

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

SPOTS IN OUR FEASTS OF CHARITY.

A Sermon

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"These are spots in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear."—Jude 12.

WHEN the church of God is extending her bounds rapidly, it is of the utmost importance that the growth should be real and permanent. If the walls of Zion are being builded quickly, the master builders should keep an anxious eye upon the workmanship, lest the stones should be put together with untempered mortar, and therefore the whole erection should by-and-by come to the ground. We desire not to grow up in a night as the gourd, lest we also perish in a night. Our Lord Jesus, who is the great Shepherd of the sheep, sends to his churches at times when they are most prospering sad reminders of human frailty, by which he warns them to "take heed that they be not deceived; but see to it that they make sure work, and build substantially, with gold, silver, and precious stones, and not with wood, and hay, and stubble." It is a very doleful season for the church of God when everything is asleep, but there are dangers connected even with activity. When a man is under the intense excitement of earnest endeavour for Christ, it is possible that much within him may be spurious, a mere fungus growth forced out by heat; and hence it is deeply necessary, as Jude says, to write unto the saints and to speak unto believers concerning this thing, that they be sound, true, real, sincere, and approved in the sight of God. Jude tells us in the text, and indeed in his whole epistle, that many who make a high profession, are not what they profess to be, and that in the church of God in her best estate, many are clouds without rain, trees without fruit, and wandering stars reserved for eternal darkness.

I. To come to the text at once, we have to remark from it that WE MUST EXPECT TO FIND UNGODLY MEN IN THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH.

They ought not to be there: the church is bound to use her most earnest endeavours to keep them out, and, being in and being discovered, she should not be slow to cast them forth. She should put away wicked members and endeavour to preserve her purity; but for all that, there will never be a perfect church this side the grave. They are without fault in the Canaan above, but a mixed multitude

always will be mingled with the tribes of Israel while we are in this wilderness. We may look for this, in the first place, because *it always has been so*. If even in the paradise of God among perfect beings sin intruded, how much more in our imperfect assemblies where every man's heart is naturally deceitful! The very first human family had a Cain in it who, on the day of solemn sacrifice, came to God's altar, although he was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. When, after a solemn judgment, the earth had been purged, and a little church of only eight members was gathered in the ark, there was among them one of whom the patriarch said, "Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be." Ham was in the ark an ungodly reprobate, though surrounded by saints. When the Lord had been pleased, according to the election of grace, to take Abraham from among mankind, and set apart both him and his household, we read of Ishmael who mocked Isaac. In Isaac's family we hear of profane Esau. However few may be the chosen, there is sure to be some connected with them who are *with* them, but not *of* them. The people who were eminently typical of the church of Christ, I mean Israel in the wilderness, were polluted in the same manner: no matter how strict might be its regulations, and how earnest might be its leader, yet the rebellious murmured, the mixed multitude fell a lusting, and Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, were a root of bitterness. I need not take you through all the history of the Lord's people down to the coming of Christ, but wherever you may put your finger, you will be certain to discover the tares mingling with the wheat, and the serpent's seed nestling in the bosom of the elect household. As for the days since the coming of our Master, this fact is painfully conspicuous. Our Lord had but twelve disciples who were near to him, and yet he said, "I have chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil." The name of Judas will go down to eternity stamped with the curse, "It were better for that man that he had never been born." Afterwards, when Jesus had ascended, and the Spirit of God had been given, when the church had all things in common, and was in her first love, yet we read of Ananias and Sapphira who hypocritically pretended to have given their substance, when they had kept back much of it, and upon them the stern voice of Peter pronounced sentence of immediate death. So early were the liar and the hypocrite found within the gates of Zion. Pristine purity could not utterly exclude the unworthy. Look again at the church in Samaria. The preaching of Philip had stirred the city, and a pretender to magic who had deluded the people, professed to become himself a believer. He believed, it is said, and was baptised; but his heart was not right in the sight of God: his faith was not the faith of God's elect. How solemn were the words of Peter to him, "Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter. . . . For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bonds of iniquity!" The execrable name of Simon Magus is another proof that the church of Christ in her most zealous estate, cannot expect to be clear of the basest of men. Our own observation, and the history of any branch of the Lord's church will go to show the same thing. It is said that the emperor Frederick III. once heard a courtier declare that he would go forthwith to a place where he should find no hypocrites. Then, said his majesty, "You

had need to go beyond the frozen ocean, where there are no men; and if you should reach the place, there might be one hypocrite there then." It would be difficult to find any association of persons in which there are no unworthy individuals, and amongst those companies which are most select, you may frequently discover the worst of men.

