

PETER AFTER HIS RESTORATION.

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“When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.”-Luke 22:32.

PETER was to be sifted, so our Lord warned him; and Satan was to operate with the sieve. Satan had an intense desire to destroy Peter- indeed, he would like to destroy all the chosen of God-and therefore he desired to sift him as wheat, in the hope that he would be blown away with the husks and the chaff. To see a child of God perish would bring to the evil one a malicious joy, for he would have wounded the heart of God. If ever the fallen spirit can be happy, he would derive happiness from defeating the grace of God, and robbing the Lord Jesus of those whom he bought with his blood. “Satan hath desired to have you”: it would be a satisfaction to him to have a believer in his power. He was anxious to get Peter into his clutches, to give him as tremendous a shaking as he could manage. If Satan knows, as he no doubt does, concerning any one believer that he cannot quite destroy him, then he is especially anxious to worry him. If he cannot devour the chosen, he would at least defile them: if he cannot ruin their souls, he would break their quiet. As the Revised Version puts it, Satan even asks of God to have them that he may sift them as wheat. This is a curious statement, for it seems from it that the devil can pray; and that his petition may be granted him. The margin has it, “Satan hath obtained you by asking.” The Lord may grant the request of the devil himself, and yet he would not prove thereby that he had any love towards him. The Lord’s wisdom may grant Satan’s desire, and in the very act overthrow his evil power. Let us not then stake our faith in the Lord’s love upon his giving us the precise answer we desire, for what he gives to Satan he may see fit to deny to those whom he loves, and he may do so because he loves them. It is a fact that the evil one is permitted to test the precious metal of God’s

treasury. The story in the Book of Job is no fiction, or piece of imagination. It is even so, that Satan desires to have choice ones of God put into his power that he may test them-that he may torment them, that he may, if possible, destroy them. The Lord may permit this, as he did in the case of Job, and as he did in the case of the apostles, and specially in the case of Peter. He may grant the tempter's request and allow him to touch our bone and our flesh, and see whether we will hold to our God in mortal agony.

We are not bound to know God's reasons for what he does or permits. It is sometimes sinful to enquire into those reasons. What the Lord does is right; let that be enough for us who are his children. But we can see sometimes a reason why the saints should be sifted as wheat; for it appertains unto wheat to be sifted, because it is wheat. Sifting brings a desirable result with it: it is for the saints' good that they should be tried. Satan doubtless wishes that he may let the good seed fall to the ground and be destroyed; but God overrules it to separate the chaff from the wheat, and to make the wheat into clean grain, fit for storage in the King's granary. Satan has often done us a good turn when he has meant to do us a bad one. After all, he is only a scullion in God's kitchen to clean his vessels; and some of them have received special scouring by means of his harsh temptations. God also may find a reason for allowing his saints to be tempted of Satan, and that reason may have more relation to others than to themselves. They may have to be tested for other people's good. The testing of their faith is "more precious than that of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire," and part of its preciousness is its usefulness. The child of God under temptation, behaving himself grandly, will become a standing example to those who are around him. "Ye have heard of the patience of Job"; but ye never would have heard of the patience of Job if Satan had not sifted him. This great treasury of instruction, the Book of Job, and all the truth taught us by Job's example, comes to us through God's having permitted Satan to put forth his hand and to press the patriarch so sorely. We also may be afflicted not so much for ourselves as for others; and this may be remarkably the case in the instances of those of you whom God makes useful to a large circle of friends. You live for others, and therefore suffer for others. The whole of your lives will not be accounted for by yourselves, but by your surroundings. As a minister I may have to be tempted because temptation is one of the best books in a minister's library. As a parent you may need affliction, because a father

without a trial can give no counsel to a tempted child. Public workers may have to be tried in ways which, to a private Christian, are unnecessary. Let us accept remarkable discipline if thereby we are qualified for remarkable service. If by the roughness of our own road we are trained to conduct the Lord's sheep along their difficult pathway to the pastures on the hill-tops of glory, let us rejoice in every difficulty of the way. If apostles, and men like Peter, had to be put into Satan's sieve while they were being trained for their lifework, we may not hope to escape.

