

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

WHAT CHRISTIANS WERE AND ARE.

A Sermon

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C. H. SPURGEON,

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“And were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.”—Ephesians ii. 3.

“The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ.”—Romans viii. 16, 17.*

THESE two texts will furnish me with two familiar but most important themes,—*what Christians were*, and *what they are*. There are great and vital differences between what they once were and what they now are, and these are implied or indicated by the two expressions “the children of wrath” and “the children of God.” There is so much instruction in each of our texts that we will proceed at once to consider them without any further introduction.

I. So, first, let us consider WHAT CHRISTIANS WERE.

The apostle tells us that we “were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.” “*By nature*,” mark you, not merely by practice, but “by nature *the children of wrath*.” The expression is a Hebraism. When a person was doomed to die, he would be called by the Jews “the child of death.” One who was very poor would be called by them “the child of poverty.” So, because we were, by nature, under the wrath of God, we are called “the children of wrath.”

When the apostle says that we “were by nature the children of wrath,” he means that *we were born so*. David expressed what is true of us all when he said, “Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.” Our first parent, Adam,

* See *The New Park Street Pulpit*, No. 339, “The Sons of God.”

sinned and fell as the representative of the whole human race. "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men." If any object to this principle of representation, that does not affect its truth, and I would also remind them that, by this very principle of representation, a way was left open for our restoration. The angels did not sin representatively, they sinned personally and individually; and therefore there is no hope of their restoration, but they are "reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day." But men sinned representatively, and this is a happy circumstance for us, "for as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous." As we fell through one representative, it was consistent with the principles upon which God was governing mankind that he should allow us to rise by another Representative. At first, we fell not by our own fault; so now, by grace, we rise not by our own merit. Death by sin came to us through Adam ere we were born, so did life come to us through Christ Jesus. Thus our first text sets before us this terrible fact,—as true as it is terrible, and as terrible as it is true,—that we were by nature under the wrath of God from the very first. The whole race of mankind was regarded by God as descended from an attainted traitor; we were all born "children of wrath."

This expression also implies that *there was within us a nature which God could not look upon except with wrath.* The way in which some cry up the excellence of human nature is all idle talk. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" Our Lord Jesus Christ has told us that "out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies." Everything that is evil lurks within the heart of everyone that is born of a woman. Education may restrain it, imitation of a good example may have some power in holding the monster down; but the very best of us, apart from the grace of God, placed under certain circumstances which would cause the evil within us to be developed rather than restrained, would soon prove to a demonstration that our nature was evil, and only evil, and that continually. You may take a bag of gunpowder, and play with it if you care to do so, for it is quite harmless as long as you keep the fire from it; but put just one spark of fire to it, and then you will discover the force for evil that was latent in that innocent-looking powder. You may tame a tiger if you begin training it early enough, and you may treat it as if it was only a big cat; but let it once learn the taste of blood, and you will soon see the true tiger nature flashing from its eyes, and seeking to destroy all that come within reach of its cruel claws. In a similar fashion to that, sin was originally latent within every one of us; and whatever better qualities God may, by his grace, have planted there, it is still true that we "were by nature the children of wrath, even as others."

I need not say any more about the original sin of Adam, or about the sinfulness of our nature, for those of us who have been saved know that *our practice was according to our nature.* Who

can deny that the fountain was defiled when he is compelled to confess that polluted streams flowed from it? Can you look back with complacency upon the days of your unregeneracy? I feel sure that you cannot think of the sins that you committed then without weeping over them; and especially sorrowing over that sin which so many forget,—the sin of not believing on the Son of God, the sin of so long rejecting the Saviour, the sin of not yielding to the gentle calls of his grace, the sin of bolting and barring the door of your heart while he stood without, and cried, "Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled: for my head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night." But we would not rise, and let him in. What a horrible sin it was not to see the loveliness of Christ, and not to admire the infinitude of his love! Had we not been sinful by nature and by practice too, our opposition or our indifference would have been melted by the coming of Jesus, and we should at once have opened our hearts to receive him.

