

# GOSPEL VINES AND SOUL DECEIVERS

## A SERMON

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“Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines: for our vines have tender grapes.” Solomon’s Song 2:15

THE theme of this book is the oneness of the Lord Jesus Christ and his people. All their blessedness is founded in that indissolubly constituted oneness which the living God has formed. And therefore, this book is called the Song of Songs, because of the supremacy of its theme. So we have instances in other parts of Scripture of the same mode of speech, wherein the Savior, in his supreme regality, is called King of kings; and where the Lord’s especial presence was manifested in a way it was nowhere else in the whole range of the world, it was called the holy of holies; and so this book, setting forth the Lord Jesus Christ, and the everlasting love of God by him, is called “the Song of Songs,” superior to everything else, and “which is Solomon’s.” The word Solomon means peaceable, pointing to Him who is our peace. Jesus Christ is our peace; by him the Lord is unto us a God of peace.

I come now to notice our text. And we must be careful in the very onset to ascertain definitely, if we can, what the truths, what the doctrines are which are taught in this text. I think the first doctrine here taught is that of *reconciliation to God*; I think the next doctrine taught is that of *deceivers*, of whom we are to be aware; and I think the third doctrine taught is, that *these fox like, these cunning teachers shall by-and-bye be all excluded*. Hence, “Take us” or take for us, “these foxes;” take them away: and we shall see, at the close of our discourse, how they are already virtually taken away.

Now the first doctrine, I think, taught here is that of *reconciliation to God*. You are aware that the vine stands contrasted with the thorn, the bramble, and the brier; and that a state of peace with God is indicated by the vine and the fig tree. “They shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree, and none shall make them afraid.” There the vine and the fig tree indicate the state of things. But I think in our text that the persons of believers are referred to under the character of vines; just the same as when the Savior speaks of himself as the vine, and of his disciples as the branches of that vine. I will, therefore, in the first part of my discourse, very carefully point out to you that

state in which such vines are planted; that the Lord plants his vines, his trees, in a certain state; and their character, as that is indicated by the vine, that that contrasts with the bramble. Let us, then, be careful to look to this, inasmuch as it is written (and we may carry that scripture with us in our minds, if we can, through our discourse this morning), that “Every plant which my heavenly Father has not planted shall be rooted up;” that is, however we may be converted, or whatever profession we may make, if it be not positively, effectually, and actually the hand of God by his Spirit taking us out of our brier, thorn, bramble-like state, and bringing us into the state here indicated; if it be not his work we must, when death comes, if not before, be rooted up; and there, where we shall most want our hope, our hope must perish, and our souls be lost. First, then, let us look at the state in which the Lord plants the trees, the living trees, that he is the husbandman to. There is a great victory wrought, and then, secondly, there is a state of things which the Lord keeps; and those who are averse to that victory, to the doctrine, shall I say, of that victory, and averse to that state of things, are, in the neighborhood of the same scripture, called thorns and briars. Now, first, there is a great victory wrought. “The Lord in that day, with his great, and sore, and strong sword, shall punish leviathan, that piercing serpent; even leviathan, the crooked serpent; and shall slay the dragon in the sea.” Now, the Lord Jesus Christ did this when he died. No doubt Satan is the piercing serpent there alluded to, having by sin pierced us through in the first Adam, and poisoned both our souls and our bodies, and brought us into a state of guilt and condemnation in the sight of a righteous Judge. He, no doubt, is that crooked serpent that adopts all sorts of plans and ways to deceive men. He is, no doubt, that dragon, “and shall slay the dragon in the sea;” he is, no doubt, that tyrant that has tyrannized over the souls of men. But Jesus Christ, by his word, for his word is the strong sword; and there was the prediction of what Christ should do, and the dear Savior did put away sin by the sacrifice of himself, and in so doing destroyed Satan’s power over us; that the Savior did put away all delusion by the same sacrifice of himself, and thereby wrought deliverance from Satan’s delusions; that Jesus did overcome at Calvary’s cross the power of the devil; then was the hour and power of darkness; but that hour and power of darkness could not prevail over him. He was stronger than all the powers of darkness, and so, in spite of all the weapons hurled by Satanic agents against him, he nevertheless retained and kept his self-possession, and agonized agony after agony, bore grief after grief, and sorrow after sorrow, and suffered for sin after sin, and endured penalty after penalty, curse after curse ; and thus went on until there was no more to suffer, no more to endure, and he said, “It is finished.” Now, then, where the Lord intends the salvation of a soul, the sinner is led to see that his complete, that your complete victory thus over sin, consequently over Satan, over delusion, over death, that it must be in oneness with this victory that is wrought by Jesus Christ. The warfare is accomplished. Now, again, “In that day sing you unto her;” that is, attribute to her, viz., the church, “a vineyard of red wine. I the Lord do keep it.” How different this from the 5th chapter of Isaiah, where the vineyard was let out to husband-men, and that vineyard let out to husbandmen degenerated, and brought forth wild grapes, and the Lord took away the hedge thereof, and gave it up to the adversary, and it became a scene of ruin. But this vineyard in the 27th of Isaiah can never become a degenerate plant; it can never bring forth sour grapes; it can never degenerate; it will retain its character and its freshness forever, even for ever and ever. “I, Jehovah, do keep it; I will water it every moment; lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day.” Now, then, the man that is at all averse to this victory that the Savior has wrought for his Israel, the man that is at all averse to that infallible certainty of gospel truth there indicated, that “I will water it every moment, I will keep it night and day lest any hurt it;” what a sweet promise is that! now, the man, I say, who is at all averse to that is in the next verse called a thorn and a brier. “Fury not in me?” It says, “Fury *is* not in me;” but that little word *is* is in italics, and

