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THE SILKEN FETTER.

A Sermon

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“Fear the Lord and his goodness.”—Hosea iii. 5.

THE whole verse runs thus: “Afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the Lord their God, and David their king; and shall fear the Lord and his goodness in the latter days.” A brief word may suffice upon the prophecy. I think no reader of Holy Scripture can doubt but that the seed of Abraham, however long they may be in blindness, will at the last obey the Messiah, Jesus, the Son of David, and in those days the goodness of God to them will be so extraordinary, that they shall fear and wonder at it; constrained by gratitude, they will be numbered among the most earnest servants of the Lord. May the Lord hasten so blest a consummation in his own time. O that the happy day would dawn, when Israel’s sons shall acknowledge Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews, to be the Messiah that was promised of old! The expression, “Fear the Lord and his goodness,” much impressed me, and I have therefore ventured to take it from its connection, that we may meditate upon it. Is it so, that there are powerful motives and active causes for fear not only in God himself, but also in his goodness? Alas! dear friends, too many who enjoy the blessings of divine men are far enough from fearing him. His goodness, from the very commonness and continuity of it, casts them into a self-complacent slumber, in which they dream that they will continue in prosperity for ever, but they spend not even a single thought on him from whom all goodness flows. Alas! another class of persons are even excited by the goodness of God to a height of pride and arrogance. If Pharaoh be fixed on a powerful throne, if his dominions be in peace, if the Nile causes Egypt to be fat with harvest, the proud monarch defiantly demands, “Who is Jehovah that I should obey his voice?” If the hosts of Sennacherib be mighty in battle, and if God give prosperity to his kingdom, what will Sennacherib do but wax exceeding haughty against God, the God of Israel, and laugh his people to scorn! Many a man has put his trust in his riches, and has presumed against the Most High; because he has enjoyed long years of success, he believes not that any evil can befall him, but his pride towers aloft, even to the very heavens. Alas! even in those men who are right-hearted, in whom grace reigns, it has too often happened that the goodness of God has not wrought in them a

corresponding gracious result. Hezekiah is endowed with riches, and displays them with ostentatious pride: instead of honouring his God in the presence of the ambassadors that came from far, he sought only to give them a high idea of himself, and thus by the pride of his heart he brought upon himself a stern rebuke from his Lord. Asa prospered, but when he was lifted up in outward circumstances, he became also lifted up in heart, and departed from the Most High. Even good men cannot always carry a full cup without some spilling. Even those whose hearts are right have not always found their heads steady enough to stand with safety upon the pinnacles of prosperity and honour. Yet, my brethren, though these things do occur as the results of the goodness of God, on account of the evil of our hearts, yet the true and right effect of goodness upon us ought to be to make us fear God; not to lift us up, but to keep us down; not to make our blood hot with presumption, but to cool and calm it with a grateful jealousy; not unduly to exhilarate us until we become profanely defiant, but to sober us with conscious responsibility till we humbly sit with gratitude at the feet of him from whom our good things have proceeded. This, then, is to be the drift of this morning's discourse—the right and proper result of the goodness of God upon our hearts.

I shall address myself, first of all, *to God's people*; secondly, *to such as are yet unreconciled to him*.

I. First, TO GOD'S PEOPLE.

It is yours, beloved, to fear the Lord and his goodness. You have received of God's goodness in two ways; the first and the higher is his spiritual goodness to you with regard to your immortal nature and your eternal concerns; the second form of goodness in which God has been very lavish to some now present is the providential bounty of God towards you as a pilgrim in this present world.

Let us take the first, and dwell upon it, and survey *the spiritual goodness of God* to you his people for a moment. It was no small goodness which chose you at the first, when there was no more in you than in others whom God beheld in the same glass of his purposes; he might have passed you by as he has passed by tens of thousands of others, but he chose you because he will have mercy on whom he will have mercy, and he determined that you should be the vessels of mercy to be filled with his grace. It was no slight goodness which ordained a covenant on your behalf with Christ Jesus, a covenant ordered in all things and sure, which is, I hope, to you to-day all your salvation, and all your desire, even if your house be not so with God as you could wish. It was no slight goodness which fulfilled that covenant, by the gift of the Only Begotten. My words when applied to such a topic, seems to me to be threadbare and miserable things, too poor to set forth the lovingkindness manifest in our incarnate God dwelling among men, in our holy Saviour working out a perfect righteousness, above all, in our bleeding Redeemer making expiation for innumerable sins by the giving up of himself to death. Here are heights of goodness which the hind's foot of imagination shall never scale; here are depths of mercy which the plummet of profoundest reasoning can never fathom—What do you not owe unto him who loved you and redeemed you unto God by his blood?

