

## THE PRECIOUS TAKEN FORTH FROM THE VILE

When the following sermon was preached by me I had not the slightest idea that a reporter was present to take down the words as they fell from my lips: nor indeed was I made acquainted with that circumstance until the Ms., some time afterwards, was put into my hands. A hasty glance, however, over its pages at once convinced me that either I had given a most inadequate and imperfect exposition of the text, or that it was a most incomplete record of it; in other words, either that I had preached a very bad sermon, or had fallen into the hands of a bad reporter. I have learnt since I penned this that he took down much of the sermon in the dark. Which of the two was in fault, **and I do not wish to throw the blame wholly off my shoulders on those of the reporter,** I saw in a moment that the sermon could not go forth in the same shape as that in which it thus came before my eyes. Perfectly willing, then, should I have been that, according to Job's wish concerning himself, "it should have been as though it had not been, and have been carried from the womb to the grave," **Job 10:19**,—that grave of oblivion which has swallowed up thousands of far better sermons, but which still is never satisfied, nor ever says, "It is enough." **Pr 30:16** But besides parental affection, which somehow or other makes preachers cleave to their own offspring, and plead for their life when born, though I have had too large a family in the sermon way to hail with pleasure any such increase, two feelings have concurred to make me willing to send forth the following discourse under its present amended shape:

1. That I might not shrink from giving my testimony in favour of the step, which has been taken to dissolve and re-constitute the church at Zoar. With that step I had nothing to do. I was not consulted upon it before it was taken, nor had I

at the time any hand in it, directly or indirectly. But when made known to me I approved of it, highly approved of it, and therefore thought it right, when I was asked to preach at Zoar, to give my public testimony in its favour.

2. That my testimony, if of any value, might, with God's help and blessing, a little strengthen the hands of the Zoar friends in their present trying circumstances, by showing them from the word of truth that there must be a taking forth of the precious from the vile, if the servants of God are to be as God's mouth.

I have no doubt that the following pages will be considered by some as very personal. If by "personal" is meant pointed, separating preaching, I admit the truth of the charge, for if I am to wield the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, it will have both point and edge, unless it be a wooden sword—a dagger of lath, more fit for the stage than the pulpit. But if by "personal" be meant an attack upon individuals, I disclaim the charge, and upon this plain and simple ground, that I do not personally know a single individual of those who once were but are now no longer members of the church at Zoar. I have attacked here and elsewhere their error, and justified the step which has issued in their separation; but of the individuals I know nothing, and therefore could not personally attack them. Personality in controversy I abhor. I have had indeed enough of it directed against myself to provoke me to retaliate in its sharpest form; but to make libellous attacks upon opponents under cover of religious controversy is abhorrent to every right feeling in my bosom. I wish to spare no man's error, but I ever desire to spare both his character and person. I could, indeed, in several flagrant cases, easily lay rough hands on both, for some of their deeds, or rather misdeeds, have for some years not been hidden in a corner; but I know that "the

weapons of our warfare are not carnal," and that "the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God."

J.C.P. Aug. 5th, 1861

## **THE PRECIOUS TAKEN FORTH FROM THE VILE Part 1**

Preached at Zoar Chapel, Great Alie Street. London, on Thursday Evening, July 18th. 1861.

"If thou take forth the precious from the vile, thou shalt be as my mouth: let them return unto thee: but return not thou unto them." Jeremiah 15:19

Of all the prophets of the Old Testament, Jeremiah appears to have undergone the largest amount as well as greatest variety of suffering for his Lord's sake. Many circumstances concurred to produce this. First, his lot was cast in **a time of great general suffering**. The Lord was pouring out his wrath upon the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. His sore judgments, long denounced, were now being executed. Sword, pestilence, and famine were stalking through the land; and as these were national judgments, the righteous and the unrighteous, the true prophet and the lying priest, the king on the throne and the captive in the dungeon, alike partook of them.

But he had not only a large measure of personal, individual suffering, but, as deeply **sympathising** with a captive people, a besieged city, and a fallen church, and as identifying himself with the afflictions of Zion, as an eye-witness of the fearful scenes of desolation that were daily spread before his eyes, "for these things he wept; his eye ran down with water, because the Comforter that should

relieve his soul was far from him, and his children were desolate because the enemy prevailed." **La 1:16**

Another ingredient in the cup much also embittered his lot—**the persecution** and opposition that he met with in the discharge of his prophetic office. The false prophets of those days always prophesied good and not evil; and thus, by their lies and deceptions, buoyed up the people in a vain security. Their language to the people,—and this they pretended they spoke by the inspiration of God,—was, "Ye shall not see the sword, neither shall ye have famine; but I will give you assured peace in this place." **Jer 14:13** Thus they "prophesied lies in the Lord's name," telling the people, even when surrounded by the invading armies of Nebuchadnezzar, that they should not go down to Babylon: that there was to be no captivity of the nation, no destruction of their city, or desolation of their temple: crying out continually, "The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are these:" as if, because they were the Lord's people in external covenant, he would never punish them for their sins.

