

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE DANGER OF CARNAL SECURITY.

A Sermon

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DELIVERED BY

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“Then the five men departed, and came to Laish, and saw the people that were therein, how they dwelt careless, after the manner of the Zidonians, quiet and secure; and there was no magistrate in the land, that might put them to shame in any thing; and they were far from the Zidonians, and had no business with any man. . . . And they took the things which Micah had made, and the priest which he had, and came unto Laish, unto a people that were at quiet and secure: and they smote them with the edge of the sword, and burnt the city with fire. And there was no deliverer, because it was far from Zidon, and they had no business with any man.”—Judges xviii. 7, 27, 28.

I HAVE for this evening's discourse what some of you may consider to be rather a singular text; let me therefore begin by briefly stating the circumstances surrounding it.

The tribe of Dan found its portion to be rather too small, so the people held a council to decide what was to be done. They resolved to send a small body of men to spy out the land; these spies came in due time to a place called Laish, which they found to be inhabited by certain people who dwelt there carelessly, in supposed security, “after the manner of the Zidonians.” They were attacked without any notice, and the tribe of Dan took their territory, and added it to their own. I do not in the least degree commend the action of these people; what I have to do with the narrative is to use it for the purpose of drawing from it lessons suited to the present time.

I suppose that these people, who were living at Laish, were originally a colony of Zidonians, and they had settled in a very fat, fertile valley; according to the tenth verse, a place where there was no want of anything. They did not care to trade with others, they were not at all an enterprising or busy people; but finding every luxury growing out of their own soil, they had no care to do business with any other men whatsoever. They kept no guard or watch, for, although they knew that, in common with all the other inhabitants of the land of

Canaan, they had been doomed to fall by the sword of Israel, yet the Israelites had been very slow in conquering the country; many years had passed since Joshua had died, many judges had come and gone, and they had never been troubled. Therefore they rested in perfect ease, neither drilling themselves, nor exercising any warlike arts, but feeling altogether secure, living luxuriously in a fools' paradise. It was so, for, on a sudden, these Danites, giving them no notice whatsoever, fell upon them, cut them up root and branch, burnt their city, and took the land for themselves. I am not going into the moral of this business, how far Dan is to be blamed; but I am simply going to use this incident as the picture of a very common condition which is to be found among the sons of men, which condition is a very dangerous and false one, and will end, unless the grace of God prevent, in the destruction of those who are thus carnally secure.

I. First, let us notice THE CONDITION OF CARNAL SECURITY INTO WHICH CHRISTIANS SOMETIMES FALL.

If they do fall into such a condition as that, they may rest assured that it is one of great danger. Let me describe it to you. Here is a man who is a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. In times long gone by, he struggled hard to get his feet upon the Rock of ages; but at last he obtained a firm footing, and there he stood in blessed security. For some time, perhaps even for years, he has been free from all doubts and fears, and also *free from all internal struggles and conflicts*. He almost thinks that the devil is dead, or, if not, that the devil in him is dead, that sin has become so broken and bruised in his nature that it will never rise again, or cause him trouble. He rejoices, and continues to rejoice; but it may be that, in course of time, the dry rot of self-satisfaction begins to show itself. The man would not say, with the Pharisee, that he thanks God he is not as other men, but there is something of that sort of feeling within his heart. He entered into full assurance of faith at the first, but that full assurance has begun to rust into confidence in self; and now, no longer emptied from vessel to vessel, his sin remaineth in him. No longer tossed upon the waves, he makes little or no progress towards the heavenly haven; his ship's keel upon the ocean is still amidst a calm, and the fear is that the calm will grow into stagnation, and the stagnation into corruption. God save the man to whom a calm itself becomes more dangerous than a tempest! I think you must know some people of that kind; perhaps, if some of you look in the glass, you may see at least one person of that sort. The Zidonians mentioned in our text had no dread of warfare, or the sound of trumpet, or the crash of arms; and self-confident professors are in much the same condition.

