

THE FORLORN SON

Sermons on Luke 15:11-32



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By Samuel Rutherford

Table of Contents

[I The Forlorn Son.—LUKE 15:11–12](#)

[II, The Forlorn Son seeks away from his Father.—LUKE 15:11–13](#)

[III. The Forlorn Son—The Grounds why he came Home, and his Prayer.—LUKE 15:14–19.](#)

[IV. The Forlorn Son—The Father's Welcome.—LUKE 15:20–1](#)

[V. The Forlorn Son—The Father's Expressed Welcome.—LUKE 15:22–23](#)

[VI. The Forlorn Son—He was Lost and is Found.—LUKE 15:24–28](#)

[VII. The Forlorn Son.—LUKE 15:29–32](#)

The Forlorn Son

"And he said, A certain man had two sons: and the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that

falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living."—LUKE 15:11, 12.

IN this parable, beloved in our Lord, we have to consider these particulars, the meaning of the parable, and then Christ's scope therein. All parables in the Word of God they are no other but only continued similitudes and metaphors illustrating some spiritual thing. In this parable there is a man and a householder spoken of, a father who has two sort of sons. For the meaning of the text, we have to understand, first, what is meant by a house here; second, [who is the father]; and third, what is meant by the two sons.

Now for the first. Ye know it is ordinary for the Lord in His word to resemble His Kirk or the kingdom of grace to a house or a family; for Christ our Lord He holds a house here wherein all the bairns of the house are free to the table, for there is a difference even here between the bairns of the house, and those who are only servants, and goers and comers as it were.

Then, secondly, what is meant by the father? There is greater difficulty in that to know what is meant thereby, because the Word of God it does ordinarily call the first Person of the Trinity, the Father, distinct from the other two persons. And yet there are three good reasons wherefore this is to be understood of Christ, the second person of the Trinity.

First: If we will look unto the scope and drift of the parable, it will say this much to us, for the text tells us that the Scribes and Pharisees murmured at Him saying, "This man receiveth sinners, and He eateth with them," and so they thought He could not be the Messiah and the Saviour of the world, who used such company that haunted among godless and profane persons. Now to take away this scruple and objection, Christ our Lord uses this parable that now we have read, and so labours to let them see how welcome such are to Him, who have been runaways, who have been lewd and lascivious persons, if so be they will come home, and will indeed acknowledge

that they have need of Christ. He will show that He has the mind of a father towards such, and welcomes them home again as kindly as the father does his lost bairn, who has spent all that his father gave him to live upon, and, having spent all, repents of his misspending, and comes home again to his father in a submissive and humble manner. Again—

Secondly, to prove that it is Christ that is here meant is clear by this: This parable in substance is all one with the former two parables in this chapter, concerning the lost and wandered sheep, and the lost piece of silver. If a shepherd be careful, having lost a sheep, to seek it in again to the flock, and will receive it in gladly, meikle more will He, who is the Good Shepherd, have a care of those who are His sheep, to seek those who are lost, and welcome them when they come. In John 10:11 Christ says, "I am the Good Shepherd, the good shepherd giveth his life for his sheep." If, then, this parable be one in substance with the other two parables, and these be spoken of Christ, that it is He who loses the groat, and from whom the sheep wanders, and He seeks them in again, and will not rest till He find them, then it cannot be another father who receives a prodigal waster, runaway child, than Christ. And—

Thirdly, thus to call Christ Father is not against Scripture neither, but is agreeable to divers places therein. And to leave all the rest, and take to this one place it makes it clear Heb. 2:13; it is said there that Christ has many bairns and sons for glory, and therefore having many bairns He must be a father. That is brought out in the words cited out of Isaiah, "Behold I and the children whom the Lord hath given Me." And this style it is also given unto Christ, Isa. 9:6: "The Everlasting Father," so that both the scope of the parable itself and of the parable going before, and other places of Scripture clear unto us, that here, by the father, is meant the Son of God.

Now, the third word is, we are to consider, what is meant by the two sons. The younger son some have taken to be the Kirk of the Gentiles, and the other son to be the Kirk of the Jews. And there is

reason for this, because the Kirk of the Jews they had the morning market of Christ, and He made a covenant with them before He made a covenant with us, who are Gentiles. But however it be, the text it will bear further than this. As Christ, He casts none away who come to Him, Jew or Gentile, and repents of their sin's provocations. By the older son we take to be meant all they who live within the visible Kirk, who profess themselves to be Christ's, and yet, in the meantime, they are nothing else but rotten hypocrites. And by the younger son, who craved his portion of goods of his father, and went away having gotten the same and spent it riotously, and then came home and confessed this wandering, is meant any sinner who sees his wanderings and is laden with sin, and comes to Christ and makes his moan to Him.

The purpose of the Son of God in this parable is to take away that slander laid against Him, that He could not be the Messiah, because none of the honest people, none of the kirkmen and bishops, none of the clergy, haunt His company; but His ordinary company is debauched, wicked men, that such will no keep company with. Publicans and sinners are His ordinary company, and therefore He cannot be the Messiah. Now our Lord takes upon Him to prove that this same proves Him to be the Messiah, because He makes such welcome when they come to Him.

Out of this ye may see, then, what has always been the judgment and opinion of natural men of Christ. Ye may see by this that they have always taken their marks of Christ by the moon. "Scribes and Pharisees follow not this man, and therefore He cannot be the Messiah, seeing they countenance Him not." And this is yet the opinion the world has of Christ and the gospel. The kings of the earth, and the clergymen, and universities, and velvet gowns follow not Christ and this way of the gospel, and therefore it cannot be the right way, for if it were the best way such would follow it and countenance.

But this form of reasoning is against Scripture, for the Scripture says: Not many rich, not many wise, not many [noble], not many learned, but the poor, base, and contemptible things of the world are the followers of Christ. Because there are few scarlet clothes and crowned kings at Christ's back, that proves not that He is not Christ and the Saviour of the world; but because He has publicans and sinners to be His followers, that makes Him to look like the Messiah than otherwise He would, albeit the world think not so. For such a Saviour as Christ should always be beside lost sinners. Such a physician as Christ is should be beside sick and diseased persons. And to let the world see that Christ's kingdom it comes not with observation and outward pomp and glory, therefore He would haunt the company of publicans and sinners. Let none then be scared away from Christ as a lordly Saviour, but come in humility to Him, as the woman who had the bloody issue durst not come to speak to Him or to touch His skin, yet she touches the hem of His garment, and that cures her. Such are nearest Christ who are aye complaining of sin, and think themselves to be furthest from Him; for whole folks need not Christ, only those who are sick.

Now the parable has thir parts in it, shortly: (1) We have the foolish resolution and journey of the younger son, and this is from ver. 11 to the 17th. (2) We have his coming home again, and the grounds and causes thereof, from the 17th verse to the midst of the 20th. And then (3) from the 20th verse, how his father received him when he comes home. O, how heartsome a welcome is there between our Lord and a home-coming sinner. Now this home-coming the Spirit of God sets it down in the rest of the verses. And, first, it is set down how his father received him when he comes home; and, second, how his older brother received him, who should have been blith at his home-coming.

For the father of this forlorn son he sees him afar off, and knows him. Who has a warm heart to a home-coming sinner if Christ have it not? And, seeing him, he ran to meet him, and fell upon his neck and kissed him. There is never a word of quarrelling at all on Christ's part

when the forlorn child comes to Him, but causes bring the best robe and put upon him, and put shoes on his feet, and a ring upon his hand, and there is feasting and dancing for his recovery and restoring safe. The fatted calf is killed for him.

And then the carriage of the elder brother. He was in the field, and when he comes home he hears meikle mirth in his father's house, and he calls for one of the servants to see what these things meant; and the servant tells the elder son that his younger brother was come home, and his father had killed the fat calf, because he had received him safe and sound. When he hears that his brother was come home, who had spent all his patrimony, and that his father had so received him, he was angry, and would not come in to the house where his repenting brother was, but was angry at him and his father both, and made a quarrel of it to his father. His father came out, and entreated him to come in. "But he, answering, said to his father, Lo, these many years have I served you, neither at any time transgressed I thy commandment, and yet thou never gavest me a kid that I might make merry with my friends. But as soon as this thy son was come which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf." And the Lord is brought in mercifully choosing the elder brother also, for all his hard quarrelling his father for what he did, and saying, "Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. It was meet that we should make merry and be glad; for this thy brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found." The father calls him not to the elder son "my son," but "thy brother," telling he is as sib to him as he is to him. "And thou hast reason to be as glad as I at his coming home." Indeed, it sets our Lord very well to be blyth and glad, and the company of those who are glorious in heaven when a repenting sinner comes home. O, that is the matter of heaven's mirth, albeit others be angry that they are received in the house. This is the sum of the parable.

Now in the eleventh verse there is set down: (1) The occasion of the parable. (2) We have the suit of the forlorn son to his father. And (3) We have the father granting the suit of his forlorn son. (1) For the

occasion of the parable, "A certain man had two sons." (2) The suit of the forlorn son to his father. "And the younger said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me," as meikle as if he had said: "Father, I am tired of your company, and I would now have my own will, and therefore give me that that is due to me." Woe! to that sinner that gets that which falls [to] him and is his due, for that is hell!

And then we have the father yielding to his request: "And he divided to him his living." He yields to let the sinner fall upon his own weight, who will not be upholden by Him; that he may know what bottom he is on when he is not upon God. His father says to him, "If ye be tired of me and of my guiding, and will have your portion that falls [to] you, ye shall have your portion, and try what ye will do with your own strength, and with your own wit, and your own guiding;" and he divides his goods, and gives him his portion. And having done, he turns his back upon his father, and his father turns his back upon him, that he may see the odds between his father's house and the forlorn country he gaed to, having left it.

Now for the first:

"A certain man had two sons." You see that both thir sons are not of one kind. The one of them is a repenting forlorn son, and the other is a professing son within the house, and no more.

The doctrine then that rises from this is clear: that the Kirk of God is not a clean house here upon earth, but our Lord has in it the elect and reprobate, gold and dross, vessels of honour and vessels of dishonour. And there is a bed spoken of Luke 17:34: Two lying in a bed, the one is rejected and the other is chosen; two grinding at the mill, the one taken and the other shall be lost; two walking in the field, the one shall be taken and the other shall be lost. The Kirk hereaway is made up of thir two sorts of persons, elect and reprobate. The Kirk is the Lord's barn floor whereon there is both caff and corn. There are some in the Kirk that are believers and sons

indeed; others that are only bastards and servants. Two lying in one womb together and one of them chosen and loved, to wit, Jacob, and another of them hated and rejected, namely, Esau. "Before the children were born, or ever they could do good or ill, I loved Jacob, but I hated Esau." Two sons in a family together—and one of them the son of a handmaid who may not be the heir, Ishmael; and the other the son of the promise, Isaac. "In Isaac shall thy seed be called." Wherefore is it that the Lord compared His Kirk to a draw-net that is cast into the sea, and draws out of it all manner of fishes? All are not chosen who are in the family of the Kirk here; all are not one father's bairns. Indeed though they be in profession, all are not in the right way to heaven who profess to be walking to it. This speaks reproof to two sorts of persons.

And, first, to those who defile the house of God. Bearest thou up rowme in the house of God and walk not as it becomes the son of such a father, then the Lord He will soup you to the door. The servant abides not in the house, but the son abides therein. There is a day coming when there shall be a separation of those that are now within the visible Kirk here, when those who are indeed and truly sons, and those who are bastards shall sunder. The professor who counts that holiness enough to hear the word, and to take His sacrament as it comes about, they shall be put out of the house; but those who follow the practice and power of religion, who follow Christ in everything shall be kept in as sons, and shall be sons indeed for ever. Second, this speaks also against them who will have a clean Kirk hereaway, against them who separate from a Kirk because there are hypocrites within the same, who will have the visible Kirk here to be made up only of regenerate persons, and will join with no other Kirk to be members thereof. They will have a Kirk here that is all white paper. That is a man in the moon; that is not to be found here till we come to the triumphant Kirk in heaven. It shall indeed [yet] be made up of such only as are clean and white and pure. But the Kirk hereaway maun have sons and servants in it. The Kirk here must have good corn and popple, and the dike of God's providence must be going about both those. And so we are not to look that that barn

floor shall be free of caff and popple. Till the Judge come with His last fan in His hand, we are not to look for that here, to see a Kirk free of all errors. That is the Kirk that is spoken of Eph. 5:25, for which Christ gave Himself that He might sanctify and cleanse it by the washing of water and the word. But until we be landed in glory there will be within the walls of the visible Kirk, there will be heresies and errors in it, and sinful and wicked persons, there will be Judases in the Kirk whose God is their gain, there will be Diotrephezes in it who love the pre-eminence, and Hermogenes who deny the resurrection from the dead. There must be in the visible Kirk hereaway Scribes and Pharisees, who are heart enemies to the Son of God, and yet the Kirk is not to be separated from because of that.

Now the second part of the text is: The younger son his desire to his father. "And the younger son said, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth me." There are no tint words here, but every word is to good purpose.

Why is it that he gives him who leaves his father the style of the younger son? It is even to tell us this, that it is a trick of youth for any to leave Christ, that it is an ordinary thing for young ones to tire of God's company, and to long to be at their own tutoring. It lets us see this. I grant neither youth nor old age will bring folks to Christ till He Himself do it. Yet of all the glassy ways that can be wherein we are most ready to fall, that is youth. And the Word of God gives three reasons wherefore it is so.

First: Because those who are young they have no experience. They are like strangers who are new come to a country; they know not the fashions of the country. He knows not how to behave himself. He knows not the cross of Christ who is young and new begun, and therefore he starts at it. It is no marvel that our Lord make a question of this in Psalm 119:9, "Wherewith shall a young man cleanse his way?" Wherefore is it not said, "Wherewith shall a man, or an old man, cleanse his way?" but only telling us this, that it is a question,

and hard, for a young man to hold his feet and hear what God says to him.

A second reason is, the soul, while it is in the body, it works by organs, and while the organs are young the soul then it is light; while the lusting youth is strong, it is hard to serve God; while witlessness is bound unto the heart, as ordinarily it is in youth, and the affections are following the temper of the body, and it is strong and vigorous, it is a greater matter to see a man seeking God at such time than afterwards. For fra one begins once to settle himself, then ordinarily the Lord, in old age, He lets them see what they have been doing in their younger years, and they are humbled when they see it. And therefore David, a man according to God's heart, prays, "Lord, remember not the sins of my youth;" and Job says (13:26), because of the bitterness that was upon him, "Thou makest me to possess the sins of my youth."

A third reason of this is, there is no time of our age that is meet for God in itself, but the most unmeet time of all is the time of our youth, and yet the Lord lets us see herein that He will refuse none, of whatever age they be, who seek to Him—as young Joseph the Lord accepts of him, and young Daniel the Lord regards his seeking Him, and young David in Saul's court seeking the Lord He is found of him, and young king Josiah, they set themselves to obey the Lord's directions. And it tells us this far, that old age has no lawburrows against damnation more than youth, and temptation may prevail with the one sometimes as well as with the other. When young Joseph will not be tempted by lust, yet old wise Solomon is tempted and overcome thereby. David, when he was young, was not tempted to uncleanness, and yet, notwithstanding growing old and secure, he is tempted by Bathsheba: letting us see this far, that it is grace that holds us up that we fall not, and neither youth nor old age.

O! that young ones would start to in time to seek the Lord while they are young, that they would begin to make their acquaintance with the Lord and to drink in the knowledge of the Son of God, that they

would study to know the sweetness of His love, that they would set to to get their young hearts married on Christ! If they will do so once, give Him their love, and their hearts' love, it shall not be in their power to follow another lover again.

"Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth unto me." There [is] a trim style the prodigal child gives! He calls him "father," yet says he, "albeit thou be my father, let me be my own man."

That he gives this style unto Christ it teaches us this far, that there be many in the visible Church who pretend to have God for their Father, and yet would be away from Him; that there be many who say, "Lord, Lord," that shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Many, when they are upon an ill course, they will give God His own name, and profess that they are His sons, and yet for all that it is not so—as Herod, when he was upon the slaying of Christ; and Judas, who betrayed Christ with a kiss. And Absalom, when he is on that purpose to slay his own father, and so to usurp the kingdom, he says that he has a religious vow at Hebron, and he must go there to perform it, whereas he intended no such thing, albeit he pretended so. When Judas was to betray Christ, he gives Him a low back and kisses Him.

Let us learn, then, to know upon what ground it is that we give our Lord His own styles. Try what it is that makes us come to hear His word, and make a profession that we are His, for they are not all Christ's friends who give Him here a laigh good day, and fair words, and a white-like profession. Many shall say to Him, "Lord, Lord," that shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Many at the last day shall say that they wrought miracles in Christ's name, cast out devils, eat and drank at His table, and so professed, and did outwardly very much; and yet they shall get that answer from Christ, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." Let us, then, strive to be honest and sincere to our Master, and let us indeed be that for Christ which we profess ourselves to be, and if we do so, then the truth shall make us free. But if we have a fair face to Christ, but are not back friends also, but rather enemies

that way, better that we had never given our name to Christ to be His, than having once given our name to prove false to Him. There are many in the world that, while religion seems to be holy, and it is well spoken of to be religious, and religion has the Kirk stamp upon it, many are there will then follow religion and back it, will profess fair, and so follow the Lord that way, and will be as religious as any. But when times change, they change. To swear a covenant with Christ and to pretend to do for Him, and yet to be doing against it secretly! Woe! for ever is thy case who callest thyself a friend of Christ, callest thyself His son, and Him thy Father, and yet despisest His directions and art a friend to the house of bondage! Great are the woes that attend such. It is religion to be religious in secret as well as to be religious in public, to take Christ into your families. See what ye think of this—to take Christ for well and for woe, to resolve if there were no moe to back Christ but myself, yet I will avow Him. That is that proves any to be religious. A colour of religion will not please the Lord. It is but a scorning Him. Those who believe all that the Lord says of heaven or hell, and everything; that is honest-like. But for those who only put the fair cloak of religion about them to be seen so by the world, that will not carry you over death, but the Lord will discover you one day to your shame.