is not in the original, and I think ought not to be there; and so that clause ought to read as a kind of interrogation and exclamation. "Fury not in me? Fury not in me! who would set the thorns and briars against me in battle?" Who are the thorns and briars? Why, those that stand opposed in any shape or form to the completeness of the victory which the Savior has wrought; that stand opposed in any shape or form to that infallible certainty of truth there declared, that he will water it every moment, keep it night and day. "Fury not in me?" You deny the victory obtained by my dear Son? You deny the certainty of my truth? You think you can break in upon my vineyard, and destroy the vine and its branches? You think you can do this, and fury is not in me? I will let you know fury is in me; for "who would set the briars and thorns against me in battle? I would go through them; I would burn them together," as he has done, from age to age, the enemies of the people of God. Should there be one here saying, Well, I have hitherto hated the very doctrine you are now advancing, but I see now that I am wrong; I see I must be saved by the victory that is brought in by what Jesus Christ has done; I see now that God's gospel is a gospel of infallible certainty; that he keeps his people night and day, waters the work every moment. I see it; I see I am wrong; but I am an enemy, there is no hope for me. Yes, there is. The Lord meant these testimonies to convince some that they were wrong; and so the Lord says of the bramble and thorn that were lighting against him, and joining with those that were speaking evilly of these truths, "Or let him" the bramble, the brier, the thorn, the poor sinner convinced of his worthless, lost condition, "or let him take hold of my strength, that he may make peace with me, and he shall make peace with me." So if you see you are wrong, and ready to admit that if you escape hell it must be by the Savior having conquered the conqueror of the world, namely, the devil, it must be by the Savior having conquered the king of hell, the devil; it must be by the Savior having put away all sin, brought life and immortality to light, established unbounded freedom, and the truth of God made yea and amen. If, then, poor sinner, you see that you have been wrong, and you have a desire to lay hold of Christ, for Christ is God's strength, Christ the power of God; "I can do all things," says one, "through Christ that strengthens me;" and if now you desire to believe in Jesus, and to set your hope upon him, and your affection upon him; if your eyes are thus opened to see what a worthless thing you are by nature, that you are as a bramble, a brier, and a thorn, fit only for the fire of the wrath of Almighty God. Such is the state of us all by nature; but this change brings us into a new existence, plants us together into conformity to the death of Jesus Christ. And now just hear how the Lord describes this change, and this change is founded in the certainty of God's truth: 55th of Isaiah, "My word shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." Now, mark what is the result. Why, "Instead of the thorn" instead of your living and dying in that state of enmity, in that sinner-ship, worthless state, instead of this, you shall be brought out of this state into a new existence, anew character, "Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir-tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree, and now take note of the certainty, "and it *shall* be to the Lord for a name." Not we hope it may be not if the fir tree grows fast enough; not if the myrtle tree grows fast enough; there is no if in the matter; "it shall be." This change of things, this change of state "shall be to the Lord for a name." And is it not so? If we trace up the successive steps by which the Lord has marched forth for our eternal salvation, is it not manifest that it is all, from first to last, of the Lord? So that it is to him for a name. And now notice, and "for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off." Certainty of truth again. So, then, the vines represent those that are brought out of this thorn, brier, bramble state; brought out of this state of worthlessness and of enmity against God, and are planted together under the shelter of the Savior's achievement, are planted in the certainty of God's eternal truth.

