

Israel's Departure and Return

Preached at Providence Chapel, Eden Street, London, on Tuesday Evening, July 17, 1849

"O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity. Take with you words, and turn to the Lord: say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously: so will we render the calves of our lips. Asshur shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses: neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, Ye are our gods: for in thee the fatherless findeth mercy." Hosea 14:1, 2, 3

Our text is rather a long one; but it presents such a connected chain of blessed truth, that if I were to attempt to make it shorter, I could only present to you broken links and scattered fragments. As it stands, it is complete in itself—a beautiful and blessed exposition of divine truth. But it is only so as taken in its connection. Tear it asunder; take separate verses; and the beauty and sweetness of it are lost. I shall, therefore, as our text is long, and contains much matter, proceed at once to consider its contents. And I think that we may observe in it three or four leading features.

I.—*First*, the *charge*; "Thou hast fallen by thine iniquity."

II.—*Secondly*, the *invitation*; "O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God. Take with you words, and turn to the Lord; say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously."

III.—*Thirdly*, the *response* of the church to this gracious and tender invitation; "So will we render the calves of our lips. Asshur shall not save us: we will not ride upon horses; neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, ye are our gods."

And to these three leading features, I may add a *fourth*, which seems to put a crown upon the whole; "For in thee the fatherless findeth mercy."

I.—The *charge*—the accusation that God brings against Israel; "Thou hast fallen by thine iniquity." But there may be some here who are inwardly saying to themselves, 'These words do not apply to me; I have never fallen by mine iniquity; I stand upright; what has this to do with my case?' If there be such secret feelings at work in any of your minds, it does not show that the text will not apply to you: it merely shews, that the veil of ignorance, self-righteousness, and unbelief is still upon your heart. For, were that veil taken away, and you had a sight of yourself as you stand in the eyes of a holy God, you would find, that in one sense or other you have much to do with the accusation; and then, so far from putting the charge from you, you would be the very first to fall under it.

The book of Hosea is filled with expostulations, warnings, admonitions, invitations, and promises. Spiritually viewed, these are applicable only to a certain character, one who has departed, or is departing from the Lord. And, as I believe in my conscience, there is no child of God who really knows his heart, that has not departed from the Lord, and is not, more or less, daily departing from him, in thought, word, or deed, this charge belongs to the whole family of God. But if you think it does not apply to you, stand aside, and let those hear who have ears to hear.

But what is the substance of the charge? The Lord is speaking here to his own people, whom he addresses by the name of Israel; and in order to make the charge more pointed, he puts it in the second person; "O Israel, *thou* hast fallen by thine iniquity."

The words will need a little opening up.

1. What are we to understand, then, by "*iniquity*?" Are we to limit the expression to open acts of sin? Are we to say there is no iniquity except that which consists in words spoken or acts performed? that nothing short of drunkenness, adultery, theft, falsehood, and other such open sins, can be designated by the word iniquity? A man who thinks and argues thus, can know very little of the character of God; he can know very little of the holiness, purity, majesty, and power of the Lord God Almighty; and he can know very little of the wickedness, sinfulness, and depravity of his own fallen nature. Every, yea, the least departing from God, is iniquity; all that does not lie level and straight with the divine character. Just as when a straight rule is laid upon a curved surface, it detects the least crookedness; and as the slightest crookedness whatever maybe called a departure from a right line, so every departing of the heart from God is iniquity. Or, in the same way as a grain less than the real weight makes the weight defective, so the least deviation from the purity, perfection, and holiness of God, is iniquity. A man that is not aware of this, and is not keenly alive to it, can know little either of the character of God, or of the character of sin.

2. But what is it *to fall*? "Thou hast *fallen* by thine iniquity." Must we refer this falling only to something outward? Are there no other falls but positive words or positive acts of sin? Is nothing to be designated a fall but that which may be brought before a church as an act to be visited by its censure? A man must be as ignorant of what falling is, as he is of what iniquity is, if he thinks that there is no other falling but that which consists in some words spoken, or some acts done. There is a falling inwardly. There are secret thoughts, desires, lusts, and workings of our depraved heart by which we fall; and the more a man is acquainted with his own

heart, and the character of God, the more will he be alive to these inward slips and falls, even when to the eye of man, however keen it may be, there may seem to be nothing inconsistent or unbecoming.

