

THE HEART OF FLESH

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**A SERMON
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*“I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.”
Ezekiel 36:26*

IT is a peculiar feature in our holy religion that it begins its work within and acts first upon the heart. Other religions, like that of the Pharisees, begin with outward forms and ceremonies, perhaps hoping to work inwardly from without, although the process never ends so, for though the outside of the cup and of the platter is made clean, but the inside still remains full of rottenness as before.

No truth is more sure than this concerning all the sons of men, “Ye must be born again.” There must be an entire and radical change of man’s nature, or else where God is he can never come. The Gospel does not flinch from this, but enforces the declaration. The Holy Spirit does not attempt to improve human nature into something better, but lays the axe at the root of the trees, and declares that we must become new creatures, and that by a supernatural work of the omnipotent God.

Scripture does not mince matters, or say that some men may be better than others naturally, and by an improvement of their excellencies may at last become good enough for God. Far from it, it declares concerning all, “Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven.”

True religion begins, then, with the heart, and the heart is the ruling power of manhood. You may enlighten a man’s understanding, and you have done much, but as long as his heart is wrong, the enlightenment of the understanding only enables him to sin with a greater weight of responsibility resting upon him. He knows good to be good, but he prefers the evil. He sees the light, but he loves the darkness, and turns from the truth, because his heart is alienated from God.

If the heart be renewed, the judgment will ere long follow in the same track. But as long as the heart is wrong, the affections govern the will, and bias the character of the man towards evil. If a man loves evil, he is evil. If he hates God, he is God’s enemy, whatever his outward professions, whatever his knowledge, whatever his apparent good qualities. “As a man thinketh in his heart so he is.”

This heart is more nearly the man than any other of the faculties and powers which God has bestowed upon our nature. What if I say that the heart is the Eve in the little garden of our nature, and she it is that first plucks the evil fruit, and though the understanding follows the affections, even as Adam followed Eve, yet the first power for good or evil lies in the affections.

The heart, when renewed by grace, is the best part of manhood. Unrenewed, it is the very worst. Aesop, when his master ordered him to provide nothing for a feast but the best things in the market, brought him nothing but tongues, and when the next day he ordered him to buy nothing but the worst things in the market, still brought nothing but tongues.

And I would venture to correct or spiritualize the story by exchanging hearts for tongues, for there is nothing better in the world than hearts renewed, and nothing worse than hearts unregenerate.

It is a great covenant promise that the heart shall be renewed, and the particular form of its renewal is this—that it shall be made living, warm, sensitive, and tender. It is naturally a heart of stone—it is to become, by a work of divine grace, a heart of flesh. Hence, very much of the result of regeneration and conversion will be found to lie in the production of a tender spirit.

Tenderness, the opposite of that which is stout, obstinate, cold, hard—tenderness is one of the most gracious signs in a man’s character, and where God has given fleshiness, or living sensitiveness, instead

of stoniness, or dead insensibility of heart, there we may conclude that there is a real work of grace, and that God has created vital godliness within.

Concerning this tenderness I am about to speak—"I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh."

I. Our first remark is that THE TENDERNESS HERE INTENDED IS ABSENT IN THE UNREGENERATE.

They frequently have a natural sensitiveness—some persons who are not converted are very tender indeed, as mothers to their children, as fathers to their offspring, as friends to friends. And God forbid that we should say anything amiss concerning that which is good in human nature after its kind, but that is widely different from the spiritually tender heart.

Some there are who have a tenderness which arises from timidity, a tenderness which sometimes inclines them to good, not because they love the good, but because they are easily ruled by their company, so that they would be just as easily led towards evil if they fell in with bad counselors. They have no principle, no root in themselves.

Such tenderness Rehoboam had, who was tender, and therefore followed evil advisers to his own injury. Such an unmanly softness as this is to be striven against, for we need to have some grit in our constitution, some firmness and resolution, and that sort of pliability which unman's a man, and makes him a puppet for others to handle, is a great evil.

There is also a tenderness which arises mainly from legal terror and fear, which is very different from the evangelical or saving softness of heart which is described in our text. Some also I know who exhibit a sort of counterfeit tenderness. When they hear a sermon, they are excited by it, and if it be about the world to come, the lifting up of the curtain of the future, they are affected for the time being, but then their goodness soon departs from them.

