

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE GREATEST FOLLY IN THE WORLD.

A Sermon

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DELIVERED BY

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“There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God.”—Romans iii. 11.

WE are told that God looked out of heaven to see if there were any that had understanding, that did seek after God. If there had been any, God would have seen them, for he sees all things and all persons. If there had been any good people, God would have discovered them. A good man is quick to see other good folk, and the good God would soon have spied out good men. But God's description of the character of men, though we may be certain it is not uncharitable or unjust, is not in the least like that which I have heard ascribed to them by flattering preachers. It has become the fashion of the day to talk about “the nobility of manhood,” and “the dignity of manhood.” I remember that Mr. Whitefield used to say that man, by nature, before the grace of God comes to him, is half beast and half devil; and I shall leave you to judge which is nearer the truth, after all,—a good and faithful preacher of the Word in the days gone by, or the refined flatterers who are taking out of the Bible everything that is objectionable to the superior minds of this nineteenth century, and who vainly imagine that, in so doing, they shall be accepted of God.

Let me read you what God thinks of men in their natural state; here is a divinely-inspired description of their true character: “As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness: their feet are swift to shed blood: destruction and misery are in their ways, and the way of peace have they not known: there is no fear of God before their eyes.” That is God's portrait of man by

nature, and he knew the truth about them better than we know it; and, as I have already said, he is free from uncharitableness or injustice. There is no motive in God to paint the picture blacker than it is. He gives our photographs in lines of absolute truth. The light of God is the light of truth, and what he depicts before us is undoubtedly just as he makes it appear.

What I want you to observe, dear friends, is that all this is spoken of all mankind,—of all unregenerate men,—of all who are still in the kingdom of darkness, and under the power of sin, whether they be polished, learned, polite, and wealthy, or whether they be illiterate, and cast down in the very depths of degradation. “As in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man.” Differences in station may make a difference in outward conduct, but not a difference in heart. “All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” For, after all, be it never forgotten that the human race is one. The most degraded tribes of men still belong to the one great tribe of mankind; they are our brothers. “God hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth.” What that savage is who has gone furthest aside from the paths of civilization, that you and I would have become had it not been for certain influences which have kept us in some measure under restraint. The heart of all leopards, and of all lions, and of all tigers, is the same as the heart of all the rest of their savage race; and in heart all men are alike, they are all evil; and if they were let alone, they would all go in one direction or another towards a yet greater evil. “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way;” but we have all wandered away from God.

“Each wandering in a different way,
But all the downward road.”

The race is one, there is a solidarity about it; and when God speaks concerning men, he describes the whole race without exception, and uses those great all-encompassing “*alls*.” “They are *all* gone out of the way, they are *together* become unprofitable;” and, in order that none should escape, he uses the negatives as well as the positives: “There is *none* that doeth good, no, *not one*.”

“Now, why is it,” some will ask, “that all men do not run to the same excess of riot? Surely, they cannot be all alike.” Yes, there are many persons who go through life with an almost pure morality, yet their heart was always as evil as that of those who have defiled themselves with outward vice, the reason lying in the fact that they were not so much tempted as were those others, they were not brought under the same conditions. You and I may fancy that we are a great deal better than other people whom we have known, but if we had been exposed as they have been, if we had been left of God as they have been, we should have become as vile as they. And if we have not fallen into one form of sin which men agree in despising, yet we may have gone further in some other form of sin which is so common that men overlook it, but which is just as black and vile in the sight of God. It is our common habit to judge that sin to be the worst which injures men the most. Hence, if you call a man a criminal, his blood

is up in a moment, he will not allow you to do that; yet a criminal is a person who has offended against man. If you call him a sinner, he says, "Oh, yes! of course, we are all sinners." That does not seem to be, in his eyes, at all a severe charge, because it is *only* an offence against God! And this shows how completely our hearts are turned upside down, and how our judgment is perverted; else we should at once think it a far greater offence to do dishonour to the great King and Lord of all than to do wrong towards our fellow-men. We judge not as we ought; and hence, some of us who may wrap ourselves up in the filthy rags of our self-righteousness may, after all, be just as bad at heart as the sinner whom we despise; ay, that very despising of another is in itself a grave offence against the infinite graciousness of the God who has borne with us in our loathsome pride.