Not only were we "children of wrath" by descent, by nature, and by practice; but, had not God, in his long-suffering patience, spared us until we were converted, *we should have had to endure the wrath of God for ever* in that dark realm where not a single ray of hope or one cooling drop of consolation will mitigate the miseries of any child of wrath who hears the dread sentence, "Depart from me; I never knew you." We cannot bear even to think of the doom of those who have died impenitent. I confess that my flesh creeps when I read those terrible words of the Lord Jesus concerning the worm that never dies, and the fire that never shall be quenched; and yet, instead of sitting in these seats at this moment, rejoicing in the good hope through grace, we might have been there; ay, and without any very great change in the order of God's providence before our conversion, we might have been there. We were sick with the fever, and if only the disease had taken an unfavourable turn, we should have been there. We were shipwrecked; and if only the waves had washed us out to sea instead of washing us up upon a rock, we should have been there. Possibly, some of us have been in battle, and as "every bullet has its billet," if one had found its billet in our brain or heart, we should have been there. Some of us have been in many accidents; if one of them had been fatal before we knew the Lord, we should have been there. All of us are in jeopardy every day and every hour; we are constantly being reminded of the frailty of human life; yet God spared us by his grace, and did not cut us off, as so many others were, while we were unrepentant and unregenerated. Had he done so, we should indeed have been "the children of wrath" in the most terrible of all senses, for we should even now have been enduring the wrath of God on account of our sin. Children of God, as you realize the truth of what I have been saying to you, I trust that you will feel intensely grateful to the Lord who has so graciously interposed on your behalf, and delivered you from going down into the pit.

Notice also that Paul says that we "were by nature *the children of wrath, even as others.*" God's grace has made a great difference

between his children and others, but there was no such difference originally; they were "the children of wrath, even as others," that is, in the same sense as others were children of wrath. I know that God's children have been from eternity the objects of his distinguishing love, for there never was a period when he did not love those whom he had chosen as his own; but regarding us as sinners, unforgiven sinners, dead in trespasses and sins, we "were by nature the children of wrath, even as others."

We were also "the children of wrath, even as others" who remain unconverted. You have, perhaps, a daughter for whose conversion you have long prayed; you have brought her to hear the gospel since she was a child; but, up to the present moment, it has not touched her heart. Do not forget that you also were a child of wrath, even as she is. You have a friend who ridicules the gospel, even though he comes with you to listen to it. Yet you were an heir of wrath, even as he is; and if it had not been for the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit, you also would have been only a hearer and not a doer of the Word; you would have been like so many others in this congregation, and you might have said, with Cowper,—

" I hear, but seem to hear in vain.
Insensible as steel."

But you are not "insensible as steel" now; you do feel the power of the Word. It makes you tremble, but it also makes you rejoice, for you know that it is the Word of your Father in heaven who has loved you with an everlasting love, and who therefore with loving-kindness has drawn you to himself. While you remember all this with devout gratitude to him who has made you to differ from others, and also to differ from what you yourself used to be, never forget that you were once a child of wrath, even as others still are.

Yes, beloved brethren and sisters in Christ, you "were by nature the children of wrath, even as others" who still revel in sin. As you pass along the street, you see such sights and hear such language that you are shocked and horrified that men and women can so grievously sin against the God who made them, and who still permits them to live; yet do not look down upon them with an affectation of superior holiness and say, "What shameful sinners those people are in comparison with us!" but rather say, "We, too, were by nature the children of wrath, even as others still are."

Yes, and to emphasize what I have previously said, we "were by nature the children of wrath, even as others" who pass away impenitent, and in due time must stand before the judgment bar of God. They will stand shivering before that great white throne whose spotless lustre will reveal to them, as in a wondrous mirror, the blackness of their lives and the guiltiness of their impenitence; and when the King sits down upon his throne, even though it will be the Lamb himself, who died for sinners, who will sit as their Judge, they will cry to the mountains and rocks, "Fail on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath

of the Lamb: for the great day of his wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand?" There is nothing so terrible to look upon as injured love. Fiercer than a lion leaping upon its prey is love when once it is incensed. Oil flows smoothly, but it burns furiously; and when the love of Jesus has been finally rejected, then the sight of him whose head was once crowned with thorns will be more terrifying than anything else to the eyes of those who have rejected him. They will wish they had never been born; and, indeed, it would have been better for them if they had never had an existence. Had it not been for the grace of God, their portion would also have been our portion; for, by nature, we were the children of wrath even as they were, and amidst that shivering, trembling crowd we must have taken our station. But, believing in Jesus, our place shall be at his right hand "when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe." We shall be amongst those to whom the King will then say, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." Yet, by nature, we were "the children of wrath, even as others."

