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# Surrey Tabernacle Pulpit.

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KIND COMMANDS.

## A SERMON

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, 7TH JUNE, 1868,

By MR. JAMES WELLS,

AT THE NEW SURREY TABERNACLE, WANSEY STREET.

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"Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven."—MATTHEW vii. 21.

LAST Lord's day morning from this text we noticed the things which the Lord had in his testamentary will or covenant determined that his people should do; we pointed out what those things were, and that in doing those things they thereby prove that they are the children of God. But this morning we have to come to another and a more preceptive part of God's will, wherein, as we go along, we shall feel,—if in our right minds, reprov'd; for reproof stands connected with precept, and we are all poor creatures, and need all the reproof, chastening, and affliction which the Lord is pleased to lay upon us. I shall therefore this morning notice *the preceptive will of God.*

Now the first command,—for I shall notice four which are given in connection with our text,—is that of prayer. We look upon that as a command. "Ask, and it shall be given unto you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." First, then, we are to ask, and it shall be given. But what man, since the foundation of the world, ever asked God for that which he hath to bestow, but those that he himself is pleased to teach. There is not a man under the heavens by nature that knows what he does need for his eternal welfare; therefore he may say a great many prayers, and even pray earnestly to escape hell and to go to heaven, and yet such a one shall remain all his days unconvinced of what God's truth is, and of his need of that truth. And whenever that truth be sounded in the ears of such a one, he, through blindness and the native enmity of his heart, has such an antipathy to that very truth by which alone he can be saved, that, notwithstanding all his religion, he avoids that truth all he possibly can; whereas those who are taught of God, as were the

persons whom the Saviour here addressed,—for in the sermon on the Mount he spoke to his own disciples,—those who are taught of God are made to love the truth. Let me look at two or three things that the people of God are led to ask for. First, they ask to know what the truth is. What is the truth? Lord, do not let me believe a lie, and think at the same time that I am believing the truth. Let me know what the truth is, that I may understand the truth, especially as the Saviour hath said, “If my word continue in you ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” I may go back even as far, (for we love ancient things, and these things are ancient), I may go back as far as the days of Moses, and see how he answers to this inquiry after the truth. “Ask thy father,” that is, Abraham, “and he,” from his own history, “will show thee; thy elders, and they will tell thee.” Then Moses goes on to describe what the truth is, which I will notice after I have just observed, that after declaring the name of the Lord, the stability and perfection of Christ, Moses found that the main body of the people did not receive what he said; and therefore he saith of them, they having already apostatized from the Lord, and adopted error, “Their spot is not the spot of his children.” If you substitute the word “faith” there for the word “spot” you get the meaning; “their faith is not the faith of his children,” because their faith believes in error, it does not believe in the truth. Now the Lord’s people are distinguished by their faith,—by what they believe, and by how they believe. Moses goes on to show what the truth is, and the way in which alone a sinner can be saved. “When the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of Adam,” Cain and Abel,—as though Moses should say to those that were inquiring, God separated these two, Cain and Abel, Which would you like to be? Would you like to be Cain? Would you like to be found an enemy to the sacrifice of Christ? Would you like to be found out of the faith that Abel had? Would you like to be found where he was found? Or would you like to be found where Cain was found, and to become a fugitive and a vagabond upon the earth,—wander and wander about until you wander into hell? Would you like to be Cain? No, says the sincere inquirer, convinced of his state, my desire is to be one with Abel, to have the same faith, to look to the same Mediator, and to obtain justification by the same eternal righteousness, “when he separated the sons of Adam.” The separation increases as it goes on; there is a great difference between the two while they live, and there is a greater difference still when they die, and a greater difference still at the last day, and a greater difference still as eternity rolls on. Then Moses goes on; “He set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel.” He had taken their welfare into his hands; he had designed certain providential, and divine, and eternal mercies for them. Now, “Ask, and it shall be given unto thee.” If you ask after the truth, then you will see the difference the Lord makes between the believer and the unbeliever; and you will also see how it was the one became a believer, and the other was left; that the Lord hath mercy upon whom he will have mercy. Being not under obligation to have mercy upon any, yet he doth have mercy upon a number that no man can number. Countless millions shall in life through Jesus reign. Then Moses goes on to show that “the Lord’s portion is his people.” And, then, mark how they become believers. How do they come into the faith of Abel? How do they come under the Lord’s government? and how do they know his eternal truth? It is explained thus; “He found him in a desert land.” We must not take this desert land literally, but spiritually. The Lord found us dead in trespasses and in sins.