Now for the matter of this young man's prayer. It is, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth me. What ailed him at his father? Wise bairns think their father's house to be good company, especially if their father be a great man. What ailed this young man to weary of his father's company? Would ye trow that a natural conscience will see a fault in God, for God is the Father that is here meant? In Jer. 2:5 the Lord says: "What iniquity have your fathers found in Me, that they are gone far from Me, and have walked after vanity, and are become vain?" Was there ever a people that "found sin in God"? and yet the Lord says, "What wrong did I against them." There is such a complaint as this (Mic. 6:3): "O my people, what have I done unto thee? and wherein have I wearied thee? testify against Me." Who is there that leaves God but they find some fault in Him? All sinners who continue in sin they find something in God that makes them to

tire of Him. What gars the drunkard, the whoremonger, the idolater, covetous person, tire of God? Is it possible that any reasonable appetite can desire to be free of that which is infinitely good; if so be they saw no ill in Him, at least, apprehended ill in Him? What is this that sinners see in Christ, and what ails them at Him? What gart people call Him a Samaritan, and He the chosen of God and precious, and God Himself? Is it possible, think ye, that men can obtrude this upon a conscience that is led with reason that they should think good ill, and to esteem that which is infinitely good to be ill, that they should account that which is happiness and good itself to be ill? Yes! certainly there is never a sinner, who follows his own ways, but he has his something in God that he loves not.

There are some grounds and reasons for this, that a sinner, looking wrong upon God, sees something in Him that makes him tire of His company.

First: There is old nature in man. Like fool Adam, following his footsteps, that would be his own tutor, not trusting in God but in himself. And it is easy to prove that to be Adam's first sin, that he trusted not in God, and hearkened not what He said, but hearkened to that which his wife said, and the devil said to her; for if Adam had trusted in God he would not [have] believed what the devil spake. We all love this, to have a world of our own making. God awes them, and the cords that He lays on, they bind, and we do not bide that—to be bound by religion. We do not bear the Lord's bands, and therefore we would be quit of God and of His yoke. The law of the Lord awes the natural man so that he would fain be fra Him, and to quit Him and His law both.

A second reason: Sinners they see God and Christ afar off. They see Him not near hand. There is aye something between them and Christ when they see Him. And, you know, when anything is seen with any medium intervening, it cannot be well seen. Those who look to Christ through their gain or lust, they see Him not right, they see Him not to be all glorious as indeed He is.

A third reason that makes them not to see Christ right, but with faults in Him, is, because they and their lusts and their conscience are all sib together; and so all is seen wrong where the light whereby we see is wrong. Our conscience should control us in that which is wrong; but our lust and our conscience under corruption are like two thieves meeting together. Ilk one of them tempts another to steal. And so they agree together in that which is spoken Prov. 1:13: "We shall find all precious substance, we shall fill our houses with spoil." The blinded will and affections, they see always some fault in God, and ilk one of them helps another to sin. Like those two inclined to lust meeting together (Prov. 7), and saying: "Come, let us take our fill of love until the morning: let us solace ourselves with loves. For the goodman is not at home, he has taken a long journey;" and the other party is allured, and goeth straightway after her, as an ox goeth to the slaughter, not knowing that it is for his life. Just so is it here. The natural light it is led away by the affections, that great witch. And ilk one of them helping another to go wrong, never considering it is so till they be fanged in the net.

Again, as a fourth reason, consider the way how men are led on to sin. Who in the world will not say that God is happiness, and who will not acknowledge but Christ is better nor gain, or court, or the world, or pleasure? But when it comes to that, Is Christ better nor this gain? In the assumption there, the poor soul is led away, and the miserable will and affections they lead away the mind there, and ilk one of them bewitches another to sin. There is this meikle power into the soul as some kings have in some parts to call together and dissolve Parliaments by their royal prerogative. So the will it is king, and calls all together as it pleases, and dissolves them again when it sees meet. It were good for us if we could learn to compare God and eternity, and all things that are here under the sun together. But that is the misery, the will has that meikle power in us as to draw all away from comparative judging of things, and lets only the one part be judged, but not the other. It is blind light that leads on a sinner to commit sin. The drunkard, when he is led to drunkenness, he sees only the present pleasure; he sees not that time coming when he will

not get a drop of cold water to cool the tip of his tongue, and so cannot compare them rightly. Esau, in selling his birthright, he only saw the pottage, and found his present hunger. But he saw not that he was selling his birthright, which was to him a type of heaven.

O! but it concerns us very meikle to have rectified judgments, to have all things in us in their own right order, and minding heaven and the things that are above! There is a word spoken by the apostle, Rom. 8:5, which clears this point: "They that are of the flesh savour the things of the flesh; but they that are of the Spirit, they mind the things of the Spirit." Unrenewed men, there is nothing that smells well to them even in matters of religion; but what they see has honour, gain, lust, ease following upon it. But those who are spiritual, they will smell Christ another way; they will see in Him forgiveness of sins to be gotten, and that they shall be reckoned freemen of the Lord in that day when heaven and earth go together, and the earth shall all be burned in a fair low. O! that will draw them to seek after Christ. But woe! to them who find fault with God and with Christ, and see something in Him that makes them to tire of Him.

But is there any who finds fault with God? Yes. Any who find fault with His ordinances and laws, they find fault with Himself. They who hear that He commands such a thing to be done or forbids such a thing, and will not obey the same, they indeed find a fault in Him. O! for the light of heaven to let us see where-away we are going! And to this light, to Christ's Father and our Father, to Himself and the Holy Spirit, we ascribe all glory, praise, honour for ever and ever.—Amen.

The Forlorn Son seeks away from His Father

"And he said, A certain man had two sons: and the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living. And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living."—LUKE 15:11–13.

IT is a wonder, beloved in the Lord, to see a sinner tire of God and weary of His company. There is no ill in God nor anything that is worthy hatred. John says, "God is love;" and all things in God they are love also. Yet an ill eye sees colours wrong, and the sinner sees something in God which is not in Him. In Jer. 2:5, the Lord there complains by His prophet: "What iniquity have your fathers found in Me, that they have gone far from Me?" What sin or what ill can a sinner see in God? And yet if they saw no ill in Him, impossible that they would leave Him, impossible it is that the reasonable appetite can flee from anything but that wherein it sees the notion of ill. But to see any ill in God, it is ill seen when all is done; for He is the excellency of all the creatures. We have [need] therefore for us to pray to the Lord that our judgment and our light may be rectified, that so we make not a prayer to God to be away from Him, as this young fool did. There is none that leaves God who sees things rightly. All that look so upon other things as to embrace them and leave God, they have a wrong and unsound judgment. Esau looked not well, and compared not between his birthright and the mess of pottage that he sold his birthright for. He looked not to the end of it. The drunkard, he looks not well upon his lawless lust and desire after drink, and the anger of God that is hot as fire; and the dishonourer of God's name compares not his present satisfaction and the roasting his tongue in hell for ever and ever. Sinners see something in sin that none can see but themselves. But it is but the first sight they get; in the second sight it is like Eve's sight, to see the Godhead growing upon a tree!—

if she would eat, and sin against God, she should be like God in knowing good and ill. So do we fools. We think if we will commit such a sin we will be happy. But it is but a mistake. We are beguiled in the end, and this is the case of many who go away from God.

But learn to keep your judgment and understanding clear, learn to know God and to know the creature, to compare them rightly together; learn to know the vanity of sin and the excellence of God, and then ye cannot go wrong. The soul that sees Christ, and considers what is in Him, it must love Him. And there is none out of love with Christ but such as see Him not.

Ye heard the substance of the young man's prayer, "Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth me." Never a word that "he seeks of his father that he would bless him, or that he seeks his father's favour and goodwill to the purpose that he is upon;" but "give him the portion of goods that falleth him." The meaning is, "Give me my own will to follow my own way with something of this life," and there is the sinner's heart-wish morning and evening. All that the sinner seeks here is something divided from God, that he may get some created perishing thing out of his Father's hand. That is all that a sinner can seek who is left and forsaken of God, either the world, or the glory thereof, or the pleasure, or ease, or gain thereof, or something to satisfy the lawless desire of his heart and lusts. That is all the divinity the natural man has.

In a word, it is only this life that the natural man seeks, even that which our Lord reproveth, John 6:26: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek Me not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves and were filled," and tells them what to seek, and what not to seek: "Labour not for that meat which perisheth, but for that which endureth to life everlasting which the Son of man shall give unto you." That is only reason from our misted judgments that see not things rightly, and from this that the sinner would always be at something that he trows to be heaven and happiness, when indeed it is not so, for there is nothing in the creature can do so.

But is there nothing at all in the creature that is good or can make a man good and happy? Yes. All the creatures of God in their own kind they are good. But when we make any of the creatures an idol, and make them a god, when we trust in the creature and place our heaven and happiness in them, then all the creatures are nothing else but vanity and vexation of spirit. When we do so then there is nothing good at all that is under the sun. When the creature is any ways divided from God, then it is not good. Whatever thou would rest upon without God or beside Him, that is ill. The creature as a creature is good; but the creature as an idol and a god is ill.

May we not, then, seek after the creature? Yes. But if thou seek it right it must be sought in God, the Creator. Seek ourselves in God, and we shall certainly find ourselves there. Seek yourselves, and seek the creature for God, and then ye shall find both God and the creature and yourselves. But if ye seek God out of God, and seek the creature out of God, then thou art seeking fire under you. And all natural men they are thus seeking fire under them. They seek their good things out of God, and so never get satisfaction to the soul. They seek a good thing that is like themselves. As it is in Psa. 4:6: "Many say, Who will show us any good thing?" That is a well-fard prayer to say, "Who will show us any good thing?" But the next verse tells us what the natural man's good things are, to have his corn, wine, and oil to abound. Their thought is how their house may be built up, and yet they may leave enough to their children behind them, as it is Psa. 49:11. And when they have gotten that their hearts are after, they are no a whit the more happy, but rather further from happiness than before.

Again, third, How comes this that men desire to be away from God, and that they are set to seek something without God to place their happiness in, when they may be persuaded they will not get the thing that they would be at?

The answer is, Ignorance can never make a right comparison of things whereof it is ignorant. He that never saw Spain cannot

compare Spain and Scotland together. If one know not both the members of the comparison they cannot compare. The natural man he knows something of the creature, of lust, of gain, of reputation in the world, and court, &c., but he knows nothing of God; and therefore it is impossible that ever a natural man can make a right comparison between the Creator and the creature. And so the natural man is aye wrong in his comparing.

The natural man makes a comparison as bairns do sitting about their father's fireside, thinking there is not a fairer town in the world nor they are in; for they never saw Rome. That is the best that ever they saw. They think there is no more pleasant garden or fields than where they live, because they never saw better, and so conclude there can be no better. All natural folks, they have bairns' wits in this point; for they know something of this present world, but they know nothing of God, and therefore they make the comparison as they do. I grant, indeed, this world is a fair apple, and is good to have, it being rightly used; but alas! that we should be such fools as to prefer the world or anything in it to God! Alas! where is the wit of the Scribe and the scholar, when they go to seek their happiness in the creature, or anything beside God! When we do so it is even as we would go to mend an egg-shell or a lame vessel. For any to go build themselves up in a couth of this world that time will take away, what folly is it! That night that the Lord shall take thy soul from you, and that good thing that thou sought beside the Lord, it shall take its leave of you, and thou of it. Thou shalt be forced to say then, "Oh, I made an ill comparison, for I looked not well upon things as they were, indeed, but with my blinded eyes." They see the creature and the Creator rightly who see anything in the creature to be dry and lifeless without God himself be to be found there.

"And his father divided unto them his living." Why should his father [have] done this, given him such a suit.

The doctrine it is this: They that love an ill end and have a wrong eye toward the creature that they must have, there is a Providence

individually disposing that means shall be furnished to such for attaining their ill end, and for gaining their unlawful conquests. They that have an ill end before them and their intentions are poisoned in looking unto the last end beside God, the Lord in His providence disposes so that such shall be blinded, and means shall be furnished unto such to lead them on into the blind way they have set before them. There are some spoken of by the apostle (2 Thess. 2:11) that are pleased in unrighteousness, because they received not the love of the truth, that they might walk therein, and therefore "God shall send them strong delusion that they should believe a lie, that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness." God sends means unto such proportionable unto their wicked end, and that they may accomplish the same.

Eve she fell in love with those words, "Ye shall be as Gods knowing good and ill;" and because she fell in love with them, and had that wrong end before her, therefore the Lord left her, and then she gaed on in a course of defection as a boul goes down a brae without stay, till she brought ruin upon herself, and all her posterity. Fra Ahab was once set for Naboth's vineyard that he would die if he gat it not, the Lord finds out a way for that; and Jezebel, that wicked instrument, she is employed to hatch that plot, and promises to get him the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite. And the Lord disposes of matters so that he shall get it. Scribes and Pharisees they were thrifty for the blood of Christ, and the Lord's providence lets them see a way how they may be satisfied. A man comes to them and says: "What will ye give me and I will betray him unto you," and he and they make a market. They promise him threttie pieces of silver to betray the Lord of glory, and he receives them, and from that time he sought the opportunity to betray Him. The man that made profit and gain his end in following Christ, the Lord gives him an office like unto Himself. He is made Christ's purse master, and then at last he makes a market of Christ for his gain. It is said of some (Mic. 2:2) they coveted a field, and the Lord answered them in means to fulfil their coveting desire. They "take it away by violence;" if they get their end

they care not by what means they come to it, and the Lord answers them in means according to the end. Now, there are two reasons wherefore the Lord does this especially.

First: It is an ordinary gate in God to punish sin by sin. If thou wilt be at a wrong end, then the Lord will let you go out of His hand, and thou shalt find wrong ways to follow that end. If thou would be at the world God says, "Take it to you, and thou shalt get means cast in thy way for acquiring the same;" to teach us to beware of unlawful desires to be away from God, and after any other thing, and to beware of our lawless and idolatrous desires.

A second reason for this: The making the creature your end is idolatry, and the highest degree of idolatry, because the Lord He is the first author of all things and of our happiness. And if anything be made the first author except God that is idolatry. And ye make that to be your God, whether it be a king, or court, or pleasure, or profit, that is idolatry. And Romans 1:21 says that the Lord punishes that by other sinful sins: "Because when they knew God they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness." And verse 28 says, "And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, and to do those things which were not convenient." The Lord gave them over to that plague that they cannot repent, but follow after sin greedily. And therefore let us beware of such desires as we set upon the creature without warrant or beside the Lord, for fear the Lord say to you, "Thou shalt get it, and an ill end with it."

Now, secondly, that his father gave unto him the portion of goods that fell to him. Wherefore does God answer an ill desire to any? This is a question that flesh and blood are inclined to make. Wherefore should the Lord so easily [have] given this forlorn child his will, and not told him the ill of the course he was taking himself to; and that he was in a happy case presently if he would make good use of it? But his father gave him his portion, and he is content. He fell on his own

weight, and that he may try whether it be better to be with him in his house or to feed upon the swine's husks of sin, and cannot find them, it may be, when he would have them.

The doctrine arising from this is, that it is not against the wisdom of God or the goodness of Christ to permit sinners to fall in [to] sin. It is not against the goodness of the Creator to permit Adam to fall, albeit at first he was made according to the image of God perfectly holy and happy. Natural wit and reason and the enemies of God's grace, they will not suffer any permission of sin to be in God because sin comes from our will, and make all the cause of sin to come only from our nature and will; and when we have willed such a thing, then the Lord joins His concurrence to the committing thereof. This is indeed a devised justice in God, for this would prove the first sin to be before ever the first sin was committed. For why should the Lord [have] permitted Adam's will to look wrong, seeing He might [have] hindered the same? But we must go higher to see the cause why the Lord permits sin to be. He does it because it is the good pleasure of His will. It is the objection of that old heretic Marcion to say that the Lord envied man's estate and so permitted him to fall, or that He knew not of it, or that He was negligent and so permitted his fall.

Consider three things in God, and ye will then get the cause of this wherefore the Lord permits sin and permitted Adam to fall. The Lord has the nature of the creature to plead for him in this, a creature having free-will is unstable, and the Lord will make that to plead for him in this point. And they have well said who disputed this point, "Whether or not the creature could be created that it could not sin, that a creature shall be created unmovable and completely happy that way." That cannot be to create a creature after such a manner. Indeed, I grant the Lord may change the second act and so may hinder the creature to sin. But there is no reasonable creature but there is a power in it to fall, if God take away His hand from upholding him. Why, then, will some object, should the Lord make man such a creature to be under a possibility of sinning? That is even

as to speir wherefore did the potter make all the vessels of clay that they may be broken, and not that they cannot be broken?

The Lord at the beginning made man a creature, and a reasonable creature, and a reasonable creature endowed with free-will, and so had in him a possibility to stand or to fall, and it became the Lord very well to let him try his own strength, seeing He had given him free-will to stand or fall; and that is the second reason wherefore the Lord permitteth sin—even to let him know there is a great difference between his own will and the grace of the Mediator. And therefore it is that the Lord suffers men, and suffers His own children to fall in sin, that they may know that in themselves they are but frail creatures when God leaves them to themselves; that we may learn to put a difference between that which is ours concredited to us of God, and that which is of free grace; that we may see when our will and the creature is left unto itself, that it is but a creature.