Further, this might be expected to be so because of *the many inducements which exist to tempt unscrupulous men to assume the Christian name*. Few inducements, I grant you, existed when the stake, the axe, or death in the amphitheatre, were the only reward for following the Lord Jesus; but many inducements are there nowadays—when to be a Christian is to be respected, when the Christian profession introduces you into good society, secures you trust and credit in your business, and procures custom for your shop: when altogether religion is a most comfortable and respectable thing, it is no wonder that knaves adopt it. Persecution has not ceased—there are Christians who have to endure much of it; but, on the other hand, many make a good thing of their profession, and some cunning rogues have proved that they could not have adopted a better trick for succeeding in life than taking up the garb of piety. Do you wonder, therefore, if persons should be found who thrust themselves upon sacred ground, and brave all consequences of future punishment? See yonder eagle, how it mounts. Does it care for the ethereal blue, or aspire to commune with the stars of heaven? Not a whit, such airy considerations have no weight with the ravenous bird; and yet you will not wonder that it soars aloft when you remember that it thus obtains a broader range of vision, and so becomes the more able to provide for its nest. It mounts towards heaven, but it keeps its eye evermore upon the outlook for its prey. No celestial impulse is needed, its love of blood suffices to bear it aloft. It soars only that it may flash downwards with fell swoop upon the object of its desires. Wonder not that men with the hearts of devils yet mount like angels: there is a reason which explains it all. That wild ass would not bray if there were no fodder. Men would be less in a hurry to avow their pretended faith if there were no advantages to be gained. The rower in the boat sits with his back to the shore, but is all the while pulling towards it: many tug the oar towards the world which they pretend to have renounced. How many are like that famous painting of the olden time, in which the artist depicted what seemed at a distance a holy friar with his hands crossed in devotion, and a book before him, looking like a saint indeed, but when you came close to the venerable impostor, you found that his hands, though clasped, enclosed a lemon, and instead of a book, there was a punch-bowl into which he was squeezing the juice. Many an inn has an angel on the sign, and a devil for the landlord. Fair without is often foul within. To seem to be answers men's purposes so well, that it is little marvel if pretenders swarm like the flies in Egypt's plague.

Moreover, brethren, we might have reckoned that there would be ungracious men mingled with the people of God, since *it is clear to every thoughtful man that this must be one of the craftiest designs of Satan*. In what way can Satan so seriously damage the church of God as by thrusting unworthy persons into it? While men slept, the

enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, because the tares would take away the nourishment from the wheat and help to choke it, and prevent it from yielding so rich a harvest. The Greeks, outside the walls of Troy, were unable to storm the city, but after a long war they succeeded by using the stratagem of the wooden horse. Putting some few Greeks within the hollow monster, they pretended to flee, and left the horse to be dragged within the gates of Troy by the infatuated Trojans. In the dead of night, out came these traitor Greeks and opened the gates to their friends without. Satan knows right well that one devil in the church can do far more than a thousand devils outside her bounds. He understands that all the blasphemers, and atheists, and free-thinkers, and so on, that ever assailed the bastions of the church of God, could not do one tithe as much mischief to her as those who pretend to be followers of the bleeding Lamb, and in secret are crucifying the Lord afresh and putting him to an open shame. If there be any here of this sort, and I fear there are, I do beseech you look to yourselves—you are cat's-paws, for the evil one, mean tools of the fallen spirit; blush to be so degraded. How sad to be a miserable skulker in the service of the prince of darkness! Better, surely, if *honour* be what you seek, to fight for Satan openly and avowedly, wearing the black plume and the diabolical regimentals, than to be a base, cowardly assassin, sneaking into the ranks of the godly to stab them in the dark. None but pirates sail under false colours, and the yard-arm is the best place for them. O you snakes in the grass, you serpents who insinuate yourselves so craftily, how shall you escape the damnation of hell? That foul fiend who now employs you upon his secret service, laughs in his sleeve as he foresees the triple bands of flame with which you will be bound for ever. O that you could repent and turn from your base and crooked ways, for otherwise your end will be terrible and your doom eternal.