It is true, then,—I am not going to prove it, I am not going to dwell longer upon it,—but it is true that we have all gone aside from God, and turned away from the path of holiness. "There is none that doeth good, no, not one." If any differ from this, I should recommend them not to dispute with God. If any still say, "It is not so," I will not contend with them; it is not my statement, it is God's. He has said it; and, as God has drawn man's likeness, it is not for you or for me to cavil at it, for it must be so. Better far that we should humble ourselves before the all-seeing God, and seek to be healed of this desperate disease which in his loving truthfulness he here exposes to our gaze.

Now let us come to the text: "There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God." And, first, I want to show you that *not to seek after God, argues a want of understanding*: "There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God." The two sentences are parallel and explanatory to one another. Secondly, *this want of understanding is very common, and takes many forms*. Thirdly, *this want of understanding ought to be removed*. Let us pray that it may be removed in the case of any who are suffering from it.

I. So, first, may the Spirit of God help me to speak upon this truth, that NOT TO SEEK AFTER GOD, ARGUES A WANT OF UNDERSTANDING. Come, you thoughtful people, you who want to be right, I wish to speak with you as a brother would speak, as one who anxiously desires that you should prove truly wise in this life, and make the best of it by preparing for the life that is to come.

First, let me remind you that, if you do not seek after God, *you miss the great end of your being*. God has made you, and the purpose of your making lies within himself. We may say to God, concerning all men, as the elders in the Revelation said concerning all things that he hath made, "For thy pleasure they are and were created." If you make a thing, you do so in order that it may serve a certain end; there is some object which you have in view, and if it does not answer your purpose, you put it aside, for you feel that it is a failure. Why, you would not keep a horse if it did not labour for you! You would not even let a dog live in your house if it did not fawn upon you, or in some way recognize that it ought to love and serve you. And when God made us men, he intended that we should serve him, he meant that we should find our happiness in doing his will; and he has so

formed us that, if we do not glorify him, we do not really enjoy life. If we are not holy, we are not happy. I thank my Lord for that kind tenderness which constituted things after this blessed fashion. O man, wouldst thou miss the object of thy being? Wouldst thou be designed for a certain purpose, and then, after all, prove to be a failure? Oh, I pray that this may not be the case with thee! Surely, if thou dost willingly allow it to be so, and, therefore, thou dost not seek after God, it is because thou hast no understanding.

Again, he who does not seek after God *neglects his highest duty*. Every honest man wishes to discharge his debts. A right-minded man will not lie under liabilities longer than he can help; he wishes to do what is expected of him in the position he occupies. Now, it must be the first duty of a creature to know, to love, and to reverence its Creator. Man is such a singular being, so fearfully and wonderfully made by the skill and power of God, that he ought, as a creature, at once to acknowledge the wisdom and might displayed in his creation; it is his bounden duty so to do. Besides, we are daily fed by God's bounty; we are clothed by his charity; we are nurtured by his lovingkindness; we are constantly sustained by his power; and for all these reasons we ought to serve him. It is the first obligation that we have. Shall not a servant obey his master? Shall not a child reverence his father? And shall not we, indebted as we are to our Lord, overwhelmed with obligation to him, see to this first and primary duty of our being, and seek after the God to whom we owe so much? If we do not, we act most foolishly, and prove that we have no understanding.

Further, the man who does not seek after God *loses his truest life*. They who seek after God, by his grace, live in a higher sphere than others do. They have truer enjoyments and deeper delights than those which fall to the share of others. He who seeks God, through Christ, by the aid of the Holy Spirit, receives a new and diviner life than belongs by nature to the fallen sons of men. You, who are unconverted, may not believe it; but we dare to affirm, and we are honest witnesses, that there is a life, which God alone can give to men, which is far more exalted above the ordinary life of human beings than a man's life is above that of an ox. There is a heavenly sphere in which the spiritual move, which makes them greater and more noble beings than they could have been apart from God. Oh, my friend, if thou art without God, what art thou but an impotent rebel against the goodness of his majesty? But if thou hast found God in Christ, what art thou then? Thou art his child, his heir, a partaker of his nature, indwelt by his Spirit, preserved by his power, and destined to an immortality of glory like to that of the Lord himself. Canst thou bear the thought of missing all this blessing? O man, if there were but a bare possibility of securing this boon, I would recommend thee to try to obtain it; but, inasmuch as thousands bear witness that this privilege is a matter of fact to them, thou wilt be indeed without understanding if thou dost not seek after God, and keep on seeking till thou dost find him!

