

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

CONTENTION ENDED AND GRACE REIGNING.

A Sermon

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“For I will not contend for ever, neither will I be always wroth; for the spirits should fail before me, and the souls which I have made. For the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth, and smote him: I hid me, and was wroth, and he went on frowardly in the way of his heart. I have seen his ways, and will heal him: I will lead him also, and restore comforts unto him and to his mourners.”—Isaiah lvii. 16—18.

The high and holy One that inhabiteth eternity is here speaking with himself concerning Israel. The Lord is holding high soliloquy. He is not so much addressing the sons of men, bidding them do this or that, as speaking to himself of what he intends to do among them. He allows his prophet to stand where he can hear the sacred soliloquy of the great Supreme; and he does hear it, and then under the dictate of the divine Spirit he records it in the inspired book, where it remains to this day for our instruction. Hear, then, these words of the living God, and let your hearts be satisfied concerning the secret purposes of Jehovah. Although the Lord may say many things to himself which we do not hear, and which it were not well that we should hear, yet he never unsays in secret what he has spoken in public; and specially we may rest assured that he never speaks in the dark places of the earth concerning the house of Jacob, “Seek ye my face in vain?” No decree of God is contrary to the gospel; we may always be sure of that. Whenever he unveils before us his private thoughts we never find them to be less gracious than his published words; the same love which spoke itself through prophets and seers dwells in the silent heart of God, and abides for ever at the full even when it finds no voice. In the verses before us we find words of exceeding great mercy and special tenderness, and we see moving before our adoring eye the eternal wisdom, the infinite patience, and the immutable love of the great Father. May it please the Lord, in very truth, to restore comforts unto his mourners by the subject which shall now engage our attention, for under the blessing of the Holy Ghost it is in every way calculated to cheer the contrite heart.

I. The first truth to which I call your attention is that God contends with men, and that THE DIVINE CONTENTION IS WELL DESERVED
No. 1,490.

on their part. He says, "I will not contend for ever," in which it is implied that he does contend sometimes. Where he has purposes of eternal grace, the Lord, at the opening of his saving work, comes into contention with men. Smiting comes before saving. He bends his bow, and points his arrow against the heart's sin before he pours out his balsam for the heart's wound. He usually gives the spirit of bondage before he sends the spirit of sonship: he thunders by the law before he waters the soul with the soft shower of the gospel. Nor need we wonder at this, for there is so much in man that is altogether opposed to the divine nature, and alien to the object and design of God, that there must be a conflict till the opposing principle is overcome and removed. The strong man armed will not go out except by force, neither will the Lord enter the soul except as a conqueror.

First I would speak of this to *the seeking sinner*. It may be that there are in this house anxious persons who were once careless and at ease, but now there is a striving within them, and a conflict which rages terribly. The Lord has a controversy with them. However unhappy it makes them I am right glad that the inward strife is felt by them. Anything is better than the horrible calm of the dead sea of spiritual indifference. My friend, your deadly peace is broken, your fatal sleep is ended, the magic spell of Satan has lost all its power, you are aroused, and sadness rules the hour. Your wisest friends are glad of this, they welcome your return to feeling even as we rejoice to discover signs of life in one who has been snatched from a watery grave. There is now some hope of you. The Spirit of God has come to you as a spirit of bondage, and this makes you fear, but fear is often the outrider of faith. The Lord's design in contending with you is *to convince you of your sin*. You will never see sin to be exceedingly sinful unless the Holy Spirit throws his own light upon it. You love sin too much to deal with it impartially: you are so tainted by it in your nature that your conscience by no means censures you so much as your iniquity deserves. Though some say that conscience is the vicegerent of God there is nothing in the Scriptures to prove that statement, neither is it true. Conscience is an imperfect guide and monitor, and like all the other faculties it is weakened and vitiated by the Fall, so that it is a very prejudiced judge of right and wrong, and too often it puts bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter. Conscience is often blinded by self-love, and at all times apt to slumber. Until the Holy Ghost quickens your conscience you will never discover to the full the enormity of sin. You may know it to be evil as a matter of dogma, but you will not feel it to be evil as a matter of experience, nor will see how greatly, how continually, how wickedly, you have offended against the law of God unless the Lord opens your eyes. This he intends to do, and he will not cease to strive with you till his purpose is performed. My dear friend, the Lord will probably keep up the controversy in your soul until your beauty consumes away, and instead of admiring yourself you come to loathe yourself. Though you wash yourself with snow-water, and make yourself never so clean, yet will he plunge you in the ditch till your own clothes shall abhor you. You shall see your righteousness to be filthy rags, and your person to be under the curse, and then part of the Lord's design will be accomplished.

