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GOD'S DESIRE FOR US, AND HIS WORK IN US.

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A Sermon

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“Behold thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom.”—Psalm li. 6.

WHAT a contrast is here, and I think intended to be here! In the verse before this one, David describes human nature as it is in its original. He was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did his mother conceive him. So that throughout his entire nature from the very first there was iniquity and sin. But God desireth the very opposite, so that he felt that he was the very opposite of what God would have him to be. God desireth truth, and his heart had been false to God. God would have him to be wise, and he was from his very birth as foolish as a wild ass's colt. Observe, then, that wide as the Poles are asunder is human nature, and what God would have human nature to be. It would be right to tell you that the older translators and commentators have been accustomed to read this verse somewhat differently from our own version, though I believe our own version to be correct. Calvin and others that preceded him thought that David here said, “Thou desirest truth in the inward part, and in the hidden part thou *hast made* me to know wisdom,” putting it in the past tense; and they thought that David said this to show how very inexcusable was his sin—“I am not an untaught one—an uninstructed person. I have not been left without knowledge of thy law, of what sin is, and of what holiness is. Thou hast made me to know wisdom. I have felt thy power within my heart. I have been taught in my most secret places to know thee, and yet for all that, I have revolted and gone aside, and

committed this 'foul sin of adultery and murder.' If so—if that were the correct translation (and there is no reason why that should not be correct, as well as the one we have here), it teaches us that it is a great aggravation to sin when sin is committed by a Christian. Never say that because a man is a believer his sin is less. Nay, but if it be the same sin as in another, it is far worse in him than it would be in another. A stranger may say of me what my child must not say without being guilty of great ingratitude and much unkindness. It was thou, a man, my friend, mine acquaintance—this made the treachery of Judas to become so cutting to the Saviour. The nearer a man is to God's heart, the more detestable is the sin in him. You cannot bear to see an evil in one you love. If one you love have the toothache, you think more of the pain of that beloved one than of some far greater sickness of one in whom you take no concern. So sin is a disease which, when God sees in his own beloved child, he perceives it with sorrow, and he is quick to remove it, and to heal it. Never trifle with sin because thou art a Christian. Rather be the more careful to watch against it.

"Quick as the apple of an eye,  
O God, my conscience make;  
Awake my soul when sin is nigh,  
And keep it still awake."

But now we will go to the text as it stands in our own most admirable and never equalled, and I think never to be excelled, version of Holy Scripture. We have here two things; first, we have *God's desire*; and secondly, we have *God's work*. "Thou desirest truth in the inward parts"; then next, "In the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom." Let us consider first:—

#### I. THE LORD'S DESIRE FOR US.

That which is desirable to God must be exceedingly and essentially desirable. All wise men will desire that which the infinitely wise God may desire. We are quite certain that there must be something exceedingly precious in that which God thinks fit to be an object for his infinite desires.

Now observe what this desire is. And the first remark shall be, *it has to do with inward things*. "Thou desirest truth in the inward parts." God had made man not only outward, but man inward—not merely these outward members, but the sentient, thoughtful, commanding spirit, that rules these members of flesh and blood. God looks, therefore, in all that is done by us that we should do it with our spiritual nature, and he estimates all our actions not merely by what they are apparently, but by what they spring from; he measures them by the motive, by the spirit, by the ruling desire in them. Having made our inward parts, he keeps his eye fixed upon the complicated spiritual machinery within us, understanding it all, knowing when any cog of any wheel is out of order, when any of the machinery is disarranged. Nothing is hid from his presence and knowledge. He searcheth the hearts, and trieth the reins of

