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# Surrey Tabernacle Pulpit.

SOLEMN FEELING.

## A SERMON

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, 20TH JUNE, 1869,

BY MR. JAMES WELLS,

AT THE NEW SURREY TABERNACLE, WANSEY STREET.

*"But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection; lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway."—1 Corinthians ix. 27.*

By the fall of man all were cast away from God's presence, and may be looked at in that sense as castaways; and so we are represented as lying in the open field, no eye to pity, no hand to help, until the Lord himself is pleased to pass by, to gather us up from our castaway state, and to say unto the soul, "Live;" and it doth live. And then again we see also how awfully the path from Egypt to Canaan was strewed with castaways, and we see all through the history of the Old Testament what numbers through apostacy were cast away; and we see at last, when we come down to the coming of Christ, that the Jewish nation itself proved to be but reprobate silver, and so the Lord rejected them, and they were cast away, and so they remain to this day. And what shall I say to the apostasies of the New Testament professing church? Hence the apostle assures us that a great apostasy should come, that a tyrannical power would rise, and would persecute the church of the blessed God. Then the question is, what does the apostle here mean by a castaway? What is the meaning here of a castaway? Why, it means to be lost; it means to become reprobate silver; it means to be cast away fatally. This I believe is the view which the Wesleyans take, and the Wesleyans are perfectly right in this part of their interpretation of this text, though wrong in another part. There are some that have said the apostle's meaning was that he kept his body under and brought it into subjection, lest by open inconsistencies he should be cast away from the ministry. But it has no such meaning whatever. The Greek word here translated "cast away" is just the same in meaning as the last verse that I have just quoted of the 6th of Jeremiah;—"Reprobate silver shall men call them, because the Lord hath rejected them." I have seen a translation where it reads thus:—"I keep my body under, and bring it into subjection, lest when I have preached to others I myself should be reproved." But no, it will bear no such interpretation. It does mean becoming an actual castaway; this is, no question, the meaning of the apostle here, and it is for us to read out his meaning, and in what way such a scripture sorts with the certain security of all the people of God.

In looking at the subject, I thought I would first bring forward this morning a large array of scriptures to demonstrate beyond all dispute

the final perseverance of all the saints of God ; but I saw that in handling the text in that way, that part would have occupied nearly all the time ; and I felt at the same time that some of our friends perhaps might be anxious to get at what we believe to be the real meaning of the text. Let me therefore first observe that of course keeping the body under is expressive of that life of self-denial which all the people of God are enabled and favoured to live, and to bring it into subjection, referring especially to the body of infidelity within us, so as to keep that body in subjection to the faith of God's elect. This no doubt is the meaning. There is a great deal said by some ministers about the inconsistencies of people, and no doubt we all have our faults ; but I myself see so many excellences in so many people in London and in the country that I would rather look at those excellences. I do not want to be gathering dust, and laying a heap of dust down at that man's door, and that man's ; I would rather look at the good. It is true we must sometimes take perhaps a little notice of the evil ; but for myself I think I may indulge in some little confidence in this,—I have seen a great deal in my day, and I must say that I have seen the grace of God shine in London and in the country, and so far from my finding much fault, I am rather surprised, astonished, pleased, and delighted, to see so many souls devoted in heart, lip, and life to the glory of God and to their eternal welfare.

I will, then, in the first place, point out what appears to me to be *the meaning of the apostle here*, when he speaks of becoming a castaway,—the kind of character that he had in view. Then, secondly, I will see if I can find a *key that will so unlock this scripture as to make it entirely sort and agree with the doctrine of the impossibility of a Christian being lost*. Thirdly, *some of the effects which such a scripture as this should have upon us*.