A third reason wherefore the Lord permits sin is because He made all things for Himself, and He has decreed that all He has made should be for two proposed ends to Himself—to wit, the glory of His justice, and the glory of His mercy. And fra the Lord has "made all things for Himself, even the wicked for the ill day" (Prov. 16:4), why but the Lord may make man with a possibility to sin, and to fall, even for that end that we may see what it is to be holden in God's hand, and not to be left unto ourselves; that we may tremble and stand in awe to sin against God, and provoke Him to forsake us; that we may always put up the prayer unto the Lord, "Lord, lead us not into temptation;" and that all may know if the Lord leave them there is no sin but they would be ready to fall in it if occasion offer, even the sin of Judas, to betray the Lord of glory. Being left and forsaken of the Lord, thou wilt be ready to fall in that unnatural sin of murdering thy own brother, as Cain did.

And therefore this serves to teach all of us this lesson, to count meikle of grace, for God has our heaven and our hell in His hand this way as He is pleased to hold or to let go. Thou standest by grace, and

therefore take heed and beware [not] to provoke the Lord by sinning against Him who may loose His fingers from upholding you, and He doing so thou wilt not miss to fall.

Now the text says: "Not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey to a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living."

The doctrine is clear, and it is this: As soon as God leaves us, then there is no longer standing for us; as soon as [He] gives a sinner leave to sin, he must then sin necessarily. When his father had given him his portion, not many days after he took his journey to a far country, and spent all there with riotous living. When he is away he proved the man he was, for he was no more but a man, a perverse son, that could stand no longer for he was made his own tutor, and left his father's guiding. There is no longer standing for once God takes away His hand—especially, for a sinner.

There are three things that bring a necessity of a fall upon such—I mean upon such an one as stands with liberty having guiltiness with his liberty.

First: There is something in us that brings on a necessity of this falling. A misted understanding, aye, looking wrong. If there were no devil to tempt us to sin, there is in us a will going aye downward to tempt us to wickedness. Christ tells us what it is that destroys a man, Matt. 15:19: "Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. These are the things which defile a man." The devil has little ado to make us fall in sin. He needs neither bring fire nor timber to kindle up that fire, for there is enough of that within us; and the devil's tempting to sin is nothing else but to bring [the person and the sin] together, to present an object to the understanding, the will, and the affections. And if that once be, and the Lord go away and desert, then the sinner cannot stand, because his props whereby he stood are tane away; so the rotten house must down.

A second reason of this is: The thing that is most natural unto us now since the fall of Adam, is to sin. It is natural to us. And ye know there [is] no need to tempt the fire to burn timber. It is natural to it. And a stone being lift [ed] up, and loosed from any grip, there [is] no need to tempt it to go down; it must do it, because it is the nature thereof so to do. Our nature inclines to sin. The Word of God has said this of us, Eph. 2:3. Our nature has an inclination toward sin as a stone has to go downwards. There [is] a man inclined to wickedness and to sin, and therefore when the Lord lays the bridle on his neck, and upholds not nature by his strength, he must fall. And then—

Thirdly: What is it that holds all the sons of Adam in that estate they are in now? There is an upholding power in God, which, if he had, he could not fall. God made them according to His own image, for He had habitual grace that He might have stood in the state of innocency. But the Lord took his actual working from him, and therefore he behoved to fall. And since it was so with Adam in the state of innocence, far more must it be with us, if God take away His upholding power, and leave us to the guiding of our own will, down must we go. If He take away the working in us to will and to do of His good pleasure, we can do nothing but that which is ill. And the question is here between us and the enemies of the Lord's grace. Whether man's will or the grace of God be strongest; or, if the creature can stand when the Lord takes away His grace, or, if he must fall, He taking away His efficacious grace? This text says it must be so. And this also answers another false position of those who are enemies of the Lord's grace. They say when the Lord has permitted the creature to sin, it is in the power of the creature to sin or not, to sin as well as before the permission came. No. There is a place in Isa. 57:17, that says the contrary: "For the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth, and smote him. I hid me and was wroth, he went on frowardly in the way of his heart," and if that be a judicial hiding, all the world will not answer it. In Psa. 81:12, it is said, "The Lord gave the people at that time to their lust," and what followed upon that? "They walked in the way of their own heart." If the Lord once loose His hand from Adam, then Adam must fall. If the Lord but permit

Pharaoh to keep the people of Israel in bondage, leave it to his free will to let them go or not go, then Pharaoh's heart is hardened, and he will not let them go.

The use of this point is, first, to condemn those who say they can keep a moderation in sinning, who think they will only take this meikle of sin, and no more, even like the fool who says, "A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep," and he is aye the more ready for a new slumber. One will say I will do this little sin, but I will do no more; I will take this meikle ill conquersh, but no more. I will give it over when I have gotten that. I will only permit this looseness of my thoughts, but I will go no further on in sin. But remember that it is not in thy power to hold thy feet when the Lord looses His grip of you; and therefore hold fast thy grip of the Lord, and pray to Him to hold His grip fast of you, and that the Lord would not lead you into temptation. Thou knowest not when thy fire and the devil's timber are cast together, how soon they will make up a blaze; and therefore the hand of the Lord's grace is needful to be employed for upholding us; and, above all things, we would employ the Mediator, Christ, and be thankful to Him, who has made the estate of His ransomed ones in Himself so sure and immovable.

Can we give thanks great enough to free grace, and to the Mediator, Jesus, who keeps us that we fall not into the sin of Sodom, in Judas' sin, or Cain's sin? Make meikle then of this grace of God, and employ it frequently. Well is the heart that has gotten that grace to depend only upon the Lord, to father thy standing upon Christ only, and so to put thy trust in Him. This was Peter's fault that he lipped not his standing only to Christ's strength, and it moved the Lord to let him know something of his own strength. For out of a conceit of himself he said, "Master, though all should forsake, yet will not I forsake Thee." But stay till death be presented before him, and he sees his Master bound and ill-used by men, and he be in fear of his life, and till his blood grow cold (for he spake that in hot blood). When it comes to that, he is made to see that man is nothing but man, and when God leaves him, he will prove but a brickle reed that will fall

with the least opposition. Well to them who are upholden by the hand of the Lord, and are not lippingen to their own strength. Made meikle of Christ and of His free grace, and employ Him and His strength as ye would be kept safe to the second coming of our Lord. To this Lord, who is able to keep us and to present us blameless to His Father at His coming; to Christ Himself, to His Father and our Father, and the Spirit of grace, be all praise, and dominion, and glory for ever.—Amen.

The Forlorn Son—the Grounds why he came Home, and his Prayer

"And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him. And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants."—LUKE 15:14–19.

BECAUSE, beloved in the Lord, to believe that we have such a father as honours us to be His sons, and [because] if the state of adoption and of the adopted children of God were well known, it would be more thought of nor by the most part it is, we would think more upon it than we do. It is no small matter of a bastard of hell to be made a heir and a son of heaven; of one who has no claim to Christ to be made one who has free right to Him. And if it be not so, it is our own fault, for our Lord excludes none from Him who are within the visible Kirk. His offer of mercy and reconciliation is so broad and large, that they are in a woful and miserable case, who live in a land,

or country, or congregation, or city, where Christ shines in the gospel, and yet they are not the better of Him. What a condemnation will it be that when the parable of the lost and forlorn son is preached to a lost world and a lost people, his going away and his returning again, and his father's receiving him, and yet they will not return!

Consider what is in God, and what is in the creature; and this is indeed the main lesson that we should set to to learn, to know our Creator, and what is in Him, that He has made all things and all things subsist by Him. And then, upon the other hand, to know sin and misery, to know ourselves, to know the bentness of our wicked hearts unto sin, [hearts] which run away from the Lord days without number. And if so be that we could rightly acquaint ourselves with these, then we would be made to acknowledge our own wanderings, and we would be made to come unto a liking of God; if we could win to that, all were done that should be done. And then our preaching, and praying, and praising, and reading, and conference, exhortation, &c., would have a blessed effect with it, and we would still be seeking to know more till we came to the enjoying of the Lord Himself. And when thou hast gotten Christ Himself, and thou art in Him, O then, sinner, thou art at home; but never till then.

Now we have to consider: (1) upon what ground it is that the forlorn son came home; (2) what is his prayer when he comes to his father.

Now, for the ground whereupon he is stirred up to come home. It is clear enough in the words going before. He is in want, and at the point of tyning for hunger. He thought himself to be in a miserable estate, and that made him to take up a new resolution, and then when he comes home, he seeks not to be in the rowme that he should be in, that his father would make him a son in the house, but that he would make him as one of his hired servants. The motive that the Lord used to bring home this forlorn son is his want and his affliction, as we read in Hos. 5:15: "I will go and return unto My place till they acknowledge their offence and seek My face; in their

affliction they will seek Me early." That is one of the Lord's ordinary means of wooing His own children. He woos them in the furnace of affliction when they may neither fend nor fee as it were. Even when it is with him as it was with Manasseh, 2 Chron. 33:11, 12: "The Lord brought upon them the captains of the host of the king of Assyria, which took Manasseh among the thorns, and bound him in fetters, and carried him to Babylon. And when he was in affliction, he besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly." He and the people sinned against the Lord, and therefore the Lord sent enemies against them, and he is taken and carried away captive to Babylon. And when he was so fettered there that he could not win away, then, in his affliction, he humbled himself, and sought the Lord. Deut. 30:1-3: "And it shall come to pass, when all these things are come upon thee, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before thee, and thou shalt call them to mind among all the nations, whither the Lord thy God hath driven thee, and shalt return unto the Lord thy God, and shalt obey His voice according to all that I command thee this day, with all thine heart, and with all thy soul; then the Lord thy God will turn thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee, and will return and gather thee from all nations, whither the Lord thy God hath scattered thee." Hos. 2:14, 15: "Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her. And I will give her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope;" that is, in the midst of great affliction I will speak unto her heart, and that ordinarily is the time when the Lord uses to do so. And there is a reason given for this, Prov. 29:15: "The rod and reproof," says the Spirit of God there, "give wisdom." If ever men do well at all, they will do well when the hand of God is upon them. Those that are not humbled by the Lord's visitations, what will humble them? It is true the Word of God uses this form of speaking, that "His word humbles" the heart; and sometimes it will do so. But such is the crookedness of our nature, that the most part they are not brought in to the Lord till the iron sinews that are in their neck be broken, and [He] souple our stiff-neckedness.

Use. In all our afflictions let us speer home to our Lord and husband, and say with the prophet: "It was better with me when I was under his guiding nor ever it has been since." Let us strive to make that use of all the Lord's visitations, to acknowledge that it is God's messenger seeking you to turn home to Him again, because thou hast been a runaway. But do all that the Lord strikes, turn to Him by the straiques that come upon them? No, certainly; there are many that fall further away from the Lord after they have been stricken. The Lord says of His people, Isa. 1:5: "Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more." That is one of the ills that lie upon our nature, that many, when the hand of God lights on them to strike, it strikes them dead, and they wot not what He either says or does, but they are further from God nor before, and when it is so, the Lord will tire of visiting such, and will seek them no more.

A second ill that comes of visitations to some is: Holiness in seeking God in the day of their visitation; and yet it is not holiness from the heart, but only from the teeth, forward. And therefore all the holiness and humiliation that we have under a cross, it should be well examined, because there are many while the hand of the Lord is upon them any way, they carry themselves humble like, and hing their head as a bulrush; they will speak words humbly to God, and yet for all that they have but a lying heart; for their purpose in seeking the Lord and in humbling, is only that they may get the cross removed. We should beware with that, for it will beguile us when the cross is away.

How many are there in the world who will say in their sickness, "If the Lord will restore them again to their health, they shall be sure not to be the old man." They will vow to forsake their ill ways, and to take up a new course of life, an they are delivered from their disease, and yet afterwards they become as wicked and profane as ever they were before; and some worse. The ground of this comes from a false heart that gives God fair words while they are under His hand, and yet as soon as the rod is removed they, Pharaoh-like, harden their heart, and turn to their old bias again. And so blinded are they, who thus

seem to turn to God when His hand is on them, that when it is off they turn away again.

And there is a third sort also in whom God wastes many crosses, and they are nothing the better; but they remain as proud as ever they were. Such are iron that no fire will soften, such as will neither wash nor wring; for all the pains can be taken, they will neither bow nor break. The Lord loses all the pains He wares upon such. The dross is not taken from them for all that the Lord does to them. Albeit He cast them into the furnace, they remain still as they were at the first.

And then, lastly, there are some who take a wrong course under their affliction to be rid of it. They take not such a course as this son does to come home to his father that he may help him, but they use indirect and sinful means to win out of the fang thereof. And such are in all their crosses like a stranger going to ride a water, he takes the wrong ford, and falls in a weel, and drowns there. The right gate under any cross, if it be of taking anything from you, is, with Job, to say, "The Lord has given, the Lord has taken. Blessed be the name of the Lord."

The right way to win through the furd of that water and be safe, is to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God, and He will lift us up, to see the world's vanity and the sovereignty of the Lord, the Creator, to consider that man is but flesh, but God is a Spirit, and if His straike be so heavy even in this life, O! what must the pains and torments that He inflicts on soul and body in hell be? If it be so great a pain to be four and twenty hours pained under the disease of gout or gravel, O! what torment must it be to be tormented in hell both in soul and body for ever in hell both night and day, no rest there; and to have that to close all with, never to be delivered out of that pain and torment. If we were wise we might learn meikle of God in our crosses, if we would come to Himself by them and acknowledge that it is our Father that strikes us, and not an enemy, halflings against His will, remembering always that He "delights not in the death of a sinner;" that He is not shooting them away whom He strikes, but, by

the contrary, makes them welcome who come to Him, and to consider, as it is, Lam. 3:33, that He punishes or afflicts not willingly.

The first part of this forlorn son's prayer is: "Make me as one of thy hired servants."

Look now where a converted sinner desires to sit. God needs to put him no lower than he puts himself. That is the vantage of humiliation where it comes truly. It lays him upon the ground, the Lord working with this visitation to let him see himself. He acknowledges that he is the most unworthy in all his father's house, acknowledges that he is unworthy of his father's company or of his presence; acknowledges it is much more than he deserves if he be handled by his father as a servant, let be to be used as a son. Always this is a mark of a converted sinner when he is brought to think little of himself. As soon as the Lord began to show Himself to Peter, he became humble in his own eyes, and says: "Lord, depart from me, for I am a sinful man." The centurion's word to Christ: "It is a shame to see such a Lord under my roof who am so unworthy. Lord, I am not worthy that Thou shouldest come under my roof; but speak the word only, and my servant shall be whole." A truly converted sinner knows not how laigh to set himself. If there were a pain and torment greater nor the pain and torment of hell, he would acknowledge it to be his deserving, and that it is procured by him at the Lord's hands. How great a word speaks the Apostle of himself, Eph. 3:8: "To me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ." When he considers that God had made him an apostle and a preacher of the gospel, and applies that to himself. "To me who am less than the least of all saints," &c.: great Paul that calls himself little, and not only so but less, not only less than apostles, but less than saints, than any who are begun to be sanctified, ay, less than all saints, and less than the least of all saints. O! how low is that soul that sees itself well who has gotten a sight of its own vileness and so of its deserving.

Let us learn, then, to know that this is a mark of such as are in love with Christ. They think less of themselves than they can do of any other. Pride is not a mark of the children of God. There is a staff of pride in every one of us by nature as the Prophet Ezekiel speaks. And whoever they be who will be higher nor God will have them (as there be many in the world), they are far from the strain this son is at. Humiliation: O! but it be a great grace, and pride is a sin of great parents, but it is a miserable ill. Pride was born in heaven, and it fell out of heaven; but it could never win there sinsyne. The Lord "resists the proud, but He gives grace to the humble." The Lord says of him who is proud that He is his enemy. Woe! to that man whom God knows far off as an enemy.

And therefore learn this lesson to strike sail to Christ, and, for that effect, to know what sinful dust and ashes are. Consider if the Lord would turn thy outside out thou would be forced to say: "I am no more worthy to be called Thy son, make me as one of Thy hired servants," and acknowledge this of thyself.

Was this a good petition of his? Every way. See upon what ground he says this: "I have sinned against heaven and before Thee." And upon that he brings in that conclusion.

It is a great matter if our humiliation be not a hindrance both to faith and prayer. Because thou hast sinned against heaven and earth, should thou therefore conclude, that thou wilt not seek to be one of God's sons, nor to be one of the children of God. Many times we are so low in our own eyes, that we pray to the Lord for that which we deserve, but not for that which we desire. But let us acknowledge our wrong in this, and seek as meikle from the Lord as we would be at, and not which we desire. He declines indeed to be esteemed a servant, or to be thought the basest of the servants, and yet he dare not seek to be in the room of a son. But when ye pray to the Lord this way seek for that which it becomes Him to give, and not for that it becomes your baseness and guiltiness to receive. Know to whom it is

that ye are speaking. Ye are speaking to one who can make a son of a slave of hell, as well and as easily, as He can make a servant of him.

It is a great matter to be humbled, and yet to believe, both at one time. Ofttimes the one of these hinders the other, as Peter being humbled in his own eyes, says: "Lord, depart from me, for I am a sinful man." It had not been telling him that the Lord had gone from him according to his prayer. But being humbled, follow not his example in this, but pray rather: "Lord, let me stay with Thee, for I am a sinful man," for no company is so good for him that has that disease as to be with Him who is the physician. And that woman who had the bloody issue being thus humbled in her own eyes, she seeks only to touch the hem of His garment. Had it been a sin for her to have sought to kiss His feet or His face? No, certainly. But her humble faith thought it very meikleif she should get leave to come that near such a Lord as to touch the hem of His garment. But the humbled soul may come nearer Christ nor she. It will be welcome to come nearer even to kiss His sweet mouth; for the best chair in heaven is prepared for such as are humble. O, what our Lord esteemed of that woman, who esteemed herself but a dog, and was content to feed with the dogs upon the crumbs that fell from the children's table! He says of her, "I have not found such faith, no, not in Israel."

