

SERVANTS AND SONS

Preached on Lord's Day Morning, July 4, 1841, at Zoar Chapel, Great Alie Street

"And the servant abideth not in the house for ever: but the son abideth ever." John 8:35

No circumstances can arise in the visible church of God, for which there is not a provision already made in the Scriptures of truth; no heresy can spring up, for which there is not some effectual antidote: no error can come abroad in the face of day, for which there is not there some adequate remedy; no character can arise, whose features have not been there traced out; no delusion, stratagem, or deceit of Satan can start up, which is not to be found already exposed and condemned in the word of God. Not that these things are to be found on the surface, not that they are visible to ordinary observers, but they are hidden in the depths of God's word a part of those secrets which are with them that fear the Lord. It requires, indeed, Divine illumination to see, and Divine inspiration to feel and understand, truth as opposed to all such errors. And, generally speaking, we find, when any new doctrine arises in the visible Church of Christ, or any plausible error which opposes the truth of God, or is calculated to binder the growth of saints, or in any way to tarnish the glory of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Lord raises up some one or more instruments in his hands, whom he enlightens into an acquaintance with the truth, and whom he enables to testify as faithful witnesses and iron pillars against that error, whatever it may be. And such stand up, clothed in the armour of God, taught of the Holy Ghost, and bringing forth out of the word of God those weapons of warfare which are made instrumental in pulling down error and building up truth. I would fain hope that I see raised up

in different places faithful witnesses who are boldly testifying against the death that prevails in the Calvinistic churches, and contending for the power of vital godliness.

But I proceed to consider the words that now lie before me.

The text from which I hope, with God's blessing, to speak a few words this morning, is pregnant with heavenly truth. It aptly describes the state of the Church of God in the days in which we live. It is a bright mirror, in which the features of the visible Church of God are now reflected, and, doubtless, have been similarly reflected in all ages since Christ set up his Church upon earth. It will be, therefore, my business, with God's blessing, this morning, to bring out of this text, as far as the Lord has been pleased to lead me into it, such instruction as he may condescend to bless to your soul? "And the servant abideth not in the house for ever; but the Son abideth ever."

Our translators do not seem to me to have understood the meaning of the text, for they have written the word "son" with a capital letter, as though it meant Christ, the Son of God, whereas it means a son in a house generally, as opposed to a servant.

The Lord brings this forward as a comparison, a metaphor, an illustration, and then leaves it. He did not then vouchsafe to interpret his meaning. He left it to be explained by the Spirit, in the epistles of his inspired apostles. He merely threw out a truth, and left it without further explanation. And that this is the meaning of the words, I shall endeavour to show from other parts of Scripture, "comparing spiritual things with spiritual."

In the Scriptures of the New Testament, we find mention made in several places of "the house of the God." Now, I believe, the Scriptures of the New Testament never, in any one instance, mean, by "the house of God," any material building. It has come to pass, through the tradition received from the fathers, that buildings erected by man, collections of bricks and mortar, piles of squared and cemented stones, are often called "the house of God." In ancient Popish times they invested a consecrated building with the title of God's house, thus endeavouring to make it appear as though it were a holy place in which God specially dwelt. They thus drew off the minds of the people from any internal communion with God, and possessed them with the idea that he was only to be found in some holy spot, consecrated and sanctified by rites and ceremonies. The same leaven of the Pharisees has infected the National Establishment; and thus she calls her consecrated buildings, her piles of stone and cement, "churches," and "houses of God." And even those who profess a purer faith, who dissent from her unscriptural forms, have learned to adopt the same carnal language, and even they, through a misunderstanding of what "the house of God" really is, will call such a building as we are assembled in this morning, "the house of God." How frequently does the expression drop from the dissenting pulpit, and how continually is it heard at the prayer-meeting, "coming up to the house of God," as though any building now erected by human hands could be called the house of the living God. It arises from a misunderstanding of the Scriptures, and is much fostered by that priestcraft which is in the human heart, inciting us to believe that God is to be found only in certain buildings set apart for his service. The ancient temple was indeed "the house of God," for it was typical of Jesus. God did indeed manifest his presence and glory there, and the Scriptures of the Old Testament continually call it by that name. "I was glad," says David, "when they said unto me,

