

The New Park Street Pulpit.

THE ALLEGORIES OF SARAH AND HAGAR.

A Sermon

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"These are the two covenants."—Galatians iv. 24.

THERE cannot be a greater difference in the world between two things than there is between law and grace. And yet, strange to say, while the things are diametrically opposed and essentially different from each other, the human mind is so depraved, and the intellect, even when blessed by the Spirit, has become so turned aside from right judgment, that one of the most difficult things in the world is to discriminate properly between law and grace. He who knows the difference, and always recollects it—the essential difference between law and grace—has grasped the marrow of divinity. He is not far from understanding the gospel theme in all its ramifications, its outlets, and its branches, who can properly tell the difference between law and grace. There is always in a science some part which is very simple and easy when we have learned it, but which, in the commencement, stands like a high threshold before the porch. Now, the first difficulty in striving to learn the gospel is this. Between law and grace there is a difference plain enough to every Christian, and especially to every enlightened and instructed one; but still, when most enlightened and instructed, there is always a tendency in us to confound the two things. They are as opposite as light and darkness, and can no more agree than fire and water; yet man will be perpetually striving to make a compound of them—often ignorantly, and sometimes wilfully. They seek to blend the two, when God has positively put them asunder.

We shall attempt this morning to teach you something of the allegories of Sarah and Hagar, that you may thereby better understand the essential difference between the covenants of law and of grace. We shall not go fully into the subject, but shall only give such illustrations of it as the text may furnish us. First, I shall want you to notice *the two women*, whom Paul uses as types—Hagar and Sarah; then I shall notice *the two sons*—Ishmael and Isaac; in the third place, I shall notice *Ishmael's conduct to Isaac*; and I shall conclude by noticing *the different fates of the two*.

I. First, we invite you to notice THE TWO WOMEN—Hagar and Sarah. It is said that they are the types of the two covenants; and before we start we must not forget to tell you what the covenants are. The first covenant for which Hagar stands, is the covenant of works, which is this: "There is my law, O man; if thou on thy side wilt engage to keep it, I, on my side will engage that thou shalt live by keeping it. If thou wilt promise to obey my commands perfectly, wholly, fully, without a single flaw, I will carry thee to heaven. But mark me, if thou violatest one command, if thou dost rebel against a single ordinance, I will destroy thee for ever." That is the Hagar covenant—the covenant propounded on Sinai, amidst tempests, fire and smoke—or rather, propounded, first of all, in the garden of Eden, where God said to Adam, "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely

die." As long as he did not eat of the tree, but remained spotless and sinless, he was most assuredly to live. That is the covenant of the law, the Hagar covenant. The Sarah covenant is the covenant of grace, not made with God and man, but made with God and Christ Jesus, which covenant is this: "Christ Jesus on his part engages to bear the penalty of all his people's sins, to die, to pay their debts, to take their iniquities upon his shoulders; and the Father promises on his part that all for whom the Son doth die shall most assuredly be saved; that seeing they have evil hearts, he will put his law in their hearts, that they shall not depart from it, and that seeing they have sins, he will pass them by and not remember them any more for ever." The covenant of works was, "Do this and live, O man!" but the covenant of grace is, "Do this, O Christ, and thou shalt live, O man!" The difference of the covenants rests here. The one was made with man, the other with Christ; the one was a conditional covenant, conditional on Adam's standing, the other is a conditional covenant with Christ, but as perfectly unconditional with us. There are no conditions whatever in the covenant of grace, or if there be conditions, the covenant gives them. The covenant gives faith, gives repentance, gives good works, gives salvation, as a purely gratuitous unconditional act; nor does our continuance in that covenant depend in the least degree on ourselves. The covenant was made by God with Christ, signed, sealed, and ratified, in all things ordered well.