First, then, *the meaning of the apostle here*. “Lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.” Of course it applies to private Christians as well as to ministers ; because the Christian as a private Christian may handle it thus,—Lest, while I profess to others to be a Christian, I myself should be a castaway. Let us see the kind of character he had in view. The scriptures are very clear upon this, and I will point them out as clearly as I can. We see, then, in the 6th of Hebrews a people that were enlightened, and that tasted the heavenly gift ;—they were so enlightened as to see there was something in religion worth following ; and they had tasted the heavenly gift ; they were so pleased with Jesus Christ that up to a certain point they were attracted to him ; and were partakers of the Holy Ghost,—not of course in the operations of his power ; because where the Holy Spirit quickens the soul, if the Lord be true, which you know he is, he shall be with you for ever, and where he begins the good work, he will perform it unto the day of Jesus Christ. Therefore such persons were partakers of the Holy Ghost only in a twofold sense ; first, professionally, and secondly, in the letter of the word, as the word was indited by the Eternal Spirit, and tasted the good word of God. They have heard some sermons with pleasure, and the minister has been very pleasing to them for a time, as one that could play well on an instrument ; and are willing for a time to dwell in his light ; but by and by this goes off. “And the powers of the world to come ;” they have some thoughts about eternity. And then it saith, “If they shall fall away.” Why our translators put the word “if” there, I cannot imagine ; there is no “if” in the original, there is no sign of one ; and evidently it ought to read, as every modern Greek scholar would render it, “And have fallen away ;”—not “if they shall fall away,” but “have fallen away,” and become base metal ; that this professed silver is become dross ; and that these professed myrtle trees have become briars and thorns, and that these professed regenerated plants have become degenerate, and have fallen away. And then the



apostle describes the nature of their fall,—that they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh. What a mercy they cannot crucify him to any one else! To crucify him means to put him to death. Jesus Christ was alive to me; that is, I professed to hold him as my life, but now I turn away from him,—I have killed that. These are they that crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh; they crucify him to themselves, but they cannot crucify him to others, they cannot kill him to others; their unbelief cannot make the faith of God's elect of none effect. Also, they put him to an open shame. Then the apostle gives us to understand, passing by one verse, that “that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned.” Therefore if we are left nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned, and is rejected, and is despise God's truth, and to despise Christ, then we are rejected, we are in a place, and in a manner that we never thought of. They are nigh unto cursing, whose end is to be burned in that fire which cannot be quenched. This is the character the apostle had in view; and you may see by the next chapter that he refers to the Israelites of the Old Testament—that they disbelieved God's truth, went back again to Egypt, became enemies, and fell in the wilderness. Then again the apostle takes up this character in the 10th chapter, and he saith, “If we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins; but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.” Why, there is not a man upon the earth that does not sin; there is not a believer upon the earth that does not acknowledge this truth I ever aim to set forth,—it is this,—the Lord saith that he will water the work in the heart every moment; and I make no hesitation in saying that the heart of man sins every moment of his existence, and that therefore you need pardoning mercy every moment of your existence, you need goodness to cover your badness. While in the high court of heaven, while in the counsels of the Lord and the meditation of Christ, you stand pardoned and free to all eternity, you need the manifestation of this mercy and pardon every moment. I say it with reverence and with solemn feeling,—that the great God cannot, consistently with his holiness and justice, abide by us without perpetual pardon. Therefore it is that Christ,—and you cannot lay too much emphasis upon the word “continually” there,—abideth a priest continually, that the Lord may water the work by pardoning mercy continually; he is forgiving every moment, and therefore the water with which he waters the work is the living water of his mercy, pardoning as well as possessing other qualities, and to be understood in other respects as well; now, what did their sin consist in? Why, treading under foot the Son of God, counting the blood of the covenant wherewith he was sanctified an unholy thing, and doing despite to the spirit of his grace. Now here there is nothing but a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, that would devour us, and we should sink into hell. Ah, you will say, I shall never sink into that. No, not if you are a real Christian. The apostle was not in reality afraid he should; we shall presently see the respect in which he expressed this feeling upon the matter. Thus then this casting away does not mean a temporary apostasy; it does not mean fall and a restoration; it means fatal apostasy; away; it means that you are gone, and gone for ever. The very language is remarkable;—“Lest I myself should be a castaway;” not merely cast away, but a castaway as refuse silver, a castaway as a thorn and a brier; a castaway as twice dead,—dead in Adam and in dead profession; plucked up by the roots, all hope and confidence destroyed;—a castaway, therefore I keep my body under, and bring it into subjection to God's truth, to the faith of God, to the fear of God, to the order of God's salvation; lest when I have preached to others I should rise up an enemy to these very things I have preached, and so I myself be a castaway.

