

THE PRECIOUS AND THE VILE

Preached at Eden Street Chapel, Hampstead Road, on Lord's Day Evening, August 24, 1845

"If thou take forth the precious from the vile, thou shalt be as my mouth." Jeremiah 15:19

Of all the prophets in the Old Testament none seem to have walked in such a rough and rugged path respecting the ministry as Jeremiah. Four distinct circumstances met in his case, which made the prophetic office peculiarly burdensome to him. One was, **the distresses of the times.** The Lord at that time was bringing judgments, such as sword, pestilence, and famine, upon the house of Judah; and these judgments falling upon the people of God, as well as upon the ungodly, made Jeremiah's lot peculiarly hard. A **second** circumstance was, **the persecutions that he had to endure** because he would not prophesy smooth things and speak peace where there was no peace. A **third** was, that he was left **to know and manifest more of the rebellion and peevishness of his depraved nature** than any of the prophets, if perhaps we except Jonah. And a **fourth** was, that **the Lord hid his face from him,** and did not appear for his comfort and deliverance in the way that Jeremiah earnestly longed to enjoy.

These four circumstances, meeting in Jeremiah's case, made his path as the prophet of the Lord so rough and rugged. We find him, therefore, in this chapter giving vent to the passionate rebellion of his heart. He says, "Woe is me, my mother, that thou hast borne me a man of strife and a man of contention to the whole earth!" He pities his mother that ever she gave birth to a child so deeply wading in the waters of strife and contention, and obliged to stand up so boldly in

the Lord's name. "I have neither lent on usury, nor men have lent to me on usury; yet every one of them doth curse me." He felt it was a painful path to endure almost universal odium, when he knew in his conscience that he did not deserve it—that he was not one of those wretched usurers who deservedly met with public scorn and hatred, but a friend to Judah and Jerusalem. He therefore pours out his soul to the Lord in these peevish and fretful complaints.

Now the Lord meets the prophet on these points. He says, "Shall iron break the northern iron and the steel?" that is, Shall this iron-hearted oppression that thou art passing under—shall this iron yoke thou art wearing—shall the bows of iron bent against thee—shall the gates of iron closed before thee—in a word, shall this trouble from without and within, which is to thee as hard and as strong as iron, be stronger than the northern iron and the steel of my covenant purposes, eternal counsels, and immutable decrees? Shall the stronger fall before the weaker? The northern iron being so much stronger and better tempered must break the ordinary metal; and the sharp steel must cut it utterly asunder.

This word from the Lord affords the prophet some little comfort; and therefore he answers, "O Lord God, thou knowest; remember me, and visit me, and revenge me of my persecutors; take me not away in thy long-suffering; know that for thy sake I have suffered rebuke. Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart; for I am called by thy name, O Lord God of Hosts. I sat not in the assembly of the mockers, nor rejoiced; I sat alone, because of thy hand, for thou hast filled me with indignation. Why is my pain perpetual, and my wound incurable, which refuseth to be healed?" And then, in a most inexcusable burst of passion, he says, "Wilt thou be

altogether unto me as a liar?" **What rash, unbecoming words for a creature of the earth, a worm of the dust, to address to the Almighty!** "and as waters that fail?" Hast thou promised, and wilt thou not perform? Hast thou declared thou wilt appear in my extremity, and shall it not come to pass? Are thy promises like a deceitful brook, dried up by the summer's sun?' **Job 6:15-20** In answer to this passionate cry, passing over with infinite forbearance and longsuffering his unbecoming appeal, the Lord gives him this word to support his fainting spirit: "If thou return, then will I bring thee again, and thou shalt stand before me; and if thou take forth the precious from the vile, thou shalt be as my mouth."

It is as though the Lord said, 'If thou return from this passionate, rebellious murmuring, from this unbelief and despondency, and yield thyself up into my hands, then will I bring thee again before this people as my honoured prophet, and thou shalt stand before me with acceptance as my ministering servant. And is not this thy highest honour—is not this thy greatest privilege—to be as my mouth? Dost thou want more? Have not I chosen thee for this purpose? Have I not called thee—have I not strengthened thee for the work? Is not **that** sufficient? Will I not stand by thee? Will I not bring thee safe through? Will I not honour my own word by thy lips? And canst thou think, when so honoured as to be my mouth to my people, that I will ever leave thee?' Thus the Lord supports his fainting spirit, and encourages the prophet still to stand up boldly and faithfully in his name, whether men will hear, or whether they will forbear.

