

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

BATTLEMENTS.

A Sermon

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“When thou buildest a new house, then thou shalt make a battlement for thy roof, that thou bring not blood upon thine house, if any man fall from thence.”—Deuteronomy xxii. 8.

THIS interesting law, which in its letter was binding on the Jewish people, in its spirit furnishes an admirable rule for us upon whom the ends of the world are come.

It is not necessary to inform this audience that the roofs of Eastern dwellings were flat, and that the inhabitants were accustomed to spend much of their time upon the tops of their houses, not only conversing there during the day, but sleeping there at night. If the roofs were without any fencing or protection around their edge, it might often happen that little children might fall over, and not unfrequently grown-up persons might inadvertently make a false step, and suffer serious injury, if not death itself. Where there were no railings or low walls around the roof, accidents frequently occurred; but God commanded his people, while they were yet in the wilderness, that, when they came into the promised land, and proceeded to build houses, they should take care in every case to build a sufficient battlement that life might not be lost through preventable casualty.

This careful command clearly shows us that God holds life to be very valuable, and that, as he would not permit us to kill by malice, so he would not allow us to kill by negligence, but would have us most tender of human life. Such rules as the one before us are precedents for sanitary laws, and give the weight of divine sanction to every wise sanitary arrangement. No man has a right to be filthy in his person, or his house, or his trade; for, even if he himself may flourish amid unhealthy accumulations of dirt, he has no right by his unclean habits to foster a deadly typhus, or afford a nest for cholera. Those whose houses are foul, whose rooms are unventilated, whose persons are disgusting, cannot be said to love their neighbour; and those who create nuisances in our crowded cities are guilty of wholesale murder. No man has a right to do

anything which must inevitably lead to the death or to the injury of those by whom he is surrounded, but he is bound to do all in his power to prevent any harm coming to his fellow-men. That seems to be the moral teaching of this ordinance of making battlements around the housetops,—teaching, mark you, which I should like all housewives, working-men, manufacturers, and vestrymen, to take practical note of.

But, if ordinary life be precious, much more is the life of the soul, and, therefore, it is our Christian duty never to do that which imperils either our own or other men's souls. To us there is an imperative call from the great Master that we care for the eternal interests of others, and that we, so far as we can, prevent their exposure to temptations which might lead to their fatal falling into sin.

We shall now lead you to a few meditations which have, in our mind, gathered around the text.

I. First, GOD HAS BATTLEMENTED HIS OWN HOUSE. Let this serve as a great truth with which to begin our contemplations. God takes care that all his children are safe. There are high places in his house, and he does not deny his children the enjoyment of these high places, but he makes sure that they shall not be in danger there. He sets bulwarks round about them, lest they should suffer harm when in a state of exaltation.

God, in his house, has given us *many high and sublime doctrines*. Timid minds are afraid of these, but the highest doctrine in Scripture is safe enough because God has battlemented it; and as no man need be afraid in the East to walk on the roof of his house when the battlement is there, so no man need hesitate to believe the doctrine of election, the doctrine of eternal and immutable love, or any of the divine teachings which circle around the covenant of grace, if he will at the same time see that God has guarded those truths so that none may fall from them to their own destruction.

Take, for instance, the doctrine of election. What a high and glorious truth this is, that God hath, from the beginning, chosen his people unto salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit and the belief of the truth! Yet that doctrine has turned many simpletons dizzy through looking at it apart from kindred teachings. Some, I do not doubt, have wilfully leaped over the battlement which God has set about this doctrine, and have turned it into Antinomianism, degrading it into an excuse for evil living, and reaping just damnation for their wilful perversion. But God has been pleased to set around that doctrine other truths which shield it from misuse. It is true he has a chosen people, but "by their fruits ye shall know them." Without holiness no man shall see the Lord. Though he has chosen his people, yet he has chosen them unto holiness; he has ordained them to be zealous for good works. His intention is not that they should be saved *in* their sins, but saved *from* their sins; not that they should be carried to heaven as they are, but that they should be cleansed and purged from all iniquities, and so made meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.

