

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

ACCEPTABLE SERVICE.

A Sermon

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C. H. SPURGEON,

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"Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: for our God is a consuming fire."—Hebrews xii. 28, 29.

As a congregation you have of late been diligently engaged in the service of God by endeavouring to provide a home for fatherless children. I have been astonished and delighted at the liberality which has been shown by all sorts of persons in this good and gracious work. I felt sometimes like the king of old, who said, "Who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort?" I am sure you have well earned all the commendation that your fellow Christians can give to you; for the work has been so well and so heartily done that we all rejoice together. But, now that it is all over, careful thoughts arise in my mind. It is but a small thing that you and I should be accepted of one another; the great matter is that we should be accepted of the Lord. I, who am but as the doorkeeper of my Master's house, not only approve, but abundantly commend my fellow servants; but what of that? The great point is that the King himself should say, "Well done, good and faithful servant." We do but see the fair externals of things, but the great Father of spirits searches the hearts and tries the reins of the children of men, and judges after a higher standard. Therefore, with holy anxiety have I looked at this text and turned it over, hoping that the Holy Spirit may cause each one who has engaged in our benevolent work to examine himself, and to judge his part in this labour of love, that he may amend any fault which may hinder his work from being a sacrifice of sweet savour unto the Most High. What if we should bring our sacrifice, and the Lord should have no respect thereunto! That would be a repetition of the sad story of Cain, of whom it is written, "Unto Cain and to his offering the Lord had not respect." Then, indeed, would our countenances be fallen; but I trust it would be with repentance rather than rebellion. If unaccepted of the Lord we would weep bitterly, and ask him that the sin-offering which lieth at the door might be available for us. The chief thing is that our labour should be acceptable unto God, and upon that subject I shall speak this morning, as the Spirit of God shall enable me.

Many things are absolutely needful for the acceptance of any service rendered unto God: of these some are not stated in the text, but they are so important that I commence with mentioning them. The first is that the person who attempts to serve God should himself be accepted. The offerer must himself be accepted in the Beloved, or his offering will be tainted by his condition and be inevitably unacceptable. The uncleanness of the person pollutes his sacrifice. He that hath an impenitent heart, an unrenewed will, a disobedient mind, an unholy life, may perform outward acts of devotion, but the Lord saith, to such—"Who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations unto me." The heart itself must be given to God; for the offering which comes from a heartless worshipper is a mere pretence of homage to the Most High. See well to that, my dear hearers. God says, "My son, give me thy heart:" give whatsoever you please afterwards, but the heart must lead the way—that is essential. Let a traitor in actual rebellion bring tribute to a king; it will be but a mockery; he must first submit himself unto his prince, and then he may come with his token of loyalty.

The next essential is that, the act being performed by a person accepted, it should be distinctly done as unto God. Our text speaks of serving *God*. Alas, much is done which is in itself externally commendable, but it is not acceptable to God, because it is not rendered unto him, and with a view to his glory. Some, like the Pharisees of old, give alms out of ostentation; they sound a trumpet before them that they may have praise of men. Verily, I say unto you, they have their reward, and a poor reward it is. Some are energetic in holy work out of emulation, that they may surpass others, and may have credit for superior ability and goodness. Like Jehu they cry, "Come, see my zeal for the Lord of hosts!" Now, inasmuch as in this they seek their own honour, and not the glory of God, they cannot be accepted of him. Better far the two mites dropped into the treasury unobserved of all but the great Master himself, than all the wealth that we could possibly bring if we made the offering with divided intent. If we would serve God we must forget self. There must be the distinct desire to obey and honour the Lord, and we must not act as men-pleasers, or as labouring for our own exaltation; otherwise the Lord will abhor our offering.

And we must take care that all this is done with faith in Christ Jesus; for it is a law of universal observation in the kingdom of heaven that "without faith it is impossible to please God." "Though I give my body to be burned and have not charity," saith Paul, "it profiteth me nothing;" and the same may be said concerning faith. He who does not believe in God, and yet pretends to be religious, is manifestly either a deceiver or deceived: as the unbeliever is condemned already, his service can only be that of a condemned man, and how can it give pleasure to the Lord? We must bring our offering to Jesus, our great High Priest, and he must present it for us, for it can only be acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

These things being mentioned, I now confine myself to the text itself, which has in it a world of solemn, heart-searching thought with regard to the acceptable service of God.