You noticed also about these Zidonians that they had "no magistrate in the land." I think I have known some persons who may have possessed a conscience, but if so, it had gone to sleep. I have great fear for *religious men with sleepy consciences*; and it is really amazing what mischief may be done by men who seem to be heartily religious, yet whose consciences have gone soundly asleep. There are some ungodly men who would tremble to do what some professing Christians do without any qualms of conscience. God save you, dear friends, from such a state of heart as that! We ought to

long for a holy sensitiveness of conscience, we should wish to have it tender as the apple of the eye, so that the very least touch of sin should startle and amaze us. We are all too apt to grow a skin over our conscience, and after a time it gets to be callous, I had almost said horny; and we need to have it wounded again, and kept open like a fresh raw wound, so that the least speck of sin may cause it intense anguish. We are never what we ought to be except we are in that condition; yet have I known some professors who have been so long at ease in Zion that the moss has grown over their conscience, and you can scarcely get at it so as to arouse it to a sense of sin.

These Zidonians, next, had *no care at all about other people*. We are told twice that they "had no business with any man." Are there any people who are called Christians, who are of that sort, and have no concern, or very little concern, about the souls of others? They say that they do care about the heathen, for they have subscribed five shillings towards sending out a missionary to lay down his life on a foreign shore! They do care about the people who are dying at home, for they spoke to someone about the Sunday-school a little while ago, and they said a kind word for the City Mission! They have never done anything by way of teaching children, or visiting the poor and needy; you could not expect it of them, of course. They are such men of business, they have so many matters to attend to, that you could put into a small thimble anything they do for the cause of God. They take little or nothing for the Lord out of the full river of their life's force; so far as the good of their fellows is concerned, they have "no business with any man." Years ago, they were very active workers; at least, they tell us so. In some dim remote past, almost forgotten, they did try to take up Christ's cross, and to bear his yoke; but now they are gentlemen at large, supernumeraries, who have entered upon a period of dignified rest,—Zidonians, having no business with any man. Some of these people never join a church, for they do not care about its responsibilities. They are going to heaven, so they say; yet they are trying to get there without walking in the King's highway, but sneaking behind the hedges, and taking rest whenever they can; not entering the Palace Beautiful, nor joining the caravans of pilgrims that march together, with their Great-hearts leading them, and fighting giants on the road. We have this sort of Christians about still; I call them Christians, but God alone knows whether they are his or not.

These people also live, like the Zidonians did, *without any fear of invasion*. It is not at all likely that they will ever fall into gross sin; at least, so they say. Young people, of course, have strong passions, and they *may* fall into sin; but these old, experienced people are not likely to be carried away by temptation. Some people are very foolish, and they may be caught by the subtlety of the old serpent; but these good old professors are wonderfully wise; indeed, it is quite a wonder that one small head can carry all they know! They are so deeply experienced that, if they were to die, half the experience in the church would die out with them! So excellent are they that, with regard to their yielding to temptation and falling into sin, it is quite impossible! Of course, the young folk had better pledge themselves to total

abstinence; because drink would be a temptation to them; but these good people can drink just a sufficient quantity, and no more, they have such control of themselves! Of course, young men and women had better keep away from doubtful places of amusement; but these old people are so supremely good that, if they were living in the devil's camp, their hearts would still be in heaven! They can be trusted anywhere!