Now come and look at the allegory. First, I would have you notice, that *Sarah who is the type of the new covenant of grace, was the original wife of Abraham*. Before he knew anything about Hagar, Sarah was his wife. The covenant of grace was the original covenant after all. There be some bad theologians who teach that God made man upright, and made a covenant with him; that man sinned, and that as a kind of afterthought God made a new covenant with Christ for the salvation of his people. Now, that is a complete mistake. The covenant of grace was made before the covenant of works; for Christ Jesus, before the foundation of the world, did stand as its head and representative; and we are said to be elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus. We, long ere we fell, were loved of God; he did not love us out of pity to us, but he loved his people, considered purely as creatures. He loved them when they became sinners; but when he started with them he considered them as creatures. He allowed them to fall into sin, to show forth the riches of his grace, which existed before their sin. He did not love them and choose them from among the rest, after their fall, but he loved them beyond their sin, and before their sin. He made the covenant of grace before we fell by the covenant of works. If you could go back to eternity, and ask which is the oldest born, you would hear that grace was born before law—that it came into the world long before the law was promulgated. Older even than the fundamental principles which guide our morals is that great fundamental rock of grace, in covenant made of old, long ere seers preached the law, and long ere Sinai smoked. Long before Adam stood in the garden God had ordained his people to eternal life, that they might be saved through Jesus.

Notice next: *though Sarah was the elder wife, yet Hagar bare the first son*. So the first man Adam was the son of Hagar; though he was born perfectly pure and spotless, he was not the son of Sarah when he was in the garden. Hagar had the first son. She bore Adam, who lived for a time under the covenant of works. Adam lived in the garden on this principle. Sins of commission were to be his fall; and if he omitted to do the sin, then he was to stand for ever. Adam had it entirely in his own power whether he would obey God or not; his salvation, then, rested simply on this basis, "If thou touchest that fruit thou diest; if thou obeyest my command, and dost not touch it, thou shalt live." And Adam, perfect as he was, was but an Ishmael, and not an Isaac, till after his fall. *Apparently*, at any rate, he was a Hagarene, though *secretly*, in the covenant of grace, he may have been a child of promise. Blessed be God, we are not under Hagar now; we are not under the law since Adam fell. Now Sarah hath brought forth children. The new covenant is, "The mother of us all."

But notice again, *Hagar was not intended to be a wife; she never ought to have been anything but a hand-maid to Sarah*. The law was never intended to save men: it was only designed to be a hand-maid to the covenant of grace. When God delivered the law on Sinai, it was apart from his ideas that any man would ever be saved by it; he

never conceived that man would attain perfection thereby. But you know that the law is a wondrous handmaid to grace. Who brought us to the Saviour? Was it not the law thundering in our ears? We should never have come to Christ if the law had not driven us there; we should never have known sin if the law had not revealed it. The law is Sarah's handmaid to sweep our hearts, and make the dust fly so that we may cry for blood to be sprinkled that the dust may be laid. The law is, so to speak, Jesus Christ's dog, to go after his sheep, and bring them to the shepherd; the law is the thunderbolt which affrighteth ungodly men, and maketh them turn from the error of their ways, and seek after God. Ah! if we know rightly how to use the law, if we understand how to put her in her proper place, and make her obedient to her mistress, then all will be well. But this Hagar will always be wishing to be mistress, as well as Sarah; and Sarah will never allow that, but will be sure to treat her harshly, and drive her out. We must do the same; and let none murmur at us, if we treat the Hagarenes harshly in these days—if we sometimes speak hard things against those who are trusting in the works of the law. We will quote Sarah as an example. *She treated Hagar harshly, and so will we.* We mean to make Hagar flee into the wilderness: we wish to have nothing to do with her. Yet it is very remarkable, that coarse and ill-featured as Hagar is, men have always a greater love for her than they have for Sarah; and they are prone continually to be crying, "Hagar, thou shalt be my mistress," instead of saying, "Nay, Sarah, I will be thy son, and Hagar shall be bondmaid." What is God's law now? It is not *above* a Christian—it is *under* a Christian. Some men hold God's law like a rod, *in terrorem*, over Christians, and say, "If you sin you will be punished with it." It is not so. The law is under a Christian; it is for him to walk on, to be his guide, his rule, his pattern. "We are not under the law, but under grace." Law is the road which guides us, not the rod which drives us, nor the spirit which actuates us. The law is good and excellent, if it keeps its place. Nobody finds fault with the handmaid, because she is not the wife; and no one shall despise Hagar because she is not Sarah. If she had but remembered her office, it had been all well, and her mistress had never driven her out. We do not wish to drive the law out of chapels, as long as it is kept in its right position; but when it is set up as mistress, away with her; we will have nought to do with legality.