the children of men; and his desire, as here expressed, is not so much anything with regard to the outward act or the tongue, or to any ceremonial performances whatsoever, but, first of all, it hath to do with the inward parts. Dear hearer, learn from this that there is nothing in religion that is so desirable as the inward part of it. Thy first and chief business with thy God has to do with thy innermost self—thy real self. Thou shalt come to keep thy outward rightly enough if thou wilt begin first to cleanse the inside of the platter. The outside of the house shall be whitewashed and cleansed afterward; but thy first work must be to look into the secret chamber of thy spirit, and discover what is there. True religion does not begin without, and then go within, but it begins within, and then it works without. The candle is not outside the lantern, but it is first inside the lantern, and then it sheds light all around. Let thine inward part be, then, the first part of thy care. The mass of even religious mankind think not so. Do they not go to their place of worship on a Sunday? Do they not read their Bibles occasionally? Have they not a form of prayer at the very tip of their tongue? Have not they given up swearing? Are they not strictly sober? Are they not honest? There are all these outward and external things, and a few ceremonies to complete them, such as baptism and the Eucharist, and many more things sometimes are added; and the man thinks himself perfectly complete, whereas he hath not even begun yet, for all this is but a thing of nought unless the heart has first of all been purged and made right inside by God. Dear hearer, whatever thou shall omit, see to it that thou look to thy heart. "My son, give me thy heart": see to it that thou love thy God with heart and soul, and that thy religion is a thing that has to do with thy vital, thine inward, thy very essential self; for God's desire is here, and let thy anxiety be in the same direction.

Next, I observe in the text that *God careth for truth*—he looks for truth—by which, I think, we are to understand here, *truth as opposed to hypocrisy*. Hypocrisy in the heart is a mortal disease. If thy religion be only a pretence, if thy heart be black, though thy face be bright; if thou hast filthiness in the well, though in the bucket there may be a little clean water, thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bonds of iniquity. The pure, truthful, holy God abhors hypocrisy. There can hardly be conceived anything more detestable in the sight of the Most High than to mock him with words of seeming, while our hearts and the reality of our nature are at enmity to him. God desireth truth *in opposition to mere semblance*. There are some who have no intention to be hypocrites, but still all the grace they have is but sham grace; all the knowledge of God they have is but theoretical; all the experience they have ever had is fanciful; all the communion with God they have ever had is mere delusion. The whole thing is but a bubble. Fair are its colours, but it will soon vanish; it is not stable and substantial; it is a mere outward shadow, but there is no substance in it. God desireth "truth in the inward parts," real repentance, real faith, vital godliness, real com-

munion with God. Everything there must be what it professes to be, for God desireth truth—that is, substance—in the inward parts.

Does not this yet mean a third thing, that God desireth *truth as opposed to falsehood*? Some persons very sincerely hold falsehood in their inward hearts. I do not doubt but what there is many a man who believes a false religion, and is as sincere in it as any man is in a true one, but his being sincere in believing a lie doth not transform the lie into a truth; and if he followeth a wrong way, that wrong way will lead to a wrong end, however sincerely it may be followed. God desireth that there may be truth in thy heart, not error. Even if it be thy *heart* that holds the error, that shall make no difference. He desires truth to be there—truth about himself, truth about his Son, truth about his Spirit, truth about thyself, thy sin, the way of thy salvation—truth about what he has revealed. He desireth truth—"truth in the inward parts."

Now put the two things together, God desireth truth and he desireth truth in the inward parts. Now does not this mean that *he desires truth to affect all the powers of our mind*, and all the powers of our mind to be conformable to divine truth? This is what I mean—we have knowledge we know—God would have us truly know. There is much knowledge that is not true knowledge. A man knows Christ, it may be, by what he has heard, what he has seen of others; but he does not know Christ truly in his own soul. Beware thou of the letter only. Beware thou of mere theoretical knowledge! God desireth that what thou knowest about his Son should be true, real knowledge. There is a great danger when we live with Christian people to pick up a second-hand experience. They have their sorrows: we hear them speak of them. We, perhaps, think we know something about those sorrows: we talk as they do. We hear of their joy, and oh! it is so easy to dream that we have enjoyed the same. We use their language. This is how cant comes into the world; and it has not quite gone yet: it is all too common. But a borrowed experience, and the language that comes of it—these are very loathsome to true minds, and very loathsome to God. God would not have thy brains stuffed with mere words, nor would he have thee seduce thyself into confidence with mere doctrines. He would have thee know in thy heart the guilt of sin by bitterly lamenting it—know in thy heart the power of the precious blood by receiving the cleansing which it brings. Knowing the sorrows and the joys of being a Christian by being a Christian thyself. He desires truth in the inward parts, wherein our knowledge is stored up.