I will give you one more scripture, though I must not detain you too long here. I am fully aware that we are rather close upon the same line of things that we were upon last Lord's day morning; but then I am not my own master and cannot choose for myself. I read the Bible, and those scriptures that come with most light and most power, and represent the Lord to me in the most endearing light, and spiritualize my mind, and soften my heart, and melt away my troubles, and make me to forget my misery, as waters that pass away; when I am thus provided, I feel that that is the line of things in which I must come to the people, the Lord having come to me in that abundant mercy. I will mention, then, one more scripture. I am trying now to show that the vines represent that people who are brought out of their state of nature into a state of grace, united to the Spirit of grace, united to the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, united to the grace of God, united to God after his order of grace: 2nd Book of Samuel, 23rd chapter, you read there of "an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure; for this is all my salvation and all my desire, although he makes it not to grow." Well, say some, that certainly is all free grace, that is high doctrine, as you call it. Well, call it what you will, there it is. Now, then, David looks upon all persons that are averse to this eternal covenant in which he found both all his salvation and all his desire, and if that did not seem at the present to abound in affording him pleasure, that did not alter the certainty of it. David looks upon all people averse to this covenant in the light of thorns. And how remarkable his next words! "But the sons of Belial" that is, sons of the devil, children of the devil, children of Satan, "the tares are the children of the wicked one. He that sowed them is the devil." Belial is a name of the devil. To be a son of Belial is to be a sou of the devil. I must speak plainly, because of the weightiness of these things. "But the sons of Belial shall be all of them as thorns thrust away." Mark that, "as thorns." How do we see they are thorns? Because they stand opposed to this covenant. And every man knows that he can never gather grapes of thorns, nor figs of thistles. There are certain animals that nibble and live partly upon thorns and thistles; but not so with the real Christian, he must have the pure grapes of Eshcol. Now David's idea there is, that all that are opposed to this everlasting covenant are sons of the devil; they are thorns and briars. And he says, "The man that would touch them must be fenced with iron and the staff of a spear." The margin reads it, "must be filled with iron," and I like that better. I do not see any sense in being filled with iron, say you. Well, then, to speak plainly, he must be an iron man. He must not be a boiled bread man; he must not be of the gutta percha make; he must not be of the if-you-wish-it make; he must be as an iron pillar, as a brazen wall, as a defended city, and stand proof against all opposition. We live in a day when many ministers escape this. They have three or four gospels in one sermon, which several gospels address themselves to the several tastes and inclinations of men, and so these ministers need no courage to stand by their system; for there is no one in reality to offer anything like opposition to it, worth naming. But stand out for God's immutable covenant, and bring nothing in connection with it, no human inventions, no human doctrines. The man that would do so must be a kind of iron man; he must stand fast, like an iron pillar, and be moved by no one; like a defended city, or a brazen wall, filled with iron. Ay, and with "the staff of a spear" also. And what is the spear? Why, God's word of rebuke. The minister must use that sometimes and he must run the hypocrite right through.