Again: *Hagar never was a free woman, and Sarah never was a slave.* So, beloved, the covenant of works never was free, and none of her children ever were. All those who trust in works never are free, and never can be, even could they be perfect in good works. Even if they have no sin, still they are bond-slaves, for when we have done all that we ought to have done, God is not our debtor, we are debtors still to him, and still remain as bond-slaves. If I could keep all God's law, I should have no right to favour, for I should have done no more than was my duty, and be a bond-slave still. The law is the most rigorous master in the world, no wise man would love its service; for after all you have done, the law never gives you a "Thank you," for it, but says, "Go on, sir, go on!" The poor sinner trying to be saved by law is like a blind horse going round and round a mill, and never getting a step further, but only being whipped continually; yea, the faster he goes, the more work he does, the more he is tired, so much the worse for him. The better legalist a man is, the more sure he is of being damned; the more holy a man is, if he trust to his works, the more he may rest assured of his own final rejection and eternal portion with Pharisees. Hagar was a slave; Ishmael, moral and good as he was, was nothing but a slave, and never could be more. Not all the works he ever rendered to his father could make him a free-born son. Sarah never was a slave. She might be sometimes taken prisoner by Pharaoh, but she was not a slave then; her husband might sometimes deny her, but she was his wife still; she was soon owned by her husband, and Pharaoh was soon obliged to send her back. So the covenant of grace might seem once in jeopardy, and the representative of it might cry, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me;" but it never was in real hazard. And sometimes the people under the covenant of grace may seem to be captives and bond-slaves; but still they are free. Oh! that we knew how to "stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free."

One thought more. *Hagar was cast out, as well as her son; but Sarah never was.* So the covenant of works has ceased to be a covenant. Not only have the people been

cast away who trusted in it, not simply was Ishmael cast out, but Ishmael's mother too. So the legalist may not only know himself to be damned, but the law as a covenant has ceased to be, for mother and son are both driven out by the gospel, and those who trust in law are sent away by God. You ask to-day who is Abraham's wife? Why Sarah; does she not sleep side by side with her husband in the Machpelah's cave at this instant? There she lies, and if she lie there for a thousand years to come, she will still be Abraham's wife, while Hagar never can be. Oh, how sweet to think, that the covenant made of old was in all things ordered well, and never, never shall be removed. "Although my house be not so with God, yet hath he made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure." Ah! ye legalists, I do not wonder that ye teach the doctrine of falling away, because that is consistent with your theology. Of course, Hagar has to be driven out, and Ishmael too. But we who preach the covenant of free and full salvation know, that Isaac never shall be driven out, and that Sarah never shall cease to be the friend and wife of Abraham. Ye Hagarenes! ye ceremonialists! ye hypocrites! ye formalists! of what avail will it be, when at last ye shall say, "Where is my mother? Where is my mother, the law?" Oh! she is driven out, and thou mayest go with her into eternal oblivion. But where is my mother? the Christian can say at last; and it will be said, "There is the mother of the faithful, Jerusalem above, the mother of us all; and we shall enter in, and dwell with our Father and our God."

II. Now we are going to review the two sons. While the two women were types of the two covenants, the two sons were types of those who live under each covenant. Isaac is a type of the man who walks by faith, and not by sight, and who hopes to be saved by grace; Ishmael **of the man** who lives by works, and hopes to be saved by his own good deeds. Let us look at these two.