I wish to explain this matter fully at the very outset, in order that I may throw the net as widely as possible, and include in its capacious folds every one whose soul God has quickened to fear his great Name. For, I am certain, if the grace of God be in your heart: if your conscience be made and kept alive and tender in God's fear; if you have light to see, and life to feel, you will acknowledge and fall beneath the charge, "Thou art fallen by thine iniquity."

When the Lord is first pleased to draw us near to himself by some manifestation of his mercy, goodness, and love, we walk with him in simplicity and godly sincerity; he has our hearts and our warmest and most ardent affections, and our delight and pleasure is to have sweet communion with him. And here for the most part we stand so long as the blessed Spirit is drawing up our hearts and affections, and fixing them where Jesus sits at God's right hand. But when he leaves us; when he withdraws his inshinings and the visitations of his mercy and favour, then, like Abraham, we return to our place, and it may be said often of us too truly, "Thou hast fallen by thine iniquity."

But in how many ways do the Lord's people inwardly fall when God keeps them from slipping outwardly! Some fall by *spiritual pride*, even those whom the Lord has specially blessed. The very blessings of the Lord may be and are abused by the carnal mind; as Hart says, and to my mind he never wrote a truer line,

"The heart uplifts with God's own gifts,

And makes e'en grace a snare.

The Apostle Paul found this. After he had been caught up to the third heaven, "lest he should be puffed up with the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan, was sent to buffet him, lest he should be exalted above measure." (2. Cor. 12:7.) Spiritual pride was working in him; even from the manifestations and revelations that God had favoured him with. And who that knows anything of the visitations of God to his spirit, does not feel that when these sweet seasons are withdrawn, he is lifted up with pride, thinks that he stands nearer to God, and higher in the divine favour than others, and has something to boast of over his weaker brethren? Others fall by *worldly pride*. Pride is a tree with many branches. Some who are free, to a certain degree at least, from the outward manifestations of worldly pride, are eaten up with spiritual pride; and those, perhaps, who are kept humble in their souls, and in whom spiritual pride does not manifest itself, feel one of their chief enemies to be worldly pride. Others fall by *covetousness*; "the love of money, the root of all evil," entangles and draws them aside. Others fall by *worldly-mindedness, earthly cares, and temporal anxieties*, that seem to eat up, like the locust, every green leaf of the life of God in the soul. Others fall by *presumption*; and others fall by *despair*. Each person that knows his own heart is best acquainted with that which entangles him, and draws him aside.

Sensuality is the snare of some. An inclination to *strong drink* is a temptation to others. *Worldly relations and connections* are a besetment to a third; *family cares and anxieties* are a temptation to a fourth. Each may have his own besetment; each may have his own snare; and yet the end and result be the same in all and each. "O Israel, thou hast fallen by thine

iniquity"—'by that iniquity which has more or less power in thy heart to entangle thee, to bewitch thee, to allure thee, to blind thy eyes, to draw thee aside, to turn thy feet out of the narrow path, to carnalize thy mind, to deaden thy spirit, to harden thy conscience, to weaken the influences of faith, hope, and love.' Let conscience speak in the bosom of each, (who know what it is to have a conscience), and it will point out to each some besetment connected perhaps with his situation in life, or some temptation springing perhaps out of the peculiar relationship in which he stands. Each whose eyes are opened to see the workings of his heart, may see (if God be pleased to show him) that there is some iniquity, some besetment, some temptation, some lust, some idol, some snare; that there is something working in his heart whereby he continually falls away from communion with God; from the actings of faith, hope, and love; from his steadfastness; and from the sweet feelings that the Lord has from time to time blessed him with; so that his mind becomes more or less carnalized, darkened, and deadened.