II. Now I must turn from that sad, solemn knell—"children of wrath, even as others," to the joyous peal that rings out from our second text, which tells us WHAT CHRISTIANS ARE, what we now are if we have believed in Jesus: "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God."

It is such a wonderful thing that those who were the children of wrath should now be the children of God that *there are two witnesses to it*: first, our own spirit says that we are the children of God; and then the Holy Spirit comes, and says, "Ay, and I also divinely bear witness that you are the children of God."

Now, beloved, do you realize that God has wrought this great miracle of mercy in you? *Does your spirit bear witness that you are now a child of God?* When you go out of this building, and look up at the stars, will you say to yourself, "My Father made them all"? Will you feel that you must talk to your Father? And when you go to your bed to-night, should you lie sleepless, will you begin to think of your heavenly Father as naturally as a little child, when it lies awake in the dark, thinks of its mother, and calls to her? If you are a true believer, this is the case with you. The Spirit of adoption is given to you, by which you are enabled to cry, "Abba, Father." Do you not also know what it is sometimes, when you are sitting down quietly by yourself, to think, "The God who made the heavens and the earth, and who upholds all things by the word of his power, is my Father"? Then very likely a flood of tears will come as you stand silently before the Lord just as the lilies do, for at times there is no form of worship that seems possible to our joyous spirit except standing still, and letting the love of the heart silently breathe itself out before the Lord like the fragrance of flowers ascending in a gentle breeze. In such a frame of mind as that, your spirit may well bear witness that you are a child of God.

Then comes the Holy Spirit, the infallible Witness, and through-

the Word, and through his own mysterious influence upon our heart, *he bears witness that we are the children of God.* Two witnesses were required, under the law, to establish a charge that was made against any man; and, under the gospel, we have two witnesses to establish our claim to be the children of God,—first, the witness of our own spirit, and then the second and far greater Witness, the Holy Spirit himself; and by the mouth of these two witnesses shall our claim be fully established. If our own spirit were our only witness, we might hesitate to receive its testimony, for it is fallible and partial; but when the infallible and impartial Spirit of God confirms the unfaltering witness of our own heart and conscience, then may we have confidence toward God, and believe without hesitation that we are indeed the children of the Most High God. One of the points on which the Holy Spirit beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God is this: “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren.” When we really love those who are God’s children, it is strong presumptive evidence that we are ourselves members of his family; and when we truly love God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, when we have a compassionate love to the souls of men, and an intense love of holiness, and hatred of sin, and desire for God’s glory, all these are the further witness of the Spirit with our spirit that we are the children of God.

Then, as there are two witnesses that we are the children of God, so are there *two ways in which we become the children of God.*

First, we are the children of God *by adoption.* When God asked himself the question, “How shall I put the children of wrath among my children?” he himself answered by saying, “I will do it by adopting them into my family.” We were far off from God by wicked works, “aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world;” yet, by the grace of God, we have been adopted into the divine family.

Now you know that a child may be adopted into a nobleman’s family, and yet he will not really be one of the nobleman’s kindred; so there is a second way in which we become the children of God, that is, *by regeneration.* We are born into the family of God as well as adopted into it, and thus we become “partakers of the divine nature.” So Peter writes, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” Adoption gives us the privileges of the children of God, regeneration gives us the nature of the children of God. Adoption admits us into the divine family regeneration makes us akin to the Divine Father; it creates us anew in Christ Jesus, and puts into us a spark from the eternal Spirit himself, so that we ourselves become spiritual beings. Before

regeneration, we are only body and soul; but when we are born again, born from above, we become body, soul, and spirit; being born of the Spirit, we understand spiritual things, and have spiritual perceptions which we never possessed before.

Becoming the children of God, we are entitled to all the privileges of childhood. It is the privilege of a child to enjoy its father's love, its father's care, its father's teaching, its father's protection, its father's provision, and last, but by no means least, its father's chastening. Whatever a child receives as its right from its father, we also receive from our Father who is in heaven. "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children; how much more shall your heavenly Father give" to you who are his children every blessing that you can possibly need while you are here on earth, and heaven itself to crown it all?