And is not this the exact feature of the false prophets of our day, who will not allow that the people of God ever undergo chastisement for their sins and backslidings? who cry, "Peace, peace," when there is no peace? who neither preach nor practise the precepts of the gospel, but wrap all their ministry up in a system of dry doctrine, and thus deceive the people in the Lord's name, by pretending to be his servants when he has neither taught nor sent them? As Jeremiah, then, was raised up of the Lord for a special purpose, and "set over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down," as well as "to build, and to plant," **Jer 1:10** he could not but speak all that the Lord put into his mouth. His tidings, therefore, were

heavy tidings, for he had to declare to them that they were to go into captivity, even unto Babylon; that their city was to be taken; their temple to be burnt with fire; and the whole land to be made utterly desolate. This unwelcome news, therefore, stirred up the enmity of the princes, the priests, and the whole people of the land, who had been all propped up by the false prophets, to whom they looked as the mouth of God, to believe themselves sure of his protecting hand.

But in addition to these outward troubles, Jeremiah appears to have possessed naturally a **very rebellious spirit**, which, as stirred up by opposition and persecution, often made him very fretful and unbelieving; and this evil appears at times to have gained great power and prevalence over him, for under its sad influence he was even sometimes permitted to use toward the Lord most unbecoming language, as, for instance, in the words immediately preceding our text, "Why is my pain perpetual, and my wound incurable, which refuseth to be healed? wilt thou be altogether unto me as a liar, and as waters that fail?" What rebellious, inconsistent, unbecoming language is this! With the exceptions of Job and Jonah, there is scarcely any saint of God through the whole Scripture who fell into such rebellious language against the Majesty of heaven. But no doubt this rebellious spirit and murmuring tongue, falling back upon him in guilt and shame, produced a large additional measure of grief and trouble.

But in addition to this he had to endure great depths of **personal affliction**. He was committed into the court of the prison, and had for his subsistence but a piece of bread daily, given him until all the bread in the city was spent. Thence he was cast into the dungeon full of mud and mire; where he was like to die of hunger, for there was no more bread in the city **Jer 37:21 Jer 38:6,9**.

And when we add to this that the **light of God's countenance** was often **withdrawn** from him as a chastisement for his rebellion, we may well see that all this complication of circumstances filled his soul with trouble, and his mind with confusion. If rebellion against the Lord could be ever excusable, it was in the prophet Jeremiah; for we may be well sure that nothing but such a weight of sorrow could have drawn from him the passionate words that I have quoted, "Why is my pain perpetual," &c.

But how does the Lord answer this complaint? What is the solace, which he gives to his mourning prophet? What is the balm of consolation, which he pours into his bleeding wounds? Not what we should expect, and yet, seen in the light of the Spirit, a relief most blessedly adapted to all the circumstances of his case: "If thou take forth the precious from the vile, thou shalt be as my mouth." It is as if the Lord said, "Jeremiah, my own prophet, whom I have commissioned to bear my tidings to the nations: thou whom I expressly called by my Spirit and grace to this office, that thou shouldest be as my mouth, did I not set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms to root out and to pull down, and to destroy and to throw down every plant and every tree not of my setting, and every building not of my rearing? Why art thou thus filled with rebellion and self-pity at witnessing the effects of thine own work, which I gave thee to do? Why art thou weeping over the miseries of the people whom I am justly punishing? Why, as a soldier of the truth, art thou shrinking from the field of battle, 'the thunder of the captains, and the shouting?' Or why fearest thou persecution from the enemies of God? Know this, for thy comfort and encouragement, that thy highest office and greatest privilege is to be my mouth. Dream not of worldly comfort: think not of a false and unrighteous peace with the ungodly, or of

freedom from their persecution, as if, by some compromise, you might disarm their enmity or win their favour. Banish the thought of such carnal ease, and be satisfied with this one most blessed privilege, that thou art my **mouth**: that I do thee the honour to speak in thee and by thee: that whatsoever thy sufferings are, or shall be, thou still art my faithful servant: that I will still support thee, hold thee up, and bless thee, and make it manifest to thee and to all around thee that I have sent thee, and that my words in thy mouth shall be fulfilled, so that not one jot or tittle of them shall fail." This word from the Lord, as it dropped into the prophet's soul, calmed, no doubt, his rebellious spirit, and brought him to feel, if not to say, "Well, Lord, if I am to be thy mouth, I can bear all that thou mayest be pleased to lay upon me. As thy son and servant, as thy prophet and minister, let me speak thy words, not my own. I want not the smiles of men, I only want thy support, thy power, and thy presence, my God, my Father, and my Friend." Such, I believe, is the spirit and such the feeling of all who are sent to do Jeremiah's work, and through whose lips the God of Jeremiah speaks.

In opening up the words of the text, I shall, therefore, with God's help and blessing, show,

I. **First**, what is the "**precious**" and what is the "**vile**" mentioned in it;

II. **Secondly**, how the servant of God is to "**take forth**" the precious from the vile:

III. **Thirdly**, that so far as he does this he is "**as God's mouth;**" and,

IV. **Fourthly**, as, the Lord may enable, I shall drop a few remarks on the word given by the Lord to his prophet by way of **holy caution**: "**Let them return unto thee; but return not thou unto them.**"

I. Three things at once strike our mind as springing, as it were, out of the very bosom of our text: first, that in the professing church, for it is with that with which we have mainly to do, as Jeremiah had of old, there are things "**precious**" and things "**vile**:" secondly, that these are so mixed together as to require separation: and thirdly, that it is the main office of the servant of God to take forth one from the other. I am called upon. therefore, by the very position which I now occupy as standing up in the Lord's name in your pulpit, to show you what in the light of God's truth, is "**precious**" and what is "**vile**," that I may do what Jeremiah was told to do, and speak what Jeremiah was told to speak; and thus be to you as God's mouth, speaking with authority and power to your consciences.

