

GOSPEL LIBERTY

A SERMON

by MISTER JAMES WELLS

Preached on Sunday Morning 6th, March 1870

VOLUME 12 Number 591

“If the Son therefore shall make you free, you shall be free indeed.” John 8:36

There is not anything against which the adversary has directed so much of his power as against the freedom of the gospel; nor do I know anything that is less understood; because no man, unless taught of God, can possibly see, much less feel solemnly, his need of this liberty of the gospel. Hence there were some nominal kind of disciples that professed to believe in Christ, and he said to them, “If you continue in my word, then are you my disciples indeed, and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” This gave great offence, and they immediately said that they were Abraham’s seed, were never in bondage to any man; “and therefore how say you we shall be made free?” Then the Savior said, “He that commits sin is the servant of sin;” and that belongs to every man and woman in the world, for “there is none righteous, no, not one.” All the sons and daughters of Adam are by nature sinners, and some in one form, some in another, are servants of sin; therefore, they must remain, for aught they can, do, servants to sin and Satan and the wrath of God to all eternity. But “if the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed.” Therefore, in order to be free, there must be something to make us free, and that something is set before us in our text. And these Jews knew not what they were in their spirit; they thought themselves to be holy, righteous, and pleasing in the sight of God; therefore, the Savior in compassion told them what they really were, “You are of your father the devil; and the lusts,” that is, the desires, “of your father you will do; he was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him.” How many among them were convinced of the truth of this statement in relation to themselves it is not for me to say; but we are not to understand that the Savior so spoke to them in malice, anger, or ill feeling; he always spoke the truth in love; and he would not have spoken to them in such language as this but to convince at least some among them that this was their condition. And when their eyes were opened (supposing the word went home with power) to see that their religion was a lie, and that their state was that of the same murderous and demoniacal enmity against God and Christ as that of Satan, how they would be startled when they saw this to be their condition! Would they not feel a little of that which Saul of Tarsus in after years felt, when the Lord met with him? “Saul, Saul, why persecute you me?” There was Saul, as to his spirit and religion and murderous conduct, a child of the devil; but in God’s secret purpose he was a child of God; God had loved and chosen him, and now manifests himself to him, and makes him a vessel of mercy, a messenger of the grace to others by which he himself was saved. It is an unspeakable mercy to know our need of a deliverer.

There are three ends I shall aim at this morning. First, *to set before you the foundation of gospel freedom*, Secondly, *the several elements or features of that freedom*. Thirdly, *what is the wrong and what is the right use to make of that freedom*.

First, *the foundation of gospel freedom*, “If the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed.” The question might naturally arise, How did we come into bondage? The word of God will answer that it was by our fall in Adam. Now it has pleased the Lord to provide a ransom; and we must be made entirely free from original and personal sin, and that freedom must be final or eternal; because if it stopped anywhere, then we should be stopped, we might get free today, but we might go on a little further, and the redemption of Christ not being eternal, or his atonement not being everlasting, we might meet with something to bring us into bondage. But let us praise and bless our God that it is not so, that the redemption which Jesus Christ has obtained is eternal. First, then, as to sin. The Lord Jesus Christ bare our sins in his own body on the tree. And perhaps it is in reference to our original sin (I will not positively say it is so, but I should think that is the meaning) where he is said to be “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.” That as soon as sin came into the world, he, standing as the surety of the better covenant, the very instant that sin was committed it fell upon him; that is, it was set down to his account; so that he was then virtually slain. Hence the promise, “The seed of the worm shall bruise the serpent’s head;” and we all know that Jesus Christ fulfilled that scripture by his death; that he through death destroyed the power of Satan, who had the power of death; that it was through death that he fulfilled and established that promise. It is clear beyond all dispute that all the sin, original, internal, personal, of the saved was imputed to Jesus Christ. “The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.” And as to what is said of his putting sin away, can anything be more clear than that he has put away sin by the sacrifice of himself, that his blood cleanses from all sin; so that hereby it is forgiven and forgotten, and passed eternally away; and here the people are held entirely free from sin. This is the foundation, that sin was laid on Christ, and on Christ alone; and he, being God as well as man, compassed and bare the whole; he has finished transgression, it is done; he has made an end of sin, it is done; he has made reconciliation for iniquity, it is done; he has perfected forever all them that are sanctified. Now our possessing this freedom by faith is one thing, and the personal realization of it in perfection is another thing. Some people want to persuade us that the liberty of the gospel consists in our being free from sin in ourselves; and if it does consist in that, then I hesitate not to say there is no such thing as gospel liberty in the whole range of the world. But if gospel liberty consists of my receiving Jesus Christ, who is my acquittal from sin, and guilt, and all law charges, if I receive him and hold him as my freedom, while in my nature I have just the same sin that I had while in a state of nature, with my flesh I serve the law of sin, and in my flesh dwells no good thing, yet receiving Jesus Christ we receive him as our freedom; there it is we stand free from sin. Let it be our prayer, from day to day, to walk in the assurance that the atonement of Jesus Christ is infinitely more able to save than our sin is to destroy. But instead of living such a life as this, and singing in the ways of the Lord, rejoicing in the thought that he is a Father who is nothing to us but love, that the Savior and the Holy Ghost are nothing to us but love, and that the gospel is nothing to us but love; and walking cheerfully in the ways of the Lord, instead of this, we are like Peter, looking down at the waves of our sins; and if we had not this sin, and that, and the other, we think we should do. All this is the carnal bias of our nature. But precious faith lays hold of the dear Redeemer, sets him over against sin, and sees that by him the whole is swallowed up and gone, and the soul leaps up into liberty, and glories in the eternal God; the cause of fear is removed forever. So “if the Son make you free.” We want something to make us free; and it is no small