Yet further, he who does not seek after God *foregoes the highest form of strength*. There is no power anywhere but the power of God; all

the forces of nature, of which some talk so much, are but the ever-present Deity working according to certain rules of his own making. There is not a leaf that falls trembling from the tree in autumn but the Lord supplies the force that draws that leaf to the ground. God's own power, emanating from himself, keeps everything in the universe as it is. If, therefore, I can link myself with God,—if my heart desires to fulfil his purposes,—if in prayer I seek his help, and if by faith I get it,—what a strength I have! What troubles I can bear, what sorrows I can endure, what labours I can perform, what hopes I can indulge, what elevated joys I can obtain, if I have but God with me! O men, surely you do not love to be feeble! Every man wishes for power, that is an ambition which most if not all of us cherish; but the noblest power there is anywhere is that power which God gives to those who seek him. When God is willing to gird the feeblest of mankind with his own omnipotence, he who does not come to the fountain of all strength is, surely, a man who has no understanding.

Besides, let me also say that he who does not seek after God *has missed the highest glory of his being*. As I think of it, it does seem wonderful that I, the creature of an hour, who shall soon dissolve back into dust, and be as nothing, yet have within me an immortal spark of heavenly flame, and I am permitted, with my soul and mind, to commune with God, to speak to him, and to hear him speak to me,—ay, that I should receive from God his own self in the person of his dear Son, and, yet more, that I should be allowed to give myself to him, and offer to him the daily sacrifice of prayer and praise, and so to give him pleasure. By nature, we are linked to materialism, and are but as the dust on which we tread. When it is blown by the wind, and flies into our eyes, it seems to say, "I am akin to thee; I am thy brother, and I have come to make thee smart, and to feel thine own insignificance;" yet, for all that, we who have sought after God, and who have found him, are the brothers of the Eternal Christ, and the children of the Everlasting Jehovah. The King of kings and Lord of lords has adopted us into his family, and put into us the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry even to the God of all the earth, "Our Father, who art in heaven." This is sublimity itself; and not to seek to obtain this honour, shows a gross want of understanding; this is, indeed, the greatest folly in the world.

Moreover, my dear brethren, if we do not seek after God, and do not find him, *in the end, we shall lose everything*. Suppose we live in this world simply to hoard up money, is it a sublime thing to have it reported in *The Illustrated London News* that we died "worth" so many thousands of pounds? What is the good of such a notice as that? Or, suppose we gain honour and fame, so that our names are handed down to posterity, will that charm the ear of death, or keep a single worm from devouring our body in the grave? What is the use of fame,—the breath of men's nostrils,—when it is gained by flattery, or by doing that which God would not have us do? Is there anything worth living for except our God? To die without God, oh, what an eternal loss is that! To wake up in the world to come, and to have no Heavenly Father, to have no Advocate in the day of

judgment, to have no Rock of refuge whereunder to hide in the last tremendous day! O sirs, if you seek not God, you are indeed fools; I dare not use any milder expression than that. We are all fools that we did not seek him earlier; but if we permit age to tell upon us, and our God is still unsought, then write upon us that word, "FOOLS!" in capital letters, and speak it with an emphasis, for so we deserve to be described. The first thing that a man who wishes to be accounted wise should do, is to know his God, and to be right with his God.

This must suffice concerning that first point,—not to seek after God, argues a want of understanding.