I. And, first, according to the apostle, if we are to serve God acceptably it must be UNDER A SENSE OF OUR IMMEASURABLE OBLIGATION TO HIM. Look, "Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear." See, brethren, whatever service we may render to God, we must begin by being receivers. Our first dealing with the most High must not be our bringing anything to him, but our accepting of everything from him. We receive, that is our first stage; and I trow it is our last; for if ever we are able to serve the Lord by our gifts, we shall have to confess, "Of thine own have we given unto thee." When we are privileged to cast our crowns before Emanuel's throne, they will be crowns which he himself bestowed upon us of his own sovereign grace. Every hymn that comes up from saints made perfect is but an echo of almighty love. They love him because he first loved them. They are first receivers, and then, like pipes that are well filled from the fountain head, they pour out their contents. First we receive grace, and then we return service: holy service is a gift from beginning to end.

We must, then, in approaching to God, remember what we have received of him; and is it not wonderful that it should be written, "We receiving a kingdom"? What a gift to receive! This is a divine gift; we have received, not a pauper's pension, but a kingdom,—*"a kingdom which cannot be moved."* The old dispensation or kingdom has passed away; its ceremonial laws are abrogated, and its very spirit is superseded by a higher spirit, and we have entered upon another kingdom, in which the ruling principle is not law, but love. We are not under the yoke of Moses, but we are the subjects of King Jesus, whose yoke is easy and whose burden is light. The kingdom of Jesus will never end while time shall last, for he is the King Eternal, and immortal; neither will his laws be changed, nor shall his subjects die. Till that day when he shall deliver up the kingdom unto God, even the Father, and God shall be all in all, Jesus must reign: and even when the earthly mediatorial reign is consummated, the kingdom of God, the kingdom of heaven shall be continued unto us, and we shall still be members and citizens of it. We have received an eternal kingdom, and for this we ought to be eternally grateful. The shadows have vanished, but the substance abides: we have risen out of the types of Judaism into his kingdom by whom grace and truth have come unto us. This gospel state abideth; above the wreck of all things it remains, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. Ours is the kingdom of Jesus Christ, in which the gospel is the law, believers are the privileged subjects, and grace and glory are the revenue,—a kingdom daily growing in brightness, a kingdom which shall consummate its glory in the eternal world when Christ shall have put all enemies under his feet, and his people shall reign with him for ever and ever.

"But," say you, "we have not *received* this kingdom yet." I answer that we have received it in a certain sense: we have received it first in the *promise*. Our Lord said, "I appoint unto you a kingdom as my Father hath appointed unto me." "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." Now, with a man's word, if he be a man of honour, we are content: we count his promissory

note as the equivalent of the gold which he promises to pay. Let him set his hand to a promise, and we pass it from hand to hand, regarding it as the thing itself which it promises. Shall we not think as much of the word of God? The promise of God is so firm, so sure, so true, that inasmuch as he hath promised a kingdom unto all them that wait for the appearing of his Son, that kingdom is ours, and by faith we grasp it this morning. Bless the Lord, we have received a kingdom. Let us worship him in that spirit of thankfulness which such a boon should excite.

More than this, we have received it in the *principles* of it, for it is written, "The kingdom of God is within you." As the fairest flower lies packed away within the little shrivelled seed, and wants but time and sun to develope all its beauty, so perfection, glory, immortality and bliss unspeakable lie slumbering and hidden away within the grace which God hath given unto all his people. "He that believeth in him hath everlasting life." The life of heaven is begun within the believer, it is germinating, it is daily developing, it shall in God's good time come to its absolute perfection. We have the kingdom within us: it is not meat and drink; but righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. The Spirit of God within a man is the earnest of heaven, and an earnest is of the same nature as that which it guarantees. We who are born unto God have the firstfruits of the kingdom of God in possessing the indwelling Spirit; and in the firstfruits we see the entire harvest. Rise to this, my brethren, and under a sense of your immeasurable indebtedness go forth and serve your God with joyful thankfulness. This is the spirit in which to worship the Lord who has given us the kingdom.