Further, my dear brethren, it is a very sad reflection, that we may always expect to find ungodly men in the church of God, for numbers *come there, at first, through inadvertence*. I will excuse many, in some respects, for being found numbered with God's people, though unconverted—I excuse them to some degree, for I believe that they were honest when at first they were added to the church. They were never saved, of course; but they thought they were. Never having had a true sense of sin, they nevertheless experienced some alarms, and they set down those alarms for repentance. Although they have never truly believed in the Lord Jesus, they have felt a degree of peace, and have come to look upon this treacherous calm as the result of true faith. They have never really received a new heart, still there is a measure of reformation, and they mistake the outward for the inward. They were excited by the earnestness of God's people, and under a thrilling sermon they were made to feel as they had not felt before, and straightway, the wish being father to the thought, they concluded they had passed from death unto life, while they still remained dead in trespasses and sin. At first, a few fears may have passed their minds, but by degrees, finding these fears uncomfortable, and Satan determining to blind their eyes and sear their consciences as with a hot iron, they at last made no further enquiries, but went straightway onward to ruin

with their eyes closed, believing that they were on the road to glory. It is said that a certain player had acted the part of Richard III. so admirably, and had thrown his whole soul into it so thoroughly, that he imbibed the idea that he was actually a king, and became so extravagant in his living, and withal so haughty in his behaviour, that he brought himself first to contempt, and next to beggary. Doubtless there are many who at first were mere actors, who at last have grown into the conceit that the part which they have merely acted is a reality, and so they have continued to strut with all the pride of Pharisees, till God has plucked the mask from off their wicked faces, and set them up to be butts for the arrows of eternal contempt. Oh, beware lest that should be our lot, lest, inadvertently to ourselves at the first, being mistaken, we should at last become miserable dupes and deceivers of others.

We might naturally expect to find hypocrites, formalists, and unconverted persons in the church of God, because *human nature is bad enough for anything and everything*. If there be an evil which is detestable beyond all others, for that reason will men run to it. Nothing can be more mean than hypocrisy, nothing more base than to assume a character which is not properly your own, nothing more horrible than apostasy from plighted vows and promises; but for that very reason, he who knows the heart of man to be deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, might expect to find men rioting in such evil. There is no water so deep but fish will swim in it; no pond so foul but frogs will live in it; no mire so filthy but swine will wallow in it, and no sin so damnable but man will commit it. Men will even seek out ways and means of making themselves more and more proficient in the most mean of vices, each one vieing with his fellow. The world is getting mightily accomplished in falsehood, and has learned to deceive in the most dexterous manner, and while professors of the art of hypocrisy are so numerous, there is no hope of the trade dying out. I expect to see great offenders, for I am told by inspired penmen that evil men and seducers will wax worse and worse. I expect as the ages roll on to see good men grow better, and bad men grow viler, for each age is in advance of its predecessor. If in these last ages there should arise monsters of iniquity exceeding Nero and Caligula in infamy, we must not be astonished, for long practice of sin makes men proficient therein. The earth is ripening, and men's characters are rotting to the uttermost degree of corruption. This is the age of villany, the chosen era of shams, lies, and hypocrisies, and we must expect to see more and more of the boilings over of the sink of iniquity which lies in human nature. Be not startled, if in these last days there should be seen whole herds of wolves in sheep's clothing, deceivers and defamers of the church, for even so have we been warned by the voice of God.

II. In the second place, UNGODLY MEN DO SERIOUS MISCHIEF IN THE CHURCH OF GOD.

We are told in the text that they are *spots* in our *agapæ*, or feasts of love. It is a solemn reflection that *they defile the church before God*; they are spots upon her face, they mar her beauty in the eyes of her heavenly Friend. When the Lord looks upon his church in Christ, of course she is always fair, but when he looks upon her in herself, the defilements

which come upon her through the ungodly provoke him, and he is led to send chastisements upon her, and for awhile to withdraw the converting power of his Spirit, and the comforting power of his promise. Dear friends, we can little tell how much of evil may be brought upon any community by wicked persons in the midst of it, and we little know how much good may be kept back from the general body of the church of God by those ungodly professors who are living in uncleanness and yet pretend to have fellowship with God.