II. And now, secondly, let me say that THIS WANT OF UNDERSTANDING IS VERY COMMON, AND TAKES MANY FORMS.

This is one form of it, *the man sinks to mere brutishness*. He lives for nothing else but this world. I will suppose that he is a poor man. He gets up very early in the morning, and trudges off to his work; he toils hard all day, and when night comes, he returns home, goes to bed, and falls asleep. The next morning, the big bell rings, the man gets up, and he works just as he did yesterday. Six days in the week, he works and toils. On the seventh, probably, he rests a bit, but he has no thought of God even then; and all the week he just keeps on work, work, work, work, work, work. There are thousands upon thousands of our fellow-men whose life consists in going round, and round, and round, and round, and round, and round, like a poor horse in a mill, never getting a bit further. They are just where they were when they were young, and they know no more than they did then. They are just consumers of so much bread and meat, that is about all they are; and sometimes there is not enough of that to satisfy them. Then look at the upper classes, as they consider themselves. What multitudes there are of them who do not half as much as the poor man! They have so little to do that they have to invent plans to "kill time." They call upon one another, and leave bits of pasteboard bearing their names and titles, and bow and scrape and talk in an affected style, and think themselves wonderfully important, when all the while they are simply wasting their time laboriously doing nothing at all! That is a summary of their whole life. You may take the lives of hundreds of wealthy men, and when you have compressed them, they will not make a single square inch of anything that is worth having. Their talk, perhaps, would cover miles of *The Times* newspaper; but the real, true life that there is in multitudes of our fellow-citizens in this city, is microscopic, or even less than that. Often, there is nothing whatsoever in it, and the reason is because they do not seek after God. This mode of living turns a man into a mere beast.

"Like brutes they live, like brutes they die."

The meadow, if it be but fat, and the grass up to their knees, quite contents them. If there be a standing pool of water, and but few flies, and not much of being driven from meadow to meadow, then are they perfectly satisfied, and they say that they have had "a good time." Poor brutish creatures! God preserve us from being like

them! These are they who have no understanding, and seek not after God.

Ay, but we have some better people than these! There are some who seem to have understanding, yet they seek not after God, because, although they think a great deal, and see a great deal, yet they never see God. *They are blind philosophers.* A man goes out among the mountains of Switzerland, or he sojourns among the lakes of Cumberland, or he goes down to stay at the seaside, and when he comes back, you ask him what he has seen. He says that he has seen certain laws in action, and he tells you that the laws of nature are wonderfully operative. You ask him, "Did you see God?" He replies that he did not think about God, and he did not want to think about him; to him, there was no God where he went. You know what our Saviour said to his disciples: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." The man who has his heart cleaned has also had his eyes cleansed; and when he looks upon nature, he admires the laws which God has made, but he admires much more the God who made them. As he looks up to the sky in the eventide, and sees the varied light and shade, he blesses the God whose breath upraised the clouds, and whose pencil painted them. There is not a flower in the vale but speaks to him of the Most High, nor even a drop of spray, as it leaps upon the shore from the crest of the wave, but makes him remember the God who holds all the waters in the hollow of his hand. It is a great pity that people should go into any man's house, and that they should see there everything except the man himself. They admire his carpets, they rejoice at the regularity with which the meals are put upon the table, they see that there are certain laws that make provision for the breakfast and the dinner of all the household; they approve of the "laws" which have kept the house clean, and the "laws" which have decorated it, and the "laws" which govern everything. But where is the master who made those laws? Alas! they do not want to see him! They like to look at what he has provided; they like to sit with their legs under his mahogany; but they do not want to see the master of the house. Surely, this must arise from a lack of understanding. When I am staying with a friend, I am pleased with his entertainment, but I want to spend as much time as possible with *him*; and I can truly say that I have been much more pleased to stay with a Christian man, whose means were very straitened, than I have to lodge with some of the great ones of the earth with whom I have had but little Christian fellowship. It is the host, and not his dinner, that makes the true enjoyment of a visit; and in the world, it is God himself, and not his laws, nor all the products of them, that affords us the highest joy. As he would be unwise who paid a visit, and forgot to commune with his friend, but only noticed his house and grounds, so is he most unwise who, in this matchless world, sees everything save him who is everywhere, and who made it all. This is folly indeed.

