

# Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

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THE TWO DEBTORS.\*

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## A Sermon

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DELIVERED BY

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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

*On Lord's-day Evening, July 14th, 1867.*

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"There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most?"—Luke vii. 41, 42.

It is not wise to compare ourselves with our fellow-men. It is comparing one incorrect standard with another, and is very apt to mislead. Still, as men will do this, as they will sail upon this tack, we will for the moment do the same with the view of correcting some of their mistakes.

I. The very brief Parable before us suggests four thoughts, upon which we will dwell for a few minutes. The first is, that THERE ARE DIFFERENT DEGREES IN OUR SINNERSHIP,—some owe five hundred pence, and others only fifty.

It would be very incorrect to say, of all men, that they are alike sinful. That they are all guilty, is true; but that they are all equally guilty, is not true. There are persons who would contend very earnestly for this distinction because they claim to be among the better sort of sinners. They claim that they are not one tithe as guilty as many whom they know, and that, in comparison with more grossly vicious persons, they are all but innocent. We will admit that, my excellent friend. We will admit—not all, perhaps, that you would like us to admit;—but we will at once allow that you are not so guilty as others. We will also admit that all sins are not alike degrading. There are vices, especially those which pollute the body, which manifestly lower men to the level of beasts, or worse than that; and we would not for a moment insinuate that our young friends, who have been educated in the midst of godliness, and have been preserved from any taint of vice, are so degraded by sin as drunkards and revellers, the profane and the debauched.

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\* Mr. Spurgeon had commenced to revise the manuscript of this Sermon in readiness for publication. Other Sermons by him, in the *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, on various parts of this Parable, are as follows:—No. 2,768, "Debtors and Debtors"; No. 1,739, "Bankrupt Debtors Discharged"; and No. 2,127, "Love's Competition."  
No. 3,015.

Moreover, we are persuaded that the penalties of sin will differ; and that, albeit all the wicked shall be cast into hell, yet there will be degrees in the anguish of that lost state. Our Master has himself told us, "That servant, which knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required." There are great criminals, whose punishment shall be more intolerable than that of others; and there are others, who have not sinned to the same extent, who, though justly punished with God's wrath, shall not endure it to the same extent as those who have plunged more deeply into iniquity.

Thus, we are prepared to admit that there are differences in sin, differences in the consequent degradation of sinners, and differences in the punishment due to sin. Our own conscience, common sense, and right judgment teach us this; yet, notwithstanding these admissions, I want to put a few plain questions to you, dear friends, who think that you are among the fifty-pence debtors, and who look down with some sort of disdain upon those who owe five hundred pence. And, first, let me ask you this question,—*Are you quite sure that you are the lesser sinners?* Are you certain that you are to be reckoned among the fifty-pence debtors? Remember that we must always judge of sin, not merely by its outward appearance, but by the motives and character of the person committing it, and also by the circumstances under which the offence was perpetrated.

Will you not all admit that *a sin, committed against light and knowledge, is far worse than a sin of ignorance?* If a man should offend against the law of the land, not knowing it to be the law, his offence would not be as gross as that of another man who, understanding what the law is, deliberately sets himself in opposition to it. It may be that some of those, upon whom you have looked down as owing God five hundred pence, may have been without the light that you have had. Probably, the most of them never had the privileges that you have enjoyed. Did not your godly mother pray over you from your very birth? Did not your anxious father diligently instruct you in the way of salvation? You have read the Bible, you have a tolerably clear notion what is right and what is wrong, so you have sinned in the light, you have sinned knowing it to be sin. May not, therefore, your little sins, as you think them to be, really be more heinous in the sight of God than those apparently greater sins which others have committed without the same degree of light and knowledge that you have had?

