he says in the anguish of his heart, that he cannot live without it. The psalmist, says, "My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning: I say, more than they that watch for the morning."

There is no other desire that is quite like the desire of a quickened man after righteousness; and, hence, *this desire often becomes very painful*. Hunger and thirst, endured up to a certain point, involve the very keenest of pangs; and a man who is seeking the righteousness of Christ is full of unutterable woe until he finds it; and the Christian warring against his corruptions is led to cry, "O wretched man that I am!" until he learns that Christ has won the victory for him; and the servant of Christ desiring to reclaim the nations, and to bring his fellow-men to follow that which is right and good, is often the subject of pangs unutterable. He bears the burden of the Lord, and goes about his work like a man who has too heavy a burden to carry. Painful indeed is it to the soul to be made to hunger and thirst after righteousness.

The expressions in our text also indicate that *this is a most energetic desire*. What will not a man who is hungry be driven to do? We have an old proverb that "hunger breaks through stone walls," and, certainly, a man hungry and thirsty after righteousness will break through anything to get it. Have we not known the sincere, penitent travelling many miles in order to get where he could hear the gospel? Has he not often lost his night's rest, and brought himself almost to death's door by his persistency in pleading with God for pardon? And as to the man who is saved, and who desires to see others saved, how often, in his desire to lead them in the right way, will he, surrender home comforts to go to a distant land; how often will he bring upon himself the scorn and contempt of the ungodly because zeal for righteousness works mightily within his spirit! I would like to see many of these hungry and thirsty ones as members of our churches, preaching in our pulpits, toiling in our Sunday-schools; and mission stations,-men and women who feel that they *must* see Christ's kingdom come, or they will hardly be able to live. This holy craving after righteousness, which the Holy Spirit implants in a Christian's soul, becomes imperious; it is not merely energetic, but it dominates his entire being. For this he puts all other wishes and desires aside. He can be a loser, but he must be righteous. He can be ridiculed, but he must hold fast his integrity. He can endure scorn, but he must declare the truth. "Righteousness" he must have, his spirit demands it,

by an appetite that lords it over all other passions and propensities; and truly “blessed” is the man in whom this is the case.

For, mark you, *to hunger after righteousness is a sign of spiritual life*. Nobody who was spiritually dead ever did this. In all the catacombs there has never yet been found a dead man hungering or thirsting, and there never will be. If you hunger and thirst after righteousness, you are spiritually alive. And *it is also a proof of spiritual health*. Physicians will tell you that they regard a good appetite as being one of the signs that a man’s body is in a healthy state, and it is the same with the soul. Oh, to have a ravenous appetite after Christ! Oh, to be greedy after the best things! Oh, to be covetous after holiness;-in fact, to hunger and thirst after everything that is right, and good, and pure, and lovely, and of good repute. May the Lord send us more of this intense hunger and thirst! It is the very opposite condition to that of the self-satisfied and the self-righteous. Pharisees never hunger and thirst after righteousness; they have all the righteousness they want, and they even think that they have some to spare for that poor publican over yonder who cries, “God be merciful to me a sinner.” If a man thinks that he is perfect, what can he know about hungering and thirsting? He is filled already with all that he wants, and he, too thinks that he could give of his redundant riches to his poor brother who is sighing over his imperfections. For my part, I am quite content to have the blessing of hungering and thirsting still, for that blessing stands side by side with another experience, namely, that of being filled, and when one is in one sense filled, yet in another sense one hungers still for more, and this makes up the complete Beatitude, “Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst, after righteousness: for they shall be filled.”

III. Having thus described the object and the desire of the truly blessed man, I must now proceed, in the third place, to speak of THE BLESSING ITSELF, the benediction which Christ pronounces over those who hunger and thirst after righteousness: “They shall be filled.”