There are some people of another kind who, though they seem to do so, do not really seek after God, but only have a *form of religiosity, without any reality.* There are persons who go to a church or a chapel, but they have no spiritual understanding, and they do not seek

after God. Some go to a service because they want to hear a certain man preach; if he is not there, off they run. Some go to see certain ceremonies, or to take part in a mere formal ritual. There are prayers, and collects, and Psalms, and chanting, and so on, and they like that sort of thing, but they do not worship God in it all. Others come to a place of worship where everything is done with the greatest simplicity; they like it, but that is all, they have not sought after God. They have been to a place of worship, and they are quite pleased with themselves; they evidently feel that they have done something that is most praiseworthy. The Sunday has passed very pleasantly, and they go to sleep at night, but what do they mean by it all? What do you mean, dear friend, if I have been describing you? You have gone through this form of worship, but you have not sought after God. I am sick of this empty religiousness. We see it everywhere; it is not communion with God, it is not getting to God; indeed, God is not in it all. Some even say prayers regularly, and have family prayer, and read portions of the Bible, too, in due season; but God is not in it all. O sirs, if you are going to be content with the husks of outward ceremonies and of formal religiousness, and think that you can live on these, you are sadly mistaken! The true life of your soul cannot feed on these outsides; it wants the kernel, which is God himself. Oh, to seek after God! I would rather find God beneath a shed with half-a-dozen poor working-men, than I would go and see the gorgeous ceremonies in a cathedral where God is not present. It is not the place, it is not the form, it is not the garb, it is not the sweet tone of song or music; it is getting near to God that is the all-important matter. Whatever else we do,—whether our service is plain as a Quaker's, or gorgeous as a Romanist's, if we do not seek God, it is all nothing,—a bottle of smoke, and it shall come to nothing after all. The outward ceremonialist has no understanding, for he does not seek after God.

I shall go a little further even than that, for I believe that there are some who make their religion to consist in *orthodox beliefs, without any real seeking after God*. God forbid that I should think or say anything against orthodox beliefs! Be as orthodox as ever you can, and hold to nothing but the truth of God; but, you know, you may say that you believe the truth, you may even fight for it,—you may be a Calvinist to the backbone, if you think that to be the best form of Christianity,—yet, after all, you may never have truly sought after God. What you believe is not unimportant; but it is often more important that you should seek God in what you believe, and that you should never be satisfied unless you really find him in it all. You must have a Father in heaven, or you are orphans indeed. You must have a Saviour, or you are lost for ever. You must have the Holy Ghost, the Quickener, or you are still dead in trespasses and sins. These come not by mere outward forms and ceremonies, or by a dead creed; there must be a divine work upon the inner man, the power of the Spirit of God working in us, to will and to do of his good pleasure; and we must seek after that, or else we shall have no true understanding, and we shall obtain nothing worth the having.

III. I must not keep you longer than a minute or two while I

just refer to the last point, namely, that THIS WANT OF UNDERSTANDING OUGHT TO BE REMOVED.

I wish that it might be removed even now. My heart longs that it may be so with some dear friends here whom I love. I can see them, and I can truly say that, for years, I have never seen them in this place without praying distinctly for them; yet they are not at present brought to know the Lord, I fear. I would like to say to them,—Dear friends, you know that you ought to seek after God, and you know that you never will be happy till you do; you are often a good deal troubled about this matter. Then, why not seek the Lord at once? We have often had God's blessing in this house of prayer, and I hope that some will find the Saviour at this service; will *you* be among them? Just listen to these closing sentences of my sermon, and try to follow me step by step to the end.

If you would get a good understanding, and seek the Lord, *begin by confession*. That is the way for you to commence who have hitherto neglected concern for your souls. Confess your neglect, own your want of understanding; acknowledge that it has been an unwise thing to run the awful risks that you have run, for you might have been dead before now; and if you had been taken away, where would you have been? I would not have any of you run these risks any longer. If you are of a speculative turn of mind, speculate with your gold if you can afford to lose it; but do not speculate with your soul. Do not, as it were, gamble with heaven and hell, as some are doing. Confess that you have been unwise; for, often, a confession of ignorance is the doorstep to knowledge. He who begins with regret will end with rejoicing; and when you have thus confessed to God, then set your face with determination to seek the Lord.