What, then, is "the precious" and what is "the vile?" There may be others, but I shall chiefly confine myself to four distinct classes of precious things and vile things. There are, then, precious **characters** and vile **characters**; precious **doctrines** and vile doctrines; precious experience and vile **experience**; and precious **practice** and vile **practice**; and these precious characters and these vile characters, these precious doctrines and these vile doctrines, this precious experience and this vile experience, this precious practice and this vile practice, are so mingled together in the professing church that it needs the hand of the servant of God, as enabled by his Master, to take forth the one from the other, that he may be as God's mouth to God's people.



i. We will, then, first, look at precious **characters** and vile **characters**; and show, from the word of truth, who they are and what are their distinguishing features. But let us examine, in the light of the Scripture, the meaning of the word, "**precious**," for unless, as seeing light in God's light, we can clearly and plainly determine the meaning of the words, "precious" and "vile," we shall miss our mark at the very outset. What, then, is the literal and, I may add, scriptural meaning of the word, "precious?" First, then, it means something **exceedingly valuable**. Thus we speak of precious stones, such as diamonds, rubies, and sapphires. And this idea we find in the word of God, for there we read of "precious stones," **1Co 3:12**, of "wisdom" being "more precious than rubies," **Pr 3:15** and of "the precious onyx, or the sapphire." **Job 28:16** These gems are called "precious," as containing large value in a small compass, and, as coveted objects of ornament, use, or beauty, worth large sums of money. But there is another idea attached to the word. "precious." as signifying articles exceedingly **scarce, and**, therefore, to be obtained only with great difficulty—for some things are precious, that is, bear a large nominal value on account of their rarity, which are not in themselves intrinsically valuable, such as old books and old china, which are precious in the eyes of connoisseurs, often not from any real value but from their extreme scarceness. Take these two ideas, and apply them to the case before us. There are in the sight of God precious **characters**. But who are they? The elect of God, the church, of which Jesus is the glorious Head: the bride, the spouse of the Lord the Lamb. These are they to whom the Lord speaks, addressing himself to the church of God, "Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee." **Isa 43:4** These are "the precious sons," and we may add, "daughters," of Zion, **La 4:2** of whom the prophet speaks as "comparable to fine gold," and who will one day be gloriously manifested

when the Lord makes up his "jewels." **Mal 3:17** These are unspeakably "precious," because, in God's sight, they are immeasurably valuable. But what gives them this value? Nothing in themselves, for they are all sunk in the ruins of the Adam fall, and in their carnal nature full of everything filthy and vile. But as members of the mystical body of Jesus, as chosen from all eternity in the glorious Person of the Son of God, as washed in the fountain of his most precious blood, and as justified by his perfect obedience, they stand before the throne of God "without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing." And when in due time they are quickened into divine life by the invincible power of the Holy Ghost, are sanctified by his heavenly grace, and conformed to the suffering image of God's dear Son, they are, so to speak, doubly precious in the sight of God.

But as these glorious truths are so opposed by the pride of man's heart, let us look at them in the light of the Scripture. First, then, view the elect of God as **given** by the Father to the Son in eternity, according to the Lord's own words, "Thine they were, and thou gavest them me;" and again, "And all mine are thine and thine are mine." And do look at that wondrous language which, as it were, opens to us the depths of eternity and of that eternal love wherewith the Father loved the Son and his people in him: "And hast loved them. as thou has loved me." **Joh 17:6,10 Jn 17:23** Must they not be in the eyes of God inconceivably precious if **loved with the same love** as that wherewith the eternal Father ever loved his eternal Son?

But they are precious also in his eyes as **redeemed** by the Son of his love. The Apostle therefore says. "Ye are bought with a price:" **1Co 6:20** and again it is declared, "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation

received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." **1Pe 1:18,19**

But the real family of God, as compared with the great bulk of the profane and the professing world are very scarce—exceedingly **rare**, and that makes them, in the second sense of the word, "**precious**." Whatever deceptive speeches false charity may utter, it is most evident from the whole current of God's truth that his people, all through the Scriptures, are spoken of as exceedingly rare. How the Lord, for instance, speaks by this very prophet, "Run ye to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, and see now, and know, and seek in the broad places thereof, if ye can find a man, if there be any that executeth judgment, that seeketh the truth; and I will pardon it." **Jer 5:1** So when the prophet Ezekiel saw the six men commissioned to slay utterly old and young, every man having his slaughter weapon in his hand, how few were those that "sighed and cried for all the abominations," and upon whose foreheads the man clothed with linen set his mark! **Eze 9:4-6** And if you answer that those were Old Testament times, what will you say to the words of the blessed Lord himself? "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." Popular ministers, large congregations, and a motley mixture of worldly professors may give to the professing church a great appearance of outward prosperity; yet were you to weigh them in the balance of the sanctuary, how many of the precious children of God would you find amongst them? God and man view things and persons with different eyes. Man looketh on, as he only can see, the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart. None are more overlooked, or, if known, more despised in our day than those precious characters whom the Lord loves, for few are favoured with spiritual discernment to distinguish between the living family

of God and the hypocrites in Zion. The day will indeed come when "the eyes of them that see shall not be dim, and the ears of them that hear shall hearken:" but until then "the vile person will speak villany, and his heart will work iniquity, to practise hypocrisy and to utter error against the Lord." **Isa 32:3,6**