Further, *must not sin also be measured by the violence which a man has to do to his conscience in order to commit it?* To some persons, no doubt, from their early habits, and even from their very constitution, I will not say that sin becomes inevitable, but certainly they glide into it almost by nature, and without being conscious of any restraint, or the restraint is so little that they scarcely feel it. I know that there are some of you who, happily.

had to pull and tug against the bit and bridle before you could live as sinners. Conscience has so sharply pricked you, and made you so uneasy in your course of life, that you have had to wrestle with your own conscience as a man struggles with his adversary. You have had to clutch conscience by the throat, and try to throttle him; and if you could have done so, you would have stifled, once for all, that warning cry which became a constant nuisance to you. You could not sin with such pleasure as others could, because your conscience would not keep silence; so, may not those minor offences of yours, which have been committed notwithstanding the alarms of your outraged conscience, have had in them a heinousness which does not appertain to the sins of others, who have not had to contend against this inward monitor when plunging into sin?

Yet again, dear friends, *may not example sometimes have a great deal to do with sin?* When I see some of our young people inclining to be drunkards, I am very sorry, and I blame them; but can I wonder at their conduct when I see how many parents train up their children as if they really intended to make drunkards of them,—tempting them to drink, and giving them their first taste of that which becomes a cause of stumbling to them? I do not see how, if it were the object of some parents to make their boys drunkards, they could act otherwise than as they now do. I have heard a working-man say to his son, when he has passed him a jug of ale, “Take a drink, my lad,” and he has looked quite pleased when the boy has taken a deep draught; and then he has taken him to the gin-palace, and let him mingle freely with the evil company usually found in such a place; so, is there any wonder that the boy becomes a drunkard? Can a father blame his son for swearing when he is himself a blasphemer? No; and I say that people, who have thus been in the midst of sin from their very childhood, may not, after all, be such great sinners as others, who have had the very opposite example set before them, and yet have committed these sins, contrary to all the training of their early childhood. Some of us cannot recollect a fault on the part of our parents. Honestly looking back upon the private life of my father and mother, I cannot recall anything in their example which it would have been unsafe for me to imitate. Well then, if I have sinned, I have sinned against a parental example which I ought to have followed; and, therefore, there must be more guilt in my fifty-pence sin than in the five-hundred-pence sin of others who have not had such an example as I had.

*Do you not think, too, that circumstances greatly affect the comparative enormity of sin?* If a thief steals a loaf because he has starving children crying at home, would you give him the same punishment as you would award to another man who steals what he really does not need, and who seriously injures the man he robs merely for the greed of gain? You all make distinctions as to the motives which prompt to various actions; if you find that the motive, in one case, although not right, was more excusable than in the case of another, you judge the first one the more leniently. How do you know, my dear hearer, who resisted the calls of divine

grace last Lord's-day, that you were not more guilty than that man who was not here, but who reeled home, that same night, intoxicated? You came into direct contact with God's mercy, and you resisted it; and that is more than the poor drunkard did. And as to some of you, seat-holders, who are constantly here, yet still remain unconverted though we have entreated you to lay hold on Christ,—I will not say it, but I almost think that your resistance of those continued invitations of grace may have in it more of moral guilt, in the sight of God, than some of those offences for which men are shut up in prison, and are execrated by their fellows. Many people do not regard sins against God as being so heinous as crimes against men, yet they are even more so; and it is one of the marks of our common moral obliquity that, while a man may not be greatly offended if you call him a sinner, he would be very angry if you called him a criminal. That is to say, such a man thinks there is not much amiss in having offended God, but he thinks it would be a dreadful thing to have broken the laws of his fellow-men.

If you think these things over seriously, I should not wonder if any one of you—who at first said, "I am a fifty-pence debtor; I thank God that there are differences between sinners, and that I am not so degraded as other men are,"—should have to say, "It makes very little difference to me after all; it is true that I have never been a thief, I have never committed an act of unchastity, I have been an honest, upright, respectable member of society, yet, as I have not believed in Jesus, and turned from sin, I may be among those who were apparently first, who shall be last, while some, who seemed to be last, shall stand far before me." I shall not be sorry, dear hearer, if that is the point to which you come; indeed, I shall rather be glad, for it will be a more hopeful position for you to occupy than that which you once felt was your right place.