mercy to understand how he has made us free, by thus putting away all sin. "By the blood of your covenant I have sent forth your prisoners out of the pit wherein there is no water.

But secondly, free from wrath. There is no wrath, no curse. "He will rest in his love." Where is your wrath, then? "This is as the waters of Noah unto me; for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth, so, have I sworn that I would not be angry with you, nor rebuke you. For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from you, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, said the Lord that has mercy on you." Where is wrath? I am ashamed of myself; instead of walking with God as though he loved me, I walk with him as though there was no Jesus Christ, or try to do so sometimes; instead of walking with God in the full assurance of a yea and amen promise, and of the freedom I have in Christ, I am looking for it in myself. "If the Son shall make you free." What do you say this morning? Are you prepared to give the dear Savior the honor of having thus wrought out your freedom, and that you have that freedom by faith, by promise, by manifestation, and that that freedom is not in your hands, it is in the hands of God our Father, and he will take care of it for you; it is in the hands of Jesus Christ, it is in the hands of the Holy Ghost, who will take care of it for you. When God put the freedom of the Israelites into the hands of some of the kings, they did not take care of that freedom for them; they let in a new, strange, heathen god; and thereby themselves went into bondage, and brought the people into bondage. But will the Savior take up the name of another god into his lips? Will he sanction their offerings of blood? No, he despises the whole. Our liberty stands, then, in the hands of our reigning King, in the hands of our all-prevailing Priest, in the hands of our Elder Brother, in the hands of the eternal God. He committed the liberty of the Jews as a nation to men, to kings; but he never committed the liberty of the gospel to any but Christ himself. He has committed all judgment unto the Son, all power in heaven and in earth is given unto Christ; Christ came into all our bondage; and legally, righteously, majestically, triumphantly, worked his way out of that bondage. "you," he says, "which have showed me great and sore troubles, shall quicken me again, and shall bring me up again from the depths of the earth." "you shall increase my greatness, and comfort me on every side;" and so he rose triumphant from the dead. The Son himself is free, and "if the Son shall make you free you shall be free indeed." Do not tell me that something is gospel, and at the same time is not good tidings to a poor perishing sinner, that something is gospel, and is not good news to the poor creature fallen among thieves; that something is gospel, and yet not a joyful sound to the vilest of sinners that are brought to feel their need of the price paid by the great Surety of the covenant, Christ Jesus, to set the prisoner free. Where then is this freedom? In Christ. "There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ" "planted together in Christ," the liberty he has wrought; and "who walk not after the flesh," for that would be to walk after the carnal mind which is enmity against God, that is the meaning of the apostle there; they walk not after the spirit of enmity, but after the spirit of faith and love; and thus they walk not after the fleshly mind, but after the spirit, the law of the spirit of life in Christ; and what is that law? The law of liberty, of entire freedom; the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus; made free from the law of sin and death. "What the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh." So that sin was condemned to death in Christ's flesh; there sin died, the Savior lived; there death is abolished, there we rejoice and triumph. "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." This freedom, then, is by faith in Christ. I should like you clearly to understand this freedom; because, feeling so much bondage in ourselves, often