Let us now, however, look at "**the vile,**" as opposed to the precious: and as we have thus far spoken of precious characters, we will now fix our eyes upon vile characters. But as I showed the literal meaning of the word, "precious," before I traced out its experimental signification, so look with me first at the word, "vile." It means, first, cheap, worthless; an object of no real or intrinsic value. Such, in the sight of God, are all but those who have a personal interest in the Person and work of his dear Son. Whatever may be their rank or station, whatever be their natural abilities or acquired learning, whatever be their moral conduct, religious profession, sect or denomination, whatever others may think of them, or they may say or think of themselves, they are all worthless and vile in the sight of God who have no standing in the Person or place in the heart of the Son of God. They are, therefore, spoken of as chaff, which "the wind driveth away" **Ps 1:4** and which is burnt "with unquenchable fire." **Mt 3:12** They are also compared to "tares" among the wheat; **Mt 13:25** to "dross," as in the expression, "Thou puttest away the wicked like dross;" **Ps 119:119** and to "reprobate" or "refuse silver;" **Jer 6:30** all which figures point to things worthless in themselves, and yet mingled with what is valuable. Sin having taken full possession of them, and they not being washed from their iniquity in the atoning blood of the Lamb, nor clothed in the spotless righteousness of the Son of God, they are in the sight of him who is "of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on iniquity," altogether worthless and vile. That the word, "vile," in

Scripture has the meaning of worthless and refuse is plain from a remarkable passage in the history of Saul, when, contrary to God's command, he and the people with him spared Agag, and "the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, and of the fatlings, and the lambs, and all that was good; but every thing that was **vile** and **refuse**, that they destroyed utterly." **1Sa 15:9**

But take another signification of the word, "**vile**," as meaning base and corrupt. This is the most usual sense of the term: for, as the saints of God are "**precious**," not only from their intrinsic value as elect jewels in the mediatorial crown, but as redeemed from all their iniquities by the precious blood of Christ, so the vile are not only cheap and worthless, as having no union with Christ, but are, in the eyes of God, corrupt and impure, as lying naked before him in all their iniquities, and, like the child spoken of by the prophet, polluted in their own blood, and cast out in the open field to the loathing of their persons. **Eze 16:5,6** They are, therefore, "vile" in the sight of God, not only as sunk in the ruins of the Adam fall, but as additionally stained and polluted with thousands of crimes, their throat being an open sepulcher, the poison of asps under their lips, their mouth full of cursing and bitterness, their feet swift to shed blood, and destruction and misery in all their ways. **Ro 3:13-16** And we may observe, in passing, that as the precious and the vile are mixed together, and the servant of the Lord has "to take forth" one from the other, it is very plain that these vile characters are in the professing church, and therefore, besides the sins of their former profanity, are wrapped up in the additional iniquity of a false, hypocritical profession. Such were the sons of Eli, who, as priests, offered sacrifice at Shiloh, and "made themselves vile," according to God's testimony, by wrapping up their sins under priestly garments. **1Sa 3:13** So Jeremiah had two "baskets of figs"

set before him, of which the one were "good, very good," and the others "evil, very evil;" yet both fruit that grew on the same tree. The professing church is full of these "vile figs that cannot be eaten, they are so evil;" **Jer 29:17** and all the servant of God can do is to take forth the precious from the vile, as the good figs are picked out to be eaten, and the vile tossed away into the hog trough.

ii. But there are also precious **doctrines** and vile **doctrines**: and as the precious characters and the vile characters are mingled together, as on a barn floor, in the same heap, lie wheat and chaff, so vile doctrines and precious doctrines may be seemingly so mixed together that it needs the hand of the servant of God to take forth the one from the other. What. Then, are **precious doctrines?** and why are they precious? They are precious as dear to God: and because they have been revealed by the Holy Ghost in the word of truth they are made precious to believing hearts. Among these precious doctrines, and indeed the foundation of them all is the great and glorious doctrine of a Three-One God—a real Trinity of Persons in a Unity of Essence. Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are not mere characters and offices, or mere names and titles, but express what they are in their eternal being anterior to and independent of any covenant relationship. Thus the Father ever was ever is and ever must be, the eternal Father: the Son ever was, ever is and ever must be the eternal Son: and the Spirit ever was, ever is, and ever must be the eternal Spirit; and yet not Three Eternals but One Eternal: for though they are Three in distinctness of Person, yet are they One in Unity of Essence: and there can no more be three distinct Eternals than there can be three distinct Gods.

I cannot be silent, standing, as I do here, at such a crisis in the history not only of the well-being but the very being itself

of you as a church, on such a foundation truth as this. The true, proper, and eternal Sonship of our glorious Lord has been made very precious to my soul, and if I have found an indescribable blessedness and preciousness in the vital truth that Jesus was from all eternity the Son of God, why should I keep it back because so many preachers and professors have lifted up their heel against it? And am I the only one to whom this blessed truth has been made precious? What a mighty array of men of God, whose writings now live, though they are dead, might be summoned as witnesses of this blessed truth; and some of you can testify that God has himself revealed it to your hearts. Were we, then, silent, would not the very stones be ready to cry out? But as this precious doctrine has been so much opposed, and such awful language held against it by its opponents, I feel I must drop a word, not in a way of controversy, but to relieve the difficulty of any timid, unestablished child of God who may stumble at an objection often brought against the doctrine of the eternal Sonship of the blessed Lord. You know that it is brought against us that we thereby hold "a begotten God." Not to speak of the irreverence of such unbecoming language, I will show you the fallacy of that objection. What fundamental truth do we lay down as the basis of all our faith? That there is but one God. "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is one LORD." **De 6:4** The essential Unity of God is the very basis of revelation itself: so that to depart from it is to deny the foundation of all religion, and to be an avowed infidel. See then, the consequence if we held, as we are charged, the doctrine of a begotten God. If that charge be true, we must hold not a Trinity of Persons in a Unity of Essence, but three distinct Gods: first, a begetting God: secondly, a begotten God; and thirdly, a proceeding God. But such three Gods would not be three distinct Persons, but three distinct Gods, which would at once contradict the very foundation principle of One God, from which we start and