But perhaps I had better notice now *how this sorts with the security of the saints*; because, as the Wesleyans tell us, and they are perfectly right, it is absurd to talk of the apostles saying, "Lest I should be a cast-away," if there was no possibility of his being cast away, we have this morning to find out in what sense the possibility existed, and in what sense it now exists. We shall find a key presently, I believe, that will make it as clear to us as we could wish. But let us linger a moment with those who say there would be an absurdity in the apostle's using this language if there was not some one sense in which the thing was possible; and yet, paradoxical as it may seem, it is not possible. And I shall so endeavour to speak that our Wesleyan friends who read this sermon, which no doubt some of them will, may see that my object is not to serve a party, not merely to advocate a creed, nor to gain the victory, but that my object is to make God's truth manifest and clear. Now, before I go farther, I may say that our text is evidently, what we call almost entirely, an anthropomorphism, or a mode of speech after the manner of men;—this is the way the apostle is speaking; and this suggests the key, but it does not bring the key. Now, if I can bring before you an apparent contradiction, and show how it harmonises, I think that will somewhat help us out with the meaning; and I think we can get this from the 38th of Isaiah. Now Hezekiah was sick unto death; mark that, he was sick unto death; that illness was a deadly illness; and for aught Hezekiah or his physicians could do, he certainly must die; and so the Lord, making this disease, mind the rule of his words sent by the prophet, and said, "Set thine house in order, for thou wilt die;" for the words "shall" and "will" are sometimes—not always—convertible terms; and there would be no violence done were you to read it in that way; "Set thine house in order, for thou wilt die;" that is, this disease will kill you; that will be the natural result of the disease; that is the Lord's declaration. Yet you see the will of the Lord comes out, and it was not possible for Hezekiah to die. According to the disease it was not possible for him to live, but according to the yet unrevealed will of God it was not possible for him to die. Do you not see how these are reconciled,—that according to the disease he must die, but according to God's will he should not die, but shall live fifteen years longer. Just so, according to my infidel nature I should as surely become an apostate, an enemy, and give up God's truth, and everything pertaining to it—if left to my infidel nature, to the world, and to circumstances,—as that I exist. Therefore, according to my vile infidel nature this is possible, probable,—nay, it is certain. But then according to the will of God it cannot take place, because we shall ever have to sing, that,—

"Grace has kept me to this day,  
And will not let me go."

Mr. Hart says that Hezekiah in his prayer turned the mind of God; now if that good man had used the word *proved*, it would have been more consistent,—if he had said Hezekiah proved the mind of God. Hezekiah's danger laid in himself; his safety laid in the Lord; and so our danger lies in ourselves, but our safety lies in the Lord. I will illustrate this a little farther, for these words are put upon record to be a check upon presumption, Pharisaism, and worldly-mindedness, to be a check upon everything contrary to that earnestness with God which becometh a Christian. Now there is no doubt whatever but that Noah will certainly survive the flood; there is not the least fear about it. But mark, if he does survive the flood, and does go through it, he must go through it in God's own order. Suppose you go to Noah and say, Noah, what do you go on labouring and toiling at this ark for? You must get through the flood; and therefore you may sit down and do nothing. And then, when the ark is finished, and he is shut in,—Why, Noah, there are some of the mountains not yet covered, the flood will not be universal, will not cover