Perhaps you enquire, "Does anybody seriously believe this that you have been saying?" Anybody seriously believe it? Why, yes, some of you do, only you do not put it into words; and if I were to point you out, and say that you believed it, you would flatly contradict me. But you do all the same. There are many professing Christians who live as if they were beyond gun-shot of the enemy, and were quite safe and secure. They say, spiritually, "Soul, take thine ease; thou hast much goods laid up for many years, eat, drink, and be merry;" and all the while they are in imminent danger of falling into the very worst forms of sin, proving apostates after all, showing the rottenness of their profession, letting all see that their religion is nothing better than a painted disguise to go to hell in, but not a work of God in the soul by which that soul is really and truly saved. A friend told me that, the other night, as she sat in this Tabernacle, there spoke with her a person who is a regular frequenter of this house of prayer, and who said that she was without sin, that she did not know that anything preached here at all suited her, and that she believed I was well aware that she did not require any admonitions or exhortations. She was glad to hear me earnest about sinners; but she was not a sinner, she had not been a sinner for a long time, and any exhortations that were directed to sleepy saints, she felt were very proper, but they did not belong to her; in fact, she only came because it was a proper thing to come, but she did not expect to get anything for herself out of the services, she had advanced far beyond that point. Well, I do not know where you are, my good sister, but you are the very person to whom I am now speaking. You superlatively good people who think you do not need any warning, are the identical persons I am most anxious to warn. Remember Cowper's lines,—

"He has no hope who never felt a fear;
And he that never doubted of his state,
He may perhaps—perhaps he may—too late."

He that is, as men say, so "cock sure," may find himself lost after all. He may be but a dotard and a dreamer, notwithstanding all his confidence. I would rather go to heaven doubting all the way, than be lost through self-confidence. I would rather cry out in the bitterness of my spirit, "Am I sincere or not?" and cry it out every day, than write myself down among the blessed, and at last wake up and find myself in hell. There is a holy fear which must not be banished from the Church of God, there is a sacred anxiety which puts us to the question, and examines us whether we be in the faith, and it is not to be scouted as some would scout it. It is all very fine to say, "Believe that you are right, and you are right;" but if you

believe that you are right, and you are all the while wrong, you put yourself beyond the probability of ever getting right. He who believes himself to be saved when he is not is likely to shut the door of salvation in his own face, and to perish self-excluded. God save us from that fatal folly! I would blow even in Zion the trumpet of warning, I would sound an alarm in God's holy mountain. May you and I never get beyond spiritual conflicts, beyond striving against our corruptions, beyond hating the garment spotted by the flesh! May we never get beyond a holy filial fear, and a grave anxiety that in all that we do we may be pleasing and acceptable in the sight of God! If not, we may get to be like these Zidonians dwelling carelessly in their city of Laish, and one of these days destruction may enter our gates when we little expect it.

II. Now I change the theme to speak of THIS CONDITION OF CARNAL SECURITY IN THE UNSAVED, and to address those who know that they are not converted, and who make no profession of religion whatever. There are some of these who live very carelessly, and who are very difficult to arouse to a true sense of their peril.

Let me describe this condition as it is found among many unsaved persons. Our text tells us that, when the spies came to Laish, they "saw the people that were therein, how *they dwelt careless.*" That is the way with the carnally secure, they are careless; as long as they can enjoy the present, they are quite indifferent to all thoughts of the future. Many of you see no further than your hand can reach. Multitudes of men restrict their vision to that which might be seen by an ox or a sheep. If there is enough grass in the pasture, the ox is satisfied; indeed, he does not look over the whole pasture, for if there be but grass near his nose, it is enough for him. And, oh! the multitudes of London, and of England, and in the world at large, whose only questions are, "What shall we eat? What shall we drink? Wherewithal shall we be clothed?" They live as if they would never die; or as if, when they died, they would die like dogs, and there would be an end of them. This spirit breeds carelessness about their lives, about their thoughts, about prayer, about all holy things. They ask, "What is all that to us? It may do very well for some people to be religious, but we have to work hard from morning to night, and we cannot think about these things at all." They would reduce themselves, if they could, to the level of swine; they are as careless as the beasts that perish. Perhaps, my dear hearer, that word "careless" describes you.