upon which we stand. It is, therefore, a "vile" perversion of our doctrine, and such as only a "vile" person would slander us with, knowing, as he must know, that we firmly hold the doctrine of the Trinity, of which the essential feature is, that whilst there is but one God there are three distinct Persons in one undivided Essence. To say, then, that we hold a begotten God is a vile perversion of that glorious truth which we feel so unspeakably precious.

But besides these foundation doctrines of our most holy faith, there is a whole chain of divine truth, of which every link is "precious" to believing souls. Such, for instance, are the doctrines of "an everlasting Covenant, ordered in all things and sure;" of the incarnation of the Son of God by taking upon him a real yet pure humanity in the womb of the Virgin; of the full, perfect, and complete redemption of the church of Christ by the shedding of his precious blood upon the cross; of the free and full justification of their persons by the imputation of his perfect obedience to the law of God; of regeneration of the vessels of mercy in the appointed season by the power of the Holy Ghost; and of their being kept by the power of God, through faith, unto salvation. All these doctrines, with everything good and God-like that springs out of them, are precious to those that believe.

But there are also **"vile" doctrines**, and they are "vile" because opposed to pure and precious truth. They are not only cheap and worthless, mere chaff and dross, but they are "vile" as polluted by the corrupt mind of man which gave them birth. One of these "viles" doctrines is that of **man's righteousness**, as able, wholly or in part, to save his soul, and thus bringing in a way of salvation independent of the blood of the Lamb. However it may be wrapped up by specious arguments and a show of holiness, any such doctrine is "vile," as casting dishonour upon the blood and



righteousness of the Son of God, and thus robbing God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost of their equal glory, as planning and accomplishing the scheme of eternal redemption.

But the professing church, by which I mean those who profess the doctrines of grace, with which we have chiefly to do, is full of "vile" doctrines. That a believer, for instance, **cannot backslide**, is a "vile" doctrine, because contrary both to the express declarations of God's word, and to the daily experience of all his children. It is a "vile" doctrine also from its tendency to harden men in sin, and to make the slips and falls of believers of no consequence: and "vile" because it virtually confounds the very principles of right and wrong, overthrows all godly fear, and encourages a whole tribe of wanton professors to mock a holy, heart-searching God, and trifle with their own immortal souls.

A kindred doctrine, and equally "vile," is, that **God does not chastise his people** for their sins, which is a direct contradiction to the plainest testimonies of God's word, as, for instance, "For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." **Heb 12:6** How "vile," then, must that doctrine be, which thus sets itself in direct opposition to the plain and positive testimony of God, and encourages vile professors to dally with their sins as not chastised for any of them.

I may also add, if a doctrine be "precious," whatever denies it must be "vile;" and therefore all those views and arguments which have been lately set up, in a whole shower of pamphlets, against the eternal Sonship of our blessed Lord, must be essentially vile, as contradicting precious truth, and alike dishonouring God the Father by denying that he has a Son, and God the Son by denying that he has a Father,

and God the Holy Ghost by denying his testimony to both Father and Son.

iii. But there is also precious experience as there is **vile experience**. All experience wrought in the soul by the power of God is "precious" experience, as being in itself of unspeakable value as the gift of God, and as the pledge, earnest, and foretaste of eternal life. Thus, everything that God is pleased to do in and for a believer: every promise applied with power to his soul: every sweet word of encouragement: every manifestation of Christ and inward revelation of him as the Son of God, are all so many parts and portions of a precious experience: for their sure fruit is to make Jesus precious. And as Jesus is revealed to faith, as hope anchors in him, and love flows forth toward him, every act of living faith, of hope, and of affection, is precious experience. So also is every feeling of simplicity and godly sincerity: of tenderness of conscience, and filial fear: all meltings into contrition and penitential sorrow for sin: all true self-loathing and self-abhorrence: all crucifixion of the flesh, with its affections and lusts: all putting off of the old man and putting on of the new: all spirituality of mind: all fellowship with the Father and the Son—in a word, all that life of God in the soul by which a living branch is distinguished from a dead and fruitless bough, may be called **precious experience**, as being wrought in the heart by the power of God.

But there is **vile experience**: an experience of corruption but not of salvation and sanctification: of the malady, but not of the remedy: of temptation, but not of deliverance; of slips and falls, but not of any recovery from them; of sinning, but not of repenting; of the evils of the heart, but not of the grace that subdues them; of darkness, coldness, and hardness, but not of light, life, liberty, and love. Such an experience is a vile experience, because cheap and

worthless, the mere refuse of a corrupt nature in which and under which there may not be one mark or feature of a work of grace. Possessors and professors of this vile experience will sometimes get together, and turn out their hearts to one another. They will talk of their barrenness, darkness and hardness; and well they may, for they have neither life, nor light, nor grace to make them otherwise. Peter has well described their character as "servants of corruption," for they were never delivered from it by the power of grace; and yet they speak great swelling words of vanity, sporting themselves with their own deceivings, beguiling unstable souls, and speaking evil of the things **(the things of the Spirit)** that they understand not. **2Pe 2:12-19** Of what use or value is a knowledge of sin and corruption without a knowledge of the remedy for them?