Think again of the goodness of God to you when you were as yet unconverted: what longsuffering! what tenderness! When you were determined to perish, he was determined to save. When you rejected his offers of mercy, he did not reject you; he would not take your denial for a reply, but he persevered with the sweet solicitations of his gospel and with the silent influences of his Holy Spirit, until at last he made you willing in the day of his power, and brought you to that cross to find your hope hanging thereon, and to be filled with joy and peace, as you looked up to Jesus and rested in him. Months and years have glided away since then, but all along life's chequered way, divine goodness has continually followed you. My dear brethren and sisters, I need not be choicer in my language in order to excite in you gratitude, if you will but now turn over the pages of your day-book, one by one, and think of what God has done for you since that dear hour when he brought you to his foot, and placed you among his children. Why, your bread has been given to you spiritually, and your waters have been sure. You have been preserved from temptations, and preserved in temptations, and brought out of temptations. You have been led first into one truth, and then into another; you have been conducted, step by step, in the pathway of experience; little by little, as you have been able to bear it, has he revealed himself unto you; you have been kept until this day by his power; you have been comforted unto this day by his presence; you are being taught every day by his Spirit; and you are being made meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light. Oh, the goodness of God to you! If *you* do not feel it, I desire to be, for my own part, overwhelmed with thankfulness, so as to say in my own soul, "Oh, the goodness of God to me in spiritual matters, his goodness to an unworthy one who continues still unworthy, his goodness in watering the plant that bears so little fruit, his goodness in ministering comfort to one so ready to create distresses by foolish fears; in bearing in his teaching with one so prone to forget, and so slow to understand." Brethren, we cannot mention even the small dust of our great Father's mercies; he has outdone all that we have asked or even thought in what he has revealed to us; he has dealt well with his servants according to his word.

Now, all this goodness, which I would fain recall to your recollection, should constrain you to fear the Lord. To fear the Lord and his goodness—how is this to be done? First, there should be a fear in your souls of *admiration* to think that ever the infinite God should deal graciously with you; that he who made the heavens and the earth should stoop from his loftiness to you; that you, being sinful, and having therefore provoked him, and angered his sense of purity—that he should stoop to you in your defilement and loathsomeness, and should reveal his Son in you. The wonder grows as we think, not merely that he should give mercy, but such mercy; not merely grace, but such boundless grace, such unsearchable goodness and loving-kindness. A truly enlightened mind is bewildered amid the multitude of the Lord's favours, and bowed down with sacred awe. The fear that hath torment love has cast out, but the fear which must ever suffuse a spirit when it stands on the brink of the boundless, and gazes into the infinite, such a devout and wondering fear we feel when we

behold the everlasting love of God. I remember well being taken one day to see a gorgeous palace at Venice, where every piece of furniture was made with most exquisite taste, and of the richest material, where statues and pictures of enormous price abounded on all hands, and the floor of each room was paved with mosaics of marvellous art, and extraordinary value. As I was shown from room to room, and allowed to roam amid the treasures by its courteous owner, I felt a considerable timidity, I was afraid to sit down anywhere, nor did I hardly dare to put down my foot, or rest my hand to lean. Everything seemed to be too good for ordinary mortals like myself; but when one is introduced into the gorgeous palace of infinite goodness, costlier and fairer far, one gazes wonderingly with reverential awe at the matchless vision. "How excellent is thy lovingkindness, O God!" I am not worthy of the least of all thy benefits. Oh! the depths of the love and goodness of the Lord.