Ah, say you, don't go to say that; I don't mean literally, through his body; the weapons of our warfare are not carnal. But Stephen used the spear of rebuke to the people he had to encounter, and he handled that spear so successfully and so powerfully that they were cut to the heart with it; and though it did not convert them, it made them shudder and tremble, increased their rage, and they stoned Stephen to death; but Stephen died the conqueror after all. He, therefore, would not be

moved by these sons of the devil; he still walked in the truth, and would not be moved from it. He was a kind of iron man in that respect, using the spear of rebuke, and pierced them through and through. "Judge you," said John and Peter, "whether it be right to hearken unto you more than unto God;" and they found that the only remedy was to get rid of them as soon as they could. Thus, then, my hearer, if you are one of the trees of the Lord's planting, you are planted under the shelter of the Savior's victorious achievement; you are planted in the certainty of truth; you are planted in that order in which you will be unto the Lord for a name, and for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off; you are planted in the new covenant, ordered in all things and sure, where you will find all your salvation and all your desire, though you may not enjoy it as you could wish. And if you are one of these you will lay hold of Christ's strength, and by the sacrifice the Savior has made make peace with God. "He shall make peace with me." You will never make your peace with God but by faith in that peace which Jesus has made; you will never find acceptance with God but by faith in that righteousness which he has brought in.

But again; while then, these are the trees of the Lord's planting, that are thus planted in the certainty of truth, our text says, "Our vines have *tender* grapes." We may refer to the Epistle to the Galatians for this. The tender grapes here represent a weak understanding, weak faith, and wandering affections, unsettled affections, like those that love everything and do not in reality love anything, because their affections are wandering about, do not know what they love, and what they do not love. And so here is a sinner called by grace, but as yet he has no clear understanding of the way of the Lord; he needs to be taught the way of the Lord more perfectly, and he is not yet grown enough, as a new-born babe, shall I say, to live upon strong meat, to live upon the solid testimonies of the new covenant. Now then, if such happen to go among these cunning teachers, why, such will, in a great measure, be spoiled, bless the Lord! not fatally, but they will be bewildered. There is the minister, he tells you to come to Christ, leave your doubts and fears. But let the living God bring a soul into real earnestness about its state, let the living God stir up jealousy in a soul, like a man of war, and such an one will feel that he can no more by his own doing part with his doubts, and fears, and troubles, than he can atone for his sins; such an one will find out the truth of the Savior's words, "I open, and none can shut; and I shut, and none can open." And they shall wait until the appointed time; there is a set time to favor Zion, and that time will come, when the Lord will arise, have mercy upon such, illuminate their minds, and bring them out. But still, until the Lord does so, there is a weakness of judgment. Such an one says, How earnest that minister is for me to come to Christ; but I cannot do it; how earnestly he tells me to pray, but I cannot do it. I wish I could. I am still just where I was. What am I to do? I don't feel I can help myself; and I would not tell the people so, for I shall be reported to the minister as a dangerous character if I do; and I must not go to see the minister, because if he speaks like that in public, what will he say in private? I don't know what to do. Well, such a one does not yet know the thoughts of the Lord, neither does he yet understand his counsels. And yet such an one will say, Well, the minister is right; you know we ought to resist the devil. You resist the devil! What does he care for your resistance, unless the Lord be with you? Ah, but it says, "Resist the devil." That's the letter, sir; but the letter alone, without the spirit, kills; it is the Spirit that quickens, and the letter can do nothing but kill you. If you attempt to accomplish it by the letter of the word, then all your attempts will be in vain. Now their stories are very feasible; there is a great deal in their sermons you cannot reject; it is not so much what they say as what they do not say; a great deal of craft, plenty of this. But when these little vines, these little ones, when they come to a clearer understanding of the sovereignty of the Holy Ghost, there is the great secret. When they begin to see that the heavenly