Let us go into the house of the Lord" (Ps. 122:1). "I went with them to the house of God" (Ps. 42:4). "This house," says Solomon, "which is called by thy name" (2 Chron. 6:33). The ark of the covenant, the brazen altar, the table of the shew-bread, the altar of incense, with all the sacrifices of the Levitical priesthood, were typical of Jesus, in whom it hath pleased the father that all fullness should dwell. Christ is indeed the true "house of God," for "in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily;" and he is the true temple, of which Solomon's was but the figure and type, according to the Lord's own words, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19). No modern building, then, can ever rise to the dignity, or I claim the title of that ancient temple, because the substance having come, the shadows have passed away. The holiness of the old temple was typical of Christ, as "sanctified by the Father" (John 10:36); and holiness has never been connected with any building since the Lord of the house has appeared upon earth, and is again ascended up where he was before. But the expression, "the house of God," bears in the New Testament several different meanings. It signifies, **first**, "the general assembly and church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven," the spouse of Christ, the redeemed from among men, the mystical body of Jesus. It is used in this sense, Heb. 10:21, "Having a high priest over the house of God;" and again, "Christ, as a Son over his own house" (Heb. 3:6). But it signifies also a Church of God, an assembly of saints, which is formed on Gospel principles; a Gospel church, as consisting of living members of Christ's body; and thus we find the Apostle Paul instructing Timothy "how he ought to behave himself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15). So again, "Whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end"

(Heb. 3:6). And again, "Ye also, as lively **or "living"** stones, are built up a spiritual house" (1 Pet. 2:5).

But there is a third meaning of the words, according to which they signify a visible church, one in which there are sheep and goats, wheat and tares, living souls and dead professors, vessels of mercy and vessels of wrath; as Paul speaks "but in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonour" (2 Tim. 2:20). With respect to the meaning of the word "house" in the text, I believe it means a visible Church of Christ; not the "general assembly and church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven," not that glorious church which Jesus has purchased with his own blood, and clothed with his own righteousness. Nor does it mean a pure Gospel church, one of which all the members are living souls, if indeed such a church ever existed; but I believe it means a visible church of Christ, such a one as is spoken of in the text above quoted, "In a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth." The same as is intended in that passage, "Judgment must begin at the house of God" (1 Pet. 4:17), that is, the professing church below.

We read in the text of two characters inhabiting this house. "And **the Servant** abideth not in the house for ever: but the son abideth ever."

I. There are two characters, then, spoken of as dwelling in the house of God,—the servant and the son; and the lot and appointed portion of each is declared by the mouth of Truth itself: "And the servant abideth not in the house for ever: but the son abideth ever." We shall see, as we proceed, that there are really three characters that dwell in this house,—servants, sons in their minority, and sons arrived at

manhood. But taking the broad line of distinction, which is established in our text, the dwellers in this house on earth, in this visible church, may be divided into two—servants and sons. We cannot have a more familiar comparison than this. It is one with which all that have a family, and can afford to keep a servant, are conversant. In every such household there is always a marked line of distinction drawn between the members of the family and the servants who wait upon them; and no attempt on either side can ever change the servant into a son, or the son into a servant. The sons and daughters may often, from necessity, perform the menial offices of a servant; but this does not deprive them of their birthright and original character. They may do all that a servant does, but their undertaking these menial offices does not alter the position in which they stand with respect to their parents; nor, on the other hand, can any acts of kindness, any acts of domestic intercourse, any inviting the servant to sit at the family board, at all do away with, or alter the real standing and position of the servant. He is a servant still, merely made use of for a time to do those offices which he has contracted to perform, and no kindness nor intimacy on the part of the family can ever do away with that original distinction—that he is a servant, and not a son. Thus, then, it is with the visible Church of Christ. There are in that church, servants, who never, by any process, can be made sons, and there are sons, who never, by any process, can be made servants. "The servant may ride on horses," as we read, (Eccl. 10:7), "and the princes **the sons of the King of kings** may walk as servants upon the earth:" but there is no changing their original position, there is no destroying their real standing, no overthrowing their intrinsic and eternal difference. By a church, I understand a church that professes truth; no other deserves the name. The Establishment is not worthy the name of a church, and if ever I call it so, it is from the mere force of habit; nor do I