Every servant of the Lord has to endure a measure of what Jeremiah went through. He has to endure persecutions, temptations, assaults from Satan, the workings of a rebellious heart, the hidings of the Lord's countenance, and a

whole train of trying circumstances. But these very things fit him for the ministry, and without them he would be but a dry breast to the Lord's quickened family.

In considering these words this evening, I shall endeavour to take up the two clauses of the text as they lie before me; first, by shewing the mind and meaning of the Holy Ghost in the words, "**If thou take forth the precious from the vile;**" and **secondly**, the promise connected with them "**Thou shalt be as my mouth.**"

I.—Ever since the fall of man there has been that which is "vile;" and ever since the first promise there has been that which is "precious" in the world. But let us dive a little deeper into the meaning of the words. I love to penetrate, as the Lord enables, into the mind of the Spirit. Let us see his mind in these two expressions—"**precious**" and "vile." Whatever comes from the flesh—whatever springs from the Devil—whatever is tainted with the pollutions of this fallen world, is "**vile:**" that is, abject, refuse, contemptible, fit only to be rejected and trampled under foot. Whatever comes from a covenant God, bears his stamp, wears his mark, and shines forth out of his glorious fulness—that is "**precious.**" Therefore, in one word, we may say, everything connected with the flesh and with fallen man is utterly "vile;" and everything that comes from Jesus, and is connected with Jesus, is unutterably and unspeakably "precious."

But, if we look at the words, we shall see, that "the vile" and "the precious" are apparently mingled together. And so they are in this fallen world. "If thou **take forth** the precious from the vile;" this implies that the precious and the vile are so apparently mingled together, so confusedly blended, and so often mistaken one for the other, that it requires divine wisdom and spiritual discernment to see what is vile and

what is precious; and that it requires divine power and heavenly teaching to take forth, to separate, to draw out the tangled threads, and clearly distinguish that which is precious from that which is vile.

And if we look a little more closely at the text, we shall see it does not say, 'If thou take forth the vile from the precious,' but the precious from the vile;' implying that the vile abounds in a far greater proportion than the precious. If there were a few grains of gold in a dunghill, you would not say, 'Take the dunghill from the gold;' but you would say, 'Take the gold from the dunghill.' If there were a few grains of wheat in a vast heap of chaff, you would not say, 'Take the chaff from the wheat;' but, 'Take the wheat from the chaff.' So, the very expression, "Take forth the precious from the vile," implies not merely that the vile and the precious are lying together in one heap, but that the proportion of the vile is so great in comparison with the precious, that the precious is to be taken from the vile, and not the vile taken from the precious.

Now, we may observe, in order to clear up the subject, that there are four distinct points of view in which the precious are to be taken forth from the vile by every man of God. There are **precious characters**, and there are **vile characters**. There are **precious doctrines**, and there are **vile doctrines**. There are **precious experiences**, and there are **vile experiences**. And there are **precious practices**, and there are **vile practices**. And all these are so intermingled, apparently so confused and mixed up with one another, that it requires divine illumination and divine power so to take forth the precious from the vile, as to make them manifest to be what God has declared them.

We will take, then, a glance at these four distinct things, in which the precious and the vile are mingled together.

I.—There are **precious characters**, and there are **vile characters**. Who are the precious characters? The children of God. And who are the vile characters? The children of the Devil. With all the various ranks in society, with all the different dispositions of the mind of man, and with all their outward circumstances, there are really but two grand classes—the children of God, and the children of the Wicked One. The saints of God, we read, are precious. "The precious sons of Zion, comparable to fine gold, how are they esteemed as earthen pitchers, the work of the hands of the potter!" **La 4:2** These are "precious," because God has made them so. They are jewels that will shine for ever in the Redeemer's mediatorial crown. They are precious, because they have an eternal standing in Christ, because God has blessed them with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in him, and because they are redeemed with his most precious blood "as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot" **1Pe 1:19**.