Observe, dear friends, what came before the sifting and went with the sifting. Note well that blessed "but." "But I have prayed for thee." Not, "Thy brethren have prayed for thee." Not, "Thou hast prayed for thyself." But, "I have prayed for thee," Jesus, that master in the art of prayer, that mighty pleader who is our advocate above, assures us that he has already prayed for us. "I have prayed for thee," means-Before the temptation I have prayed for thee. I foresaw all the danger in which thou wouldst be placed, and concerning that danger I have exercised my function as high priest and intercessor. "I have prayed for thee." What a divine comfort is this to any who are passing through deep waters! You only go where Jesus has gone before you with his intercession. Jesus has made provision for all your future in a prayer already presented: "I have prayed for thee." You may be much comforted by the prayers of a minister, or of some Christian man who has power with God; but what are all such intercessions compared with the praying of your Lord? It were well to have Noah, Samuel, and Moses praying for us, but better far to have Jesus say, "I have prayed for thee." Blessed be God, Satan may have his sieve, but as long as Jesus wears his breastplate we shall not be destroyed by Satan's tossings.

Notice that the principal object of the prayer of our Lord was, "that thy faith fail not." He knows where the vital point lies, and there he holds the shield. As long as the Christian's faith is safe the Christian's self is safe. I may compare faith to the head of the warrior. O Lord, thou hast covered my head in the day of battle, for thou hast prayed for me that my faith fail not. I may compare faith to the heart, and the Lord holds his shield over the heart that we may not be injured where a wound would be fatal. "I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not." Faith is the standard-bearer in every spiritual conflict; and if the standard-bearer fall, then it is an evil day: therefore our Lord prays that the standard-bearer may never fail to hold up his banner in the midst of the fray: "I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not." If faith fails, everything fails: courage fails, patience fails, hope

fails, love fails, joy fails. Faith is the root-grace; and if this be not in order, then the leaf age of the soul, which shows itself in the form of other graces, will soon begin to wither. "I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not."

Learn a lesson from this, my brother-that you take care to commend your faith unto your God. Do not begin to doubt because you are tempted: that is to lay bare your breast. Do not doubt because you are attacked: that is to loosen your harness. Believe still. "I had fainted," said David, "unless I had believed." It must be one thing or the other with us; believing, or fainting; which shall it be? "Above all, taking the shield of faith." Not only taking it so that it may cover all, but making this the vital point of holy carefulness. Watch thou in all things, but specially guard thy faith. If thou be careful about one thing more than another, above all be careful of thy faith. "I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not." Our Savior's pleading goes to the point, and thus it teaches us where to direct our own desires and our own prayers. He asks for us far more wisely than we shall ever learn to ask for ourselves: let us copy his petitions.

Therefore it follows because of Christ's prayer that, though Peter may be very badly put to it, yet he shall be recovered, for Christ speaks of it as of an assured fact- "When thou art converted." As much as to say-When thou comest back to thy old life and thy old faith, then exercise thyself usefully for thy Lord. He speaks of Peter's restoration as if it were quite sure to be. And is it not quite sure to be? If Jesus, the Beloved of the Father, prays for his people, shall he not win his suit with God? He will win it! He will uplift Peter from among the siftings where Satan has thrown him. We are sure he will, for in prospect thereof, he sets him a loving and suitable task: "When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren." The establishment and confirmation of all the rest are to hinge upon the setting up in his place of poor thrice-denying Peter.

Now, beloved friends, I may be addressing a number of persons who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ as Peter did, but they have fallen into a bad state, and need a new conversion. I am very sorry for you, but I am by no means staggered at the sight of you, for you belong to a numerous class. "When sitting to see enquirers I am constantly stumbling on backsliders, who come back very sincerely and very truly, and feel right pleased to find a Christian home again. I meet with many who have been outside in the world, some of them, for years, attending the house of God very irregularly, and seldom or never enjoying the light of God's

countenance. They have wandered so that none can tell whether they are the Lord's or not, except the Lord himself, and he always knoweth them that are his. I bear happy witness that the Lord brings his own back again. Though the Lord's sheep stray, yet the Good Shepherd finds them. Though the Lord's children go into the far country, yet they each one in due time say, "I will arise, and go to my Father." It is not every prodigal that returns, but only the prodigal son. In due time, the son returns to the Father's house. It is not every bit of stuff that falls on the ground that is found again; but the woman's piece of money is sure to be discovered. She will not lose it: it is hers, and she values it; she sweeps the house, and makes any quantity of dust until she finds it. The Lord will find his own, even though Satan tries to prevent the gracious discovery.

