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Surrey Tabernacle Pulpit.

NATURAL AND SPIRITUAL.

A SERMON

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, 24TH JANUARY, 1869,

By MR. JAMES WELLS,

AT THE NEW SURREY TABERNACLE, WANSEY STREET.

“Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual.”—1 Corinthians xv. 46.

THESE are two opposite errors into which men have fallen. The one is so to secularise, and carnalise, and literalise the Scriptures as to leave hardly any part of the Bible with a spiritual meaning; and thus they swallow up nearly all the Bible in things that are temporal, literal, and perishable. That is one extreme into which men have fallen. And the other extreme of error into which men have fallen is to so fancifully spiritualise everything all through the Scriptures as to almost do away with their literal meaning, and to make the Bible a mere mystic book, with scarcely anything in it but that which they fancy to be spiritual. After all, the holy Scriptures are a literal history, as well as an embodiment of infinite and eternal mysteries. And the remedy for these two evils is the word of God itself, if we can but come to the Bible with a teachable spirit, with a determination not to teach the Bible, but that the Bible shall teach us; not to say that that is spiritual which we have not scriptural authority for, nor to say that that is literal unless we have scriptural authority. We do, therefore, need the Lord to guide us in these matters, which, after all, are of vital importance. While men may say, This does not matter, and the other does not matter, the word, as I have said, itself is the remedy. And what does the word say upon the great matter of rightly or wrongly understanding it? Do you not read of some that are unlearned—that is, that are not taught of God, and consequently unstable—that they wrest, that is, pervert the Scriptures to their own destruction? Ah, it is a solemn thought—to be a Bible reader all your days, and yet so to pervert the Scriptures, to take such wrong views, hold such false notions, doctrines, and conclusions, that you find at last instead of being saved you are destroyed. This is a very solemn matter. Only imagine to yourselves, if you had written a document of very great importance, and that involved matters of great moment, and a person reading that document should put a wrong construction upon every sentence pretty well in that document; could you, the author of that document, knowing what your intentions were in those expressions, say Amen to such wrong constructions and perversions? Would

you not take the document from him, and would you not see at once how he is deluded? Now if this be a matter of great importance in human arrangements, human settlements, and in questions of human right and human property, what shall we say to the great matter of eternity? Oh, if we are wrong in the Scriptures, we are wrong everywhere? See a whole nation, the nation of the Jews—they perverted the Scriptures, and the result was temporal judgments here, and eternal damnation hereafter. The Saviour said to such, “Oh, generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?”

Under these solemn feelings and reflections, therefore, I will go through the vast subject which our text brings before us with all the care I possibly can; praying that I may be preserved from error in every sense, and say nothing but that which the Holy Scriptures clearly set before us as God's eternal truth. In so doing I shall look more at the spirit of the text than the mere collocation of the words. You will observe that the doctrine here contained is that, that which is spiritual succeeds that which is natural. “Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual.” I will take a threefold view of our subject. First, *in the order of federal headship*; secondly, *in the order of personal salvation*; thirdly, *in the order of the Holy Scriptures*.

First, *in the order of federal headship*. The natural is first, and the spiritual succeeds it. But, before I enter upon the subject, I may just remind you that of all successions this perhaps is the most beautiful and sublime that possibly can be, when you consider that it is this succession of the spiritual to the natural that assimilates the people to God himself; that it is this succession of the spiritual to the natural that brings about that eternal happiness which the saints of God shall for ever enjoy.

