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SERMON CCCXCII.

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MISTAKES IN EDUCATION.

“When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice, and I am persuaded that in thee also.” 2. Tim. i. 5.

THE Apostle here expresses confidence in the personal faith or holiness of Timothy; and by affirming that two of his nearest relations had been also sincere believers, intimates that there was a connexion between his faith and theirs; or that theirs was in some way causative or instrumental of his:—an intimation which accords with experience. What of true religion has existed among men, has, with little exception, been found among the descendants of the faithful. And this is only what might be reasonably expected from the nature of holiness, and of the parental relation, and from the ordinances, declarations and promises of God.

The connexion, however, between parental and filial religion, is very far from being invariable. Some religious parents have unbelieving and profligate children; others have large families, with scarcely one religious child; and an extended family circle, with no irreligious member is uncommon. That religion has increased among men, shows that family religion has been advancing; but had the children of pious parents been invariably pious, the Church long since would have had possession of the world.

Why is it that the connexion in this case is broken; that the unfeigned faith which dwells in parents, has too often no lodgment in the hearts of their offspring?

It is very true, and may be very appropriately said, at this place, that piety does not descend like depravity from parents to children, by a principle of nature, or a divine constitution, or any fixed law, positive or natural. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, whether

SERMON CCCXCIII.

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THE LORD DEPARTED.

“And he wist not that the Lord was departed from him.” Judges xvi. 20.

THE presence of God is the joy of his people, and the pledge of their prosperity. But, “woe to them,” saith the Lord, “when I depart from them!”

This the son of Manoah found to his cost. His was a remarkable experience. Even before his birth he appears to have been the object of divine regard in a peculiar degree. A child of promise, from his youth up he received the blessing of God, and was favored above many. “The child grew, and the Lord blessed him.” From an early age he was brought under the influence of the Spirit of God in a remarkable and extraordinary manner. “And the Spirit of the Lord began to move him at times, in the camp of Dan.”

He soon became the wonder of his age, by reason of the marvellous physical strength with which he appeared to be endowed, and gave rise, perhaps, to the fabled Hercules of heathen mythology. In some way unknown to us, and unknowable by man, the Spirit of the Lord imparted unto him a power that made him a terror to his enemies. On the occasion of his meeting a young lion at the vineyards of Timnath, we are told that “the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him, and he rent him as he would have rent a kid.” It was because “the Spirit of the Lord had come upon him,” that he was able to slay thirty of the men of Ashkelon, on another occasion. The same account is given of the power which he put forth, when, having been bound with two new cords and delivered into the hands of the Philistines, he burst them as if they had been flax burnt with fire, and slew a thousand of his enemies.

It has been much questioned whether Samson was truly a child of God or not. His life, it must be admitted, was very different

from that of David, and other holy men of honored memory. We can discover in it but little of the Spirit of adoption, and see but little, if anything, to confirm his claims to a place among the saints. It is to be borne in mind, however, that the record is short, and occupied more with the exploits of the man, and the wonders that he wrought in behalf of God's people, than with the life of God in the inner man of his heart. He is numbered by the apostle Paul among the Old Testament saints, "who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises," and the like; all of whom "obtained a good report through faith." If saved, it must have been, so as by fire.

That he was the subject, not merely of an occasional afflatus of the Spirit of God, but of an abiding operation, we may gather from the words of our text. His power was derived from his fellowship with the Holy Spirit. It was because of the abiding, or indwelling of the Spirit, that he was able to put forth such amazing strength. However necessary it was that, as a Nazarite, his hair should be unshorn, it was not in his locks that his might was treasured up. When he had been deprived of the hair of his head, it is said of him, that rising up after the deep sleep of which this advantage had been taken, he observed, "I will go out as at other times before, and shake myself;" not knowing "that the Lord was departed from him." In this departure of the Lord, or of the Spirit of the Lord, was his subsequent deficiency. "The Lord had departed from him," and therefore he became a prey to his enemies, and was brought to an untimely grave.

No truth is more clearly or frequently taught in the word of God, than that the Holy Spirit holds intercourse with human beings on the earth. How this intercourse is held, or in what way the Spirit of God influences, sways, and controls the spirit of man, is not to be explained or known in this present corporeal state. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit."