The next reason for the Lord's contending with you will begin to operate when the first purpose has been accomplished. You will, in your self-abasement, be driven to look to the grace of God. It is hard to part a man from his sin, it is still harder to divorce him from his self-righteousness : and this is a part of the Lord's contention with awakened souls ; he determines to rid them of all self-confidence because it is false confidence, and they on their part appear to be resolved to hold to self as long as there is a rag or a thread left. That our salvation is entirely of the grace of God is a lesson which we are slow to learn, and yet we must learn it or perish. Dear anxious one, if ever you are saved it must be by an act of undeserved favour on God's part. I do not care who you are, you are guilty, and if you escape execution a free pardon will have to be given to you by the Great King for reasons found in himself alone, for there is nothing in you which can constitute a claim for mercy. You may never have fallen into adultery or murder, nor even have committed theft or false witness, but the same grace is needed to save you as to save an adulteress or a murderer. You have no merit to plead, nor any claim upon God : such claim as you had as a creature you have forfeited, and you have done nothing to create any other. You have committed treason against God, and you are condemned already by his unquestionable justice. If you shall ever be saved it must be by a high act of the Lord of mercy, passed in his infinite sovereignty, not because of anything in you to deserve it, but because he will have mercy on whom he will have mercy, and he will have compassion on whom he will have compassion. So stands the matter, and this controversy between you and your God is meant to bring this fact before you, and push the question to an issue with you. When the Lord contends with a man's soul and the law of the Lord enters his spirit, it hides pride from him and lays his glory in the dust ; in fact the truly awakened man cannot find a place low enough to lie in, nor words black enough in which to describe himself ; he is driven to a deep spiritual despair of self, and to a horror of soul at his presumption in having dared to offend against the God of heaven, and a deeper horror still that he should have transgressed against the Christ of love, and should have rejected him year after year. May God bring you down to this prostrate condition if he has not done so. If the Lord has now begun to trouble you he will not have done with you till he has laid you even with the ground. This will not only make you know that you must be saved by grace alone, but it will cause you to value grace itself as more to be desired than the much fine gold. A soul with whom God hath entered into the lists prizes every word of promise, every single look of grace, for he sees himself to be in an evil plight unless grace shall supervene. The tears of Jesus over sinners are very precious to hearts with whom God is contending, and still much more precious is the blood, the heart's blood of Jesus, with which he takes away sin. They can speak lightly of grace who have never had a heavy heart on account of their transgression ; but give a man to feel the burden of sin, and the faintest hope of grace will be worth all the king's jewels to him. O sirs, sin is a burden such as an angel's shoulders could not bear, it crushes a man not only into the dust but into the grave, nay, even there he cannot find rest. If nothing else were prepared for the impenitent in the

next world except a sight and sense of their own sin it would of itself create a hell within the human bosom. Stake and rack are nothing compared with the torments of remorse. It is God's design to make us feel something of this, that we may bless his name if he doth but look upon us or think upon us in a way of grace, and that we may praise and magnify him with all our hearts for ever and ever when he freely pardons us for his name's sake, and accepts us in Christ Jesus. Do you wonder that God hath a contention with seeking souls when such needful and beneficent designs are answered thereby?

Moreover, no one can be surprised that the Lord lets forth a measure of his wrath upon seeking sinners when we see how they behave, even while they are seeking. We have known them red hot one day and icy cold another, and albeit that they long for mercy, you will see them at certain seasons acting as if they despised it. At times they tremble at God's word, and anon they are hardened against it. I may be speaking to some of you who know that during the time of your conviction of sin you have tried to stifle your feelings, and you have sought to kill the messenger within who has so effectually aroused you. Many of you have run after carnal amusements, and evil pleasures, in order to drown conscience and escape from rebuke; and others of you have run to this, that, and the other pretended way of salvation, instead of running to Christ alone for his free grace. All this provokes the Most High, and therefore it cannot be wonderful that the Lord should have a contention with you.