A humble faith it is certainly, a high and a great faith, and a soul that thinks little of itself, O! what the Lord thinks of it. And therefore let us not be [led] that way to measure God's goodness by our wickedness. That is a false compass to measure our Lord with. Whatever thou be, wert thou never so sinful and wicked, yet the Lord is the Lord. That woman that is spoken of, Luke 7:38, who did wash Christ's feet with her tears, and wipe them with the hairs of her head, she would [have] been welcome to come hither to embrace Him, and kiss His mouth. Ay, the more humble thou art, so much nearer art thou to thy Lord. Once learn this lesson, to think little of thyself; and when it comes to that, thou art within sight of Christ. When thou art humble, thou art within Christ's breath, and it shall blow upon you.

Go not over far away from the Lord in thy humility. Learn to seek more of Him nor thy deserving dytes thee to seek. It is an ill-dyted prayer that is dyted according to our deservings. But let us learn to dyte our prayers according to the Lord's mercy, and the riches of His free grace. To seek a drop of grace at the Lord's hands, because it is no more that we deserve? No, we deserve not that; and therefore seek a sea of grace from the Lord. Albeit, according to our deservings, it sets us to get little. Yet it sets Him well to give meikle.

Seek no less than Christ Himself, and heaven, and the remission of sins, joy of the Holy Ghost, peace of conscience, &c. Seek that which is given only to the sons of God and the heirs of heaven, and be not satisfied with that which is given to servants. Ay, the greedier thy prayers be, thou art the more welcome to the Lord, for He cannot endure pinched, narrow prayers. He is not content that thou should seek less than He minds to give, and is willing to give you. He is not like that king who said, "Ask of me what thou wilt unto the half of my kingdom, and I will give it unto you." Seek no half a kingdom of the Lord, but seek a whole kingdom. And therefore learn this lesson: Not to make your prayers over narrow, but seek great things from the Lord contrary to that which Jeremiah (chap. 45:5) says to his servant Baruch; seek great things, even the greatest things that are in the Lord's coffers, for He is as able to give heaven as He is to give an acre of land or a drink of water. He is as able to give glory as He is to give grace. He is able to give the Spirit which He promises, by the prophet Joel 2:28, to pour out, the spirit of prophecy that your young men shall see visions and your old men shall dream dreams. Be not narrow in seeking from the Lord, to seek over little of Him. We are oftentimes too straitened in seeking from the Lord. The Lord is not troubled night and day with our prayers in seeking great things. And because we seek but little of the Lord therefore it is that many times we receive but little at His hands. But learn continually to seek more and more from the Lord, and tempt the Lord's liberality, as it were, in asking great things of Him, and then thou shalt get thy desire. And wite thyself if thou receive little at His hands, for it is only because thou art narrow in thy seeking.

Now, howbeit he put himself out of his own room, yet still he keeps God into his room, for he calls Him "Father." That is good and right humiliation indeed, that holds the Lord always where He should be, as ye may see Dan. 9:8–9, Daniel confesses, "To us belong confusion of face as at this day, to our kings, our princes, and our fathers. But to the Lord our God belong mercies and forgiveness, though we have rebelled against Him." That is right work. Let the Lord always be righteous and glorious, albeit shame and confusion should be written in great letters upon our faces. Let the Lord always be high and magnified, and all others put low that He may be high, as the Kirk acknowledges, Isa. 63:16, "Doubtless thou art our Father though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not. Thou, O Lord, art our Father, our Redeemer; Thy name is from everlasting." Albeit we be named apostates, and are not worthy to be called the sons of Abraham; yet Thou art worthy to be called our Father, for Thy name is called upon by us. So it is said also Jer. 14:7–9, "O Lord, though our iniquities testify against us, do Thou it for Thy name's sake: for our backslidings are many; we have sinned against Thee, for they put themselves very low," and then in the eighth verse, they say, "O the hope of Israel, the Saviour thereof in the time of trouble, why shouldest Thou be as a stranger in the land?" Their God is made the hope of Israel and the Saviour thereof in time of trouble. But for themselves they acknowledge, "Our backslidings are many, and we have sinned against Thee." This is the way that the Lord would have His children to carry themselves, always to put God in His room, to make Him a Father, albeit I should be no son.

Now, is not this contradiction? If one call Him a Father to him, then he must be a son? Yes, it is true. But happy they who can set God on high, and can set themselves low, that He may be high. Happy they who can give the Lord that which is His due, if it were with the loss of all that they have in the world. Ware upon God and give out for Him, albeit it were to tyne all that thou hast in the world, and thou shalt be no tyner when all is done. Thy husband, albeit he were dead in another country, yet let this content you that it is God who has done it, and acknowledge He is worthy of all that thou hast if it were

meikle more. And this is the reasoning of a humbled soul, to exalt God as high as heaven; and if thou could get Him far up above the heavens to set Him there, and thou thyself to sit as low as hell.

This must answer a doubt that many of the children of God have, and it is this, say they: "Whatever God be in Himself, yet I wot not if I have any claim to Him to call Him my Lord and my Father. If ye have no better reason for that, "that ye wot not if He be your Lord or your Father," but that because ye are sinful, then it is but the forlorn son's logic, and it holds not in all. But rather say this: "If I were a slave of the devil, a child of wrath and perdition, yet I know He is in heaven and is a Father, and I will look unto Him as to a Father, notwithstanding of all my transgressions, for this is a part of His glory to make them welcome, and to forgive them their iniquities and transgressions who have run away and misspent all, played the harlot with many lovers, when they return unto Him again. It is not possible that our narrow thoughts can comprehend this Lord. And this indeed is the very ground of our sinning, because we measure our Lord by ourselves. Because thou hast a false heart therefore thou thinkest so of the Lord also. Because we are varying and changeable, we expone our Lord to be of that same kind. Because we cannot forgive great wrongs that are done against us, therefore we expone so of Him also. Never any shall have a solid and constant faith who look not over themselves and over their deservings to God, who considers not whatever our provocations and undeservings be, yet He is near unto all those who seek unto Him in truth.

O that we may learn to have right thoughts of Christ our Lord, not to measure Him by our short ell-wand, but by His large measure that He is in Himself. And to this Lord, to Christ's Father and our Father in Him, to Himself and the Holy Spirit, one incomprehensible Godhead be praise for ever.—Amen.

The Forlorn Son—the Father's Welcome

"And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son."—LUKE 15:20–21.

YE have heard, beloved in our Lord, of the conclusion and logic of the first part of this parable, and of the behaviour of the forlorn son, when he came first home to his father. Now follows the second part thereof, which is the Lord's acceptation of His forlorn son, His welcoming him home again, and this is expressed in three particulars in the text. (1) The Lord's own behaviour towards: "When he saw him afar off, he had compassion upon him, and ran, and fell upon his neck, and kissed him. (2) We have set down the preparation the father makes for him, and the direction that he gives unto his servants for welcoming him home again. He gives direction to make him a new man, and to adorn him with other ornaments than these he had in the days of his vanity. There is a change upon him, for he gets the best robe put upon him, a ring put upon his hand, and shoes upon his feet, and to kill the fat calf. And then (3) there is the welcoming of both the father and all the house towards this prodigal son. There is a feast made, and the fat calf is killed, and great mirth and joy among all as it sets our Lord well, and all the angels and glorified in heaven well to rejoice at the home-coming of a runaway sinner.

There is none who comes to our Lord in spirit, truth, and sincerity, who shall get a worse welcome than this, or shall be put away, because they have been running away from Him, John 6:37: "Him

that cometh unto Me I will in no ways cast out." No, in no sort He will send such away again. No, there is here not so meikle as a sign of the Lord's anger for his former misspending of time and means and all; but a loving intimation of his Father's love towards him, and such sweet expressions as you will find in no other father welcoming home such a child. There is no quarrelling of by-gones now, but all these are laid aside. There is not a word of finding fault, that before he tired of his father's company; no rebuking him for his looseness, nor misspending that which he got. For this forlorn son breaks his own heart, the Lord will not break it. When he is sad and mourning for his provocations, the Lord has nothing to say to him; but He will give him the garments of joy and gladness for the spirit of sorrow and sadness.

If we humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God, the Lord will lift us up. If we judge ourselves we shall not be judged of Him. If we had a casten down heart for sin, then should we get from our Lord the garment of righteousness and rejoicing. It were good for us to come with such preparation as this to God and Christ, with a heart humbled and cast down for sin. But this is not a thing that we have of our own. This is not a flower that grows in our garden. All dispositions and preparations to make a soul meet for Christ, the King Himself sends before He come to lodge in that inns: "Every good gift and every perfect donation come down from Him who is the Father of lights." There is no man who can come out to meet Christ till first He come to him. No man can love Christ till He love him first, because our love of Christ is nothing else but an effect of this love to us. There would be no light in the earth, nor any glancing in a transparent if there were not light without. We would not have light here, if the sun were not in the firmament. Even so if any let out a love look towards Christ, it is because He has loved us first. So we may learn for ever to sing a song of free grace shown in our conversion, that we may know on whom we should father it, that we make it not a bastard, that our home-coming to our Lord may only be put upon Him who is spoken, James 1:18: "Of His own will He begat us with the word of truth, that He should be a kind of firstfruits

of His creatures;" and 2 Tim. 1:9: "Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His grace and His own purpose, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began;" Tit. 3:4: "But after that the kindness and love of God toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us."

What is the ground of our salvation? The love that God carried toward man applied unto us. His free love is all-enery the cause that moves Him to make a market to buy us; John 3:16: "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." It were good for us to seek all that we stand in need of for our salvation in Him; and happy they who get grace to know to whom they owe thanks for the work of their conversion, and know to whom their eyes should be lifted for the same, even to Him who has that draught in His hand (John 6:44) to draw all men unto Him.

A word, now, of the Lord's behaviour towards His forlorn son. His kissing him and falling upon his neck tell us this far: when a sinner comes to the Lord truly humbled for sin, there is nothing then but free love and kindness and expressions of love upon the Lord's part: Rev. 3:20: To him who knocks, the Lord says that He will open to him, and will come in, and they shall sup together. At the Lord's first meeting with a sinner, the Lord opens his heart by grace to let Him in, and there they sup together. There is a feast of love between them. And it sets our Lord well to do so at the first conversion of a sinner. I mean not that the sinner has no sorrow before Christ and he meet. Ay! he has meikle grief and sadness. But at the first meeting, I say, it sets our Lord to give the humbled sinner joy and consolation, and a feast of His presence. And there are three good reasons for this. The

First is taken from the disposition that the poor soul has been under before, for our Lord has promised that such shall be comforted, and the reason is clear thus: there are none who are converted but those who are once humbled, for our Lord has good news unto none but

them that mourn; Isa. 61:1: He is sent to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; and to them who are not humbled and mourn not, He has a day of vengeance to preach unto them. So those who are humbled and mourn, and meet with the Lord, must be comforted.

Second: It is also agreeable to the Lord's love that humbled sinners, at their first meeting with Christ, should get such arles as they may never forget again all their days. Now I mean not by this that all the children of God can tell the very first mathematical point of the time of their conversion, for there be some with whom the Lord has dealt from their youth, and, with some, the Lord deals more smoothly in their conversion than He does with others. But for the most part I say this is His dealing, that when sinners have been going on into a course of rebellion, running away from Him, after their humiliation ordinarily He fills them with a feast of the sense of His love, that all their days they cannot forget it. And this answers a point that troubles very many of the children of God, "That they had once a hearty desire after the Lord and a rejoicing in His presence, they were earnest in seeking Him long syne, and found Him very kind to them, but now they find it not so with them." This answers the doubt. This is Christ's manner of dealing with His own, that at the first starting to the race He will give them a sight of the gold and garland, but afterwards He will only give them blinks of it now and then. At the first He will give them such a sight and sense of His kindness as that they may mark the very day and hour of their meeting and His, and that we may cry forth to His praise, O the excellence of that day wherein the Lord began first to shine in upon a poor soul by the blinks of His loving-kindness, who had no mind of Him to make them seek after more of it. A

Third reason of this is taken from the case of weak beginners. For to scare weak beginners at the first with glowming, they would then be discouraged. The first day that bairns go to the school it is no wisdom to strike or to boast them, but to make of them rather. When the

Lord gets a new scholar to His school, the first seat He sets them in He puts them into His bosom, that so they may be forced to say, He is a Lord worthy to be served, and that they may be made to condemn themselves for biding so long away from such a Lord, who is love and kindness itself.

The use we are to make of this is: O, if we could get natural people persuaded but to take a trial of Christ's love! if we could make them but to kepp one of Christ's kisses! But O! it be a hard matter to persuade nature what grace is. Ay, it is the hardest task in the world to gar natural men believe themselves to be in such a case as indeed they are in. If we could but come to this, to make the world believe the ill of drinking, swearing, whoring, covetousness, &c.; and, upon the other hand, to believe the superexcellency of Christ's love, then the field were won. But it is a hard matter to persuade two sorts of people of this, that there are thousands who believe they are in Christ who, notwithstanding, are deceived, and are not in Him.

The first [sort are] secure sinners, who know not what God is, or what heaven and hell are, and are going on in sin and will not be convinced thereof, nor rise out of the state they are in. No; were Christ in the flesh preaching to them they would not rise out of their secure estate.

A second sort of people hard to believe this are natural civilians, who go under the name of honest men in the world. They are not adulterers, thieves, ordinary drunkards, or blasphemers, &c., they have a civil white life in their own eyes and the eyes of the world. O! but it be a great matter to persuade such to fall in love with Christ, because they think they have already as meikle as to take them to heaven; and it is but a mistake when all is done. It is only nature that they take for true grace. And there are thousands in the world who are beguiled with this. I wish that ye would labour to know indeed what it is to have a conscience purified from dead works; to have many waking nights for sin; that ye were put to this, "Lord, if I had Christ I should quit all the world for Him, for He is more worth than

it all." O! to be acquainted with the Son of God and His excellency. If men had such thoughts as these, and knew what need they stand in of Christ, O! what a high price would they put on such an excellent Saviour as Christ is!

Now there is cast in here a word, by the way, of the prayer of the forlorn son and of his father's welcome to him. If ye will compare his prayer with the prayer he resolved upon while he was in a strange country, there is something left out of his last prayer, and he gets not all said that he would say. Ay, he gets it but half said. There can be no other reason for it but this. The forlorn son was struck with confusion and sorrow and grief for offending his father, and with astonishment and wondering that his Lord and Father met him, and that at their meeting there is nothing but words of love, whereas he deserved no such thing.

And there is none but when they come to seek God, at their first meeting with Him they shall find confusion and shall have broken prayers to God, like that we read in the Psalm 6:3: "O Lord, how long! Return, O Lord, deliver my soul! O save me!" Sorrow and desire fighting together—and so the poor soul is overwhelmed. So was it with the forlorn son at this time: his heart was so tane up with the consideration of his father's love, and with the sense of his own unworthiness, that it is no wonder that he forgot the half of his prayer.

We may learn here, that the prayers of the children of God when they come to pray to Him are not aye so logical and so methodic, that there is nothing left out of them, that they should say that all their prayers are set down in rhetorical and logical terms; neither are we to think that God answers no other prayers but those that are formed that way. No; you will oftentimes find the prayers of the children of God to be imperfect this way; and yet the Lord for all that makes them and their prayers welcome to Him. For in prayer He looks not so meikle to words as He does to the meaning of his own spirit. Ye will find in the Word of God there are seven sorts of expressions that are

called prayer; and yet in our form of speaking we only call that prayer when a sinner pours out his heart to the Lord, and vocally utters his mind to Him.

First: The Lord He acknowledges crying to be prayer, even crying where there is no distinct voice, as in Psa. 22:1; and in Psa. 69: "Why art Thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring, O my God. I cry in the day-time, and Thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent." And David is brought, in Psalm 69, crying until his throat be dry, and till he be weary, and, indeed, crying to the Lord's majesty, albeit it be not joined with words. When the heart is going with the cry, it is prayer. When David makes a noise that way the Lord acknowledges that for prayer, and esteems it to be no less than prayer. Again—

Second: The Lord counts the very breathing, and that is less, to be prayer. The afflicted Kirk says (Lam. 3:56): "Thou hast heard my voice, hide not Thine ear at my breathing, at my cry." When the Kirk of God is under distress they are but sending up their very breathing to the Lord, and beseech Him to accept of it. And David panting to the Lord, it is accepted. The speech is borrowed from them who cannot speak being out of breath, and so they pant. "I have panted for Thee all the day long," and the Lord welcomes that as praying.

Third: The lifting up of the eyes is expounded as prayer, and therefore in Psalm 69 that is a part of David's complaint that his eyes failed with looking up, and he gat no answer of the Lord; Psa. 5:3: "O Lord, in the morning will I direct my prayer unto Thee and look up," says David. Looking up, with the eyes towards the Lord, is one of these gestures that He esteems. All these are sacrifices of the heart which the Lord makes welcome, albeit words be not joined with them.

Fourth: Making moans in prayer the Lord accounts it as prayer. Jer. 31:18: "I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself." The like is spoken of King Hezekiah (Isa. 38:14), that he chattered like a crane, or a swallow, and mourned as a dove; and Ezek. 7:16: "They that

escape of them shall escape, and shall be on the mountains as doves of the valleys, all of them mourning, every one for his iniquity." The Spirit of God is speaking there of a repenting people that they shall mourn for their iniquities as doves of the valleys.

Fifth: Prayer is expressed by sighing and sobbing. The Lord is said (Psa. 102:20) to look down from heaven, to hear the groaning of the prisoner; and Rom. 8:26 it is said, we ourselves know not what to pray, but the Spirit maketh intercession for us with groanings that cannot be expressed. Even dumb sighs that want auricular words and verbal expressions the Lord accepts them as prayer.

Sixth: Stretching out the hands is put for prayer; also as in Psa. 88:9: "Lord, I have stretched out my hands unto Thee;" and in Psa. 143:6, David says, "I stretch forth my hands unto Thee." The Lord accounts that to be prayer in His estimation.