This is a unique blessing. No one else ever gets “filled.” A man desires meat, he eats it, and is filled for a little while; but he is soon hungry again. A man desires drink, and he has it, but he is soon thirsty again. But a man who hungers and thirsts after righteousness shall be so “filled” that he shall never again thirst as he thirsted before. Many hunger and thirst after gold, but nobody ever yet filled his soul with gold; it cannot be done. The richest man who ever lived was never quite as rich as he would have liked to be.

Men have tried to fill their souls with worldly possessions; They have added field to field, and farm to farm, and street to street, and town to town, till it seemed as if they would be left alone in the land; but no man ever yet could fill his soul with an estate, however vast it might be. A few more acres were wanted to round off that corner or to join that farm to the main body of his territory, or if he could only have had a little more upland he might have been satisfied; but he did not get it, so he was still discontented. Alexander conquered the world, but it would not fill his soul; he wanted more worlds to conquer. And if you and I could own a dozen worlds, were we possessors of all the stars, and if we could call all space our own, we should not find enough to fill our immortal spirits; we should only be magnificently poor, a company of imperial paupers. God has so made man's heart that nothing can ever fill it but God himself. There is such a hungering and thirsting put into the quickened man that he discerns his necessity, and he knows that only Christ can supply that necessity. When a man is saved, he has obtained all that he wants. When he gets Christ, he is satisfied. I recollect a foolish woman asking me, some years ago, to let her tell my fortune. I said to her, "I can tell you yours; but, I don't want to know mine; mine is already made, for I have everything that I want." "But," she said, "can't I promise you something for years to come?" "No," I answered, "I don't want anything; I have everything that, I want, I am perfectly satisfied and perfectly contented." And I can say the same to-night; I do not know anything that anybody could offer to me that would increase my satisfaction. If God will but bless the souls of men, and save them, and get to himself glory, I am filled with contentment, I want nothing more. I do not believe that any man can honestly say as much as that unless he has found Christ; but if he has by faith laid hold upon the Savior, then he has grasped that which always brings the blessing with it. "He shall be filled." It is a unique blessing.

And *the blessing is most appropriate* as well as unique. A man is hungry and thirsty; how can you take away his hunger without filling him with food, and how can you remove his thirst without filling him with drink, at least in sufficient quantity to satisfy him? So Christ's promise concerning the man who hungers and thirsts after righteousness is, "He shall be filled." He wants righteousness; he shall have righteousness. He wants God, he shall have God. He wants a new heart; he shall have a new heart. He wants to be kept from sin; he shall be kept from sin. He wants to be made perfect, he shall be made perfect. He wants to live where there are none that sin; he

shall be taken away to dwell where there shall be no sinners for ever and ever.

In addition to being unique and appropriate, *this blessing is very large and abundant*. Christ said, “Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall,—have a sup by the way? Oh, no! “for they shall” — have a little comfort every now and then? Oh, no! “for they shall be filled-*filled*,” and the Greek word might even better be rendered, “they shall be satiated;” “they shall have all they need, enough and to spare. They who hunger and thirst after righteousness shall be filled:- filled to the brim. How true this is! Here is a man who says, “I am condemned in the sight of God, I feel and know that no actions of mine can ever make me righteous before him, I have given up all hope of self-justification.” Listen, O man, wilt thou believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God and take him to stand before God as thy Substitute and Representative? “I will,” saith he; “I do trust in him, and in him alone.” Well, then, O man, know that thou hast received from Christ a righteousness which may well satisfy thee! All that God could rightly ask of thee was the perfect righteousness of a man; for, being a man, that is all the righteousness that thou couldst be expected to present to God; but, in the righteousness of Christ, thou hast perfect righteousness of a man, and more than that, thou hast also the righteousness of God. Think of that! Father Adam, in his perfection, wore the righteousness of man, and it was lovely to look upon as long as it lasted; but if you trust in Jesus, you are wearing the righteousness of God, for Christ was God as well as man. Now, when a man attains to that experience, and knows that, having believed in Jesus, God looks upon him as if the righteousness of Jesus were his own righteousness, and in fact imputes to him the divine righteousness which is Christ’s, that man is filled; yea, he is more than filled, he is satiated; all that his soul could possibly desire he already possesses in Christ Jesus.