First, *Ishmael is the elder*. So, beloved, the legalist is a great deal older than the Christian. If I were a legalist to-day, I should be some fifteen or sixteen years older than I am as a Christian, for we are all born legalists. Speaking of Arminians, Whitfield said, "We are all born Arminians." It is grace that turns us into Calvinists, grace that makes Christians of us, grace that makes us free, and makes us know our standing in Christ Jesus. The legalist must be expected, then, to have more might of argument than Isaac; and when the two boys are wrestling, of course Isaac generally gets a fall, for Ishmael is the biggest fellow. And you must expect to hear Ishmael making the most noise, for he is to be a wild man, his hand against every man, and every man's hand against him; whereas Isaac is a peaceful lad. He always stands up for his mother, and when he is mocked, he can go and tell his mother that Ishmael mocked him, but that is all that he can do; he has not much strength. So you notice now-a-days. The Ishmaelites are generally the strongest, and they can give us desperate falls when we get into argument with them. In fact, it is their boast and glory that the Isaacs have not much power of reasoning—not much logic. No, Isaac does not want it, for he is an heir according to promise, and promise and logic do not much consist together. His logic is his faith; his rhetoric is his earnestness. Never expect the gospel to be victorious when you are disputing after the manner of men; more usually look to be beaten. If you are discoursing with a legalist, and he conquers you, say, "Ah! I expected that; it shows I am an Isaac, for Ishmael will be sure to give Isaac a thrashing, and I am not at all sorry for it. Your father and mother were in the prime of life, and were strong; and it was natural that you should overcome me, for my father and mother were quite old people."

But where was the *difference* between the two lads in their outward appearance? There was *no difference between them as to ordinances*, for both of them were circumcised. There was no distinction with regard to outward and visible signs. So, my dearly beloved, there is often no difference between Ishmael and Isaac, between the legalist and the Christian, in matters of outward ceremonies. The legalist takes the sacrament and is baptized; he would be afraid to die if he did not. And *I do not believe there was much difference as to character*. Ishmael was nearly as good and honorable a man as Isaac; there is nothing said against him in scripture; indeed, I am led to believe that he was an especially good lad, from the fact that when God gave a blessing, he said, "With Isaac shall the blessing be." Abraham said, "O that Ishmael might live before thee." He cried to God for Ishmael, because he loved the

lad, doubtless, for his disposition. God said, yea, I will give Ishmael such-and-such a blessing; he shall be the father of princes, he shall have temporal blessings; but God would not turn aside, even for Abraham's prayer. And when Sarah was rather fierce, as she must have been that day when she turned Hagar out of the house, it is said, "It grieved Abraham because of his son;" and I do not suspect that Abraham's attachment was a foolish one. There is one trait in Ishmael's character that you love very much. When Abraham died, he did not leave Ishmael a single stick or stone, for he had previously given him his portion and sent him away; yet he came to his father's funeral, for it is said that his sons Ishmael and Isaac buried him in Machpelah. There seems then to have been but little difference in the characters of the two. So, dearly beloved, there is little difference between the legalist and the Christian as to the outward walk. They are both the visible sons of Abraham. It is not a distinction of life; for God allowed Ishmael to be as good as Isaac, in order to show that it was not the goodness of man that made any distinction, but that he "will have mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth."

Then *what was the distinction?* Paul has told us that the first was born after the *flesh*, and the second after the *Spirit*. The first was a natural son, the other a spiritual one. Ask the legalist. "You do good works; you have repented, you say: you are keeping the law, and you have no need to repent. Now, where did you get your strength from?" Perhaps he says, "Grace;" but if you ask him what he means, he says that he used it; he had grace, but he used it. Then the difference is, *you* used your grace, and others did not. Yes. Well, then, it is your own doing. You may call it grace, or you may call it mustard; it was no grace after all, for it was your using, you say, that made the difference. But ask poor Isaac how he has kept the law, and what does he say? Very badly, indeed. Are you a sinner, Isaac? "Oh! yes, an exceedingly great one; I have rebelled against my father times without number; I have often gone astray from him." Then you do not think yourself quite as good as Ishmael, do you? "No." But yet there is a difference between you and him after all. What has made the difference? "Why, grace has made me to differ." Why is not Ishmael an Isaac? Could Ishmael have been an Isaac? "No," says Isaac, "it was God who made me to differ, from the first to the last; he made me a child of promise before I was born, and he must keep me so."