Seventh: Even tears, where the children of God do not pray, they have a voice unto the Lord, as we may see Psa. 6:8: "Depart from me all ye workers of iniquity, for the Lord hath heard the voice of my weeping."

Any of these expressions in prayer, whether it be crying, breathing, or panting, lifting up the eyes, making a moan, stretching out the hands, sighing and sobbing, or if it be but a tear, or some few tears where words are not, but the mind is confused with sorrow and grief, the Lord makes all these or any of them welcome, and counts them prayer. This answers many doubts that trouble the children of God.

Some will say, "Alas! I cannot get words in prayer, and so can look for nothing at the Lord's hand."

Answer: God is that kind, that dumb beggars get alms from Him as well as speaking beggars. Alas! if we would learn to tell God in the morning in our family, what ails us or them. And ye need not a book to do this to signify to Him what ails you, for the Lord will accept of a sigh, if thou cannot get a look to Him nor speak to Him. Make both a

sign to the Lord, and lift up your eyes and your heart to Him, and acknowledge to Him what ye are. Speak to the Lord as ye can, and I will assure you He will not find fault with your prayers for want of order and method, and because ye want logic in them; for it is the heart the Lord looks to. It is the sighing of his spirit that he specially beholds.

There be some who complain they could never get a prayer put up to God all their life's time that they could count [to be] prayer. There may be reasons for this, I grant, for there be some who will pray earnestly to the Lord, who will not get fine terms in prayer, and this is no want in prayer when all is done. For sometimes the constitution of the natural parts will do this, as want of that measure of natural abilities that others have, and sometimes the grief of the mind will be greater than that the tongue can express the same; but the Lord esteems more of the sighings of the spirit nor of all the finest terms that can be uttered. [By] the poets it is said that some, being about great matters, they have been so much tane up therewith that they could not speak, and so have gone away stricken in dumbness, and that has been accounted sufficient to represent the weightiness of the matter; and therefore the children of God should not be cast down for any of those things.

But what cares He for the bowing of the head, or spreading out the hand, or lifting of the eyes, or breathing, or crying? No; He cares for no sort of expression that can be used where the spirit is not humbled in His sight. But where the spirit is humbled before Him, O! but the least expression that such can make is very welcome to Him, if it were but a sigh, or a sob, or a lifted-up head, or hand, or eye; till more come, He will accept of that, and will not let it go without an answer. If ye would set up a kirk to God, every one that has a family, in your families, and learn to speak to Him there, it would be a welcome and acceptable sacrifice to Him. It is a sore matter that so many should say they cannot speak to God in their families. If any of you have a suit to present to any magistrate, ye will seek him out and present your suit to him yourselves. Ay, ye will take upon you to

Speak to a king if it be a matter that concerns life and death. Nature teaches you to do that. But it must be the spirit of adoption that man teach you to pray to God; and I assure you all the book prayers in the world will not teach you this lesson to pray to God. The Lord gives the spirit of prayer unto His children in a special manner, and therefore this should be sought of Him. And this proves you to be the sons of God, indeed, when ye can thus speak to Him in prayer. What says the first word of the Lord's prayer? Says it not, "Our Father which art in heaven," teaching us this far that none can pray right to God but those who can in faith say "Our Father," and apply Him to be their Father. Those who can only call the Lord their Creator, the Lord who provides for them, who keeps them in being, they cannot pray right to the Lord, but only those who can call Him "Our Father."

Another thing here in this confession, he says: "I have sinned against heaven and against thee." He was far from God while he was riotously wasting all that his father gave him. To say, "I have sinned against heaven and against thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son," comes from another heart than he had before. And to say this as this forlorn son said it, none can do it but one who is a new and converted man. We read that David said this when Nathan came to him and accused him of his sin. He says: "Against Thee, against Thee only have I sinned" (Psa. 51:3). It is a great matter to say this right—not to say the syllables thereof distinctly; that is easily done; but to say this from the heart, this is a work of the Lord's Spirit, and only the converted child of God can say it after this manner. Where was this prayer when he prayed to his father: "Father, give me the portion of goods of that which falleth unto me; I am tired of your company, and therefore give me what you will give me, and let me go my ways and be my own tutor"?

But we may learn here: There is no man, so long as he is in the estate of sin, that is sensible it is so. But fra once we are converted and turn unto the Lord, then we feel our sores, and see that we have been sinning against the Lord. Now there are three reasons wherefore it is so.

First: You know people use to say, "A green wound is half whole." All have reason to say they have sinned against the Lord. But sin is not sensible of itself. Grace, indeed, knows grace to be grace; but sin knows not sin to be sin. Death knows not that death is death, but life knows life to be life. A man that is beastly drunk knows not that he is so, but when he is fresh and free of drink, he will know himself to be so; for drink, where it is, puts the senses out of the right place, and so they cannot discern. Now, while a man is in the state of sin, he is even like a man dead drunk. Therefore it is said, "They are drunk, but not with wine; they stagger, but not with strong drink" (Isa. 29:9). To persuade the natural man that drinking is a sin, and such a great sin as indeed it is, that we cannot get done. Can we make the blasphemer of the Lord's name believe that for that sin, if he repent not, his tongue shall be tormented in hell's fire for ever and ever? A man that is in the estate of nature he knows not what the ill of those sins is. But when some sense of the life of God is begun in the soul, when grace begins to grow, and the Lord begins to show His loving-kindness in some measure, then they begin to see their wanderings. And when that is so, Ephraim begins to say (Jer. 31:18): "I am as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke;" but not till then. And there are two reasons for this—

First: Because it is an infused light from heaven that lets man see sin and the breach of the law. A natural conscience, I grant, will say something to this, but it lets not the sinner see sin every way as it is, for it lets him not see the main object against whom sin is committed—lets us not see that glorious Majesty whom we provoke by our sins, before whom the glorious angels cover their face when they behold Him, and the heavens are not clean in His sight. There are two things to be seen in Christ if we look right unto Him. There is light and divinity; or rather there is in Him light and Divine light. There is a Divine power that comes from God to convince a sinner of the estate that he is in. The natural conscience will see and discern those sins to be sins that pagans, wild Americans, Turks, may also see, as killing of father or mother, adultery, oppression, &c. But to see spiritual sins to be sins, as to see and discern the pride of their nature to be a sin—

that they cannot. Unbelief in the Son of God, no[t] making conscience to sanctify the Lord's day, to set up His worship in families, to keep correspondence with Him in heart, &c.—a natural conscience cannot see such to be sins; for as the natural conscience cannot believe in the Son of God, it being a supernatural work, so the natural conscience cannot see unbelief in the Son of God to be a sin, for it sees no form or privation therein. Thus it is supernatural light that maun let us see such sins as these to be sins. That which is called divinity in the conscience, if it be right and sound divinity, it is a plant which the Lord Himself plants there.

I observe this now for this cause, because I persuade myself of this, that the main cause wherefore multitudes in the world run on headlong into many ill courses without any awe or fear of the Lord's majesty and of His judgments, it is because they have no supernatural light in their conscience, for where this supernatural light is, it prevails against all temptations that can be cast into our way to draw to sin. But where all the light that one has is natural light that is soon overcome. There is no man that will abstain from sin as sin, but the man who has more than the light of nature. The main reason wherefore the world goes on in sin, and there are so many gods set up therein to be worshipped, and wherefore men live in drunkenness and in the breach of the Lord's day, wherefore they fear not an oath, as Solomon says; the reason wherefore men care not to live contentedly in the ignorance of God, it is because they want this supernatural light to awaken them. Never man shall go right to heaven who is pleased with the way he is in, as natural men are pleased with their way. This form of service to God contents them, and they will never speer whether that form be right or not. They never question but they are on the way to heaven, and that they have the marks of the children of God.

This says that many believe themselves to be right when they are wrong, and in the end shall be deceived; or then they would be after speering what shall become of them in that day, when they shall appear before the Lord in judgment. "Lord! if we could but once

persuade you of this, that we could bring men to acknowledge they are in a state of sin, to be convinced that they are undone if they find not salvation in Christ, and win not to heaven another way than by anything I can do myself." And while the world is thus blinded as the most part, what marvel that they say they have faith in Christ, that they believe as well as any, while in the meantime there is no such matter!

For Christ's sake be not beguiled, and deceive not yourselves as the most part do. There are hundreds of you who hear me that trow you are going to heaven and will not be put off it. But it is so. But when it comes to that part of it, "Give account of your stewardship," and the poor soul maun be judged according to the works done in the flesh, whether they be good or bad, O! there will be wakening then, and ye will see that ye have been far wrong! But alas! it is out of time when a sinner is once wrong, and doubts not that it is so. He goes on, and so still goes further wrong, even like a traveller going in an unknown way. He goes wrong, and ay the further he goes that way he is the worse and the further from his lodging; and when night comes he is disappointed of lodging, and lies in the fields, because he never doubted that he was in a wrong way, and so speered not for the right way.

It were good for us to speer and try in time, if we be in the way to heaven or not, and to be earnest to know what shall become of you when ye shall be called to give an account of your behaviour, what it has been, how ye have spent your life, and what you have profited by the hearing of the gospel. What wilt thou answer to God, who hast had twenty years' occasion of hearing the Word, receiving the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, and had many occasions of that kind, and yet are not the better of these, not a whit wiser to salvation than at the first? But alas! I see I was beguiled. I thought I had been right enough, and yet thou shalt see then thou wast close wrong. Such are those who shall come at the last day and say to Christ, "We have preached, wrought miracles in Thy name; we have eaten and drunken at Thy table, &c., and so thought all was well enough." But

Christ tells them they were mistaken, and He shall say to them, "Depart from Me, ye workers of iniquity." This will be a cold meeting with the Son of God, and yet thousands shall be met therewith who will not believe it now, and will not examine their case to see if they be right or not. Lord, make us wise to see and try our case in time, that so we be not deceived with many others, and to this Lord, to His Father and our Father, and the Spirit of grace, be all praise and dominion and glory for ever.—Amen.

The Forlorn Son—the Father's Expressed Welcome

"But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry."—LUKE 15:22–23.

WHO has such opportunity, beloved in our Lord, of our Lord's kindness to a soul running to a free Saviour as those who have once been rebels and are come home again to their Lord and Father. None can sing mercies' song so well as they who can do it out of sense and experience. None can do this so well as one who can say, "Once I was blind, but now I see. I was dead once, but now I live. Once I was a child of Satan and an heir of hell, but now I am made an adopted son of God, and an heir of heaven." Who can speak more to our Lord's commendation out of experience, nor a home-coming sinner thus made welcome to his Lord and Father again? You heard in the first

part of this parable how our Lord was pleased with this forlorn, and what welcome the father gave him, or ever he spake one word of apology for himself, or ever he made any prayer at all, his father fell upon his neck and kissed him, for he waited not upon our God to move Him to be merciful unto us. He will not wait till He gets a hire for His mercy. He waits not till we make some way on our part for any good He is to do to us. He may not look for anything from us that will down-weigh the weights of His free love. O! so weighty as that is there is meikle telling there. Nothing in us to prevene the same. But or ever this poor forlorn son speak a word he falls upon his neck and kisses him. And then when he makes his prayer to his Lord, leaving the half of that he resolved to say unspoken, God welcomes it. The Son of God, the same Lord who is here called Father, He passed by all the slips of his prayer, and commands that he be received by the servants of the house as a son and not as a servant. And truly they will be very feckless and confused prayers that come from any spunk of faith that our Lord will not accept and make welcome. Yea, in Hosea 14:2, he learns His Kirk what to say to Him when they come: "Take with you words, turn to the Lord and say to Him, Take away all iniquity, and save us graciously. So will we render the calves of our lips," &c. He will take half-prayers, or He want all, even prayers where words are missed, and the meaning they intended to be at. Ay, He will take sighing and sobbing for prayer, the lifting up of the hands, or of the eyes, &c., so content is He with what His Spirit says, however it be said, as it is Rom. 8:26, He knows the meaning of the Spirit. He seeks no more for a prayer at some times but a believing sigh that is a work of His Spirit. And when we know not what we are doing, He knows well enough the meaning of His own Spirit, and can put a perfect commentary upon that, albeit we know not what it will do, that no man should think the Lord will not hear their prayers, because they have not good oratory to speak to the Lord in prayer, because they cannot speak as a print book, and set all the words in order, and so leave off to pray to the Lord. No, the Lord He hears the very breathing of His Kirk, Lam. 3:56. Ay, when His children cannot speak, and they have no words to say to Him for what they would be at, they may be confident to be heard, for many a dumb beggar has

gotten almost at His door. They who cannot set their words in good method and order in prayer, if their heart look honestly toward the Lord, then He accepts of the sighs and good meaning of such, and takes that for prayer, and will answer it. So that all who come to Christ as they are bidden, and come in truth and sincerity, may be comforted in this, that their prayers shall not be cast away of Him.

Now, we have the expressed welcome of the Lord towards his forlorn son, and the direction and charge he gives unto his servants for getting ornaments for his body, and entertainment for cheering himself and all the house. For the ornaments that he gives direction to get, it stands in three particulars: First: That they get the best robe and put upon the home-coming sinner. Like enough he was ragged, or he came home, as all are ill clad when they come first to Christ. Second: He commands them to get a ring upon his finger, that is an ornament of honour; and then, Third: To put shoes upon his feet. And then for expression of the joy of the Lord's mind, and the joy of the whole soul, and that all that hear what the Lord has done may be allured thereby, the fat calf is slain that all may rejoice at the home-coming of a lost sinner.

O! the rejoicing that our Lord and all the angels make for the home-coming of a lost sinner. There is more joy in heaven for the recovery of one lost sinner than there is for ninety and nine righteous persons. The Lord He knows not how to express His joyfulness and His kindness to a sinner who acknowledges what he has been doing, and repents of his misdeeds! O! repentance, it is an unknown work. Repentance is not known to be so acceptable a sacrifice to the Lord, as indeed it is. A home-coming soul that can get a bleeding heart for sin, that can thrust out an honest tear before the Lord for sin committed against Him, it knows not that God has a bottle to keep that in. They know not that God writes down all their sighs and their sobs, their tears and their sad looks. And because this is not known by the most part, therefore repentance is a slighted and neglected work. The world loves nothing worse than sorrow for sin. They think it a sad and melancholious thing; but there is no joy hereaway

comparable to that joy which proceeds from an honest tear shed for sin, and for offending such a majesty as we have to do with.

Now, the first ornament that our Lord commands to be put upon this prodigal is "The best robe." He commands to put a robe upon him, and the best of the robes. There is no necessity that we should strike largely upon every particular in a parable, if the main scope of the parable be looked unto. And yet there is little in this parable that looks not clearly to point out the state of a sinner in the state of sin, and to show the Lord's welcoming when they return to Him, and to let us see what ornaments He puts upon them when they come to Him.

First: Ye see he is to be clothed with a "robe," and with "the best robe." While a sinner is in the state of sin he is a ragged creature, and so has need of a robe, if ye will consider him two ways. If ye will consider him as he is, a man in nature, or if ye will consider him as he is, a civil righteous man; for man of himself as he is a natural man has no righteousness at all, or if he have any righteousness if he will say, it is as the phrase is, "A clout with many a hole in it," like that garment spoken of Job 8:14; it is like the spider's web, that garment of man's righteousness—it holds no wind away. All our righteousness is like a menstruous clout (Isa. 64:6). And you will find that all the garments that the natural man, while he is in the state of nature, they are so indeed. For while he has them he is not honest; nor marriage like to be married upon such a bridegroom as Christ. So long as we have no other garment but only our own natural righteousness, it is nothing else but sin, defiled further with sin. Isa. 59:6: "Their webs shall not become garments, neither shall they cover themselves with their works; their works are works of iniquity, and the act of violence is in their hands." The works of the natural man are compared there to webs, but their webs will not cover them, for the best things they do there are violence in them and unrighteousness. All those who would be married upon Christ, and would be handseled new with Him for evermore, they must have another covering upon them than

their own works, or their civil righteousness. There are two things in all natural garments that make them faulty.

First: That no natural garment we can have is able to hold away the cold from us. All those who stand to be Pharisees in the act of justification by the works of the law, or by their own righteousness, they shall be forced at last to say that it will not be able to hold out the rain of the Lord's indignation. And therefore David says, "Lord, enter not into judgment with Thy servant, for in Thy sight no flesh living shall be justified" (Psa. 143:2). "If Thou, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand." All thir and many moe places. They are shamed both with the lining and the outer half of their garments, which are only covered with nature and civil honesty, and with a seeming righteousness that the natural man counts so meikle of.

Another fault in a natural garment is that it is not honest before the Lord. It will be long or God give that commendation to a natural and civil righteous man, that He gives to His spouse in the Song of Solomon: "Thou art all fair, my beloved, thou art all fair: there is no spot in thee." Long or thou smell in his nosethirsof myrrh, aloes, cassia, and cinnamon. The natural and civil righteous man has no smell of heaven, or of glory. But Isa. 64:6, says, "They smell like a menstruous woman." All their "righteousnesses"—in the plural number—are like filthy rags that will never make a creature beautiful in the sight of God, and therefore there must be such a niffer as that which is spoken of 2 Cor. 5:21: "He must be made sin for us who knew no sin; that we may be made the righteousness of God in Him." These two must be done or we can be clean in the sight of God. Christ must be clothed with our sins, and we, again, must be clothed with His righteousness, and that is the fairest and the closest garment that any can be.