Then there is the sublime truth of the final perseverance of the saints. What a noble height is that! A housetop doctrine indeed! What a Pisgah view is to be had from the summit of it; "The Lord will keep the feet of his saints." "The righteous also shall hold on his way, and he that hath clean hands shall be stronger and stronger." It will be a great loss to us if we are unable to enjoy the comfort of this truth. There is no reason for fearing presumption through a firm conviction of the true believer's safety. Mark well the battlements which God has builded around the edge of this truth! He has declared that, if these shall fall away, it is impossible "to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame." If those who are true saints should altogether lose the life of God that is within their souls, there would remain no other salvation; if the first salvation could have spent itself unavailingly, there would be no alternative, but "a certain looking for of judgment and fiery indignation." When we read warnings such as, "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall," and others of that kind, we see how God has made a parapet around this tower-like truth, so that saints may ascend to its very summit, and look abroad upon the land that floweth with milk and honey, and yet their brains need not whirl, nor shall they fall into presumption and perish.

That wonderful doctrine of justification by faith, which we all hold to be a vital truth, not only of Protestantism but of Christianity itself, is quite as dangerous by itself as the doctrine of election, or the doctrine of the final perseverance of the saints; in fact, if a man means to sin, he can break down every bulwark, and turn any doctrine into an apology for transgression. Even the doctrine that God is merciful, simple as that is, may be made into an excuse for sin. To return to the doctrine that we are justified by faith, and not by the works of the law, Luther put it very grandly, very boldly, and for him very properly; but there are some who use his phrases, not in Luther's way, and without Luther's reasons for unguarded speaking, and such persons have sometimes done serious damage to men's souls by not mentioning another truth which is meant to be the battlement to the doctrine of faith, namely, the necessity of sanctification. Where faith is genuine, through the Holy Spirit's power, it works a cleansing from sin, a hatred of evil, an anxious desire after holiness, and it leads the soul to aspire after the image of God. Faith and holiness are inseparable. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature." Good works are to be insisted on, for they have their necessary uses. James never contradicts Paul, after all; it is because we do not understand him that we fancy he does so. Both the doctrinal Paul and the practical James spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. Paul builds the tower, and James puts the battlement around it; Paul conducts us to the summit of God's house, and bids us rejoice in what we see there; and then James points us to the balustrade that is built up to keep us from overleaping the truth to our own destruction. Thus is each doctrine balanced,

bulwarked, and guarded, but time would fail us to enter into detail; let it suffice for us to know that the palace of truth is battlemented with wisdom and prudence.

Take another view of the same thought. The Lord has guarded *the position of his saints if endowed with wealth*. Some of God's servants are, in his providence, called to very prosperous conditions in life, and prosperity is fruitful in dangers. It is hard to carry a full cup without a spill. A man may travel on the ground well enough, and yet find it hard work to walk on a high rope. A man may be an excellent servant who would make a bad master; and one may be a good tradesman in a small way who makes a terrible failure of it as a merchant. Yet be well assured that, if God shall call any of you to be prosperous, and give you much of this world's goods, and place you in an eminent position, he will see to it that grace is given suitable for your station, and affliction needful for your elevation.

The Lord will put battlements round about you, and it is most probable that these will not commend themselves to your carnal nature. You are going on right joyously, everything is "merry as a marriage bell;" but, on a sudden, you are brought to a dead stand. You kick against this hindering disappointment, but it will not move out of your way. You are vexed with it, but there it is. Oh, how anxious you are to go a step farther, and then you think you will be supremely happy; but it is just that perfect happiness so nearly within reach that God will not permit you to attain, for then you would receive your portion in this life, forget your God, and despise the better land. That bodily infirmity, that want of favour with the great, that sick child, that suffering wife, that embarrassing partnership,—any one of these may be the battlement which God has built around your success, lest you should be lifted up with pride, and your soul should not be upright in you. Does not this remark cast a light upon the mystery of many a painful dispensation? "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now have I kept thy Word;" that experience may be read another way, and you may confess, "Had I not been afflicted, I should have gone far astray; but now have I kept thy Word."