What should we think of a surgeon in the London Hospital, close by, uncovering wound after wound, probing and laying open to view all the ulcerous matter, and then neither to swathe, bind, nor cure them? Any rough medical student could tear away the bandage, lay open the wound, and pass on to another patient. But this is not surgery. This is not the healing hand, the soft bandage, or the soothing balm. So it is in grace. It is true that God the eternal Spirit lays bare the depths of the fall: uncovers the ulcerous wounds that sin has made: strips off the bandages and plaisters wherewith physicians of no value would "heal the hurt of the daughter of God's people slightly, saying, Peace, peace, where there is no peace." But if he make us feel the deep pollution of our fallen nature, he does not leave us to die in our corruption, still less to mistake the ulcerous sore for the healing plaister: but in due time he brings the balm of a Saviour's love and blood to cure every gaping, bleeding wound. And when the soul enjoys the sweet manifestations of super-abounding grace and of pardoning love, the same heavenly Testifier of

Jesus raises up and draws forth a holy fear of sinning against so merciful and gracious a God: and this constraining love of Christ gives power and motive to crucify the flesh, with its affections and lusts, to mortify the whole body of sin, and to do those things which are pleasing in God's sight. This is a **"precious" experience**, for it is fruitful in every good word and work. But an experience of corruption, without a groan under it; of temptation, without any deliverance from it; of sin, without any mortification of it; of the flesh, without any crucifixion to it: of the world, without any deadness to it, is a **"vile" experience**—an experience rather of the pot-house or the brothel than of the love of God and the work of faith with power.

iv. But again. There is **"precious" practice** and **"vile" practice**. Precious practice is that which springs out of a vital, abiding union with Christ as the only true vine, according to the Lord's own words: "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can ye except ye abide in me, I am the vine, ye are the branches. He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing." **Joh 15:4,5** No practice, therefore, can really be called "precious," unless first wrought by the power of God in the heart, and issuing thence in the lip and the life. Thus "the precious sons" and daughters of Zion are distinguished from the vile professors of the day, not only by the possession of a precious experience, but by the performance of precious practice: and thus they bring forth "the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God." Indeed none but they bring forth good fruit, speak good words, or do good works: for in order "to give goodly words." like Naphtali, the soul must be "satisfied with favour and full with the blessing of the Lord." **Ge 49:21 De 33:23**

So in order to do good works, and thus bring forth good fruit, the tree must be first made good: **Mt 12:33** and this cannot be unless it be a tree of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he may be glorified. **Isa 61:3** The grand mark of the living branches in the vine is that they bear fruit; and "every branch that beareth fruit the Father purgeth it that it may bring forth more fruit." Under, then, his purifying, cleansing hand the branch brings forth increasing fruit to his praise, as the Lord himself speaks: "Herein is my Father glorified that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples." **Joh 15:8** To love God's people, to do what lies in our power for their profit and benefit; to be separate from the world in heart and life; to live, speak, and act in the daily fear of God, desiring to know his will and do it; to watch against besetting sins; to be upon our guard against every temptation; to set a watch over the door of our lips; to be just and honourable in all our dealings; to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present evil world; meekly to bear reproach, shame, and persecution for the Lord's sake: and to walk in the precepts of the gospel in all holy obedience as it becomes our profession—this is "**precious**" **practice**, and without it there is little evidence of the grace of God being in our hearts. But where do you hear these gospel fruits brought forward and insisted upon by the ministers of the letter? When and where do you hear them contending for the fruits of righteousness and a consistent walk and conversation: and that it is vain to talk of believing in Christ unless we walk in Christ's footsteps, are conformed to Christ's image, and imitate Christ's example? Doctrine, doctrine, doctrine—and all as hard and dry as hard hearts and brazen throats can make it, is their constant theme; but like "the troops of Tema," or "the companies of Sheba," we may look in vain, and wait, and wait long, for any breaking forth of a living

experience like a brook in the desert, or any practice hanging upon their bough as a cluster of gospel fruit.

**But what is "vile" practice? We may divide it into practice that is cheap and worthless, and practice that is polluted and corrupt.**

1. There is much practice, which appears to be good, but is cheap and **worthless**, as not springing from grace. Such is all the practice, which does not spring out of a vital union with the Son of God: for if "without him we can do nothing," all practice without him is nothing worth. This cuts off at a stroke all the good works of men profane or professing who have no union with the living vine.

2. But how much practice in our day is **"vile"** in the worst sense of the word. What a vast amount there is of pride, covetousness, cheating, lying, and, it is to be feared, secret drunkenness, amongst those who profess the truth in the letter. The late controversy has disclosed a vast amount of error in the professing churches; and I am strongly of opinion that if our professing Jerusalem were searched as with candles, there would be found as appalling a mass of evil as there is of error. I have thought sometimes of London and its scenes of misery and crime, say at 10 o'clock at night. Could we be, as it were, suspended aloft, and see the whole of this seething, reeking Metropolis spread before our eyes as a panorama underneath—I need not say more; how we should shrink at the sight as we witnessed tens of thousands of crimes, perhaps including murders, passing before our eyes which at present are hidden from view. Now, if in a similar way the veil could be suddenly removed off the churches, what evils should we see committed which now are only viewed by God's omniscient eye.