we have to say with David, "Bring my soul out of prison, and I will praise your name." Often have we to say, "I called upon you out of the low dungeon;" often have we to say, "I am shut up, and cannot come forth;" yet that does not affect the liberty we have in Christ; we are as free there as though we had the full enjoyment of it. Let me illustrate, this. We have liberty in Christ for the soul and we have also liberty in Christ for the body; and do you mean to say that because I am still mortal, I have not yet received the liberty of the body? Do you mean to say that because I am still corruptible in myself, I have not received the liberty of the body? Do you mean to say that because I am a poor dying creature in my body, I have not yet received the liberty of the body? I have received the liberty of the body by faith, and in the testimony of it; that liberty is in the hands of Christ. "I will ransom them," said the Savior, "from the power of the grave, I will redeem them from death; O death, I will be your plagues; O grave, I will be your destruction; repentance shall be hid from my eyes." 15th of First Corinthians, there I get incorruption into the place of my corruption, immortality into the place of my mortality, the heavenly into the place of my earthly, the mighty into the place of my weakness, the glorious into the place of my poor dying body. We receive that doctrine, and therefore virtually we are free not only from sin, but also from mortality; because the creature itself shall be by and by actually what it is now virtually and relatively, delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. And so, because I am not yet risen from the dead, therefore I have not liberty in Christ; and because I am still a poor, sinful, hard-hearted creature in and of myself, therefore I have not liberty in Christ. So, if you argue that we are not free from sin because we are not free from it in ourselves, you might as well argue that we have not in God's promise and purpose the final freedom of the body, because we have not yet got it in ourselves. We have got nothing except by precious faith; the Holy Spirit quickens the soul, and brings us to understand and receive the truth. Here, then, is freedom from sin, from wrath, from the grave, from bondage, from everything that stands against us. The Old Testament saints made more of this than we do; and so, did the apostle Paul and those in his day; they looked forward to that glorious time, that they might attain unto this better resurrection; they knew what the better resurrection was. Oh, what a deliverance has the Savior wrought! what a release has he established! what a scene of things has he brought about! How it beggar's language, and all the similes we might attempt to use, to set forth the blessedness of that liberty we have in Christ!

"If the Son shall *make* you free." Here is nothing said about the creature making itself free; but "if the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed." If you look to him in what he is, and has done, and expect the Lord to treat you and deal with you according to the worth and worthiness of his dear Son, then there is freedom indeed. But leave him out, and expect the Lord to deal with you in things that are eternal on the ground of something good in you, then there is nothing but disappointment, despair, and delusion. Not anything that Adam could do could reinstate him in paradise; he could not meet the flaming sword; not anything that the people could do at Sinai could give them access to God; not anything that the Jews could do could enable them to gather up their broken covenant, mend it, and bring themselves into their ancient national glory. But when the dear Savior comes in to restore that which he took not away, he does that that none other could do, and hereby we are free. "So, speak and so do as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty." "Stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made you free." Nothing short of this will do. We do not, until the Lord is our teacher, know what stands against us. Am I speaking to some poor man, that sees how sin stands against him in all the strength of God's law, and how heaven stands against him, and how death stands against him? for that will kill you by and by you must die. If

this be your feeling, the Lord has given you this conviction; and he who has given you this conviction will ere long bring home some word with power, and enable you to realize his pardoning mercy, a goodly testimony of what Christ has done for you.

