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Surrey Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE RIGHT WARFARE.

A SERMON

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, 17TH MARCH, 1867, BY

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AT THE NEW SURREY TABERNACLE, WANSEY STREET.

“Bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.”—2 Corinthians x. 5.

THE religion of the Son of God is, first, “glory to God in the highest;” because no creatures are so highly exalted as the people of God. He passed by the nature of angels, and took up into oneness with his eternal deity the seed of Abraham. It is therefore an exaltation into a sonship, blessedness, and glory, that surpasseth any other order of things. It is also “peace on earth.” The gospel of Jesus Christ is a gospel of peace in a twofold sense; first, to bring us into peace with God, and thereby to bring people into peace with one another. This peace has been scandalously violated. “It is impossible but that offences will come, but woe unto that man by whom the offence cometh.” Another item of the religion of the Son of God is that of “good will towards men.” What God has done for men he has done in good will, and he implants that good will in the hearts and minds of his people, so that they shall have a good will towards one another, and a good will towards all men. The religion of the Son of God wrongs no man; corrupts no man, but cleanses many; defrauds no man, but bestows infinite and eternal blessings upon many. And the apostle therefore may well say that “the weapons of our warfare are not carnal.” Had Constantine the Great have understood the nature of the gospel he never would have incorporated Christianity with the civil government. Civil governments have nothing whatever to do with religion; they have no business with it whatever—not as civil governments considered. The instrument of the civil government is the sword, for the punishment of evil doers that would interfere with the civil, legal, moral, and just rights of others. The government of the Church of the blessed God is another sword—the sword of the Spirit; that interferes with no man’s worldly rights, liberties, or privileges; but it is that sword of the Spirit that enters into the soul, and does infinite good, therein severing the soul from all that would injure it, and uniting it to that which shall for ever benefit it. Hence it is, then, that there ought to be no State Church; there ought to be no religious tests, as they are called, to put people to; the Catholics ought to have as much liberty to acquire honourable standings in civil society as others. And so of all; all ought to be thrown off from the civil government, and all ought to be made perfectly equal. Then, if that were done, we should rarely, if ever, hear of insurrections. If that were done, then all the civil government would have to do would be to govern secularly the whole, and maintain the civil rights of every one. So that if a Catholic annoy a Protestant,

the civil government comes to him and says, "You are stepping out of your religion into civil matters, and I must put you right." If a Protestant annoy a Catholic, the civil government would step in and say, "You are doing that which infringes upon the liberty of a fellow-citizen, and I must put you right." I am not sure that such practices are not at this time carried on. For instance, you have your Sisters of Mercy, Puseyite and Papist; they thrust themselves into houses, and that contrary to the wish of the inhabitants of those houses. Where they know there is a weak-minded woman, they call and tell her that unless her child be what they call baptized it will go to hell. This woman wishes that person to call no more, but she thrusts herself in; this is an infringement, and is punishable, happily, by the civil law. For as soon as ever our houses cease to be our castles, and as soon as ever the public streets cease to be perfectly free for every properly-behaved person, then away goes our liberty. But, happily, we have in civil matters statutes for this evil, so that if you are annoyed in your houses or in the streets by anyone, and that person is once warned that he is annoying you, after that he becomes punishable by law. I make these remarks in order that you may not run away with the notion that we hold a kind of a lawless creed. We respect the civil law. We are to honour the Queen, and we are to respect the laws of the country—wholesome and righteous laws; yea, we are to pray for those that are in authority over us, that we may, under the protection of the civil law, lead a peaceable and a quiet life; "that being delivered from the hand of our enemies, we may serve God in holiness and in righteousness all the days of our lives." This is a little sample, and only a little sample, of my sentiments upon these matters. And before I enter upon the subject before us, I must just say that we are very eloquent—I may say grandiloquent—in dwelling upon the Catholics having put the Protestants to death. Now the fact is, if you were all put into a sack together, I was going to say I do not know which would come out first. What one sect is there that has not persecuted and put others to death? The Arians have put the Athanasians to death; the Catholics have put the Protestants to death; Protestants have put Catholics to death; Episcopalians have persecuted others. Yea, whatever sect has been in the ascendant, and has had civil law at command, has persecuted, apprehended, and put others to death. Why, we are as bad as the Catholics in our nature. And for myself, I would no more trust the *hypers* with civil power than I would the Roman Catholics. What, not your own sect? Not I. Why, the unchristian and unscriptural onslaught that the *hypers* made upon me some time ago is a pretty good proof of what they would do when led captive by a certain personage; that if they had had fire and faggot at command, you may depend upon it I should have been silenced long ago. And therefore, for myself, I would not trust any sect; for let them be who they may—high doctrine, low doctrine, Catholic, Puseyite—let them be what they may, let them have the civil sword, and you may depend upon it the others would stand a poor chance. Therefore, I say, let the law stand for all alike; let all be protected by the civil law, and have the same civil privileges, and never make any religious test whatever; let it be left out of the question, and let us have nothing, no, nothing under the heavens to guide us in religion but the Bible. The apostle Paul appealed to Cæsar. He did not as an apostle appeal to Cæsar; he did not as a Christian appeal to Cæsar; he did not appeal to Cæsar that Cæsar might take under his protection the gospel, that he might take under his protection the spiritual privileges of the apostle; he appealed to Cæsar as a citizen of the Roman Empire for his citizenship rights. Just so we distinguish between the civil and the spiritual. The apostle thus teaches that "the weapons of our warfare are not carnal;" "we wrestle not against flesh and blood." Ours is not a carnal warfare, ours is not an earthly warfare; ours is a spiritual, a heavenly, injuring none, but benefitting thousands upon