But I proceed to notice the order. First, then, the spiritual succeeds the natural in the order of federal headship—5th of Romans. What is the natural? I will not occupy any time upon that, because you know what it is; but just a Scripture. “By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned;” that is the natural; and “there is none righteous, none that doeth good, no, not one.” I pass over the long parenthesis the apostle gives in a way of explanation in that 5th of Romans, and follow up his explanation of this succeeding of the spiritual to the natural. “As by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation,”—there is the natural, so that by nature we are children of wrath, even as others. Now comes the spiritual—“even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life.” Jesus Christ then hath by his mediatorial righteousness put an end to death, having put away sin; and so it may well be written that “he that believeth in him,” that is, as the end of death, “hath everlasting life.” There must be a believing in him as the end of death; and if he is the end of death, he is the end of death by being the end of sin. Sin is the cause of death; and if Christ be the end of death, then he is the end of sin; and therefore to believe in him to everlasting life is to be so illuminated as to see that nothing but his atonement could put an end to sin, and thereby put an end to death. Now being led to lay hold of him in this character, you will see that faith, repentance, has nothing whatever to do with putting an end to sin; Christ did that; he is the end of sin, and thereby the end of death. See, then, in this federal headship of the two Adams, the first and the last, how infinitely superior is the last. Then, again, “As by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.” So that not only does sin cease, but the people cease to be sinners, and they are called saints; they are righteous; and whatever that righteousness of Christ brings them to, they are for ever to possess. Then comes the law—“Moreover the law entered;”

there is the natural, for the law belongs not to the spiritual department, but to the natural, what we are in the first Adam; "the law entered, that the offence might abound." When the law enters a sinner's conscience, then the offence abounds; that is, abounds in the man's feelings; he then sees that he is that lost, condemned, ruined sinner that he finds out, in the Lord's own time; he can do nothing towards his own salvation; he consequently dies to the law, reads the Holy Scriptures, and to his delight finds that Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth; he falls in with that; and where sin thus abounds, grace, by faith in Christ as the end of the law, doth much more abound. Then, again, going on with the natural, "That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life." Now there is a fourfold righteousness by which grace reigns unto eternal life. The first is God's sovereignty—God's right to have mercy upon sinners if he is pleased to do so. Therefore, by his sovereign pleasure—that is, his right to do as he pleases—grace shall reign, through his sovereign right; for if you take away the rights of his sovereignty, grace would lose its foundation; and take this foundation away, what would the righteous do? But the Lord has a right; and, therefore, having a right to reign he doth reign. Secondly, righteousness means the mediatorial righteousness of Christ. First, here is the sovereignty of grace; secondly, here is the justice of grace; for by the righteousness of Christ God is just, and yet the justifier of him that believeth. And thirdly, the resurrection of Christ is another part of the right through which grace reigns, for "if Christ be not risen, then your faith is vain, ye are yet in your sins." And fourthly, through the righteousness of faith; for faith is a right thing; and if I am a believer, then by my faith in Christ grace will reign for me, grace will reign in me, and with me, and I shall reign by that. See then the difference between the natural and the spiritual.

We will have just one word here upon the headship of the Saviour. First, you will observe, he brings in justification unto life. Is not his righteousness everlasting? Doth it not say in the ninth of Daniel that he should bring in everlasting righteousness? Therefore he is called the last Adam, the last federal head, because there will be no successor to him; no successor will ever be needed; his one righteousness will last us for ever; it is a robe of immortality, and

*"Ne'er can change its glorious hue;
The robe of Christ is ever new."*

Then mark his headship in the next step; that he has put an end also to sinnership, and constituted the people righteous. Hear what the apostle saith of this,—that "he hath by his one offering perfected for ever them that are sanctified." Here is the blissful spiritual that succeeds and infinitely surpasses the natural. Then comes the law;—"the law entered, that the offence might abound." Is not Christ the end of the law for ever? Will the period ever arrive when the law will ask any more, will require anything more of the Saviour? Has he not in his humiliation rendered all that to the law that the law will ever demand? Therefore he will reign in freedom, and he brings his people into his own freedom. "If the Son make you free" from all the law demands, "ye shall be free indeed," not in mere form, but in reality and eternally. And then again, come to the fourth aspect there given—namely, that of death. "Sin hath reigned unto death, but grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life." Now mark the language;—"he dieth no more" death hath no "more dominion over him." And "because I live," saith Christ, "ye shall live also." Thus then, what do you say to this great subject of the spiritual succeeding the natural? Oh, what a mighty difference between the innumerable woes that we have by the first Adam,