They forget the next moment that which affected them a moment back. They are soon hot, and soon cold. They are inconstant as the wind. That is a kind of tenderness also not to be desired—goodness which is as the morning cloud, and the early dew, which pass away.

In all unregenerate men there is a lack of the real spiritual tenderness of which I have to speak, though all are not equally hardened. In all, for instance, there is a *natural stoniness of heart*. We are not born into this world perfect, so that when sin meets us it receives a kindly reception, and is not dreaded and shunned as it should be.

Those who notice children in their first acts will not have discovered any strong aversion in them to children's sins, or horror at the sight of them. How early does the little child give way to unrestrained passion, and practice little acts of deceit? As the prophet said, "We go astray from the womb, speaking lies."

Our children's poet was correct when he said,

*"True, you are young, but there's a stone
Within the youngest breast,
Or half the sins which you have done
Would rob you of your rest."*

The heart by nature is like the nether millstone, and its hardness is increased by *contact with the world*. A youth's fresh from a godly household is not one-half so hard as he who has been for some time in the midst of ungodly company, and has seen the ways of the debauched and the profane. Custom has a great power over us, and what we see others do with impunity, we by and by come to think (unless the grace of God prevents) it cannot be quite so bad as our parents and guardians taught us that it was.

Familiarity with sin does not breed contempt for it, but often causes a measure of contempt for the law which forbids it. We see the sparkling eye of the drunkard, we hear his hilarious shout, and imagine that there is pleasure in the bowl. Or we hear men speak of the delights of their transgressions and the

sweets of lust, and unless we are held back by providence and grace, we are apt to think lightly of those things which once we regarded with abhorrence. This world is a petrifying spring, and all who are of the world are being petrified in its stream, and so are growing harder and harder as the years roll on.

Moreover, men harden themselves by *their own sins*. Every time a man sins it becomes more easy for him to sin again. Like a stone falling, sin gains impetus and increased velocity. The man who sins once has a stronger tendency to sin again, and there are some sins which almost necessitate a succession of sins.

The man who lies, for instance, thinks he must lie a second time to conceal the first. And some transgressions which root themselves in the flesh breed a hunger and a thirst for the sin so that the flesh craves to be indulged again—and those who cannot bridle their passions are thus carried away by them with great force.

As labor renders the hand hard, so sin makes the heart callous, and each sin makes the stony heart yet more like adamant. At the same time, *all the circumstances around* an unregenerate man will be perverted to the same result. If, for instance, a man prospers, nothing is more hardening to the heart than long prosperity. Find me an ungodly man whose course has been one of perpetual gain, and you shall find me almost certainly a man who is ready to say unto the Lord, “Who is JEHOVAH that I should obey his voice?”

Pride is often begotten of fullness of bread. If the man had known what want is, he might, perhaps, have been humbled before God. But now he boasts in his broad acres and his large estates, and like Nebuchadnezzar, he says, “Behold this great Babylon that I have builded.”

It is also a dangerous thing to be for many years in good health without a sickness. This also hardens a man. The sickness which brings to the borders of the grave is often sanctified to the breaking of the heart, but to be without ache or pain for a long time, is so far from being a blessing from God to the wicked, that I scarcely know anything which may turn out to be a greater curse to an ungodly man.

Never chastened! then you are no child of God. Left to find pleasure in sin! then surely it must be that God will let you have what pleasure you may in this world, because He knows a terrible future awaits you. O soul in prosperity, disturb yourself, for you are in solemn danger. Hardness of heart will almost inevitably come upon you. You are at ease from your youth—you have not been emptied from vessel to vessel—therefore your scent remains in you, and that scent is pride and carnal security.

The opposite condition of circumstances will, through sin, produce the same result. Affliction hardens those whom it does not soften. There are men who have been in many storms at sea, and though once they feared, they never tremble now. If the mast had to be cut away, and the vessel were almost to go down, they would curse and swear in the teeth of the tempest, they have grown so desperate.

Those who have escaped many accidents and dire diseases, who have passed unscathed by the hot furnace-mouth of fever, or have risen from between the jaws of cholera, are too often men whom nothing can move. What the fire does not melt, it anneals as steel. Alas, of how many may it be said, “Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more.”