And, connected with this carelessness, there is, next, *a great quietness from all trial.* It is not so with many of you; for you are sore vexed with troubles, sickness, poverty, or bereavement. You seem to be always afflicted, and you may always thank God if you are. It is evident that he has not given you up, and left you to sleep yourselves to destruction. But there are certain persons who appear to have no troubles; their path is wonderfully smooth, they have all that heart can wish, they touch nothing without prospering. They are contented, and well they may be, for it seems as if Providence had determined to make them rich. And yet what do I see before me? A bullock fed in the stall. Would I rejoice to be that bullock? No,

for I know why it is thus fed ; it is fattened for the slaughter, and already I see the pole-axe lifted in the air, and about to descend upon the poor beast. And many a man, who is indulged with everything that he can desire, is nothing better than a fattened bullock doomed to die. Yet many care not about that ; they are quite satisfied if they can enjoy themselves to-day ; as for to-morrow, it must take thought for the things of itself.

Meanwhile, these same people are *quite secure as to the future*. A funeral perhaps startles them for a moment ; the passing bell has a strange tone to their ears, but, for the most part, they put away all thoughts of death. They are young, or they are robust, they will not soon die ; wherefore should they even think of it ? And, as for that great white throne, and the judgment-seat, and the assembled worlds, and the rocking earth, and the blazing heaven,—well, it is only preachers who talk about those things. They put their fingers in their ears, and will not listen to our warnings, and they go their way to their farms, and to their merchandise, and let the future take care of itself. This is the horrible condition of multitudes of mankind that, with the best possible reasons for being concerned about the future, they resolve that they will not wake up to it, but that, like these men of Laish, they will dwell “quiet and secure.” The trumpet is sounding, the adversaries are marching from Dan, they have already encamped on the way ; ye men of Laish, why do ye gird yourselves for the dance, and for the feast, for the sword of the enemy will soon be at your throats ? And, O ye men of London, ye men of this world, how can ye make mirth and sport while the day of your doom hastens on, and death on the pale horse rides so fast towards you, and judgment follows at his heels ? Yet I may say what I will, but, with the most of men, I shall but waste my breath, for they dwell so carelessly, and wrap themselves up at their ease.

These people of Laish, it seems, were also *free from all restraint*. “There was no magistrate in the land.” It is a perilous thing for any of us to know no restraint ; especially for that young man who, in a few days, is coming into possession of a large fortune, and will then have his full swing. Oh, if I could get hold of his hand, I would wet it with my tears while I besought him not to court ruin with his fingers jewelled with the mercies of God ! To turn the blessings of Providence into stones to throw at him who gave them to us, is base ingratitude indeed. I pray that the young man, instead of acting so, may begin a new and better life, and so use his substance for the glory of God. We are all impatient of control, but nothing can be worse for some men than to have no voice to check, no language to upbraid, no tender wife or gentle friend who will administer a kind rebuke. But there are such, and there may be such here, who are all the more confident and stolid because there is no conscience yet awake within them, and nobody to serve as a conscience for them : “There was no magistrate in the land.”

And, once more, these people at Laish were *self-contained* : “they had no business with any man.” There are some persons who are all the more hard to get at because they do not want to be interfered with. If anybody were to speak to such a man about

his soul to-night, he would say, "Don't you bother about me; let me alone, I can take care of myself." But he who takes care of himself generally has a fool for a keeper. All of us need some help from others, and those of us who receive most help thank God for all that we get.

Yet once more, according to verse 10, these people at Laish had "*no want of any thing.*" They had all that heart could wish. I daresay that, while I have been describing them, some of you have half envied them. Of course you do so if you are of the same nature as they were; but the day shall come when some of us will bless God for poverty, and for sickness, because we shall get to heaven by such help, while others will have to curse themselves because they turned their health, their vigour, and their wealth, into occasions and opportunities for sin. If we could, we would escape all trial; but we should be very unwise to do so. If, by falling down upon my knees now, I could prevail with God so that there should be no poverty to the drunkard, I dare not pray the prayer; or that there should be no disease to the unclean liver, I dare not pray the prayer; or that there should be no punishment to the thief, I dare not pray it. It is, after all, best for society that sin should be followed by chastisement, and it is best for us all that we should be drawn to God, or driven to him, by the troubles and trials of this mortal life, rather than that we should now be set in the slippery places of ease, and by-and-by be cast down to destruction. Oh, that I could say a word that would make you easy-going men, who have all you can desire, begin to tremble amidst your plenty, lest eternal ruin should follow the greatness of God's bounty!

