

THE FRUIT OF THE LIPS

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"I create the fruit of the lips; Peace, peace to him that is far off, and to him that is near, saith the LORD; and I will heal him" Isa.57:19

The Lord had said in verse 16 of this chapter: "I will not contend for ever, neither will I be always wroth: for the spirit should fail before me, and the souls which I have made." As though the Lord saw, so to speak, the fruitlessness of contending with man that all his stripes were thrown away upon him; that his severest chastisements, unaccompanied by grace, did not bring him into submission and humility; that all his heaviest strokes could do would but wear the spirit out and make it fail before him, but that his contending in anger would never make him a partaker of godly sorrow, nor cause him to lie low at his feet. "For the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth, and smote him: I hid me, and was wroth, and he went on frowardly in the way of his heart" (verse 17).

The Lord tells us here why he smote his people. It was for the iniquity of their covetousness; the word "covetousness" pointing out what the human heart is chiefly engaged upon. For we must not limit the expression merely to avarice after money, but consider it as embracing the going out of the heart of man after the things of time and sense, the insatiable desire of the carnal mind after earthly and sensual gratification. This covetousness God speaks of as iniquity, the iniquity of man lying in this: that he loves everything earthly and sensual better than God, that he seeks pleasure from every object but the Lord, that he wilfully and greedily runs

into every base lust, making carnal things his delight and happiness. Now the Lord, provoked by the iniquity of his covetousness, smote him with stroke upon stroke, with disappointment upon disappointment, with affliction upon affliction, with trouble upon trouble. But it was all thrown away. It did not raise up in him a spiritual work, it did not bring him to the Lord's feet, it did not change his will; it did not renew him in the spirit of his mind, but it left him as it found him: earthly, sensual, and dead; or rather, it left him worse than it found him for his heart became more hardened and his conscience more stupefied than before. The Lord, therefore, adds: "I hid me;" as though he would try what that would do. He took no apparent notice of him. The Lord would not appear conspicuously in a way of providence. He shut himself up, as it were, in his own glory, and covered himself with a cloud, so that no ray should pass through. But that failed also. "I hid me, and was wroth, and he went on frowardly in the way of his heart." So obstinate, rebellious, wayward, perverse a wretch is man that no step which the Lord could take in a way of judgment or anger, independent of the Spirit's operations (for that is the point I am endeavouring to enforce) could ever have the least effect upon him. Now do not you parents often see this very thing in your children naturally? You sometimes cannot make anything of them; there is such a frowardness and perversity of disposition in them, that all your chastisements and every means you employ to make them better, only seem to make them worse. They go on frowardly in the way of their heart; and you cannot, with all the pains you take with them, make them one whit better. Now what children often are to their parents, such are we toward God. His stripes, his frowns, his hiding himself, his sharp afflictions, do not produce in us any spiritual good; but we go on frowardly in the way of our heart, muttering perverseness, full of rebellion, peevishness, and discontent; and though we may feel the rod of God upon

us, yet there is no breaking down of heart, no submission of soul, no contrition of spirit before him. The Lord therefore says: "I have seen his ways." What a creature he is! What an obstinate, perverse, rebellious wretch, and that wrath and judgments will not mend him. It is, then, as though he added: "I will alter my plan altogether. I see that there is no use in smiting and afflicting him with these sharp troubles; he is only the worse for it; only the more rebellious, more perverse, more forward. I have seen his ways, and will heal him." The Lord speaks as though he would change his conduct towards him. If he could not frown him into obedience, he would kiss him into it. If, he could not by the manifestation of his anger, make him walk in a right way, he would do so by love, and as he could not bend the heart by trouble, he would break it by an overwhelming sense of grace, mercy, and pardon. In that way, then, does the Lord gain his point and bring about his blessed purpose, warming the soul into fruitfulness by summer suns, which wintry blasts could never produce, pardoning sin, and thus making it hateful; overcoming the soul with his goodness, so as to new model it into obedience; and by communicating a new heart and a new spirit, bring out of it freely and cheerfully that humility, submission, devotedness, and affection, which stripes and blows could never have extorted. This, then, is the connexion of the text. And this slight sketch of the context may, with God's blessing better prepare our minds to see and feel something of the sweetness and beauty of the text.