“Buried in sorrow and in sin,  
At hell’s dark door we lay.”

Can there be a more desert land than sin? And, mark, he found us in the first death; and if we do not come out of the first death before we

die, then we are subjected to the second death. The death of the body is not the first death; that is only the second part of the first death; the first death is that spiritual death that we died in Adam. And, then, if you go on a little farther, you will see that in this our state as sinners we are in such a condition that there is not anything the creature can do to help himself out of that state. Sin must be atoned for, but no man can either redeem himself or his brother; and no man can be accepted into heaven unless he be made righteous, and by the works of the creature can no flesh living be justified. "He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness." There is experience here. If you ask after the truth, you must expect to know it experimentally. Mr. Newton was in the secret when he said,—

"I asked the Lord that I might grow  
In faith, and love, and every grace;  
Might more of his salvation know,  
And seek more earnestly of his face."

When a sinner is quickened by grace, then for the first time in his life his sins howl after him like so many wild beasts; the evils of his nature rise, and seem to have a hellish, a damning, a threatening force; and he says, Here am I in this desert land, in this waste howling wilderness, I can hear the howlings of death after me, and at the time and place, and by the means appointed, death certainly will meet me. I know not the moment, the place, or the means, but I do know that it is certain. Nay, saith one, I seem as though I could hear the howlings of hell after me. He feels himself to be in a desert land, a waste howling wilderness. When this is the case, it will make the sinner pray. He begins to ask, Lord, show me the way out of this desert, out of this waste howling wilderness. Instead of the Lord doing that at the first, he will give you to experience a little more of it. "He led him about, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye." So it will be with you; till by and by the Son of Righteousness will arise, and you will see in contrast to all your sins the atonement of Jesus Christ, and what that atonement can and doth make you; what it will deliver you from and bring you to; and you will see his righteousness, his electing grace, and his eternal mercy, his everlasting love, the covenant ordered in all things and sure; and you will come to this conclusion, that if you are saved it must be from first to last by the grace of God. Ah, you will say, the origin of my salvation must have been with him, and the accomplishment of my salvation was by the omnipotent arm of the Saviour. This is a part of God's preceptive will, that his people should pray, and not faint. "Ask, and it shall be given unto you." Such a one will also ask to be brought into the bond of the covenant. "They shall ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherward, saying, Come, and let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant." Then, if it be a perpetual covenant there must be something to give it perpetuity; and what is it gives this covenant perpetuity? First, the atonement of Christ; secondly, the righteousness of Christ; thirdly, the immutability of the blessed God. "Let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten." I am speaking now to the little ones, that are just beginning to see; only I want you, the Lord enabling you, to seek the right things, that you should seek to know the truth for yourselves; you will have to die by yourselves; and then when you know the truth for yourselves, you will not have to ask any man what the truth is. You are brought into the bond of God's everlasting covenant, and you see and feel that there is no safety anywhere else. You will not depend then upon any one. Though I am a Baptist, I am at the same time an Independent; that is to say, I like to be independent of man; and I wish you all to be the same—to feel that your faith stands not in the wisdom of men, but in the omnipotent power of the everlasting God; the