II. Having thus shown you that there are degrees in sin, I shall now pass on to show you that THERE IS AN EQUALITY IN THE BANKRUPTCY OF BOTH THE GREAT AND THE LITTLE SINNERS.

Neither of the debtors in the Parable had anything with which to pay his debt; and when God means to save a soul, he makes it realize that it has nothing with which it can discharge its debt to God. If any of you think that you can do anything towards saving yourselves, go and do it; but Christ will have nothing to do with you on those terms. You must be brought to feel that you are helpless, hopeless, lost, ruined, and undone, and that you cannot lift even a finger to save yourself; but that the grace of God must do everything for you, from the first to the last; and unless you are thus emptied, and humbled, and laid low in the dust before God, I see no sign that his Spirit is effectually working in you.

"While we can call one mite our own,  
We get no full discharge."

Both these debtors knew that "they had nothing to pay." *There are some men, who are conscious of a great deal of guilt, who offer*

to discharge their liability by their repentance. "Oh!" says such a man, "I am very sorry for my sin, and that sorrow will surely make up for it. My tears shall flow freely, and I will deprive myself of this pleasure and that; surely that is all that is needed." But the man, whom God means to save, knows that his repentance cannot atone for his past guilt. If I get into debt, it is no use for me to be sorry; that sorrow will not pay my debt; and as I am immeasurably indebted to God, my tears of repentance will not discharge that debt.

"Could my tears for ever flow,"

they would not atone for sin. I hope you all realize the truth of what I am saying; for, if you do, it is a token for good in your case.

*Some others, though they cannot pay the full amount of their debt, hope to make a composition.* They will do their best, and leave the Lord Jesus Christ to make up the rest. They cannot offer to God perfect obedience, so they offer such obedience as they can, and they trust that will satisfy him. But a soul, that has been truly awakened by the Holy Spirit, knows that "composition" is quite out of the question. The divine declaration is, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." There is not a word about some things which are required, and other things which may be excused. My dear hearer, I trust you are convinced that no half-obedience can ever be accepted by God. If you are to be saved by your own works, you must be absolutely perfect, in thought, and word, and deed, from the moment of your birth to the hour of your death. One crack in the crystal vase of perfection spoils it; and you all know that the vase was not only cracked, but smashed to atoms long ago. Do not trust in your own righteousness, but confess before God that you have "nothing to pay" off that terrible debt which you have incurred through sin.

*Some men give their note of hand, and promise to pay their debt.* They hope they will be better in the future than they have been in the past; but suppose they are, they will then be no better than they are always bound to be; and how can that improvement discharge their past debts? Try that plan on one of your tradesmen; you owe him, shall I say fifty pounds? Well, then, go to him, and say, "I cannot pay what I owe you, but I will never get into your debt again." Will that promise take your name off his ledger? You know that it will not; and so, even if you could serve God perfectly in the future, that would not put away your sins in the past. The fact is, these promises of yours are just like the paper money which represents no real security, and so lead to bankruptcy. You may build up a nice-looking structure with promises of good works which you will do in the future; but it will all come tumbling down one of these days, and great will be the fall thereof.

This is the only safe declaration for a man to make:—"O God, I am deeply in thy debt, and have nothing to pay! If thou wouldst save me through my repenting, even then, if thou didst not

enable me to repent, I could not repent, for my heart is hard as a stone! Lord, wilt thou not take away my heart of stone, and give me a heart of flesh! And, Lord, if I am to be holy in the future, it must be thy grace which will make me so. I know that, if I am ever to enter heaven, I must be holy; and I also know that holiness must be wrought in me by thy Holy Spirit; consequently, it cannot be any credit to me; thou must have the credit of it all. As for me, I am like the two debtors, I have 'nothing to pay,'—nothing whatever. If thou dost send the sheriff's officer to take me, and put me in prison, and tell me that I shall never come out thence till I have paid the uttermost farthing, I must lie there for ever and ever, for I know that it is not in my power to meet even one in ten thousand of thy just demands. If thou shouldst lay judgment to the line, and righteousness to the plummet, my building for eternity must be found wanting. Pull it down, Lord, and then build me up as thou wouldst have me!"