allow an Arminian Church to be a visible Church of Christ; its name is "a congregation of the dead," that is the title which the Scripture has stamped upon it (Prov. 21:16). The real house of God is "the pillar and ground of the truth;" and therefore, if a church so called does not hold the doctrines of grace, it is not worthy the name of a church. In the remarks, then, that I shall drop this morning on a church—I understand by the term a visible Church of Christ, a church that professes truth, that stands upon Gospel principles, and bears Scriptural marks of being a Church of God. In these churches, then, such as yours, to which I am now addressing myself, there will always be not only sons, but servants, whom God, for wise purposes, has seen fit to employ in the performance of such offices as cannot be done without them. Mark, I do not say that God introduces them, but he suffers them to be introduced. Their coming in was their own act and deed, for which they must be responsible—a fruit of that presumption of which their hearts are full. But being in, and that according to Divine appointment, God makes use of them as servants for the family. For instance, in a visible church, there are often persons of wealth, substance, and property, who seem employed by God to keep things together. You will scarcely find any church in which there are not members who have some substance or worldly property, and the Lord makes use of them as instruments to support the cause, and do that which it requires silver and gold to do. Not that the poor members of a church are to look with envious and suspicious eyes upon those who are favoured with worldly substance, and make their money an evidence against them, if they bear marks of grace; for the Lord, who is no respecter of persons, though he will not have many such among his people, has doubtless some; and thus the poor members of churches have no more right to take a man's worldly substance as an evidence against him, than they are warranted to take their temporal poverty as an

evidence for themselves. "Let the brother of low degree," says James (James 1:9, 10), "rejoice in that he is exalted; but the rich in that he is made low;" clearly implying that they were both gracious characters.

Others of these servants may be useful in visiting and relieving poorer members, receiving the ministers, and filling offices. Some may have gifts in prayer, and understanding the Scriptures, and, to use a common term, may "make themselves generally useful." But whatever situation or position they may occupy, they will still have in their minds all the feelings of a servant. Let a servant be invited to sit at the family board, he never sits there as a child; there is a restraint, an unpleasant feeling working in his mind, an edging away from the table, a sense of confusion, as if he were out of his place, a conviction that he ought not to be there. And thus, though he sits with the children and partakers of the children's food, yet there is working in his bosom an unwillingness to be there; he would rather be in the kitchen, would rather sit in his own corner, and not be at the table to which he is promoted. So it is with those servants in visible churches, who have nothing of "the Spirit of adoption" in their bosoms, who have no tenderness of filial feeling towards God, who cannot approach with spiritual access to him, so as to feel anything like the working of a child towards a father. In all their approaches to God, and in all their sitting together with the family, there is a bondage and a constraint; when they partake of the bread. It is with servile fear; when they drink the wine, there is no partaking by faith of the Saviour's blood; but guilt and bondage chain them down with heavy fetters. And however they may talk of liberty, however they may boast themselves in a presumptuous confidence, however they may enthrone themselves among the princes of God's people, yet, with it all, there is a servile spirit; there is nothing like spiritual

freedom in their hearts, no liberty nor enlargement in their souls; no filial access to God, but all is a piece of wretched lip-service, bodily exercise, and slavish toil, which is done to pacify the natural conscience, but which is not the real feeling of a child towards a father.

But some of these servants, through the base pride of their hearts, shall exercise authority, when they can, over the children of the living God. It happens in families sometimes, when the children are young, that the servants, behind the parents' back, shall show them cruelty. The servant, grudging, as it were, the privileges of the children, feels a kind of base delight in tormenting those who are his superiors in station. His wretched servile heart rises up with envy against the embraces that a child receives from his parent; and knowing the day will come when the child now under him shall rise above him, in order to gratify his mortified feelings, he will often tease, and show unkindness towards the child, who, for a time, is under his care. I do not mean to say that this is a common case, but still there are frequent instances of it. Thus there is in servants that are in visible churches, who have a Gospel tongue and a legal heart, have a servile enmity, a base, illiberal, grudging spirit against the real children of God. Their eyes are quick to see that sons have feelings different from servants. They mark in them contrition, reverence, godly fear, simplicity, tenderness, brokenness of heart, very different from the proud presumption that works in their minds, very different from that seared crust of a hardened conscience under which their servile spirit throbs and festers; and therefore, being provoked at seeing, in the living family, marks which they find not in themselves, they are glad to ride over their heads in the chariot of presumption. And if they find, as they continually do find, any of the living family in bondage, trouble, and distress of mind, they delight to cuff and beat