But apart from these more glaring evils, what a vast amount there is of enmity, violence, slander, and calumny displayed by those who are deeply sunk in the error which you have had, even in these walls, to combat. Is not this **vile** practice? And has anything more clearly manifested the spirit of the men who hold the error than the weapons which they have made use of to defend it, and to beat down, if possible, both the truth itself and its champions? But there is a mercy in this, for they have been thus more clearly manifested as under the power and influence of the spirit of error, and as defending a bad cause with bad weapons.

II. But to pass on to our second point. What is the main office of the servant of God, as pointed out in our text? He is **to take forth the precious from the vile**. The very form of this expression clearly implies that the precious and the vile are mingled together in such a heap that it needs the power of God, as manifested in the ministry of his servants, to take forth one from the other. And you will observe that the command is not to take forth the vile from the precious, but the precious from the vile. The servant of God, therefore, must needs be blessed with three things to enable him to do this—a discerning eye, a courageous heart, and a strong hand. If he have not a discerning eye, he cannot know the precious from the vile: if he have not a courageous heart, he will falter from the fear of man; and if he have not a strong hand, he will not be able to take forth the one from the other, as they are so closely and firmly blended together. But who is sufficient for these things? None but he whose sufficiency is of God.

But **how** is he to take forth the precious from the vile? Not by the **hand of violence** or persecution, for the tares are to be allowed to grow with the wheat to the harvest; nor in his **own spirit**, for there is such a thing as preaching Christ of

contention: **Php 1:16** nor by **carnal argument**, and "enticing words of man's wisdom," for the faith of God's saints is not to "stand in the wisdom of man, but in the power of God." **1Co 2:4,5** But he is to take forth the precious from the vile by the power of God resting upon his testimony. He sees with a discerning eye how they are mingled one with the other, feels at times a holy zeal of heavenly warmth in his bosom, such as Phinehas felt when he was zealous for God's sake among the children of Israel, **Nu 25:11** and as he is aided by God putting words into his mouth, to show who are precious characters and who are vile characters, what are precious doctrines and what are vile doctrines, what is a precious experience and what is a vile experience, what is precious practice and what is vile practice, he instrumentally and ministerially takes forth the precious from the vile. We are to expect in the professing church of God this apparently strange mixture. It is so as regards **characters**, according to the Apostle's testimony. "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." **2Ti 2:20** The vessels of gold and silver are "precious" characters, for they are made and used "to honour;" but the vessels of wood and of earth are "vile," for they are made and used "to dishonour." But the Apostle adds, "If a man, therefore, purge himself from these," that is, if he purify himself by a godly separation from these vessels of wood and of earth, "he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified and meet for the Master's use, and prepared unto every good work." **2Ti 2:21** Before, then, a servant of God can take forth "precious" **characters** from "vile" characters, he must be himself separated from them in heart, in spirit, in walk; for only in proportion to his own actual separation from them can he take forth the precious from the vile in his ministry. How can he, at least with any consistency, condemn those with whom he associates? How



can he be sanctified and meet for the Master's use, if openly and visibly intermingled with vessels made to dishonour?

In a similar way, before he can take forth "precious" **doctrines** from "vile" doctrines, he must have known and felt the liberating and sanctifying power and influence of truth in his own heart, and also seen the polluting influence of error on the minds of others. Then he can take forth "precious" doctrine from "vile" doctrine with keenness of eye, courage of heart, and strength of hand.

So must he know something in his own soul of the blessedness of a "**precious**" **experience**, and see the awful delusion of a "**vile**" **experience**—loving the one as the work of God's grace, and hating the other as a deception of the devil. As, then, he sees and feels this, he can stretch forth his hand and take the "precious" experience of the saints of God from the "vile" experience of the servants of sin and Satan.

Constrained also by the love of Christ, and influenced by godly fear, he will be ever desiring to live to God's praise: and as, from time to time, the "**vile**" **practices** of ungodly professors are brought before his eyes, he will take forth "**precious**" **practice** from vile practice by showing that the one is a fruit of the Spirit and the other a fruit of the flesh.

III. Now, so far as he does this, he is "**as God's mouth:**" that is, he speaks not only in the name but in the very power of God: for God speaks through him as if he were his own mouth. "But truly I am full of power by the Spirit of the Lord, and of judgment, and of might, to declare unto Jacob his transgression, and to Israel his sin." **Mic 3:8** Look at your own experience, and see if you have not had some testimony in your own soul of the truth of this. When a servant of God

has described God's people, held them up, as it were, before your eyes, as drawn by the finger of God, have you not had some witness in your bosom that it was the truth of God which fell from his lips? While he was discriminating between the **possessor** and the **professor**, and thus was taking forth the precious from the vile, you could read your spiritual features, as a child of God, and could bless him for any marks of his discriminating grace thus experimentally set up. But if he had huddled together saints and sinners, sheep and goats, wheat and chaff, without any separation or discrimination between the precious and the vile, what would his words have been to you but wind and confusion—an empty noise, in which there was no voice from God or testimony to conscience?

So again, when the servant of God is enabled to preach God's truth clearly and experimentally, to open it up and, at the same time, point out the errors by which it is opposed and contradicted—as he thus takes forth "precious" **doctrines** from "vile" **doctrines**, and the blessed Spirit accompanies his word with power to your soul, you know that God is speaking in him by the same power which has at various times made his truth precious to your soul. So, when he points out error, disentangling it from all its glosses and its interminglings with truth, as dressed up in its garb by erroneous men, it is made clear to you how "vile" it is, as robbing Jesus of his glory, and contradicting that truth of which you have felt the power and blessedness. Thus, as you see the beauty and feel the preciousness of truth in its purity and power, so you see the ugliness and feel the vileness of error.