The like prudence is manifested by our Lord towards those whom he has seen fit to place in *positions of eminent service*. Those who express great concern for prominent ministers, because of their temptations, do well; but they will be even more in the path of duty if they have as much solicitude about themselves. I remember one, whose pride was visible in his very manner, a person unknown, of little service in the church, but as proud of his little badly-ploughed, weedy half acre, as ever a man could be, who informed me very pompously, on more than one occasion, that he trembled lest I should be unduly exalted and puffed up with pride. Now, from his lips, it sounded like comedy, and reminded me of Satan reproving sin. God never honours his servants with success without effectually preventing their grasping the honour of their work. If we are tempted to boast, he soon lays us low. He always whips

behind the door at home those whom he most honours in public. You may rest assured that, if God honours you by enabling you to win many souls, you will have many stripes to bear, and stripes you would not like to tell another of, they will be so sharp and humbling. If the Lord loves you, he will never let you be lifted up in his service. We have to feel that we are but just the pen in the Master's hand; so that, if holiness be written on men's hearts, the credit will not be ours, but the Holy Spirit must have all the praise; and this our Heavenly Father has effectual means of securing. Do not, therefore, start back from qualifying yourself for the most eminent position, or from occupying it when duty calls. Do not let Satan deprive God's great cause of your best service through your unholy bashfulness and cowardly retirement. The Lord will give his angels charge over you to keep you in all your ways. If God sets you on the housetop, he will place a battlement round about you. If he makes you to stand on the high places, he will make your feet like hind's feet, so that you shall not fall. If God commands thee to dash against the enemy single-handed, still, "as thy days, so shall thy strength be." He will uphold thee and preserve thee; on the pinnacle thou art as secure as in the valley, if Jehovah set thee there.

It is the same with regard to the high places of *spiritual enjoyment*. Paul was caught up to the third heavens, and he heard words unlawful for a man to utter: this was a very, very high place for Paul's mind, mighty brain and heart as he had; but then, there was the battlement: "Lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me." Paul was not in love with this drawback, he besought the Lord thrice to remove it; but, still, the thorn could not be taken away, for it was necessary as a battlement around the eminent revelations with which God had favoured his apostle. The temptation, if we are at all happy in the Lord, is to grow secure. "My mountain standeth firm," say we, "I shall never be moved."

Even much communion with Christ, though in itself sanctifying, may be perverted, through the folly of our flesh, into a cause of self-security; we may even dream that we are brought so near to Christ that common temptations are not likely to assail us, and by these very temptations we may fall. Hence it is that, as sure as ever we have high seasons of enjoyment, we shall sooner or later endure periods of deep depression. Scarcely ever is there a profound calm on the soul's sea, but a storm is brewing. The sweet day so calm, so bright, shall have its fall, and the dew of the succeeding night shall weep over its departure. The high hill must have its following valley, and the flood-tide must retreat at ebb. Lest the soul should be beguiled to live upon itself, and feed on its frames and feelings, and by neglect of watchfulness fall into presumptuous sins, battlements are set round about all hallowed joys, for which in eternity we shall bless the name of the Lord.

Too many of the Lord's servants feel as if they were always on the housetop,—always afraid, always full of doubts and fears. They

are fearful lest they shall after all perish, and of a thousand things besides. Satan sets up scarecrows to keep these timid birds from feeding upon the wheat which the great Husbandman grows on purpose for them. They scarcely ever reach the assurance of faith. They are stung by "ifs" and "buts", like Israel by the fiery serpents, and they can scarcely get beyond torturing fear, which is as an adder biting their heel. To such we say, Beloved, you shall find, when your faith is weakest, when you are just about to fall, that there is a glorious battlement all around you; a gracious promise, a gentle word of the Holy Spirit shall be brought home to your soul, so that you shall not utterly despair. Have you not felt sometimes that, if it had not been for a choice love-word heard in the past, your faith must have given up the ghost; or if it had not been for that encouraging sermon which came with such power to your soul, your foot had almost gone, your steps had well-nigh slipped? Now, the infinite love of God, dear child of God, values you far too much to allow you to fall into despair.