**"Grace all the work shall crown
Through everlasting days;
It lays in heaven the topmost stone,
And well deserves the praise."**

Isaac has more really good works; he does not stand second to Ishmael. When he is converted, he labours, if it be possible, to serve his father far more than the legalist does his master; but still doubtless, if you were to hear both their tales, you would hear Isaac say that he was a poor miserable sinner, while Ishmael would make himself out a very honorable Pharisaic gentleman. The difference is not in works, however, but in motives; not in the life, but in the means of sustaining life—not in what they do, so much as in how they do it. Here, then, is the difference between some of you. Not that you legalists are worse than Christians; you may be often better in your lives, and yet you may be lost. Do you complain of that as unjust? Not in the least. God says men must be saved by faith, and if you say, "No, I will be saved by works," you may try it, but you will be lost for ever. It is as if you had a servant, and you should say, "John, go and do such-and-such a thing in the stable;" but he goes away and does the reverse, and then says, "Sir, I have done it very nicely." "Yes," you say, "but that is not what I told you to do." So God has not told you to work out your salvation by good works; but he has said, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God that worketh in you to will and to do of his good pleasure." So that when you come before God with your good works he will say, "I never told you to do that. I said, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and be baptized, and thou shalt be saved," "Ah!" you say, "I thought the other was a great deal better way." Sir, you will be lost for your

thoughts. "Why is it that the Gentiles, who followed not after righteousness, have attained unto righteousness," when Israel, who followed after righteousness, hath not attained it? It is this: "Because they sought it not by faith, but by the works of the law."

III. Now I will briefly say a word or two concerning ISHMAEL'S CONDUCT TO ISAAC. It says that Ishmael mocked Isaac. Have not some of you, dear sons of Hagar, felt exceedingly irritated when you heard this doctrine? You have said, "It is dreadful, it is horrible, it is quite unjust, that I may be as good as I like, but if I am not a son of the promise, I cannot be saved; it is really awful, it is an immoral doctrine; it does a deal of damage, and ought to be stopped." Of course! That shows that you are an Ishmael. Of course Ishmael will mock at Isaac; and we need no further explanation. Where the pure sovereignty of God is preached, where it is held that the child of the promise, and not the child of the flesh, is the heir, the child of the flesh always makes a hubbub about it. What said Ishmael to Isaac? "What business have you here? Am I not my father's eldest son? I should have had all the property, if it had not been for you. Are you above me?" That is how the legalist talks. "Is not God the father of everybody? Are we not all his children? He ought not to make any difference." Said Ishmael: "Am not I as good as you? Do I not serve my father as well? As for you, you know you are your mother's favourite, but my mother is as good as yours." And so he teased and mocked at Isaac. That is just how you Arminians do with free salvation. The legalist says, "I don't see it, I cannot have it, and I won't; if we are both equal in character, it cannot be fair that one should be lost, and the other saved." And thus he mocks at free grace. You may get on very easily, if you do not preach free grace too fully, but if you dare to speak such things, though they are obnoxious to the crowd, what will people say? They call them "baits for popularity." (See the *so-called* FREEMAN Newspaper.) Few fishes, however, bite at those baits. Most men say, "I hate him, I cannot bear him; he is so uncharitable." You say we preach this to gain popularity! Why, it is, upon the surface of it, a bare-faced lie; for the doctrine of God's sovereignty will always be unpopular; men will always hate it, and grind their teeth, just as they did when Jesus taught it. Many widows he said, were in Israel, but to none of them was the prophet sent, save unto a widow of Sarepta. And many lepers were in Israel, but none of them were healed, except one who came far away from Syria. A fine popularity our Saviour got from that sermon. The people ground their teeth at him; and all the popularity he had, would have been to be pushed down the hill, from which, it is said, they would have cast him headlong, but he made his way out of them and escaped. What! *popular* to humble a man's pride, to abolish man's standing, and make him cringe before God as a poor sinner! No; it will never be popular till men be born angels, and all men love the Lord, and that will not be just yet, I ween.