I. What are we to understand by the expression which meets us in the first clause: "I create the fruit of the lips?" I understand by it that which grows upon, or rather out of the lips. Just in the same way as the fruit naturally is that which grows upon or grows out of a tree, so spiritually that which grows upon and out of a gracious man's lips is here called

"the fruit of the lips." But cannot a man say just what he pleases? Not to God's honour and glory. If it is true that God *creates* the fruit of the lips, and that there is not a single word which man's lips can speak for the honour of God except what the Lord himself creates by as great a miracle as when he called the world into existence, what a death-blow to human merit, creature righteousness, fleshly sanctification, legal obedience, free will, and the whole spawn of Arminianism! What a sweeping off at a single stroke all the piety and holiness of the creature, if it is true, as most true it is, that a man not only cannot create a spiritual thought, nor perform a spiritual action, but that he cannot even create a spiritual word that he cannot actually bring forth from the door of his lips anything which God calls fruit, except it be created in him by a miraculous putting forth of supernatural power. But, however the wise and learned may call this enthusiasm, or however Pharisees and Free-willers may rebel against God's sovereignty and man's helplessness, yet all the living family are taught, sometimes by painful and sometimes by pleasurable experience, that they cannot find in their lips a single spiritual word to breathe out secretly into the ears of God or before the ears of their fellow men, except the Lord the Spirit create it for and in them. The word of the lip, when it is such as the Lord calls fruit, is that which comes from the heart: "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer." It is the heart must prompt the tongue, as we read: "The heart of the wise teacheth his mouth, and addeth learning to his lips." Unless heart and tongue go together, there is neither fruit in the one or the other. The Lord, then, by his blessed hand in the soul, creates a spiritual work within, and raises up spiritual feelings, spiritual desires, spiritual sensations; and as he produces this spiritual experience by putting forth his power in the heart, he creates also the fruit of the lips, that these spiritual sensations may

find a vent through them. For it is as necessary that the Lord should create the fruit of the lips to *express* them, as that the Lord should create the fruit of the heart to *feel* them. We have, for instance, sometimes spiritual sensations heaving, fermenting, and working in our bosoms, but we cannot give them vent. They are sometimes too deep for utterance, "groanings which cannot be uttered," as says the apostle. Many of God's people cannot express what they feel, they have a clear experience, but a confused speech, they know what experimental truth and divine teachings are, but cannot defend the one nor explain the other. The Lord, therefore, must not only create the spiritual sensations, but he must create the spiritual expressions, that out of the heart, through the mouth, the fruit may come to his honour and praise.

The first sensation usually that God creates in the soul, is a feeling of its own guilt, ruin, and misery; and the first fruit of the lips that he creates as springing out of and corresponding with this spiritual sensation is *confession*. "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy." "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." But of all humbling things confession is one of the most humbling. It is so even to man. We often feel ourselves to be wrong, but we cannot confess it. There is that wretched pride and self-justification often working in a man's heart that he absolutely will not confess his faults to a fellow-creature, when his conscience all the time is condemning him. And so it is spiritually. It is a very hard spot to come into the presence of God with confession. Confession must be, as it were, squeezed out of us, pressed out of our heart by heavy burdens laid upon the conscience. An honest heaven-taught soul knows that there is no use mocking God with hypocritical confession, that to confess

iniquity with the mouth and hug it in the bosom, is but to add sin to sin, that it must not, with Gehazi, stow the two talents of silver in the house, and then go and stand before its Master unabashed. But wherever the soul is truly humbled before God, and confession is created as the fruit of the lips, it always implies a desire to be spiritually delivered from the filth, guilt, and the power of the sin acknowledged. Thus confession, as one of the first and the earliest fruits of the lips, flows from a spiritual feeling of the burden of sin, a solemn hatred to it and abhorrence of it, as laid upon the conscience, a cry to the Lord to pardon it, and an earnest desire, in the strength of the Lord to be delivered from its dominion. Honest confession, then, as springing out of a heart made tender in God's fear, is a supernatural creation of the Lord's. To mock God with saying we are sorry, and then rush the next moment into the sin we profess to be sorry for, is but to deceive ourselves and insult him. Yet this is what we have done a thousand times, and shall do again if grace prevent not. So that no man comes to honest confession except God works confession in his heart; and thus making the heart and tongue move together, he creates confession as the fruit of the lips.