thousands. These principles of freedom are not even now much understood; but I do desire to be thankful that they are making a little progress. And I hope, in two or three hundred years' time, that these principles I am now naming will so prevail that Church of Englandism will be a thing of the past. They are evidently ruining it as fast as they can, and the sooner it is blown to ashes and chaff—I do not mean by any physical, but by moral force—the sooner it is brought to nothing the better. I long to see the glorious gospel have its full liberty, the Bible, and the Bible only, being our guide. The reason that no one sect now puts those of other sects in prison and to death, is simply that no one sect has the power so to do. The *elements* of deadly persecution exist in *all*, and in the *hypers* as well as in others, and especially in *some sections* of the *hypers*.

In our text we have two things to consider. The first is, *how every thought is brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ*. Secondly, *the completeness of that subjection*; “bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.”

First, then, I notice, *how every thought is brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ*. Now, we must take the preceding clauses in order to understand this. The apostle saith, “The pulling down of strongholds, casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God.” All this must be done in order to bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ. We have to deal this morning, as we always have, indeed, more or less, with invisibles. Now, what are the strongholds? I will take the strongholds, in the first place, to mean our sins that stood between us and God like fortresses, like mighty towers, by which Satan kept us away from God; and our approach to God, while sin was between God and us, was impossible. We have a sample of this at Sinai. Now, in the 30th of Isaiah, to my mind, there is a beautiful representation of the strongholds of sin being torn down for us. We will come to the experience of it presently. It is a scripture which I am sure all you that are Christians must many times have admired. “There shall be upon every high mountain, and upon every high hill, rivers and streams of waters.” These rivers and streams of water represent, of course, the blessings of the everlasting gospel—“in the day of the great slaughter, when the towers fall.” The day of the greatest slaughter that ever was or ever will be was the day when Jesus Christ slew sin, when he slew this leviathan, when he thus slew the dragon, when he thus bruised the serpent's head. It is a doctrine, happily, in which you are well established; and I will repeat an idea we advanced some time ago, because it is, to my mind, so important—namely, that sin was condemned in Christ to death; that sin could not be condemned to death anywhere but in Christ. Angels could not endure the sentence and survive the sentence, and consequently, while sin was condemned in fallen angels, sin was not there condemned to death, because angels could not find an atonement for sin, nor a righteousness to meet the law of God by themselves. Sin was condemned in Adam, but it could not be condemned to death, because Adam had no atonement and no righteousness by which to survive the condemnation. Sin is condemned in every one; but it cannot be condemned to death, because no man can give to God a ransom either for himself or for his brother. But in Jesus Christ sin was condemned to death; and here the curso fell with its mightiness, there the sentence fell with all its force; and the dear Saviour had a righteousness by which to meet the law, and he embodied in his death all the suffering that sin had demerited. Hereby the towers of hell fell. Why, though invisible to our mortal eyes, every sin may be called a kind of tower, a kind of fortress, by which Satan would have for ever kept us from God. As Watts, amidst his many beautiful and instructive observations and ideas, says,—