They are *spots upon the church's sacrifice*. According to the Jewish law, no beast could be offered to God which was blemished. What an awful thing it is when a wicked man becomes a church member, and in public, as he prays in the name of the church, offers to God an unclean hypocritical prayer! What a filthy prayer that must be which comes from the lip of the man who is the slave of vice, and yet dares stand up in the public sanctuary to lead the devotions of others! Can God bear such infamy? Must not the whole service be polluted thereby? Such a man at the Lord's table! How he profanes the sacred feast! Such a man preaching, for there have been many such! How he dishonours the name of minister! Such a man passing round the sacramental cup! What despite to the precious blood! Why, I wonder, when I think of it, that such solemn feasts, since they have been, so far as such persons were concerned, deliberate mockeries, have not brought down the thunderbolts of God upon those who were engaged in them. It is an awful thing to have such loathsome sacrifices laid upon our altar in our name—truly, we knew not of the offenders' guilt, our sin was therefore a sin of ignorance: the Lord have mercy upon us. When Joshua led his troops to Ai, they were defeated, not for want of courage, nor for want of wit, nor for want of armed men for the fight; they were put to the rout before their adversaries for no other reason than because Achan was in the camp, and had hidden in his tent the goodly Babylonish garment, and the wedge of gold. Think me not severe if I speak with indignation of any who have turned aside unto crooked paths, after standing high among the Lord's people—from my soul I pity such, I bewail them in my inmost heart, but yet I for Christ's sake, and his people's sake, feel towards them concerning their iniquity as Joshua did when he spared not the sentence, but adjudged the offender to his doom. Even though confession was made, yet every true-hearted Israelite cast a stone at the man who had made Israel naked before her enemies, saying, "Why hast thou troubled us? The Lord shall trouble thee this day." The church must be purified and cleansed, for our Lord's fan is in his hands, and he will thoroughly purge his floor. He who winks at sin becomes a partaker in it. God would have us put away the unclean thing from the midst of us, lest we be utterly polluted, and become an abomination in his sight. O you professors who are not living as you should live, you who are practising secret sin, you members of the church who, unknown to us, are wallowing in evil, I do beseech you go forth from among us of your own accord, before the Lord launch out his plagues upon you. Get you gone from us lest double judgment fall upon you. As for us, when your case is clear, we dare not excuse you; we hate even the garment spotted with the flesh, and much more those filthy dreamers

who wrap their lusts about them as a robe. If you have any reason left, you will surely prefer, if lost at all, to perish without incurring the double vengeance which awaits deceivers. Repent and forsake your iniquities that your sins may be blotted out, but if you will not do this, at least cease to dishonour the church of God by your false professions.

Furthermore, the ungodly in the Christian church do her mischief in the next respect, because *they defile her in the eyes of the world*, "These are spots in your feasts of charity." They defile the Christian church in the judgment of onlookers. The world is always glad to find a stick to beat the church with. It so thoroughly hates professors of godliness, that it only wants a chance to spring upon them as a lion upon his prey. So soon as one professor goes aside, men say, "Ah! just so; that is one herring out of the barrel: they are all alike." And yet if a man gets a bad shilling, he does not conclude that all shillings are bad. Men know that the existence of hypocrites does not prove that all Christians are such. They frequently say so, but they know better: you need not be in any hurry to answer them; they know that they lie in their throats when they declare all Christians to be deceivers, for they must know that there are hundreds who are not such, whose lives are pure and holy, and in every way according to their professions. They know that if they were to treat any body of men in the same way as they treat the church, they could not stand the test. Have there been no thieves in the House of Commons? Are the members of our legislature therefore all rogues? Doubtless some of them have no honesty to spare; but are there no honourable men? Was there ever a club in all the world without disreputable persons in it? Was there ever any association of men that might not be condemned, if the fool's rule was followed, of condemning the wheat because of the chaff? When with all our might and power we purge ourselves of deceivers as soon as we detect them, what more can we do? If our rule and practice is to separate the unholy so soon as we unmask them, what more can virtue itself desire? I ask any man, however much he may hate Christianity, what more can the church do than watch her members with all diligence, and excommunicate the wicked when discovered? It is a foul piece of meanness on the part of the world that they should allege the faults of a few false professors against the whole church: it is a piece of miserable meanness of which the world ought to be ashamed. Nevertheless, so it is, "Ha! ha!" they say, "So would we have it! So would we have it!" The daughter of Philistia rejoices, and the uncircumcised triumphs when Jesus is betrayed by his friend, and sold by his traitorous disciple. O deceitful professor, will not the Lord be avenged upon you for this? Is it nothing to make Jesus' name the drunkard's song? Nothing to make the enemy blaspheme? O hardened man, tremble, for this shall not go unpunished.