"Mid all your fear, and care, and woe,
His Spirit will not let you go."

Battlemented by eternal grace shall this roof of the house be, and when you are tremblingly pacing it, you shall have no cause for alarm.

II. From the fact of the Lord's carefulness over his people, we proceed, by an easy step, to the consideration that, as imitators of God, we should exercise the like tenderness; in a word, WE OUGHT TO HAVE OUR HOUSES BATTLEMENTED.

A man who had no battlement to his house might himself fall from the roof in an unguarded moment. He might be startled in his sleep, and in the dark mistake his way to the stair-head, or, while day-dreaming, his steps might slip. Those who profess to be the children of God should, for their own sakes, see that every care is used to guard themselves against the perils of this tempted life; they should see to it that their house is carefully battlemented. If any ask, "How shall we do it?" we reply:—

Every man ought to examine himself carefully, whether he be in the faith, lest professing too much, taking too much for granted, he should fall and perish. At times, we should close our spiritual warehouse, and take stock; a tradesman who does not like to do that is generally in a bad way. A man, who does not think it wise sometimes to sit down and give half a day, or such time as he can spare, to a solemn stocktaking of his soul, may be afraid that things are not going right with him. Lest we should be after all hypocrites, or self-deceivers; lest, after all, we should not be born again, but should be children of nature, neatly dressed, but not the living children of God, we must prove our own selves whether we be in the faith. Let us protect our souls' interests with frequent self-examinations.

Better still, and safer by far, *go often to the cross, as you think you went at first.* Go every day to the cross; still with the empty hand and with the bleeding heart, go and receive everything from

Christ, and seek to have your wounds bound up with the healing ointment of his atoning sacrifice. These are the best battlements I can recommend you: self-examination on the one side of the house, and a simple faith in Jesus on the other.

Battlement your soul about well *with prayer*. Go not out into the world to look upon the face of man till you have seen the face of God. Never rush down from your chamber with such unseemly haste that you have not time to buckle on your helmet, and gird on your breastplate, and your coat of mail.

Be sure and battlement yourself about *with much watchfulness*, and, especially, *watch most the temptation peculiar to your position and disposition*. You may not be inclined to be slothful; you may not be fascinated by the silver of Demas into covetousness, and yet you may be beguiled by pleasure. Watch, if you have a hasty temper, lest that should overthrow you; or if yours be a high and haughty spirit, set a double watch to bring *that* demon down. If you be inclined to indolence, or, on the other hand, if hot passions and evil desires are most likely to attack you, cry to the Strong for strength; and as he who guards well sets a double guard where the wall is weakest, so do you.

There are some respects in which every man should battlement his house by denying himself those indulgences, which might be lawful to others, but which would prove fatal to himself. The individual who knows his weakness to be an appetite for drink should resolve totally to abstain. Every man, I believe, has a particular sin which is a sin to him, but may not be a sin to another. No man's conscience is to be a judge for another, but let no man violate his conscience. If thou canst not perform a certain act in faith, thou must not do it at all; I mean, if thou dost not honestly and calmly believe it to be right, even if it be right in itself, it becomes wrong to thee. Watch, therefore, watch at all points. Guard yourselves in company, lest you be carried away by the force of numbers: guard yourselves in solitude, lest selfishness and pride creep in. Watch yourselves in poverty, lest you fall into envy of others; and in wealth, lest you become lofty in mind. Oh, that we may all keep our houses well battlemented, lest we fall and grieve the Spirit of God, and bring dishonour on Christ's name!

III. As each man ought to battlement his house, in a spiritual sense, with regard to himself, SO OUGHT EACH MAN TO CARRY OUT THE RULE WITH REGARD TO HIS FAMILY.