Now if you cannot go thus far with me, I have no hope whatever that you can go one step further. If there is no response in your bosom to what I have thus far been attempting to sketch out (and most feebly I confess have I thus sketched out some of these inward departings from the Lord); if you cannot go thus far, I have not the least hope of taking you one step further. But if you have been able thus far to follow me, and conscience bears its inward testimony that I have spoken the truth, and described more or less what you daily feel and mourn under, then let us proceed in company a step further, to our *second* point, which is,

II.—The *invitation* which the Lord addresses to all who know and feel that they have fallen, and that they do fall, and that daily by iniquity. And perhaps if I could follow some of those

sitting before me into their secret retirements; could I listen to their sighs and cries as they lie upon their midnight bed; could I be near them when they are engaged in their various occupations; could I watch their lips as they traverse the streets of this metropolis,—I might hear them secretly complaining and confessing to God how vile they are, how base, how filthy, how entangled, how overtaken, how ensnared, and what trouble this causes them, that they are continually falling by their iniquity.

i. The Lord speaks to *these*; *they* have ears to hear; and his words will not fall to the ground. And what does he say? He addresses them tenderly; he speaks to them in the sweetest invitation; "*O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God.*" 'I know where thou hast been, Israel; I know what thou hast been doing; I see how thou hast fallen; I know what grief thine inward or outward backslidings have cost thee; mine eye hath seen the trouble of thine heart, and mine ear hath been opened to the sighs, and cries, and groans of thy lips. I am not a hard taskmaster, to cast thee off, cut thee down, and send thee to thy deserved place; "O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God.'"

But how much there is couched in the words, "the Lord *thy* God!" What still! though thou hast fallen by thine iniquity; though thou hast departed from the Lord; though thou hast nursed every abomination in thy heart; though thou hast gone, in thy fallen nature, after the filthiest idols; though thou hast forsaken me times without number; though thou hast preferred anything and everything to my ways; yet he is the Lord thy God still, who has loved thee with an everlasting love, who hateth putting away, who will not reject thee, nor cast thee aside, nor cut thee down, nor send thee into eternal misery. He is still the Lord "merciful and gracious;" thy tender, thy compassionate, thy ever-living, ever-loving

God; thy Father still, thy Benefactor still, thy sin-pardoning God still!

Now there is nothing that so melts and moves a poor sinner's heart, as when the Lord is pleased to drop such gracious and tender words into his soul as these. The Lord knows how to deal with us. He knows how to overcome us. He does not drive us to distraction by his wrathful anger; but he softens, melts, and moves the heart by tenderness, compassion, and love. He puts his hand upon the tenderest springs of our heart; he touches the right cord; he addresses to us the invitations, which when they come from his lips move and melt the soul. 'Return; I am ready to receive thee. I hold out my arm of tender compassion to thee.' "O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity."

If you have never known the misery of departing from God, you can never know the sweetness of returning to God. If you have never bewailed, lamented, nor mourned over the backslidings, the idolatries, and the adulteries of your fallen nature, you can know nothing of the sweetness of forsaking him. You are like the elder son in the parable, who never at any time offended his father, but always kept his commandments; and you therefore have never had occasion to confess to the Lord how you have fallen by your iniquity. You stand in your own holiness, righteousness, obedience, and consistency of life; and therefore know nothing of the moving and melting breakings of heart that spring out of the Lord's tender invitations as applied to those who mourn and sigh because they have departed from him.

ii. But the Lord says also, "*Take with you words;*" as though he would put words into our mouth; as though he would himself suggest to us the most prevailing arguments. Some have contended from this language of the prophet for written

forms of prayer; but, I think such have sadly overlooked the real spiritual meaning of the text. I think I may illustrate it by a very simple figure. Here is a criminal in a court of justice who is so cut up with shame and guilt, that he has not a word to say; but there stands by his side an advocate, a councillor, who knows the whole of the case; and he puts words into the criminal's mouth, and such words as he knows will have the greatest prevalence with the judge and jury. He tells him what to say, because he knows that the words which he puts into his mouth are the best to make use of, and such as will carry the greatest weight and power with those before whom he stands. And thus, when the Lord says, "Take with you words," he does not mean to put forms into the mouths of any. It is not to furnish a written formula for them to use; but it is to put prevailing arguments into the mouth of those who are so cut up with shame and guilt, that they have not a word to plead in their own behalf. It is as though he would himself put into Israel's heart and mouth arguments that would not fail to touch his own bosom, and bring down answers of mercy and peace out of his inexhaustible treasury. "Take with you words."