Secondly, I notice *the several elements or features of this freedom*. The first element I shall notice is the privilege not only of each Christian, but of each man, to judge for himself. No one man, or class of men, has any right whatever to usurp the consciences of others. If you choose to be an ungodly man, and go on in the world in all the ungodliness you can, do so; only remember that for all such things God will bring you into judgment. It is not for man to condemn you; your Maker is your Judge. If you like to be a Roman Catholic, no one has a right to reproach you for that; if your convictions lead you that way, to be a Roman Catholic, you have a right to judge and choose for yourself. The fault I find with Roman Catholics is interfering with the liberties of others. They have a right to be Roman Catholics, but they have no right to usurp the consciences of others, and to pretend to those things which they know are not true. They well know that their bread and wine do not become vital; they well know that their bread and wine do not become the body, the blood, the soul, the deity of Christ. I should question whether there is a priest throughout the whole world that believes any such thing. But provided you do not meddle with the liberties of others, you have a right to be what you like, that is a fact; and no one has a right to usurp any authority over you in those matters, because to your own master you stand or fall. If you like to be a Church of England man, be so, if your convictions lead you that way; no one has a right to persecute you, or to say an unkind word to you. If you like to be a Socinian, be so, you have a right, and no one has any right to interfere with you. If you like to be an Independent, do; if you like to be a Baptist, do; if you like to be a high Calvinist, do. I hold this doctrine, then, of the liberty of each man to judge for himself. But then the Roman Catholics say, What a number of sects and parties we shall have! Never mind that; we agree to differ. I am not going to quarrel with any man because he is a Catholic, or because he makes no profession at all, or because he is a Church of England man, or because he is an Independent, and of course there is not much danger of my quarrelling with him because he is a Baptist or a high-doctrine man. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. Choose your own minister, your own place of worship, and let the matter stand between you and your God, let your minister be who he may; and no more receive a thing that I say because I say it than you would if a Roman Catholic priest were saying it. Do not trust me, I dare not trust myself. Try what I say by the Lord's word; do not follow me a single inch beyond where you see me following the Lord. If you feel that what I advance is God's truth, then you will receive it, not because your minister says it, but because the word of God sets it forth and confirms it. Understand this to be the very first element of Christian liberty. Jesus Christ is King in Zion; he does not want men to make laws for his religion; he does not want Acts of Parliament to govern his religion, he does not want human laws to prescribe the path that the Holy Spirit shall walk in; the Holy Spirit is unfettered, he takes up the isles as a very little thing. Am I to make a prayer for the Holy Spirit to be guided by, a creed for the Holy Spirit to be guided by? Are men to make certain forms of worship for the Holy Spirit to be guided by? God makes laws for himself, and he honors and blesses those laws. It does appear to me one of the most monstrous assumptions that men can pretend to, to make laws for God Almighty, to govern the Holy Spirit, to govern Christ and God the Father; monstrous to make human laws (pretending those laws are divine) to govern the church of the living God. When human laws are brought, into religion, those men are governed not by the gospel, but by the laws of men; so, they govern the gospel, and the people, and God Almighty too, only the Lord will not listen to their laws. When the Savior was on earth, he broke through their