But now I turn to *the people of God*. Sometimes, my brethren, our Lord hath a contention with us, and then he covereth the daughter of Zion with a cloud in the day of his anger, and he burns against Jacob like a flaming fire which devoureth round about. This is not at all wonderful when we consider how unworthily we often live towards his sacred name; indeed, "it is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed." His contention with us will show itself occasionally in adverse providences. He will aim a deadly shaft at the beloved objects of our heart; perhaps not once alone doth the arrow fly, but he seems to empty out his quiver, and finds no other targets but the breasts of those who are our other selves. With one believer the Lord contends by a sickness in his own person; with another by the pining away of a beloved wife or child. The contention which the Lord hath with his elect frequently displays itself in troubles connected with their temporal circumstances: nothing prospers with them; they make a navy to go to Tarshish for gold, and it is broken by the storm: a worm eats up all their increase: the caterpillar devours the garden, and the locust, or the blight, or the drought, or the exceeding moisture destroys the produce of the field. When God hath a controversy with his own people he smites again and again in this fashion, nor does he stop at bruises and bleeding wounds. Our heavenly Father never spares the rod; no sin of Eli can be alleged against him.

Even more severe are his blows when it comes to be a controversy carried on by his Spirit within the mind. When the light of God's countenance is withdrawn; when conscience is allowed to point out inconsistencies, and hypocrisies, and wanderings of heart; when the promises cease to be wells of comfort; when the means of grace appear to be dry

and barren ; when private prayer becomes rather a task than a pleasure, and communion with God seems to be little more than looking up to an angry Father who only frowns,—this is much worse than any providential chastisement. When God smites a man in the heart the blow is a staggering one. The affliction of the soul is the soul of affliction. God will touch his people in their bone and their flesh, and in their very hearts. Ah, my brethren, if you remember your laxity in life, your dullness in prayer, your forgetfulness of God's word, your hardness of heart at times towards poor sinners, your indifference to the Lord's cause, the want of life, the want of love, the want of power, the want of holiness, the want of the mind of Christ within, the want of delight in the divine will,—you will perceive that there is quite enough in us to lead the Lord to have a controversy with us. Hath he not said that he will walk contrary to us if we walk contrary to him? Is it not his special word to us, "You only have I known of all the people of the earth ; therefore I will punish you for your iniquity"? Chastisement must come to the beloved child of a wise father : the servant may escape, the bastard may know no touch of the rod ; but the true-born and well-beloved child of God must smart if he sins, not because his Father dislikes him, but because he loves him. The dearer we are to the heart of God the more jealous he is, and the more does he resent any wandering of our heart from him. His love is strong as death, blessed be his name, but as a natural consequence his jealousy is cruel as the grave : he will not endure unchastity of heart in the beloved object of his eternal choice. I have, however, said enough upon this topic, if we are now ready to confess that the divine contention with us is well deserved.

II. We now advance to the next truth, namely, that **THIS DIVINE CONTENTION WILL COME TO AN END WITH THE CONTRITE**. We know that it will be so, for the words are very express : "For I will not contend for ever, neither will I be always wroth." Oh, catch at this, ye humble and contrite ones with whom God has been contending. Here is a word of gracious, absolute, unconditional promise for you. May the Holy Ghost enable you to draw consolation from it.

The question arises : when may we expect that this promise will be fulfilled? Kindly notice the verse which precedes the text, for that assures us that God hath no controversy with the humble and the contrite. This is self-evident, for he declares that with such he will dwell, and the God of grace will not dwell in a house that is full of contention. He contends where he does not abide, but where he abides there is peace. When a man is humble and contrite, then God's contention with him has come to an end. Omnipotence will not lift its hand to overthrow one who yields himself up. Greatness doth not strike a fallen foe who craves forgiveness. Majesty will not wreak vengeance upon suppliant misery. Crouch in the dust, and Jehovah's wrath, which like his thunderbolt smites lofty things, will pass you by. Surrender unconditionally, be thou saint or sinner : throw down the weapons of rebellion, doff the plumes of pride, and sue out a pardon on thy bended knee. Cry out, "Lord, I am undone, for I have ill done ; I am cast away, for I have cast thy fear away ; I must die, for I have slain myself. But God be merciful to me a sinner." Majesty is ever pitiful to misery.