Moreover, in a measure we have received this kingdom in the *power* of it. Notice, the text does not say we have received a little lordship, a small estate, a scanty portion, but we have received a kingdom. No gift less than this could content the great heart of our heavenly Father. He never stops half way in his march of mercy. He made us first his subjects, then his children, then his heirs, and here he makes us kings; for every heir of God is heir-apparent to a throne. "He hath made us kings and priests unto God, and we shall reign with him." Brethren, in the grace which God has given you you received a measure of kingly power: you who have believed in Jesus have power over yourselves, power over your passions, power over the powers of evil, power in measure over your fellow-men for their good. You have also power in prayer, and what a real power is that, when a man can ask what he wills and it shall be done unto him. God hath endowed you with power from on high by giving you the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Thus you have received a kingdom in promise, in principle, and in power.

Moreover, you have received much of the *provision and protection* of that kingdom. You that are children of God are not left in the power of the enemy, but being redeemed the Lord is a wall of fire round about you. You are garrisoned by angelic strength, you are led by unfailing wisdom. The all-sufficiency of God is your treasure-house. The Lord hath said, "No good thing will I withhold from them that walk uprightly." This is a royal charter of boundless liberality. "For all things are yours. Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world,

or life, or death, or things present, or things to come ; all are yours ; and ye are Christ's ; and Christ is God's."

What royal provision is thus set apart for you ! "All things work together for good to them that love God, to them that are the called according to his purpose." Everything is arranged for our benefit. There were two brothers, one of whom had been diligently attentive to his worldly business, to the neglect of true religion. He succeeded in accumulating considerable wealth. The other brother was diligent in the service of the Master, and had learned both to distribute to the poor and for conscience' sake to forego many an opportunity of gain, so that when he lay sick and dying he was in straitened circumstances. His brother somewhat upbraided him, remarking that if it had not been for his religion he would not have been dependent upon others. With great calmness the saintly man replied, "Quiet ! quiet ! O Tam, I have a kingdom no begun upon, and an inheritance I have na yet seen." Speak of laying up for a rainy day : we have infinite goodness laid up for them that fear the Lord, and none can rob us of it. Every child of God is as David when Samuel anointed him to a throne. He has a kingdom in reversion, secured by a covenant of salt.

This kingdom which we have received has come to us by grace alone, We could not have earned it, or merited it, or won it by our own strength, but the Lord has given it to us in Christ Jesus. He has taken the beggar from the dunghill and set him among princes. He has lifted us up from the ruin of the fall and redeemed us from the misery of our ungodly days, and he has enriched us with all spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus : shall we not serve him out of gratitude for such inestimable benefits ? No crack of the whip shall drive us to his service, for we have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear. No fear of hell, no hope of deserving heaven shall urge us on to please our Lord. Nay, rather this shall be our song :—

"Loved of my God, for him again
With love intense I burn :
Chosen of him ere time began,
I choose him in return."

Gratitude is the only fountain of acceptable service ; without it the streams are far too defiled to flow in the paradise of God.

A large measure of the splendour of our kingdom lies in this that it is a "kingdom that cannot be moved." Other kingdoms go to pieces sooner or later. You and I who are in middle life can remember kingdoms that have been blown down by the wind, or toppled over at the blow of one brave man's sword. Empires that have rivalled Cæsar's in apparent strength have been swept down like cobwebs. As houses made of a pack of cards, so have dynasties fallen never to rise again. There was one year in which our great caricaturist pictured kings and princes out at sea in little cockboats, tossed up and down by the wild waves of revolution. So frail was their tenure of power at that moment. Even to-day, I warrant you, the last office I should choose would be that of an emperor in any country : a man might wisely prefer to take the post of a common crossing-sweeper rather than be a king, or even a president. As for the Empire of Russia, who would court

its deadly honours? If those who deserve the severest imaginable punishment for horrible crimes were compelled to be autocrats, it would be a punishment too heavy. What must be the strain upon the mind, the constant fear, the awful unrest of a man who has the sole control of millions, and has deadly foes upon his track? Glory be to God, our kingdom cannot be moved! Not even dynamite can touch our dominion: no power in the world, and no power in hell, can shake the kingdom which the Lord has given to his saints. With Jesus as our monarch we fear no revolution and no anarchy: for the Lord hath established this kingdom upon a rock, and it cannot be moved or removed. When the sun and moon are blown out in darkness, and when the stars fall like the withered leaves of autumn, the kingdom in which we rejoice shall enjoy perpetual prosperity, as it is written, "Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and thy dominion endureth throughout all generations." Receiving such a kingdom, what are we bound to do? I would fain cast silver chains about you to hold you fast to your Lord. I would fasten anew these silken bonds upon you to bind you to your God. You have received a kingdom. You can never pay back the millionth part of what you owe. To-day, however, let the sweet love of Christ constrain you to judge that if he made you kings it is for you to crown him King with all your hearts, and if he has given you a kingdom that cannot be moved by you, it is for you to be "stedfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord."