First, *seek forgiveness for the past*. God proffers it through the precious blood of his dear Son; then, say to him, "Lord, I trust in Jesus; give me pardon for all the past." Then ask him to renew you, to give you a new heart altogether, that your desires may be changed, that you may not have that longing look after Sodom which was the ruin of Lot's wife, but that you may part with all your friends in the City of Destruction, and run from it, and seek the Celestial City, and joys that last for ever. Pray God to help you to do so now.

When that is done, go on your knees, and *cry to God to manifest himself to you*. What you want, beyond all else, is God. I gave you this illustration, the other day, but I repeat it for the benefit of any who were not with us then. Here is a little child that we have picked up in the gutter, a poor, miserable-looking object. Look at it! It is foul, it is diseased, it is starved, it is famished, it is naked, it is ready to die. What does that child want? Now, you mothers, come and look at it, and tell me what it wants; take out your blacklead pencils, and a long strip of paper, and make out a list of what it wants; and, when you have done, I will undertake to tell you what it wants in one word,—*that little child wants its mother*; and if it gets its mother, it will get everything else that it needs. What you want, poor sinner, in order to

make you right, is this, and that, and the other,—you want such a number of things that I cannot stay to make out the list,—but, in one word, *you want your God*; and if you get your God, all will be right with you.

“Oh, but I am such a sinner!” says one. God is ready to pardon. “Oh, but I have such troubles!” “As thy days, so shall thy strength be.” “Oh, but you do not know what evil companions I have!” “Certainly I will be with thee,” saith the Lord, and his presence will make you strong to overcome them all. “Oh, but I am such a wayward, fickle creature!” I know you are; but God says, “Fear not, thou worm Jacob; I will help thee.” Only put yourselves into the keeping of God, and all will be well. Do not say, “I shall go and see such-and-such a good man;” or, “I shall try to have a talk with the Pastor.” You do not need them, they may be of some use to you another time; but, just now, what you want is your God. Oh, if you stop short at your minister, you might just as well have stopped before! He who goes to his priest has gained nothing; if he would really get what he needs, he must go to his God. Judas went to his priest, and then went out and hanged himself, and I do not wonder that he did so. But go you to God, and confess your sin, and trust in Jesus, and you will not want to hang yourself after that. When you have God as yours, then you have rest, peace, pardon, joy, help,—help in time, and help in eternity. Oh, happy was the day when first I sought and found the Saviour! I have never repented it; I have never met with a man who did, and I shall never meet with such a man. Come you, and seek him. “If thou seek him, he will be found of thee.” He waiteth to be gracious. “Seek ye the Lord while he may be found; call ye upon him while he is near.” It seems a very common-place thing to hear me talk to you in these very simple tones with no kind of pretence at oratory; but I wish, somehow, that I could get hold of the hand of you who hesitate, you who linger, and say to you, “O dear friend, do seek the Lord!” As you love yourself, do seek the Lord. As you would be happy, seek the Lord. As you would lead a life that shall be noble and pure, do seek the Lord. As you would stand without trembling when the heavens are on fire, seek the Lord. As you would live for ever when the sun is turned into a black coal, and the moon is like sackcloth of hair, and the stars have fallen like withered leaves from the bough,—as you would be eternally blessed, seek the Lord. And as you would escape the eternal destruction from the presence of the Lord, seek ye his face. As you would escape that awful word which Christ pronounced, and which, therefore, I dare not soften,—“These shall go away into everlasting punishment,”—as you would escape that,—

“Come, guilty souls, and flee away
Like doves to Jesu’s wounds;”

and may his good Spirit receive you even now; and to his name shall be praise for ever and ever! Amen.

Exposition by C. H. Spurgeon.

MATTHEW XV. 1—20; AND 29—39.

Verses 1—14. *Then came to Jesus scribes and Pharisees, which were of Jerusalem, saying, Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread. But he answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition? For God commanded, saying, Honour thy father and mother: and, He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death. But ye say, Whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, It is a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; and honour not his father or his mother, he shall be free. Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition. Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. And he called the multitude, and said unto them, Hear, and understand: not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man. Then came his disciples, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the Pharisees were offended, after they heard this saying? But he answered and said, Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up. Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch.*

Teacher and taught, Pharisee and disciple, "both shall fall into the ditch." Great responsibility rests upon the blind leader, but not all of it; for great responsibility also attaches to the blind follower. He should not follow a blind leader, he above all others needs a leader who can see. It is a pity that the man who can see should follow a blind leader; but if a man cannot see at all, then is he doubly unwise if he has a blind leader.