“Our sins like pointed mountains rise.”

But here we read, "In the day of the great slaughter, when the towers fall." So that, however numerous your sins, they all fell there dead, and they are dead; they are deceased; they shall rise no more. These are the lords that had dominion over you; but they are gone, they are dead, and dead for ever. That is the day, then, of the great slaughter. Believest thou this? If so, thou wilt see that as sin is the cause of death, and as the cause is dead, the effect must cease; death is hereby swallowed up in victory. Precious faith in the Lord Jesus Christ enables you to draw near to God, and your sins can be no hindrance. And then mark what a happy experience there is to be in connection with Christ having thrown down, pulled down, these strongholds; these were Satan's strongholds, by which he held us fast, and kept us away from God;—see the happy experience there is to be in the people on whose behalf this was done. "Moreover, the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun." I take the moon there to mean the gospel, and the light of the moon being as the light of the sun is to denote—so I take it, but judge for yourselves—the gospel in that increased clearness in which it should appear by a clear understanding of what Jesus Christ hath done. "And the light of the sun"—the same thing, the gospel—"shall be seven fold, as the light of seven days;" and the clearer you are in the completeness of the Saviour's work, the more you see the perfection of God, the more you see the perfection you have in Christ. Hence it is that the church in this light is represented clear as the sun. And then, that we may understand this matter, it saith, "In the day that the Lord bindeth up the breach of his people, and healeth the stroke of their wound." Those of you that have seen your sins in their strength to keep you from God, in their strength to damn you, in their strength to destroy you, and that have seen the Lord Jesus Christ throw these towers down, slay this mighty monster, and that you are eternally free, and are thus brought into the light of the wondrous gospel, when the Lord bindeth up the breach,—Ah, you say, honour to his dear name! the work is done; we have nothing to do; we have only to receive what is done, to live upon what is done, to plead what is done, to glory in what is done, and to walk with our God by what is done. This is one step towards bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.

Then, again, the difficulties that may stand in our way are all virtually destroyed. "I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron." What is this but bringing before us the mission of the Saviour? What was his mission? Why, to open the prison-house to them that were bound, and to set at liberty them that were bruised. Let us, then, come to experience here for a moment. Unhappily, such is our state by nature that we are unconscious of the unbelief, the hardness, the blindness, the enmity, and the many evils of our nature, that are as gates of brass to imprison the soul; that are as bars of iron to keep those gates shut, to keep the soul in total darkness. This is the prison-house. But when the Holy Spirit quickens the soul, then for the first time in his life the man says, Hitherto I have thought nothing was meant by religion but moral right and wrong; I have hitherto thought that nothing was meant by religion but simply doing to others as we would they should do unto us. But now that the law of God has come home, and I am enabled to contrast myself with that law, I feel I am in prison to sin, I am in prison to corruption, I am in prison to God's almighty and eternal law. How am I to get out? I now see that religion consists of salvation; I now see that religion consists of that faith in Christ that shall deliver my soul from the sorrows of death and from the pains of hell; I now see that religion is a path the vulture's eye hath not seen, a path kept close from the fowls of the air, a path the lion's whelps have not trodden. Why, I now see that there is a secret in religion I never saw before. Oh, wretched condition I am in! If I am in