consequence will be, your faith shall not fail. Then as they are to come to Zion by this covenant, the Lord has promised that the dew shall descend upon the mountains of Zion, and that there shall be showers of blessing. Come then, can we not go thus far? Can we not say that we do from time to time seek the Lord for this? Are we not come to-day with a hope that his blessed word may be to our souls as the dew of heaven, as the rain of heaven, that it may be softening to our souls, that it may come down and take away our hardness? Oh, when our hardness towards God, towards Christ, towards the truth, towards his service, and towards our souls is taken away, we can then throw off every worldly care. A man or a woman's heart shall be full of sympathy towards everything earthly, and yet at the same time as hard and as dead towards God's truth as though that truth did not exist, or was not worth thinking about; and as dead towards Christ as though he was not worth a thought; as dead towards God in the everlasting love wherewith he has loved us, and the provisions he has made for our eternal welfare, as though it was not worth having; and as hard towards God's service as though it was about one of the worst things to attend to; and as hard towards prayer and everything spiritual, as though spiritual things, which in reality are everything, were hardly worth a thought. Now the Christian knows this, the Christian can distinguish between that which is spiritual and that which is not. I am ashamed to say it, but I will say it, that I am sometimes in that state that my hard heart treats eternal things, the Saviour in all he has done, the service of God, and everything else, with indifference. Why, the thought comes, You a Christian? A Christian is a man that has the love of God in his soul. Where is the love of God in your soul? The Christian is a man in whose heart is shed abroad the love of God. Where is the love of God in you? The Christian is a man that walks with God; you do not walk at all. You are asleep, you are worse than Jonah, he was awake when they awoke him; but I do not know how long you have been sleeping. And so Elijah lay down and went to sleep. So it is with me—I find it so. David saith, "Lighten thou mine eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death." No man can keep alive his own soul. How encouraging, then, it is that we are favoured to pray, Let us ask the Lord to fulfil his own blessed promise, "I will see you again, and your hearts shall rejoice." Hereby, we shall be doing the preceptive will of God our Father. We shall not be blessed *for* our deed, but we shall be blessed *in* our deed. And then look at the great encouragement which the Saviour gives us. He says, "What man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent?" or, as it saith in another place, "If he ask an egg, will he give him a scorpion?" "If ye, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children," if the father know how to receive the poor prodigal, and how to put upon him the best robe, to pass by all his faults, and not even name them; and how to place the ring of honour upon his hand, and how to bring forward the provision suited to his necessity, and how the music should be conducted to charm his sorrows away, and make him feel he is at home; "how much more shall your father which is heaven, how much more?" I am glad the dear Saviour has put it in that form, "how much more?" Oh, how much more! What was the ring on the prodigal's hand compared with our adoption into the family of God? What was the best robe upon the prodigal's back compared with the righteousness of Christ? And what were the shoes upon his feet compared with the shoes of iron and brass of the promise, "As thy days, so shall thy strength be." And what was the fatted calf compared with that feast of eternal realities we have by Christ Jesus? And what was the music compared with the music of the Saviour's name, of the Saviour's love, and the wonders of the victories that he has wrought? And what was the dancing there? Why, mere

bodily action, it was nothing in comparison with that ecstasy, delight, and triumph, which the soul shall realize in the love and presence of God, and that for ever. "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your father which is in heaven?" He has proved it already in the gift of his dear Son, and in what the Saviour has done, and in the exceeding great and precious promises of his holy word. See then how we are encouraged to pray. I bless the Lord that our salvation does not depend upon prayer, but prayer rather depends upon salvation. But in our right minds we shall not slight any one of the graces of the spirit. In another place it saith, "If ye being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly father give his Holy Spirit." Oh, what sweet praying it is when the Holy Spirit is there. There is then a power, an intensity, a confidence that we shall receive the things we ask for. Ah, what sweet preaching it is when the minister feels the vitality and power of the Holy Spirit; and when the sermon, or some parts of it, are made life and power to the hearer. Ah, the hearer saith, I do believe I listened to that sermon by the power of the eternal spirit! for the sermon came with more than word, it came with power; endeared the Saviour, encouraged me, and made me forget my poverty, so that my countenance was no more sad. I shall no doubt be soon sad again, but thanks to the Lord if it is only a few moments' release from the sadness and castings down that I have. They are sometimes way marks to look back upon and say,—

"Did Jesus once upon me shine,  
Then Jesus is for ever mine."

O what a mercy that we have such a God to pray to! Is there anything that he is unable to do? Is there anything that we need for our welfare that he is not willing to do? Is there anything that he has not provided for? Not anything. Ours is a glorious and a blessed God to pray to. Thousands of our fellow creatures pray to gods that cannot save; but our God is indeed able to do abundantly above all that we can ask or think.

Now the next part of his preceptive will is that of the law of kindness. "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them." Now that is brought in, you see, after this declaration, "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?" After reminding us of the infinite liberality and mercy of the Lord towards us, he says, "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." Now here I preach to myself, and leave you to do the same. In the first place I will mention a precept which I confess is very hard to obey; yet I can honestly say, in the sight of the Lord, I do desire to obey that precept. Leviticus xix. 18, "Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge;" mark the plain, common expression, "nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people; but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the Lord." Now I should not like any one of you to have anything against me. Pray don't curse me, don't kill me, don't hurt me; I should not like it. "Thou shalt not bear any grudge against the children of thy people." Now I hope you have not any old grudge against me, or new grudge either. I should not like it. Ah, says one, I have an old grudge against you; I will make him feel it some day; I will send an arrow after him some day. Now don't say so; I should not like to be treated so. Well, say you, what am I to do with my grudges, then? Just what the Lord has done with your sins, forgive them and forget them, and cast them out, and say no more about them. That is the best way. "Thou shalt love thy neighbour." Ah, says one, I could not like that man. Well, try. Do not look at him in his own form,