I told you that the man also wanted a new nature. He said, “O God, I long to get rid of these evil propensities; I want to have this defiled body of mine made to be a temple meet for thee; I want to be made like my Lord and Savior, so that I may be able to walk with him in heaven for ever and ever.” Listen, O man! if thou believest in Jesus Christ, this is what has been done to thee; thou hast received into thy nature, by the Word of God, an incorruptible seed, “which liveth and abideth for ever.” That is already in thee if thou art a believer in Jesus, and it can no more die than God himself can die, for it is a divine nature. “The grass withereth, and the flower

thereof falleth away; but the Word of the Lord” — that Word which thou hast received if thou hast believed in Jesus, — “endureth for ever.” The water which Christ has given thee shall be in thee a well of water springing up into everlasting life. In the moment of our regeneration, a new nature is imparted to us, of which the apostle Peter says, “The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away;” and the same apostle also says that believers are “partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.” Is not that a blessed beginning for those who hunger and thirst after righteousness?

But hearken further; God the Holy Ghost, the third Person of the blessed Trinity, condescends to come and dwell in all believers. Paul writes to the church of God at Corinth, “Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost?” God dwelleth in thee, my brother or sister in Christ. Does not this truth astonish thee? Sin dwelleth in thee, but the Holy Ghost has also come to dwell in thee, and to drive sin out of thee. The devil assails thee, and tries to capture thy spirit, and to make it like those in his own infernal den; but lo! the Eternal has himself come down, and enshrined himself within thee. The Holy Ghost is dwelling within your heart if you are a believer in Jesus; Christ himself is “in you the hope of glory.” If you really want righteousness, dear soul, surely you have it *here*, the nature changed, and made like the nature of God; the ruling principle altered, sin dethroned, and the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit dwelling within you as your Lord and Master. Why, methinks that however much you may hunger and thirst after righteousness, you must count yourself well filled, since you have these immeasurable blessings.

And hearken yet, again, my brother or sister in Christ. Thou shalt be kept and preserved even to the end. He who has begun to cleanse thee will never leave the work until he has made thee without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing. He never begins a work which he cannot or will not complete. He never failed in anything that he has undertaken, and he never will fail. Thy corruptions have their heads already broken; and though thy sins still rebel, it is but a struggling gasp for life. The weapons of victorious grace shall slay them all, and end the strife for ever. The sins that trouble thee to-day shall be like those Egyptians that pursued the children of Israel into the Red Sea, thou shalt see them no more for ever. “The God of peace

shall bruise Satan under thy feet shortly;" and as surely as thou hast believed in Christ, poor imperfect worm of the dust as thou art, thou shalt walk with him in white, on yonder golden streets, in that city within whose gates there shall never enter any thing that defileth, "but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life." Yes, believer, thou shalt be near and like thy God. Dost thou hear this? Thou hungerest and thirstest after righteousness; thou shalt have it without stint, for thou shalt be one of the "partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light." Thou shalt be able to gaze upon God in his ineffable glory, and to dwell with the devouring fire and the everlasting burnings of his unsullied purity. Thou shalt be able to see the God who is a consuming fire, and yet not be afraid, for there shall be nothing in thee to be consumed. Thou shalt be spotless, innocent, pure, immortal as thy God himself; will not this satisfy thee?

"Ah!" thou sayest, "it satisfies me for myself; but I would fain see my children righteous too." Then commend them to that God who loves their father and their mother, and ask him to bless your children as he blessed Isaac for Abraham's sake, and blessed Jacob for Isaac's sake. "Oh," you say, "but I also want to see my neighbors saved." Then hunger after their souls, thirst after their souls as you have hungered and thirsted after your own; and God will teach you how to talk to them, and probably, as you are hungering and thirsting for their souls, he will make you the means of their conversion.