Now there is no promise of pardon of sin till there is confession of sin. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins." But how many there are who talk about pardon and forgiveness, who have never yet been brought to an honest confession; who have never yet put their mouth in the dust, bewailed themselves in the sight of God, nor acknowledged their sins in the bitterness of soul-trouble, with tears of contrition flowing down their cheeks and the sobs of godly sorrow heaving from their bosoms!

Another fruit of the lips which God creates is *prayer*. The Lord himself must pour out upon every child of his "the spirit

of grace and of supplications," for unless he is pleased to create this fruit of the lips, there is no more spiritual prayer in our heart than there is in a corpse. We may indeed mock God by carnal petitions, or go through a formal round of daily prayer; but as to any spiritual breathing out of our wants into the bosom of God, as to any faith in blessed exercise whereby we come to the throne of mercy and grace, and, according to the injunction of the Holy Ghost, pour out our heart before him, there is not a single grain of this fruit till the Lord himself by a supernatural operation upon conscience, first creates the desire, and then gives power to breathe forth that desire in supplication at his feet. Now of this spirit of prayer, every living soul has a measure. When the Lord quickens the soul into spiritual life, he always gives "this spirit of grace and supplications;" and when once given, it is never wholly lost out of the heart. For the Lord who first creates this fruit of the lips, mercifully keeps it alive in the soul. "I will water it every moment," he says. He therefore feeds the lamp of intercession in the soul with the oil of the blessed Spirit, the unction of the Holy One; and though to our feelings we are often as dead and prayerless as if we had never felt the breath of the Spirit within, yet the Lord secretly again and again works upon the heart and causes this fruit to grow upon the lips. In this respect, as in others, we pass through many changes. We may sometimes, for instance, be in trouble, and yet cannot pray; be exercised in our minds, and yet cannot go to the throne of grace, nor vent our desire for deliverance into the ears of the Most High. We are often, too, in a state where there is no sigh nor cry going up out of the heart; when the world seems to have full possession of us, and there is scarcely even the faintest desire to be brought out of this state, and to feel the weight and power of eternal things. Nor can we even feel what a sad state this is to be in, nor cry to the Lord to revive us again that we may rejoice in him, unless he once more create this

fruit of the lips, and draw out our heart towards him.

But *praise and thanksgiving* is also a fruit of the lips, and as such is the special creation of God. What a sweet thing it is to bless and praise God! There is no feeling upon earth to equal it. To bless God for his unmerited mercy, for his undeserved favour, and for the testimonies of his goodness, is indeed a sweet employ. It may indeed be called a feeling and a foretaste of heaven, for will not the bliss of heaven much consist in blessing and praising God, in singing the "song of the Lamb," in giving vent to the happy feelings which will occupy and fill the soul? God teaches all his people, sooner or later, to bless and praise his name. But then they must go into very dark holes and corners, must often sink very low in their feelings, must be taught very sharp lessons within, must see themselves to be utterly helpless, and at times feel almost hopeless, in order that this fruit of the lips may be created by the hand of God in them. How often are we in that state when we can neither pray nor praise; when sullenness, frowardness, and peevishness seem to take such complete possession that so far from praising God, there is no power even to seek his face; and so far from blessing him, there are even dreadful things working up in the heart against him, which awfully manifest the enmity of the carnal mind! Those who are painfully exercised with such feelings are certain therefore that it is God's work to enable them to praise and bless his holy Name. And does not the heaven-taught soul come sometimes into this spot: "O that the Lord would give me something to praise him for, would bring me out of this trial, break this wretched snare, remove this awful temptation, lift me out of this providential difficulty, bless and water my soul, comfort my heart, strengthen my spirit, give me some testimony of his covenant love!" Says the soul: "O how I would then bless and praise him! I would spend all my breath in exalting his