Nor is it majesty alone that thou mayest look to with hope, but mercy also is thy friend. Mercy is very speedy where confession is complete. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins." Be humbled, for to such God giveth grace; the river of his goodness flows along the low valleys. Talk no more of thy good works: boast no longer of thy Christian experience, thy bright profession, thy precise religiousness, but fall at Jesus' feet and lie down. Tears for thine eyes are more becoming than rings for thine ears; sackcloth suits thy case rather than fine attire. Be humble because you are a nobody, be contrite because you are a sinner.

It is wonderful how the pity of God has in some cases been excited, even by a temporary repentance. When wicked Ahab rent his clothes and put sackcloth upon himself, the Lord took note of it and said, "Seest thou how Ahab humbled himself before me? Because he humbled himself before me I will not bring the evil in his days." When the Ninevites repented, though probably there was very little spiritual about their humbling, yet it was sincere as far as it went, and the Lord turned from his fierce anger and there was a reprieve for the wicked city. This plainly shows that the Lord is speedily moved by true humiliation, and if any soul will but lie before him in self-abasement and lowliness, he will no longer contend, but will put away his anger. Besides, his truth is compromised in this matter for he has given a promise of grace which runs thus, "Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up" (James iv. 10). He cannot spurn those who submit themselves before him, for it is written, "Though the Lord be high, yet hath he respect unto the lowly." He is full of grace, and that grace is for the poor and needy. Condescension to the lowly is his glory, as the blessed Virgin sang of old, and as many fainting ones may sing at this moment if they will: "He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree: he hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away." The Lord delights in mercy, and his mercy delights to come to those who are most abased in their own esteem, and judge themselves to be least worthy of it. We are quite sure that the divine contention will come to an end with the humble and contrite, because, as we have said, the promise is "I dwell in the high and holy place with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit." Do not say, dear cast down one, "God will never look at me; I have no hope, no strength, no merit." This thy self-abasement prepares thee for him. By this is thy house swept and emptied for God to dwell in. He hath two houses; one is above in glory, and that high house above is none too high for him; his other dwelling is below in all his condescension, and the lowliest heart is none too lowly for him. He comes not to whole-hearted men who bear their heads aloft and scarcely own their need of his favour; he comes not to those who trust in themselves, and think but little of his grace, but—

"He bids his awful chariot roll
Far downward from the skies,
To visit every humble soul
That low before him lies."

Lowly roofs attract the Deity. He comes to those who are broken in heart, and when he comes the contention is over.

And what else doth the Lord promise to do? He says he will dwell with the humble, and he adds that he will *revive* them. Thou art fainting now, poor soul, thou art very feeble, thou art as one that is slain: the Lord will come and revive thee, that is, give thee new life; he will give thee life enough to hope in his mercy, life enough to believe in Jesus Christ his dear Son, life enough to see thy transgression covered for ever, never to be laid to thy charge. He will not contend for ever, for on the contrary he will revive the spirit of the humble. Perhaps he means by adding a second "revive" to make us a promise of comfort, "to revive the heart of the contrite ones." Weeping one, he will wipe away those tears. Despairing sinner or desponding saint, if thou wilt lie low at his feet he will stoop to thee and cheer thine heart. So anxious is he to cheer his mourners that the third person of the blessed Trinity has undertaken this special work; the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, loves to come where there is comforting work to do. Look up now from your beds, ye soul-sick ones, for the great Physician comes to heal you. He ends the inner conflict of your nature by becoming himself your peace. Look up now, ye that sit in darkness, in the valley of the shadow of death, bound with affliction and iron, for the time of your deliverance has come. I know your plight, for I have been in it myself, and while I am speaking to you I am remembering the time when my chains clanked as I walked, and when as I lay down to sleep they entered into my soul, so that the visions of the night alarmed me. Job's cry was mine, "I was at ease, but he hath broken me asunder: he hath also taken me by my neck, and shaken me to pieces, and set me up for his mark." Thus was it with me once, but it was not so for ever, for in tender pity my Lord laid down the sword, and spake comfortable words to me. Just when I had come to the worst, and I thought no hope would ever visit me, I was made to realise the blessed truth of the text, "I will not contend for ever, neither will I be always wroth," and of that other promise, "With this man will I dwell, even with him that is poor and of a contrite spirit and that trembleth at my word." Encouraged by my own experience of great love I feel bound to comfort others. Penitent hearts, he will revive you, he will give you comfort again; your mourning he will turn to dancing, and your sackcloth into beautiful array. Do not, I pray you, sorrow as those that are without hope. This is not the den of despair, so long as this life lasts it is the hill of hope: neither are you a person who has any cause to despair, since those whom the Lord chastens he certainly has not cast away. Men do not prune the vine which they mean to root up and cast into the fire. This chastening is not unto death. There is a measure to your stripes which cannot be passed, and there will be a speedy and happy end to the scourging. The Lord's anger endureth but for a night, and that night will end in a hopeful dawn. When your proud spirit is conquered, the Lord's controversy with you is closed.