I must add here, that *this defilement falls upon ourselves too*. We cannot mix with deceitful and wicked men without feeling conscious that we have been in contact with pitch, and have been defiled thereby. Who sits with a leper without danger of contagion? To talk over the sin of a false professor is injurious to the mind. We cannot deal with the sin of a brother, even in the way of discipline, without a degree

of evil to our own hearts. I believe the reading of newspaper reports of criminal trials is as instructive a school for iniquity as any the devil himself could have invented, and to go into details with the person before your eyes is even more so. When we read or hear of sin, whether we are conscious or not of the effect, there is always a defilement left upon the mind. The church of God being conscious of the contagion which a sinner leaves in the camp, should daily sanctify herself. Let us proclaim a daily repentance for the unknown sin among us. We are all as one body as soon as we join the Christian church, and in some sense the sin of one is the common fault of the whole. Leaven in one chamber is leaven in the house: the plague in one house is the plague in the city. We must not say, "Oh, I cannot help the fault of such a one." He is one with us: we must all be humbled before God when there is anything wrong in the case of any one, for he is one of the family. Was he not a member of the same body? Is not the whole body concerned in the sickness or sin of the meanest member? There should be a daily walking near to God, a daily seeking of mercy, a daily humbling, a daily coming to the precious blood of Jesus for restoring grace, that so the defilement may be removed and the spots in our feasts of charity may be purged.

III. I come, thirdly, to a very important point. THE UNGODLY IN THE CHURCH OF GOD ARE GENERALLY VERY MUCH AT THEIR EASE THERE.

This head I trust may greatly comfort some who are afraid of sin, by showing them that they are not hypocrites, "*Feeding themselves without fear.*" These men had no right to come to the love-feasts, had no business whatever in the communion of God's people, but there they were, without the slightest fear. They had no fear as to whether they were saved or not; they did not trouble their heads to examine—they took it for granted. They said, "Oh! well, we are as good as other people," and so they carelessly dismissed all self-examination. They had no fear about the present, they took all for granted, and let well alone. If accused of sin, they could stand up and deny it, lying in the face of God's people without the slightest blush. They had no fear concerning the future, although running themselves into present difficulty and insuring to themselves eternal damnation. They had no bands either in life or death; they were unconscious of fear; they looked the happiest of people, wearing a perennial smile, and looking the image of peace. I have seen the genuine child of God afraid lest he should not be truly regenerate, trembling and alarmed, conscious of his present imperfections, bemoaning them, often trembling because of temptations in the future, and afraid lest he might fall; fearful of death, and alarmed lest after all he should be a castaway; yet this trembler has been the genuine coin of God's realm, about whom none were anxious but himself; while the base counterfeit has said, "Oh! yes; I believe, I know I do. I am sure I am saved;" while in his private life he was going from bad to worse, plunging himself into the sloughs of sin. My dear friends, seek after full assurance of faith, but do, do, do abhor anything like presumption. If your lives are not what they ought to be, I beseech you do not be too confident. "By their fruits ye shall know them." If there are any of you living in sin, I do not care what

doctrines you have received, or what experience you may boast, I am afraid for you if you are not afraid for yourselves. I entreat you do not lull your souls into peace while your lives are ungodly, for it will be, "Peace, peace, where there is no peace." You cannot be perfect, I grant, and salvation is not by works, but by grace, but at the same time, "Be not deceived, God is not mocked, whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." Do I cut any of you sharply? I mean to cut: I only wish I could cut deeper, but my fear is, that those who are the best will feel it the most. I know they will, and those who need it most will say, "I am glad the preacher is faithful, but his censures do not apply to me." Remember Cowper's words—