So as to **experience**. When the servant of God has described what "precious" experience is, and taken it forth from a "vile" experience, you feel a sweet testimony that you

are a partaker of grace, and blessed and taught of God. So when you hear a "vile" experience described, such as an experience of corruption without any groaning under it, a knowledge of sin without any deliverance from it, a continual entanglement in snares without their being ever broken, and an indulgence of every vile lust without any repentance for them or forsaking of them, you feel that this "vile" experience is hateful to God and his people, as a delusion of Satan or a mask of hypocrisy. As the precious experience of the saint of God is then taken forth from the vile experience of a hypocrite in Zion, your own spirit bears an inward testimony that God is speaking to you through his servant, for his word comes with power to your soul.

So as the servant of God takes forth the "**precious**" **practice** that springs out of the two-fold constraint of the love of Christ and the fear of God, from the **vile practice** of hardened professors, who turn the grace of God into lasciviousness, and continue in sin that grace may abound, you have the witness in your own conscience that he is speaking for God as his mouth to your soul by way of instruction, encouragement, reproof, or caution; and as his words fall with power into your heart you receive them as if God himself were speaking to you by him.

Now, if a minister cannot or does not thus "take forth the precious from the vile," he cannot be God's mouth. How can he be? Does God mix wheat and tares in the same field? Does he put together sheep and goats into the same fold? It is true that in his providence he permits these things so to be; but it was "an enemy" that sowed the tares in the field. It is Satan who mingles his own seed, the seed of the serpent, with the children of God. Does the Lord approve of vile doctrines? Does he smile upon vile practices? Can, then, a man be a faithful servant of his, whose ministry never

winnows the chaff, never separates truth from falsehood, never exposes the delusions of Satan, never denounces practical ungodliness? True it is that such a ministry will fill men's minds with enmity and wrath, and even some of the Lord's people may think it severe and cutting; but sooner or later, as their consciences are more abundantly wrought upon, they will have a testimony that it is God's mouth which speaks with power to their hearts.

We live in a day of little power in the ministry of the word. A spirit of slumber seems poured out upon our Zion. Ministers and congregations, like the wise and foolish virgins, seem generally slumbering: and we now seem to have come to that point where there is little taking forth of the precious from the vile, and therefore but few are as God's mouth.

IV. But we come now to our last point. **"Let them return unto thee: but return not thou unto them."** There will be, there must be, a separating fan where God's truth is faithfully preached. We are warned that "the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine," that is, salutary teaching, "but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers having itching ears: and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables." **2Ti 4:3,4** When, then, the servants of God take forth the precious from the vile, those who are convicted by their ministry, either as vile characters, or as holding vile doctrines, or as deluded by a vile experience, or of being guilty of vile practices, not being able to bear the condemnation of their own conscience, go out one by one, like the accusers of the woman taken in adultery. Jeremiah saw friends turn into enemies, and one after another drop off; and there might have been a temptation in his mind to go after them, in order to bring them back. But God said to him, "Let them return unto thee; but return not thou unto

them." There was to be no compromise of truth to win any back. If they went they were to go, and he was not to go after them. He was to stand firm if he stood alone. Some of them might return to him as being convinced that he was right and they were wrong. These he might receive, but he was not to deviate one jot from God's truth, or turn one step out of the way to gain their approbation or win their friendship.

So would I say unto this church as re-constituted upon a new basis—the basis of truth, and especially upon that vital, essential, and fundamental truth, that the Lord Jesus Christ is the true, proper, eternal, and only-begotten son of God. Let them, therefore, if the Lord should convince any of their error who are now no longer members of the church, return unto thee, but return not thou unto them. If there has been a pulling down of an old building, in which, through length of years and other circumstances, dry rot had made some of the beams and rafters rotten, to pull it down was far better than to patch it up. Like the leprous house, if the plague were widely spread, and no scraping or plastering could remove the fretting leprosy, the best, the wisest, the only course was "to break down the house, the stones of it, and the timber thereof, and all the mortar of the house." **Le 14:44,45** Error must needs be "a fretting leprosy." I rejoice, therefore, that this church has acted as it has done. I am convinced that there was no other way for the maintenance of the truth of God, or for the peace and prosperity of Zoar. I have considered the subject in all its bearings, as far as I could, and I have been brought to the fullest persuasion in my own mind that there was no other course to be taken but to dissolve the old church and to constitute a new one upon the grand foundation principles of our most holy faith. And I hope the Lord will give his testimony to the step so well, so wisely, and so firmly taken, by often visiting you in this place

with his gracious power and manifested presence. This you will value more than the smiles of men, and supported by this, you will fear no frowns of preachers or professors. The Lord make it manifest that though the church be new, it is old Zoar still, and that it still retains those vital truths, older than the everlasting hills, which, as preached here, have been blessed for more than 50 years. I can say no more, and, as called to stand up before you this evening, I could say no less. I trust I have not spoken in my own spirit, with any wrath or any bitterness, but have preached what I believe is God's truth, with, I hope, a single eye to his glory, and your souls' profit. In his hands therefore I leave it, that he may commend it with his own divine power to your hearts and consciences.