and the innumerable mercies, blessings, glories, and pleasures, that we have by the last Adam. Contrast the two states—the natural and the spiritual. What a mercy for you it is not the spiritual passing away, and the natural to take its place; but the natural passing away, and the spiritual to take its place; the inferior passing away, and the superior to take its place; the hay, wood, straw, and stubble passing away, and the gold, silver, and precious stones, to take their place. Ah, that was a happy day when your soul first drank in the testimony of what Christ had done. “Howbeit,” then, that was not first “which is spiritual;” alas, if it had been, Adam would have corrupted the whole. Bless the Lord for this, that he saved the spiritual in sure hands; that he would not bless us with all spiritual blessings in the first Adam, for if so all would have been lost, and there could have been no saving succession; he therefore blessed us with all spiritual blessings, in safe hands—namely, in Christ Jesus the Lord.

Secondly, that the spiritual succeeds the natural also *in the order of personal salvation*. Now here I must come as close as I can; and I would rather distress you all beyond measure than I would deceive one soul. If it be true that the spiritual must, in order for us to be saved, succeed the natural, then in the very nature of things it is not possible for a soul to be saved unless it be born again. It must be born of the spirit of God in order to have life in it, in order to be spiritual; for “the natural man receiveth not the things of the spirit of God, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” And how can we be lively stones, built up a spiritual house, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ, if we ourselves are not born of God? “Ye must be born again.” “You hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and in sins.” In order to serve God acceptably, and in order to be saved, we must be a spiritual people. There must be spiritual life; there must be a conviction of that great and tremendous truth, the force of which none can feel but those who are born of God, and they do not feel it even so much as they could wish, when it is said, “the law is spiritual, and I am carnal, sold under sin.” Therefore they that are in the flesh, not born of God, cannot please God. They may please themselves, and please the world, and please a great many fellow-creatures; but what is all this if we are not pleasing to God? “Without faith,” and there is no true faith without this regeneration, “it is impossible to please God.” I am dwelling, I am aware, chiefly upon doctrine—the doctrine of being born again; but can anything be more solemn? There stands the testimony also, that “if any man”—it does not matter who he is; he may be the most angelic man under the sun, and people may applaud him while he lives, and make a hero of him or deify him when he dies; let him be what he may;—“If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.” Is it any wonder, therefore, that you should undergo sometimes some solemn heart searchings upon this matter? For you know, those of you that are born of God, that this is the great turning point; either you are called by grace or you are not; either you are alive or dead; either you are quickened into spiritual life, or else you are still in the flesh;—one or the other. Now you will say, How can we know this? Well, there are several degrees of knowledge upon this question. Some persons may have evidences enough to have a little hope that they are born of God; others a further assurance, others a full assurance of being born of God. I will just mention a few things here. One evidence, then, of being born of God will be that you will be led to see and to feel in some measure what the publican felt,—“God be merciful to me a sinner;” and you will feel that nothing but that free, sovereign, and eternal mercy, that is by Jesus Christ, can save you. You may at the first, not knowing better, go and hear, from Sunday to Sunday, sermons very feasible as to what the creature ought to do, and how you ought to come to Christ,