Now this garment is called "the best garment;" and it is the king's best garment, for it is the righteousness of our Lord. There may be good garments and better garments, but this is the best of all

garments. Ay, this garment of Christ's righteousness is better in respect of the event, and for us, than if Adam had stood in the state he was in, and so we to have been clothed with Adam's righteousness. This is the best robe of all—the righteousness of God made ours, Phil. 3:9; the apostle says, "He counted all things but dung that he might win Christ; and be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith," clothed with that righteousness, that is, the righteousness of Him who is both God and man. And look what wisdom of God is to be found here! and what goodness and loving-kindness! and such a supernatural providence that whereas the devil, that old serpent, had a mind by Adam's fall to bring Adam and all his posterity in the compass of eternal damnation; yet the Lord has turned about the wheel, so that so many as belong to Him in His election shall get better nor they lost in Adam, a more sure and permanent and glorious estate.

This reproves those who would have the death of our Lord Jesus for sinners to come by hazard; who say that the Lord at first intended not the incarnation of Christ and His death and sufferings of itself, but at the first He principally intended Adam's obedience, creating him in the state of innocence; and that he was able to stand, but that Adam fell, and then there was a necessity of a Saviour; that He intended no[t] principally, but it came upon our Lord by hazard. This is a wrong unto our Lord, who, from the beginning, intended the glory of His mercy and free grace, and also the glory of His justice. No; the Lord was not deprived of His first intention, as they say, and so behoved to take Him to a second thought. No; for from the beginning the Lord He intended the glory of His mercy to be manifested towards some, and to manifest the glory of His justice upon others, to the glory of His name. And we owe Him hearty thanks for this, that we should be made welcome to get the borrowed righteousness of Jesus; and if we get that, we shall be marriage-like, and our Lord will marry us. Alas! what will the civil living of many do to them without this? No; such are in the way to be lost for ever, and

to be naked, so that the cold shall seize upon them, and Christ will not marry them to Him because they live and die and never see themselves to be sinners, and so cannot inherit the kingdom of God. Our Saviour says, "Unless a man be born again he cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven." The civil natural man he knows not what that is to be born again, and so lives and dies without seeing himself to stand in need of Christ. He contents himself with the outward calsay godliness, and thinks that enough to take him to heaven. But certainly if thy natural pride be not subdued, and thy worldly-mindedness, thou cannot come there. If thou only seek to be approven in the eyes of the present world, that will fail you, for it is not the best robe; it is not the main thing the Lord gives His elect ones to live a civil life. But those who are clothed with the robe of Christ's righteousness it shall not fail them, but cover them from the cold.

The second ornament his father appoints for him it is a "ring upon his finger." This is a simple ornament.

We may learn from this that the laigher a sinner set himself, the Lord will set him up higher. Albeit he set himself very low, the Lord will not do so also. The forlorn son would not believe when he sought a rowme among the servants that his father would [have] advanced him to be a son; he thought it much if he gat that. But now his father makes him a son, and will have him no lower, and he is adorned with the best robe, and gets a ring put upon his finger. Thus we may see, let a humbled sinner set himself very low, God will not do so to him. Also Eph. 3:8: "To me who am less than the least of all saints is this grace given to be a preacher of the gospel." Paul there is little in his own conceit, but God counts not so of him also. And when Ananias makes a question, Acts 9:13, if he shall go to Paul shortly after his conversion the Lord says, "Go" to him, "for he is a chosen vessel to carry My name through the world." The Lord gives unto the humbled sinner a high rowme and seat in heaven. The believer is never a whit the worse esteemed in God's books that he counts little of himself. That thou count'st thyself very base and low, shall not blot thy name

out of the Lamb's book of life. High shalt thou be in the Lord's books if thou humble thyself very low. Better that the Lord lout, and take thee out of the dust than that thou shalt build thy nest among the stars with Edom, and the Lord to pull you down out of thy nest.

This speaks against many of the dear children of God that put themselves far beneath themselves, and will not let it light that God has thoughts of peace towards them while indeed He has great and large thoughts towards them for their good. But if believers knew what thoughts God has of them, and what a royal and stately throne He has prepared for them, they would then be over fain, and would set their sails over high, and would not not be so much tane up with the sense of the Lord's loving-kindness. But He will let His children mourn and walk humbly under the sense of their own unworthiness, that they may be the better fitted to make a high preaching of the Lord's goodness and free mercy, who louts Himself to take up those who are so low, and respects them who are little in their own eyes and the eyes of the world about them.

The third ornament is "shoes upon his feet." Albeit, it is true, we need not, neither will we, stand upon every particular, yet there is good ground for this in Scripture, that a home-coming sinner he is ordained for a journey after he is come home. In Cant 7:1, shoes are spoken of: "How beautiful are thy feet with shoes, O prince's daughter." And Eph. 6:15, among the rest of the pieces of the spiritual [armour], we are commanded to have our "feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace." Why would the Lord speak this to His Kirk and children, but to let sinners know when they are come to Him, they may not be barefooted. For there are thorns and sharp rocks in the way to heaven, and therefore we have now to take heed to that exhortation set down Heb. 12:13: "Make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way." What a sweet word is that which we have in Psa. 119:104: "I have refrained my feet from every evil way, that I may keep Thy word." The righteous sinner must take heed where he sets his feet, and not set down his feet in every place, nor be barefooted, for there are moe

snares and rough passages in the way to heaven nor ye trow there be. How many are there who go to heaven and sink not in some myres by the way? We have heard of none of these. It is well said that the way to heaven is like a mossy way, some wet their feet as they go through it, and yet win through at last. But some going on unawares they drown in a myre by the way, and never win through. The Lord's children in the way towards heaven must not be barefooted, but have shoes upon their feet, for there are many thorns in the way, as the examples of the servants of God that have gone before us declare. David's adultery and murder was a thorn strake up in his foot, and made him to halt all his days. Noah's drunkenness, and the Lord's chief disciple Peter, [who] in denying his Lord and Master, gets a thorn in his foot, tell us that we had great need to take heed to our feet, and to walk in Christ's way that He has gone before us, to have our feet shod against those rough ways. And how many are there in the world who live and die in adultery and harlotry, living a profane and godless life, not making conscience of swearing, drinking, breaking the Lord's day, and so tyne the right gate to heaven, only because they are not shod with the shoes of the gospel of peace, and see not the right way where they should walk?

There is yet a particular to be marked which is very worthy our observation, and it is also a part of the scope and drift of the parable, and it is this: That our Lord He makes more of the forlorn son coming home again to Him nor he does of the other son who had stayed at home, not departing from the house. For ye see there are no ornaments put upon the eldest son, nor any melody for his biding in the house. Where we may learn this, that repentance and rising by the grace of God out of the state of sin, is better nor all the civility and Pharisaical righteousness in the world. And in some respects this repentance and rising by grace out of the state of sin having fallen, is better nor no sinning at all.

There are great questions about this, Whether it had been better for man not to sin, or to sin and get mercy for sin. It is true, I grant, there is danger in the one which is not in the other, and in reference

and respect towards us, it were better not to sin than to sin. It were better not to be sick, and so not to need the physician, than to be sick and need his cures. But if we will look unto Christ's feasts and offers that He makes unto us, having sinned, and to the Lord's comforts and refreshments He has prepared for His own, we may say that it is best. And in respect of the Lord and what He gave for repentance; He gave a dear price for repentance, a greater price than was given for Adam's not sinning; for if [he] had continued there needed no repentance, and it was free; but the other cost a very dear price (Acts 5:31). Christ coft repentance. He died and rose again to purchase repentance; and therefore it must be of more worth than Adam's not sinning, seeing it cost our Lord such a price. Ye will grant that a jewel that has cost ten hundred thousand thousand pounds must be better nor that which cost but twenty pounds if he have any skill that coft it. Repentance cost very dear. Ay, it is dearer nor if Adam had stood in the state of innocence to this day, and all His seed with him. It cost no less price than the blessed blood of the Son of God. The Lord in His blessed wisdom foresaw this, for it is not without His providence that our Lord He would suffer man to drown himself in the debt of sin, that he might get a royal and kingly cautioner to relieve him of his debt. He would suffer him to be under the hazard of hell that he might get a lovely Redeemer. He would suffer him to be sin-sick for that end, that he might get a drink of the blood of the Son of God. He would suffer him to do that which procured him to be shot out of Paradise, and from the trees of the garden, that he might have right to the Tree of Life that grows in the midst of the Paradise of God, that bears twelve manner of fruits every month, and to the River of the water of life. And that certainly is better than his first estate was.

The Fathers said to this purpose, that the fall of Adam it was *felix culpa*, not that it was happy in itself, but happy in regard to the consequents of it; to have such a disease as will have the Lord of life Himself to come from heaven for the curing thereof, and take our sickness and infirmities upon Him in our nature, and make us partakers of His Divine nature, and clothe us with the robe of His righteousness!

And if ye will look unto us also, this is better to sin and repent of sin, than to live in a Pharisaical righteousness, or we had stood in our first estate; for there is no man who has such experimental knowledge of the goodness of God as that man has who has been over head and ears in sin. And our Lord gives not a fairer commendation to any as that woman, who wash Christ's feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Christ says she loved much because much was forgiven her, for He had cast seven devils out of her. And Paul was a blasphemer, a persecutor of the Church, thirsting for the blood of the saints, an injurious person, &c., yet being forgiven, and the Lord taking him into His service, he does more glorious works than all the rest of the apostles did. Now this teaches us two things shortly.

First: That we beware of turning the grace of God into wantonness. For whatever I have said of the excellence of repentance, and rising from the state of sin beyond standing in the first estate of Adam, and not sinning, comes all by accident of the grace of God, and no thanks to the sinner for it. And therefore let no man say because Jesus Christ is come into the world to die for sinners, and to purchase repentance and remission of sins, therefore we will live as we please, and go on in a course of sinning, for that is to tramp the blood of the covenant under foot. He who does so, whatever he be, he knows not the worth of the blood of the Son of God, and the excellence of Jesus our Lord. The dear blood of God that was shed for sin, it should teach us to beware of sin, that seeing our sins put Him to such pain, shame, to so many sore scourges and wounds, and many sad hearts, put Him to those words, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto the death;" "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken me," should not this make us to beware to commit sin?

And another thing this teaches us, is to let us see what our Lord will do unto them who come home to Him, that He will receive them graciously and pardon them, that no man may despair, and think their sin to be such that mercy and forgiveness and a welcome are above anything they can look for at the Lord's hand. If thou wilt

come home to God and Christ, repenting for thy sins, and seek to be into the kingdom He has purchased, there is more remedy for thy disease than can be spoken of, there is more sweetness in our Lord nor the sinner believes to be in Him. The coming to the kingdom, let be to the kingdom of glory, is like the Queen of Sheba's coming to see the glory and order of Solomon's court, she confessed she saw much more than was reported to her. If the natural man know Christ's welcome He gives to a home-coming sinner, how He adorns, puts the robe of His righteousness on them to cover their nakedness, puts a ring on their finger to adorn them, and shoes upon their feet that they may walk the better in His ways, He gives them the joy of the Holy Ghost, and inward peace of conscience, gives them a feast of fat things, gives them to drink of the wines refined upon the lees; think you that they would love sin and the way thereof, as they do? Would they count so meikle of roses and lilies and windle-straes that will presently fade, and there is no more of them. No, certainly. It is because the world knows not what it is to meet with Christ, whose breath is heaven itself, whose comforts transcend far the motions of all natural understanding, that they count so little of Him, and follow after other vanities. O, but there is meikle sweetness in meeting with Christ. Men know not what tranquillity and security under a pacified conscience are. O! but that is solid rejoicing under the hope of glory. Now for this hope's sake, and the hope of redemption laid up for the children of God, we render, to the Father of our Lord Jesus, and our Father, and to Jesus, and the Holy Spirit, all praise and glory for ever and ever.—Amen.

The Forlorn Son—he was Lost and is Found

"For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry. Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant. And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound. And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and intreated him."—LUKE 15:24–28.

THEY have no less nor cause, beloved in our Lord, to be glad and to rejoice, whenever a wandering sinner comes home to Christ Jesus, who is so cheerful a receiver of them, who is so willing to receive them, and is so heartsome and kind to all His own who have any grace to claim kyndness to Him. And we see there is good ground for rejoicing and mirth, at the home-coming of a wandering sinner here. And wherefore we should rejoice also, when our Lord He rejoices, and makes such mirth. When He is so glad at the home-coming of a sinner, the sinner himself whom this most concerns should much more rejoice, and be glad. And our Lord He gives a very good reason for this gladness and rejoicing, "for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found."

Now the last part of the parable is, How the elder brother—eldest or in possession, and so repute[d] eldest—took with the Lord's kind dealing towards his younger brother. The text says, "And when he drew near the house, he heard music and dancing," and knew not what it meant, as the natural man knows not what it is to come to Christ, and how welcome a sinner is to Jesus. They know not how sweet the Lord's breath is unto those who have been long away from the Lord and get grace to come home to Him again. And the elder son calling for one of the servants, he speers, what meant that more

than ordinary mirth that was among them? The servant answers, "Thy brother is come, and thy Father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound." And the son was angry, and would not go into the house. And the rest of the chapter is spent in a conference between the angry son and a kind and meek father. But we see the son that had an ill eye because his father's heart was good, and [was] the gentle and loving father; he was angry that his father had received the younger brother into his house again. There is nothing that makes a hypocrite's heart more sad than when God welcomes home a sinner to Himself. And the father again, as if he had done a fault, he speaks to his angry son in calm words, and gives a reason of his making mirth, and why he dealt so kindly with his younger son, and made so meikle of him; "Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. It was meet that we should make merry and be glad, for this thy brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found." That is a matter of joy in heaven to the Lord and to the blessed angels, and the Lord avows that He is content at the home-coming of a sinner, howbeit the eyes of the wicked world do not endure it.

Now there be two excellent reasons given in the twenty-fourth verse, wherefore the Lord is glad and rejoices at the home-coming of the forlorn son. "This my son was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found." There is a change made upon him. "My son is translated from death to life; he was lost, but now he is found." That is a matter of rejoicing to be avowed before the world when a sinner that was dead becomes living; when a sinner that was running away from the Lord turns home again to Him and is found of Him. And this is a cause of rejoicing to the Father and the whole house that the Lord has gotten home a lost bairn and a forlorn son that was running away from him formerly.

See now what is said of his estate before he come home to his father. Before he was dead and lost in an uncow country; dead, and yet hungry, and would eat husks, and not long since he was coming home, and acknowledging to his father: "I have sinned against

heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants;" and was ragged, and naked, and bare, and you know the woful gate that he was in. How then was he dead? for all these be actions of life. But, whatever a natural man does we may say he is dead, for all thir actions of life he does are not the actions of the life of God; for he has not that life, and so he is spiritually dead and knows not the case he is in while it is so. And that is the estate of all those who are not within the kingdom of the Son of God, albeit they eat, drink, sleep, walk, laugh, &c., and go about all the businesses of this life, and work the works of sin as living men, yet in the Lord's estimation they are nothing else but dead men.

The best works of the unregenerate who are not born again by the water and the Spirit, they are but only works of dead men. And therefore never go to question if the heathen and those that never heard of Christ can do works good in the sight of God, as the patrons of nature have been careful to defend things done by them as good. All the actions of natural men are dead actions before the Lord, and the best thing they can be called is only to call them well-farded sins. For actions are only good in God's estimation that can be called good from all the four causes. First, that are good in regard of the author of them; second, in regard of the matter; third, good in regard of the form or manner of doing them; and fourth, in regard of the end wherefore they are done. And if an action want any of these that it be not good in all these respects, then it is imperfect in the sight of God, and so ill. And therefore the Apostle says, Rom. 14:23, "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin." Now all the works of men, while they are in the state of nature, they are done without faith, and so they are sin. Look but to two things in the works of the natural man, and you will see all of them to be sin.

Works that come not from faith, if that the first motion of them comes not from the renewed man, these works are sin, as ye may see, Heb. 11:6: "Without faith it is impossible to please God." Let all the world distinguish as they will, it is a thing impossible that a man can

do works to please God and procure life eternal unless he have faith, and the works be done in faith; which cannot be said of the natural man. Let all the world distinguish in this as they will, the Word of God warrants us to say this. Make the works of the natural man as fair and as beautiful as ye will in your eyes, and never so life-like, yet the Lord esteems them to be no other but dead and sinful works.

And then look to the end of all that the natural man does, and in that they are wrong also. Nay, but, says one who takes their defence, they intend not always an ill end in all they do, who are not in Christ, for they do not all to the honour of an idol or a wicked god, or for the honour of the creature. But the Spirit of God says, 1 Cor. 10:31, "Whether ye eat or ye drink or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." Where a work wants this intention, and the doer of the work aims not at this, albeit he should give his body to be burnt in the fire, and bestow all his goods on the poor, yet the Lord says this of him, that he is no other but a sounding brass, and a tinkling cymbal. It is a work of sin and is not done in obedience to God, but He is therein disobeyed.

And for that they refer not the end of all that they do to the honour of an idol-god; albeit it were so, as they allege, there are none who profess to give religious worship to anything but virtually he refers the last end of all he does thereto. But be it so, that he does not refer it to an idol; yet because he refers not the last end of all his actions to God, and makes not Him his last end, it is certain he must have another last end to which he refers all he does; for all reasonable creatures, even devils and wicked men, they do all that they do out of a conceit to attain happiness, and therefore their wicked end must either be the Creator or the creature. But if it be confessed, as the adversaries themselves do confess, that the last end is not the Creator, because they understand him not in the Mediator Christ Jesus, then the creature must be their last end, and that certainly is idolatry. To make the creature, either the first author of anything, or to make it the last end of anything, it is to put the creature in the rowme of God. For a man to do things for his credit, honour, his

friend, &c., having no other end for what he does, is a work of a dead soul, and the Lord will not accept thereof as acceptable to Him.