15, 16. *Then answered Peter and said unto him, Declare unto us this parable. And Jesus said, Are ye also yet without understanding?*

It was not a parable, it was a plain piece of simple language that the Saviour had uttered: "Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man."

17, 18. *Do not ye yet understand, that whatsoever entereth in at the mouth goeth into the belly, and is cast out into the draught? But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man.*

It is not that which we eat that defileth us. If it is such food as we ought to take, it builds up the body. If it is improper food, it may injure the body, yet it is not in itself capable of being regarded as sin; but a spiritual thing,—a thought, a desire, an imagination,—comes out of the heart, and if that is evil, it does defile the man.

19. *For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies:*

What a horrible den the heart itself must be, then! If all these evils come out of it, what a nest of unclean things it must be! A dreadful sight to the all-seeing God must be an uncleansed human heart. Let me read this verse again: "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies." All these evils come out of the heart of man, out of such a heart as yours until it is renewed by grace. Though you sit very attentively in the house of God, unless his grace has changed your heart, all these evil things are there, and they only want an opportunity to come out, and reveal themselves.

20. *These are the things which defile a man: but to eat with unwashed hands defileth not a man.*

You should understand that the washing here meant was not such as you and I give our hands when we feel that we have soiled them with our labour; then, it is very proper to cleanse them. But this was a ceremonial washing which the scribes and Pharisees would have everybody give, whether his hands were clean or not, before he sat down to meat, and was a mere piece of absurdity, if not something worse. Yet they magnified it into a most important matter, and our Saviour here shows what an idle thing it was.

Verses 29—32. *And Jesus departed from thence, and came nigh unto the sea of Galilee; and went up into a mountain, and sat down there. And great multitudes came unto him, having with them those that were lame, blind, dumb, maimed, and many others, and cast them down at Jesus' feet; and he healed them: insomuch that the multitude wondered, when they saw the dumb to speak, the maimed to be whole, the lame to walk, and the blind to see: and they glorified the God of Israel. Then Jesus called his disciples unto him, and said, I have compassion on the multitude, because they continue with me now three days, and have nothing to eat: and I will not send them away fasting, lest they faint in the way.*

Was not that a most gracious utterance? "I will not send them away fasting." What confidence the disciples ought to have had that the people could be fed, and would be fed, when the Master gave that solemn promise, "I will not send them away fasting, lest they faint in the way."

33, 34. *And his disciples say unto him, Whence should we have so much bread in the wilderness, as to fill so great a multitude? And Jesus saith unto them, How many loaves have ye?*

That is always a good form of enquiry: "How many loaves have ye?" How much grace have you? How much gift have you? How much ability have you? Are you using it all? Have you consecrated it all to the Master's service?

34, 35. *And they said, Seven, and a few little fishes. And he commanded the multitude to sit down on the ground.*

It is very wonderful that they did as he told them; they could not see anything to eat, and yet, when he bade them sit down, they obeyed him, and did so. Thus the Lord prepares men's hearts for the reception of the gospel. I do not doubt that, whenever we go forth faithfully to break the bread of life, the Lord makes the people sit down in readiness to receive it.

36. *And he took the seven loaves and the fishes, and gave thanks, and brake them, and gave to his disciples, and the disciples to the multitude.*

Notice the order of our Lord's action, thanksgiving first, and then the breaking of the bread. We do not always thank God for what we have already received, but the Lord here sets us the example of giving thanks for what is yet to come. For the multiplied loaves and fishes, he first gives thanks, and then passes them to his disciples to hand to the multitude.

37—39. *And they did all eat, and were filled: and they took up of the broken meat that was left seven baskets full. And they that did eat were four thousand men, beside women and children. And he sent away the multitude, and took ship, and came into the coasts of Magdala.*