III. I would now ask your loving attention to this choice fact, that GOD HIMSELF FINDS REASONS FOR ENDING THE CONTENTION. We could not have found any, for in ourselves there is much cause for the Lord's anger but none for his grace. A convinced sinner can give no

reason why he should be saved. It is a part of his conviction that his mouth is closed as to self-justification: he can make neither apology nor appeal: he feels that he will have to say "Amen" to his own damnation if God shall drive him away from the mercy seat. But the Lord himself finds reasons for his grace. Two of these he mentions in our text.

The first is found in *human weakness, and its inability to bear the divine contention*. "I will not contend for ever, neither will I be always wroth: for the spirits should fail before me, and the souls which I have made." The Lord's chastisement is meant to be corrective, not destructive: his intent is curing, not killing; and therefore he will not make his medicine too potent, or his surgery too severe. He presses his heavy hand on the sinner until he cries out with David, "Day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer." He felt as destitute of life-moisture as if God had wrung him out as men do a wet sheet, and made him dry as cloth which has hung up in the hot sun. All his life and spirits were gone out of him, and he felt that his bones were dried and fit only for the charnel house. When things have come so far the merciful Lord saith, "But I do not desire to kill him; I do not purpose his destruction, for I hate nothing that my hands have made. Nay, I love with all my heart this poor, troubled soul whom it is in my mind to bless." "The Lord doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men." He aims at whipping self out of us, but it is not his will to crush the humble under his feet. In measure will he debate with us, for he aims at our conviction and conversion, and not at our condemnation. If he were to go forth to fight against us it would be as when fire enters into battle with briars and thorns: he would go through us and burn us together. Our weakness shall plead for us, even as it is said in the seventy-eighth Psalm, at the thirty-eighth verse: "But he, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and destroyed them not: yea, many a time turned he his anger away, and did not stir up all his wrath. For he remembered they were but flesh; a wind that passeth away, and cometh not again." Upon certain strong minds God lays a heavy load of conviction, as, for instance, upon John Bunyan, whose five years of inward contention you will find mapped out in his "Grace Abounding"; but these cases are not the rule, and in such instances the Lord means to make a peculiarly useful and experienced man. In the formation of a competent leader, and a spiritual champion, the Lord exercises the man to make him expert in dealing with others: but he doth not do this with poor, weak minds, which are rendered still weaker by the assaults of Satan and their inward fears. "He gathereth the lambs in his bosom, and doth gently lead those that are with young." "I will not contend for ever," saith he, "for the spirits should fail before me, and the souls which I have made." Some men under a sense of sin have been driven to lay violent hands upon themselves; others have been scarcely able to eat or drink, and many have been severely injured in their health by the inward corrosion caused by strong conviction. A sense of sin fills some souls with gall and wormwood to such a degree that they are drunken with it, and are as men at their wits' end: but God stayeth his rough wind, and holds in the rage of his tempest. In due time he saith to Moses, "Stand back, and let your law-work cease;

you have been faithful as my servant, now retire and let my Son come in, for he is meek and lowly in heart, and those who tremble at my word shall now find rest unto their souls by his knowledge." Yes, this is God's reason for being gentle with his people: "For my name's sake will I defer mine anger, and for my praise will I refrain for thee, that I cut thee not off." Sometimes when he sends them correction after correction, chastisement after chastisement, they can scarce bear up under it; but it is never his intention to destroy his own children, and therefore he stayeth his hand, and saith that he will not always chide, nor keep his anger for ever; for, "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him; for he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust." If any of you are enduring such a variety of troubles that you are staggered, and feel that you can hold up no longer, then you must appeal to the pity of the Lord. If your heart is like a lily when the stalk is bruised, drooping on its stem, and your soul is pining like a consumptive child, and your heart is melted like wax in the midst of your bowels, let your weakness appeal to God; yea, it is appealing even now. He says, "I know their sorrows. I have surely seen the affliction of my people, and I have heard their cry. I have visited their transgression with the rod, and they are brought very low, but they can bear no more, therefore shall the sighing of the prisoner come before me." The Lord marks man "fragile," as we do boxes of glass which must not be roughly handled lest they be broken; in this frailty he finds a reason for tenderness; let his name be adored for it.