But what shall those words be? There are *two* which the Lord has here put into the heart and mouth of returning Israel.

1. *First, "Take away all iniquity."* How suitable is this! *Iniquity* has been the great stumbling-block, the main wall of separation, the chief cause of all the troubles, the real reason of all the controversy between God and the soul. Israel had fallen by iniquity. It was some secret idol set up in Israel's heart which had provoked the Lord; and thereby she had fallen from him. It was either her pride, her covetousness, her sensuality, her worldly-mindedness, her carnality, her presumption, her unbelief, or her infidelity; it was some idol, some iniquity, or stumbling-block, set up in her heart,

whereby she had fallen. Therefore, until this was taken away, she would ever be in the same state that she was in before. She must therefore say from the heart as well as from the lip, "Take away all iniquity."

Now, before the soul can use these words, it must see it has iniquity; and it must see *that* iniquity in particular whereby it has fallen. Therefore, I said, if you did not feel the application of the *charge*, I would not ask you to go a step further: I said, you had better stand aside, and give place to others. But when you have eyes to see there has been *this* iniquity whereby you have fallen, *this* lust, *this* pride, *this* worldly-mindedness, *this* besetment, *this* temptation, *this* indulgence in something sinful, *this* secret departing from God, *this* forgetfulness of prayer, *this* neglecting his word, *this* hardening of your heart against the truth—when you begin to see and feel you have departed from the Lord, and say, 'I have not that sweet enjoyment of God's presence that I once had; I have not that communion with him which my soul once enjoyed; I have not those manifest answers to prayer, not those visitations of his grace and favour, not that access unto him, not that delight in reading his word, not that love to his people, not that satisfaction I formerly had in hearing his truth;'—when you begin to see a little of the malady, then you are fit to receive the remedy. If you had some inward disease, and went to a physician, the first thing he would do would be to find out what the disease really was. He would ask you a number of questions; he would perhaps strip you to find out what was really the matter with you: and when he had found out the disease, he would address himself to the cure. So if you do not see or feel that there is some idol, some temptation, some besetment, some snare, something unlawful, something evil which you have been indulging in: and that *this* is the cause why you have not those sweet manifestations of God's favour and love to your

soul, and why you are living for the most part in a careless and hardened state: I say, unless you see the real root, and dig down into your heart to find out whence all this springs, you cannot come to the Lord, and say, "Take away *all* iniquity." But, besides that, you must have *suffered*; you must have groaned, cried, and almost bled beneath the iniquity, the lust, the idol, the temptation, the besetment, before you can say, "Take away *all* iniquity." 'What *all*? Must *all* be taken away? Take away what I love so much? Take away what my carnal heart so delights in? Take away what I have gone out in such secret desires after? Take *all* away? This is taking my life! It is taking away all my worldly happiness: it is taking away all that my carnal mind finds pleasure in.' But when we have suffered and learnt to value one smile of God in the heart beyond a thousand carnal pleasures and pursuits, and would make any sacrifice so that he would appear for us, and bless our souls with the sweet manifestations of his love—when we can come here, we can *then* say, "Take away *all* iniquity," and enter into the real meaning of the words, into the very heart of the text.