III. So now, thirdly, I want to speak briefly upon THE EVILS OF THIS CONDITION OF CARNAL CONFIDENCE, in which an ungodly man is perfectly at his ease in a dying world.

The first result of it is, that *warnings are unheeded.* Preach, Mr. Preacher, and preach your very heart out; but this man does not care a bit about it all, for he is perfectly at ease and happy, nothing ever stings him into anxiety. He never wakes at night to cry to God for mercy, he never dreams of judgment, not he; his companions sing that "he's a jolly good fellow," and he thoroughly enjoys himself. Just so; yet he has no God, no Christ, no hope, he trifles with eternal things, and makes this world his all. Alas! all our most solemn warnings are lost upon him.

What is worse, *all the mercies of God are lost upon him.* What is the use of bidding him wash in the fountain opened for sin and uncleanness? He does not feel that he is foul. Why present him with garments of righteousness? He does not know anything about his iniquity. Why talk to him of a Physician? He feels no sickness. Why point him to a Saviour? He does not believe that he is lost. Oh, how I wish that the pangs of contrition would strike through ungodly men and women in this house! Dear Master, fit thy sharp arrows to thy bow, and wound them now! Fill this house with stricken souls that will cry mightily for thee! Then shall they have thee, then shall they rejoice in thee. But men miss these choice mercies of God because they are self-contented and carnally at ease.

The result further is that, as year follows after year, *the heart grows*

harder still. In the young man there was a little feeling once, but now in the grey head there is none. You might have impressed him when he was a boy at his mother's knee, but you cannot influence him now. He does not believe anything you say, for he is case-hardened; the devil has fitted on him a coat of mail which seems to turn the edge even of the sword of the Spirit. Ah, miserable man!

And in this man, worse still, *great sin is being prepared for.* He may not yet have sinned grossly against the laws of his country or of society; but where there is such fuel as this hard heart and stolid will, the devil will not be slow to bring the flame. I look on some self-confident men, and read their terrible future in their present assurance, and I would say to each one, as to another Hazael, "I know what thou wilt do; thou hast been moral and excellent, but the day will come when, having cast off all fear of God, thou wilt do what it would horrify thee to hear of now." The man asks, "Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?" No, you are not a dog; but if you were, it would be better for you than to be what you are. No man knoweth how much of devil there is asleep in him; and no man may dream that he is secure from the worst of evils unless he comes to Jesus, gets a new heart, and puts himself into the keeping of the One who is better and stronger than himself. Then will he be safe; but short of that, all his fancied security is ruinous to the last degree.

I do not know all to whom I am speaking, but I am convinced that I am preaching directly to some of you; whether you are in the top gallery, or downstairs, or close around the platform, I do not know, but the Lord, the Searcher of all hearts, knows for whom this message is intended. Let us each one take it so far as it bears upon our case. Wake, ye sleepers, wake! Why sleep ye? Sin besets you round. If you have not fled to Christ for salvation, if you have not received a new heart and a right spirit, give no sleep to your eyes nor slumber to your eyelids till these things are set right by the power of the Holy Spirit, and you are saved from the wrath to come.