They resemble Ahaz of old, who, the more he was afflicted, the more he sinned—of whom the Spirit of God has written, “This is that king Ahaz.” This is obduracy indeed, comparable to that of Pharaoh, whom the Lord hardened by judgments which ought to have melted him to repentance.

And alas! alas! that we should have to add it—*holy influences will come in to complete this hardening* and carry it to a still higher degree. The Gospel has a wonderfully hardening power over those who reject it. The sun shines out of the heavens upon wax and softens it, but at the same time it shines upon clay and hardens it. The sunlight of the Gospel shining upon hearers either melts them into repentance, or else hardens them into greater obstinacy. You cannot be hearers of the Gospel without its having some effect upon you.

Some of you have attended this place ever since it was built, and if you are not the better for it, you certainly are the worse. If the Gospel be not a savor of life unto life to you, it will be a savor of death unto death. Among hardened sinners, the Gospel-hardened sinner is one of the worst.

Yet, further, when an unregenerate man dares to put on a *Christian profession*, this is perhaps the most rapid and certain process for consummating the devil's work. For if a man will be audacious enough to join himself with the saints while he is indulging in private sin, if he will continue to come to the communion table when he knows that his base lusts are still indulged, and if, moreover, he has the face to boast of being a child of God when he knows that he is an utter stranger to divine grace, why, such a man is the raw material out of which Satan can make a Judas.

The devil himself could not make a Judas till he had found a false apostle. You must look among hypocritical professors of religion if you would find the worst of men. And I must add, you may succeed best in your search if you can find a false-hearted minister. The higher the place in God's garden, the more rank the weeds.

The hardest hearted men of all are not those who have been guilty of crimes against society, and have been put away into our jails—often a little kindness will melt these savages down. But the worst of all are those demons in human shape that make a profession of being the people of God, and all the while know that they are sinning with both hands wickedly. To cover a vile life with the coverlet of a Christian profession is a sign of reprobation.

Take men, however, at any stage, this is still true, that the heart of flesh is not to be found in any unregenerate man.

II. WHEREVER TRUE TENDERNESS IS FOUND, IT IS A SPECIAL GIFT OF THE NEW COVENANT.

A heart of flesh is a boon of sovereign grace, and *it is always the result of divine power*. No heart of stone was ever turned into flesh by accident, nor by mere providential dispensations, nor by human persuasions. You might argue with a rock a long while before you would persuade it into flesh.

Neither is such a change wrought by a man's own actions. How shall a stone, being a stone, produce in itself flesh? A power from above the man must work upon him, according to the language of the Scriptures, "Except a man be born from above he cannot see the kingdom of God." The Spirit of God must change the nature, or the heart of stone will never become a heart of flesh.

Note that *the first works of the Spirit of God upon the soul tend towards this tenderness*, for when He comes to a man, He convinces him of sin and so softens him. The man convinced of sin does not laugh any longer at sin, neither does he despise the wrath of God on account of it. When the Spirit of God darts the arrows of conviction into the soul, then the heart begins to bleed, and the man is conscious of feelings and emotions to which he was a stranger heretofore.

I trust there are some of you who understand this first work of the Spirit in the heart—He has begun to make you feel the guilt of sin. He has compelled you to tremble before an angry God, and to dread the wrath to come. This early work of grace has already made you more sensitive as you never were before, and the further the Spirit's work proceeds, the more tender will you become.

When the soul comes to be really saved, and to obtain peace through Jesus Christ, one great mark of its salvation is tenderness in heart. Oh, what a place for tenderness the cross is! When for the first time our eye beholds the Savior, we weep. We look and live, but we also look and mourn that we pierced the Lord.

Who can behold a bleeding Savior suffering for his sin without being melted down? No heart of stone can bear contact with the cross. Let but Jesus dart a look of love, and we are dissolved, as once Peter's heart was melted and made to flow out in penitential tears. Only let us hear the accents of our Redeemer's voice, and we shall cry, "My soul melted while he spake to me." The fact that He loved us, and gave Himself for us, is enough to dissolve a heart of iron, if it could once know it.

Now, as these first works of the Spirit of God in conviction and conversion lead to tenderness, *so it is true of all the divine operations which follow in due course*. The whole tenor of the Gospel is towards tenderness. I cannot recollect a promise, I cannot recall a doctrine, I cannot remember a fact connected with the Gospel, which could make a believer hard-hearted. Can you?