which you consider so repulsive, but look at him in the new covenant; look at him as a brother in the Lord. Now then, James Wells, as you would not like people to avenge you, do not you avenge them; and as you would not like them to bear a grudge against you, do not you bear a grudge against them. And as you like people to be kind and merciful to you, mind you do the like to others. So, then, "whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them." Well, then James comes in and gives a hint upon this subject, and he says, "So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty," for you are by the atonement of Christ set at liberty from every sin, and every fault, and every thing; there is not one thing against you. "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?" You stand eternally free; the blessed God hath made you free; be ye like your heavenly Father. "For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath showed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment." Now, Mr. James Wells, of the Surrey Tabernacle, how would you like to have judgment without mercy? Not at all; I should tremble at it. I know we all need forgiveness from one another more or less, as well as from the Lord; therefore let James Wells be careful to be merciful unto others.

"That mercy I to others show,  
That mercy show to me."

"Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them." It is not in human nature to do this,—I confess it is not; but it is in the divine nature to do it. God has done it, and we are said to be partakers of the divine nature, because we have divine love to love us, a divine Spirit, and divine truth, and divine mercy. It is not in human nature thus to deal kindly, even with their brethren at times. But it is in the divine nature, and when the human nature is thrown down into its place, and the divine nature gains the uppermost, then it is that love triumphant reigns.

And doth not the Saviour speak very largely upon this? This is the preceptive will of God. He does not like to see his family dislike one another; he does not like to see his family bearing old grudges; he does not like to see anger resting in any one's bosom. It stamps the character as Solomon stamps it. I will not mention all his words, lest I should offend some,—“Anger resteth in the bosom.” You can find the place, and read what follows. Now then, “Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them.” One of old owed about a million and a half of money—a pretty good debt,—and his fellow servant owed him three pounds ten. the one that owed the million and a half could not pay, and the one that owed the three pounds ten could not pay. But he dealt very differently towards his fellow servant from the way that his lord dealt towards him, and they went and told his lord of it; and he said,—“Thou wicked servant, did I not forgive thee all that debt, and shouldest thou not have had compassion on thy fellow servant instead of dealing with him like this? I will make this your conduct such a torment to you that you shall be tormented all your lifetime to think you have done so; that having received all this mercy, you could not give this man a little more time, but went and took him by the throat, and showed him judgment without mercy. Now you are delivered to the tormenters, and when he got out I don't know. The law of kindness, then. Everything the Saviour did, all the victories he achieved, were by the law of kindness. Was there a case in all the life of Christ where a poor creature, let him have been a double distilled sinner, fell down at the Saviour's feet and sought mercy, and was denied? Not one; because none can do so in faith but those that are taught by the Spirit of the living God. He who needed no mercy for himself, was of all men the most merciful to others; whereas among men those who need the most mercy are generally the

most unmerciful to others, as we have just seen in the parable of the two debtors. See then, what a peaceful, kind, and loving will the will of our God is. "By this we know that we are passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." I know I feel it hard work sometimes—when I look back at the conduct of the protesters and their abettors towards me in the Rahab controversy—mistaken to a man; not one of them understood the question. They put the question into their own shape, made a man of straw, and worked themselves up into a terrible flame about nothing. I must not owe any grudge; I must not say anything now that I would not say if that had not occurred; no, I must love through thick and thin; because some of them are good men, and I have a union of soul to them, though we may never come into personal communication in this world. I should always be very sorry to hear of any affliction falling upon them, and always very glad to hear they are blessed. I hold the sentiment, then, and I will practise it as well as I can, though we sometimes fail. "Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them." How very beautifully was this spirit of kindness exemplified in the conduct of Joseph towards his brethren from first to last. And Joseph did what the Saviour did in one sense, who having loved his own that were in the world, loved them unto the end; Joseph loved his brethren even unto the end, freely forgave them all their faults, and in his dying hour blessed them with his parting blessing, and gave commandment concerning his bones. He never regretted suffering what he had suffered, seeing it was to save much people alive. He recognised God's hand. He understood, of course, their wickedness and malice towards him, but his loving heart rose above it all. "Be not grieved, neither angry with yourselves; ye, it is true, sold me, but God sent me, and he sent me before you to save much people alive." And could we more recognise God's hand in some of the unpleasant things we meet with, we should perhaps be more—

"Calm amidst tempestuous motion,  
Knowing that our Lord is nigh;  
Waves obey him,  
And the storms before him fly."

"Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people; thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." And see with what solemnity this precept is sealed, having affixed to it the name of the Lord, and that by the Lord himself. "I am the Lord."

The third precept is a directive one, "Enter ye in at the strait gate, for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat; because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." "The strait gate." This is a difficult text, and I never could feel fully satisfied as to what is the allusion; but I will just state what I think is the chief point in relation to the strait gate and the narrow way. I have thought sometimes that a scripture in Romans iv. would set before us what the strait, that is, the narrow, difficult gate, and the narrow way are. "Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness." Now what an infinity of difficulty there is in getting the soul to believe this. What! saith the natural man, not work, not do anything, not be good, not to please God with my doings! It is monstrous. It sounds absurd to the natural man. It is only when God takes the sinner in hand, and convinces him of his state, that he is carnal, sold under sin, and that he needs something entirely divine to lift him up to heaven, and keep him there when he is there, to form and fit him for it, and bring him there; it is only then that he says, Now I see that I must be nothing but a sinner, and simply believe on that completeness that is in Christ, "Ye are complete in him," accepted in him, everything

in him. I see now that is the strait gate, the narrow way, that very, very few find. They go to other quarters to supply their need. Only just see what the poor Roman Catholics bring to supply their need, and the Puseyites. Whereas the man that knows that if it is to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, meets us just as we are, sinners, and nothing but sinners, and receives us to himself; here is the strait gate, the narrow way, which very few find. You will do all the works you can when you are brought in, to show your gratitude to God; as we say, not working *for* life, but working *from* life. There is nothing will make a man work so willingly and delightfully as the sweet assurance that none of his works are needed in the matter of eternal salvation, but they are needed to show his gratitude to God, and to adorn his profession, and to honour the name of the Lord his God as he passes through this valley of tears.

But I hasten to the next. The Saviour tells us that we are to take heed and beware of false prophets. That is another part of God's will. "Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?" Why are they called thorns? Because they pierced the saints of God, crowned the Saviour with thorns, and are enemies to the truth of God and the people of God. You will get no grapes from them, no sweet yea and amen testimonies from them, no soul troubles from them. Deut. xxxii:—"Their rock is not as our rock, even our enemies themselves being judges." Let us render it thus, for the sake of explanation: Their gospel is not as our gospel; even our enemies themselves being judges. Look at the poor Roman Catholics; what is their rock? Peter. Why, he could not keep himself up, much less keep other people up; he tried to walk on the sea, but he could not, but our Rock did. Peter—why, he was frightened, denied the Lord; but our Rock never denied God. Peter had got so much of the Jew in him that he could hardly walk upright, and Paul had to put his shoulder against him and push him upright; a pretty rock that is, certainly. I grant that the inspired testimony of Peter stands like the testimonies of the prophets and apostles—immovable to all eternity. But Peter would be astounded if he were to know what the Roman Catholics have made of him. Why, he would have said, I am saved by grace. Paul says, "By the grace of God I am what I am." It is remarkable Peter does not say that, as the Roman Catholics remind you. But he says something very like it in Acts xv.:—"We believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we"—and I suppose that includes himself as well—"shall be saved, even as they." Though we have practised these ceremonies as national customs, we do not look upon them as conditions of salvation, but we believe that we shall be saved by grace. So, then, if Peter was a saved sinner, that was all he had to desire, and that is all we have to desire. And if Mary said that her soul magnified the Lord, and her spirit rejoiced in God her Saviour, then she was a saved sinner. But again, "Their vine," that is, these false prophets, "is of the vine of Sodom, and of the fields of Gomorrah; their grapes are grapes of gall; their clusters are bitter." Ask the martyrs; they will tell you that their enemies gave them bitter, bitter things, deadly errors, to drink, but they would not drink them; no, your grapes are grapes of gall, your clusters are bitter, bitter enmity against God's truth and God's saints. "Their wine is the poison of dragons." They were intoxicated with the notion that they ought to kill other people; and so their wine that intoxicated them led them to murder others. Intoxication? literally does awful things, and intoxication there spiritually did awful things. "And the cruel venom of asps." Oh, the cruelties that have been perpetrated upon the saints of God in different ages! We may well therefore take heed and beware of false prophets, for their fruits are fruits of enmity to God's truth; whereas the fruits of the true prophets are sweet, and all in sweet harmony with the grace and love of the blessed God.