One use of this is to see that the hearing of God's Word by the natural man, receiving the sacraments, reading, praying, &c., he will get no thanks for these, neither are they acceptable to God, so long as he is not in Christ. All these things that thou doest being out of Christ, will be but small bulk in the Lord's eyes in that day when thou shalt be judged of the Lord by thy works. And therefore careful should we be that we may be found in Christ, that our persons may be accepted in Him. And your persons being accepted in Christ, then the Lord will also accept of your works. But otherways all that the natural man does is wickedness; his prayer is sin and abomination before the Lord. When he is about prayer that is not in Christ, the smell of his sacrifice is unsavoury to the Lord. He cannot endure such prayers, and therefore great need have we to be assured that we are in Christ, that our works may not be dead but living works.

Observe while he says, "This my son was dead," there is the estate of the natural man before he come to Christ. Eph. 2:2, the apostle says: "And were by nature the children of wrath even as others." "But God for His rich mercy wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ." Has not the natural man a soul, and can he not perform the works of nature? A man in nature is not naturally dead, but he is spiritually dead.

There are three things that a man in nature, touching his spiritual life, has not. And first, the natural man has not life itself; second, he has not reason; and, third, He has not sense or the use of his senses. These are all joined with life where it is; yet he wants, them. And

First: I say he wants life itself, and all the natural motions thereof; and yet for all that he is hearing the Word and singing Psalms, and reading, &c. And yet these are not works of life in him. And he is praying. Now will a dead man do so? Yes; a man spiritually dead may do all these things so as he does them. All that the natural man does

has nothing but an outside with it. The Lord sees the stinking bones of a dead corpse under all these. He sees seven abominations in such a man, and so He sees all abominations in him.

Second: The man in nature, he has no reason nor the reasonable presence of a living man. This may seem not to be very true-like. He is a governor of a city or a country side, and knows the laws very well, and he is a trim bookman. Can such a man be a dead man? Yes; all that such a man, who is in nature, does, is the work of a dead man; for there is never a word that he speaks, or a conclusion he makes, that is heaven-like, and therefore the work is dead. The very main end of all that he does is the world. It is that he may provide for him and his, that he may get honours, pleasure, court, &c., and the things of the world. All his words, thoughts, actions, run upon this pin, the things of this present world. All his logic and strongest arguments for anything he does even in reforming the matters of the house of God are taken from this: "It will hazard my life and my office in the world, if I join not in such things." This is plainly the reasoning of a dead man.

Third: Those who are only natural they want the sense of life. They know not what that is, to have a soul wounded with sin, because of this, and so are just like the drunken man that Solomon speaks of (Prov. 23:35)—when he is drunk with wine, every one goes by and beats him with rods, and he knows not that they do so till the wine be out of his head, and he wakes out of his dream; then the strokes he has gotten make him sore and crazed. Even so will it be with them who are in the state of nature, when they are wakened out of their dream. O! the blasphemous oaths will lie heavy on him then, and the harlotry of the harlot will be a sore burden to him; and he who has loved the creature more than God, who is the Creator, such a man will never feel his wounds till he be brought to the Physician Christ, and the Lord once translate him out of darkness into the kingdom of His dear Son, that he be brought from death to life. But then he feels all the sore strokes he has gotten all his time by sin. The first fall Adam got by sin dang him dead and all his posterity, and made him

and his to want the life of God and His image wherewith they were endowed, from all mankind for ever in themselves.

Can this be, that one act of sin which works morally, can take away all the habitual justice and righteousness that are in man by nature? They who oppose the truth of God deny that man could lose by his transgression, but only by the decree of God that it should be so. But if sin be well looked to, it has two set of actions in it. The one is moral and the other is physical. Morally sin, even reatus, deserves that, because of it, the sinner should be deprived of life; and then physically, the blot of sin puts out the image of God. And if any man will speer how the first fall of Adam should put the life of God out of all mankind for all eternity? I answer, albeit we could give no natural reason, or any reason of logic or physic for this, yet this is sufficient for proof of it, that the Word of God says, the natural man cannot understand the things that are of God, for they are foolishness unto him, and Christ says (John 6:44), "No man can come unto Me unless the Father which hath sent Me draw him." These and many other places say unto us clearly that, albeit we know no other reason, yet this is enough to tell us that man, in the state of nature, he is a corrupt creature, and sees not God, and is not for Him, that he loves not God in that estate, nor can love Him; and this is the woful estate of every man so long as he remains in that case.

Now the use of this is: If so be that the natural man be so, how comes it to pass then that there be so many who will not be convinced that it is so with them? how comes it that it is so hard a task for a minister to convince a natural man that he has a hard heart, and that he is in a state of sin, and that all by nature are ignorant of God? This only is the cause, that all by nature are dead in sins and trespasses, and being dead cannot be brought to know they are so. No. Ye know all the art and logic in the world used to persuade or convince a dead man, that is in the grave, of the estate of his body, that it is dead and under corruption, will not convince him to know that it is so, because he neither hears nor sees what they do or say to him. Even so is it here with the man remaining still in the state of nature; he cannot be

brought unto the faith of a hell to believe this, that "that day I came first into the world, I came in it an heir [of] hell." The natural man cannot be brought to believe this. The comparison holds well here between the natural man and the man that is buried in the grave; there are lilies and flowers growing out of the grave, but it smells filthily within. Little knows the man that is in nature what an ill smell he would cast if he were tane up and discovered. A man living in the state of nature, and so in the state of sin, he may be well busked, and have a good smell outwardly, be an honest married man in his own house, not deceiving or wronging his neighbours, not a shedder of blood, and yet he is only a man buried in a grave when all is done, and some flowers growing above the grave. But when God takes him out of his grave, and lets him see the case that he is in, then all his sins begin to stink. When he is wakened, then he counts all these things that formerly the world and he himself esteemed much of to be but dung, as we may see example in the Apostle Paul, Phil. 3:7: He counted that to be a Pharisee, to be come of the royal tribe, &c., to be but loss and dung for Christ. So we may see a man shall never get a right sight of the miserable estate he is in till first the Lord opens his grave that by nature he lies in. And, that being done, he shall then be forced to say: "Once I was dead, but now I am alive; once I was blind, but now I see; I was once lost, but now I am found. Once I was a stranger and an enemy to God, but now, Lord be thanked, who has taken in a poor forlorn dyvour to Christ, and has made me to know what is His will."

The other reason his father gives for his kind usage is, "He was lost, and is found." That is the property of a man in the state of sin. He is a lost man, that is, he is such a thing as may be lost, or wander from the right owner without his knowledge, and may be torn of wild beasts—a sinner in the state of nature. O! but there be many loose-handed devils to steal him away. In 1 John 5:18, the Apostle says, "He that is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not." The man that is in the state of nature is not held up as he that is born of God is. The Apostle says of himself, "I know whom I have believed, and

am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day" (2 Tim. 1:12). So that while a man is once in the state of grace God becomes his keeper, but so long as a man is in the state of nature he is a tint creature, and he is ready to be turned away with any kind of religion; like unto those of whom the Apostle speaks (Heb. 13:9), who are carried about with divers and strange doctrines, and have not the heart established in grace, a comparison that is borrowed from ships, that every tide and every blast of wind that blows will blow and turn them as they come upon them, because she wants a rudder to keep her sure. So a man in the state of nature will receive any new gust in religion. Any wind or tide that comes from Satan and his instruments carries him away from his Lord. And the Apostle Peter (2 Pet. 3:17) has a word to this purpose borrowed from beasts: "See that ye be not led away with the error of the wicked and fall from your own steadfastness." It is an easy thing for Satan to drive a man away from religion, who follows only that religion which a king loves best, and who places his happiness in court. Certainly it is easy to drive such from any point of faith. And therefore the Word of God uses this comparison ordinarily to compare lost sinners to wandering sheep. David says, "I am gone astray like a lost sheep." And Matt. 10:5, 6, when Christ there is sending out His disciples to preach the gospel, and telling them what they shall first preach, He says: "Go not in the way of the Samaritans, but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." All these and many others say that a man in the state of nature is a man easily carried away with every wind of doctrine. Like the word Eliphas has to Job 15:12: "Wherefore doth thine heart carry thee away, and what do thine eyes wink at?" To be like one in an uncou country, or house.

Let us learn here to know how ill we are kept while we are in the state of nature, ready to be led away with court, honour, the love of the world, and to be stolen from the Lord. Has not the devil made sin to the natural man like new wine that is sweet in the down-going, that runs into his head who drinks it, and or he wit it steals away his wit from him, and his feet, and deprives him of the use of all his senses?

So while a man remains in the state of sin, he drinks his new wine till he be stolen off his feet.

But when is the sinner well kept? Never till he come into Christ's house and kingdom, for there he gets a new Lord, and there are new laws there; he gets a new tutor then that will answer for him. This is a sufficient reason, albeit there were no more to prove that fra once we come in Christ's tutory, that we are given over to Him, we cannot fall away again; for whoever they be that are given to Christ they are not their own, but they are bought with a price. We cannot keep ourselves well. We are always running away from our Lord. But when Christ our Lord comes and takes us home in His keeping, then are we sure; and never till then. For then we are our Lord's jewels, of whom our Lord says (Mal. 3:17): "And they shall be Mine in that day when I make up My jewels." There is no man who commits himself unto Christ, who ventures his life and all for Christ's cause and for religion, [but] He will answer for all that are given to Him. And when He renders up the kingdom to His Father, He will make such compt of them as that which we read, John 17:12, where He says: "Of all that Thou hast given Me have I lost none, but the child of perdition; that the Scripture might be fulfilled." There is no man lost by Christ but he who is a lost man in God's eternal decree.

Now when the older brother comes home to the house, he hears melody and joy and meikle mirth in his father's house, and he knows not what it means. And therefore he calls one of the servants, and asks what these things meant.

The text it will clear this point unto us, that the father of the house—the Lord and His angels—they are glad at the home-coming of a sinner, for there was rejoicing and dancing at the home-coming of His forlorn son, and it must be a good spring that gars him dance. Indeed He is very blith when a lost sinner comes home to Him, and He makes a psalm of joy upon it. And this was the matter of Christ's joy at this time, that a forlorn sinner is come home. This is a matter of no small comfort to such as have a mind home toward Christ, that

their home-coming will gar the Lord rejoice. Is this modesty in Christ to dance? I am sure it is love gars Him to do it; and the apostle says love does nothing that is unseemly. The Word of God expresses to us in many pithy words the joy and rejoicing that the Lord our God has for the declaration both of mercy and justice upon mankind. As, first, for expression of God's affection when justice comes to seize upon the sinner who would have none of the Lord's counsel, nor hear none of His reproof, it is said, "The Lord laughs at his calamity, and mocks when his fear cometh" (Prov. 1:26). Laughter is not to the Lord an expression of affection as it is to man; but because this is one of the many ends that the Lord intends and aims at in the making of mankind, the declaration of the glory of His justice in so many as break their neck upon Christ, the Lord will "laugh at the calamity of such, and mock when their fears come." And then for the expression of the Lord's love and joy at the home-coming of a sinner, which is the declaration of the glory of the Lord's mercy in them who are appointed heirs of salvation, what expressions are these? Isa. 62:5: "As the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee." Zeph. 3:17: "The Lord thy God will rejoice over thee with joy, He will rest in His love, He will joy over thee with singing." And in Solomon's Song 8:6 there is an expression the Kirk has to this purpose, speaking to her beloved: "Set me as a seal upon thy hand, and as a signet upon thine arm." That which we wear between our breasts, because the breast is near the heart, and we love that well; and that which we make a chain and bracelet to our arm, we love it well. Now the Kirk prays that the Lord would make her so to Him, expressing this far unto us how excellent, how sweet, how lovely, all the Lord's elect and His lost ones, when they are found again, are to Him. And there is an expression not unlike unto this, Cant. 4:9: "Thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse; thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes, with one chain of thy neck."

All this says this much unto us, that whatever can be in the father to contribute for the good of the bairns he has begotten, or what affection can be in the mother towards the fruit of her womb, all these are in the Lord towards His children, but in Him after an

infinite manner, and are inimitable. They are in Him without any change or any imperfection at all; for the Lord needs no-wise to rejoice in this, for it adds nothing to Him, yet He expresses Himself this way to declare how greatly He rejoices in them who are saved when they come home to Him.

And also this serves to reprove that woful opinion of some who say that man's condemnation falls out against the will of God. No; certainly all that is in God is omnipotent, and so is His will omnipotent also. What He wills it comes to pass. The enemies of the grace of God bring in God weeping, full of sorrow and natural affection towards men, because He is condemned not according to His will. But if it were so, they would make God to be far from that infinite perfection the Word of God ascribes to Him; Eph. 1:5: He does whatsoever He will in heaven and in earth that we should be to the praise of His glory.

If the Lord make so meikle of honouring a sinner, that He accounts it to be the matter of His joy and rejoicing, O! that we and these who are yet in the black estate of nature, could be induced to believe, what joy it would be to our Lord, that we would repent, and believe in Him and His gospel! The natural man he knows not that the Lord rejoices at his home-coming, and will not believe the Lord's oath for it: "As I live, says the Lord, I delight not in the death of a sinner, but rather that he should repent, and be saved" (Ezek. 18:32). He rejoices at the home-coming of a sinner. Make God blith, and come home to Him and seek His face, repent of your ill-ways, and so make the Lord dance and sing that He has gotten home one who was running away from Him. Come home to the Lord and repent of sin that there may be a psalm over thy repentance in heaven. They are called a "destroyed" people (Hos. 13:9) to whom the Lord shows their sins, to make them mourn for them the more. O! that is the sweetest sight God can give to a sinner. When they been running to the devil and applauding themselves in their own ways, afterward to see them come greeting home to the Lord, touched in their conscience with rebukes and challenges for sins; O, that is a matter of God's mirth,

and a delicate to Him. Learn to know this and have other thoughts of godliness than ever yet ye have had, to account them blessed who see their sins and by the discovery of them are driven to the Lord. And to this Lord who is the remedy of sin; to the Father of Christ and our Father; and the blessed Spirit who sanctifies and cleanses us from sin, we render all praise and glory for ever.—Amen.

The Forlorn Son

"And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: but as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf. And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. It was meet that we should make merry and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found."—LUKE 15:29–32.

LET the world, beloved in our Lord, esteem of the children of God as they will, the Lord has aye a good eye to them that repent and come home to Him. The Lord is kind to any without exception who will come and lay their sores upon Him and will give Him the weight of all that lies upon them. And the Lord seeks no more, in the matter of believing, of a humbled sinner, but that they lay the weight and burden of their salvation upon Him.

In thir words there is (1) the reason the Lord gives why the forlorn sinner is so handled. (2) We have to consider how this elder brother that knows not God takes with this. At the first he knows not what it

meant when he heard more than ordinary joy and melody in his father's house, and he calls for one of the servants, and asks what it means. There is no natural man that knows the sweet kisses and expressions of love that the Lord shows to a home-coming sinner. (3) We have the servant's answer to the elder son. "Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound." (4) When the elder brother hears this, he is angry and refuses to go into the house. As the hypocrite he will not in any ways countenance the home-coming sinner. He will not welcome his brother when he is come home. Then his father comes and entreats the elder brother to come in. Then we have in the end, a conference between the loving father and the elder son, the father answering all the objections that the son could give against his kind and friendly dealing, and the son again accusing both his father for what he does and accusing his brother also.

First: He says, "I have served thee so many years and served thee after such a kind that I never at any time brake any of thy commandments, and yet thou never gavest me a kid to make merry with my friends." And herein accuses his father of unjust dealing, accounting him as it were the transgressor.

Second: He finds fault also with his father's son; he calls him not his brother but "thy son." "But as soon as this thy son was come which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf." He calls him a drunken waster, and one who had spent all his father's goods with harlots. The children of God they will never get that praise from hypocrites that the Lord Himself gives them. And then we have the father's mild and gentle oration to his son, yet entreating him and giving him fair words and giving a good reason wherefore this should be a time of mirth and rejoicing. "It was meet," says he, "that we should make merry and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found." Albeit he will not call him his brother, yet his father calls him his brother, and therefore, says he, this was a fit time to be glad and rejoice, namely,

when a sinner comes home in penitence and mercy is shown to a penitent sinner. Now of thir particulars shortly.

And first: We have to speak of this that the forlorn son gets such a welcome of his brother and that his brother thinks so of the joy that is at his home-coming, that he knows not what it means. Therefore we have to learn that—

The course of God's goodness to a home-coming sinner and of that rejoicing that the Lord and the blessed angels who are His servants, and the matter of the Lord's giving mercy to such a one, it is a hid mystery to the natural man. He that knows no better than mere nature thinks God's kindness that He shows to sinners the work of the gospel and the news thereof, inviting sinners to come to Christ telling them that they will be welcome, he thinks that to be an uncow thing. That God should take a defiled sinner into His clean bosom, and give him mercy for all his sins, he knows not what that means; and therefore he offends at it. The natural man knows not the things that are of God, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. And he is carnally minded, he knows not the depth of the Lord's love; he knows not what that is for mercy and misery to meet together. He knows not, nor considers not, how kind and gracious the Lord is towards such, and what bowels of love and tender compassion the Lord has to a repenting home-coming sinner. No. There is no man that knows the greatness of the Lord's mercy, and how far His kindness is extended to home-coming sinners, but only he that will come and see, that will come and take a proof thereof himself. Sense is the best schoolmaster to teach us this lesson of God's goodness and His loving-kindness. By preaching, hearing, reading, contemplation of the cause and the theory of this, by all these we will only see this [goodness and loving-kindness] afar off. But once come and taste this goodness of the Lord, and come in within Christ's house, and hear heaven's music, and that will say more to you of these things than anything else can do, and more than ever ye would [have] believed.