It may be, some of you have wandered into error. May you be brought back very speedily; and if you are, we are going to say to you to-night, "Strengthen your brethren." Possibly there has been a general decay in grace within your soul; you have lost your joy, your peace, your love, your zeal. This is sad; may the Lord restore you in answer to the prayer of him that redeemed you; and then, when you are converted, seek to recover your brethren from the decay of their graces which has also injured them. You will not be converted in quite the same sense as you were at first, but yet you will be turned again to your old life, and hope, and then you are to strengthen your brethren by aiming at their restoration to their first love and earliest zeal. Perhaps you have been neglectful. I find that many who were good Christian people in the country, always at the house of prayer, and walking near to God, will come up to this wicked London to live, and the change is a serious injury to them. They get lost to Christian society, and by degrees they become deteriorated by the ungodliness of this modern Sodom. Nobody in the street wherein they live ever goes to a place of worship, and they do not know anybody at the chapel, or at the church, and so they give up going to public worship, and fall into the ways and habits of the ungodly world, They are not happy. God's children never are happy when they leave their Father. If you have ever eaten the white bread of heaven, you will never rest content with the black ashes of earth. If the flavour of Christ's love has once been in your mouth, you are spoiled for a worldling. You will not make an expert sinner now, for your hand is out of it. Once converted, you must be a child of God, or nothing. You are ruined for this world; and if the world to come is not yours, where are you? The devil himself will not like you long; you are not of his sort. There is a

something about you that will not suit Satan any more than Jonah suited the whale. The whale was quite as glad to part with Jonah as Jonah was to be set free from the whale. I see arrangements for your coming home again. The Lord deviseth means that his banished shall not perish: those tokens of disquiet, those startings in your sleep, those horrible forebodings, those inward hungerings, are all pulling at you to come home. You have been trying to feed upon the dust which is ordained to be the serpent's meat, and if the Lord had not loved you, you would have done so. A deceived heart has turned you aside, but in love to your soul the Lord has made you aware of it, and your cry is, "I will go and return to my first husband; for then was it better with me than now." These are tokens by which I am assured that the Lord will bring his own back. I rest confident that he will turn them, and they shall be turned; and I am going to talk to backsliders about what they are to do when they do come back again.

We are going to take it for granted that they will come back, and to speak to them now about what it is their privilege to attempt under such gracious circumstances. "When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren." First, it is the restored man's duty; secondly, he has a special qualification for it; and thirdly, it will be a great blessing to him to set about it.

I. First it is HIS DUTY. He has gone astray, and he has been brought back; what better can he do than to strengthen his brethren?

He will thus help to undo the evil which he has wrought. Peter must have staggered his brethren. Some of them must have been quite frightened at him. John soon looked after him, but then they were not all Johns. Full of love, John soon hunted up Peter; but the others must have felt that he was a mere reed shaken by the wind. It must have staggered the faith of the weaker sort to see that Peter, who had been such a leader among them, was among the first to deny his Lord. Therefore, Peter, you must build what you have thrown down, and bind up what you have torn! Go and talk to these people again, and tell them how foolish and weak you were. Warn them not to imitate your example. You must henceforth be more bold than anybody else, that you may in some measure undo the mischief which you have done. Now, do think of this, any of you who have been cold towards the Lord. You have wasted months, and even years, in backsliding. Try to recover lost ground. It will be almost impossible for you to do it, but do at least make a serious attempt. If anybody has been staggered by your backsliding, look after him, and try to bring him back, and strengthen him.

Ask his pardon, and beg him to recover the strength of which you helped to rob him. This is the least that you can do. If almighty love has drawn you back again after sad wanderings, lay yourself out with all your heart to do good to those who may have been harmed by your sad turnings aside. Am I asking more of you than simple justice demands?