holy Name." But when the Lord withholds from the soul the blessings it so eagerly covets, it can only look at them at a great distance, view them wistfully, and long to experience them. But it says: "Until they come with power, until they are brought in with sweetness, until they are sealed upon my very heart, so as to take full possession of my breast, I cannot, I dare not, bless and praise his holy Name." O what a dependent creature a heaven-taught soul is! How it hangs upon the Spirit of God to work in it that which is well pleasing in his sight, how convinced it is that it cannot feel nor confess sin, that it cannot breathe forth prayer nor praise unless the God of all grace create by his own powerful hand these blessed fruits of the lips! Are you so helpless in your feelings as this? Are you such complete dependants upon sovereign grace? Then you are spiritually taught of God; for it is God's teaching in the soul which brings a man to an experimental knowledge of his own complete helplessness before him.

II. But we pass on to consider the other part of the text. "Peace, peace to him that is far off, and to him that is near."

"Far off!" What means that? It means that the soul passing through that experience is separated, in its feelings, and at an infinite distance from God. There is an expression in Psalm 61 which throws a light upon the words "far off:" "From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the rock that is higher than I" (verse 2). David there speaks of himself as being at the end of the earth, and from that distant spot crying unto the Lord, he places as it were the whole habitable part of the globe betwixt himself and God. He speaks of himself as at the very furthest bound of creation; not resting in God's bosom, nor lying at his footstool, nor taking hold of his strength, nor brought experimentally near by the application of the blood of sprinkling. The words "far off" and the

corresponding expression "from the end of the earth" point out an experience of distance. But what has brought the soul into this state of felt distance from God? A sense of sin laid on the conscience; for it is sin which makes the separation, according to those words: "Your iniquities have separated between you and your God." Sin has actually separated; felt sin experimentally separates the soul from God. It drives it, so to speak, to the end of the earth, to the utmost limit of creature existence. Now this inward sense of being far off, is one of the most painful feelings that a quickened soul can experience. The ungodly, who are really afar off, know nothing experimentally of distance from God, for they have never been brought spiritually near. They have felt no "cords of love, no bands of a man" drawing them with sweet attraction to the throne of the Most High; they have never sighed after the sweet manifestations of God's mercy and love; but they live gladly and wallow wilfully in those things which separate the soul from its Maker. But those who are far off in their feelings, are such as have seen something of the beauty of the Lord, and felt the evil of sin, who spiritually know Jehovah's purity and the creature's impurity, and have experienced the inward curse, bondage, and condemnation of a holy law. A spiritual discovery of his purity and holiness, making manifest their own vileness, has thrust them down from him; not daring to draw near, nor able to approach; not feeling any spiritual access, but sighing and mourning over their evil hearts in the wilderness, in desolate places; and unable to move a single step forward because the Lord does not draw them by his smile. A man must know something experimentally of this before he is brought near. How can he know the feeling of nearness if he hath not known a feeling of distance? How can we know what it is to be brought from the end of the earth, by the manifestation of God's mercy and love, unless we have been driven there, in our feelings, by some manifestation of the wrath of God against sin? But

to see the blessed Lord and not be able to draw near to him; to view his atoning blood at an infinite distance from us, his glorious righteousness well nigh out of sight, and his lovely Person out of the reach of our spiritual view, so as not to enjoy any access to these glorious realities, to know this experimentally, is to be far off from God. And I believe that God's people know very much of this feeling. There is not much nearness in our day: not much dandling on the knees, not much smiling upon the soul, not many love visits, nor tokens communicated. There is, indeed, abundant talking about them; and there are abundance of people who profess to have them, but I fear they are, for the most part, cheats and counterfeits. The real people of God, the true-hearted family are, for the most part, afar off upon the sea, for it is a dark and cloudy day in which we live.