Is it not a splendid thought that when we do anything for God, though it be but the simple offering of a prayer, or the helping of a fatherless child, we may do it with all the holy dignity of princely priests. A certain set of men arrogate to themselves exclusively the title of priests, and so deny the priesthood of every believer. In this they act like Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, thrusting themselves into an office which belongs not to them, and intruding out the true priests of the living God. Has not the Lord said to all his people, "Ye are a royal priesthood"? As for any who receive a supposed priesthood by laying on of hands of bishops we know nothing of them, except that they do err, not knowing the true dignity of every believer: they intrude into this priesthood so far as they pretend to possess priestly power beyond the meanest child of God, for all that believe in Jesus are this day made priests unto him. With what sacred orderliness, and saintly carefulness ought we to serve God, because we serve him not as common persons, if we are indeed in Christ, but we worship him as priests and kings. One of our early Saxon kings was rowed down the river Dee by Kenneth of Scotland, and seven other vassal kings, who each one tugged an oar while their lord reclined in state. The King of kings this day is served by kings; each man, each woman among us is made royal by the very fact of holy service. Let us labour for God not as slaves, but as kings! Alas, I confess that sometimes I have not served the Lord as a king: I have put on the ragged robes of my unbelief, and I have come up here mourning and groaning when I ought to have arrayed myself in royal apparel and served my Lord with joy and gladness. Some of God's own saints forget what they are, and where they are, and they go to his service as if it were a toil and a drudgery, labouring as if they were galley-slaves, and not rejoicing as princes who wait upon a great king. Brethren, your

high dignity should make you joyful, and you should perform the Lord's service with intense delight because of what he has done for you. It should be heaven upon earth to be allowed to do anything for Jesus. "Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably."

II. There is much to dwell upon in the first clause, but I must now turn to my second point. Acceptable service must be rendered to God **IN THE POWER OF DIVINE GRACE**. What saith the apostle? "Let us have grace whereby we may serve God acceptably."

Note then that acceptable service to God is not offered in the power of nature, not even of nature at its best, when we call it good nature and philanthropy; but in the service of God everything must be the fruit of grace. You are to serve the Lord, not in the strength of your own wit or experience, or talent, but in the energy of the new life which God has given you, and in the power of the grace which is continually bestowed upon you moment by moment as you seek it of the Lord. "Let us have grace," says the apostle. I know sometimes you say, and say truly, "What a poor creature I am, how can I serve God? I have not this and that gift." Just so, do not attempt to serve him in the power of gift. Ask for grace, and then worship him in the power of grace. It is wonderful how grace can make use of very slender gifts, and turn them to abundant account. It is great grace that greatly honours God; and great grace is always to be had by the least among us. You may never be an orator but you may have great grace. You may never be an organiser and take the lead among your fellow Christians, but you may have much grace. You may never attain to ample wealth so as to be able to distribute largely of your substance to the poor, but you may have great grace. Therefore, let us have grace that we may serve God acceptably.

I should like to take these words out of their connection, and hang it up for our motto as a church,—"**LET US HAVE GRACE.**" Be this our prayer—whatever else we do not have, Lord, let us have grace. If this or that means of usefulness shall be denied us, yet let us have grace, grace in our hearts, grace in our speech, grace in our lives, grace in our every breath. A true Christian should be like Aaron who had the holy oil not only on his head, but upon the skirts of his garments. Even in our little things, in our kitchen life, in our parlour life something of the holy oil should be upon us. Abundance of grace is our need. Now, dear friends, have you been trying to serve God in the power of grace, or in the power of nature? Look ye well to it. Only grace can God accept; can he accept your labour?