Besides, how can you better express your gratitude to God than by seeking to strengthen your weak brethren when you have been strengthened yourself? After our first conversion, you and I were found seeking earnestly after sinners like ourselves. We had been newly brought out of the house of bondage, and we longed to lead other slaves into the liberty wherewith Christ makes men free. This, I say, we ought to do when first brought to Jesus' feet; but if, to our disgrace, we have turned aside, and have backslidden; and if, to God's infinite glory, he has restored our souls, and made us strong again, then we ought to renew our zeal for the salvation of others, and we ought to have a special eye to backsliders like ourselves. We should say, "Lord, I will show how much I thank thee for restoring me, by endeavoring to find any that have been overtaken in a fault, that I may restore such in the spirit of meekness, remembering myself also, since I have been tempted, and have not stood against the temptation." Those of you whom the Good Shepherd has restored should have a quick eye for all the sickly ones of the flock, and watch over these with a sympathetic care. You should say, "This is the field which I shall try to cultivate. Because in my spiritual sickness the Lord has been pleased to deal so graciously with me, I would therefore lay myself out to cherish others who are diseased in soul."

Do you not think, too, that this becomes our duty, because, doubtless, it is a part of the divine design? Never let us make a mistake by imagining that God's grace is given to a man simply with an eye to himself. Grace neither begins with man nor ends with him with an object confined to the man's own self. When God chose his ancient people Israel, it was not merely that Israel might enjoy the light, but that Israel might preserve the light for the rest of the nations. When God saved you, he did not save you for your own sake, but for his own Name's sake, that he might through you show forth his mercy to others. We are windows through which the light of heavenly knowledge is to shine upon multitudes of eyes. The light is not for the windows themselves, but for those to whom it comes through the windows. Have you ever thought enough about this? When the Lord brings any of you back from your backsliding, it is decidedly with this view—that

you may be qualified to sympathize with others and wisely guide them back to the fold. All your history, if you read it aright, has a bearing upon your usefulness to your fellow-men. If you have been permitted, in an hour of weakness, to grow cold, or turn aside, and if the Lord, in unspeakable compassion, has restored you to his ways, surely this must be his motive—that you may afterwards strengthen your brethren.

By the way, the very wording of the text seems to suggest the duty: we are to strengthen our “brethren.” We must do so in order that we may manifest brotherly love, and thus prove our sonship towards God. Oh, what a blessed thing it is when we come back to God, and feel that we are still in the family! That was the point which we debated with ourselves: we feared that we were not the Lord’s. Whatever some may say about that hymn-

*“Tis a point I long to know,
Oft it causes anxious thought.”*

I do not give much for the man who has not sometimes had to sing it in the minor key. It is a pity that he ever should have to sing it; he will not if he walks before the Lord with care and watchfulness; but when he has been a naughty child, when his life has not been what it should be, if he does not doubt himself we must take leave to doubt for him. How can he help asking-

*“Do I love the Lord or no?
Am I his or am I not?”*

I am inclined to say with a good experimental writer-

*“He that never doubted of his state,
He may-perhaps he may too late.”*

It is not an ill thing to try yourselves, and see whether your faith is gold or dross. To have a question about your position in the heavenly family is a very painful thing, and should not be endured one moment if it be in our power to solve the doubt. But if the Lord has brought you back as his child, you now know that you belong to the family, and it will be suggested at once to you to do something for the brethren. Naturally, you will look around to see whether there be any child of God to whom you can show favor for his Father’s sake. You have injured all by your backsliding; and hence it is your duty, when restored to the family, to benefit them all by special consecration and double earnestness. Let it be your delight, as well as your duty, to strengthen your brethren. Prove that you are a brother by

acting a brother's part; and claim your privilege as a child, and exercise it as a child should, by helping another child that is in need. I think that the text within itself contains this argument.