I think, if you will turn over all that you know, and all that God has revealed concerning salvation, you will find nothing to make you stubborn and willful, but everything to make you tender and sensitive. Oh, to think that salvation should be of the sovereign grace of God! How it humbles us. How it lays us in the dust.

No more talking about man's rights as a creature, man's claims, and what God ought to do. We are broken down, and feel that the Lord may do exactly what He wills, and thus we are made tender before His face. Oh, to know that there is no pardon except by faith in a Substitute. To understand that God must and will punish sin—how it makes us feel that sin is no trifle. How it leads us to abhor sin as a great evil, and makes us jealous lest we should offend again.

When we read that all our help was laid on Jesus Christ, how it cuts away by the roots all our self-confidence, and makes us lie low at the foot of the throne. I might go through all the truths, and doctrines, and promises, if we had time, and I think I could prove to a demonstration that their legitimate effect is to render the heart tender, wherever they operate.

So it is with *every Christian grace*. All the Christian virtues promote warmth and tenderness of heart. Have you zeal for God? I know you will be fearful of sinning. You will hate the very garment spotted by the flesh. Have you patience under the divine rod? That patience is only softness of heart in one of its sweetest forms.

Have you much love? Then I am sure you have much tenderness, for in proportion as the heart is stony, it is destitute of affection. Every one of the divine circle of graces has an intimate connection with the heart of flesh. And this thing I also venture to say, that the more tender a man is, the more advanced in grace he is—and that the more callous and unconcerned he is, the further is he from what he should be. Let the unfeeling professor know, and rest assured that if he be a child of God at all, he is certainly in a weak and backsliding state, or his insensibility would be a great burden and grief to him.

Every grace leans towards tenderness, and the whole current of the divine life sets that way. You cannot be strong in piety unless you are tender in heart. Are you a child? Can a child be good if it be indifferent, haughty, obstinate, and stony-hearted towards its parents?

Are you a servant? Who is a good servant but he that is tender of his master's reputation, and anxious to fulfill his lord's command? Are you a soldier? Where is there a good soldier that is not jealous of his captain's honor, and careful lest by any means he should break the martial law?

There must be tenderness. It is an essential point. Unless it is melted down, the hard metal cannot be poured into the mold and fashioned for use and beauty. The Lord Jesus will never set His seal upon cold wax. He stamps His image on hearts of flesh and not on stones. A tender conscience is an essential ingredient in the perfect Christian character, and where it is not, neither is the life and work of God.

III. Let us dwell upon another point, that THIS TENDERNESS, WHEN IT IS GIVEN, IS OBSERVABLE UNDER SEVERAL ASPECTS.

The man who has a heart of flesh given him becomes sensitive to fear. He trembles at the thought of a holy God in arms against him. He no longer cavils about hell and eternity, as so many do, but he says, "My heart standeth in awe of thee, and I am afraid of thy judgments." He no longer argues that the Lord is too severe, but he owns that He is just when He judges, and clear when He condemns.

The renewed heart is afraid of what other men call little sins, and flees from them as from a serpent. The regenerate man knows that there is death in every drop of sin's wine, and he will not venture to sip thereof, or taste a mouthful of sin's most royal dainties. He fears the Lord and dreads to offend, because he is made alive, so as to know the Lord's holiness and perceive His justice.

The stony heart neither knows nor fears, and therefore abides in death. I have little fear for a soul that fears, but I tremble for those who never tremble. I have sometimes wished that certain, very assured Christians, as they think themselves, who are I fear in very truth presumptuous pretenders—I wish they could and would have a dash of fear about them.

Fear of the kind we now mean is a holy salt to a man's character. Fear and trembling will become even the most eminent saint. "God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of his saints." "Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling." "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling."

Though I greatly deplore all doubts of God's truthfulness, I do not equally deprecate doubts concerning our own condition, for there is such a thing as holy anxiety, and I charge you never to think little of it, but remember the poet's lines—

*"He that never doubted of his state,
He may, perhaps, he may, too late."*

Self-examination will often suggest holy fear and deep searching of heart—and it will reveal so much of sin in us that we shall be sent to our knees, with weeping and supplication, to cry out for help and pardon. To live without fear is to live in sin, for one mark of a believer is that he has the fear of God before his eyes. In this sense, "Blessed is the man that feareth always."