laws. What does not your Master keep the traditions of the elders? What an awful crime! Does he not say their prayers? does he not fast their fasts, and hold with them? Dear me, your Master must be a terrible man. But he broke through the whole of it, cared for none of it; they were only as so many cobweb walls, he went on straight forward in the path of eternal truth, like the living creatures in Ezekiel's vision; and they were astonished at his doctrine, for he spoke with authority, that is, with power from on high, and not as the scribes did, mumbling out their prayers and creed, a parcel of empty trash and formality. The Savior spoke with power; where he spoke, devils were cast out, lepers healed, sinners saved, God glorified, delusions made manifest, and the souls of his people rushed into the presence of God, and blessed him for that light that had appeared among them, rejoicing that this was the true Messiah. The Savior said, You have heard what I have said, judge for yourselves; you have seen the miracles, judge for yourselves; and you see how I live, very badly by report; very well, I will give you a public challenge: Which of you convinces me of sin? You have plenty of law courts open and plenty of witnesses. They would not undertake it, then. We shall see by and by, let things go on a little further. They brought a great many witnesses into court at last, but somehow or other the witnesses happened to belong to Babel, and so their language was confounded. Neither did "the witnesses agree," and so it came off that the Savior was holy, righteous, sinless, the spotless One, the glorious One, the conquering One, at the last, and will be forever. So then let every man judge for himself. You cannot be a congregation of honest people if you do not judge each for himself. I shall die presently, and if your religion were pinned to my sleeve, it would be a very poor religion. Suffer no man to judge for you in these matters. Each of us will have to die by himself, and in that respect what a solitary hour it will be! Your minister cannot help you; your brethren cannot help you, none but God can help you. I well know if you are taught of God, how you will judge. You will judge of your own lost and ruined condition as the Lord himself judges of it, and you will choose Jesus Christ as that good part that shall not be taken from you. Ah, you will say, my conviction is, if ever I get to heaven it must be by the mediatorial perfection of Christ, by the mercies of God, according to the promise of the blessed God by Jesus Christ. Here, then, is liberty to judge for yourself. The Son of man has set everybody free in this respect. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. And when this is the case, what a stability it gives you, when you know the truth experimentally, to feel what a poor ruined creature you are, and there can be no freedom but in Christ! Thus, then, let every man judge for himself. And there is a certain feeling it is right for us to cultivate, and that is, however we differ, which we do most solemnly, from the Roman Catholics, let us abstain all we can from any angry feeling towards their persons. Let us hate their delusions, but not their persons. And so of all other sects and parties, we cannot love them as we do the people of God; it is not in the nature of things to do so, but we are rather to pray for them that would despitefully use us than not, and we are to have, a good will towards all. The Lord give us grace, then, to distinguish between the errors by which men are deluded and their persons; for when they perceive that we have an ill feeling, and utter our sentiments offensively, not in order to undo their delusions and bring them out, but in order to insult, degrade, and offend them, and exalt ourselves, it closes their eyes, and ears, and hearts against us. It is the law of kindness that does the business. What does the Savior say? "If you had known what that means, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice," you would not have been such Sabbatarians as to condemn my disciples for doing that on the Sabbath day which is not unlawful. And again "Go you and learn what that means, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice. I am come not to call the righteous, for there are none righteous, but sinners to repentance." What is it but his kindness that wins us? what is it but the love of our God that wins us?

I wish I could see the Roman Catholics in England cast off their religion, cast off the authority of the priests. "Fear not them which can kill the body, and after that there is no more they can do; but fear him who is able to cast both body and soul into hell; yes, I say unto you, fear him." Do not be terrified by man into compliance with anything; let the fear of God rule you; but the fear of man does indeed bring a share.

The next element of gospel liberty is that of daring, bold, down right decision for God's truth. "The remnant" these are the elect, you see, "of Jacob shall be among the Gentiles in the midst of many people as a lion among the beasts of the forest, as a young lion among the flocks of sheep," or "goats," as the margin reads it; "who, if he go through, both tread down and tears in pieces, and none can deliver," bold, decided. Two lion-like men, bold as lions, and spiritually swift as roes on the mountain, stood before their judges; you may see the semicircle of big-wigs sitting round, and there is Peter, not dressed half so well as I am, depend upon it, nor John either; I dare say they both looked rather shabby; they had not much money, Peter at one time had none at all. But there they stood, and these great men, armed with all the terrors of national law and ecclesiastical assumption, could not move them; "and when they saw the boldness of Peter and John they marveled, and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus." And in the 5th of Micah it says concerning these people that are bold and decided, "Your hand," the hand of faith, "shall be lifted up upon your adversaries, and all your enemies shall be cut off" "No weapon that is formed against you shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against you in judgment you shall condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness is of me, said the Lord." When a Christian loses his boldness, he loses his life; when a minister loses his boldness, he loses his life; he is not worth hearing. The minister must feel on the one hand the great solemnity of his high and responsible position; on the other hand, he must feel entirely independent; he must not be accountable to any man. I am not accountable to any man or woman under the sun in these things; I would not listen to any man that would try to move me from God's truth. And you, as Christians, are not to listen to any one. If you are not to be decided for the liberty of the gospel, then in the name of all that is sacred, solemn, and eternal, what are you to be decided for? There is no life without it, no access to God, no mercy, no hope without it; There is no life without it, no access to God, no mercy, no hope without it; everything is found there. If our martyrs had not had this boldness what would England have been now? England now would have been worse, socially, commercially, politically, and ecclesiastically, than the worst part of Ireland. Did you ever know Catholicism really rampantly reign, and the people happy? Never. And if our forefathers had not been bold as lions, and given up their lives rather than give up the liberty of the gospel, Catholicism would have covered this land, and the locusts from the bottomless pit would have darkened the air to this day. We owe our freedom in that respect to the blood of our forefathers; the Lord help us to prize it, and to make a right use of the same. "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, said the Lord." A great many lectures are given upon Catholicism, but they are always Protestants that hear them. A great deal is said about Catholicism, but none of the Catholics are there to hear it. The only remedy for Catholicism is to get among the laity and tell them God's truth, and if God open their eyes, they will throw off their delusion, and accept the truth. There is no other remedy; no Act of Parliament can do it. But if they meddle with our civil rights, then Parliament is the proper resource; but in religious matters the Bible is our only arsenal, our only armory: God's truth is the only weapon we can legitimately use.