Let us see to it, dear friends, if we have been restored, that we try to look after our weak brethren, that we may show forth a zeal for the honor and glory of our Lord. When we went astray we dishonored Christ. If any of these others go astray they will do the same. Therefore let us be watchful, that if we can we may prevent their being as foolish as we have been. Let us learn tenderness from our own experience, and feel a deep concern for our brethren. If one member of this church sins we all suffer-in our reputation, at any rate; and, specially, the best known among us have to bear a great deal because of the inconsistency of this person and of that. Do you want us to be wounded through you? My beloved friends, I do not think that one of you would wish to cast reproach upon your minister. Alas! Christ himself suffers. His worst wounds are those which he receives in the house of his friends. Peter, if you ever denied your Master, mind you look well to others who are growing presumptuous as you were before your great sin. If you meet anyone who is beginning to say, "I will go with thee to prison, and to death," give him a gentle jog, and say, "Mind, brother; you are going near a nasty hole into which I once fell. I pray you take warning from me." If you speak experimentally, you will have no cause to boast, but you will find in your own sin a reason why you should tenderly guard your brethren lest they should cause like dishonor to that dear Name which is more precious, I hope, to you than life itself. "When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren." It is your duty.

II. Now secondly, HE HAS A QUALIFICATION FOR IT. This Peter is the man who, when he is brought back again, can strengthen his brethren. He can strengthen them by telling them of the bitterness of denying his Master. He went out and wept bitterly. It is one thing to weep; it is another thing to weep bitterly. There are sweet tears, as well as salt tears; but oh, what weeping a sin costs a child of God! I recollect a minister speaking very unguardedly: he said that the child of God lost nothing by sin except his comfort; and I thought, "Oh dear me! And is that nothing? Is that nothing?" It is such a loss of comfort that, if that were all, it would be the most awful thing in the world. The more God loves you, and the more you love God, the more expensive will you find it to sin. An ordinary sinner sins cheaply: the child of God sins very dearly. If thou be the King's favourite, thou must mind thy manners, for he will not take from thee what

he will take from an enemy. The Lord thy God is a jealous God, because he is a loving God. He has such love for his own chosen that, if they turn aside, his jealousy burns like coals of juniper. May God keep us from ever provoking his sacred jealousy by wandering at any time into any kind of sin. Now Peter, because he could tell of the bitterness of backsliding, was the man to go and speak to anyone who was about to backslide, and say, "Do not so, my brother; for it will cost you dear." Again, Peter was the man to tell another of the weakness of the flesh, for he could say to him, "Do not trust yourself. Do not talk about never going aside. Remember how I talked about it. I used to be very lofty in my talk and in my feelings, but I had to come down, I felt so sure that I loved my Lord and Master, that I put great confidence in myself, and could not think that I should ever wander from him. But see, see how I fell. I denied him thrice ere the time called cock-crowing." Thus, you see, Peter was wonderfully qualified, by having known the bitterness of sin, and by feeling the weakness of his own flesh, to go and strengthen others in these important points. But he was also qualified to bear his personal witness to the power of his Lord's prayer. He could never forget that Jesus had said to him, "I have prayed for thee." He would say to any brother who had grown cold or presumptuous, "the Lord Jesus prayed for me, and it was because of his prayer that I was preserved from going farther, so that I was led back, and delivered from the sieve of the Evil One." Do you not think that this would strengthen any trembling one when Peter mentioned it. It is wonderful how men and women are helped by those who have had a similar experience to themselves. Theory is all very well, but to speak experimentally has a singular power about it. How one can comfort the bereaved if one has been bereaved himself! but how little can the young and inexperienced yield of consolation to those who are greatly tried, even though they are anxious to do so! And so, brethren, if the Lord has blessed you, and remembered you in his great mercy, and you know the power of the prayer of the great Intercessor, you can strengthen your brethren by reminding them of the perseverance of the Savior's love.

And could not Peter speak about the love of Jesus to poor wanderers? The Lord turned and looked upon Peter, and that look broke Peter's heart, and afterwards the Lord spoke to Peter by the sea, and said to him, "Feed my sheep, and feed my lambs." O beloved, Peter would always remember that, and he would speak of it to any whom he found in a sad and weary condition. He would say, "My Lord was very good to me, and was willing

to receive me back. Nay, he did not wait until I came back, but he came after me. He sent after me, saying, Go tell my disciples and Peter; and when he saw that I was penitent, he never rebuked me, except in such a gentle side-way that I was rather comforted than rebuked by what he said.” Oh, you that have wandered, and Christ has restored you, comfort the wanderers when you see their tears! When you hear any word of doubt, or anything like despair from them, tell them that there is no truth in the suggestion of Satan that Christ is unwilling to forgive. Beseech them not to slander that dear heart of love, which is infinitely more ready to melt towards the penitent than the penitent’s heart is to melt towards it. You know it. You know that you can speak not only what you have read in the Bible, but what you have felt in your own heart. You are qualified, therefore, to strengthen your brethren.

