

## The Heavenly and Earthly Witnesses

Preached at North Street Chapel, Stamford, on Thursday Evening, March 10, 1859

(A Posthumous Sermon)

"For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. And three that bear witness in earth, the spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one." 1 John 5:7, 8

The doctrine of the *Trinity* does not rest upon any one isolated text such as this; but it is a ray of light that illuminates the whole book of God from *Genesis* to *Revelation*. In fact without it the word of God would cease to be what it is—an inspired book. Without this, instead of its pages being full of light and life, they would be full of darkness and confusion. Only take away the doctrine of the *Trinity* out of God's word, and you would have no redemption, no pardon of sin, no justification, no sanctification, and you would have no salvation, and a revelation that does not proclaim all these blessings, what is it worth? It is of just as much value as the *Koran* of the Mahometan or the *Shaster* of the Hindoo. Almost immediately in the opening of divine revelation we find an intimation of the Trinity, when God in the creation of man said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." But as I said before we have not merely one or two or twenty passages to refer to; but it shines as a light through the whole. Therefore do not suppose that the Bible only enforces the doctrine of the Trinity in these expressive words, "There are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one." The apostle seems as if he would collect in this verse a grand testimony

of revelation, as if he would gather into one mass what covered the whole of the inspired book. And then he goes on to show that not only are there these three heavenly witnesses, all which in nature, essence, glory and power are one; but that there are three witnesses also upon earth, for this forms a part of the same grand truth, and these witnesses are,—the spirit, the water, and the blood; and as the heavenly witnesses are one, so these agree in one. As the heavenly witnesses are one in essence, nature, glory and power; so these, although they are not one in the sense, yet they all agree in one in power, in harmony, in testimony.

In opening up these words, therefore, I shall, as the Lord may enable me, follow out the division of our text as it naturally presents itself and show—

I.—First, *Who and what are these heavenly witnesses, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost, and though they are three distinct persons, yet are they one self-existent "I Am."*

II.—And secondly, as the Lord may enable, point out *the three earthly witnesses, the spirit, water, and blood, and point out how these three agree in one.*

I need hardly occupy your time this evening with showing you how the Father is God; for none who have any acquaintance with the letter of truth, and much less they who have any experimental knowledge of the only true God by some manifestation of his power and glory, can doubt that the Father is God. For, how can we pray unto him, confess our sins unto him, fear his great name, desire to serve him, dread to offend him, unless we carry about with us a living evidence that he is the great and glorious Jehovah, who scans every thought, hears every word, and is privy to every action. This is the very foundation of religion, the very

element of vital godliness, the commencement of religion:— the knowledge of the only true God, the great and glorious Jehovah, with the works of whose giant hand we are surrounded on every side. Well, the man who is dead in his sins, or in an empty profession of religion, has no knowledge of this only true God, no holy reverence towards, or godly fear of the sacred majesty of heaven, nor does he bear about in his breast the consciousness that God is looking down, and reading every thought of his heart, hearing every word of his tongue, and is cognizant of every action of his hands; nor is he aware that he is continually sinning against him. He has no sense of his terrible majesty, no apprehension of his heart-searching presence, no desire to walk before him in the light of his countenance, nor any dread lest he should sin against him, nor has he any sense of his justly deserved doom. But grace brings these things into a man's heart, and communicates that life divine whereby these grand verities are felt and experienced. But our text, and not only our text, but the grand current of revelation, the whole teaching of the Spirit of God in the word declares that the Word, the second person in the glorious trinity is God also. To blot out the Deity of Christ, is to blot the sun out of the sky. What would be the effect of annihilating the orb of day? What would earth be then? What, but a second chaos? So in a sense, if Christ be not God, you are taking away out of the church the Son of righteousness, and annihilating all life and all salvation, and leaving the church and the world in misery and confusion. I doubt not but that your reasoning mind may have been exercised with this grand mystery, that Christ the babe at Bethlehem, he who expired between two thieves on Calvary's cross, should be the true self-existent God. But take away the Deity of Christ, and what hope could we have of being saved? What virtue would there be in his blood? As I have thought and said sometimes, if the Lord Jesus Christ be not God, his blood could no more save my soul nor purge away