The "vile," on the other hand, are the children of the Wicked One; the tares that grow up with the wheat; the chaff that lies upon the threshing-floor with the pure grain; the dross that is mingled with the gold. And these are vile, because they are left to nature's corruption. They are vile, because they have no standing in the Son of God; not bought by redeeming blood, not justified by imputed righteousness, not quickened by the Holy Ghost, not brought into a participation of the treasures that are in Christ Jesus. God looks upon them as abject and refuse; and one day he will sweep them out of his presence, just as filth and dust are swept away out of our houses into the streets: "Reprobate silver shall men call them, because the Lord hath rejected them" **Jer 6:30**. "And ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes

under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, saith the Lord of hosts" **Mal 4:3**.

But these "precious" characters and these "vile" characters are intermingled. In a congregation, there are precious characters; in a congregation, there are vile characters. In a church, however pure, there are sure to be vile characters; and these vile characters are mingled with the precious, and require a discerning eye to see the difference. They are not, therefore, profane, but professing persons. If I walk through the streets, and see a man rolling in drunkenness, I know at once who he is; I am not deceived in him. When I see the men and women of this world flaunting about in pride, dress, and gaiety, I make no mistake; I do not suppose that they profess vital godliness. But when I go among the professing people of the day, then I require a discerning eye, a spirit of judgment to see and find out the difference between the mere professor and the real possessor—betwixt the "vile" hypocrite dressed up with a name to live, and a "precious," honest, God-fearing, spiritually-taught child of God. Now, whatever may be a man's consistency, enlightened judgment, gifts or abilities, if he is devoid of the grace of God, he is "vile;" he is but the chaff mingled with the wheat for a short time on the threshing-floor.

The minister of the Lord sent forth to do God's own work, is then to take forth the precious character from the vile character. But how so? By tracing out the work of grace upon the heart, by shewing the operations of the Holy Ghost in quickening, delivering, reviving, encouraging, and strengthening God's people. He will also shew, in a way not to be mistaken, the other side of the picture, pointing out with all clearness, and holding up conspicuously the distinction between the life of God in the soul, and all

pretension, profession, or hypocrisy that comes short of the inward light and life of God the Spirit in the heart.

II.—Again. There are **precious doctrines** and there are **vile doctrines**. These precious doctrines and these vile doctrines are apparently intermingled; and the office of the man of God, the work of the gospel minister, is to take forth the one from the other; to disentangle and separate them; to hold up what is precious to be received in the love of it, and to hold up what is vile to be rejected and turned away from with abhorrence. Now, every man of God, sent forth to preach God's word, will set forth and hold up the precious doctrines of the gospel of Christ; and every man sent forth to preach God's word will expose and denounce every vile doctrine, however it may wear the appearance of truth, however dressed up with human eloquence, however masked and disguised by the "cunning craftiness of those who lie in wait to deceive."

1. The doctrine of the glorious Trinity, Three Persons and One God, a Trinity in Unity, is a "precious" doctrine, and the foundation of all vital godliness.

2. The **eternal Sonship** of the Lord of life and glory—that he is the actual "Son of the Father, in truth and love;" that he is a Son by nature, and ever was a Son—is a "precious" doctrine, precious to the hearts of those who see the lovingkindness of God displayed in sending forth his only begotten Son out of his bosom to bleed and die for poor fallen man.

3. The incarnation of the Son of God, and his taking into union with himself our nature, and yet a holy, a spotless and unsinning nature, is another "precious" doctrine.

4. The personality and operations of God the Spirit, his work upon the soul in all its various branches, his divine teachings, his heavenly leadings, his special operations, his spiritual guidings—every part and every branch of the work of the Holy Ghost as a distinct Person in the glorious Godhead, equal with the Father and the Son, is a "precious" doctrine.

5. The redemption of God's people with atoning blood, that the Lord Jesus laid down his life for his sheep,—that he made a propitiation for their sins,—that he put away all their iniquities by his own sacrifice,—and that he is the only atonement made for sin—is a "precious" doctrine.

6. The superaboundings of grace over the aboundings of our iniquity; the reign of grace through righteousness unto eternal life; the sovereignty, freeness, and indefeasibility of grace—is a "precious" doctrine.

7. The sure perseverance of the saints till they reach the eternal mansions prepared for them before all worlds; the certainty of their attaining to their heavenly inheritance, and that they shall stand before the Lord in glory—is a "precious" doctrine.

In a word, all the doctrines of grace that are according to godliness, are precious to the man of God, and precious to the people of God.