them, to take down the parents' rod, which the servant is strictly forbidden to use, and flog them for their doubts and fears, and their very tears of affection at their parents' absence. Sometimes these servants shall get into a pulpit, and instead of feeling any love or affection for the family, instead of sympathising with the sons and daughters of that Parent of whom they presumptuously claim to be children, all their aim and delight is to trample down and shoot their bitter arrows against every feeling of tenderness, contrition, and godly fear, every symptom of meekness, simplicity, and uprightness in the children, and to harden their fellow-slaves in presumptuous confidence, in enjoying what I may call the slave's holiday, the liberty of the negro in the absence of the overseer, not the sweet, savoury, chastened liberty that the "Spirit of adoption" communicates to a child of God. Watch them with a keen eye, and wherever you see preachers building up professors in vain confidence, and wounding and distressing broken hearts and contrite spirits, trampling under their proud feet the groaning living family of Zion, depend upon it they are servants, and not sons, walking in a vain show, thrust by the devil, their father, into the pulpit, to torment and harass the souls of God's family. But the servant will always carry about with him the mark of a servant. Let a footman doff his livery and put on his master's clothes, he is a footman still; there are his clumsy hands and his gawky figure; he has not the air of his master; he is not at home in his new dress; you discern him at once under his master's garb. And so let the servants in the visible churches deck themselves in the dress of the family, they are servants still; their "voice is the voice of Jacob, but their hands are the hands of Esau;" they may talk of humility, but it is only the pride which apes it; they may speak of liberty, but their faces bear the stamp of bondage; they may boast of God as their Father, but their very countenances mark that they know him not in any other way than as a Master and a Judge.

Therefore, watch them in every state. Some of them are under convictions—I mean natural convictions; **they** are servants still. Some are walking in vain confidence; **they** are servants too. Mark them in every state—watch them in every position; servitude is stamped upon them. There is nothing of the features of the child—there is nothing but that which a servant is, and that which a servant ever will be.

"And the servant abideth not in the house for ever." It is needful for him to be for a while in the house. As I was passing a church so-called this morning, I could not but look at the scaffolding reared up to the top of the steeple. A thought crossed my mind. The scaffolding will be taken down—the building will stand—but the scaffolding will be removed; and when the poles become rotten, they will be cast into the fire. So there must be a scaffolding for God's visible church; and when the church is built up in its fair proportions, and the top-stone put on with shoutings, "grace, grace unto it," the scaffolding will be pulled down and cast into the fire. So these "servants abide not in the house for ever." They must do their work—they must perform those menial offices which are necessary for the family—but their time will come to depart: they "abide not in the house for ever."

In a family, a servant may be a very useful person, almost indispensable to the comfort of the master and the mistress. They shall, for this reason, bear for a long time with his fretful humours, and shall endure many things from him which much try their patience: but there is a limit to all forbearance: the time at last comes when the master or mistress can no longer put up with that insolence which they have endured so long. The servant is summoned into the master's presence, his wages are paid, he is dismissed, he is no more to enter the doors: he "abideth not in the house for

ever," and when he is once turned out, he is never to enter again. Not so with a child. A child may be refractory, disobedient, rebellious, and even show insults towards his parents; but he is a child still; and as being a child, he will be chastised. The master does not chastise the servant; he dismisses him—sends him about his business—dissolves the tie that exists between them; but he cannot treat a son so. Though he is a rebellious child—a disobedient, refractory son—he is the father's. He has an interest in his bosom, he has a place in his affections, and all his disobedience cannot break the tie. Therefore, the father chastises him; and if the son, in a fit of passion or sullenness, runs away from his father's house, and, like the prodigal, "goes into a far country to waste his substance in riotous living," not all his disobedience, nor even his turning his back on his father's abode, can do away with the ties of blood and relationship, or ever make him not to be a son; and when, in contrition and repentance, he comes once more to his former home, the doors are opened to him as before. But "the servant abideth not in the house for ever." When he leaves voluntarily, or when he is dismissed, he leaves no more to return. The days, indeed, of his stay may be greatly prolonged, but he must leave one day or other. He may even continue until the family is broken up; but when the family is dissolved, he must leave then. So there shall be servants in the visible Church of Christ who may remain with the family until the day comes for the house to be broken up, when the Lord shall come a second time unto salvation, and "the elements shall melt with fervent heat;" then when the house is dissolved upon earth to be united in heaven, when the members are broken up here below to be gathered into one harmonious body above, the servants and the sons are separated. The one are taken, and the other left; the sons are admitted, and the servants excluded; the doors are

opened for the one, and shut upon the other. Hagar and Ishmael are turned out, and Isaac inherits the promise.