everything; you are sure to be saved; I would not stop in the ark;—go out. Don't you think, that while Noah was going on working at the ark, he had not at times discouragements and doubts; if the Lord had not watched over him, he would have given up. And when in the ark, he saw some mountains perhaps covered with fruit-trees, and the whisper might come,—Go and get some of that fruit; don't stop in the ark. Think you that he would not have infidelity enough in his nature to disbelieve God's word, and to leave the ark, and be himself destroyed at last? There'sore so far as he was concerned there was a danger of his not going on, there was a danger of his not stopping in the ark. So then, no thanks to Noah that he saw the flood coming; no thanks to Noah that he saw the way of escape, and no thanks to Noah that he kept at work at the ark, for it was God that worked in him to will and to do of his own good pleasure; and no thanks to Noah that he stayed in the ark. And oh, my hearer, no thanks to us that we labour to work out our own salvation; no thanks to us that we remain in the faith, that we remain in the Lord's service and ways; not unto us, not unto us, but unto him be all the glory; so that we are enabled to keep our bodies under, the body of infidelity within us under and in subjection, so as to continue in the faith; or else our presumption, our pride, our worldly-mindedness, and a thousand other things would carry us away; and then if we were reproved, we should in the pride of our hearts despise that reproof, and then we should pass on from that to despising the God of heaven and earth, and become the rankest infidels that ever lived. But thanks to God—not to us, but to him,—the thing is not possible. Still at the same time God saves in his own order; don't you see this? Noah, why do you work on with the ark? Lest I should not be saved. Why do you stay in the ark? Why lest I should not be saved. Therefore, while I have been working thus at the ark, it is God's way of saving me. Then we come to the Israelite;—suppose the Israelite had said,—oh, well the angel will not touch me, I am an Israelite, and I am sure to be saved; I am in no danger whatsoever;—would that be a right spirit? No; the Lord had a certain order of things. You must take a spotless lamb; the lamb must be slain; you must be a partaker of that lamb, you must sprinkle the blood, you must eat the unleavened bread and the bitter herbs, and you must continue in the house until the judgment is ministered; and when I see the blood,—not when I see you,—when I see the blood I will pass by. But, my hearer, think you there was one Israelite that had not infidelity enough in him and pride enough in him for him to run out of doors and say, I am not going to be sheltered in this way, I am not going to be saved in this way; I shall not look to this for my protection and escape? But no; the Lord worked in them to will and to do of his good pleasure.

Now, when the apostle speaks according to the depravity and enmity of his nature, he there sees he could become an apostate, but when he speaks according to the grace of God, the Christ of God, and the salvation of God, he disdains the thought. So that there are two rules to speak by,—what we are, and what Christ is. When he comes to look at what Jesus Christ is, he says, "There is no separation from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." But we must be saved in God's own order and way; and he will soften our brazen brow, if we have one; and if we have a stiff-neck against him, even as an iron sinew, he will break that neck of pride, and will hedge up our way with ten thousand thorns, to bring us into his own order; that while we are to be saved, we must be saved in God's own way.

Then again we come to Rahab; and the spies said to her, "whosoever shall go out of the house into the street, his blood shall be upon his own head; but those that continue in the house, their blood be upon us if any hand be upon them. Also if thou utter this our business, then we will be

quit of the oath which thou hast made us to swear." Suppose one whom I would call a real Antinomian had gone to Rahab, and said, Oh Rahab, never mind; you are sure to escape; you go out of the house; don't hearken to those spies, don't hearken to those ministers; and you utter their business; don't do as they said. Rahab would say, Ah, if I do go out, I am slain; if I do utter their business, I am slain. Well, but then if God has decreed you to be saved, you will be saved. Yes, she would say, but he has decreed me to be saved in his own way, in his own order; and it is only as I am in his order that I have any right to conclude I am saved. And it is only as we are in his order, keeping in his way, that we have a right to conclude that we are saved. Let us have another scripture, which is in substance the same in meaning, where the apostle in the first of Colossians saith of Jesus Christ, "In the body of his flesh, his sacrificial flesh, through death, to present you only and unblameable and unprovable in his sight." Oh well, it doesn't matter then what we do;—we can go anywhere, do anything; it doesn't matter what we do if this is it; we can go on just as we like. No; "if ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel." So then, to sum up this part, it amounts simply to this, that the Lord teaches his people what they are in their own hearts, and they feel that according to their vile nature they would apostatise and go away from everything. This is the identical experience that makes them so highly prize the securities and certainties of the everlasting gospel of God. Do we not sometimes sing that hymn which begins with,—

"When any turn from Zion's way,—  
Alas what numbers do;—  
Methinks I hear the Saviour say,  
Wilt thou forsake me too?"