So would the Lord have *truth in our desires*. We desire to be saved, all of us, I suppose; but oh! how many of these desires have no truth in them! "Yes," saith a man. "I would fain be saved, but then he will not give up his sin. He would fain be saved, and he commences to pray, but his goodness soon vanishes. Prayer is irksome to him: he has not learnt prayer. He desires, he says, to be taught of God, but he does not give a willing ear. He desires

to be resigned to God's will, he says, and he continues to kick and rebel against it. It is vain to say, "My desire is this" and "that," when my course of action is clean contrary to it. I certainly do not desire to go North if I voluntarily steer towards the South. God would have our desires to be all true. Oh! delude not yourselves with the thought that you have holy desires unless you truly have them. Do not think your desires are true towards God unless they are really so: he desireth truth in our desires.

So would the Lord have *truth in all our affections*. We think we love God, but I venture to ask the question of myself—I would raise it, and I would have you raise it with yourselves—do you really love the Lord? Do you *really* love him? Were he here, and your soul spoke the honest truth, and it were put, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?" what would the answer be? And, indeed, it will be put to you to-night; when you get home it will probably be put to you in some new shape. You will be tried in your patience. If you love him, keep his commandments then, and be patient towards all men. You may be tried to-night by some loss or cross; if you love him you will take up his cross and cheerfully follow him. See how your love may be. "Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith: prove your own selves." Where are your affections? Are they where the moth and rust corrupt, or are they yonder where eternity shall never see corrosion or robbery to deprive you of your possessions? "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." God desires not that thou shouldst say, "I love," if you do not, or that you should say, "Peace, peace," where there is no peace, and give a traitorous kiss. He desires truth in thy affection. Is thy heart right? Ah! this question is easy to put, but to answer it is not so easy—at least it may be easy to answer it if it be hurried without consideration, and probably untruthfully; but if thou wouldest be grounded on the rock, truly bottomed on a sure foundation, thou wilt say, "Search me, O God! and try me, and know my ways: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. Help me to keep my heart with all diligence, for I know that out of it are the issues of life." May there be truth in the inward parts of my affections.

So the Lord would have *truth in our emotions*. The emotion of fear, for instance, should not be excited as it is in some by foolish frivolous things. This is a false fear which ought not to come across the Christian's mind. There be some, too, who say they have a fear of God; others who say they have a joy of God; some that speak of sweet peace in God; others that talk of holy delight in God. But it is one thing to talk about these things, and another to possess them. He desires that all thy emotions, when thou art in his presence (and thou art always there), should be truthful. Too often we say in prayer, I fear, more than our heart says, and perhaps the preacher, in talking to you to-night, may say more than he himself knows. We are apt to do this. We have, therefore, good need to be very, very watchful, for all that there is within us that is

untruthful is unaccepted. Only that which is of the truth, that cometh of the truth that is in Christ Jesus, who is The truth—only that that can be pleasing to the Lord our God. Thus might I mention *the understanding*. God would have us have truth there, and not put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter. I might mention *the will*. The will should truly be surrendered to God, and cheerfully obedient to him. He desireth truth there. But whatsoever there may be within man, whatsoever faculty, power, or talent he possesses, the whole should be truthfully laid at his feet, and the whole experience of the little world within us should be conformed to the truth as it is in Jesus. To live with truthfulness within is a great thing, for we often talk in our hearts falsehood. The fool said in his heart, "There is no God." We may tell lies in our own hearts; we may thieve, and rob, and steal, and murder in our own hearts. Yea, our own hearts may be a shamble in which we may murder all the world, though we never laid a finger on any man, and in our hearts we may destroy the very throne of Deity, aye, and God himself, for we do that in our heart when we wish there were no God. I know not what there may be in our heart—a very pandemonium, a little hell—a great hell in a little heart. Oh! God, look thou on us, and put out all false things, and let truth be in our inward parts.

Now mark, before I turn from this first head of the subject, that when we say that the great desire of God is that we should have truth in our inward parts, we are not to suppose that, therefore, he is indifferent to our outward actions, our words, and so on. On the contrary, it is because he is a lover of holiness and purity that he thinks most of our hearts, because a true-hearted man must be a truth-speaking man and a truth-loving man. You have made the fountain clean—well then, there cannot be foul water come out of it. If once you have been made all clean within by sovereign grace, then the outcome must be from what there is within. You may have the devil within, and hang out the angel outside; but you cannot have the angel within, and the devil without; it cannot be so. Where Jesus Christ reigns in the interior, the glory of his presence will glow in the exterior too. You may be to your neighbours and friends an upright man, towards your enemies a forgiving and gentle man, towards your God a manifestly devout man, if in all things you are upright within, and devout within. May God grant, then, that we may be what he would have us be—that we may have truth in the inward parts. Now for the second part of the text.