But it does not follow that we are to reject a doctrine, because there is something mysterious pertaining to it. The world is full of mystery. Man is a mystery to himself. God is all mystery. We must reject all these, and everything else connected with them, if we refuse to believe in the existence of anything that is at all mysterious or incomprehensible. That God is able to commune with the soul of man, to hold intimate intercourse with the human spirit, and to establish an uninterrupted correspondence with his intelligent creatures, must be admitted. You know it, and I know it. That he does do it is matter not only of revelation but of experience. Who is there among us that has not been made to know it again and again? The unconverted are, in every land where the gospel is preached, brought in unnumbered instances to

feel that there is a reality in these influences of the Spirit. When the truth is applied with peculiar power to the heart and conscience, and they are constrained to tremble in review of their sins and in prospect of a judgment to come, they cannot but own that "it is God which worketh in them."

"Say, sinner! hath a voice within
Oft whispered to thy secret soul,
Urged thee to leave the ways of sin,
And yield thy heart to God's control?
Sinner! it was a heavenly voice,
It was the Spirit's gracious call;
It bade thee make the better choice,
And haste to seek in Christ thine all."

But it is the child of God, more especially, that, by being made the subject in a peculiar degree of these influences, knows the reality of these gracious operations. Having been born of the Spirit he cannot but recognize his heavenly parentage. Taught by the Spirit, and led by the Spirit, he has a delightful perception of his divine teacher and guide, and cometh up from the wilderness, leaning on his beloved. Sealed by the Spirit of promise, and made a temple of the Holy Ghost, he cannot deny a present Deity. Brought to feel, from day to day, the constraining power of this Holy One, he often finds occasion to exclaim,

"Sure the blest Comforter is nigh!"

The fact, therefore, of this spiritual intercourse being admitted,—a fact that lies at the very foundation of the Christian scheme, and of revelation itself,—your attention will be directed to two considerations growing out of this fact, and suggested by the words of the text. Consider, first, the evil of losing the Spirit, and, then, that, however great the evil, we may not at the time be aware of it.

I. The departure of the Holy Spirit is an unspeakable evil.

If God can establish this spiritual intercourse, as we have seen, then he can also dissolve the connection thus formed, whenever he pleases. That this connection is frequently dissolved, wholly or in part,—that the Spirit of God, having communed to some extent with the human spirit, does at times, in particular instances, depart from the soul, is a fact as well attested as that of his intercourse with man. When Samson awoke from that fatal sleep into which he had been lured by his vile paramour, and went out to bestir himself, as at other times, he found, though he knew it not at first, that "the Lord had departed from him." That blessed Spirit, which, dwelling in him, and imparting to him grace in every time of need, had made him a terror to his enemies, and a tower of strength to his friends, had left him—and left him a prey to his foes.

The same truth is also taught in other passages of the word of God, and in numerous instances of similar bereavements. We are told in various language to court and cherish the Spirit of God, and admonished not to provoke him to leave us. "My Spirit shall not always strive with man." "Woe, also, to them when I shall depart from them. Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God." "Quench not the Spirit."

It may seem to those who have no desire for the favor of the Almighty, no regard for the joys of fellowship with God, no wish for the infinite bliss of heaven, no fear for the terrors of the world to come, who live to the flesh, and care not for another world, to be a light thing to lose the presence of the Spirit, and to be forsaken of the Holy One of Israel. But to one who has a soul and knows its worth, who is not willing to be shut out from the paradise of God, and to have his portion in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, there cannot be a greater evil than to be abandoned by the Spirit.

Infinitely great are the blessings that flow to the soul from a connection with the Holy Ghost, such as has been suggested. It is by the presence and operations of this Divine agent that

The soul of the stupid sinner is roused to a proper sense of his undone condition :

The sinner is constrained to confess, by being made conscious of his guilt, that he deserves the wrath and curse of the Almighty :

The convicted soul is made to feel its helplessness, to renounce entirely its own righteousness, and to look for salvation simply and alone to Jesus Christ, the only Redeemer of God's elect :

The soul, that was dead in trespasses and in sins, is made alive, born again, and made a new creature, being translated from the kingdom of Satan into the kingdom of God's dear Son :

The work of sanctification, from the very first stage of regeneration to the last of glorification, is carried on in the heart of the believer :

The child of God is sealed and secured against all the wiles, craft, and malice of men and devils ; and brought at last into the full possession of the promised and eternal inheritance.