Family religion was the strength of Protestantism at first. It was the glory of Puritanism and Nonconformity. In the days of Cromwell, it is said that you might have walked down Cheapside, at a certain hour in the morning, and you would have heard the morning hymn going up from every house all along the street; and at night, if you had glanced inside each home, you would have seen the whole household gathered, and the big Bible opened, and family devotion offered. There is no fear of this land ever becoming Popish if family prayer be maintained; but if family prayer be swept away, farewell to the strength of the church. A man should battlement his house for his children's sake, for his

servants' sake, for his own sake, by maintaining the ordinance of family prayer. I may not dictate to you whether you should sing, or read, or pray; or whether you should do this every morning or evening, or how many times a-day; I shall leave this to the free Spirit that is in you, but do maintain family religion, and never let the fire on the altar of God burn low in your habitation.

So in the matter of discipline. If the child shall do everything it chooses to do, if it shall do wrong, and there be no admonition, if there be no chastisement, if the reins be loosely held, if the father altogether neglects to be a priest and a king in his house, how can he wonder that his children one by one grow up to break his heart? David had never chastised Absalom, nor Adonijah, and remember what they became; and Eli's sons, who never had more than a soft word or two from their father, how were his ears made to tingle with the news of God's judgments upon them! Battlement your houses by godly discipline, see that obedience be maintained, and that sin is not tolerated; so shall your house be holiness unto the Lord, and peace shall dwell therein.

We ought strictly to battlement our houses, *as to many things which in this day are tolerated*. I am sometimes asked, "May not a Christian subscribe to a lottery? May not a Christian indulge in a game of cards? May not a Christian dance, or attend the opera?" Now, I shall not come down to debate upon the absolute right or wrong of debatable amusements and customs. The fact is that, if professors do not stop till they are certainly in the wrong, they will stop nowhere. It is of little use to go on till you are over the edge of the roof, and then cry, "Halt." It would be a poor affair for a house to be without a battlement, but to have a network to stop the falling person half-way down; you must stop before you get off the solid standing. There is need to draw the line somewhere, and the line had better be drawn too soon than too late; and whereas the habit of gambling is the very curse of this land,—ah! during the last Derby week, what blood it has shed! how it has brought souls to hell and men to an unripe grave!—as the habit of speculating seems to run through the land, and was doubtless the true cause of the great panic which shook our nation a few years ago, there is the more need that we should not tolerate anything that looks like it.

For another reason, we should carefully discern between places of public amusement. Some that are perfectly harmless, recreative, and instructive,—to deny these to our young people would be foolish; but certain amusements stand on the border ground, between the openly profane and the really harmless. We say, do not go to these; never darken the doors of such places. Why? Because it may be the edge of the house, and though you may not break your neck if you walk along the parapet, yet you are best on this side of the battlement. You are least likely to fall into sin by keeping away, and you cannot afford to run risks. We have all heard the old story of the good woman who required a coachman. Two or three young fellows came to seek for the situation; each of them she saw and catechised alone. The first one had this question

put to him, "How near could you drive to danger?" He said, "I do not doubt but that I could drive within a yard of danger." "Well, well," the lady said, "you will not do for me." When the second came in, the good woman questioned him in like manner, "How near could you drive to danger?" "Within a hair's breath, madam," said he. "Oh!" she said, "that will not suit me at all." A third was asked the same question, and he prudently replied, "If you please, madam, that is one of the things I have never tried; I have always tried to drive as far from danger as ever I can." "You are the coachman for me," said she; and surely that is the kind of manager we all should have in our households. Oh, let us not so train up our children that in all probability they will run into sin! Let us, on the contrary, exhibit such an example in all things that they may safely follow us. Let us so walk that they may go step by step where we go, and not be cast out of the Church of God as a reproach, nor be cast away from the presence of God. Battlement your houses, then: do not be afraid of being too strict and too Puritanic; there is no fear of that in these days; there is a great deal more danger of bringing solemn judgments on our families through neglecting the worship of God in our households.

IV. THE PREACHER WOULD NOW REMIND HIMSELF THAT THIS CHURCH IS, AS IT WERE, HIS OWN HOUSE, AND THAT HE IS BOUND TO BATTLEMENT IT ROUND ABOUT.