Then the apostle further says, "*and if children, then heirs*; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ." Now, in this country, it is not always true that, if children, then heirs, because we have laws, (of which some may approve, though I fail to see the justice of them,) which make one son to be the heir just because he happens to be the firstborn. It is not so in God's family; it is "if children, then heirs;" that is to say, all the children in the divine family are God's heirs. The last one who ever will be born into the family of God will be as much an heir as the first who ever said, "My Father, who art in heaven." And the least of the children of God—Little-faith, Ready-to-halt, and Miss Much-afraid, are just as much the heirs of God as Faithful, Valiant-for-Truth, and Mr. Great-heart himself. "If children," that is all; "if children, then heirs." Are they true-born children of God? Have they the faith which is the characteristic mark of all who are in God's family? Are they truly converted? Have they been born again, born into the family of God? If so, then it follows of necessity that, "if children, then heirs." Does not this truth encourage poor Miss Despondency over there, and you, Mr. Fearing, and friend Little-faith over yonder? "If children, then heirs." Not "if big children," nor "if firstborn children," nor "if strong children," but simply "if children, then heirs." If you have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby you cry, "Abba, Father," you are an heir of God, and a joint-heir with Jesus Christ.

There is another remarkable thing in the family of God; if we, who were by nature the children of wrath, become by grace the children of God, we thereby become, all of us, the heirs of all that God has. Now, this can never happen in an earthly family. If the father were rich, and all his children were his heirs, one son would have one farm, and another son would have another farm, and each of the girls would have so many thousands of pounds for her dowry; but each one of them could not have all that there was, it would have to be divided between them; one would have what the others had not, and could not have anything that they had. But, in God's family, all the children are heirs of all that is his. My dear brother or sister in Christ, if you have a choice privilege that is yours because you are a Christian, I rejoice that you have it,

but I have it too; and if I have a precious promise that belongs to me because I am one of the Lord's children, you may be thankful for it, for it belongs equally to you. No child of God can keep Christ all to himself, for he is the portion of all his people. Some dear brethren, whom I know, would like to plant a very prickly hedge around their little gardens, so as to keep all their Christian privileges to themselves; but God's birds of paradise can fly over those hedges, and share in all the good things they are intended to enclose.

"If children, then heirs; *heirs of God.*" You, my dear brother or sister, have Christ, and I have Christ. You have the Spirit, and I have the Spirit. You have the Father, and I have the Father. You have pardon, you have peace, you have the righteousness of Christ, you have union with Christ, you have security in life, you have safety in death, you have the assurance of a blessed resurrection and of eternal glory; but so have all those who have believed in Jesus. There is the same inheritance for all the children of God; not a part for one, and another part for another. The covenant is not, "Manasseh shall have this portion of the promised land, and Issachar that portion, and Zebulun that other portion;" but to every believer the Lord says, "Lift up now thine eyes to the North, and to the South, to the East, and to the West, for all this goodly heritage have I given to thee by a covenant of salt for ever."

There is another thing about this inheritance that makes it still more precious to us, and that is, that every one of the heirs shall certainly inherit it, and that is more than you can say about any earthly inheritance. If you know that somebody has made a will in your favour, do not reckon that the estate or money is really yours until you are actually in possession of it, for "there's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip." The will may be cancelled, and the new one may leave you out; or there may be a flaw in it, so that the estate will get into Chancery, and remain there for the term of your natural life. Even if there is no doubt that you are the heir, there may be many who will dispute your right to the inheritance; but if you are really a child of God, not even the devil himself shall be able to rob you of your heavenly inheritance. Satan may deny that you are an heir of God, but your heavenly Father will say, "Yes, he is indeed my child, and heir to all I have. I remember his first tear of penitence, and I have preserved that in my bottle. I remember his first true prayer, his first look of faith, his first note of praise, they are all registered in my records that none can erase. I have his name here in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, and it can never be blotted out. Yes, he is my child, and my heir; all that I have belongs to him." There is a day coming when all Christ's sheep shall pass again under the hand of him that telleth them; and in that day, not one of the whole redeemed flock shall be missing. As the long roll of God's ransomed family is called, it shall be asked, "Is Little-faith here?" and he will answer to his name not at all in the trembling way in which he used to speak when he was upon earth. When it is asked, "Is Miss Much-afraid here?" she

will reply, in jubilant tones, "Glory be to God, I am here!" No matter how weak and feeble you may be, if you are a child of God, you shall certainly be there, and the inheritance shall assuredly be yours.