But there are **vile doctrines**. There are vile Arian, vile Socinian, and vile Arminian doctrines, that detract from, that sully and tarnish the glory of free grace and the glory of a Three-One God, which elevate the creature instead of debasing, and lower the Saviour instead of exalting him. These are "vile" doctrines.

Everything that exalts the Saviour, and humbles the sinner, is "precious;" everything that puffs up the sinner, and degrades the Saviour, is "vile." Every doctrine fraught with godliness and divine fruits—every doctrine which is according to Scripture, that bears the stamp of God upon it, that is attended with the blessing of the Holy Ghost to the soul, that lays the sinner low, and exalts a precious Jesus in his heart—every such doctrine is precious. And every doctrine that feeds the pride of man, that exalts the creature, that invests him with some fancied natural self-righteousness, that deceives and deludes him into the belief that he is something in the sight of God which he is not—every such doctrine is "vile." And the man of God will take forth the precious from the vile; he will, as the Lord the Spirit enables him, shew the difference between those precious doctrines that exalt the Saviour, and those vile doctrines that exalt the sinner. He will shew the difference between those precious doctrines that give the glory to God, and those vile doctrines that take the crown from the brow of Immanuel, and place it on fallen man.

III.—Again. There are **precious experiences** and **vile experiences**. Just as the vile **characters** and the precious **characters** meet in the same chapel, and often sit in the same pew; and just as the precious **doctrines** and the vile **doctrines** are often apparently mingled together: so there are precious **experiences** and vile **experiences**. And the man of God is as much to take forth the precious experience from the vile experience, as the precious doctrine from the vile doctrine.

But what is precious experience? Everything that the Holy Spirit does in the soul, everything that springs out of his divine operation in the heart, is a precious experience: and every imitation, every delusion—everything that springs from

self and Satan, however it counterfeit the work of God—is "vile." And these two things are to be distinguished; their differences are to be explained, and one is to be taken forth, separated, and discriminated from the other.

1. Now, these "precious" experiences are, first, an experience of our own sinfulness, guilt, misery, helplessness, and ruin. To know this by divine teaching; to feel that we are sinners; to have the corruptions of our heart laid bare; to mourn and sigh on account of indwelling sin; to see the spirituality of the holy law, and behold the inflexible justice of a justly-incensed God; to view his glorious perfections, and feel our heart trembling within us at the sight of his glory., as a holy, just, sin-avenging Jehovah—this is a precious experience.

But then, there are **vile experiences** that counterfeit this. There is the working of a natural conscience, as there is the working of a spiritual conscience. There are convictions, troubles, sinkings, fears, which do not come from God, but spring from the flesh, or from the deceits of Satan as an angel of light.

The man of God is then to take forth the one from the other. He is to describe the difference between the two, to shew their distinct effect, to trace out the workings and to manifest the result of each. If our temptations and fears, our troubles and sorrows, our corruptions and burdens, our trials and perplexities never drive us out of refuges of lies, never lead to Jesus, never issue in gospel deliverance, never bring us to the Redeemer's feet, never make him precious to our souls—they are "vile." The man of God will trace them out; he will look at their result; he will describe their fruit; he will work out, as far as the Lord has taught him, their inward operations, and shew to what end they tend, and what they produce. He will shew, that if these convictions do not lead

the soul out of self, do not break to pieces the arm of creature help, do not beat out of lying refuges, do not make the soul honest and sincere, do not bring it with weeping and supplications to the Lord of life and glory, do not soften, do not break down and lay low, do not humble, do not separate from the world, do not empty of self, do not make Jesus precious; if these troubles and exercises begin where they end, and end where they begin—in the flesh, they will be condemned by him as "vile."

2. But **secondly**, every experience of the grace that bringeth salvation, every manifestation of mercy, every shining in of the light of the Lord's countenance, every ray of hope, every sweet sensation of the pardon of sin, every comforting testimony from the Lord's own most blessed lips, is a "precious" experience. But then, there is a "vile" experience that counterfeits it; there is a carnal presumption that mimics living faith. There is a false hope, the hope of the hypocrite, that counterfeits a good hope through grace. There are fleshly affections that counterfeit the love of God shed abroad in the heart. There is a false deliverance that counterfeits the deliverance into the liberty of the gospel. There are false comforts that counterfeit the consolations of the Spirit. There are false liftings up of fleshly excitement which counterfeit the liftings up of the light of God's countenance.