Many come here, Sabbath after Sabbath, to hear the gospel; the immense number and the constancy of it surprise me. I do not know why the multitudes come and crowd these aisles. When I preached yesterday in Worcestershire, and saw the thronging crowds in every road, I could not help wondering to see them, and the more so because they listened as though I had some novel discovery to make,—they listened with all their ears, and eyes, and mouths. I could but marvel and thank God. Ah! but it is a dreadful thing to remember that so many people hear the gospel, and yet perish under the sound of it. Alas! the gospel becomes to them a savour of death unto death, and there is no lot so terrible as perishing under a pulpit from which the gospel is preached.

Now, what shall I say to prevent any of my hearers falling from this blessed gospel,—falling from the house of mercy,—dashing themselves from the roof of the temple to their ruin? What shall I say to you? I beseech you, *do not be hearers only*. Do not think that, when you come here Sundays, and Mondays, and Thursdays, it is all done. No, it is only begun then. Praying is the end of preaching, and to be born again is the great matter. It is very little to occupy your seat, except you hearken diligently, with willing hearts; looked upon as an end, sitting at services is a wretched waste of time. Dear hearers, be dissatisfied with yourselves unless ye be doers of the Word. Let your cry go up to God that you may be born again. Rest not till you rest in Jesus.

Remember, and I hope this will be another battlement, that if you hear the gospel, and it is not blessed to you, *still it has a power*. If the sun of grace does not soften you as it does wax, it will harden you as the sun does clay. If it is not a savour of life unto life, to

repeat the text I quoted just now, it will be a savour of death unto death. Oh, do not be blind in the sunlight! Do not perish with hunger in the banqueting-house! Do not die of thirst when the water of life is before you!

Let me remind you of *what the result of putting away the gospel will be*. You will soon die; you cannot live for ever. In the world to come, what awaits you? What did our Lord say? "These shall go away into everlasting punishment." The righteous enter into life eternal, but the ungodly suffer punishment everlasting. I will not dwell upon the terrors of the world to come, but let me remind you that they are yours except Christ is yours; death is yours, and judgment is yours, and hell will be yours, and all that dreadful wrath which God means when he says, "Beware, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver you." Oh, run not on in sin, lest you fall into hell! I would fain set up this battlement to stay you from a dreadful and fatal fall.

Once more, *remember the love of God in Christ Jesus*. I heard, the other day, of a bad boy whom his father had often rebuked and chastened, but the lad grew worse. One day he had been stealing, and his father felt deeply humiliated. He talked to the boy, but his warning made no impression; and when he saw his child, so callous, the good man sat down in his chair, and burst out crying as if his heart would break. The boy stood very indifferent for a time; but, at last, as he saw the tears falling on the floor, and heard his father sobbing, he cried, "Father, don't; father, don't do that: what do you cry for, father?" "Ah! my boy," he said, "I cannot help thinking what will become of you, growing up as you are. You will be a lost man, and the thought of it breaks my heart." "O father!" he said, "pray don't cry. I will be better. Only don't cry, and I will not vex you again." Under God, that was the means of breaking down the boy's love of evil, and I hope it led to his salvation. Just like that is Christ to you. He cannot bear to see you die, and he weeps over you, saying, "How often would I have blessed you, and you would not!" Oh, by the tears of Jesus, wept over you in effect when he wept over Jerusalem, turn to him! Let that be a battlement to keep you from ruin.

God bless you, and help you to trust in Jesus, and his shall be the praise! Amen.

Exposition by C. H. Spurgeon.

JOHN VI. 1-14; 30-45.

Verses 1-6. *After these things Jesus went over the sea of Galilee, which is the sea of Tiberias. And a great multitude followed him, because they saw his miracles which he did on them that were diseased. And Jesus went up into a mountain, and there he sat with his disciples. And the passover, a feast of the Jews, was nigh. When Jesus then lifted up his eyes, and saw a great company come unto him, he saith unto Philip, Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat? And this he said to prove him: for he himself knew what he would do.*

That verse is worth thinking over. How often does Christ seem to ask us riddles, and place us in difficulties, so that we begin to say, "What will come of this? How shall we escape from this temptation; or how shall we