But the Lord has spoken of another character, and described him as one that is "near;" that is, one brought experimentally nigh, who has felt the blood of sprinkling reconciling him to God, who has had the veil taken from his heart, who has had power communicated to approach unto God, and had a measure of spiritual access unto and blessed communion with him. But what is remarkable is, that the same promise is given to each: "Peace, peace to him that is far off, and to him that is near." These two characters seem to include all the quickened family of God: for all who are made alive unto God are in one of these two states, experimentally far off or experimentally near, enjoying God's presence or mourning his absence, fasting or feasting, lamenting or rejoicing, crying or blessing, dandled in the bosom or weaned from the breast. We find no intermediate state spoken of, no middle class, they are either far off or they are near in feeling. God in this text seeming to recognise no other states but these two. Let me not, however, be misunderstood. We are often in neither one nor the other, but not as a matter of Christian

experience. We have an experience of the flesh as well as of the spirit, and this experience of the flesh is coldness, deadness, worldliness, unbelief, and other corruptions. But the Lord does not recognise this as Christian experience, though too often the experience of a Christian. We say, therefore, that so far as we are under the teachings and leadings of the Spirit, we shall be experimentally far off and mourning distance, or experimentally near and enjoying access. Therefore, spiritually viewed, "far off " or "near" includes all. But there are an abundance of persons everywhere who are neither one nor the other. They are never near by the spiritual manifestations of God's presence, they are never afar off in soul-trouble and soul- sadness. They occupy what they consider to be a middle spot, which is in fact no spot at all, for they know nothing of frowns or of smiles, of banishment or of return; they know nothing of God's anger nor of God's love, guilt nor pardon, misery nor mercy, helplessness nor help, weakness nor strength, but stand upon an empty profession, having the mere shell and outside of truth without being led by the Holy Spirit into the secrets of the sanctuary.

To God's people then, summed up in these two classes, those that are far off, those that are near, there is a promise given; and that promise is redoubled to point out its certainty: "Peace, peace, to him that is far off, and to him that is near." Bunyan well represents this in his *Pilgrim's Progress*, where he speaks of Christian after being entertained in the House Beautiful, going to sleep in the chamber called Peace. What blessed sensations are couched in that word *Peace*! It was the legacy that Jesus left to his church: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you." The apostle says of it that it "passeth all understanding." Now many even of the Lord's people seem as if they wanted and were expecting raptures. There is, I

believe, a vast deal of enthusiasm in the natural mind of man, as is evident from what I may call its religious history in all ages; and this leads many who, in other points, seem rightly taught; to look for wonderful visions, ecstasies and raptures, things which nature can imitate, or Satan, as an "angel of light" counterfeit. False churches have had abundance of these. There are some most remarkable accounts in the legends of the Roman Catholic Church of the ecstasies and raptures of their so-called saints. Satan, as an "angel of light" can counterfeit these things to delude souls. But, I believe, Satan cannot bring the peace of God into the conscience. He may kindle a sort of infernal ecstasy; he may dazzle the mind with his juggleries and witcheries, and lift a man up in his own conceit into the "third heavens;" he may work upon the natural spirits and intoxicate the mind with the light and airy gas which he breathes into it. But he cannot speak gospel peace to the conscience; he cannot bring a holy calm into the soul. He could lash the waters of Gennesareth into a storm but there was only One who could say to them: "Peace, be still!" Satan may raise a storm in our carnal mind, but he cannot allay it; he cannot pour oil upon the waves, he cannot bring peace to the troubled breast and enable it to rest upon God. Of all spiritual blessings, none seem preferable to peace; and I believe that is what a child of God covets more than anything. For O how much is implied in the word *peace*! Is not man by nature an enemy to God? Then to be saved he must be reconciled, and that implies peace. Is not his heart often troubled, as the Lord said: "Let not your heart be troubled!" Then he wants peace. Is not his mind often agitated and tossed up and down by conflicting emotions? Then he wants peace to calm it. And when he has to lie upon his dying bed, O if he can but lie there in peace, peace with God through Jesus Christ, and a holy calm comes over his soul, flowing out of manifested mercy and felt reconciliation, it will beat all the raptures in

the world. How often we hear of a triumphant death-bed; and how Arminians of all shades and grades are continually trumpeting forth from their pulpits and publishing in their periodicals, triumphant deathbeds! May God, in his mercy, give me a peaceful one! It is better to close one's eyes with the sweet enjoyment of the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost, than to have all the raptures and ecstasies which may spring out of an excited nature. But to be blessed with peace, through the blood of sprinkling, before the soul glides out of its earthly tabernacle to enter into the haven of peace above, this indeed will make a death-bed happy, this will extract every thorn from the dying pillow, and enable the departing believer to say, with holy Simeon: "Lord, now lettest Thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation."