His second reason is, to my mind, even more extraordinary. It is given in the next verse: "For the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth, and smote him: I hid me, and was wroth, and he went on frowardly in the way of his heart." This argument is founded on *the inoperativeness of the divine contention upon the heart which is to be won*. The Lord says, "I was angry with him, and smote him." Did he repent? No. "I hid my face from him." Did he humble himself? No, "he went on frowardly in the way of his heart." What is the reason of this wicked petrifying of the heart? Here is the key to the cause:—

"Law and terrors do but harden
All the while they work alone,
Nothing but a blood-bought pardon
Can dissolve a heart of stone."

Affliction often drives the child of God into impatience, and of itself it has a hardening and not a softening influence, while even the convictions wrought in us by the Spirit of God are often perverted into causes of unbelief, and Satan comes in and drives the soul to unworthy thoughts of God. Such is our evil heart that it even curdles self-loathing and hatred of sin into a reluctance to go to God, and into a persuasion of the impossibility of mercy. I have known humiliation and self-despair, which are so much to be desired, lead to unbelief, which is the saddest of all crimes. "Therefore," saith the Lord, "I will not contend any longer; for my anger seems to excite rebellion rather than to subdue it." See a wise father when he has a proud and obstinate boy who has become estranged; he puts him under strict rule and discipline, and he chides and chastens him; but if the child evidently grows more

stubborn, if he is manifestly of such a spirit that the more you drive him the more he will not be driven, his father says within himself, "I will try other methods with him, and see what gentleness will do." Such is the mind of God, who says: "For the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth, and smote him: I hid me, and was wroth, and he went on frowardly in the way of his heart. I have seen his ways, and will heal him: I will lead him also, and restore comforts unto him and to his mourners." If wrath will not humble us the Lord may yet in his grace try what love can do. He will love us to a better mind, till our heart sings:—

"And dost thou still invite my love,
And court me to be blest?
Wilt thou my friend and patron prove,
My refuge and my rest?"

"Convinced, ashamed, amazed, I now
Obey thy gracious call;
To love's command I freely bow,
And offer thee my all."

IV. This brings us to the fourth and last point, which is this: God himself having found a reason why he should cease from contention, nay, two reasons, the one in our weakness and the second in the failure of his own chastisement by reason of the flesh, **HE HIMSELF INVENTS AND PROPOSES ANOTHER METHOD FOR ENDING HIS CONTENTIONS** and making us right with himself. Here it is, and we note in the first place that it is an *astonishing* method: "I have seen his ways, and will heal him." Hear this, O ye heavens, and be astonished, O earth! God's mercy is not blind mercy, he is merciful in spite of his clear vision of our sins. "I have seen his ways, and yet I will heal him." If God had not seen man's sin his passing it by would be easy to understand. What the eye does not see the heart does not rue. But it is wonderful that it should be written, "I have seen his ways, and will heal him." The Lord seems to say, "I see him become more froward the more I smite him; I see him provoking me over and over again though I chide with him; I see not only his ways, but I see through his ways the rebellious heart which dwells within. I see that he is worthless, undeserving, ill-deserving and hell-deserving; I see that his mind is set on mischief, that he is altogether estranged from me, even from his birth, and that his whole nature is tainted with rebellion." Yet the Lord adds that astonishing word of grace, "I have seen his ways, and will heal him." O soul, God sees what you are, he knows your secret wickedness, and you have not half such an idea of your own sin and perverseness as he has, and yet over the head of it all leaps the eternal, boundless mercy, "I have seen his ways, and will heal him."