And the answer is very judicious and very proper,—

"Ah Lord, with such a heart as mine,  
Unless thou hold me fast,  
I feel I must, I shall decline,  
And prove like them at last,  
  
What anguish has that question stirred,  
If I will also go?  
But, Lord, relying on thy word,  
I humbly answer, No."

No, Lord, keep us near to thyself. So in the Apostle Paul there was no desire to go away, but he felt his depravity was such it could carry him to anything, and therefore his need to be kept in order, lest, when he had preached to others, he himself should prove to be good for nothing. The apostle felt that while there was a possibility of such a thing in relation to himself, but not in relation to God. Hence he saith in the preceding verse, "I therefore so run, not as uncertainty;" but if in his relation to God there was an uncertainty, then he could not run with certainty; but he did run with certainty. Let us look at a few more scriptures bearing upon presumption and Pharisaism, and worldly-mindedness, and everything contrary to the truth, the service, and the ways of the Lord. Now there are many promises upon this great matter. There are two opposite people, and the Lord's people have in them two opposite principles. Let us have a word or two upon the two opposite people. Now there were two nations. Take, in the first place, Israel and the Egyptians;—there were to be two manners of people, and the manner of one was to fight against God, and oppress his people; the manner of the other was to cry to God, and to look to him for mercy and deliverance. Which do we belong to? Do we belong to them that would fight against God's truth, and against God; or do we belong to that nation that cry to God? for that is the sign of eternal election. It is true their cry was more the cry of nature than the cry of grace, because very few of them were gracious



people; but spiritually speaking it is a sign of eternal election when our souls cry to God; for his elect cry unto him day and night. And it is surprising how the world, especially the religious world, mistake the character of God's elect. They look at us as holding certain doctrines in our heads, and they think that is all our religion. Well now, let me just tell you what God's elect are characteristically, at any rate what they are exhorted to be, and I am sure what they pray for grace to be. "Put on as the elect of God,"—ah, saith the religious world, all sorts of presumption and daring, hard-heartedness, and I don't know what all: these elect are the worst people in the world. If there are any here that say that, I assure you you don't know them; if you knew them only the tenth as well as I do, you would not say so. The apostle takes a very different view. "Put on as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any;" the margin reads it, "a complaint," but I like the textual reading better; I like the word "quarrel;" because some people, if they have a complaint, it generally grows to a quarrel, for they can quarrel as well as other people when the flesh gets somewhat the upper hand; and I don't know how many threatenings are not sometimes dealt out; but then by and by godly fear begins to work, and then they come into an opposite feeling. "If any man have a quarrel against any; even as Christ forgave, so also do ye." Well, come, brother; is it possible for you to forgive me so much as Christ has forgiven you? Oh, dear no, say you, because he has forgiven me ten thousand talents, and if I forgive you, it will only be three hundred pence. Well then, as Christ has forgiven you, do ye also the same. So then these people that are divinely taught, their gospel manners are good manners, and their desire is to appear in those excellent qualities which the apostle there sets forth. Now, it is said of these two nations that "the one shall be stronger than the other." The Egyptians appeared to be stronger than the Israelites; but presently it came out that the Israelites had on their side a hidden power; that hidden power came out embodied in a shepherd's staff. What is that shepherd's staff? Instead of Moses coming with mighty armies, bows and arrows, spears and swords, and war chariots, he came with a shepherd's staff. That shepherd's staff, sir, is the symbol of omnipotent power; God has chosen that to be the symbol; and a gentle movement of that staff can ruin Egypt; a gentle movement of that staff can divide the roaring sea; a gentle movement of that staff can roll the mighty ocean over Pharaoh and all his host; a gentle movement of that staff can bring water from the flinty rock that shall supply the thirst and meet the necessities of two millions and a half of people in the solitary desert. There is the hidden power. So that the one shall be stronger than the other. Gad may be overcome at the first, but he shall overcome, at last,—all we want is faith in God; he will stand by all those that thus, from a consciousness of what they are, will stand by him. He knows that we do feel indebted to him for his preserving power as well as for our salvation and eternal glory. So then, we remain in the faith, in God's love, and in his truth, and we thus keep the body of infidelity under, lest, when we have professed to others, we ourselves be cast away. Our nature is bad enough; but then, grace must reign, and our souls must live.