## II. GOD'S WORK IN US.

I am very thankful that the second sentence comes after the first, for surely we might all tremble if it were not so. "Behold thou desirest truth in the inward parts." "Yes," we might say, "but, Lord, how shall we ever get it there? How shall we who are unclean be purged? Thou mayest say, 'Thou shalt be clean,' but, Lord, we cannot bring it to thee; how shall we who are polluted cleanse ourselves?" Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his

spots? But now comes this, joined on with an "and," a blessed rivet that can never be driven out—"and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom." Now let us go over this blessed word of encouragement—"and in the hidden part"—the secret part—"thou shalt make me to know wisdom." Observe that *where there is all fallen within us*, there will God work. He does not disdain to begin even with us, though all be out of order, though all be stained and all polluted. When he made the world, truly there was nothing to help him, but there was nothing to oppose him. Darkness was on the face of the deep, and disorder ruled, but those were rather negative than positive, and they disappeared at once at his bidding. But in the fallen heart there is much to oppose, and to oppose vigorously. With a fierce determination to ruin himself, man resists the grace of God, and were it not that he who created the world puts his hand a second time to the work, to create in us a new heart, we should continue in our destruction, and in our guilt, and enmity to to the Most High. Now what a comfort it is that God will deal with our secret part—our hidden part! He does not disdain to come and touch the wheel, and the machinery within, though it is all polluted. If we were to think of touching a running sore, or to put our hand upon a leper, we should shudder at it; but what must it be for a holy God to come and deal with an unholy heart, with corrupt affections, with a depraved will! We think of some poor men that are, for their livelihood, compelled to work in loathsomeness in our common sewers, but oh! what is all that compared with the heart! Yet the infinite mercy, and condescension, and omnipotent grace of God stooped down to deal with our inward parts. Admire the condescension of God, and have hope for thyself, poor lost one, because God will deal with thy inward parts.

But now notice that in my inward part, "Thou wilt *make me to know wisdom*." See the grandeur of that word! No one else can make a man wise, really, spiritually, internally, and eternally wise, but God himself. Here, again, I must remark upon the condescension of God. In one verse I find him asked to be a washer, in another place I find him asked to heal us, and here I find him asked to come and teach us. Shall he be schoolmaster to us? Shall he take such as we are in hand, and our inward parts in hand, to teach our inward parts his wisdom? Yes, he will do it. Means are used, I know—his ministers, his Word, his providence—but we never learn by these till *he* teach us to profit. These are school books, the apparatus of the school-house. The Master must come and explain them, and bring the truth home, or else we learn not. It is his prerogative, his sole prerogative, to speak to the heart so as to make us foolish ones wise. The Holy Ghost will do it. "In the inward parts thou wilt make me to know wisdom." Oh! blessed Spirit, thou wilt show me of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment to come: thou wilt take of the things of Christ, and reveal them unto me: thou wilt not disdain me, poor scholar as I am: thou wilt make me to know wisdom. And great Son of God! so wilt thou also teach:

thou wilt condescend by thine example, by thy sacrifice, and by thy precept, to make me to know wisdom. And thou, great Father, even thou shalt not disdain to deal with us as with sons, and by thy chastening still to teach us until we know wisdom. See, then, how God dealeth with the inward parts, and it is God that does it