I have not yet done with this expression, "heirs of God." Paul does not say that the children of God are heirs of heaven. Our inheritance is much bigger than that, for heaven has its bounds, but God has none. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but God never will; we are heirs, therefore, of unending bliss, for we are "heirs of God." There is no one here, there is no one on earth, there is no man or angel in heaven who can tell the full meaning of this expression: "heirs of God." The words are simple enough for even a child to utter, but only God fully understands what they mean, and we shall go on learning throughout eternity all that is included in those three short syllables. To have God himself as our inheritance, to be able to say, "The Lord is my portion," is a thousand heavens in one. And all the children of God are the heirs of God; no one of them will ever have to say, "My portion will have to be stinted because my elder brother has taken such a large share;" but every one shall have God to enjoy here on earth, and then to enjoy for ever in glory.

Finally the apostle says, "*and joint-heirs with Christ.*" It always adds to our enjoyment of any pleasure if we have someone whom we greatly love to share it with us; then how much more shall we enjoy our heavenly inheritance because we are to occupy it with Christ Jesus, our Lord and Saviour, to whose incarnation, and life, and death, and resurrection, and intercession we are indebted for it all! Oh, who would not be a child of God, to have such bliss for ever, and to enjoy it in such blessed company? Yet is there anyone here who despises this inheritance? Is there anyone here like Esau, "who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright," and who, "afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears"? Is there someone here who was once a professor of religion, who has gone back to the world, in the hope of getting a better living or a little praise, among men? Poor soul, poor soul, how I pity you! But, O child of God, have you been kept faithful even to this hour? Then let Naboth rather than Esau be your model. Ahab offered Naboth a better vineyard than his own, or the worth of it in money if he would sell it, but he would neither exchange nor sell his inheritance even though his refusal to do so cost him his life; and it would be better for us to die a thousand deaths than ever even to think of parting with our heavenly patrimony. Happily, if we are really the children of God, he who has, by his grace, made us his children, will keep us his children; and he will both keep us for the inheritance, and keep the inheritance for us. There is, however, such a danger of being only children of God in name, and not in truth, that we shall all do well to give heed to the apostle's warning, "Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it." Having put our hand

to the plough, let us not even think of looking back; but may we be proved to be the living children of the living God by walking in his ways until we come into his blessed presence to go no more out for ever, for his dear Son's sake! Amen.

Exposition by C. H. Spurgeon.

EPHESIANS II.

Verse 1. *And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins;**

Then you owe your very life to him. You were dead, you were like a corrupt carcass, but his life has been breathed into you. "You hath he quickened." Then you are no longer dead, you are a living soul before the living God; and as you owe this to him, praise him with all the life you have. You "were dead in trespasses and sins;"—

2, 3. *Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.*

It does us good to remember what we used to be. There was no reason in us, by nature, why we should be made the children of God. There were in us no distinguishing traits of character by which we were separated from our fellow-sinners. We ran in the same course; we were possessed by the same spirit; we wrought the same works; we had the same nature; we were under the same condemnation: "children of wrath, even as others."

4, 5. *But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) †*

"By grace ye are saved." I know that you feel that it is so. Our quickening out of our death in sin must have been by grace; and as God has done it, unto him must be ascribed all the glory of it. There can be no merit in those who are dead in sin that they should be quickened out of their sin; this must be the work of the Lord alone, and unto him be all the praise. He "hath quickened us together with Christ," so that our life is mystically linked with the life of Christ, as he said to his disciples, "Because I live, ye shall live also." Until he can die, those who are one with him cannot die.

6. *And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus:*

It is all in him, and it has a sevenfold sweetness about it because it is in him. To live unto God is a wondrous mercy; but to live together with Christ is an unspeakable honour. To be raised up into the heavenly places would be a surpassing blessing; but to be raised up there together with Christ, and to be made to sit there with him, is a boon that is above the superlative; I know not how else to speak of it.

7, 8. *That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. For by grace are ye saved through faith; ‡—*

* See *The New Park Street Pulpit*, No. 127, "Spiritual Resurrection;" and *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, No. 2,267, "Life from the Dead;" and No. 2,388, "Once Dead, Now Alive."

† See *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, No. 2,968, "His Great Love;" No. 805, "Resurrection with Christ;" and No. 2,741, "Salvation by Grace."

‡ See *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, No. 1,064, "Salvation all of Grace;" and No. 1,609, "Faith: What is it? How can it be Obtained?"