wind, the Spirit, blows just where he likes, and that, so far from there being anything in you to hinder him, why, he takes up the isles as a very little thing, and all nations before him are as a drop in the bucket, as a mere atom; when you are enlightened to see this, then good-bye to these foxes, the big ones and the little ones, for I read of two classes of foxes, there are the great ones and the little ones, and the little ones are generally the most zealous. So, then, my hearers, what a mercy it is to know the truth for ourselves. Now, then, these men, by their legal twang, by their milk and water, their wine and water, their tin and silver mixed, their mixed seeds they sow, they hereby spoil the vines; for such do not grow up in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, but these ministers, to a man, do all they can to lower the character of a free-grace gospel. And yet they call their own a free-grace gospel. It is mockery, and delusion, and a snare, to call their gospels free-grace gospels. Why, the free-willier calls his gospel a free-grace gospel; it is not a free-grace gospel, it is a false gospel. The duty-faith man calls his gospel a free-grace gospel; it is not a free-grace gospel, it is a false gospel, it is a free-will gospel in disguise. Now these are the gospels that spoil the vines, the little ones, whose understandings are weak, whose faith is weak, and whose affections are not yet rightly fixed. By-and-bye they understand the truth clearly, and their faith will grow exceedingly in God's free grace; presently their affections will become fixed. My affections were fixed about thirty-seven years ago, and don't say I am not a true lover; I have loved all that time without one wandering affection. Why, say you, don't say that. I do; my affection has not wandered since. Ever since I have seen the dear Savior's perfection and eternal sameness, he, and he only, ever since; ever since I have seen the Holy Spirit's omnipotence, sovereignty, eternity, and certainty, infallibility of testimony, and infinity of interest he has in every saved soul, and that he himself creates the sighs and groans of which the people of God are the subjects, and I loved him then, have loved him ever since, love him now, and shall to eternity; none other will do for me. Ever since I have, seen by Christ Jesus, God the Father in the eternity of his love, and in his choice of my soul to eternal salvation, and in that provision of blessedness which he has made in that future world to which my soul is hastening as fast as time can carry me along, I loved him then, have loved him ever since, love him now, and shall to eternity. Thus, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, these three are one; "this God is our God for ever and ever, and will be our guide, even unto death;" "My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed; I will sing and give praise." Leave mere professors to love a duty-faith God, a free-will God, a Puseyite God.

"But see what an amiable man he is." Yes, but the devil is underneath it. Not all the creature excellencies in the world will ever take my affections away from a covenant God and set them upon gods that are vanity. No, my hearers; such butter balls do more harm than cannon balls, ten times; the one kills the body, but the other kills the soul. Beware of these butter balls. Thus, then, the little vines are for a little time spoiled and hampered, until they shall grow up a little taller, and then they shall see over the heads of all these foxes, look down upon them with sovereign disdain, and shall rejoice that the Lord is with them, and that he is their keeper night and day.

Now these foxes, then, represent cunning, false teachers. 13th chapter of Ezekiel: "O Israel, your prophets are like the foxes in the deserts." Mark, they belong to the desert: their sympathies are in the desert. Cain was one of these; Ishmael was one of these; Esau was one of these. Foxes of the desert; very cunning before the world. And let us see what, with all their doings, they do not do. They do not go up into the gaps, no. We need every truth of the new covenant to fill up the gaps; we need the mediatorial perfection of Christ; we need the eternal love of God; we need electing grace; we need a new and sworn covenant; we need the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart; we

need his sovereignty; we need Jehovah thus in his eternity, immutability, acting independently of the creature; yes, in spite of the creature, for “when we were yet sinners Christ died for us;” when we were without strength and ungodly Christ died for us. Thus, then, these cunning teachers do not go up into the gaps. “Neither have you made up the hedge for the house of Israel to stand in the battle in the day of the Lord.” No; if you stand in the battle in the day of the Lord it must be by this truth, namely, that “as the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about his people henceforth and forever.” Therefore, the false teacher is the man whose gospel is at fault, who leaves a great many gaps for the creature to fill up, instead of showing how the Lord has filled them up; the false teacher is the man that does not set forth the Lord as being eternally round about his people, irrespective of any worth or worthiness on their parts.