Again, a tender heart becomes sensitive as to the decisions of its enlightened *conscience*. The heart changed by grace begins to weigh its own actions towards God, and it comes to the conclusion, "I have acted unjustly towards my Creator and Benefactor. He has been all goodness to me, I have received at His hands countless benefits, and yet I have ungratefully forgotten Him. When I have heard of Him, I have treated Him slightly. I have lived for myself, but not for my good and gracious Creator."

The quickened conscience holds a daily court, and its sentences are heard and respected by the heart of flesh. In the ungodly man there is a conscience, but it is asleep, and wants a cannon fired at its ear to wake it up, so that the stony heart is never troubled thereby. Let our prayer be—

*"Quick as the apple of an eye,
O God, my conscience make;
Awake my soul when sin is nigh,
And keep it still awake."*

The Christian feels that it is a horrible thing to sin against God, against the Savior's love, and against the influence of the indwelling Spirit. And he starts back from sin—not only is he afraid of the punishment, but because he is wounded by the sin itself. As smoke to the eyes, as thorns to the flesh, and as gall to the palate, such is sin to the heart of flesh.

Then, again, the new heart, the fleshy heart, becomes sensitive of the *divine love*. Is it not one of the most wonders in the world that the story of Calvary does not flood with tears every eye that reads it? Was there ever such touching, affecting love as that shown by the Son of God towards His enemies, when He left the dignities of heaven for the shame and suffering of earth?

Silly stories of love-sick maids, or the improbable plots of three-volume romances, will bring showers of tears from those who peruse them—while this grand narrative, this wondrous tragedy of love, is as a thrice-told tale, and the Book which contains it is often put upon the shelf as far too dry for reading.

Though it concerns us all, and we are lost without it, and with it are lifted up to be near akin to God—yet is this dying love of Christ disregarded. How can it be otherwise while the heart is made of stone? When his heart is turned to flesh, then the love of God affects the man, humbles him, melts him, woos him, wins him, captivates him, enchants him, enamors him, inflames him with ardent thankfulness, and draws him up towards heaven.

Divine love begets in the renewed man sensitiveness to *gratitude*. "Has Jesus done all this for me? Then, what can I do for Him? Has He bought me with His blood? Then I am His, and not my own, or the world's. What can I do for Him that died to save my grateful soul?" The renewed heart feels that the love of Christ constrains it, and it judges "that if Christ died for all, then were all dead, and that he died

for all, that they which live should not live henceforth to themselves, but unto him that died for them and rose again.”

Moreover, the heart becomes sensitive henceforth to holy *grief*. When it has erred, it chastens and humbles itself for having grieved the Savior. It takes revenge upon itself if sin has been indulged.

Withal it becomes sensitive to *joy*, and oh the joy which a Christian feels, to which the ungodly man must forever be a stranger. The renewed heart sings at the sound of the Savior’s footfall, and when His love is shed abroad, no precious ointment can be half so sweet to it.

Oh, the exhilarations and delights we have known when we see clearly our acceptance in the Beloved! Oh, the feasts and the banquetings when we have fellowship with the Crucified One! Oh, the ravishments and ecstasies when we look through the open gates of pearl and behold our eternal inheritance, the crowns of gold, and the palms of victory.

By regeneration we are made capable of an unknown fullness of joy. Every power and faculty is so quickened as to be able to quiver with delight. Heaven itself seems to flash along every nerve when the heart is steeped in fellowship with Jesus.

And so we become sensitive *with pity for others*. I would give nothing for your religion if you do not desire others to share in it. If you can, without emotion, think of a soul being damned, I fear that it will be your own lot. If you can look upon the ignorant, and the perverse, and the rebellious, and think of their destruction with complacency, you are no child of God.

Your Savior, who is the firstborn of the divine family, wept over Jerusalem. Have you no tears? Then you are not a member of the family of which He is the Head.

*“Did Christ o’er sinners weep,
And can our cheeks be dry?
Let drops of sympathetic grief
Distil from every eye.”*

A heart of stone says, “Let them go where they will—am I my brother’s keeper?” But a heart of flesh says, “Lord, help me by any means to save some. It shall be a delight to me to turn sinners from the error of their ways.”