my guilty crimes, than the blood of one of the thieves; for if he be not the God-Man, what merit is there or can there be in that blood? But because he is God, one with the Father in essence and power, infinite merit is stamped upon that blood; for that invests it with such merit, and gives it such power, to purge the conscience from filth, and guilt, and dead works to serve the living God. Look at the millions of sins this blood has washed away, and look at the millions it is washing away and will continue to wash away, sin of every kind, crimes of the deepest dye, such as murders, adulteries, blasphemies, and all the horrid crimes that the people of God could be guilty of. Now, how could all these aggravated crimes that have so debased human nature and all these multiplied by the millions of saints who have committed them, I say, how could all these be washed away except the blood that cleanseth them from all sin be invested with all the merit of Godhead? Could you trust your soul to anything less? When the law condemns, when conscience speaks loudly in your breast and your sins rise up like spectres before your vision, when the storms are gathered, and the dark clouds lowering, and it appears as though the lightnings which flash across the heavens would dash you into perdition, what then can give you a hope in God's mercy except atoning blood? and how could this blood have power to effect this except the Deity itself were stamped upon it; so that we are driven as it were by the necessity of the case to say that the blood to save and purge the conscience must be no less than the blood of him who was God. But, can God shed blood, or suffer or die? No; he cannot. But the man, the human nature shed the blood, the human nature suffered, the human nature offered the sacrifice; Deity being united with it invested the manhood and the acts of that manhood with all their meritorious efficacy. For as the Queen's head put upon the sovereign gives it the value of a sovereign, so the Deity being stamped upon the Lord Jesus Christ gave

validity to every word of his lips, every act of his hands and every sigh of his soul. Here then it is that we can trust our soul. Here is the merit through which millions of redeemed souls are saved, and through which they have entered the courts of heaven, and this is their song, "Blessing and honour and glory and power be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever." (Rev. 5:13.) This is the song; these are the anthems that fill the arches of heaven. Again, you must die; the cold sweats of death must gather upon your forehead; your sins may stand out in bold relief against you. How can you face that solemn hour except you have an interest in the atoning blood of the Lamb? and how can that avail unless all the authority of Godhead be stamped upon it. Therefore take away the Deity of Christ and you take away the hope of the church. It is not a dry doctrine—an elementary truth: it gives life and power to every testimony of God. You want a robe of righteousness to justify you; for what is your own? Filth, rags—a cobweb garment. Look at it piece by piece. You cannot keep from sin for five minutes. You cannot offer up a single prayer except some sin be mingled in it. What can you do to work out a robe of righteousness? Your works are all defiled with sin. You might as well go to court with a beggar's coat on and think you are fit to dine with the Queen in that torn robe as to think of standing before God in the patchwork rags of your own righteousness. You must have on the wedding garment which Christ has woven. But how could the obedience of the Lord Jesus Christ be available to work out so many white garments except it be the obedience of him who is God? Here is the beauty and blessedness of the justifying robe—he that ordained it was God. Though man's fingers wove the robe, yet it was Deity that sustained them. So he brought in a robe of righteousness in which thousands of justified sinners stand accepted before God in the Beloved. Again: how can you pray to him except he is God? Do you ever pray to Jesus? It

may be you have been puzzled at times as to which of the three persons in the glorious Trinity you are to address in prayer. Did not Stephen pray to him in his dying moments when he said, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit?" and do we not read that Saul when at Damascus prayed to Jesus? We have an old letter, which has been preserved from the ancient times, where the writer—an heathen—complains that the Christians pray to Christ as *God*. But how could they pray to Christ unless Christ be God? How could he hear our prayers, and the prayers of the saints all over the world at the same moment, if he were not God as well as man. You cannot pray to Christ unless he is a God to hear, and how can you cast yourself into his arms except he is divine? How can you embrace him as your only hope unless you feel he is looking upon you, and hearing the breathings of your soul? You will find that every action of your soul proves that he is God. Without it there is no faith, nor hope, nor love, nor any other of the graces of the Spirit. And thus, sometimes, when exercised about the Deity of Christ, you will be driven to anchor in it. For take it away, and your soul is lost. And sometimes you may be drawn out by a sweet touch of his finger to embrace it as the revelation of God to the soul.