A second reason for this is, This is a thing that is so contrary to nature that one who is a sinner, and withal a wicked sinner, that such should get mercy they cannot believe it. Scribes and Pharisees they wonder at this; and therefore Christ is challenged for this by them, for going to Zacchæus's house, who was a publican; and He is challenged and sore accused, and calumnies raised upon Him for this matter, in that He ate and drank and kept company with publicans and sinners, who were a people most hated among the Jews, that none would keep company with, but those that were like themselves, And Scribes and Pharisees and the Rabbis among the Jews break their neck upon Christ because of this, that He was so entire and so warm-hearted to poor vile sinners. And this is one point of the gospel, and indeed a main point of it, that Christ in the gospel invites sinners to come, and receives repenting sinners be they never so vile in their own eyes and the eyes of others. So that repentance is a work of the gospel and not a work of the law. It is a thing altogether supernatural and not proceeding at all from nature. And then—

Third: That the Lord should extend more than ordinary mercy to sinners, who have been furthest and deepest in guiltiness, the natural man cannot away with it. And that slays all these who are opposers of God's mercy, and so come not to Christ for mercy, because they think the offers of the gospel are not so meikle for them, seeing it is reached to them who transgress so highly in such a large manner. They cannot believe that, and foster themselves in that conceit, and take a wrong opinion of Christ. And thus they make hell to come upon themselves before the time, and the terrors of the second death before ever the Lord give out the sentence.

Now our use of this is to let us see what is the natural man's light, and what is his judgment of God's matters. That which is called free will in the understanding, believing God and Christ, the elder brother knows not what that means. This should be marked that the natural man who goes on into the ways of sin he has not right thoughts of God. All of them have false thoughts of God in their will and their affections. There is a hostility and enmity between their mind and

the Lord, and His manner of dealing with poor sinners. He knows not what that means. What! has the natural man no light at all? Yes; he has some literal and natural light, but there are four faults in it shortly, and this is a clear difference between the light of the natural man and the believer's light.

First: There is no proportion between the light of the natural man and the things that are of God. Christ is little to the natural man, and so are mercy and repentance to a home-coming sinner little also. His heart is misted and blinded, he sees not what wide bowels of mercy and love Christ has to a home-coming sinner. But the believer sees Christ and mercy and repentance all in one colour. He sees that Christ has open arms for receiving a repenting sinner. He sees there is a chamber of love to receive a lost and tint sinner in Christ. He sees there is a door opened in Christ to receive those who come not into Him till the eleventh hour. Again—

Second: The light that the natural man has, it wants weight to draw the will and the affections and all the powers of the soul to love and embrace and follow after Christ. And therefore it may well be resembled to the light of the moon, especially in the winter season. The moon in winter has light, but it is not like the summer sun that has a melting and warming power with it. Whereas the light the believer has, it works upon his heart to warm and refresh him with the love of Jesus, that as he knows Christ so he follows on to know Him. And these two are joined in Hos. 6:3 by the spirit of God: "Then shall ye know Him if ye follow on to know Him." So that light and heat and refreshment follow the heat and sense of Christ's love that the natural man has. The natural man may see the gospel to be true, but he sees it not to be good, neither assents to the promises that are contained therein. Yet they are true promises but he assents not, or follows not in them as good, and so he goes no further on but to a bare light.

Thirdly and lastly: There is no liking, love, joy, desire, accompanying the light the natural man has, and because of this it is no wonder that

those who have but little knowledge of Christ, it is no marvel albeit they misken the Lord's dealing with His children, and call that which is the excellence of Christ and of the gospel, madness and daffin. As certainly this will follow the not knowing Christ and His ordinances rightly, that so natural men may break their necks and stumble upon the works of God, as we may see in Psa. 83:11.

Now the servant gives an answer to the elder brother, wherefore there should be mirth and rejoicing in his father's house. "Thy brother is come: and he hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound." The argument that the servant uses for that [which] the father did is: "Thy father hath received him a whole and living son who was once sick and dead, and therefore there is mirth and rejoicing." And the strength of the argument is tane fra the hazard wherein the forlorn son was once, and now, says he, he is escaped from that hazard and danger, and therefore it is most expedient and lawful, that there should be mirth and feasting and rejoicing in heaven. And so by this we may learn that this forlorn son he has once been in great hazard, he has once been over in the devil's camp, and so in great danger, but now he is returned safe and sound; and therefore the servant says to his brother: "He has received him safe and sound." The Lord would hereby teach us that we have been in a fearful and dangerous hazard while we remain in the state of nature. And indeed so it is. For being there we are under spiritual death, as it is Eph. 2:2: "Called us from death to life." And being in nature, we are also under the state of condemnation: "And were by nature the children of wrath as well as others."

And therefore all those who are come to Christ, they have cause to be blyth, and to rejoice and to praise Christ's rich and free grace, and to say with their hearts: "I thank God that whereas once I was a persecutor, and a blasphemmer and an injurious person, one who hated Christ and the power of religion, &c.; but now I am not so, but, by free grace, I am become a new man." There is no man has such cause to sing a triumphant song of the Lord's praise as he who was

once dead, and the Lord has given him mercy, and quickened him from that estate.

"And he was angry, and would not go in." This was the older brother. There seems to be natural reason for this, that he would not go in, he being a civil liver, and an honest man that way, one who had not at any time broken his father's command, as he himself says, that had not run away from his father, and tired of his company, and spent his goods with harlots and in debauchery, as his younger brother had done. This is a strange thing, thinks he, that he should make so meikle of him. Because it is so, I will not go into the house. Reason would say that the elder brother has cause to stick here, and to be offended at what his father does. But this is one of the supernatural points of the gospel, and a very great one; that those who seem to be furthest from mercy, who have done most for stopping mercy to be extended towards them, the Lord He ordinarily gives mercy to such. And yet, on the other part, honest civilians and well-covered Scribes, Pharisees, that have a trim-like outside, and seek for no more of religion, and seek not into Christ, the Lord hardens the heart of such, and gives them over to the spirit of error and delusion; and harlots and publicans, and very sinful persons, who are even seen to be great sinners, they get mercy and forgiveness, and are led into Christ to seek their life in Him.

We may learn here that it is God's way, and it is the way of the gospel, to ride upon the weakest, poorest, basest, and most contemptible things in the world, and to cause the glory of His mercy and goodness to shine upon them, and to cause the news of mercy to sound effectually to those who seem most lost in the world. Look wherever, at any time, God has shown mercy and the light and saving power of His truth, wherever the Lord has shown the greatest works of mercy, whether it be upon nations, or congregations, or families, or particular persons, it has always been shown most clearly and effectually to such as the world thought least of. When Jacob is blessing his children, there is not a word spoken of any blessing to the tribe of Levi (Gen. 49); but when he is dying the Lord by him

gives them a curse because "they slew a man in their anger, and in their self-will they digged down a wall. Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel. I will divide them in Jacob and scatter them in Israel." And yet the Lord has chosen them for His portion, even the tribe come of him who gat his father's curse, the Lord chooses him out of all the tribes of Israel to be His portion. And a bastard Jephthah—the Jews abhorred any of that kind—yet the Lord will have him to be a judge in Israel, and the instrument by whom He will work a great deliverance for that people. And among the twelve Patriarchs, the odd and the castaway son Joseph, who was hated and sold of his brethren; the servant of God, Moses, at the direction of the Lord's spirit, says of him, "The blessing of the Lord upon him who was cast forth of his brethren."

And likeways when Christ is coming into Jerusalem in His triumph, as it was prophesied, riding upon an ass and a colt the foal of an ass, He will not have Scribes and Pharisees to sing His triumph, but bairns and little ones, cry out "Hosanna, blessed is the king that cometh in the name of the Lord." And where, when Christ was born, were all the Bible-men and the book-learned men that should [have] known so well, and observed the time and the place of His birth? And yet shepherds get leave to be the first preachers of His birth to the world? No; all the great rabbis and exponers of the law they had beguiled themselves with their light, and knew not that Christ was born, and the shepherds proclaim His birth that so the Lord he may triumph upon the weakest things, and these fardest unlike heaven he will take them to heaven.

And this is, indeed, the sweetness of the mercy and love of our Lord, that even those who are furthest off from mercy in their own eyes, and in the eyes of the world, these shall get mercy rather than others who seem to be nearer within the reach thereof, that the Lord may make good that which is said by the apostle (1 Cor. 1:26–29): "For you see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and the

weak things of the world to confound the strong; and base things in the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things that are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in His presence." He will choose the kinless things of the world, and the nothings, to be his portion, that no flesh may glory before him, but that the glory of the salvation of all those who are saved may be to the Lord, and to the Lord allanerly.

O happy and blessed is the case and condition of a sinner who is despised of all, yea, even of themselves, and thereby can come home to Christ. When thou comest to Him the Lord will not speer at thee when thou comest, who was thy father, or thy mother, or what thy kindred is, neither will He speer what thou hast been doing all the time till thou come to Him, if so be thou come to Him with a bleeding heart for sin. And therefore let never man speer this question what they have been doing before who are come into Christ, for all thy harlotries and thy manifold sins and provocations be not bars away for those. And albeit Scribes and Pharisees hoot at you that thou should seek home to Christ, and be made welcome of Him; yet for all their ill will and their malice at Christ's dealings with His own poor ones, seeing He makes you welcome, make thou thyself welcome also.

What further says his elder brother to his father? "Neither did I at any time break Thy commandments." The word in the first language is, "I never went beyond thy commandment." Albeit this be the word of a proud Pharisee, yet it tells us what sort of obedience our God requires of us. That obedience he craves is not to go out of the straight line, not to decline to the right hand or to the left hand.

The doctrine is clear, and it is this: The law that God will have us to follow and to square ourselves unto as a line and rule, it is such a law as requires strict and precise obedience of us. The apostle says: "Walk circumspectly as in the day-time," that is, walk as those who count all their stops, and have light to see where they set their feet. God will either give such obedience as that, or He will account any

obedience we give no obedience. And look to five things in the law of God, and that will tell us this is true.

First: The law of God it is a spiritual law, and it is not by hands, and feet, and tongue, and teeth, and obedience with the outward man that will satisfy God, but He must have the obedience of the heart and the inward man. And therefore the Lord lays charge upon our thoughts; Jer. 4:14; Isa. 55:7. In those places God will have the thoughts to be subject to Him: "O Jerusalem, wash thy heart from wickedness. How long shall vain thoughts lodge within thee?" "Let the wicked man forsake his ways, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, for He will have mercy; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon." And our Saviour Christ when He expones the the law (Matt. 5:22), ye will see expounding the sixth command, He not only forbids murder, but He says, "Whosoever miscalls his brother, and calls him 'Raca,' 'thou fool,' or is angry with him without a cause, he is a breaker of that command." And He not only condemns adultery for a sin and breach of the seventh command, but He says he that looks upon a woman and lusteth after her has committed adultery with her already in his heart; so that it will not be the outside of civility and of country holiness that will make a man accounted religious and holy in the sight of God, but the holiness of the heart.

Second: Look also to the universality of God's commandments, and that will tell us He requires such obedience, Psa. 119:6: "Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect to all Thy commandments." This says that shame follows upon that man who pretends to keep some of God's commands, and yet breaks other some wittingly. Not a drunkard and yet a harlot, shame will come upon such a man; not a cozener, and yet none may lippen to his word, shame shall come upon such a man. And that it is the commendation given to Zacharias and Elizabeth, that they walked in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. Again—

Third: If we will look to the universality of time, God requires such obedience of us, Psa. 106:3: "Blessed are they that keep judgment, and he that doeth righteousness at all times." There are anew who will keep the commandment of the Lord while the cross is lying upon them, or upon their house, or any of their bairns; but that place says: "Blessed is the man that doeth righteousness at all times." And then

Fourth: In obedience to God's commands is to look to all the circumstances of our actions, to the end wherefore, to the manner how, and to the ground and principle from whence they flow. So the believer he must look to his intentions, what it is he sets before his eyes when he comes to hear the Word of God. If a man comes to the kirk to hear the Word for saving his honesty, because it will be a shame for him, he being a man of whom notice is taken, and in some place and reputation, if his place in the kirk shall be seen empty, or for any other by respect, then you obey not God after a right and acceptable manner. But if you can say, ye do what [ye do] in obedience to His commandments, for that end that ye may win a step nearer God, and may grow deep in His love, then that is right obedience. And then—

Lastly: In our obedience to God's commandments no man must make a pattern and rule of others in their obedience. What, albeit ye be as holy as that man, if ye be not holier than he, you and he may both go to hell together, as the Scribes and Pharisees ilk one of them did imitate others. But made that them to be holy? No. Christ says, "If your righteousness exceed not the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of God." It is a remarkable place that which we read 2 Kings 14:3, where King Amaziah is reprov'd of the Lord, that he did not as David had done before him. And may not a man be a good man, albeit he be not as holy as David was? Who can win to that high pitch? Yes; I confess he may be a good man, and not win so far on as he did. But this is to teach us that we make no man our copy in obeying the commandments of the Lord. But we must set that copy before us

which Christ says of His Kirk, Cant. 4:7: "Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee." You must see and strive by all means to be quit of spots in the world.

Now the use of this, that we have been speaking [of] is, to reprove them who mock godliness, and scorn those who fear an oath, as the Scripture speaks, and make conscience of their words and thoughts as if that were in needless preciseness. But the way to heaven is a straight and narrow way, and alas! the world knows it not. They scorn a strict and precise walking with God in everything. And alas! this is even now the sin that rings in Scotland, that any who would walk so as to approve themselves to God in everything, these get a new name to be "Puritans" and "Separatists." And I believe there be not many parts where the gospel is that have gone so far on in this sin as we have done, notwithstanding our light be clearer than the light of others; and therefore our judgment must be the greater, for we lie under the woe that is pronounced by the Lord against those who call evil good and good evil.

Now only a word [more] of two things in this parable that we may close it. And—

First: That albeit the forlorn son when he comes home be highly honoured and kindly entreated by his father, yet the elder brother will not go into the house where he is, but is angry at both his father and his brother, challenging them both.

Second: What is it that ails him at his brother and his father? Nothing, but only because God is good to him, he cannot digest that. Where we may learn:

First: That whenever a sinner comes home to Christ they shall then get the hatred and envy of the rest of the world. What fault had this younger brother done to him to be angry for? No fault at all. But because he came home to Christ, therefore he is angry. And what is the ground of the hatred, that is between the followers of Christ and

the rest of the world? They have no other cause wherefore to be angry at them, but because they are come home to Christ, and because it is so, they cannot get the world's heart. That must be true which Christ says and registers in His Testament: "Ye are not of the world, for if ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Ye shall get the world's malice, and all the quarrel that the world shall have against you shall be only because you are My disciples. The seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent cannot go together, but they must be at enmity." And how comes it to pass that there cannot be a kindly peace between Prelatists and Papists, and those who have bound themselves in a covenant with God? Even because we are not in one way. The Lord has said it, that their horns must be in our side. And, therefore, let no man who comes to Christ look always for the wind fair in his sails, and that he shall lie always upon a soft bed, fra thou hast tane you to Christ. No; thou shalt be used hardly of the men of the world, who are not in the same course with you, and shall be forced to say as the prophet Jeremiah says (15:10): "Woe is me, my mother, that thou hast borne me a man of strife and a man of contention to the whole earth! I have neither lent on usury, nor men have lent to me on usury; and yet every one doth curse me." And the reason of all their envy is because the Word of God is his delight. That shall be enough for a quarrel to the world. Seek God, and ye shall get the world on your top. Even thy father and mother and the wife that lies into thy bosom, if thou seek God, and they go not on into that way, also they shall be thy enemies. And, therefore, we must resolve to take the world's feid. If we would have God's favour, whoever comes to Christ must make them[selves] for the scourge of the world's tongue.

Wherewith is it that he finds fault? "As soon as this thy son came that hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf." The Pharisee has an ill eye towards the children of God, because God has a good heart to them. It is the natural man's ordinary to find fault with his neighbour's sins. It is ordinary for them to speak that, word which we read, Isa. 65:[5]: "Stand back by

thyself, come not near me, I am holier than thou." A soul that is truly sanctified will be loathe to make a hole in his neighbour's conscience, that he may see what is there. No, he sees so many faults in himself that he sees not the faults of others well. He will say with the apostle, "I am the chief of sinners." The forlorn son speaks no ill of him, but he has much that he casts up to the forlorn son.

The last particular that we observe is: The Lord taking the forlorn son's part. "It was meet (says he) that we should make merry, and be glad," &c.—to teach us that God will for a while flatter a hypocrite, for you see the Lord reproves him not for his rough dealing. And woful is the case of that man under whose head God lays a cod to let him sleep in his security, and wakens him not to whom he says, as it is in Hos. 4:17: "Ephraim is joined to idols; let him alone." Now,

Lastly: That the Lord takes the defence of His forlorn son. "It was meet that we should be glad and rejoice," teaches us this: Come home to Christ, who will, albeit all the world should speak ill of them, yet He will take their defence, and speak on their part. When that poor woman poured the ointment on Christ's feet, and the disciples began to murmur, and say, "It might [have] been sold for much money and given to the poor," Christ took her defence, and says, "Let her alone, she has wrought a good work on Me, for she did it for My burial; and wheresoever this gospel is preached throughout the world, this also that she has done shall be preached for a memorial of her." And Acts 9, when Ananias is bidden, "Go, preach to Saul," Ananias says: "This man has done much ill, and he has presently authority to bind all that call on Thy name, and carry them to Jerusalem;" but in ver. 15 Christ says, "Go thy way for he is a chosen vessel unto Me, to bear My name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel." And—

O, but that is a sweet thing, that albeit all the world should say against you, yet if thou wilt come to Christ, He will take thy part. Let them call you what they will, never so ill, He will call you His love, His dove, His undefiled, &c. And well is the soul that has Christ's

commendation and high song of praise. It is better nor the commendation of all the world. What's the matter what men speak of you if God commend you. What is the matter albeit wicked men speak ill of you, if God speak good of you, for what He says all the world shall not get undone. Seek ye the Lord's commendation, and to be approven of Him, and it makes not then what men say against you. Lord teach us so to do for His name's sake. To this Lord, and our Lord, to His Father, and our Father, and to the Holy Spirit, be ascribed all glory, praise, and honour for ever and ever.—Amen.

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