Such are, in few words, the inconceivably blessed results of this spiritual intercourse. Not one of them all can be effected without it. This work is the prerogative of the Holy Ghost. To ascribe it to any other agent is to deny the faith. To impute to any Christian or any Christian church a denial of such honor to the Holy Ghost, is grievously to sin against God and his people.

If, then, these blessings all flow from the Spirit, how infinitely and indispensably important must it be for the sinner, the saint, the ministry, the church, to obtain and secure the presence and intercourse of the Holy Ghost ! What the life is to the body, the Spi-

rit of God is to the soul ; and vastly more. When the life of the body is gone, death ensues as a matter of course. When the Spirit leaves the soul, death spiritual ensues ; and if the Spirit return no more, death eternal. The sinner from whom he departs for the last time is given over to utter despair and hopeless ruin. The Christian from whom he departs for a season, becomes an object of pity ; and the Christian community, thus forsaken, becomes a prey to worldliness, formality, corruption, and soul-destroying error.

In confirmation of these views, survey the desolations of former days. Visit the seven churches of Asia. Behold the deplorable condition of those numerous churches that were founded by apostles, and built up by holy men that heard them. How lamentable has been for ages the state of the Greek, the Armenian, the Nestorian, the Jacobite, the Maronite, and the Roman churches ! Learn a similar lesson from the Lutheran and Reformed churches of Europe, and the Protestant establishment of Great Britain.

Are there not also in our own land many mournful examples of the same dreadful calamity ? May we not find, if not whole denominations, yet particular churches in every denomination, from which the glory is departed ? Are there not, too, in every church, particular individuals from whom the Lord has departed as he did from Samson ? May we not look around us, and within us, to-day, here, in this very house, and find not a few painful illustrations of this unparalleled evil ? How is it with you, yourself, my hearer ?

And is there—can there be, a greater calamity ? “Cast me not away from thy presence,” said the king of Israel, “and take not thy Holy Spirit from me.” Take, O Lord ! whatever thou wilt ; but, Oh ! take not away from thy people thy Holy Spirit !

“’T is paradise when thou art here,—
If thou depart, ’t is hell.”

II. *They from whom the Lord departs, are not always aware of it.*

The presence and agency of the Holy Spirit present no obstruction to the orderly operations of the soul with which this spiritual intercourse is established. The mind operates with as much freedom, at and after this connection and co-operation, as before. “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.” There is more freedom than there was before,—freedom from evil and counteracting influences. The presence of the Spirit is not, therefore, at once perceived, nor his operations recognized. The soul may be acting under this sweet and heavenly influence, so freely, as not to be aware, at least for some time, of the presence of the Comforter.

In like manner, the Spirit may withdraw from the soul in so much quietness, and in a manner so entirely free from all violence, as to give not the slightest note of warning; as to afford not the slightest intimation of the calamity that is impending. It is not affirmed that such is always the case. It may be otherwise. But ordinarily, the departure of the heavenly visitant becomes known only as in the case of Samson. The man seems to himself to be the very same, and what he seems to be he is. The current of his thoughts and feelings flows on as before; there is, perhaps, neither less nor more obstruction. He wakes from his slumber, and goes forth, like the son of Manoah, to his ordinary pursuits, and "wists not that the Lord is departed from him."

Is it a *church and congregation* that are thus deserted? They may not be at all aware of it, or if at all, not by any means of the extent of the evil. They look upon themselves with as much complacency as ever. They confide as much in their superior strength as before; nay, they may be vastly more confident, and boastingly say with Loadicea of old, "I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing." They may have abundance of outward prosperity; their assemblies may be large, and respectable, and intelligent, and refined, and wealthy. They may be perfectly confident that theirs is "the true church," that they are in the line of the true succession, that they are "the people." And yet, with all this outward show, the very last spark of spiritual life may be just expiring. They may have the form of godliness, and deny the power thereof. There is a body, but the soul is gone. The Lord is departed. Their house is left unto them desolate. The Spirit has left them, and they know not that they are "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." They "wist not that the Lord is departed from them."