And then look at the Deity of the Holy Ghost. We want a God to work in us as well as for us, to enter into our hearts, to give us heavenly affections. The soul is so deeply sunk in sin that nothing but God can communicate life to it. We need the Spirit as a spirit of prayer and supplication, a revealer of Christ, an instructor, an intercessor. So that the child of God has a distinct view in his soul of the three persons in the glorious Godhead. He knows the Father by the sweet shedding abroad of his love; he knows the Son by the application of his blood; and he knows the Spirit by the inward witness that the Spirit of God bears; for if he strive in you, pray in you, and breathe salvation in your heart, in all

these things he is his own witness. And yet you know by the same divine teaching that these three persons are one. Can there be three Gods? The grand foundation of all true religion hinges here. There is but one God. We cannot have two conflicting Gods. There can be but one God, and yet there is a *trinity* of persons. So that we bow cheerfully and believingly to the blessed truth that, "There are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, as Christ is here called, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one." Now a man cannot be saved unless he believe this; because unless he knows these things by internal teaching and testimony he has no sanctification, and, therefore, no salvation.

But I pass on to the three earthly witnesses, and these are spoken of in these words, "And there are three that bear witness in earth, the spirit, and the water, and the blood; and these three agree in one." Where are they? Upon earth. Do we see them? Are they in the air? Are they to be found in the sky, or in the hedges, or on the earth? No, no. That is not their place, They have no home there. Where then is their dwelling place? In the hearts of the saints. These three witnesses are in the heart of the believer, and it is there that they bear their witness. It is there their witness agrees, and you must have these three earthly witnesses that you may believe the heavenly witnesses, for the earthly witnesses are but the echo of the heavenly witnesses. They are a testimony within that is but a response to the testimony without. They are a voice in the believer's breast. They are but an echo of the triune God in the soul.

Let us look at these three witnesses as distinct.

i. First there is the spirit. By the spirit here I don't understand the Holy Ghost, because if I were to do so I should confuse the earthly witnesses with the heavenly. But

by the spirit I understand, that new nature of which the Holy Spirit is the Creator and Operator. As we read in Christ's own words, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." (John 3:6.) The spirit then here is not the Holy Ghost as a distinct person in the glorious *trinity*, but that new nature which the Apostle Peter calls the "divine nature" (2 Peter 1:14), and again "the new man" which is born of God, raised up by the power of the Holy Ghost, and is lodged in a man's heart. This spirit, then, is that new man of grace that the Holy Ghost produces by his own almighty power, and raises up in the heart of a child of God, and upon which he produces his holy influences. Here is the distinction between the professor or profane man and the saint born of God. The professor or profane man may have an enlightened intellect, be a member of a gospel church, do many things that a saint of God does, and yet be altogether destitute of that spirit that the Holy Ghost raises up in the heart of a saint. But the child of God—the soul that has experienced the heavenly birth—carries in his bosom an unsinning principle; for that which is born of God sinneth not. (1 John 5:18.) He carries in his bosom a pure, holy, and spiritual principle; which is not contaminated by the lust of the flesh. Though it is surrounded by it it is not injured. A sister of mine lost a diamond ring among some strawberry plants once, and although she looked very carefully at the time could not find it. She went to the strawberry plants a year afterwards and found this diamond ring uninjured, and as bright as on the day it fell there. So in a spiritual point of view, with the spirit you carry in your bosom, although it is overwhelmed and covered over with all the horrid filth and obscenity of your base and depraved nature, yet it shines forth like the diamond in the dunghill. It may be hidden from your eyes: you may not be able to see its lustre, you cannot see how it shines forth; but bring it out, let the sun shine upon it, and you will see how it gives out its colours like the



rainbow in the rays of the sun. Have you not been surprised that the most horrid feelings have worked in your bosom? Have you not been astonished at times to think you should have been so base? But at other times there have been holy desires and heavenly longings, and with all your baseness that spirit which the Lord has given is not polluted. Here the child of God is often deceived. He thinks that he shall get purer and purer, holier and holier every day he lives, and after a while he will have no lusts—no base thoughts, no filthy imaginations—but by degrees he shall get sanctified to purity and holiness. Instead of this he finds sin works in him more than ever, and his lusts and passions are ever plunging his soul into filth and ungodliness. But after a time the Lord is pleased to show him there is a new nature—a new man of grace in his bosom—and that the one has no communion with the other, and he begins to feel he is possessed of that new nature by the fruits and effects it brings forth.

ii. Then, secondly, there is the water, and this water is, I believe, the influence and operation of the Holy Ghost upon the hearts of man—upon his new nature. John saw, when the Redeemer's side was pierced with the thrust of the Roman spear, that out of his heart came blood and *water*. Both are typical. The water was typical of the sanctifying efficacy of that precious sacrifice, and the blood we know was the sacrifice offered for sin itself. So the Holy Ghost in our text speaks of the water which is the sanctifying operation of the Holy Ghost in the heart, as we read, "And such were some of you; but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God." (1 Cor. 5:11.) Here is the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost. And when the sweet influences and operations of the Holy Ghost are felt in a man's soul they bear an earthly witness, as the Holy Ghost in heaven bears an heavenly witness.