But you may, like those of old, with your mouth show much love, and in your heart go out after your covetousness. (Ezek. 33:31.) You may get up in the morning, fall upon your knees, ask the Lord to keep you through the day, to preserve you from that temptation which has entangled you before, or from the besetment whereby you have fallen; but directly you get off your knees, or leave the room, you are as weak, as powerless, as much off your guard, and as ready to fall into the temptation as ever the devil is to bring that temptation before you. Now, if you are there, you cannot use the words from an honest heart, and say, "Take away *all* iniquity." But when you see and feel what a horrible thing sin is! how hateful and dreadful! and what a filthy, base, depraved and wicked creature you are, for having been

entangled in this bewitchment, for having been overcome by this temptation, or drawn aside into this snare; when you can smite upon your breast, and say, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Rom. 7:24,) or, when you can smite upon your thigh, and say, 'Woe is me! was there ever such an one as I? so soon thrown down; so easily entangled, so quickly drawn aside; such a weak and wicked creature! Was there ever such an one as I? O, I could tear out this heart of mine it gives me so much trouble!'—when a man is brought by the secret operations of God upon his heart into this spot, then he can say, "Take away *all* iniquity." He will not say, 'Spare me this or that sin. Is it not a little one? May not I have *this* lust? May not I indulge *this* pleasure, if I give up all the rest? Let me have but this; O, I cannot part with *this*?' I say, if a man is there, it shows that he has not had a real sight and sense of sin; he has not been made sick at heart, nor has he been made really honest before God.

Now but few persons are brought here by divine teaching and divine power. It is not standing with presumptuous notions upon the heights of Zion, but it is being brought down by the power of God to lie at his feet that will do this. But if you can travel thus far with me, we will go a step further.

2. "And receive us graciously." Not only, "Take away all iniquity;" take away the *guilt* of sin by sprinkling my conscience with atoning blood; take away the *filth* of sin by washing me in the fountain once opened for sin and uncleanness; take away the *power* of sin by shedding abroad thy constraining love in my heart, and enabling me by every sweet constraint to live to thy glory. I say, not only do we, or can we thus use the words when we say, "Take away all iniquity;" but the Lord bids us to add, "Receive us graciously." How this seems sweetly to explain the other!

'What!' a person may say, 'if I go to the Lord, and he takes away all iniquity, shall I not then stand upon a better footing than before? Shall I not then have something that I can boast of?' No! "Receive us *graciously*." Free grace must still reign. 'Receive us into thy bosom, into thine heart, into thine arms, into the manifestations of thy mercy and favour, into the sweet testimonies of thy pardoning love and restoring grace. "Receive us *graciously*." Let "grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life" in the superaboundings of thy sovereign grace. This must ever be our prayer. It is grace that makes us see our iniquity, and makes us feel that we have fallen by our iniquity; it is grace that brings us to the footstool of mercy, to say unto the Lord, "Take away all iniquity;" and it is still grace that we plead, when we say, "Receive us graciously." 'Receive us for the sake of thy grace into eternal life, into the manifestations of thy mercy, and the superaboundings of thy favour, whatever we have been, whatever we have done, whatever we have said, whatever we have thought; however far we have departed, however long we have gone astray, however hardened our heart, however fallen into the snares and temptations of the devil.' When we can find these two things (and they always go together) "take away all iniquity," and "receive us graciously," they carry with them a proof that the Lord is working in our hearts, and speaking his own invitation with a divine power into our souls.

III.—But we pass on to the *response*; the reception that these words meet with in Israel's breast; "So will we render to thee the calves of our lips. Asshur shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses; neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, ye are our gods; for in thee the fatherless findeth mercy."

We observe in these words two leading things; 1, what Israel

says she *will do*; and 2, what Israel says she *will not do*.

i. What, then, does Israel say she *will do*? "So will we render unto thee the calves of our lips." The figure is taken from the sacrifices of calves and lambs which were offered under the law. So that when Israel says, she will "render the calves of her lips," she declares, that she will yield the sacrifice of praise. And this is a sacrifice acceptable to God; that we should not render to him merely carnal and worldly offerings, but, "the calves of our lips," the sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving, of blessing and extolling his holy name.