IV. Now, finally, I have to notice THE GREAT DANGER OF THOSE WHO ARE CARNALLY SECURE.

Notice the horror of their doom. These poor careless Zidonians, enjoying themselves, setting no watch, bearing no shield, wielding no sword, rested in fancied security, till, on a sudden, the swords of their adversaries cut them in pieces, and they were destroyed. What I dread most about some men is *the change which will come upon them from their present state of ease.* "Oh, it is all right, sir!" says one; "it is all right; I feel perfectly happy." An unsaved man may be even in the very article of death, and yet be quite at ease, because his conscience has been so heavily drugged that it does not awake even in his death moments; but it will awake, it will awake. There is no opium that can send your conscience into an eternal slumber, else might you venture to die with your sins uncleansed. But it will awake, and oh! the awful change from the fools' paradise to the fools' perdition, from playing with trifles to find that there are no trifles, but that everything is real, earnest, serious, in that dread world into

which your soul will plunge when God says to you, "Return," and your spirit shall return to God who gave it! I dread the change for you who are now carnally at ease.

And, further, when I think of the doom which will come ultimately upon careless souls, I dread *that sense of self-deceiving which comes upon men*. If they went to hell merely by virtue of a divine decree, it would not be such a hell to them; but to go there by their own folly, this is a fire that never can be quenched, this is a worm that never dies. Such a man will have to say, "I brought myself here. I was warned; that preacher in the Tabernacle spoke to me on that October night as best he could,—in rough but real earnest,—and he bade me awake, and escape from the wrath to come; but I said, 'Let me alone.' Like the sluggard, I turned over to the other side, and said, 'A little more sleep, a little more folding of the hands,' and now I am in hell! I shut myself in here; those iron bolts I fastened by my own folly. These fires I kindled, and the terrible truth burns in my conscience that I myself supplied the fuel for this flame." O sirs, I do pray you, commit not everlasting suicide by resting at ease and peace when there is no rest and no peace, for "there is no peace, saith the Lord, unto the wicked."

There is a short, sad sentence in the twenty-eighth verse: "*There was no deliverer.*" When the Danites were at the gates of Laish, "there was no deliverer." Thank God, there is a Deliverer now, there is a Saviour for sinners! Come, guilty souls, and trust yourselves with Jesus. Free, full, and immediate pardon is proclaimed to all who trust him. Submit to his dear will, look to his blessed wounds, and live; but if your ears refuse the language of his grace, if you despise the invitations of his mercy, there will come a time when there shall be no deliverer, *no deliverer*, NO DELIVERER, in heaven, or earth, or hell;—no deliverer, nothing but the sword and the fire, the just and righteous wrath of God, which you have yourselves obstinately incurred.

Then there came back upon these people of Laish, in their death-agony, the fact that they had no business with any man, and therefore *nobody pitied them*. Nobody came to their rescue; they had no business with any, so none had any business with them, and they died, "unwept, unhonoured, and unsung," only remembered by preachers who, like myself, try to turn their doom into a warning and a lesson for others. You self-contained people, who have no business with anybody, and do not want anybody to interfere with you, who do not wish to be warned, and would resent anyone's touching you on the shoulder, and asking you if you are saved, thus shall it be with you in the evil day; no man shall have any business with you. Shame and everlasting contempt will be the portion of that man who boasted that he could take care of himself, but who found at last that he had no deliverer, and no man to care for his soul. My dear hearers, may God save you, every one of you! Could I look you in the face, and wish anything else for any one of you, but that you might find eternal salvation in Jesus Christ? No, I could not have any other desire than that. Do you not also wish it for yourselves? Now, a wish is half a prayer; make it a whole one. Breathe this brief prayer to God: "Lord, save me." Then listen to this word of grace which has the message

of salvation in it: "Look and live." Jesus died upon the cross that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but should have everlasting life. He is lifted up before you now, that you who have been bitten by the fiery serpent of sin may look to him, as Israel in the wilderness looked to the brazen serpent, and that looking, you may be healed. As I shall meet you in that day of days for which all other days were made, as I shall make one of the vast throng that will be gathered before the judgment-seat of Christ, I pray you, bear witness to me in that day that I have spoken honestly and faithfully and fearlessly—certainly in no smooth and flattering terms,—to every one of you; and if you perish, I shall be clear of your blood in that great day. If you will not have Christ, and will be damned, you must; but it shall not be without my crying to you, "Turn ye, turn ye, for why will ye die?" "Turn ye, turn ye," saith the Lord God himself. Turn them, O Lord, by thy grace, for Jesus' sake! Amen.