iii. And then thirdly, there is the blood—the blood of atonement, that which purges the conscience from filth and guilt and dead works. It is in the heart and conscience that this works. There is the spirit—the new man of grace; the water—the influences and operations, sanctifying and regenerating of the Holy Spirit; and then there is the blood—the blood of sprinkling, the blood which is applied to the guilty conscience to purge away the filth and guilt of sin, and make the soul walk in the light of God's countenance. And these three agree in one. Not one as the three persons in the glorious Trinity are one; but they agree in one. And what is their testimony? That all is of grace, all is of God. Their testimony is one and the same, and that a spiritual living testimony in the heart of a saint. What does the spirit bear testimony to? That it is divine. What does the water bear testimony to? That it is of God. That it is not of an earthy birth, but a birth divine. And how does it testify it? It raises up faith, hope and love. Then there is an earthly witness. How does the water testify? When the blessed Spirit is pleased to shed abroad the love of God in the soul and sanctify the heart, subdue, soften, melt, moisten, and break it down at the footstool of Jesus, then there is a witness of the water, and this witness is in a man's conscience. And then, again, when the blood is applied by the Holy Ghost, when any token for good, any sweet testimony of the sinner's salvation and safety is given, it suits the spirit with the water, and thus the spirit and the water and the blood all agree in one united testimony, and this testimony is that the work is of God, that the influences upon the soul are divine, and they never can bear testimony to anything else. The Spirit can never bear testimony to our hypocrisy and self-righteousness, evil, sin and iniquity; it can accord with nothing but God and godliness. Therefore, they agree in one. And they also agree with the voice in heaven, and thus all these three witnesses in the heart agree with the voice of

God in heaven. In heaven the Father sheds abroad his love, the Word—the Lord Jesus Christ reveals his blood, the Holy Ghost communicates his sanctifying operations and breathes pardon and peace into a man's conscience. These are the three heavenly witnesses and they are one. They agree in sweet union with the spirit in the word, with the water in the soul, and the blood upon the conscience, and thus they agree in one as an harmonious whole. There is no jarring in true religion. It is all sweetly bound up together in the bonds of love with the Lord the Lamb. There is no jarring in the teachings of God, no strivings. If there be any strife, any division, any jarring, it is not of God. The witnesses of heaven are one in power, essence, dignity and glory; and the three witnesses upon earth in the heart of the saint agree in one. Now look at your experience. What has the Lord done for your soul? Is there any strife there? Is there any movement of the work of grace? Is the Lord in the beginning, middle, or end of his work there? What is God now doing for you? How the whole forms one harmonious continual chain? How there is an intermixture of the blood with the water and the spirit? Whence do you get your strength and righteousness? Whence do you get your power? Whence but from above? And do not the spirit, the water, and the blood speak of the glory of God, the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost? Then you will find these three agree in one. And this is that that gives a substantial union in the children of God. At once they recognize each other. At times the sparkling of the eye, only a word, a single expression will bring about an union, and all this because, as when two drops of rain run down a pane as soon as they get to the bottom they unite and become one drop, so does the experience of God's saints agree each with each. When they are brought together they flow into one, because the spirit is the same, and this is the foundation of all spiritual union. You cannot bring together a child of God and a dead professor.

You can as soon bring together, I was going to say, Christ and Belial, as a true saint of God and a professor. But the true saints of God can be brought together, because they are taught by the same Spirit, live under the same influences, and are washed by the same blood; and these three witnesses agree in one. This is the foundation of all union and communion, of all church fellowship, and of all walking together in sweet companionship. These are the things, my friends, we must know by the teaching of God. We may think we are sound Trinitarians. That is not enough. God must make us sound Trinitarians by forming a trinity in us. Here it is if we have the work of the Trinity wrought upon our heart. There is the workman and the work, the teacher and the teaching, and he who produces these gracious effects upon the soul is the source, the fountain whence it all flows. Without this we may have a sound creed, lead consistent lives, and walk in a fair outside profession, but where is our hope, where is our standing? And, oh, where will our souls be at the last great and final day when the Lord shall arise to judge the earth?