Now, if ever there be the incense of praise on the lip, it is when the sweet invitation of the Lord comes with power into our soul; when we not only come to him, and say, "take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously," but have a sweet and blessed answer that he has taken away all iniquity, and so receive us. O how sweet it is to be able to praise God with joyful lips! and when we can do this from a sense of his goodness and favour let down into our souls, it is the sweetest and most blessed feeling that can possibly be enjoyed. And yet see the connection. Here is Israel; she has fallen by her iniquity, been indulging some secret lust, caught in some bewitching snare, drawn aside from the Lord, has departed from him, and got entangled in something that the Lord and the soul knows is not right; she is cut up with guilt, and filled with despondency, shame, and self-loathing, and almost driven into the very depths of despair. Now when the Lord is pleased, under these circumstances, to melt and move the heart by some gracious invitation, and the soul can hear the voice of God speaking in his word, and can come to him, and has power to say, "'Take away all iniquity;" break to pieces the snare; remove the temptation; let not that besetment reign with which my poor soul has been entangled; let it never entangle me again; Lord, thou

knowest all my weakness, and all my wickedness; and how, if left to myself, I must fall; take away the snare; break it to pieces; let me never, never, never, be overcome with the temptation again'—when the Lord hears the sigh and cry of the poor prisoner, delivers him, takes away the temptation, removes the besetment, gives godly sorrow, and enables him to say, "'Take away all iniquity;" take it clean out of my heart; let it not reign or rule there for a single moment; at whatever cost, at whatever sacrifice; however deep it may cut; yet take away everything displeasing in thy holy and pure eyes; take away everything which intercepts the rays of thy mercy and favour; remove every stumbling-block, however near and dear; and deliver me from every temptation, however it may cut close into my very heart's fibres; "receive me graciously" in the blood and obedience of Jesus; and let thy grace shine forth in restoring and pardoning my soul'—I say when we can thus come before the Lord, and there is some sweet echo and response in the soul from its inmost feelings that the Lord has taken and is taking away all iniquity, and casting it into the depths of the sea; that he is removing the temptation, and subduing the power of sin, and accepting us in his beloved Son—if ever there be a feeling of thankfulness; if ever there be a note of praise in a sinner's heart or in a sinner's lips, it is then. The church therefore says, "So will we render thee the calves of our lips." 'We will not sacrifice the blood of calves and bullocks; we will not render to thee costly offerings of gold and silver; we will not build churches, nor erect altars, nor subscribe to painted windows, in order thus to obtain some manifestation of thy mercy; but "'we will render to thee the calves of our lips." As we walk up and down our room, we will thank and praise thy holy name; as we lie upon our bed, we will bless and extol thee with every faculty of our soul, and with every breath of our lips. As we are engaged in our various occupations in life, our heart shall be continually blessing and

thanking thee for thy mercy; a tear of gratitude, mixed with godly sorrow, will trickle down our cheek; and when no eye sees, and no ear hears, we will thank and praise and bless thee for what thou hast done for us.' This is the sacrifice of praise that God accepts at our hands; and it is all that we can give him for his mercy, goodness, and love.

ii. But Israel not only tells the Lord what she will do, but she tells him what *she will not do*. And what will she not do?

1. "Asshur shall not save us." Where had she been? What had been the main cause of her departing from the Lord? What had been the secret root of her iniquity? Why; looking to Asshur; that is, Assyria, which, spiritually, means some foreign help.

Let me try if I cannot trace out in this the very feelings of your heart. There is some temptation which you have been overtaken by; some besetment which has drawn you aside and entangled your affections. Let us dig down to the root of this; let us look, if it be possible, and see what gave this temptation such power, and what made this besetment so strong. It was because you were secretly leaning upon Asshur; you were not looking unto the Lord Jesus Christ; not trusting wholly to his blood; not hanging entirely upon his arm; not resting solely upon his power. But when we have learned by fatal experience what looking to Asshur has cost us; and seen that whenever we have looked to the creature, or rested upon an arm of flesh, we have only been strengthening some temptation, putting force into some besetment, or adding power to some entanglement, the soul says, with holy indignation, "Asshur shall not save us." 'I have made resolutions and promises, and relied upon self to keep me when I went into temptation; my eye was not upon the Lord; I was looking more to my own strength or

righteousness, or something in me or others; but it shall be so no longer; "Asshur shall not save us."