Where this tenderness of heart is carried to a high point, as it ought to be in every Christian, the believer becomes *delicately sensitive* concerning the things of God. I have seen an instrument for weighing of so exceedingly delicate a nature that it has been affected by a particle of dust, quite imperceptible by the naked eye. An invisible atom has turned the scale.

We have different kinds of weighing machines. Some are so rough that they would hardly yield to the pressure of an ounce, but others quiver if the smallest particle falls upon them. The believer’s heart should be like this last. A Christian’s heart should resemble the sensitive plant, which the moment it is touched, folds up its leaves as a sailor reefs his canvas, or like a wound in a man’s flesh, which is pained by the faintest brush.

Spiritual sensitiveness is fullness of life—insensibility is death. To feel the slightest motion of the Holy Spirit is a sign of high spirituality. I would not wish to be, in my heart, like the Great Eastern upon the sea, needing an Atlantic roller to stir it. I would rather desire to be as the angler’s float, which mounts or sinks by the force of the least ripple.

Spirit of the Lord, thus act upon my willing heart. I want to be so sensitive of the Spirit of God that I may be like the aspen leaf, which trembles even when the breeze is not perceptible to others. We should watch to do God’s will, and not need His whip and bridle to force us to obedience.

Yet I have known professors who have clearly seen a certain duty to be taught in the Bible, but they have said, “Well, we think it is Scriptural, but we want to have it brought to us by a deep impression on our mind, and our way pointed out by providential circumstances.” This is a disobedient spirit, and ought to meet with grave censure.

The Lord's Word is our guide, not our impressions or our circumstances. And to the renewed heart it should be enough to know the Lord's will, and our obedience should be prompt. On the other hand, if anything is forbidden in the Word, or be clearly wrong, nothing can justify our continuance in it. We are bound at once to forsake it.

The great want of this age is sensitiveness about revealed truth and the divine will. We have a church in our land in which there are three distinct classes of men, who all declare that they believe the whole of the Book of Common Prayer—and it is clearly impossible that they should do so, since these parties have no points of agreement with one another, and wage incessant war with each other. Yet they each one receive it all *ex amino*, all of it, when no man living, nor angel, nor devil could believe it all—the book itself being self-contradictory.

This, however, is of small consequence to supple consciences, trained to play with language. Some ministers of this church know their position to be a doubtful one, and yet retain it on the plea that their usefulness might be impaired if they left the church. Is this reasoning fit for Christians? Are we to seek a supposititious usefulness by continuing where our conscience is ill at ease? Surely not. Our rule of conduct is the divine will, and that only.

Oh, I long to see a race of men born among us like the old Covenanters, who would die for the least Word of Jesus, and would give their blood for the smallest jewel of His crown. But now we are to be charitable, and if any of us speak out for God, straightway we are hounded down for want of charity—whereas it is our great charity for souls that makes us speak out and run all risks.

We have charity for dying men, and charity for the age to come. We see deadly error propped up by temporizers, and we cannot be silent. If ministers of the Gospel set the example of wresting words, and trifling with the truth, where will this nation's morals be in the next generation? Brethren, we who preach the Gospel must follow the highest conceivable standard of strict truth, for God's sake, for our office sake, and for the people's sake. We cannot afford to be lax in our solemn declarations, for we shall have to answer for them to our Lord at the last great day.

If we are to be teachers of other men, we must ourselves be beyond suspicion. We must be inflexible in truthfulness, and sooner die than be false of faith, or countenance anything that savors of dishonesty, or is tainted with equivocation. We shall never lead God's troops to victory against error and falsehood if we vacillate ourselves.

Oh, for great tenderness of heart towards the truth. Even though scrupulosity could beget the revival of a fierce sectarianism, it is infinitely more to be desired than the soul-deceiving charity which is the Diana of this age, and the destroyer of souls.

Translated into plain English, the current charity of the times only means that it matters not one atom what God has said. Let us make our own systems, and mutually agree to shelve all the inconvenient parts of revelation. Let us be liberal to our fellow men out of our Lord's estate—what matters our Lord's honor so long as we make things pleasant all round?