And could not Peter fully describe the joy of restoration? “Oh,” he would say, “do not wander. There is no good in it. Do not go away from Jesus. There is no profit to be found there. Come back to him: there is such peace, such rest with him. Never, never go away again.” Peter ever afterwards in his epistles-and we are sure that it must have been the same in his spoken ministry-would testify to the love and goodness of Christ, and urge the saints to steadfastness in the faith. I would appeal to any child of God here whether he ever gained anything by going away from Christ. No, brothers and sisters, the old proverb says that honesty is the best policy, but I will turn it to a higher use, and say, “Holiness is the best policy.” Communion with Christ is the happiest life, If you gained all the world and did not lose your soul, but only lost the light of Christ’s countenance for a few days, you would make a poor bargain. There is heaven in every glance of his eye. There is infinite joy in every word of his mouth when he speaks comfortably to his servants. Go not away from him. Be like Milton’s angel, who lived in the sun. Abide in Christ, and let his words abide in you. Closer, closer, closer, this is the way to spiritual wealth. To follow afar off, and live at a distance from Christ, even if it does not make your soul to perish, yet it will wither up your joys, and make you feel an unhappy man, an unhappy woman. Therefore, all those who have tried it should bear their witness, and put their experience into the scale as they thus strengthen their brethren.

III. And now, lastly, the restored believer should strengthen his brethren, because IT WILL BE SUCH A BENEFIT TO HIMSELF. He will derive great

personal benefit from endeavoring to cherish and assist the weak ones in the family of God.

Brother, do this continually and heartily, for thus you will be made to see your own weakness. You will see it in those whom you succor. As you see how they doubt, or grow cold, or become lukewarm, you will say to yourself, "These are men of like passions with myself. I see which way I shall drift unless the grace of God sustains me." It will lead you to throw out another anchor, and get a fresh hold, as you see how they yield to the tide. One man is wonderfully like another man, only that other men are better than we are; and when we are trying to strengthen them, we are not to look upon ourselves as superior beings, but rather as inferior beings, and say, "He fell yesterday, I may fall to-day; and if I do not fall to-day, I may tomorrow." All the weaknesses and follies you see in others, believe that they are in yourself, and that will tend to humble you. I think that a true minister is often excited to better work by what he sees of weakness in his people, because he says to himself, "Am I feeding this flock well?" Perhaps he thinks to himself, "If I had properly tended them they would not have shown all these weaknesses"; and then he will begin to blame his own ministry, and look to his own heart, and that is a good thing for us all. We very seldom, I think, blame ourselves too much, and it is a benefit to us to see our own failings in others.

But what a comfort it must have been to Peter to have such a charge committed to him! How sure he must have felt that Jesus had forgiven him, and restored him to his confidence, when the Lord, having asked him, "Lovest thou me?" said to him, "Feed my sheep; feed my lambs." Peter is all right again, or else Christ would not trust lambs to him. Peter must be all right, or else Jesus would not put the sheep under his care. It is a grand proof of our being fully restored to the divine heart, when the Lord entrusts us with work to do for his own dear children. If you and I are made the means of strengthening our brethren, what a comfort it will be to our hearts! I know that it is not the highest form of comfort, for Jesus would say of it, "Rejoice not in this, but rather rejoice that your names are written in heaven"; but still to a loving child of God it is no mean consolation to find that God is using him. I know, for my own part, that when I go to see our friends who are ill, and near to die, it is a supreme consolation to see how calm they always are, without any exception; yes, and how joyful they generally are-how triumphant in the departing hour! Then I say to myself, "Yes, my Master has owned my ministry." The seals

of fresh conversions are very precious, but the surest seals are these dying saints, who have been nurtured in the gospel that we have preached. They prove the truth of it, for if they do not flinch when they stand looking into eternity, but even rejoice in the prospect of meeting their Lord, then what we preach is true, and our Master has not left us without witness. So you see that it is a great benefit to a man to strengthen his brethren, because it becomes a comfort to his own soul.