In the margin of our Testaments—I mean those of the authorized version, which will never be parted with for the so-called revised version—in the margin of the authorized version we read, "Let us hold fast grace." That is another motto I would like to give to this church, "**LET US HOLD FAST GRACE.**" To find grace is an act, to have grace is a state; to hold it fast is to make the act perpetual and the state continual. "Let us hold fast grace." There is such a thing as serving God and losing grace while you are so doing. You may become like Martha worried about your serving, and you may be cross with Mary because she does not work as you do, but preserves her

heavenly communion. It is easy to have so much to do for Jesus that you lose him amid your cares. It is possible to be busy here and there, and to miss the essence of service by not holding fast grace. O to dip our foot in oil, so that every step shall have unction with it, and in every movement we shall hold fast grace.

Now you may look at the new version if you like, and in the margin you will find another reading which is allowable though it has no great certainty about it. There we read,—“Let us have thankfulness.” That grand word *charis* or “grace,” may be rendered “thankfulness,” and it is in a thankful spirit that we should serve God. You have received a kingdom, therefore serve God in the spirit of gratitude. Do everything because you feel you must do it since such an infinite amount of love has been lavished upon you. No one suggested to the holy woman in the gospels to break her alabaster box over Jesus’ head; it was her own thought and her own deed. Nobody even encouraged her to do it: some rather looked askance upon her as she poured out the precious perfume, but she did it all for Jesus; she loved much, for much had been forgiven her. This is the true spirit of service. God keep us always filled with it! Let us have grace! Let us hold fast grace! And in the power of these three sentences we shall be helped to “serve God acceptably, with reverence, and godly fear.”

III. But now, thirdly, we must advance another step. To “serve God acceptably” WE MUST DO IT WITH REVERENCE. These two words in the text are much mixed up in the various readings, and it is almost impossible to divide the sense between them with accuracy; but yet I think I shall give the whole sense even if I do not allot a due proportion of meaning to each separate word. Acceptable serving or worshipping of God must be done with “reverence.” The word, according to Bishop Hopkins, signifies a holy shamefacedness. The angels veil their faces with their wings when they worship the most High, and we must veil ours with humility. The angels feel their own littleness when they stand before the presence of the dread Supreme. You and I who are much less than angels, and have sinned, should, when we come before God, be covered with blushes. Our heart should be filled with wonder that we are called to this high privilege, though we are so unworthy of it. Let each one feel “the Lord has made me a king; but what a marvel that this deed should be wrought on me! Oh that ever I should be called to such a noble estate as this!” If some poor girl were suddenly called away from the milk-pail and lifted from poverty and hard servitude to be the bride of a prince, the very thought of it would bring the crimson to her cheeks. “Can it be!” she would say; and I can imagine that when she was brought to court there would be a noticeable bashfulness and shamefacedness about her. Such holy shame ought to be upon us whenever we stand before the Lord to minister unto him. Is it not said, “Thou shalt be ashamed and confounded, and never open thy mouth any more?” Not because of a servile dread of God, but out of an overwhelming sense of his unutterable love we blush to be so highly favoured.

This reverence, this shamefacedness, should come upon us when we recollect what we were. When you stand up in a prayer-meeting and pray, dear friends, some of you cannot help recollecting the time when

you could swear or sing a questionable song. You are accepted among your brethren and honoured by them, but the time was when you kept very different company: do you not blush as you think of it? You may not only think of what you were but of what you are; because even now, though God favours you by allowing you to do him service, yet you know what evil lurks within you. A very hell of corruption lies within the best saint; and if the grace of God did not restrain it, he would soon be found among the chief of sinners.

Moreover bashfulness should be created not only by the thought of what you might be, but by a sight of your service itself. Perhaps your fellow creatures are saying, "That is well done;" but you will go home and lament to yourself, saying, "Ah, they do not know my faults. They little know what mean motives cropped up even when I was trying to glorify my God." "That was a fine sermon," said one to Mr. Bunyan. The good man answered, "You are too late, the devil told me that before I left the pulpit." The arch-fiend soon suggests to God's servants some lofty notion, and they are tempted to appropriate to themselves the honour which belongs to God only. Ah, what a fool I am that, even when I seek to be lowest at the feet of my Lord, I find myself satisfied with my humility! Do we not too often rather mimic humility than actually attain to it. Besides, it should always make us blush to think of the dignity of the service to which we are called; for who are we and what is our father's house that the Lord should have brought us to this? Servants of God! Ye Knights of the Garter, ye princes of the blood royal, what are all your earthly honours when compared with the holy dignity of servants of the Most High? Oh, that in the spirit of lowly gratitude we may always serve the thrice-holy One!