Note that it is an *effectual* method. "I have seen his ways, and will *heal* him,"—not "I will smite him again," but "I will treat his sin as if it were a disease." That is a very wise thing to do with persons who grievously offend you. When a man's action is very provoking I like to hear people say, "Surely he must be a little wrong in the head. Poor man, he must be out of order or he would not act so." Put the best construction you can upon an offence and treat it as if it arose out of disease. It is true that sin is much more than a disease, and God

might treat us altogether and only from its criminal side, but still it is a disease, and therefore he resolves to treat it as such. Our great Lord in effect cries, "Oh, this wicked creature of mine will not own its Creator, this sinful child of mine will persist in rebelling against my love. Surely something ails him. I will not chasten him again, but I will treat him as a sick man and I will heal him. I will change his nature, I will take away the heart of stone out of his flesh, I will give him a heart of flesh. I will take those dry eyes and fill them with tears. I will take that dumb tongue and inspire it with prayer; I will take that careless heart and melt it with holy penitence. I have seen his ways, and will heal him." It is an astonishing way; it is an effectual way.

Notice further that it is a *tender* way,—“I will lead him also.” Observe that word. The sinner will have his own way, and the Lord has been driving him into another, but he will not go; now the Lord will come to him in gentleness and lead him. He will say, “Come now, let us reason together.” He will appeal to him, and say, “Do not contend with me any longer. I can strike hard, and I could, if I would, strike you into hell: but do not fight with me, let us make peace. ‘As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, but that he should turn unto me and live.’” Come unto the Lord, thou poor broken-hearted one; he has only striven with thee to wean thee from thy sin and make it possible to him to save thee. Stand not up in thy puny insignificance to contend against thy God; do not brazen it out with him: the mere bosses of his buckler will break thee; as for his sword, if he uses it upon thee thou art utterly slain. Come, for he will put your sin away, he will cease from his fierce anger and reveal his love. He proclaims pardon. Free grace and dying love are the charming bells which ring thee into the banquet of grace. The Lord *leads* the contrite soul step by step; there is no driving, but like as a shepherd goeth before his sheep so the Lord Jesus goeth before broken, humble, and contrite spirits, and they know his voice and follow him.

Observe, also, how *complete* is this method. As if all that went before were not enough it is added, “I will restore comforts unto him and to his mourners.” How tender this is. He will take away the sorrow as well as the sin, the killing grief as well as the killing disease. He will give us the true balm of Gilead, and will pour such wine and oil into our gaping wounds, that all shall be healed, and the bones which he had broken shall rejoice.

I do not know whether I have succeeded in striking you all with an impression of my Master's great love, but it is very much upon my soul at this time. It amazes me that though he has been contending with us, after all it is no contention of his heart, but only of his hand! When we have resisted and kept up the contention, he says, “I have smitten you and you revolt more and more: why should you be smitten any more? Your whole head is sick and your whole heart faint with my smiting you. I will chasten you no more, but change my method. I have brought you down almost to death's door by affliction, and yet you kick and struggle still, as if the last breath in you should be spent in fighting against me; but I will conquer you: if it cannot be accomplished by fear it shall be achieved by love. If you will not yield to my

thunder you shall yield to my sunshine; if you will not bow before my throne you shall fall before my cross. I will die for you, and so I will win you. I will let my own heart be broken for you, that at last you shall look at me and your heart shall be broken. I will love you: I will love you into life; I will love you up from the very gates of hell; I will love you till you love me." O irresistible love! who can stand out against thee? O Lord, this morning thy people, if they have rebelled, come weeping back to thee to ask thee again to give the kiss of reconciliation. We yield, we yield, submitting ourselves without reserve to God. Many a poor sinner who has given up the hope of being saved under the crushing blows of conviction and chastisement, should now cry, "I can hold out no longer.

'Lord, what hard heart can still withstand,
And still rebellious prove?
Refuse to bow to thy command,
Or to accept thy love.

'O'ercome by glorious grace, I now
My former war give o'er;
To thy command I gladly bow,
And would contend no more.'

Oh, come, ye wanderers, and rest in Jesus. Come, ye most lost, most ruined, most hopeless, and find heaven begun in Christ. Oh, you that sit on the verge of perdition, who have made a covenant with death and a league with hell, whose death warrant seems to be signed, and put into your hands, so that you read it by the flames of hell whose fury you anticipate, come to Jesus and that handwriting of death shall be blotted out. The impending judgment seems even now to scorch your souls; come and find deliverance from it, for God himself invites you. Tarry no longer. May Jesus sweetly lead you to himself. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Isaiah lvii.
15—21; lviii.

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