prison to my sin, and I live and die there, I shall be shut up in the prison of hell, and there is no deliverance therefrom. Now comes the voice to the poor prisoner, "Turn you to the stronghold, ye prisoners of hope." But, saith such an one, where is there something to turn to that is stronger than my unbelief, and hardness, and darkness, and sin? Is there anything I can turn to in a way of hope with a hope that is stronger than my sin? Yes; the blood of the everlasting covenant is infinitely more able to bring me out of prison than my sins are to keep me in prison; and the living God, the everlasting God, by that blood of the everlasting covenant, is infinitely more able to bring me out of prison than my sins are to keep me in prison; and Jesus Christ, God and man in one wonderful person, came into the world for this very purpose. "Turn you to the stronghold, ye prisoners of hope: even to-day"—this gospel day—"do I declare that I will render double unto thee." And you know what the "double" is. Why, say you, it means abundance of favour, grace, and mercy. So it does; that's right; but we must be more definite than that—must not stop there. "Even to-day do I declare that I will render double unto thee." Now "double" means, as explained in other scriptures, grace here and glory hereafter. And when your soul is brought out of prison—and if you know your condition, you know what the prayer is, "Bring my soul out of prison, and I will praise thy name"—if you are brought out by Jesus Christ, and you receive Jesus Christ, and you are made happy in him, your sins are blotted out, he has given you the victory. Then if I come to you now, and say, Well, brother, what have you got now? Oh, you will answer, I have got the double—that is, an abundance of grace here, and glory hereafter. I have got them both now, for "whom he justified, them he also glorified." I have got the justification; that gives me the glorification; so that heaven is mine before I get there; Jerusalem is mine before I get there; God is mine before I leave this world. Thus, "I will render double unto thee." Here, then, the stronghold of sin is broken down; the soul comes out into light and life, and looks around and sees that as the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about such an one henceforth and for ever. I need not remind you of the strongholds of error, as spoken of in the 23rd chapter of Matthew, and as embodied in the 957th chapter of the Vatican. All these strongholds are broken down in the experience of the Christian when he is thus convinced of his state, and longs, as I have said, to find something that is stronger to save than his sins are to destroy. And that something is Jesus Christ, and God in Christ reconciling us to himself—not imputing our trespasses unto us. That is one thing, then—getting rid of these strongholds by the work of Christ and the knowledge of sin.

"Casting down imaginations." That is, false reasonings. Is it reasonable that man for a few years' sins should be punished to all eternity? Is it reasonable for God to choose one part of the human race, and to leave the other to perish? Is it reasonable for a man to know while he is here below what his eternal destiny will be, and that his sins are forgiven? And so they have a great many other reasonings. Then, again, Look, say they, at the whale swallowing Jonah, and, indeed, all the wonders of the Old Testament, and many miracles of the New; is it reasonable? How are these reasonings cast down? In a moment, with the Christian. The Christian says, Well, my Bible tells me that the Creator created the world. I cannot tell how he could do it by a word; but the Bible says it was so done, and what an unreasonable thing for me to deny it? The Bible tells me of the Flood; what an unreasonable thing for me to call it in question. And all the wonders of the Old Testament—Jonah in the whale's belly, and of which the Bible tells me; I have nothing to do with comprehending how Jonah could live three days and three nights in the whale's belly; I cannot tell that; I have nothing to do with that: God

says it, and that is quite enough. How the Saviour turned the water into wine I cannot philosophically explain, and how the leprosy fled out of the man's flesh in an instant I cannot explain. How the winds and the sea should be silenced in an instant by the putting forth of omnipotent power we cannot comprehend. But it would be a most unreasonable thing to call in question anything that God says. It is impossible for him to lie; it is impossible for him to be wrong. And besides, his understanding is infinite, and "who," therefore, "by searching can find out God to perfection?" Thus, the man taught of God throws his carnal reasoning to the winds, and now begins to reason sacredly, taking the Bible for his guide. His reason now becomes, not neutralized—no, his reason becomes consecrated to God. He hears his Maker say, "Come and let us reason together: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." Ah, he saith, that is the reasoning. So, then, if the Lord saith it, that settles the matter. That is where these false reasonings are all cast down.