Then again, how far, holding the doctrine of a child of God being lost, —how far such a false doctrine as that is injurious to the soul, how far that doctrine held by any man tells evidentially against his salvation, it is not for me to say. I will not ascend the judgment-seat, nor attempt to take the prerogatives of the Great Judge of all. The Wesleyans hold the doctrine, and they cannot understand this scripture (for this is one of their strongholds), without extorting from this scripture the doctrine of a real child of God being lost; but if you take the key we have given, you

will see it means no such thing. Now I ought here, as I have referred to that large body of people, just to say that I have no unkind feeling whatever towards them; although a Wesleyan minister, if the periodical report be correct, some time ago came here, and afterwards wrote a letter, and called us all fools together—a congregation of fools;—a thousand fools he said; of course he meant a congregation of fools. Well, we will not return evil for evil; but we will pity the man, who professes to love everybody, that could so forget himself. I will just say that I reckon, and have done so for many years, that the whole body of Wesleyan ministers in this country are as zealous, hard-working, and respectable a body of men as any in the land; that they have done, and do, and that the Wesleyan body at large do, a vast amount of moral and social good. So that I have no unkind feeling towards them whatever. And as to their error, that I must leave. Every one knows, and they themselves pretty well know, that I have no leaning whatever towards their doctrine;—that is to say, the idea of a child of God being lost. I recollect when I was young I once wrote a little tract, and I closed it thus,—“A sworn enemy to Free Will;” and I think a good many of our Wesleyan friends read it; and I have never recalled that oath, that decision. But while I still stand opposed to their errors, I have no unkind feeling towards them personally, because I well know, I have lived to know,—I read it many years ago, but I have lived to realise the fact, that the “wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God;” that it is “a soft answer that turneth away wrath.” Therefore, in this matter I would say with Pope,—

“Let not this weak, unknowing hand  
Presume thy bolts to throw;  
Nor deal damnation round the land  
On each I judge thy foe.  
If I am right, thy grace impart  
Still in the right to stay;  
And if I’m wrong, oh teach my heart  
To find that better way.”

Not that I believe I am wrong as regards these truths; for the great matter of final perseverance is to me too clear for doubt. So then, it amounts simply to this,—that if you speak according to what you are as a sinner, there is a possibility—that is, according to what you are—of your becoming an apostate; but if you speak according to the Holy Spirit’s dwelling in you, according to what Christ has done, according to God’s immutable counsel, and according to his care in keeping you, then you can lift up your head and rejoice that he will not suffer your foot to be moved. And you can all perceive that the language of our text is the language of solemn devotion, in contrast to presumption, Pharisaism, worldly-mindedness, and to all those things that do the soul harm.

Thirdly, *some of the effects which, if it have a right effect upon us, such a scripture as this will have.* It will give intensity, emphasis, and truthfulness to that scripture which we spoke from some time ago:—“Lord, I have loved the habitation of thy house, and the place where thine honour dwelleth.” It will endear the house of God; it will not be a trifle that will keep us away. Of course if sickness set in, or other things, and we are obliged to absent ourselves from the house of the Lord, that is a different matter. But if these things that I have been speaking of this morning have a good effect upon us, we shall not forsake the assembling of ourselves together. Let me here indulge in a word of exhortation. Whatever you do, do not neglect the house of God. Come even to our prayer meetings on Monday night if you can. And if I am speaking to others that belong to other churches, do not neglect the house of the Lord. It is where the Lord has promised to meet with his people. And remember, our forefathers had to endure all sorts of privations; and for the privileges we now enjoy, see what numbers of them laid down their lives. Shall we trifle with those privileges? Some of you are so placed you can take a sitting in the house of God.