We are all equal here; "there is no difference." You respectable ladies and gentlemen are on a level with the worst villain in the land. My lord, you are no better off, in this respect, than a chimney-sweeper. Your Majesty, even you have no preference, in this matter, over the poorest woman in your dominions. If you are to be saved,—high and low, rich and poor, ye great and mighty ones, and ye despised and abandoned ones,—ye must all bow together here. As you will have to lie in earth's common grave, so must you bow down in one common lowliness of mind before your God, whose debtors you all are, confessing that you have "nothing to pay,"—not a single rusty farthing of goodness in the whole human race. Jew and Gentile must bow together before God, crying, "Guilty, *guilty*, GUILTY! We are guilty, every one of us; and we have nothing to plead, in answer to the demands of thy righteous law, and even this confession itself is forced from our lips because we cannot help feeling that it is, alas! but too true." We are all equal here.

III. Passing on to the next point, we observe that, when sovereign mercy dealt with these two debtors,—the fifty-pence man, and the five-hundred-pence man,—IT PUT THEM ON A LEVEL AGAIN, for their creditor "frankly forgave them both."

The man, who owed the five hundred pence, could turn to the other debtor, and say, "I am out of debt, my brother;" and the other one could say to him, "Give me your hand; I cannot say any more than you can; but, glory be to God! I cannot say any less, for I also am out of debt. I could not pay my fifty pence, so I must have been shut up in the debtors' prison; and you could not pay your five hundred pence, so you also would have been kept in prison too; and though I did not owe as much as you did, yet I owed more than I could ever have paid, so let us together bless the name of the Lord, who has frankly forgiven us both because his only-begotten and well-beloved Son has redeemed us from going down to the pit by paying all our debt on Calvary's cross."

There is one word that I want you specially to notice: "He *frankly* forgave them both." By that I understand that he forgave

them altogether because he willed to do so, and not because of any reason in them why he should do so. Once for all, he fully cancelled all their debts; and now, just as if they had never been in debt at all, he could not arrest them for debt, and they had no cause to be afraid that he would do so, for he had no legal claim against them, for he had himself, by an act of grace, forgiven them all that they owed, and they were therefore clear. Ah, my dear hearers, your hearts must leap for joy if you know that God has forgiven all your past sin. Sometimes, when we get talking about the perfect pardon which we have received from God, some people say, "How egotistical, how presumptuous you are!" Well, we will be egotistical and presumptuous in that sense; and the more we are so, the better will it be. Anyone who has believed in Jesus is wholly forgiven. Against me, if I believe in Jesus, and against you, if you believe in Jesus, there is no sin recorded in God's Book of Remembrance; it is all blotted out. If you could turn the pages over, you would not find a single entry of the sin of a believer. In God's sight, if I have trusted in Christ, I am as pure as though I had never sinned, for I have been so washed in Christ's precious blood that not a spot or wrinkle remains upon me; and you, too, believer, are not half-pardoned. Christ is not half a Saviour to us, but a whole Saviour; and the pardon which God gives to us is a full and final pardon. He does not forgive us upon condition that we do not go back to the world. He makes no such condition, and he will not let us go back. He forgives us outright, and puts the whole of our sin away for ever. He receives the prodigal back into his bosom, and bids him sit at the table, and feast, while the music and the dancing make glad his heart.

Do you *know*, dear hearer, that *you* are forgiven? "Oh!" saith one, "I would give all I have to know that." You may know it. If you trust the Lord Jesus Christ, that is a sure proof that you are pardoned; and you may live, and you ought to live, in a constant realization of perfect pardon through the precious blood of Jesus. There may have come into this place, one, who would not like his name to be known, or his character to be described. He has gone very, very far into everything that is evil; but he is now standing at the foot of the cross, and he is looking up to the crucified Christ, and he can say, "My trust is in Jesus only." There is probably also here a young man, whose life, from his youth up, has been most excellent; nobody would ever detect a flaw in his moral character. He, too, is looking upon the wounds of Jesus, and he also can say, "My trust is in him alone." Now, these two persons are equally pardoned; that great sinner has no more against him in God's Book than that excellent youth who is also forgiven: "He frankly forgave them *both*;"—not forgave one of them fully, and the other only partially, but "he frankly forgave them *both*."