“Little foxes.” Time and space do not allow me to enlarge upon the characteristics of them given in the 13th of Ezekiel; therefore, I will not do so. Suffice it to say that carnal young men are by carnal means trained to the ministry; they are seen in private, and marshalled round; texts are taken, and they are told how to divide them, and what to say, and away they go, someone way and some the other; vain janglers, not knowing what they say, nor understanding whereof they affirm. And yet these carnal young foxes will take it upon themselves to ridicule God's truth, to ridicule God's people. I know a parson manufactory where there are some little foxes training, not a hundred miles from us; and it is not an uncommon saying in that factory, for one little fox to say to another, Let us go to some of these hypers on their week nights, and have some fun. Let us go to the Surrey Tabernacle, and laugh at the minister, and upset them all we can. I have witnessed several do so in this place that I know to be of that manufactory. And these young foxes will come into this place on Wednesday evening, and laugh, and turn, and twist about, and make all sorts of sport of what is said, and disturb the others around them. You shall hear the very next Sunday one of these foxes when preaching say, “Oh, my dear friends, I could cry my eyes out of their sockets for your salvation; all my concern is for souls. Dear friends, I don't care what I undergo if I could only save one soul.” Contemptible hypocrisy! well for them if they escape the damnation of hell. And I may just suggest, if there be any of those young foxes present, or old ones either, that notwithstanding their presence and their doings, I must do cures today and tomorrow, and by-and-bye I shall be perfect also. And I would just give one more suggestion, that if these young foxes, or old ones either, come here, to the Surrey Tabernacle again, and do as they have done very recently, and do not know thus how to behave themselves under the gospel, we will have a policeman in, and put them under the law. What would they say if we were to go into their places of worship, and behave like mockers and despisers? If I see a Roman Catholic sincere, I will pay respect to his sincerity, though I have none for his religion. If I were to hear a duty-faith man, I would behave myself, and pay respect to his sincerity, though I differ from his doctrine. If I hear a free-willier, or any other man, I will at least behave myself. I would, therefore, have these young foxes be aware lest one of these evenings they get caught in a trap, and then they will learn something in the college we put them to they never learnt before. It is a great thing, then, to be delivered from all hypocrisy, ignorance, unbelief, and to be brought to know the truth as it is in Jesus.

Passing by a great many things I had intended to say, I shall close with just showing what is to be done with these foxes. What does the word of God do with them? I will tell you; and what the word of God does with them is as true as the word itself. There are three things said concerning them; all three of which every real Christian can understand. 13th of Ezekiel, “They shall not be in the assembly of my people.” Bring their bodies in they may; but they cannot come into the

experience, the downward experience, of the assembly of my people; they cannot come into the life and light of the assembly of my people; they cannot come into that mount Zion of the assembly of my people; they cannot come into the bond of the covenant where my people are assembled. And I should like one of these young foxes to whom I have alluded to come before our church some evening, and just hear where he got his religion from, what sort of a thing it is, and just put him to the test. I venture to say he would be sent home to his mother, or his grandmother; I venture to say he would be started off to Jericho till his beard was grown. Men may make light of things. Read the 13th of Ezekiel for yourself; read what is there said of those that assume the character of ministers, prophesy out of their own carnal heart, follow not the Spirit of God, but their own spirit, and are enemies and deceivers, as far as God is pleased to permit them to be deceivers. Now, "They shall not be in the assembly of my people." It is a fearful thing for you not to have the same experience that the saints of God have had in all ages. Second, "Neither shall they be written in the writing of the house of Israel." They hate the book of life, they hate election; though some of them preach it, they hate it at the same time they preach it. I do not believe there is a duty-faith minister under the whole heavens that really loves election. He preaches it because it is in the letter of the word but he at the same time distorts it all he can, takes care it shall not have its full force, so as to exclude his duty-faith. And therefore, such, living and dying enemies to the book of life, is a proof that their name is not written there. Lastly, "Neither shall they enter into the land of Israel." There is a rest which they despise, a land they are enemies to, that they shall not enter. Whereas, the children, the little plants, they are planted in the likeness of Christ's death, brought into harmony with his truth, and shall be found truly and vitally in the assembly of God's people; such an one is written in the writing of the house of Israel, and such an one shall possess the land, and shall enjoy the land for ever and ever.