and to receive Christ, and a thousand other things; but you will feel that all that leaves you where it found you; and the consequence will be a dissatisfaction;—you will say,—I do not know how it is, there is something I want, and I hardly know what it is. Now I will tell you what you want; you want to realise in your soul the truth of the 32nd Psalm; “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven;” and if your transgression be forgiven, it must only be by faith in the all-sufficiency of Christ;—“whose sin is covered;” so that the Lord will not look at it, cast it behind his back; accept you in Christ, and view you there; “blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity.” This is that which you will long after. And you will see how the New Testament sets this matter before us. “God hath committed unto us,” saith the apostle, “the word of reconciliation, to wit, that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them.” Ah, say you, I see now what a beautiful way that is of getting rid of sin—that they are not imputed to me; though they are mine, personally and justly mine, yet they are imputed to Christ, and he atoned for them—blotted them out, cast them as into the depths of the sea, and has brought in reconciliation, all the mercy and pardon we can need. If born of God, this is what you will seek; and you will feel great pleasure in seeing God thus in covenant, thus in Christ, and in seeing Christ in the exact adaptability of his mission to your necessity, according to his own word, “I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me.” Here is something moving in your soul, here is supplication, here is sighing, here is hungering, here is thirsting, here is longing, here is seeking. Howbeit this is not natural, this is spiritual. “Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual.” You did not used to long after the Lord, to mourn after the Lord, to seek the Lord; but a change has taken place, and now you see an excellency in godliness that nothing can rival; now you see an excellency in godliness that not anything in heaven itself can surpass; for what is godliness but God manifest in the flesh; what is godliness but God taking upon himself the seed of Abraham, and bringing us hereby into the love, and choice, and holiness, mercy, and presence of God, presenting us before God without fault, spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing. I will just mention this as another evidence of being born of God. You read in the 8th of Romans, and you understand both the clauses well, that “to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.” I will have a word upon being carnally minded; and let us see if under that there is any evidence of life. Does your mind seem tied down to the things of time, and everything spiritual seem banished from you? Are you quite content to go on from day to day, and from week to week—can read the word and hear the word—and be quite content to remain dead, indifferent, and have no feeling after the things of God? Ah, if you are born of God, you will say, “No, I am not; and I am always disappointed when I go to hear the word if the Lord does not give me a word, if he does not somewhat overturn these dark mountains, throw them away from me, and let the Sun of Righteousness shine upon my poor, dead, frozen heart, and melt it down into gratitude and love. If born of God, nothing short of this uneasiness will be your experience. “To be spiritually minded is life and peace.” Ah, you will pray for this. Your language will be, “Quicken me after thy loving kindness;” or, as said the church of old, “Quicken us, O Lord, so will we not go back from thee.” And you will find that as your affections go out to the Lord, and Jesus Christ is endeared, it is such a wonderful inheritance, you look up to the hills, whence cometh your help, and you say, “the lines are fallen to me in pleasant places; I have a goodly heritage;” and then you are happy. Ah, some of you that know what great trials are, you look at that wave, you look at that cloud, at that threatening bank of clouds, you look down at that desert, you look

at that wood, and you tremble, and say, I do not know what will become of me; I wish I had never been born, I wish I had never existed. What a wretched scene it is! I have lived all these years, and thought I should have worked out by this time an earthly paradise almost; instead of that, thorns spring up here, thorns spring up there. Would that I had never existed! cursed be the day wherein I was born. Ah, what fretfulness, what rebellions, what repinings, what fearings! Why is this, Lord? I could serve thee very much better, Lord—that is my idea—without these thorns, and without these waves, and without these distressing things; thou seest, Lord, how they cripple me, and make me rebel, instead of loving thee, and serving thee, and running with alacrity in the way of thy commandments. I am bowed down; one-half of my time is taken up by murmuring, and rebelling against thy mysterious dealings with me. Ah, what will this do? Why, this is the mysterious way in which the Lord prepares us for fresh revelations of his mercy. And then you turn round and look at his love, at his mercy, at his grace, at his covenant, at his counsels, at his promises, and at his infallible faithfulness; and at one more fact, and that is this—that whatever may be your future, God has not forsaken you yet, he has helped you hitherto, he has not suffered you to be turned into an unbeliever yet, he has not suffered you to be an enemy to him yet, he has kept you to the present time, and you are ready, seeing all this, to break forth and say, after all,—

"I'll praise his name for all that's past,
And trust him for the rest."