My eye glances, here and there, upon some of my brethren and sisters in Christ, whose life stories remind me of the differences there are between them, and also of the likeness which grace has wrought in them. There are some here, whose tongues were used in blasphemy not long ago. The drunkard's cup was often at their

lip, and the drunkard's language was their usual speech; but they are washed, and cleansed, and sanctified; and, now, there is no difference between them and those who were preserved from wandering out of the path of morality. "No difference," did I say? Sometimes, I think that there is this difference,—that those who have sinned much, and have had much forgiven, are the warmest-hearted amongst us, the most faithful and the most earnest; so that if we, in our earlier days, seemed to excel them, they now excel us, and we almost envy them their holy joy and earnest love to the Lord who has washed them from their many sins. Still, there is an equality between these two classes. They are both alike pardoned, both washed in the same precious blood, both clothed in the same spotless righteousness, both equally adopted into the family of God, both equally secured by the everlasting covenant, both equally have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and they shall both equally stand at the right hand of Christ, wearing the white robes, waving the palm branches, and they shall equally share his victory as they sing, "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen."

IV. Now, lastly, THERE IS ANOTHER POINT OF DIFFERENCE: "Which of them will love him most?"

It is quite certain that there are some Christians who love the Lord Jesus Christ better than others do; some who love him much while others only love him a little. Shall I describe those who love Christ only a little? If I do, some of you will be able to recognize your own portraits. They come to the place of worship pretty regularly. They sing, but not too loudly, for they are afraid of being too enthusiastic. They seldom come to a prayer-meeting, and only occasionally to the week-night service. They take just sufficient spiritual nourishment to keep them alive; I suppose they are afraid of taking too much, lest their spiritual nature should become too vigorous. They do have family prayer,—sometimes. They do pray regularly, but it is very short; it may be sweet, but it is certainly very short. They do some good in the world; at least, we hope they do. They could count on one hand all the souls they have ever brought to Christ; and all the good work they have ever done for the Lord Jesus Christ might be recorded on a very small scrap of paper. Some of them are wealthy; and they heard a man ask them to give a tithe of their income to Christ. They thought he was a fanatic; they never dreamed of doing such a thing as he urged, though they do sometimes give a sixpence to the collection. They like other people to be earnest; they do not object to that, unless those people ask them also to be earnest. These little-love people have believed in Jesus, so they will go to heaven; but such a change will have taken place in them that we shall scarcely know them.

I have seen whole congregations of this sort of people. I have preached to them;—that was terrible work, I can assure you. I have gone home with the deacon, and he has been a person of the

same sort; he didn't care to know how the cause was getting on in London; indeed, he didn't care much whether it was getting on. As for revivals, if you only mention the word in the presence of such brethren, they say, "No good ever comes of them." These people have had little forgiven, so they only love a little. They never were very great sinners, and never had any very deep repentance, so, in their own estimation, they never owed Jesus Christ very much; they are a sort of superficial Christians, who will be "saved, yet so as by fire."

You hardly need that I should describe those who love Christ much,—those who delight to praise him, to pray in his name, and to do all in their power to make him known to others;—those who give to God's cause at no ordinary rate, and help us to fight Satan in no ordinary way, and to spread the gospel of Christ in no common fashion. Last week, some of us were at a meeting, at which there was present a dear brother in the ministry, the very flash of whose eyes seemed to set us all on fire; and when we have heard him speak from this platform, the very place has seemed to shake under the power of his fervent proclamation of the truth, and his impassioned prayers. A man who is thus all soul and all heart cannot preach lifeless, heavy, drugging sermons, and cannot bear to be with people who are dull, and cold, and heavy of heart. He feels that he has had much forgiven, and therefore he loves much. I could also tell you of some godly sisters, who have given to the cause of God almost all their living; and of others, who give up all their time to God's service, having sacrificed everything else that they may devote themselves to the cause of Christ. These are they who love much.