Saints who have tasted that the Lord is gracious, should fear him for his goodness with the worshipful fear of *adoration*. Everything which comes to us from divine love should bow us to our knee. Mercies should be the unhewn stones of which we should build an altar to our God. Even the sterner attributes of God compel devotion in right minds much more than the gentle glories. Survey the nightly heaven and feel how true it is, "An undevout astronomer is mad." Galen, the physician, when studying the marvellous fabric of the human body, declared that he who saw not there the handiwork of God must be devoid of reason. When one reviews the goodness of God the same feeling is produced, but it is more melting, personal, tender, and practical. In the works of creation, we behold grandeur and goodness, but in the grace that gave to man a Saviour, you behold all the attributes of God in a soft subdued splendour which charms the soul to a more loving worship than nature alone can suggest. From nature up to nature's God is well, but from grace to the God of grace is the more sure and easy way. I have never worshipped even in the presence of Mont Blanc, or amid the crash of thunder, as I have at the foot of the cross. A sense of goodness creates a better worshipper than a sense of the sublime. In our best seasons the most excellent sublimities of nature become too little for us, they dwarf rather than magnify our conceptions of God. The day in which I saw most of creation's grandeur was spent upon the Wengern Alp; my heart was near her God, and all around was majestic; the dread mountains like pyramids of ice, the clouds like fleecy wool; I saw the avalanche and heard the thunder of its fall; I marked the dashing waterfalls leaping into the Vale of Lauterbrunnen beneath our feet, but my heart felt that creation was too scant a mirror to image all her God—his face was more terrible than the storm, his robes more pure than the virgin snow, his voice far louder than the thunder, his love far higher than the everlasting hills. I took out my pocket-book and wrote these lines:—

Yon Alps, who lift their heads above the clouds,
And hold familiar converse with the stars,
Are dust, at which the balance trembleth not,
Compared with his divine immensity.

The snow-crown'd summits fail to set him forth
 Who dwelleth in Eternity, and bears
 Alone the name of High and Lofty One.
 Depths unfathomed are too shallow to express
 The wisdom and the knowledge of the Lord ;
 The mirror of the creatures has no space
 To bear the image of the Infinite,
 'Tis true the Lord hath fairly writ his name,
 And set his seal upon creation's brow ;
 But as the skilful potter much excels
 The vessel which he fashions on the wheel,
 E'en so, but in proportion greater far,
 Jehovah's self transcends his noblest works.
 Earth's ponderous wheels would break, her axles snap,
 If freighted with the load of Deity :
 Space is too narrow for the Eternal's rest,
 And time too short a footstool for his throne.
 E'en avalanche and thunder lack a voice
 To utter the full volume of his praise.
 How then can I declare him ? Where are words
 With which my glowing tongue may speak his name ?
 Silent I bow, and humbly I adore.

But in musing upon the person of Jesus Christ, and the plan of salvation, a very different result has been experienced. I have been prostrate under the weight of Deity there revealed, and ready to die amid the splendour there so graciously unveiled to my soul in rapt communion. No fear which cometh of bondage, but that which is borne of gratitude and bliss, has bowed me before the mercy-throne with awful wonder at divine goodness.

Further, the goodness of God to us should suggest *aspiration* as well as adoration. If he hath treated us so as never any other did, if he hath dealt with us in tenderness surpassing thought, then will we serve him if he will but condescend to accept the sacrifice. There was never such a God as he. Oh, what an honour to be his servants ! With tears of joy bedewing our eyes, we ask, " My God, may we be permitted to serve thee ? Is there aught of service or of suffering which thou canst condescend to allot to such as we are ? for thy goodness constrains us with thy fear, we are bound by it to be thine for ever." Brethren, the greatness of God's goodness should suggest to us great service ; the continuance of that goodness should move us to persevere in honouring him ; the disinterestedness of the love of God should make us ready for any self-denials ; and above all, the singularity and speciality of his goodness towards his elect should determine us to be singular and remarkable in our consecration to his cause. Each believer is so remarkably a debtor to his Lord, that he should not be content to render mere ordinary tribute, but should be panting and sighing that he may attain to eminence in holy labour. He owes more than others, he should render a worthier return. Oh, if the goodness of God would inspire but one here to-day to make a full surrender of his whole life to Jesus' love, what a gain would this be to the church ! If some young man whom God has favoured with especial mercy would say, " Here am I, indulged as I have been with God's goodness I will press into the front rank of self-abnegation ; I will give myself up, spirit, soul, and

body, to the Master's service in foreign lands," what might he not achieve! Come, ye gallant of heart, ye generous of spirit, ye owe a boundless debt to him; it is but your reasonable service that you give him your all. Come, lay your hands upon his altar-horns, and dedicate yourselves this day as a whole burnt-offering unto Christ. This is that fear of God and his goodness which every saint should covet.