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

Heedless and Too-bold fell into the ditch. He who is too sure with a carnal security that is not based upon the promise nor rested upon Christ, will sooner or later find himself compelled to make his bed in hell. I do wonder, when I look at the text, that these people should feed themselves without fear at the feasts of charity. I suppose this may allude to the love-feasts, but also to the Lord's Supper. How an ungodly man can drink the wine which typifies the blood of Christ when he is all the while crucifying Christ, I cannot understand. How he can break bread at the Lord's table when he is spending his life with harlots, or gaining money by dishonesty, I cannot comprehend. But sin is an incomprehensible thing. Oh, the depths of human sin! My dear friends, if any of you are exhibiting this hardness of heart, pray God that you may be forgiven; but I almost fear you never will, for if there be a sin unto death, surely it must be such a sin as this, when a man can come to the solemn feasts of God's house without fear, while he knows that his heart is rotten, and, as Bunyan says, only fit to be tinder for the devil's tinder-box.

I shall leave that point when I have read to you from "Pilgrim's Progress" a passage which struck me yesterday as portraying the deceiver's doom. "Now, when they had passed by a little way, they entered into a very dark lane, where they met a man whom seven devils had bound with seven strong cords, and were carrying of him back to the door that they saw in the side of the hill. Now good Christian began to tremble, and so did Hopeful, his companion, yet, as the devils led away the man, Christian looked to see if he knew him, and he thought it might be one Turn-away that dwelt in the town of Apostasy. But he did not perfectly see his face, for he did hang his head like a thief that is found. But being gone past, Hopeful looked after him, and espied on his back a paper with this inscription, 'WANTON PROFESSOR AND DAMNABLE APOSTATE.'" God grant that paper may never be put upon our backs, but by preserving grace may we be preserved to the last.

IV. I shall now conclude with the fourth point, by asking this question: since it is clear that ungodly men are suffered to tarry for awhile in the church of God, WHAT IS GOD'S INTENTION THEREIN? What is the lesson which he hereby delivers to you and to me this morning? That is our principal business: we have little to do with others, our business is with ourselves.

The first lesson is this: *God reminds every one of us of what we might have been but for his distinguishing grace.* Judas sells Christ, and his only reward is a halter to hang himself with. Why might not I have been Judas? Ananias dies with a lie in his throat: why might not I have been that unhappy man? Ask that question, Christian; is there any betterness in your heart beyond the heart of Judas? Are you better than Ananias by nature? Is there any goodness in your constitution which would have kept you from their sin had you been left as they were? Judas was an apostle, mark you, a preacher, a miracle-worker; he dipped his hand with Jesus in the dish, and yet he sold him; and why not you? Let not self-righteousness whisper, "Ah! I never should have done so." How knowest thou that? Simon Peter said he never would forsake his Master, but before long, with cursing and oaths, he had denied him. "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall." What another man has done I may do; and there are no depths of wickedness into which I might not have plunged had not preventing grace stayed my course.

In the second place, *the Lord bids us make sure work for eternity.* If we know that fair houses have fallen down, let us build upon a good foundation. If the wind has swept away rotten boughs, let us see to it that we are quickened with the vital sap. If the knife has already removed sundry dead branches, be it our prayer that we may be found fruit-bearing boughs, vitally united to Christ. When I think of those whom I have known who have turned aside in years past in my ministry, I feel concerned to say to myself, "Have I really repented, or was it all a sham? Am I now resting upon the Rock of Ages, or have I a fictitious confidence, a delusive trust? Am I really right with God? Do I love him? Am I serving him, or am I after all fascinated by some gigantic imposture which is leading me astray to serve myself? My brethren, I beseech you dig deep for eternity. Either make it sure, or have nothing to do with it. The paint and the tinsel are nothing worth; the masquerading and the pageantry of a mere profession will all be scattered to the winds in the great day of wrath. Get gold, not gilt; get the real metal, not the imitation, lest at the last, when you shall most need comfort, you shall find yourselves drowned in despair. Surely that is God's voice to us. Hear it, learn its teaching, practise it thoroughly.