2. "Neither will we ride upon horses." Horses were forbidden the kings of Judah; they were used for the purpose of war, pride, splendour, or activity; and it is from this the figure is taken. This perhaps is the meaning of the words, "We will not ride upon horses;" 'we will not take unlawful means of advancing ourselves.' When the children of Israel went out to war, they were not to use horses; and if they used them, it was contrary to the divine command. How often have we been entangled in the same snare! When we have gone out to war, instead of using the means which God has appointed, as faith, prayer, and watchfulness, we have used means of advancing ourselves which were forbidden by God's word. The same thing is spoken of in Isaiah (30:16), "Ye said, we will flee upon horses; therefore shall ye flee; and we will ride upon the swift; therefore shall they that pursue you be swift." They would try to get away when they were pursued; but those who pursued them should be swifter than they. Now every means of advancing or lifting up ourselves, which we take to supersede the leadings and teachings of God may be said to be "riding upon horses."

Now can you see anything of this in your experience? In your business, perhaps, instead of confining yourself to your lawful calling, you have been getting upon horses; you have been doing something unlawful; you have not kept within right bounds; let honest conscience speak. Or, in the church, perhaps, you have taken a high position; you have exalted yourself above your real standing, and thought more of your religion than it is spiritually worth; got higher in doctrine than in vital experience; have a better informed head-piece than a heart established with grace; and instead of being a poor, toiling, labouring, groaning pilgrim, kept upon level

ground, you have been desiring to obtain a something whereby you might advance yourself, and get beyond others. Now when you are convinced of these things, and seen how foolishly and wickedly you have acted, you can say, "We will no more ride upon horses."

3. "Neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, ye are our gods." This was the besetting sin of Israel, to worship idols. And have you never said to the work of your hands, "Ye are our gods?" Never been pleased with yourself on this or that account; never thought highly of yourself; never looked into your heart, and thought there was something in which you might take delight? If a man does not see that the root of all idolatry is *self* he knows but little of his heart. Perhaps, if you have walked into the British Museum, and seen the idols that were worshipped in former days in the South Sea Isles, you have wondered that rational beings could ever bow down before such ugly monsters. But does the heart of a South Sea Islander differ from the heart of an Englishman? Not a bit. The latter may have more civilization and cultivation; but his heart is the same. And if you have not bowed down to these monstrous objects and hideous figures; though you have never prostrated your body before Juggernaut, there may be as filthy an idol in your heart. Where is there a filthier idol than the lusts and passions of man's fallen nature? You need not go to the British Museum to see filthy idols and painted images. Look within. Where is there a more grovelling idol than Mammon, and the covetousness of our heart? You need not wonder at heathens worshipping hideous idols, when you have pride, covetousness, and above all that hideous idol *self* in his little shrine, hiding himself from the eyes of man, but to which you are so often rendering your daily and hourly worship. How often have you said in your heart, 'This is my god; I love it; I cannot part with it; it is too sweet and pleasant to give up; I

embrace it; I adore it; I bow down to it; it shall be my god.' But when the Lord is pleased to break our hearts with a sense of our sin and misery, then we can say to the work of our hands, 'Ye shall be no more my gods, I will not worship any but the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ in spirit and truth.'

IV.—And then comes the last point, which crowns and puts as it were a blessing on the whole, "for in thee the fatherless findeth mercy." Poor fatherless children, spiritually, who have none to look to but the Lord; who have no hope or refuge but in God; "in thee the fatherless findeth mercy." "Thou art good, and ready to forgive, and plenteous in mercy to all that call upon thee." And therefore, "we will render to thee the calves of our lips." When under divine influence, we say, 'we will do none of these things' (God knows how soon we may be entangled again). "Asshur shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses; neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, ye are our gods; for in thee the fatherless findeth mercy."