There is also this truth to solace you, there will be righteousness all over this work one day. Millions still reject Christ, but he has a people who will not reject him. The masses of mankind at present fly from him, but "the Lord knoweth them that are his." As many as the Father gave to Christ shall surely come to him. Christ shall not be disappointed, his cross shall not have been set up in vain. "He shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied." Well may you groan because of the idols that do not fall, and the oppressions that do not come to an end, and the wailing of the widows, and the weeping of the orphans, and the singing of those that sit in darkness, and see no light; but there will be an end of all this. Brighter days than these are coming, either the gospel will cover the earth, or else Christ himself will personally come. Whichever it be: it is not for me to decide; but somehow or other, the day shall come when God shall reign without a rival over all the earth, be you sure of that. The hour shall come when the great multitude, as the voice of many

waters, and as the voice of mighty thundering, shall say, "Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth." If we are hungering and thirsting after righteousness, we are on the winning side. The battle may go against us just now; priestcraft may be pushing us sorely, and evils which our forefathers routed may come back with superior strength and cunning, and for a little while the courage of the saints may be damped, and their armies may waver; but the Lord still liveth, and as the Lord liveth, righteousness alone shall triumph, and all iniquity and every false way must be trampled under foot. Fight on, for ye must ultimately be victors. Ye cannot be beaten unless the Eternal himself should be overthrown, and that can never be. Blessed is the man who knows that the cause that he has espoused is a righteous one, for he may know that in the final chapter of the world's history, its triumph must be recorded. He may be dead and gone; he may only sow the seed, but, his sons shall reap the harvest, and men shall speak of him; with grave respect as of a man who lived before his time, and who deserves honor of those that follow him. Stand up for the right, man! Hold fast to your principles, my brethren and sisters in Christ! Follow after holiness and righteousness in every shape and form. Let no one bribe or turn you away from this blessed Book and its immortal tenets. Follow after that which is true, not that which is patronised by the great; that which is just, not that which sits in the seat of human authority; and follow after this with a hunger and a thirst that are insatiable, and you shall yet be "filled." Would you be up there in the day when the Prince of Truth and Right shall review his armies? Would you be up there when the jubilant shout shall rend the heavens, "The King of kings and Lord of lords has conquered all his foes, and the devil and all his hosts are put to flight"? Would you be up there, I say, when all his trophies of victory are displayed, and the Lamb that was slain shall be the reigning Monarch of all the nations, gathering sheaves of sceptres beneath his arms, and treading on the crowns of princes as worn out and worthless? Would you be *there* then? Then be *here* now, — *here* where the fight rages, here where the King's standard is unfurled, and say unto your God, "O Lord, since I have found righteousness in Christ, and am myself saved, I am pledged to stand for the right and for the truth so long as I live, so keep me faithful even unto death." As I close my discourse, I pronounce over all of you who are trusting in Jesus the fourth benediction spoken by Christ on the Mount of Beatitude, "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled." Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON.

MATTHEW 5:43-48; AND 6:1-4.

Matthew 5:43. *Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy.*

In this case a command of Scripture had a human antithesis fitted on to it by depraved minds and this human addition was mischievous. This is a common method, to append to the teaching of Scripture a something which seems to grow out of it, or to be a natural inference from it, which something may be false and wicked. This is a sad crime against the Word of the Lord. The Holy Spirit will only father his own words. He owns the precept, “*Thou shalt love thy neighbor,*” but he hates the parasitical growth of “*hate thine enemy.*” This last sentence is destructive of that out of which it appears legitimately to grow, since those who are here styled enemies are, in fact, neighbors. Love is now the universal law; and our King, who has commanded it, is himself the Pattern of it. He will not see it narrowed down, and placed in a setting of hate. May grace prevent any of us from falling into this error!