The man of God will thus also take forth the "precious" from the "vile," and shew the difference betwixt "precious" experiences and "vile" experiences. But how is he to know one from the other? An experience that is "precious" softens; a "vile" experience hardens. A "precious" experience melts, subdues, lays low, overpowers, overcomes, and brings to the feet of Jesus; a "vile" experience emboldens, puffs up, exalts, draws away from vital truth, and leaves the soul upon the

wide sea of error. True testimonies make the conscience tender; presumptuous claims only harden and sear it. Real teachings from God bring out of the world; mere counterfeits and imitations of divine teaching take a man more into it. Real experience leads us more into union with the people of God; counterfeit experience takes us from them. Real experience brings us down in humility to lie at the feet of Jesus; counterfeit experience lifts up into presumption to lay claim to his atoning blood, without any manifestation of it to the conscience.

A "precious" experience makes the soul meek, and fills it with unutterable sensations of brokenness, softness, and tenderness; a "vile" experience only leaves it more hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. A "precious" experience is attended with changes, ups and downs, sinkings and risings, ins and outs, withdrawals of the Lord's presence and shinings in of the Lord's countenance; alternate seasons of light and darkness, alternate feelings of life and death, alternate sensations of coldness and warmth, alternate times of breathing forth the heart into his bosom, and alternate times when all is dark, shut up, and contracted. But a "vile" experience knows nothing of changes; it is always at one spot; like ditch water, always remaining at one level; not like a spring to refresh, but like a standing pool,—always stagnant, and often stinking.

Now the man of God is to take forth one from the other; to trace out the work of grace upon the soul, and point out counterfeit imitations. And so to take forth, so to distinguish, and discriminate between them, that every child of God may have a testimony in his conscience that he has felt the operations of God the Spirit, and that the work upon his heart is sound and genuine.

IV.—But again. There are **precious practices** and there are **vile practices**. And these "precious" practices and these "vile" practices are to be separated; the "precious" practice is to be taken forth, and the "vile" practice is to be shewn up in its true colours.

Everything that springs from the flesh is "vile," and everything that springs from the Spirit is "precious." Two persons shall do the same act: it shall be a "precious" act in the one man, it shall be a "vile" act in the other. This evening, two men shall pass the same plate; they shall give exactly the same sum; and yet the gift shall be "precious" in the one, and the very same gift shall be "vile" in the other. Why? Because it springs from different motives. When a man does what he does with a single eye to God's glory—when he is moved by the Spirit—when he is led by gracious feelings, when he is wrought upon by divine motives, what he does is "precious." But when he does the very same thing from carnal motives and fleshly reasons, from the workings of nature in its best and brightest form—that very same act is "vile" in him which is precious in another man.

But these things are often mingled together; and therefore the man of God is sent to distinguish them. There are wolves in sheep's clothing: there are goats that bleat, and sheep that grunt. The swine may be washed, and the dog may leave his vomit; but this does not give either a sheep's heart. A sheep may besmear itself; but that does not give it the heart of a dog. So a minister, who stands up in the Lord's name, is to distinguish betwixt the "precious" and the "vile." He is not to set down all to the Spirit's work that appears at the first blush and merely at the surface to be of his operation: he is to enter, beyond the surface, into the depth of divine teaching in the soul, and look into the secret chambers where God the Spirit works. And then he will find,

that many things are precious which apparently are vile, and many things vile which apparently are precious.

There shall be two men in this congregation; they shall come here regularly; they shall sit upon the same seat, perhaps belong to the same church, believe the same doctrines, profess the same truths; the one, perhaps, may have greater gifts than the other, more able to explain his own mind than the other; and yet the one shall be "precious," and the other "vile." Their appearance is the same, their conduct the same, their consistency the same; yea, the "precious" may not walk so consistently apparently, nor be outwardly so unblemished as the other; yet one shall be really "precious," and the other truly "vile." The man of God is to look at objects in the Spirit's light; he is to trace out the work of God upon the heart, and separate that which is of God from that which is of man. This is the distinction he is to make, this is the line he is to draw. Whatever comes from the flesh—be it in its foulest, or be it in its fairest form—be it in its brightest, or be it in its blackest colours—is vile, abject, to be cast aside, and swept out of God's house. And whatever comes from God—however weak, however feeble, however trembling, however scanty, however little—is to be cherished, because it has come from God. He is not to be deceived by appearances, not to jumble into one vast heap precious characters and vile characters, precious doctrines and vile doctrines, precious experiences and vile experiences, precious practices and vile practices; but he is to take them forth, to separate them, to shew what is precious and what is vile; to lay them clearly down, cast the light of Scripture upon them, and trace them out by what he himself knows of the operations of the Spirit upon his own conscience. If he vitally and experimentally do this, he will be "as God's mouth."