Why, Moses, you are never weak enough to suppose that that sundried, fierce, flinty-looking rock could ever bring anything to the people? God says it shall, and I am to just smite it with the rod. He did so; the waters gushed out, and supplied the thousands of Israelites. How are you going to live? The Lord knows; we shall see to-morrow morning. So the manna came—the Lord sent it. How are you going to get through Jordan? We shall see when we get there. The Lord opened the way. How are you going to throw the walls of Jericho down? We shall see when we get there: the sound of the ram's horns will do it all.

"Casting down imaginations." Some of you may say, I don't know where I shall be in a few years' time. Well, but the Lord knows: leave it with him. I don't know how I shall do; but the Lord knows: leave it with him. I don't know where I shall die; but the Lord knows: leave it with him. Why, he loves you more than you love your children; it is not possible for a creature to love its own offspring so much as the Lord loves his spiritual offspring. "If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?" Cast down, then, all carnal reasonings; let God's word decide the matter. Recollect the good old lines impressed upon the Surrey Tabernacle ever since the first time they were applied to it so emphatically, that—

"Faith laughs at impossibilities,
And says it shall be done."

When faith is sickly it cannot laugh; but when it is strong it laughs at impossibilities. If God says it shall be, it is decided. I do feel increasingly thankful that I am not an Atheist, not a Deist, not an Infidel; that I am not a Catholic nor a Puseyite, trusting in man. "It is by faith, that it might be by grace, that the promise might be sure unto all the seed." That is exactly my creed.

Then the apostle adds here,—"And every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God." Now let us take away the word "knowledge" here, for the sake of explanation, and put another word in the place of it, and read it thus:—"And every high thing that exalteth itself against the *truth* of God." Will not that explain it? Whatever sets aside the truth of God sets aside the knowledge of God; for all true knowledge of God is by the truth of God; all blessing from God is by the truth of God; and all life, all light, everything, is by the truth of God. There is nothing out of his truth. God will not suffer the golden oil of his grace to come into the souls of sinners through humanly-made and humanly-manufactured doctrines and creeds of men. "Every high thing that exalteth itself against the truth of God." So you must come down to electing grace; you must come down to divine predestination; you must come down to perfect mediation; you must come down to a sworn

covenant; you must come down to your real sinnership; and if you come down to your real sinnership, you will then, by true saintsship, rise immeasurably high, and you will remain to dwell on high, where your place of defence will be the munitions of rocks, where the bread of eternal life shall be given, the water of everlasting life shall be sure. This is the path, then; first, what Jesus Christ has done for you; second, you are brought into the light of what he has done for you; third, your carnal reasoning is cast down; and fourth, your enmity against God's sovereignty is also cast down.

Now how is this done? Why, simply by preaching the gospel. It is not done by pains and penalties—no. I am sure no one was ever used as the Saviour was, and yet he did not inflict any pain or penalty upon anybody. Judas betrayed Him; but he did not say, Now, Judas, we will give you into custody, and we will have you punished—no; we will have you hanged—no. Judas went and hanged himself; that was not Peter's fault, nor the Lord's fault. Judas had chosen the devil for his companion, and the devil brought him to a devilish end: Satan entered in unto him. And the apostles, they never threatened any penalty—that is to say, not of a human kind. So that all this was brought about simply by preaching the glorious gospel of the blessed God.