Then, when you can do this, you say, Ah, never mind the troubles, I can get above them now, I can make light of them now, I can smile at them now, I can shake my head at them now, I can laugh the adversary to scorn now, and I can rejoice that this God is my God for ever and ever, and that he not only has been, but that he will be my guide—my guide even unto death. Is this thine experience? If so, thou art born of God. This is not natural, this is spiritual; for if thou wert not spiritual, thou wouldest run to something earthly to quiet all your anxieties, to heal your wounds, and give you satisfaction; whereas nothing, no, nothing but the Lord himself can do this.

But not only does the spiritual succeed the natural thus in personal salvation, but the spiritual also succeeds the natural in the resurrection at the last day. The apostle says, "It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body." It will be a body, but it will be a spiritual body; and all I understand by that is this,—that it will be incorruptible, that it will be immortal, that it will be heavenly. We are born in the image of the earthy; what succeeds that? The image of the heavenly. We have been poor weak creatures in our body, what shall succeed that? Why, "he shall fashion it like unto his glorious body;" and his body is mighty; therefore it will be an entire contrast to the present condition,—all lightness, buoyancy, pleasure, delight, angelic activities in body and in soul, and that to a never-ending eternity. I am not sure that there may not ultimately be some reference to this in the vision of Ezekiel,—the living creatures moved like lightning. Ah, when the body is thus raised from the dead, we know not at present what the buoyancy, the joys, the delights, the activities, then will be, but John says "we shall be like him, and we shall see him as he is."

I will now lastly notice that the spiritual succeeds the natural *in the order of the Holy Scriptures*. In the early parts of the Bible you have a great deal of history. There is the history of creation, which, of course, must be taken literally—the flood, the coming out of Egypt, the manna, the kings, and all the rest of it, historically. But as the Bible progresses it becomes more spiritual. You get into the Book of Psalms, you get into the prophets, and we find there the spiritual rising into that conspicuous sort of position as to make us forget the natural. So the New

Testament. In the four evangelists you get the history concerning the dear Saviour; not that I am going to tell you that the four evangelists are not spiritual, because they are; but as you progress onwards into the epistles, there you get the spirituality of Christ's own history. And he himself gives us to understand that what he said sometimes in a way of figure must be understood spiritually. In the parables, there is first the literal, then the spiritual. Again, "Except a man eat my flesh, and drink my blood, he hath no life in him;" then comes the explanation,— "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life." And then the last book in the holy Scriptures must be understood chiefly in the spiritual sense. Hints have been thrown out lately in certain periodicals charging me with being a spiritualizer, and somewhat sneeringly. Now just let us look at the last book in the Bible, and see whether it must not be understood spiritually. In that book very sublime imagery is used, chiefly taken from the Old Testament. I come to the Book of Revelation; and when I see how many prophecies of men have fallen to the ground and come to nought, when men have assumed the prophetic character, and have written volumes and volumes to prove that such and such events were to take place at certain times, and when such things never did take place their prophecies have come to naught, it makes me think there is something wrong somewhere. I come to the Book of Revelation, and ask, how am I to understand it? I get the key at the beginning. I see seven stars and seven candlesticks; am I to understand it literally—that they were literally seven stars and seven candlesticks? If they were, what good would those stars be to my soul? what good would those candlesticks or lamp stands be to my soul? Ah, the Saviour himself saith, "I will show thee the spirit of them:"— first the natural, afterwards the spiritual. "The seven stars are the seven ministers," spiritual men, "and the seven candlesticks," or the seven light bearers, "are the seven churches"—spiritual people. But you say, they were not all spiritual. They professed to be. Here then you get the key to the book. I pass by the seven churches, and come to the 4th chapter: there you read of a throne. Do you take that throne literally and materially, or spiritually? When you read of the rainbow, and the seven lamps before the throne, says one, I take the seven lamps just as they are. But the Lord himself spiritualises the seven lamps:—"There were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God." Is not that spiritual? I think so, and expressive of the fulness of the ministrations of the Eternal Spirit of God: the number seven denoting completeness. Then you come to the 5th chapter, and the book sealed: sealed so tightly that all the angels in heaven, and all the men on earth, if they got hold of it, might pull, and tug, and knock, and kick, but they could not get it open. How am I to understand that? Does not the book mean the Old Testament, and the seals the mysteries thereof, and that none but Christ by his mediatorial work could open them. And how did the saints understand it? "Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof, for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood." Is there not something spiritual here? I think so. Then I come to the 6th chapter: and the Saviour rides forth upon a white horse. Am I to take that literally? Do you not see it is taken from the 45th Psalm:—"Ride prosperously;" going forth "conquering, and to conquer." And when in the 6th chapter the Saviour sets out, he has one crown upon his head; but in the 19th chapter he has a great many crowns upon his head: showing that he had not only not lost the one that he had, but had gained a great many more. He goes on gaining honours; the ingathering of every soul is a fresh gem to his crown, a fresh crown to his head. He sets out with one crown his right to reign; and before he gets far he has many crowns upon his head. "He went forth conquering and to conquer." Is not that spiritual? I think so.