We should also fear the Lord and his goodness in the sense of *affection*, an affection combined with the fears peculiar to holy jealousy. Has the Lord done so much for us! then how we ought to tremble lest we should grieve so kind a God. If you have a master for whom you do not care, because he is ungenerous or tyrannical, you will be little careful to please him, except so far as your sense of duty might demand; but when you are serving a kind and generous person, who has been your benefactor from your youth up, you would not for all the world vex him, either by negligence or fault. No father commands the obedience of his children like the parent whose affection to his children has been most manifest and undoubted. Fathers who provoke their children to anger, must not wonder if they find them discouraged in their reverence. Our gracious God wins the deepest affection of his people, and they become jealous lest by anything done or undone they should grieve his Holy Spirit. Oh, that blessed, holy fear, that sacred jealousy of sin! I wish we all had more of it. We had, I fear, more of it at our first conversion, but alas! many professors have little of it now. They are too familiar with the world, they have lost their sensibility of sin; they are no longer quick as the apple of an eye, they allow sins which horrified them once. God save us from getting a film over our consciences by slow degrees. He that serves God serves one who is very jealous. Remember, beloved, there are some among us here who have been permitted to enjoy communion with Christ in a very remarkable degree; you have been like John with his head on Christ's bosom, taken into the innermost chamber of divine affection. Now, none can grieve God so soon as you can. There are none that must pick their steps more carefully than you. A common subject would be allowed by a monarch to do fifty things which one of his familiars must not do. Art thou a favourite of the King? It is an awful thing to be beloved of heaven—it is as dread as it is glorious; but it calls for great care and deep anxiety; and the Lord grant that you may walk humbly before him with that fear of his goodness which dreads lest for a single moment God should be provoked by your temper, your thoughts, words, or deeds.

We must fear him again—for I have a sevenfold fear to describe, and must therefore be brief upon each—with *humiliation*. The goodness of God to us if it finds us in a healthy state, will always make us think less of ourselves. We shall be like Peter's boat, which when empty floated high, but which when full began to sink. God's great mercy to us will make us sit down with David, overwhelmed with astonishment, and say, "Whence is this to me? What am I and what is my father's house?" Reckon that thy soul is right with God if his mercy humbles thee, but if it puffs thee up, there is some base thing within thy heart that must be purged away.

Again, the goodness of God ought to make us fear him with a sacred *anxiety*, an anxiety of a double character. Am I really his? This great

salvation which I hope I have received, have I really received it, or is my experience mere fancy? I see before me a vast estate, is it mine, or do I misread the title-deeds? Does it belong to some other, or actually to me? The higher thoughts you have of the grace of God in the gospel, the more carefully should you examine yourselves whether you be in the faith, the more anxious should you be to go every day to the cross to make your calling and election sure by looking into those five wounds again, and counting once more the purple drops, and crying with holy faith, "Thus my sins are washed away." Oh, if ye had but a small heaven and a God of little mercies, ye might play fast and loose therewith, but with a God who brims with kindness, and a heaven that is flooded with glory, oh! be anxious that there be no question in dispute as to whether ye are Christ's or no. Our second anxiety should always be this, "If I be indeed his, and I have such goodness bestowed on me, am I rendering to him what he may expect?" Beloved, you are God's vineyard, he has built a hedge about you, he has watered you, and planted in your soul the choicest vine of the true spiritual life, but see how little fruit you have yielded to him in return! He looks for clusters, and he finds but grape-gleanings; you give harbour to the wild boar of the wood, but you find little room for the Lord of the vineyard; he looks at your branches, and lo, they are covered with the moss of carelessness, and at your root the ground is overrun with evil weeds of pride and self-seeking. What more could he do than he has done to you? What more of goodness could he show you? Oh, fear and tremble lest you give him nought where he has given so much, rendering no interest on your talents, no return for the outlay of his mercy.