We have differences even in the ministry. We have some brethren, who preach twice in the week, and they get so weary that they have to go away for a long holiday; but there are others, who can preach ten times in the week, or who, if they are not preaching, are visiting their people from door to door, and yet they do not die, but bless God that they have the strength thus to serve him. As it is in the pulpit, so is it in the Sunday-school, and so is it with all classes of Christians,—there is a difference. Some seem to be all heart, and others seem to have no heart at all. There are some who serve the Lord with their whole soul, and others who give him just the odds and ends of their time and strength. I pray God to raise up amongst us many brethren and sisters who shall be eminent for their grace and consecration to Christ.

What is the best way to reach this point? Not to *be* great sinners, but to *feel* that you are great sinners, to have a deep sense of your own sinfulness. If you have never plunged into open vice, be thankful that you have not done so; but regard your sin in the light in which I tried to put it in the earlier part of this sermon. Get a clear view of it till you are humbled, and broken down, and crushed under its ponderous weight. Then go to Jesus Christ with this load of sin; and, trusting in him, know that you are forgiven through his atoning sacrifice; and then there will be

a potent motive within you which will give strength to your entire life, and put muscle, and nerve, and sinew, and bone into your Christianity. Then will you sing,—

“Love I much? I’ve more forgiven;  
I’m a miracle of grace.”

God bless this message to those poor trembling souls who are deeply in debt through sin, that they may see God’s way of forgiving them through the merits and death of his dear Son, Jesus Christ, and may those who are forgiven much love Jesus much, and may God bless you all, for Jesus’ sake! Amen.

### Exposition by C. H. Spurgeon.

LUKE VII. 36—50.

Verse 36. *And one of the Pharisees desired him that he would eat with him. And he went into the Pharisee’s house, and sat down to meat.*

It was usually a suspicious circumstance when a Pharisee desired to be familiar with Christ; it might generally be suspected that he wished to entrap him. Yet, on this occasion, if there was no real friendliness to Christ, there was at least the appearance of it. We see what our Saviour did when the Pharisee gave him an invitation: “He went into the Pharisee’s house, and sat down to meat.” The Lord saw there an opportunity for usefulness. He knew that he would have a good reason for speaking personally to this Pharisee; who, peradventure, was one of the better sort. At all events, our Lord felt that it was right for him to go into that house, even if they did watch him, and try to catch him in his talk. If there was hypocrisy there, there was the more need for his presence, as Jesus himself said concerning his eating with publicans and sinners, “They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick.”

37, 38. *And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee’s house, brought an alabaster box of ointment, and stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment.*

She was not a sinner in the ordinary sense of the word, but she was “a sinner” by trade, “a sinner” by profession. It always seems to me that, in this description of her, every word is emphatic. There is much meaning in every separate action of the woman; and even in her little mannerisms there is something that is instructive to us. Our Lord was reclining at his meal, and his feet were turned towards the door, so that she had not to come far into the house before she reached his feet; and there she stood, “at his feet.” Those are blessed words: “at his feet.” That is where we also would stand and weep. That is where we would sit and learn. That is where we would wait and serve. That is where we hope to live and reign for ever: “at his feet.”

This woman “stood at his feet behind him,”—as if she were unworthy to be looked upon by him, but found it honour enough to be behind him, so long as she was but near him: “at his feet behind him weeping,”—with sorrow for her sin, with joy for her pardon, with delight in her Lord’s presence, perhaps with grief at the prospect of what yet awaited him. And she “began to wash his feet with tears.” O sweet repentance, which fills the basin better than the purest streams of earth could ever do! Then she unbound her tresses,—those nets in which she had, mayhap, caught