IV. But we have to enquire WHAT BECAME OF THE TWO SONS.

First, *Isaac had all the inheritance, and Ishmael none*. Not that Ishmael came off poorly, for he had many presents, and became very rich and great in this world; but he had no spiritual inheritance. So the legalist will get many blessings, as a reward for his legality; he will be respected and honored. "Verily," said Christ, "the Pharisees have their reward." God does not rob any man of his reward. Whatever a man angles for, he catches. God pays men all he owes, and a great deal over; and those who keep his law, even in this world, will receive great favours. By obeying God's command they will not injure their bodies as much as the vicious, and they will preserve their reputation better—obedience does good in this way. But then Ishmael had none of the inheritance. So, thou poor legalist, if thou art depending on thy works, or on anything, except the free sovereign grace of God, for thy deliverance from death, thou wilt not have so much as a foot of the inheritance of Canaan, but in that great day when God shall allot the portions of all the sons of Jacob, there will be not a scrap for thee. But if thou art a poor Isaac, a poor guilty trembling sinner—and if thou sayest, "Ishmael has his hands full,

But nothing in my hands I bring,
Simply to the cross I cling,"

If thou art saying this morning—

“I am nothing at all,
But Jesus Christ is my all in all.”

If thou renouncest all the works of the flesh, and dost confess, “I the chief of sinners am, but I am the child of the promise; and Jesus died for me,” thou shalt have an inheritance, and thou shalt not be robbed of it by all the mocking Ishmaels in the world; nor shall it be diminished by the sons of Hagar. Thou mayest sometimes be sold, and carried down to Egypt, but God will bring his Josephs and his Isaacs back again, and thou shalt yet be exalted to glory, and sit on Christ’s right hand. Ah! I have often thought what consternation there will be in hell when outwardly good men go there. “Lord,” saith one as he goes in, “am I to go into that loathsome dungeon? Did not I keep the Sabbath? Was not I a strict Sabbatarian? I never cursed or swore in all my life. Am I to go there? I paid tithes of all that I possessed, and am I to be locked up there? I was baptized; I took the Lord’s supper; I was everything that ever a man could be, that was good. It is true, I did not believe in Christ; but I did not think I needed Christ, for I thought I was too good and too honorable; and am I to be locked up there?” Yes, sir! and amongst the damned thou shalt have this pre-eminence, that thou didst scorn Christ most of all. They never set up an anti-Christ. They followed sin, and so didst thou in thy measure, but thou didst add to thy sin this most damnable of sins: that thou didst set up thyself as an anti-Christ, and bowed down and worshipped thine own fancied goodness. Then God will proceed to tell the legalist, “On such a day I heard thee rail at my sovereignty; I heard thee say it was unfair of me to save my people, and distribute my favors after the counsel of my own will; thou didst impugn thy Creator’s justice, and justice thou shalt have in all its power.” The man had thought he had a great balance on his side, but he finds it is only some little grain of duty; but then God holds up the immense roll of his sins, with this at the bottom: “Without God, without hope, a stranger from the common wealth of Israel!” The poor man then sees that his little treasure is not half a mite, while God’s great bill is ten thousand million talents; and so with an awful howl, and a desperate shriek, he runs away with all his little notes of merit that he had hoped would have saved him; crying, “I am lost! I am lost with all my good works! I find my good works were sands, but my sins were mountains; and because I had not faith, all my righteousness was but white-washed hypocrisy.”

Now, once more, *Ishmael was sent away, and Isaac was kept in the house.* So there are some of you, when the searching day shall come to try God’s church, though you have been living in the church as well as others, though you have got the mask of profession on you, you will find that it will not avail. You have been like the elder son; whenever a poor prodigal has come into the church, you have said, “As soon as thy son is come which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf.” Ah! envious legalist, thou wilt be banished at last from the house. I tell you legalist, and formalist, that you have no more to do with Christ than the heathens have, and though you have been baptized with Christian baptism, though you sit at a Christian table, though you hear a Christian sermon, you have neither part nor lot in the matter, any more than a Catholic or a Mahomedan, unless you are trusting simply in the grace of God, and are an heir according to the promise. Whosoever doth trust to his works, though it be ever so little, will find that that little trust will ruin his soul. All that nature spins must be unravelled. That ship which works have builded must have her keel cut in halves. A soul must trust simply and wholly to the covenant of God, or else that soul is lost. Legalist, thou hopest to be saved by works. Come, now, I will treat thee respectfully. I will not charge thee with having been a drunkard, or a swearer; but I want to ask thee, Art thou aware, that in order to be saved by thy works, it is requisite that thou shouldst be entirely perfect? God demands the keeping of the whole law. If you have a vessel with the smallest crack in it, it is not a whole one. Have you never committed sin in all your life? Have you never thought an evil thought, never had an evil imagination? Come, sir, I would not suppose that you have stained those white kid gloves with anything like lust, or carnality, or that your fine mouth which uses such chaste language ever condescended to an oath, or anything like lasciviousness;