IV. The other word is, "with godly fear"; and this suggests that we should serve God IN THE SPIRIT OF HOLY CHEERFULNESS. What sort of fear is this? for "perfect love casteth out fear, because fear hath torment." Observe that it is the fear that hath torment which perfect love casts out, but not this godly fear, which is quite consistent with our joy in receiving a kingdom. The more we have of this godly fear the better for us. We ought to fear lest we should offend the Lord even while we are serving him; fear lest the sacrifice should be a blemished one, and so be rejected at the altar; fear lest there should be something about our spirit and temper which would grieve the Lord. He is a jealous God, and must be served with holy carefulness. O for more of it! I do not know how my brethren feel who say they are perfect, but I am obliged to confess that when I would do good evil is present with me, and that though I would serve God like a seraph without one stray thought, or one selfish desire, yet I have by no means reached this attainment. I press forward towards the mark, and hope to reach it, but it is at present far beyond me. Oh, brethren and sisters, much of holy fear should be upon us, because we may so easily offend the Lord when we think we are pleasing him. Beware of presumptuous boldness before God. Let us not be rash with our speech, much less rude and coarse. I know that modes of worship which offend *my* taste may, nevertheless, be accepted with God, because he sees through the rough shell, and judges according to the sweet kernel; yet I fear that

thoughtless, bragging, noisy service must offend the Lord, for it is so unlike that which was offered by his gentle, tender, well-beloved Son. If Christ be the model which he sets before us, some are far away from the mark. At any rate, let us never wantonly go into a wild, boisterous mannerism; for though we be the Lord's children, and very near to him, yet he is in heaven and we are upon the earth; he is the thrice holy, and we are sinners. The psalmist says, "Serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling."

There is another form of godly fear which comes over every genuine Christian at times—the fear lest after all he should not be serving God at all. What if I have preached to others and should be after all merely preaching because it is my vocation! What if you should be teaching in the Sunday-school, and should be doing it only because it is customary for professing people of your station to have some good work to do! My dear brethren, it is not for me to doubt you, and I do not doubt you half so much as I doubt myself, but it is needful that we question ourselves as to whether we are indeed the servants of God, or are living for ourselves.

Knowing that God is to be served in his own way, and in that alone, there ought to be a godly fear as to whether we are walking in his ordinances or are following the traditions of men. God does not care for worship which he has never required at our hands. If a man invents a ceremony, he may think it helpful and instructive; but he has no right to practise it if God has not appointed it. If any of you are practising rites and ceremonies which are not according to God's word, I charge you cease from such will-worship, for the spirit which leads you to practise these things is the spirit of Rome, and of antichrist. If God has not commanded it, God cannot accept it. Not only are we to worship the true God only, which is the law of the first commandment; but we must worship the true God in his own way, which is the spirit of the second commandment. The second commandment as it forbids all worshipping of God through images does in the spirit of it forbid all worshipping of God in any other way than he has prescribed. Therefore when thou standest before the Lord ask thyself, "Did he require this service of me? Is this the way in which he would be worshipped?" for if not it is no better than idolatry, and cannot be accepted by the living God. Oh, what fear and trembling, what solemn awe, what sacred carefulness should fall upon the man who draws near to serve and worship the Lord our God!

V. Now, lastly, there is another thing to be remembered in acceptable services. We must cultivate A PROFOUND SENSE OF THE DIVINE HOLINESS and of the wrath of God against sin, "For our God is a consuming fire." Observe, then, from this most solemn sentence that the God of the Old Testament is the God of the New Testament. Read Deuteronomy iv., at the twenty-fourth verse, and you will find these words, "For the Lord thy God is a consuming fire, even a jealous God." The same words describe the God of the New Testament. I know the boasted wisdom of the age tells us that we have made a great advance upon Old Testament revelation. It is not so. We may understand the Book somewhat better, but the revelation is the same. God wears the same character as in the days of Moses, and David, and the prophets.