II.—This leads me to the second part of the subject—to be "**as God's mouth.**" What is God's mouth to do? God's

mouth speaks to the heart. God's mouth addresses itself to men's conscience. God's mouth does a work for eternity. God's mouth penetrates through the ear into the very depth of the human soul, into which a heart-searching God alone can look. Now, if a man is enabled, by divine teaching, to take forth the precious from the vile, he is "as God's mouth," because then he speaks to men's consciences. If all be jumbled up together in one huge heap, if no line of distinction be drawn, if no separation be made—if there be no searching, no trying, no weighing up, no speaking to men's hearts and consciences, professor and profane, elect and reprobate, the hypocrite and the genuine child of God, are all mingled together, and the whole work of the Spirit upon the heart is made confused and uncertain. But when a man is enabled to trace out the heavenly teachings and divine operations of God the Spirit upon the heart and conscience, and say, ' **This** is of God, and **that** is of nature; **this** springs from divine teaching, and **that** is a counterfeit imitation; **this** is fleshly, and **that** is spiritual; **this** is the work of God, and **that** is the subtilty of the Devil;' when he is thus enabled to disentangle them, to take one from the other, hold them up, explain them, and cast the light of the Spirit upon them, then God's children have a testimony, and will say, 'I have felt **that!**' 'I have known **that!**' '**this** I have experienced!' '**this** has taken place in my heart!' 'I am sure I have felt **this,**' says one; 'I believe I have known that,' says another. When the work of the Spirit is thus cleared up, there is a witness in the hearts of God's people that the minister preaches God's truth.

Now the Lord's people have in their hearts that which is "vile," and that which is "precious." They have a vile nature, and they have a precious nature. They have the workings of flesh in them, and they have the workings of grace. They have a nature that is as corrupt as it can be; and they have a

holy and pure nature which cannot sin. But in their feelings these two are often mingled. They have vile desires, and they have precious desires. They have vile workings, and they have precious workings. And these are apparently mingled together, so that they often cannot tell—'Does this come from God, or does this come from the Devil?' 'I have been cast down—whence does that come? From God, or from Satan?' 'I have been raised up—whence does that come? From God, or from the Wicked One?' 'I have been comforted—whence did that spring? From the excitement of nature, or from the power of grace?' 'I have had sweet discoveries whence came they? From God, or from Satan as an angel of light?'

Thus the child of God will be exercised. He will not consider his experience is genuine as a matter of course. It must be explained and opened up to him. The light of God must shine upon it.

But when a man of God comes forth, and is enabled to take the precious from the vile, shew what is God's work, and what is not God's work, and what is the true teaching of the Spirit—then a child of God has a testimony in his conscience—'this is of God'—'**this** is really genuine'—'**this** will stand in the day of judgment'—'I have a witness in my heart, a testimony in my soul, that I am under divine teaching.' In this way a minister, as he takes forth the precious from the vile, becomes "as God's mouth." What he speaks comes with power. It does not merely fall upon the outward ear; it enters the heart, and does its work upon the conscience; it comes as from God into the hearts of God's people.

But what does God's mouth do? God's mouth does two things. God's mouth depresses, and God's mouth raises.

God's mouth convinces, and God's mouth converts. God's mouth pulls down, and God's mouth builds up. God's mouth slaughters, and God's mouth heals. God's mouth brings trouble, and God's mouth brings consolation. And the Lord's people want the Lord alone to speak to their souls. It is not what man can say that comforts their hearts; they must have the Lord's own lips, speaking with the Lord's own power. Every minister taught of God, commissioned by him, equipped by him, and thrust out by him, has this work to do, and to be "as God's mouth" to God's people; that what he speaks may have an effect—some to kill, and some to heal; some to wound, and some to comfort; some to cast down, and some to raise up; some to bring out of nature's righteousness, and some to clothe instrumentally with the glorious robe of Christ's righteousness. But if he be not "as God's mouth," he cannot do this. It will be all confusion: and there will be no separation, no heart-searching, no shewing things in their true light, no convictions, no consolations, no bindings, no deliverances.