Then come to the 7th chapter—a great number sealed the forehead. Why, you are going to say it was an engraving upon the literal forehead? You must understand the sealing there to be spiritual, by the Spirit of the living God. And a number that no man could number washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb. Why, friends, it would amount to blasphemy almost to take that literally—to wash their robes in the blood of the Lamb. If you took it literally, it would be so gross that every Christian would feel there was something unhallowed in indulging in so gross an idea. “These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes:” that is, they themselves, by faith in Christ, are washed by the blood of the Lamb. Is not that spiritual? I think so. Then you come to the 8th chapter, and the several trumpets are sounded, and the third part of each department is destroyed. And what are these trumpets but the testimonies of God’s judgments? and the third part of each department destroyed, denotes the limited judgments of God through time, until the one universal sweep of destruction shall come at the last. And has it not been so? Have we not suffered plagues in our nation? Do we not suffer calamities now? Have not other nations suffered as well? Then I come to the 9th chapter, and would you take the star that fell from heaven literally, and that to that star was literally given the key of the bottomless pit? No, you would take the star mystically, to mean an apostate power, an apostate church. And would you take the word “locust” literally? No, but mystically; and so all through that chapter. Then we come to the 10th chapter: and an angel comes down from heaven; and who is that angel but Christ? with one foot upon the sea, and the other upon the earth. Now would you take that literally, that Christ literally stands with one foot upon the Atlantic, or Pacific, or Mediterranean, or Indian Ocean, or some other ocean, and the other foot upon the earth? Would you take it so? No, you must take it figuratively, or spiritually; that one foot upon the sea, and the other upon the land means simply the universal dominion of Christ. In that same chapter John eats a book. Would you really think that he took up the paper, the type, lids and all, and began to chew and eat the book? No, you cannot take it literally; see how gross it would be. Take the book as a simile, and then take his eating spiritually, figuratively. Then come to the 11th chapter, and they are to measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein. Would you take that literally? God himself is the temple, Christ the altar, and his people are his people. And talk about spiritualising—why, in that 11th chapter this world is spiritualized. The witnesses were to be slain, and their dead bodies to lie in the open street of the great city—now what should I be called if I were to spiritualise this world, speak of this world spiritually? I don’t know what. And yet it there saith, “they shall lie in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt.” So, being guided by that, we must take it spiritually. Then I come to the 12th chapter; would you take the woman there literally? Would you receive Joanna Southcote, the servant girl?—for that is what she was: she came to London, and got three or four thousand fools to receive her, the great donkeys, and give her divine honours; and she swore she was the woman, and that her child was the child; but the fact was she never had a child, and died without it. Oh yes, say they, she had a child, but the child went to heaven when she died. Would you believe it that there were thousands of people in England who followed that nonsense? Would you take the woman literally? No, you must take it spiritually. And would you take the war in heaven literally? You must take it spiritually. Then the 13th chapter—the beast that came out of the sea. Why, if that was a literal beast, you might soon knock him on the head. It is a mystic beast. And the 14th chapter—standing upon Mount Zion with the Lamb; is that the old or the new Mount Zion? The new.