The word is redoubled, like Pharaoh's dream (Gen.41:32), to show the certainty of it: "Peace, peace;" as though the Lord would not content himself with saying it but once. He was so determined that it should come that he says: "Peace, peace." There is also another thing connected perhaps with the reduplication of the expression, that it becomes more especially promised to each of the characters mentioned in the text. Peace to him that is far off, and peace to him that is near. Perhaps thy soul is far off upon the sea, tossed up and down with doubts and fears, and exercised with sharp temptations and afflictions. There is peace promised to thee, though in thy feelings thou art far off from God. But another here, perhaps, is in a different state; his soul is indulged with some nearness of access to the throne of mercy. There is peace for thee; for thou needest peace as much as thy brother that is far off. If his troubled soul requires it to bring him near, thou needest it to keep thee near. Both need it, and both shall have it, for the promise is given to such.

III. "I will heal him." *That* closes the promise; that is the finishing stroke to God's manifested mercy. "I will heal him." As though the Lord had said: "He is a poor leprous wretch; he has an incurable disease upon him; he must die of his wounds, and bleed to death unless I step in; but he shall not die of his wounds, he shall not bleed to death, I will heal him. Whatever be his malady, whatever be the wounds of his conscience, I will cure him; he shall not perish; though he is beyond all human cure, he is not out of the reach of my healing hand."

These are sweet and precious promises, are they not? But *where* must we be, and *what* must we be, in order to value them? What must we know and feel to have a part in them, and to experience them? Must we not be spiritually in the same spots to which they are addressed? If, for instance, we can always confess our sins; if we can pray when we please, and bless God when we please, what manifested interest have we in the promise: "I create the fruit of the lips?" If we never are far off in feeling or never near in feeling; if we are never tossed upon the wave or never borne into the harbour of safety; what can we experience, what can we want to know of the promise: "Peace, peace?" If we are never sick and diseased, full of wounds and bruises and putrefying sores, a mass of filth and corruption before God, what manifested interest can we have, or want to have, in the promise: "I will heal him?" All God's promises are adapted to certain stages and states, certain characters and persons; so that unless we are experimentally in those states or those stages, and are those characters, the promises, however great and precious, are absolutely nothing to us. When the Lord, therefore, puts us into these states, it is that he may make the promises precious; and when he ratifies and fulfils any promise in the soul, he endears that promise by that very state in which the soul was before the promise came.

Thus until we come into such desperate circumstances that none but the God of all grace can, by stretching out his hand, save and bless us, until we are utterly weaned from creature help, false hope, carnal wisdom, and fleshly strength, we are not in a fit state to receive the manifold mercy of God. We are rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing, and know not that we are wretched and poor and miserable and blind and naked (Rev.3:17).

Every soul, then taught of God, that is in this state, has an interest in this promise. You may not be able to realise it, you may not be able to rise up to it, but I know this, you will be crying to God to fulfil it in your souls. You cannot do without the manifestation of peace, more or less powerfully in your conscience; and if the Lord has brought you there, he will in his own time and way open up these sweet promises, and convey the riches couched in them into your poor and needy heart. To him may we be kept ever looking; on him may our eyes be ever fixed, that he would fulfil his promises in our soul's experience, and do for us far more than we can even ask or think!

For are not these blessings worth seeking? When sickness comes and death draws near, when weeping relatives and anxious friends surround the dying bed, will you not want peace, peace, in your soul, that you may be able to look with joy into eternity, and resign your departing spirit with calm and holy confidence into the hands of God? Sin has set us far off from God. Where this is truly and deeply felt, we shall want to be brought near by the blood of sprinkling. And this alone will give support in life comfort in death, and happiness in eternity.