II. "But the son abideth ever." We have a very different character to deal with now—one of quite a distinct class, as well as totally different origin. In God's family, as I hinted before, the sons and daughters are of different ages. We find a large part of the living family spoken of in Gal. 4:1, 2, 3, "Now, I say, that the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all; but is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father. Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world." In God's house, then, there are sons in two different states—sons in their minority, not yet arrived at manhood, and sons grown up, what is commonly called, of age. We will consider the junior branches of the family first. Many of God's children have derived consolation from that text, that "the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all." How does he differ nothing from a servant? We must not take this expression in all its latitude, because he differs from a servant very widely. The servant does not owe his natural being to the father, he has no kindred with the head of the house; and therefore it cannot be true in all its latitude, that "the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant;" for he differs in very many things. But in the matter of personal experience, so far as his feelings are concerned, viewed as under bondage to the law, he differeth nothing from a servant, being under rigid rule and government: as the apostle speaks, "He is under tutors and governors, until the time appointed of the father." There are, then, children, sons and daughters in God's house, who in their own feelings "differ nothing from servants"—that is, they have "the spirit of bondage unto fear" in their bosom; they feel guilt, condemnation, and constraint working powerfully in their hearts; and it is the presence of these

servile feelings in their breasts that in a way of experience brings them on a level with servants.

Doubtless some of you, when I was describing just now the feelings of a servant, were writing bitter things against yourselves, and secretly saying, "Ah! that is just my case—I feel all that constraint and bondage; I labour under guilt and fear, when I come to the table of the Lord; I cannot come to God as an accepted child; surely I am a servant and nothing more. Oh! I greatly fear that I am a hypocrite in a profession, and have not a spark of grace in my heart; but I have been thrust forward to do some menial office in the church, and my doom is, not to abide in the house for ever, but to be cast out and dismissed by the mouth of God himself!" But does not the word of God say, that there are sons in the house who "differ nothing from servants"—that is, in their own feelings? Then you may be a son, and yet feel bondage, constraint, and a want of power to draw near unto God with acceptance. You may be an "heir," and yet not have the "Spirit of adoption" to cry, "Abba, Father," and feel no sweet liberty of spirit in approaching a throne of grace, but be "shut up unto the faith which shall hereafter be revealed."

But we shall find, if the Lord enables us to describe the character aright, amidst all their bondage, some feelings in their hearts, which never existed in the heart of a servant. The indescribable emotions that soften and melt the heart of a child, knitting him to his parent, never lodged in the bosom of a servant towards his master. We shall find, for instance, in their hearts reverence and tenderness towards their Parent, though they cannot yet call him, "Abba, Father." There is no filial tenderness in the heart of a servant towards his master; he may respect him, he may be grateful to him for the food and clothing that he gives him; but there is no yearning of reverent affection towards him. Thus, in those

living souls that are sons in God's family, but under doubts and fears, there are tender feelings of reverence towards God as a Parent, working up from beneath all their constraint and miserable servitude. There is no searedness of conscience in them, nor callousness of heart; there is no disregard or disrespect shown to their Parent's word and will; there is no coming before him, as the servant comes, with demure looks and expressions of respect, and then behind his back turning him into ridicule and contempt or perhaps speaking disrespectfully of him to the other servants of the house. But in the real family, however weak they be, however guilty they may feel, and whatever slavish fear they may suffer under, there is some tenderness and filial respect towards their Parent. Some perhaps here have known what it is to have had a harsh father naturally, and have dreaded him so much as scarcely to feel any liberty in his presence. A harshness and reserve on his part kept them from going to him with those feelings of affection and love with which the child can approach his parent when he is kind and gentle to him. But still, in spite of all that dread which his reserve created, you had a tender reverence for him as a parent. You longed for this frozen barrier of reserve to be broken down, and your heart yearned for a smile from him. At any rate there was no disrespect paid to him behind his back and respect shown to his face; there was no siding with the servants against him, nor confederacy with them against his property or character. You could not approach him with the feelings of a child, but there was no plotting against him like a servant. Thus it is, spiritually, with many of God's living family. Though they cannot come into the presence of God with sweet liberty of access; though they cannot approach him with the Spirit of adoption as sons, yet there is a thorough absence of disrespect towards him, an absence of carelessness, whether he frowns upon them or smiles. There is in them a sort of indistinct, yet strong principle of filial

reverence towards him, though, from the want of his fatherly smiles, there is not that affectionate boldness and childlike love which distinguish manifested son-ship.