44, 45. *But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. See Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, No. 1,414 (double number), “No Difference.”*

Ours it is to persist in loving, even if men persist in enmity. We are to render blessing for cursing, prayers for persecutions. Even in the cases of cruel enemies, we are to “*do good to them, and pray for them.*” We are no longer enemies to any, but friends to all. We do not merely cease to hate, and then abide in a cold neutrality, but we love where hatred seemed inevitable. We bless where our old nature bids us curse, and we are active in doing good to those who deserve to receive evil from us. Where this is practically carried out, men wonder, respect, and admire the followers of Jesus. The theory may be ridiculed, but the practice is revered, and is counted so surprising that men attribute it to some Godlike quality in Christians, and own that they are *the children of the Father who is in heaven*. Indeed, he is a child of God who can bless the unthankful and the

evil; for in daily providence the Lord is doing this on a great scale, and none but his children will imitate him. To do good for the sake of the good done, and not because of the character of the person benefited, is a noble imitation of God. If the Lord only sent the fertilising shower upon the land of the saintly, drought would deprive whole leagues of land of all hope of a harvest. We also must do good to the evil, or we shall have a narrow sphere, our hearts will grow contracted, and our sonship towards the good God will be rendered doubtful.

46. *For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye, do not even the publicans the same?*

Any common sort of man will love those who love him; even taxgatherers and the scum of the earth can rise to this poor, starveling virtue. Saints cannot be content with such a grovelling style of things. "Love for love is manlike," but "love for hate" is Christlike. Shall we not desire to act up to our high calling?

47. *And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? See Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, No. 1,029 (double number), "A Call to Holy Living," do not even the publicans so.*

On a journey, or in the streets, or in the house, we are not to confine our friendly greetings to those who are near and dear to us. Courtesy should be wide, and none the less sincere because general. We should speak kindly to all, and treat every man as a brother. Anyone will shake hands with an old friend, but we are to be cordially courteous towards every being in the form of man. If not, we shall reach no higher level than mere outcasts. Even a dog will salute a dog.

48. *Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.*

Or, "*Ye shall be perfect.*" We should reach after completeness in love, - fullness of love to all around us. Love is the bond of perfectness; and if we have perfect love, it will form in us a perfect character. Here is that which we aim at, - perfection like that of God; here is the manner of obtaining it, - namely, by abounding in love; and this suggests the question of how far we have proceeded in this heavenly direction, and also the reason why we should persevere in it even to the end, because as children we ought to resemble our Father. Scriptural perfection is attainable, it dies rather in proportion than in degree. A man's character may be perfect and entire,

wanting nothing; and yet such a man will be the very first to admit that the grace which is in him is at best in its infancy, and though perfect as a child in all its parts, it has not yet attained to the perfection of full-grown manhood.

What a mark is set before us by our Perfect King, who, speaking from his mountain-throne, saith, “*Be ye perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect*”! Lord, give what thou dost command; then both the grace and the glory will be thine alone.

Matthew 6:1. *Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven.*

“You cannot expect to be paid twice, if therefore you take your reward in the applause of men, who give you a high character for generosity, you cannot expect to have any reward from God.” We ought to have a single eye to God’s accepting what we give, and to have little or no thought of what man may say concerning our charitable gifts.

2. *Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.*

And they will have no more; there is, in their case, no laying up of any store of good works before God. Whatever they may have done, they have taken full credit for it in the praise of men.

3. *But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth:*

“Do it so by stealth as scarcely to know it thyself; think so little of it with regard to thyself that thou shalt scarcely know that thou hast done it. Do it unto God; let him know it.”

4. *That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly.*

There is a blessed emphasis upon that word “himself” for, if God shall reward us, what a reward it will be! Any praise from his lips, any reward from his hands, will be of priceless value. Oh, to live with an eye to that alone!