Once again, there is another fear. We should fear the Lord and his goodness with the fear of *resignation*. You remember Job, noble Job. He was once very rich and increased in goods; God had been very good to him for many years, both in spirituals and temporals, and Job loved his God because of his goodness. This love he proved to be genuine, for when the cattle and the camels, and what was worse, his children and his health, were all gone, he said, "What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord." In the hour of the gladness of your spirit, you ought to say within yourself, "Ah! after he has pardoned me, made me his child, and promised me that I shall be with him in heaven for ever, he may do what he will with me. Lord, here am I, do what seemeth good in thy sight. By thy Spirit's help, I will not complain though the bone comes through the skin through long tossing on the bed of sickness; since thou hast delivered me from hell, what is sickness that I should complain of it? If the wind whistles through my scanty rags, and my table be bare, and my house unfurnished, if I have a Christ on earth and a Christ in heaven to be my portion, then I dare not murmur." Now this is the true fear of God, and if we could always keep in it, how happy should we be! If we were so satisfied that God is good, that we would not believe he could do us an unkind turn, so overjoyed with his spiritual goodness that all else appeared mere dirt and dross, we should honour our Lord more, and be far more blest ourselves.

Thus I have spoken at length upon fearing the Lord and his goodness, taking it as spiritual goodness. Now, for a few minutes, I wish to address myself to believers in Christ who possess much of the goodness of God *in providential matters*. All the saints are not poor. Lazarus is a child of God on the dunghill, but Joseph of Arimathea is no less beloved, though he hath great riches. Many were converted to God from the poorest classes in the apostles' days, but the Ethiopian eunuch, who had great possessions, was none the less a genuine disciple. Now, there are some of you whom God has always prospered in your business, who have a healthy family growing up around you, while you enjoy excellent bodily health—indeed, you have the comforts of this life in profusion. I beseech you above others to fear the Lord for all this goodness. The tendency of prosperity is too often injurious; it is much harder to bear than adversity. As the fining pot to silver, and the furnace to gold, so is prosperity to a Christian man. Many a man will pass through trouble, and praise God under it, who, when he is tried with no trouble, will forget his God, decline in grace, and grow almost a worldling. Believe me, there is no trial so great as no trial, even as an old divine used to say that there was no devil so bad as no devil; there is no state in which a man is in such great danger as when he can see no danger.

“More the treacherous calm I dread
Than tempest howling overhead.”

Let me put these few thoughts to you, you who are blessed with temporal goodness. Fear God much more than ever before, *lest these temporals should become your God*. Money is compared in Scripture to thick clay, because it sticks; and what is more, it sucks a man into itself. Many a man sinks in wealth like a horse in a bog; his possessions suck him under. While your earthly goods are kept under foot, they will do you no hurt, but when they rise as high as your heart, they have begun to bury you alive. While a man carries money in his purse, it is well, especially if the rings are not too tight; but when he carries it in his heart, it is bad, be he who he may; his gold shall eat as doth a canker, and work him infinite mischief. Child of God, need I tell you this? You know better than to trust in uncertain riches. Well, then, if you worship the golden calf, you will be guilty indeed. Oh, be anxious to fear your God, and not to be an idolater. Fear him more than you ever did at any time of your life before, and in proportion to your prosperity let the depth of your godliness increase.

Fear God and his goodness, again, *lest you should undervalue your responsibilities*. What you have is none of yours. As far as your fellow men are concerned, your possessions are your own, but as far as your God is concerned you have nothing. You are but a steward; and is it the part of an honest steward to be constantly amassing for himself, and refusing his master his due? Why, if a steward should say, when he pays his master a certain part of his profits, “I have been generous and have given my master so much,” is he not a rogue to talk so? All that he makes in a year, since he is but a steward, belongs to his master, and it is not generosity in his case to render it up. O

believers, all that you have belongs to him who bought you with his blood. I pray you ask grace that you may not accumulate sin as you increase your wealth. There is awful sin resting somewhere in the church. I know some Christians who are giving to God's cause beyond their means, and others fully up to their proportion, and yet there are souls perishing by tens of thousands because they have not the gospel, and they might hear the gospel within a week if we had the pecuniary means of sending it to them; we have the men waiting, but not the means to support them. There are heathen nations in darkness ready to receive the gospel—providence has opened the door, but there is a lack of funds for entering the door. Now, I believe there is no lack of funds whatever among the whole body of professors, but the gold gets into the hands of certain pretenders to religion who are base hypocrites, since they profess to be wholly Christ's, but their actions belie them; they do no more than others, and what is done is rather to get their names in the subscription lists and not to be thought mean, than with a single eye to God's glory. It is a sad thing it should be so, for we ought never to give to receive honour of man, but out of love to God and God alone. The more you have, the more responsibility you have; get grace, then, to know and feel your responsibility, and ask for more grace as your talents increase, that you may be honest with your God.