But there are moments when the harsh parent relaxes his countenance; when he smiles upon the child, whom, for the most part, he treats with reserve and distance. The child is anxiously watching his father's countenance; when he comes into the room, he looks at his father's face to see whether there be on it a frown of displeasure, or whether it softens and relaxes into a smile. And if his watchful eye catch his father's features gently softening into a smile, it encourages him to come forward; when, did he observe a frown, he would make a hasty retreat. So with living souls, there is an anxious watching of the countenance of God. "The eyes of all wait upon thee" (Ps. 145:15); so the eyes of a child of God are upon him, watching whether he frowns or whether he smiles; and if he but sees his severe forbidding countenance **for God is a severe forbidding judge in the law,** disarming itself of its frown, and gently dimpling into a smile, the child is encouraged to go forward; and when he approaches, and the father opens his arms, and gives him a glimpse of affection, he is astonished; and yet is enabled to tell his father how he loves him, and to speak out of his bosom the thoughts and desires that are passing there. And yet, when he leaves his father's presence, he is astonished and awe-struck at his own boldness, and wonders how he could have ever been so daring as to break through that barrier which kept him from his father, or how he could speak to him with familiarity. Now, a servant never knows this. Towards the servant the master preserves **if he is a wise master** the same unvarying aspect; he is always kind, always civil; he does not frown with angry displeasure, nor smile with undue familiarity; but he treats him with distant kindness. That is just the way in which God treats servants.

He does not manifestly frown upon them. They have not an inward sense of his displeasure, though they may fear it. They are like a servant who has slandered his master's character, or been injuring his property; when he comes into his master's presence, it is with fear and apprehension; his master, perhaps, takes no notice of it, but there is something in the servant's conscience that tells him he deserves a frown. And so with the servants of God's house. God does not frown upon them; for they never see his face. He preserves the same unvarying aspect towards them—bestowing providential favours, but neither frowns nor smiles; yet their guilty conscience, knowing their secret sins testifies against them inwardly of expected wrath and condemnation.

But the timid child, whom I have been comparing to a child of God when he has broken through this barrier, though he cannot tell how he has broken through it, yet does not speedily forget the impression that was left behind, nor the sweet breathing of affection in his heart. "Oh," he says, "how I mistook my father—he is not a harsh parent!" The child reasons on with himself: "Oh, what a mistake I have been making! I thought he was so cold, so distant, so reserved; but it is not so—it is only his manner! How he smiled the other day when I went near to him! How kind he was! What kisses of affection he bestowed upon me, and how he took me on his lap! How affectionate he was to me! I will go again!" Well, the child comes another day; the parent's countenance is not as before—there is no smile; and then he has to retreat into the old spot—to go back to his former suspicions and surmises. So the child of God has to fall back into the old spot of doubts, and fears, and bondage, and guilt, and condemnation, thinking it was all his own fancy or his own presumption, that it was not really from God; and he is condemned as having been so presumptuous and daring a

wretch as to tell out the feelings of his heart, and say, "my Father," when he goes again, and obtains no access nor liberty, as before.

And so he goes on, sometimes hoping, sometimes fearing, sometimes getting a little smile, but much more often repelled with a frown, until at last, as the apostle speaks, "the fulness of the time comes," when the appointed season to favour Zion arrives, and the "Spirit of adoption" is shed abroad in his heart, enabling him to cry, with unwavering lips, "Abba, Father." Then he is enabled to put his hands into the wounds of his Redeemer, and with the faith of Thomas, he exclaims, "My Lord and my God." Then he arrives at his majority; he is no longer "under tutors and governors," for "the time appointed of the Father" is come. And he comes, as it were, into some degree of intimacy with his Father; he occupies a new situation; he stands in a new position. He is not, as before, continually tormented and harassed with guilt, and fear, and doubt, and wrath, and bondage; but he has a more endearing access, a stronger "Spirit of adoption," and is enabled to feel more of the flowings out of Divine affection. The father in a family, though he loves all his children alike **if he has the heart of a father**, yet will treat them according to their different ages. To his grown-up son he at times communicates freely what passes in his bosom; he thinks him deserving of some confidence: he treats him more as a friend; he discovers to him his plans and intentions. The babe could not understand him; the child of a few years old could not enter into his father's plans; he does not, nor can he understand, what is passing in his father's bosom; therefore, he must wait till he comes to his majority; and when he arrives at manhood, the father will treat him with more familiarity. And though the son will still have all the reverence, respect, and awe which a son owes to the parent, yet, mingled with it, there will be more familiar

intercourse, and a greater entering into his father's counsels. As we read, "the secret of the Lord is with them that fear him, and he will show them his covenant." And thus this son, who is in a measure favoured with some intimacy with his Father, as his kind Parent discovers to him more of his standing, opens up to him the mysteries of his ancient covenant, and reveals to him more of salvation through Christ's blood and righteousness, becomes established and strengthened in the faith and liberty of the Gospel.