Exposition by C. H. Spurgeon.

1 THESSALONIANS IV. 13—18; AND V.

Chapter iv. Verse 13. *But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.*

You cannot help sorrowing, for you miss your dear ones so much; but you do not sorrow like the heathen who believe their departed friends to be extinct and annihilated. You have a glorious hope concerning those who have fallen asleep in Christ, you believe that they still live, and that, by-and-by, their bodies will rise again.

14. *For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.*

There is such a union between Christ and his people that they never can be divided from him. In life, they live in him; in death, they sleep in him; and when he comes again, he will bring them with him. Christ cannot be without his people. A head without a body would be a ghastly thing, and Christ without his people would be incomplete and imperfect.

15. *For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep.*

We shall have no preference over the saints who are sleeping in Jesus, we shall not go before them, we shall be on a blessed equality with them.

16, 17. *For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.*

Whatever ideas we have concerning the details of Christ's coming, this summing up of the whole matter is unutterably precious to us: "so shall we ever be with the Lord." There is no separating Christ and his people. If you are one with him, he will not be in heaven and leave you behind; nor will he be glorified in the presence of his Father without making you to be partakers of the glory. What joy there is for us in this blessed truth!

18. *Wherefore comfort one another with these words.*

Chapter v. Verses 1, 2. *But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night.*

That is, most unexpectedly to an ungodly world. Even they who are watching for Christ's coming may be to some extent surprised at his appearing, as the most watchful person may be when the thief at last comes; but we shall not be taken altogether unawares. We shall be, at least in a measure, prepared for the coming of the Lord, but as for the world at large, it will be an awful and surprising visitation,—

3. *For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.*

Let no ungodly man dream that he will escape; apart from vital union to Christ, there will be no escaping for any one of us in that tremendous day of the Lord.

4. *But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief.*

You who truly know the Lord, you who are saved through his first coming, and are expecting his second coming,—

5, 6. *Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others;—*

Night is the time for sleep, and we sleep best in the darkness; but if we have come into the daylight, if the Sun of Righteousness has risen upon us, let us be wakeful, let us be watchful. When the sun is shining, it is not right that men should sleep: "Therefore let us not sleep, as do others;"—

6, 7. *But let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night.*

Even in Paul's day, drunkenness was a thing that seemed more at home in darkness than in the light. As for us, brethren, let us never be carried away by excess,—either drunkenness of body or inebriation of mind,—for there is a drunkenness which abjures the cup, and yet is as gross an intoxication as the other is. We may be drunk with pride, or drunk with ambition, or drunk with wrath, or drunk with worldliness; but we are to avoid all these evils, because we are not now in the night, when these drunken fits might be in some sort of harmony with the surrounding darkness.

8—10. *But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation. For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him.*

This seems to be a theme which the apostle constantly brings up, as though he could not help it,—that we are to live together with Christ. There lies your safety, brethren: "together with him." If you could get away from him, you would go down to destruction; but "together with him" is the path of life, and safety, and perfection.

11—13. *Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do. And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves.*

So that these apostolic churches had a ministry set over them in the Lord, and they were commanded to know these labourers for the Master, to recognize them as appointed by God to their ministerial position, "and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake."

14—26. *Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feeble-minded, support the weak, be patient toward all men. See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves and to all men. Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you. Quench not the Spirit. Despise not prophesyings. Prove all things; hold fast that which is good. Abstain from all appearance of evil. And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it. Brethren, pray for us. Greet all the brethren with an holy kiss.*

That was the Oriental manner of greeting, and it means to us, "Greet all the brethren with a hearty shake of the hand." Such tokens of fellowship ought never to be forgotten among the followers of Christ.

27, 28. *I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read unto all the holy brethren. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.*

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656, 538.

"THE SWORD AND THE TROWEL."

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