Well, next, "In the hidden part thou shalt make *me* to know wisdom"—*me*. It is David that speaks, but he speaks, I trust for you. "Make *me* to know wisdom." Now who was he that used those words? *It was David, a great sinner*—to put it plainly, an adulterer and a murderer; but "thou wilt make me," says he, "to know wisdom." This is a bad scholar to begin with, a rough block for the great sculptor to carve, but says he, "Thou wilt make *me* to know wisdom." A sinner, I said, but he was a sinner publicly disgraced. Men knew of his sin, he was the song of the drunkard, and the mark of the blasphemer. His character for a while was gone; men spoke of David's sin. Ah! but thou wilt make *me*—the biggest fool in Israel (for I doubt not he felt he was)—thou wilt make *me* to know wisdom—me, from my disgrace and dishonour, thou wilt yet lift up. He that said this, mark you, was a penitent, bitterly penitent for what he had done. How canst thou know wisdom till thou hast hated sin? God hath not introduced thee to the school yet, until he has made thee smart under his rod on account of sin. This is the very beginning of wisdom, to know the bitterness and mischief of sin, and to turn from it. He that spake this *was a praying man*. The whole Psalm is a prayer. God will teach the praying one. He that teacheth thee to pray will teach thee everything else. This is one of the early lessons of the Christian, to learn to pray. "Behold, he prayeth," was said of Saul of Tarsus. Thou shalt learn to sing as angels do if thou beginnest with these bass notes of prayer. He that said this *was a believing man*. He was a great sinner, but he was a great believer. It was a great faith, as we said in the exposition, that made him say, "Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." Now sinner, disgraced sinner, but penitent, prayerful, believing sinner, God will make thee wise yet—make *thee* wise. Man, dost thou see this, that *he* desires it? He will give thee that, but he will give thee more. He will give thee wisdom: that is more than truth. You know that truth is one thing, but wisdom is better than knowledge, for wisdom is the right way of using knowledge. Many a *knowing* man is a fool. A wise man is a "knowing" man, although "a knowing man" is not always wise. He desires thee to have truth, and wherever truth is, he that follows her is wise. He will put truth within thee; that is *the doctrine*: thou shalt have wisdom, that is *the practice*. Truth shall be the sardine, the gem; but wisdom shall be the flashing rays which come from it, the brilliance thereof. He will make thee to know wisdom. Let me say very briefly, and in two or three sentences, what it is to know wisdom. Suppose thou knowest *the truth about sin*. Well, if thou dost know it truthfully, then thy wisdom will be to hate that sin. If thou knowest the reality of sin, thy wisdom

will be to lay it upon Christ by faith where God hath laid it in the old covenant, in the covenant of grace, and then having had thy sin forgiven, if thou knowest sin aright, and wilt be wise concerning it, thou wilt watch against it, knowing its damnable character, and how apt thou art to fall into it; and so, knowing the truth in thy heart about sin, in thy heart thou wilt be wise towards sin, lamenting it, confessing it, carrying it to Christ; watching against it, abhorring it, protesting against it all thy days.

So taking another subject, a blessed subject, *the Saviour*, if thou hast truth in thy inward parts about the Saviour, thou knowest him to be the sole and only Saviour, but an all-sufficient and perfect one. Well then, thy wisdom is to live upon him; to live with him, to live like him; and the God that desires thee to have the truth about Christ in thy heart will teach thee how to act wisely concerning Christ. In thy heart and in thy life thou wilt worship him, thou wilt adore him so as to spend thyself for him, for this is wisdom towards the truth as it is in Jesus.

So take but one other subject. If thou hast learnt *the truth about service*, and God would have that truth in thy heart, for thou art his servant bought with his blood, why, then, *he will teach thee wisdom in service*; he will show thee how to deny thyself, how to consecrate thyself, how to pour out thy whole strength at his feet, how to meet thine enemies, how to surmount thy difficulties, how to fight his battles, how to win the crown. He desires thee to have truth in thy heart about this matter, and he will give thee wisdom in thy heart concerning it all. So observe that what God requires of us in one place God gives us in another. He deals with sinners very honestly: he tells them what he wants. He then deals with them very generously, for he gives them what they need. He does not lower the law, or diminish its spirituality to suit the sinner: he tells him the truth, that he desires that he should have truth in his inward parts, but when he hath set out the law, he sets out an equally broad gospel. He works in the sinner what his gracious law demands. There are the tables of stone: God does not take one out of the ten commands away; he puts the mercy-seat on the top of the whole—covers the whole—and so he does not diminish from the Christian ought of what should be in him, or tell him to rest content with inferior holiness, or with a second-rate obedience. He tells him that he desires truth, even in his inward parts; he comes to him and he says, "That which I expect from thee I will give thee: that which I require I will bestow upon thee." "In the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom." Now turn my text into a prayer. "O God! I confess my inward part is not what it should be, nor can I make it. Thou mightest well sweep me away because my heart is depraved, but oh! take me—wash me in the Saviour's blood; send thy Spirit to new create me, and make me in my inward part to know wisdom," for thy mercy's sake. Amen.