In the next place, should not the departures from the faith of some professors *put us on our guard against our own special temptations?* I do not know how you may be each one of you employed in life, but this I know, that there is a precipice near every man's foot, and a snare in every man's path. You may not fall into the temptation which besets me, and I may never fall into that which besets you; but there is a lure for every bird, a bait for every fish. I would have you specially take heed of those things in regard to which you have ventured to the very verge. There are some things which are allowable up to a point; beware of going beyond the point. Ay, and beware of often going close to it, for the temptation is to go a little farther. Edged tools, long handled, wound at last. Beware of extraordinary temptations, watch against them. A child would generally stand on his feet in a gust of wind if he knew it was coming; but when the wind happens

to come round a corner furiously, he may be taken off his feet. Mind you are well ballasted by prayer every morning before your vessel puts out to sea, or carrying the quantity of sail you do, you may be blown over upon the waves to your perpetual shipwreck. Watch constantly against those things which are thought to be no temptations. The most poisonous serpents are found where the sweetest flowers grow, and when Cleopatra would have an asp to poison herself, it was brought in a basket of fair flowers. Beware of arrows shot from a golden bow, or by a woman's hand. "Watch and pray lest ye enter into temptation." I feel as if I could go round among you, and take every one by the hand, and say, "My brother and my sister, will ye also go away?" Oh, if you would answer, "No, we will follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth," then I would reply in my Master's words, "What I say unto you I say unto all, Watch."

Further—the lessons are many, but I will be brief upon each one—should not this make us *pray more for one another*? When a member of the church under my care has sinned, I have said, "Did I always pray for that man?" That is a question for you also. Do you know of some sister in Christ who has dishonoured the faith? You have known perhaps the temptation: did you ever pray for her—pointedly for her? Did you warn her affectionately of her danger? I am afraid the answer would have to be, "I am afraid I have not." But are we clear of sin in such a case? Are our consciences quite void of offence? Should not all the mischiefs in the Christian church just say this to us, "Pray for one another: and by all means hold each other up"? Aid the tempted, remembering thyself also, lest thou also be tempted. Whenever the enemy smites down one of the troops, the other soldiers should fill up the gap and stand compact together, determined that the foe shall not kill another. Let every difficulty that comes to us only fuse us more completely into one, bring us into compacter squares and firmer battalions, determined that the enemy shall not get the advantage over us after all. Brethren, pray for one another: your heavenly Father bids you do so.

Whenever any of the ungodly are found in the church, she should labour with all her might to *be avenged on the powers of darkness*, by filling up the place of the ungodly with those who are really converted. I have often had my blood boil with sacred indignation within me when I have seen the finger of Satan hindering any of the works I have undertaken for God. Sometimes I have thought a church would be established in such a locality, and something has turned up of an evil kind which has put it out of the question. I have vowed in my soul, "Ah, Satan, I will be even with thee for that, there shall be two churches somewhere else; you shall not gain an inch by driving me back in my Master's cause. I will take care that you shall gain nought of me by all thine opposition." Let the ungodly world laugh, and for its sneers we will smite it under the fifth rib with the sword of truth. Let the enemy sneer, and for that we will discharge the more arrows of God's word, we will pray more vehemently, and labour more diligently for the extension of the Lord's kingdom. The tactics of war should dictate this. The children of this generation would do so, and let them **not** be wiser than the children of light.

Lastly, dear friends, *should not this make us long for heaven?* Whenever you at any time are vexed by hypocrites and apostates, should you not at once sigh for the perfect church, and the sweet fellowship of heaven, where none can fall, and none deceive?

“O heavenly Jerusalem,
Of everlasting halls,
Thrice blessed are the people
Thou storest in thy walls.
Thou art the golden mansion,
Where saints for ever sing;
The seat of God’s own chosen,
The palace of the King.
There God for ever sitteth,
Himself of all the crown;
The Lamb the light that shineth,
And never goeth down.
Nought to this seat approacheth
Their sweet peace to molest;
They sing their God for ever,
Nor day nor night they rest.”

They are without fault before the throne. There shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and the Lamb shall be in it. We shall not suspect a brother there; we shall not bemoan a failure there; we shall not fear backsliding there, for the saints are all complete in Jesus, all conformed to the image of their Master, and they shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.

I have not spoken to you one-half as solemnly as my own heart has felt, but I do commend to you the serious considerations I have brought under your notice, and ask you in the name of the Lord Jesus, who has suffered enough without being made to suffer in the house of his friends, by his wounds, by his blood, by all his griefs and death throes, do not crucify him afresh, and put him to an open shame, but glorify him in your lives, your words and acts, and so may the Lord do unto you of his great mercy. Amen.