"But the son abideth ever." It is the irreversible blessing of a son, that he is never to be turned out of the house—that the union between the Parent and the child can never be broken, but that he is to reign with Christ through the ages of one everlasting day. This is a sweet consolation to God's family, that "the son abideth ever." How often is a child of God exercised, whether he shall abide for ever, whether he may not draw back to perdition, whether some temptation may not overtake him whereby it shall be made manifest that he is nothing but a deceiver and deceived! But the Lord himself says, "the son abideth ever;" let him be but a babe, let him have but the first beginning of spiritual life in his soul, he "abideth ever;" he has the same interest in the affections of the Father, is a fellow-heir with Christ, and has a title to the same inheritance as those who are of longer standing, and those who are his elders in age.

But sometimes the son shall get tired of the restraint of his Father's house. God is a wise parent, as well as a kind one. He will treat his children with the most tender kindness and intimacy, but he will never allow them to be guilty of disrespect towards him. Sometimes, then, the sons shall get weary of their Father's house; they are like the younger son in the parable, when he asked his father to give him his portion, and when he had got it, he went away into a far

country, away from his father's house, from under his father's roof, and wasted it in riotous living. This is where many of God's children get. There is a restraint in God's house, where the soul is really not blessed with the personal and present enjoyment of Gospel truth, and restraint being ever irksome, the vain idolatrous heart thinks it can derive some pleasure from the world which is not to be found under the roof of the father. And, therefore, he gradually withdraws his steps from his father's house, seeks to derive some pleasure from the things of time and sense, erects some idol, and falls down to worship it. But, notwithstanding all this, "the son abideth ever." If he leaves the house, he is not to be an outcast for ever, he is not to be an alien; the father does not take his pen and scratch his name out of the will; does not dissolve the connexion between them, and scatter the relationship to the four winds. The father of all his people in Christ does not disinherit his dear children; and though earthly parents may disinherit theirs, God's family are never cast out of the inheritance. The land might be sold away from the family, but it was to return at the year of jubilee. It never was to be alienated from generation to generation; it was always to continue in the same family, and to be known by the same name. Thus God never did and never can disinherit an heir of himself, for the elect are "heirs of God," and as being his own heirs, are "joint heirs with Christ." Let them be disobedient children, they are still heirs, and if they sell for a season the inheritance, it will return in the year of jubilee. The true-born Israelite who had waxed poor and sold himself unto the stranger, was to obtain his freedom in the year of jubilee (Lev. 25:47, 54), and to return to his own house and his own estate. So the son who has departed from his father's house, and sold himself under sin, and become a slave to that cruel taskmaster, when the year of jubilee comes, the year of restoration, and the silver trumpet is blown, shakes off his shackles and fetters, casts aside the

livery of servitude, returns to his father's house, and is received with joy beneath his father's roof. Oh, what a meeting! The forgiving parent, and the disobedient child! The father dissolved in tears of affection, the child dissolved in tears of contrition! Whatever, then, be our wanderings of heart, alienation of affection, and backsliding of soul; however we may depart from God, so far as we are sons, we shall "abide in the house for ever," and possess an "inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for those that are kept by the power of God, through faith unto salvation." And it will be our mercy to abide in the house below as members of the family, without departing from it, until reunited to the family above, "the general assembly and Church of the first-born, whose names are written in heaven."