In the teeth of this, the sensitive heart will be faithful, and will bear the censure of all men sooner than incur the displeasure of the Lord. Tenderness towards God we must have. Oh, for the old Elijah spirit of stern determination, tempered with the John spirit of love to those whose errors we condemn. JEHOVAH must be King in this land, and the idols must be utterly abolished.

IV. I shall close with a few reflections on the same subject. TENDERNESS OF HEART IS TO BE GREATLY PRIZED AND EARNESTLY CULTIVATED.

Some among you may, for the first time, be distressed on account of sin. I rejoice at it. Some of you are not what you used to be—frivolous and light-hearted. You are now thoughtful, and with that thoughtfulness, sorrowful. You came here this morning, praying that God would give you peace, but you have not obtained it. I pray God to give you your wish, but may you never find peace unless it be the peace of God, peace through Jesus Christ.

May your resolution be, "I will never rest until I rest in God's rest, even in His own dear Son." Beloved, do not try to get rid of soul-alarm, and conviction, and sin, except in God's way. There are

physicians of no value who would heal your wound if you would let them—do not endure them, for they will only film it over, and leave an ulcer beneath which will cost you your soul.

Ask the Lord to make your minister faithful to you, allow him to use the lancet to open the wound, and cut out the proud flesh. Yea, ask the Spirit of God to probe you to the quick sooner than allow you to be flattered into the conception that you are healed when you are not.

Go to the Lord for healing—all other healing is worthless. Say, “Lord, make sure work of it in me. Save me Yourself. Save me thoroughly. Deliver me from trusting in myself or my fellow man, and bring me to rely only on You and Your dear Son.”

Do not go to amusements which will help you to forget your true condition. Don’t be danced or fiddled, or play-acted, into indifference. Be anxious that this bruising and breaking should go on further, that you may be even yet more conscious of the exceeding guilt of sin. You will never prize the Savior until you loathe yourself. You will never love His blood until you have been ashamed of the crimson of your own sin. Jesus will never be to you a Savior till you are in your own eyes a poor, lost, ruined sinner. Go to Jesus and put your trust in Him, and harden not your heart against Him.

Next, I speak to you, O child of God. Cultivate tenderness of heart more and more. I would say to you who are Christians, do not believe anything, the legitimate result of which would be to make you callous in your spiritual feelings, or lax in your dealings with your fellow men, or careless with your God.

I dread lest any of the truths which we profess should come to be so held in unrighteousness as to make us feel easy in sin. Whenever I find a brother perfectly content with himself, I am afraid for him. I know he does not see the sin that God sees in him, or he would rather bemoan himself than give way to boasting.

I delight to hear men preaching up a high standard of holiness—the higher the better. But if any man should say that he has reached it, I blush and tremble for him. He had need begin again upon the ladder of sanctification, for he has not put his foot on the first step of it yet—for that is humility.

Be very humble, lie very low. Be more and more conscious of your natural guilt, and repent daily more earnestly. I protest before you all that I believe the very best place for a man to stand in is with his arms around the cross, saying,

*“I the chief of sinners am,
But Jesus died for me.”*

I am nothing, but Christ is everything. I am a mass of loathsomeness in myself, but nevertheless accepted in the Beloved.

Daily may we fear lest we should fall into a routine religion, without life and power. We can sing without real joy or praise. We can pray without any earnestness or fervency. We can read the Bible without feeding on its truths. And we can know the doctrines of the Gospel without proving their influences upon the heart.

Pray against this, yea, pray against all lifeless religion. I would have my soul vital all over, and as sensitive towards God as though it were flayed, and had no earth-hardened skin upon it—that every truth, every promise, every Word of God, should make me feel intensely, acutely, and at once.

I beseech you who are believers to strive after this. Remember how tender the Savior was. There was no stone about His heart. May you be as tender as He was, and you will then be fashioned into the likeness for which God is preparing you by His eternal Spirit.

Dread growing hard in your thoughts of sin. Dread growing cold in your thoughts of Christ. Dread growing stony in your thoughts of your fellow sinners. But let this promise be pleaded in your prayers before God, “I will take away the heart of stone out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh.” The Lord fulfill it to you for His truth’s sake, and His name’s sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—EZEKIEL 36**HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—5, 568, 489**

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.