Another element of the liberty of the gospel is that of satisfaction. 49th of Genesis, "Naphtali is a hind let loose; he gives goodly words." Then go to the 33rd of Deuteronomy: "O Naphtali", people prophesied all sorts of evil of you: dangerous man; you were set free, and there you were with your long legs skipping over the mountains and the hills, and singing as you went along, "He makes my feet like hinds' feet;" very dangerous character. Well, now, what has become of this Naphtali? 33rd of Deuteronomy, it is a long time afterwards, some hundreds of years, "O Naphtali, satisfied with favor, and full with the blessing of the Lord, possess you the west and the south." I am to possess the west, where the sun went down, and the south, where the sun is in its zenith, that is, I am to possess Christ in his humiliation, to deliver me from everything, and I am to possess Christ in his exaltation, to give me everything. How true are the dear Savior's words "If the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed!"

One word in conclusion upon *what is the wrong and what is the right use to make of this freedom*. The Israelites were brought into the wilderness, and who made a right use of that freedom? Those that were guided by the word of the Lord, and that did cleave unto the Lord their God, and kicked the other gods to the devil, whence they came; and their language was, "Whom have we in heaven but you? and there is none upon the earth we desire besides you." We will cleave unto the Lord our God, for he is our refuge, and underneath us are his everlasting arms; he will thrust out the enemy from before us, and say, Destroy them. These made a right use of their liberty. And who made a wrong use of it? Those that brought the golden calf, brought in another god, brought in something else, and thus adopted heathenism. thousands that thus abused the liberty fell in the wilderness, and never reached the promised land. And who is it that abuses gospel liberty now? Those that bring in human traditions, those that bring in conditions which the Savior's blood has forever blotted out; those that would drive the people of God into subjection to their orders and their commands, and would try to pick some little holes in their life, and hold up those few holes and say, there's a character for you! and so frighten the doves away from their windows. These are they that sometimes get in "privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage; to whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you." Presently the welfare of the souls of the people, and the glorious gospel of God, will become only a secondary thing. There is nothing so destructive to Satan's kingdom as the liberty of the gospel; nothing so blessed to a poor sinner as the liberty of the gospel; and there is nothing so glorifying to God; for what will be our song to all eternity but to glorify God for this great deliverance? This freedom of the gospel has always had an evil name amongst men. It is something the natural man, however religious, however pious, however full of zeal, however liberal, however amiable, *cannot* get at; he hears the sound thereof, but knows not whence it comes nor whither it goes. Like the elder brother in the parable, he does not know what these things mean. And so, his eye is evil because the freedom of the Gospel is holy, just, and good, and so both the father and the prodigal came in for a fair share of reproach. Of course, the father, in receiving the prodigal, encouraged sin; and of course, the prodigal ought to be ashamed of himself to expect to be received at all; but to be received with such a to-do was, of course, outrageous. Yet the prodigal made a good use of his freedom, for he was no more a stranger or guest, but like a child at home. The prodigal knew what these things meant; but the elder brother, the mere letter professor, did not know, but ignorantly reviled what he did not understand. And these are the two seeds, the one of Hagar, the other of Sarah, the one of the letter, which genders to bondage and kills; the other of the spirit, which gives life and freedom in Christ Jesus the Lord.