Are these the things you love? When you go to hear, what is the prevailing bent of your heart? For amusement, from tradition, from custom? These are "vile" motives, not "precious" motives; for they do not spring out of the operations of God's Spirit. Do you go for this one purpose—that God may speak to your soul? Do you go with a single eye, looking up to the Lord, that he himself would speak to your heart—whether it be to reprove, or whether it be to comfort—whether it be to cast down, or whether it be to lift up? Do you look up to the Lord of life and glory, that he himself would speak to your heart? Now, if you do, you will want a minister who is "as God's mouth." You will not want his preaching to be all jumble and confusion; you have enough confusion and jumble in your hearts; you will want things disentangled. Sometimes you cannot see who are true

characters; you will want them held up to your view, that you may see whether you are one. Sometimes in reference to **doctrine**, the mind will be confused; and you will want the truth held up to your view, that you may see which is the doctrine that bears the stamp of God upon it. Sometimes you will feel confused as to your own **experience**: it is not deep enough, or clear enough. It is a weighty matter with you. and you want to have it traced out, weighed up, and cleared up, that you may have a testimony it is the experience of God's saints. Sometimes you are perplexed as to **practice**—'Is this thing to be done, or not to be done? Which is right, and which is wrong? Is it consistent or inconsistent? Is it agreeable to the mind and will of God?' Now, you want a minister who can do this for you; who can shew you who are the people of God, and who are not—what is true in doctrine, and what is false in doctrine—what is sound in experience, and what is delusive—what is true in practice, and what is wrong. If you have eyes to see what is precious, and eyes to see what is vile—if you have hearts to love what is precious, and hearts to hate what is vile—you will want to have the crooked made so straight, the dark made so light, and the perplexed so plain, that you may see clearly for yourselves where you are and what you are, and thus have a sweet testimony that God is your God.

But where shall we find this ministry? Where shall we look for it? It is a mercy if you have it here. It is a mercy if the Lord sends forth from time to time his servants into this place, to take forth the precious from the vile. And I believe the Lord has a purpose in causing this place to stand for his own glory, that there may be such a ministry among his children, according to men's different abilities, graces, and gifts. The Lord, we would fain hope, has purposed that this place may stand at this end of the town, that the precious might be taken forth from the vile, and thus God's mouth might speak

from within these walls to the heart and conscience of God's people. If it were not so, I should have no wish to stand here. I know that unless the Lord has taught and enabled me to take forth the precious from the vile, I have no business in any pulpit. For a man to stand there, to confuse truth and error, to blend together the children of God and the children of the Wicked One, to throw into one vast heap truth and lies, and not to distinguish betwixt the work of God and the work of the flesh—I know this, that God has never sent **him** into the vineyard. And I am sure, if God has not sent him, he will never profit God's people. But those whom the Lord has thus sent, thus equipped, and thus commissioned, he will bless to his people, for they are "as God's mouth." And you that fear God's name will sometimes have a sweet testimony in your consciences, that the mouth of God is speaking through them into your heart. You will have your doubts and fears sometimes removed: you will have your perplexities sometimes cleared up; you will have the secret feelings of your heart traced out; you will have the whole work of the Spirit upon your conscience brought before your eyes; you will have from time to time the secret liftings up of the light of God's countenance upon you, and refreshings from his presence, worth more than a thousand worms. And if you have ever felt the value and tasted the sweetness of these things in your soul, you will cleave to that ministry, and you will cleave to that people, who love these things. You will cleave to the men who, by divine grace and heavenly teachings, are enabled to set forth these things before God's own tried family; and you will say, 'To know and feel these things is all my salvation, and all my desire; let my lot be cast among this people, and let me enjoy the manifestations of the love and mercy of God to my soul. With this I can live contented, and with this I can die happy.'

Now, have you any testimony in your conscience that such is the ministry in this chapel? Have you ever felt the men of God who have stood up in this place to be the mouth of God to you? Have they ever laid bare the secrets of your hearts? Have they ever traced out the work of grace upon your conscience? Have any consolations been received into your soul from their lips? Then you have a testimony that it is the word of God. And if so, you will, from time to time, prize such a ministry, and cleave to it with purpose of heart.