Thirdly, fear God and his goodness, *lest he turn his hand* and make you poor. How soon can he dry the springs and send a drought upon you! He can send seven years of famine to eat up all the years of plenty. If he should do so to you who serve him so miserably, how you will wish that you had served him when you had the opportunity. God never leaves his people, but he often chastises them; and I do not doubt that many a man is brought down in the world because God tried him in other circumstances, but he was not faithful. "Ah," saith the Master, "he is no good steward, and I will not trust him any more." I should not wonder but that many of you might have been rich, but when in prosperity you did not give in proportion, and the Lord said, "I will not put my talents out to so bad a servant." Is it not often so, that when Christian men have given away their wealth in shovelfuls, God has given it back to them in wagon loads? "There was a man," said Bunyan, "and some did count him mad, the more he gave away the more he had." Let all wealthy Christians remember that he who gives them prosperity to-day may give them adversity to-morrow, and therefore with holy fear let them adore their God while they have the opportunity of serving him.

You should fear the Lord now, especially while you have your children about you, and you are in health, because *you will have to leave all these things very soon*. They *may* leave you, but certainly you will have to leave them. Oh, set loose by worldly comforts! enjoy them as though you had them not; take them, and say as you receive them, "These are but passing, fleeting things. Embrace not such deceptive clouds, look not on these as your rest, but as slight refreshments on the way to your eternal home.

Beloved, fear God and his goodness, because *he is better than all his gifts of providence*. Let him give you a fair house, and a goodly estate, let him plant you among the rich and the noble, let him bestow on you

good health and cheerful spirits, let him give you a numerous and happy family, let him cause his candle to shine upon you, still he is better than all this. All these put together could not fill a hungry soul. God alone can satisfy a true heart. You have him, and having him you have more than all the rest can contribute to you; therefore, fear him and fear his goodness. This is a lesson for the prosperous people of God to learn.

II. May the Holy Spirit help us to say a few solemn words to SUCH AS ARE NOT GOD'S PEOPLE, but remain enemies to God, careless, and yet prosperous.

God has been very good to you; he has spared your lives, that is something. You might have been in hell, you ought to have been there; if justice had had its due you would have been there. You have oftentimes provoked God. *You* could not bear to be teased ten minutes, and yet you have vexed your God these forty years with your sins, your negligences, your despisings of his Sabbath, of his word, of his Christ. You have put your finger, as it were, into the very eye of God in speaking ill of his gospel, perhaps in ridiculing those truths in which his honour is most concerned, and yet you have been spared! You have been not only spared, but have been surrounded with the comforts of this life. I speak to many here who are not among the poorest and the neediest: you have received many comforts; in fact, you have all that heart could wish, except the one thing needful. God has dealt very graciously with you indeed. Now hear a message from God to you. Will you not fear him and serve him out of gratitude? Is it not unjust to receive so much and to give nothing in return, no love, no thanks, no service? If you make a tool you make it for your own use, and expect some benefit from it. God has made you for his own glory, and yet he has had no glory out of you. If you keep any animal on your farm you expect service, and yet God has kept you, and you have rendered him no return. Do you not feel ashamed that so good a God should be so ill repaid? I know you have so much manliness about you, that you would feel very hurt if any friend who had rendered you a kindness should accuse you of being ungrateful. You have always felt through life that ingratitude is one of the vilest of vices, and that it lowers him below a brute, since the brute has a kindness for those that do it a kindness. The dog will fawn in return if you fondle it; the ox knoweth its owner, and "the ass its master's crib;" and you would despise yourself to be worse than they; and yet you are so if you fear not God who has treated you so well. Let me say to you, wherefore will you not serve him? Is there anything that you can set off against his kindness to you? Do you suspect him of any sinister motive? If so, your gratitude might be withheld. Do you suppose that divine goodness does not lay you under any obligation? Surely you cannot be so foolish. Well, then, if indeed God has for long years of remarkable goodness had from you no recompense but neglect, shall it always be so? Is there not an invincible power in tenderness? The old fable tells us of the sun and the wind which strove to see which could first remove the traveller's cloak. The wind blustered, but the traveller only wrapped his cloak more tightly about him, but when the sun shone warm and soft upon his head, the traveller speedily cast off his cloak. If God

had dealt roughly with you, I should not have wondered if you had said, "I will not serve him;" but after his being so kind to you, off with that cloak of indifference, and be his servant. Will not the warmth of God's love thaw your soul? The chilling frost of threatenings might have hardened you into a rock of ice, but this sunshine of prosperity which the Lord has given you, will it not melt you, will it not bring you to Jesus? God grant that it may be so with many in this house, now and evermore.