I will not imagine that you have ever sung a lascivious song, I will leave that out of the question—but hast thou never sinned? “Yes,” sayest thou. Then, mark this: “*the soul that sinneth, it shall die;*” and that is all I have to say to thee. But if thou wilt deny that thou hast ever sinned, dost thou know that if in future thou commit but one sin—though thou shouldst live for seventy years a perfect life, and at the end of that seventy years thou shouldst commit one sin, all thy obedience would go for nothing; for “*He that offends in one point is guilty of all.*” “Sir,” you say, “you are going on a wrong supposition, for though I believe I ought to do some good works, I believe Jesus Christ is very merciful, and though I am not exactly perfect, I am sincere, and I think sincere obedience will be accepted instead of perfect obedience.” You do, indeed! and pray what is sincere obedience? I have known a man get drunk once a week; he was very sincere, and he did not think he was doing wrong so long as he was sober on a Sunday. Many people have what they call a sincere obedience, but it is one which always leaves a little margin for iniquity. But then you say, “I do not take too much margin, it is only a little sin I allow.” My dear sir, you are quite in error as to your sincere obedience, for if this be what God requires, then hundreds of the vilest characters are as sincere as you are. But I do not believe you are sincere. If you were sincere, you would obey what God says, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” It strikes me thy sincere obedience is a sincere delusion, and such thou wilt find it. “Oh,” sayest thou, “I believe that after all we have done, we must go to Jesus Christ, and we must say, “Lord, there is a great deficiency here, wilt thou make it up?” I have heard of weighing witches against the parish Bible, and if they were found heavier they were declared to be innocent; but to put the witch and the Bible in the same scale is a new idea. Why, Christ will not get in the scale with such a conceited fool as thou art. You wish Christ to be a make-weight. He is much obliged to you for the compliment, but he will accept no such menial service. “Oh,” sayest thou, “he shall *assist* me in the matter of salvation.” Yes, I know that would please you; but Christ is a very different kind of Saviour; he has a propensity when he does a thing to do it all. You may think it strange, but he never likes any assistance. When he made the world, he did not ask the angel Gabriel so much as to cool the molten matter with his wing, but he did it entirely himself. So it is in salvation: he says, “My glory I will not give to another.” And I beg to remind thee, as thou professest to go to Christ, and yet to have a little share in the business thyself, that there is a passage in the Scriptures which is *apropos* to thee, and which thou mayest masticate at thy leisure, “And if by grace, then is it no more of works; otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace; otherwise work is no more work.” For if you mix the two together, you spoil them both. Go home, sir, and make yourself a stirabout with fire and water, endeavour to keep in your house a lion and a lamb, and when you have succeeded in doing these, tell me that you have made works and grace agree, and I will tell you, you have told me a lie even then, for the two things are so essentially opposite, that it cannot be done. Whosoever amongst you will cast all his good works away, and will come to Jesus, with this “Nothing, *nothing*, NOTHING,

‘*Nothing* in my hands I bring,
Simply to the cross I cling,’”

Christ will give you good works enough, his Spirit will work in you to will and to do of his good pleasure, and will make you holy and perfect; but if you have endeavoured to get holiness before Christ, you have begun at the wrong end, you have sought the flower before you have the root, and are foolish for your pains. Ishmaels, tremble before him now! If others of you be Isaacs, may you ever remember that you are children of the promise. Stand fast. Be not entangled by the yoke of bondage, for you are not under the law, but under grace.