And, brethren, whenever any of you lay yourselves out to strengthen weak Christians, as I pray you may, you will get benefit from what you do in the holy effort. Suppose you pray with them. Well, then, you will pray a little more than if you only prayed for yourself; and anything that adds to your prayerfulness is a clear gain. I wish that you had the habit of making everybody pray with you that comes to your house, saying to them, "Now we have done our little business, let us have a word or two of prayer." Some even of God's people would look at you. It will do them good to look at you, and learn from you the blessed habit. With regard to those who are strangers to divine things there will often occur opportunities in which you have put them under an obligation, or they have come to you in trouble to ask advice, and then you may boldly say, "Do not let us part till we have prayed." We used to have an old member of this church who used to pray in very extraordinary places. Two women were fighting, and he knelt down between them to pray, and they gave over fighting directly. Before a door when there has been a noise in the house he has begun to pray. He was better than a policeman, for his prayer awed the most obstinate. They could not understand it: they thought it a strange thing, and they did not care to put themselves into direct opposition to the man of God. There is a wonderful power in prayer to bless ourselves, besides the blessings that it will bring upon others. Pray with the weak ones, and you will not be a weak one yourself.

Well, then, your example. If you use your example to strengthen the weak-if you carefully say to yourself, "No, I shall not do that because, though I may do it, I may do injury to some weak one this will do you good. If you hesitate, if you draw back from your own rights, and say, "No, no, no; I am thinking of the weak ones"-you will get good from that self-denial. If the poor, trembling, wandering backslider is much upon your mind, you will often be very tender how you act. You will look to see where your foot is going down next time, for fear of treading upon somebody or other; and in

that way you will be winning for yourself the great gain of a holy carefulness of walk and conversation-no small gain to you.

And again, suppose that in trying to strengthen these weak ones, you begin to quote Scripture to them-quote a promise to them-this will bless you. Some of you do not know which promise to quote. You do not even know where to find it in the Word. But if you are in the habit of studying Scripture with a view to strengthening the weak, you will understand it in the best way, for you will get it in a practical form and shape. You will have the Bible at your fingers' ends. Moreover, one of these days the text that you looked out for old Mary will suit yourself. How often have we paid Paul with that which we meant to give to Peter! We have ourselves fed on the milk we prepared for the babes. Sometimes what we have laid up for another comes in handy for ourselves. We strangely find that we ourselves have been fed while we were feeding others, according to that promise, "He that watereth shall be watered also himself."

Now, I have said all this to you that have wandered and come back, and I want to say it right home to you. May the Holy Spirit speak to your inmost souls. You know who you are, and how far all this applies to you. The Lord bless you.

But, dear friends, if you have not wandered, if the Lord has kept you these twenty years close to him, and given you the light of his countenance all that time, then I think that you and I, and any of us of that sort, ought to strengthen our brethren still more. Oh, what we owe to sovereign grace! To be kept from wandering- what a blessing is that! Let us feel that instead of having a small debt to pay, we have a greater debt to acknowledge. Let us wake up to strengthen our brethren. I ask this of you, members of the church; because, in so large a church as this, unless there is a kind of universal mutual pastorate, what can we do? You that are converted, I beseech you to strengthen your brethren.

And then, once more, if all this ought to be done to those who are in the family, what ought we not to do for those outside-for those that have no Christ and no Savior? If you are converted yourself, seek the salvation of your children, of your own brothers and sisters, and of all your household. Try to bring in your neighbors to hear the word. Get them, if you can, under the sound of the gospel. Why should we not fill up on Thursday night till the uppermost gallery is full? There are some friends up there to-night, and I am glad to see them. May God bless them. I hope that the day

will come when every seat will be occupied there, so that when we are preaching the gospel we may scatter it broadcast, and find a field upwards as well as downwards where the seed may fall. Oh for a blessing! May we meet in heaven to praise the Lord our God. Amen.