The Lord God who is to be served by us, even as our covenant God, is a "consuming fire." In love he is severely holy, sternly just. We hear people say—"God out of Christ is a consuming fire," but that is an unwarrantable alteration of the text. The text is "Our God," that is God in Christ is a consuming fire. "Our God" means God in covenant with us; it means our Father God, our God to whom we are reconciled. He, even our God, is still a "consuming fire." A large proportion of nominal Christians do not believe in this God. They profess to reverence a merciful God, but the moment you preach his justice they are indignant; the God who is a consuming fire is not accepted by this proud "nineteenth century." I do this day most solemnly declare my faith in the God of the Hebrews, who will by no means spare the guilty. The God of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob is the one and only God, and I avouch him this day to be my God. Jehovah is the Holy One of Israel, the God of the whole earth shall he be called. He that smote Pharaoh at the Red Sea, he that smote kings and slew mighty kings, is my God, and I believe in him as the God and Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. I know no God but Abraham's God, Jehovah, the I AM. Under the New Testament God is not an atom less severe than under the old; and under the covenant of grace the Lord is not a particle less righteous than under the law. We are so saved by mercy that no sin goes unpunished: the law is as much honoured under the gospel as under the law. The substitution of Jesus as much displays the wrath of God against sin as even the flames of hell would do. While the Lord is merciful, infinitely so, and his name is love; yet still our God is a consuming fire, and sin shall not live in his sight. If your offering and mine be evil, it will be an abomination unto him. He is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity; if our worship and service are mingled with hypocrisy and pride, he will not endure them.

You will be rather surprised when I say that this dreadful sentence is my hope: it is a joy to me that our God is a consuming fire. Behold two altars upon Carmel. The Baalites have laid their victim upon one of them. Do you see them as they prance about the altar, and even leap upon it? Do you hear them as they cry and cut themselves with knives and lancets? "O Baal, hear us! O Baal, hear us!" There lies the sacrifice: there is no trace of Baal's hearing them, for their god is not a consuming fire. Now comes Elijah. "Pour water," says he, "on the bullock. Do it a second time: do it a third time"; and they fetch up from the sea huge buckets, and pour the water over everything until the trenches are filled with it. And now the prophet lifts up his prayer to heaven. Down comes the fire! It is God's sacrifice, and God accepts it. He is a consuming fire, and the token of his presence is so manifest that the people cry, "Jehovah, he is the God, he is the God." Turn your eyes again to Solomon's temple, gorgeous with gold and precious stones. The king pleads with the Lord of the whole earth to accept the shrine. Lo, the priests are present in their robes of office, and the sacrifice is waiting on the altar. If no fire descends, there is no acceptance; but we read, "The fire came down from heaven, and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices; and the glory of the Lord filled the house." If I am a true and sincere man, and I am believing in Jesus, and I have brought my humble sacrifice with fear

and reverence before God, then it will be accepted; for he is a consuming fire, and my sacrifice will be consumed, and go up to him.

It may be, some of you who have been working this week will think to yourselves, "We did very well, we hope to be honoured for it." So you shall be; but if you take credit to yourselves, you will be robbing the altar of God. If God accepts your sacrifice, it will all be consumed by his fire. See the accepted sacrifice is all gone, it is utterly consumed. When God enables us to serve him, and takes away from us all self-congratulation, we ought to be very thankful. This proves that it is all burned with fire. If God had not accepted it, then we might have reserved portions of it for ourselves, whereon to feed our vanity, and that would be to feed ourselves without fear; but if the Lord has taken every morsel from the mouth of self we have great cause for rejoicing. If the Lord accepts us, his fire will consume us; the zeal of his house will eat us up.

When we go home to the Lord above, we dread not his presence, though he be a consuming fire. Those whom he has purified and made white are not afraid of the flames of his holiness. Remember that blessed text, "Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings? He that walketh righteously and speaketh uprightly; he that despiseth the gain of oppressions, that shaketh his hands from holding of bribes, that stoppeth his ears from hearing of blood, and shutteth his eyes from seeing evil; he shall dwell on high." It shall be the glory of the gracious and the true that God is their element; it shall be their bliss to live in the full splendour of his perfect holiness. They shall be like their Lord, for they shall see him as he is. Everything that is holy will endure the fire, and as for all within us that is impure, let it be consumed speedily. So let us serve the Lord with fear, but not with terror, and let this service be continued all our days.

Let us bring the sacrifices of the last week to him, with repentance for every fault, humbly pleading that of his grace he will accept it, and earnestly desiring that all we have done may redound to his glory through Jesus Christ his Son, to whom be honour, world without end. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Hebrews xii.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—186, 174, 189.