Some of you here present this morning may have been holding up a shield to ward the arrows from falling upon your conscience, by speaking thus within yourselves, "Shoot away; your arrows cannot touch me; I am not a member of any Church; I am merely one of the congregation; therefore, your arrows fall by me to the right and the left, and not one hits me; I never was in the house; there is my breast-plate of proof, and all your shafts fall short of the mark." Let me, however, once more bend my bow, if peradventure the Lord shall direct the arrow through the joints of your harness. Are you a professor of vital godliness? Have you made any separation from the world lying dead in wickedness and the world lying dead in profession? Then be you, or be you not, a member of any Gospel Church, you are still a member of Christ's visible Church upon earth; you are still an inmate in the house below; and if so, you are either a servant or a son. Then weigh up, and examine well what are the secret feelings that, from time to time, take place in your bosom. Have I described your character as a servant? Is there an

inward voice in conscience that tells you are standing in presumptuous liberty, and in vain confidence; that you have no reverence or godly fear; that you have no affection or sympathy toward the living family; that what you do, you do out of constraint and burdensome bondage? that you never had any filial access to God; and that he never bestowed upon you one smile? Then you are a servant; and what is your doom? "The servant abideth not in the house for ever." Oh, cutting words, "the servant abideth not in the house for ever!" He is to be taken away out of God's Church, perhaps, visibly before men, or perhaps left to continue till that day, when God shall dissolve your union with the professing Church by dissolving the union of your body and soul.

But there shall be others who say, "I hardly know what to make of myself; you have puzzled me strangely this morning. You have been telling me that the marks of a servant are guilt, bondage, condemnation, and fear; I thought that these were marks of a child of God; I have considered these were evidences of a living soul. And if I am not much mistaken, you yourself, and that during your present visit amongst us, have brought these forward as marks of grace." I have never said that nothing but condemnation, nothing but servile bondage, nothing but guilt and fear are marks and evidences of Divine life in the soul. I have always said, since I knew anything of these matters, that there were in the living soul, when first quickened into a spiritual existence, fear and guilt and condemnation; but if you have been attending to the line that I have been attempting, however feebly, to draw, you will see, that I have been endeavouring to show the co-existence of other feelings, and those of a filial kind, with the distressing exercises of guilt and bondage; and endeavouring to prove how these two distinct sets of feelings work together in the same bosom. Because you feel guilt, wrath, doubt, fear, and

condemnation, it does not prove that you are not a child of God; it does not prove that you are, but it does not prove that you are not. If it be guilt spiritually laid upon your conscience, it is from God; and if it be condemnation brought with power to your heart, it is an evidence of your being under Divine teaching. But I would rather look at other feelings which are working in your bosom. What tenderness there is toward God, what feeling of holy awe concerning him in your soul, what affection you have to the living, family, what trembling at God's Word, what occasional access, what transient glimpses of his countenance, what sense at times of liberty in prayer, and what breathing desires of affection toward him, even though you cannot without guilt cry, "Abba, Father!" But as the non-elect have guilt and condemnation, as Cain, Esau, and Judas, when we come to evidences, we must confine ourselves to what is peculiar to the elect; and therefore, though fear, and bondage, and so on, exist in the elect as **feelings**, I dare not set them up as **evidences**. To build up a man in the mere evidences of doubt and fear and guilt and condemnation, is not according to the Scriptures of truth, nor is it according to the line that I trust the Holy Ghost has traced out in my conscience. I have, indeed, had in my conscience, guilt, fear, bondage, doubt, and condemnation; but I might, with great justice, write against myself most bitter things, if I could not trace other spiritual feelings, other heavenly tokens, other Divine marks than these—I might then with great justice consider myself nothing hut a servant in God's house; but I am glad sometimes to find some better tokens of grace than guilt and condemnation. Then, if you would weigh yourselves up in the balance of the sanctuary, you must look at other things in the scale beside the wrath, doubt, fear, guilt, and condemnation that you are exercised with. Is there anything in you resembling the babe on its mother's lap? It stretches forth its hands towards its father, though not able to call him

by that endearing name, not able to clasp its arms around his neck, but there is still a reaching forth of its little hands with a desire to do so. If you are a child, there will be a stretching forth of your hands unto God; and more than that, nothing but his love can satisfy your hearts. The servant does not want the love of the master of the house; all that he wants is good wages, a good table to be kept and very little work; and if he can get that, what does he care for affection or anything like love? He wants it not, he understands it not. So the servants in God's house below. Let them have the high wages regularly paid them of man's esteem; let them have their abundant meal of doctrines and duties, and very little work of self-denial and crucifixion of the flesh; and they want no manifestations of mercy and love.

But if you are a son, however weak and feeble you may be, you will abide for ever in God's house; and he will lead you on, day by day, into a deeper acquaintance with his fatherly feelings toward you, strengthen your weak faith to enable you to lay hold of him more as a parent, and, at times, sweetly encourage you to pour out your soul at his feet, till you can cry unto him, "Abba, Father," from the depths of a broken spirit, without any taint of guilt or any suspicious whispering of fear.