Ought you not also, brethren, to *fear God out of hope*? If he has dealt so exceedingly well with you in temporals, though you have not feared him, have you not every reason to expect that he will do as well for you in spirituals? You call at a friend's house—you are riding on horseback; he takes your horse into the stable, and is remarkably attentive to it—the creature is well groomed, well housed, well fed; you are not at all afraid that you will be shut out, there is surely a warm place in the parlour for the rider, where the horse is so well attended to in the stable. Now, your body, which I might liken to the horse, has had its temporal prosperity in abundance, and surely the Lord will take care of your soul if you seek his face! Let your prayer be, "My God, my Father, be my guide. Since thou hast dealt so well with me in these external matters, give me grace within my heart, give me the true riches, give me to love thy Son and trust in him to be henceforth thy child. Thou hast given me the nether springs, give me to drink of the upper springs. I have the blessings which thou givest to the ungodly, O give me the blessings of the godly, the peculiar heritage of thy saints!" O Holy Spirit, constrain many thus to hope and pray.

Should you not, again, fear the Lord and his goodness out of great *admiration*? for how well, how kindly, how strangely well has he dealt with you. You could not have been patient with any one who had plagued you such a length of time, and yet God has been so with you. I have sometimes thought as I have read the story of the dying Saviour, that even if Jesus Christ had never lived and died for me, if I had no part in his precious blood, I must still love him because of his love to other people. He is so good, and so kind, that were I lost myself, I must admire the loving Saviour. Do you not admire what you have seen of God's kindness to you, and do not you feel that such a God and such a Christ should have your heart?

Lastly, let me say you may well fear God out of *apprehension* concerning his goodness, for the goodness which he now renders to you will pass away ere long. All the temporal mercy of God is but like a land-flood, but the surface water, you have not touched the great springs which cannot be dried up. The great deeps belong only to believers, theirs is the fountain of Jacob which never can be exhausted; your comforts are but the surface waters, and will be gone: what will you do then when you have only the goodness of God to think of, to leave a bitterness upon the memory because you loved not God for his kindness when you had it? Remember, if God's kindnesses do not bring you to repentance, he will deal with you in another way. The axe of the Roman lictors was bound up in a bundle of rods, and the bundle was tied together with knotted cords, and the reason

was this, when the judge examined the prisoner, then the lictors began to undo the cords knot by knot, waiting to see if there was any hope that the prisoner might escape ; if there was any repentance that might permit the scourging to be put away, they gave space for it ; if not, when the cords were unbound, then the rods were used, and if the culprit turned out to be a greater offender still, then came the axe, but only as a last resource. So the Lord hitherto has treated you with great mercy, he has not untied the knots yet, but the angel of justice is beginning to untie them. There is trouble for you in store except you turn and repent ; there will come first one rod—sickness to the child ; another—loss in business, sickness to yourself, death to your wife—more rods. I have seen this in observing God's hand in many, and if all the rods bring you not to repentance, then the axe remains to be used last. Woe to that man whom neither goodness nor severity can move ; whom neither lovingkindness could draw, nor justice drive. For such a man there remaineth nothing but to be cast away for ever from God whom he would not love, from Christ whom he would not accept, from mercy which he despised, from love which he rejected. O let it not be so with you ! I feel this morning as if my tongue were tied, comparatively, contrasted with the way in which I want to speak to you young people who at present live in much gaiety and pleasure. It would be such a noble thing, such a just thing, such a fitting thing, if in the heigh-day of your joy you would come to Jesus because God's mercies draw you. O say in your hearts, "My Lord, thou hast shone on me, and I, like the flower, will open to thee, and pour out the love of my heart like sweet perfume. Thou hast kept me from poverty and from sickness, thou hast preserved me from many of the ills of life ; here then thy lamb for whom thou hast tempered the wind, comes to thee, and saith, 'Good shepherd, carry me in thy bosom, mark me with the red mark of thy blood, take me into thy flock.'

'Dissolved by thy goodness, I fall to the ground,
And weep to the praise of the mercy I've found.' "

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON.—Psalm ciii.