But now we must notice, lastly, *the completeness of this subjection*—"bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." Ah, saith one, now then I shall be cut off, for I have all sorts of thoughts, and inclinations, and rebellions, and besetments. I have no doubt of it. And I have thoughts of God sometimes, saith one, that I would not utter for all this world, awful thoughts; conscious I am they all lie open to him. How, therefore, can it be said of me that every thought is brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ? It does not say all your thoughts are about Christ, or after Christ, but every thought must be in captivity to the obedience of Christ. Now let us make it plain. Mark, it does not say into captivity to the obedience of God—it includes that,—but *Christ*. That shows it is obedience to God, at the same time shows the order after which the obedience stands. What is this obedience? It is the obedience of faith, as the apostle expresses it in the last chapter of Romans. Every thought, therefore, that you may have that would tempt you to give up the truth, do you yield to that thought? Every thought that you have that would tempt you to hate Christ, do you yield to that thought? Every thought that would tempt you to despise the Son of God, and count the blood of the covenant a common thing, and do despite to the spirit of his grace; are those thoughts in such captivity to your faith, your belief in Christ, that though you were slain you would trust in him? Can you say, With all my imperfections, God helping me, I will never give up his truth, his name, his salvation? Why, says the enemy, I will send you evil thoughts, and see what that will do. There is that Paul; if I could get a thought into his mind that his faith could not overcome, I could overcome his faith, and turn him into a disbeliever; I could then sever him from Jesus Christ, and he would then stand on the ground of condemnation and be lost. So Satan sent a messenger. Now, Paul, you won't be able to get that messenger into captivity; he will get you into captivity, and make you give up that boasting about free grace, and about glorying in the cross of Christ—make you give up the whole of it. And the apostle trembled, as we may well do at some of the besetments that we have. It is a mercy for we are not called upon outwardly to express all we inwardly feel at times. "I besought the Lord" in earnest prayer; felt as though I should be overcome. And it was a great trial, or else the Lord would not have given such a great answer. "My grace is sufficient for thee; my strength is made perfect in weakness." "Most gladly, therefore, will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power

of Christ may rest upon me." These thoughts and besetments cannot overcome faith, but faith holds fast the Lord Jesus Christ. And thus every evil thought is brought into captivity, into subjection to the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ. But mark another point,—to obey Christ is to believe him, of course with practical faith. The Israelites that believed were alive at the end of the journey, and took possession of the promised land. Captivity to the faith of Christ. Let the besetments be what they may, so far from those besetments and evil risings of our wicked hearts and fallen nature severing us from Christ, they make us cleave the closer to him. Ah, we say, it is Christ, the blood of Christ, the righteousness of Christ, the salvation of Christ, the mercy of Christ, the promise that is in Christ, God in Christ. So that every thought, whatever it may be, shall be in such captivity that, as the apostle beautifully reasons, it shall not be able to sever us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus. Now I believe this to be a part of the meaning, but then you must be brought into conformity to Christ. You will not wish anything to be brought into captivity to the faith unless you are brought into the faith. But when brought into the faith, Why, say you, the greatest earthly empire I could possess would be a bauble and a toy in worth in comparison of this grain of faith I have in an almighty Saviour, in comparison of this confidence I have in his dear and blessed name. There is one more sense which I must just name, and that is this,—that if we take the word "thought" here to mean *purpose, intention*, and so on, then it will mean that you can never purpose anything against Jesus Christ—you can never intend anything against his truth. No; every thought that you approve is on his side, every thought that you approve is for him.

"What think you of Christ? is the test

To try both your state and your scheme.

You cannot be right in the rest,

Unless you think rightly of him."

Ah, then, happy the people that are brought so to appreciate the truth that every thought shall be subservient to their faith! Their faith shall overcome every thought, while their spiritual and Christian thoughts are at times such as diffuse a holy pleasure through the soul. "My meditation of him shall be sweet." "We have thought of thy loving kindness, O God, in the midst of thy temple." And when our souls are made like the chariot of Amminadib, how, then, can we rejoice that all is in captivity to him, that he has led captivity captive? This is our victory, even our faith in him in the victory which he himself hath wrought. The end of all shall be the glorious liberty of the sons of God.

That, in order to be built up in our most holy faith, and planted together in the likeness of Christ's death, we must be rooted up, and thrown down, and be destroyed in all other confidences. The word of God will become our rule of reasoning, and we shall use our reasoning powers to our great advantage, and for the good of others, and to the honour and glory of him who hath shown us eternal mercy, not forgetting that gospel truth is the key of knowledge; and if truth be taken away the kingdom of God is closed, and we enter not in ourselves, and we hinder them that are entering; and should thus make ourselves, not friends but enemies of the gospel of the grace of God. But our rejoicing is that the Saviour must reign until all enemies are under his feet, and all that love him and suffer for him shall reign for ever with him, and be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might.