Is it a *ministry* that is thus deserted? It is not the laying on of hands, however orderly or canonically, that makes a minister. "Receive ye the Holy Ghost!" said the Redeemer, and, having with the word imparted the gift, he sent them forth to "teach all nations." It is the Holy Ghost that makes men ministers and makes them successful ministers of the New Testament. Deprived of this "earnest of their inheritance," and this seal of their acceptance, their "orders" are empty, powerless, and worthless. A minister of the gospel may be learned, intelligent, accomplished, highly-gifted with shining graces, eloquent, persuasive, winning, melting, subduing, "a capital sermonizer," a first-rate orator;—he may charm, and delight, and move his hearers from their very seats, by the irresistible fervor of his powerful appeals to the heart and conscience, and his whole congregation, that have hung in crowds upon the words that fell from his lips, may go away fully convinced that theirs is the most powerful and eloquent preacher in the city or in the land;—and yet this very man may be in the case of Sam-

son, his locks shorn, his strength gone, and the Lord departed from him. He may preach on, month by month, and year by year, with the approbation of the multitude, and almost worshiped by the crowd that flock to hear him, while, all the time, Satan, the great and wily Philistine, may be binding him and his hearers with cords of iron, to make them grind in the prison-house of despair.

If my voice could reach the ears of my brethren in the ministry, I would with all affection and tenderness ask :—Is it thus with any of you? Has the power of thy ministry gone, and art thou wondering at the cause? Perhaps, brother! the Lord, thy life, has withdrawn his Spirit from thee, and thou knowest it not. If so, it is no wonder that thy preaching is so barren—that thou thyself, though speaking “with the tongues of men and of angels,” art “become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal.” Remember, Lord! the sons of Aaron, and, Oh! take not thy Holy Spirit from them!

Is it a *child of God* that is thus deserted? Little does he think, perhaps, of the calamity that has befallen him. Like the lion of the tribe of Dan, he may say, “I will go out as at other times before, and shake myself,” but he is not as he was before. He seeks his closet, and bows the knee in prayer; but he prays not as he did, nor with the fervor and sweetness and importunity of former days. The power of prayer is gone. It is mere lip-service. He goes to his Bible, he turns to the melting tale of “Christ and him crucified;” he reads,—but he might almost as well have closed the book before he began to read. He neither takes the sense, nor remembers what he has read. It is gone from him. His heart is not in it. His heart is elsewhere. He becomes uneasy, restless, and impatient. He is easily fretted. He is often betrayed into sinful passion. He speaks even to some of his best friends as one out of humor. Every thing goes wrong. Every thing is out of joint. Nothing suits him. Nothing succeeds with him as formerly. He goes from ordinance to ordinance, from church to church, from denomination to denomination, but gains no advantage, finds no relief. Or if any at all,

“T is but a poor relief he gains,
To change his place, and keep his pains.”

He finds fault with his minister, his elders or deacons, his fellow-Christians, “the church,”—of all but himself. His soul languishes, his gifts and graces wither, and all the symptoms of a spiritual consumption are upon him. His religion becomes a cold formality, dreary, comfortless and desolate.

All this while, it may be, he knows not what ails him. He wonders that he is not as he once was—that he feels not the same interest in the social meetings of the church, in the spiritual prosperity of his family and friends and fellow-Christians. Is it thus with

thee, my brother? Have I described thy case? Look now at poor Samson, going out as before, but alone, unattended as formerly by the Holy One. Is it not thine own condition? Wretched state! Alas! that any one should continue in it! The Spirit gone, and he wists not that the Lord is departed from him! The Lord help every poor backslider to lay it to heart, and to cry with David, "Restore unto me the joys of thy salvation."

Is it *an unconverted sinner* that is thus deserted? The Spirit, as we have seen, is busy with the unconverted wherever the word of divine grace is proclaimed. In seasons of the special outpouring of the Spirit, very many of the unregenerate are brought into a condition in which it may be said to one and another of them,— "Thou art not far from the kingdom of God." As long as the Spirit strives there is hope. If the Spirit departs, the sinner receives "the grace of God in vain." Under the gracious operations of the Holy Ghost, he is brought, perhaps, to feel that "the Lord's time" has come;—that "now is the accepted time," and that "now is the day of salvation." He is told not to grieve the Spirit, not to harden his heart, to submit himself to God, and to present himself a living sacrifice to God NOW. He feels the force of the appeal, has not a word to say against the truth, is conscious that every obstacle has been taken out of his way, and that he has only to fall into the hands of the Lord, in order to be at peace. But he hesitates, puts off the decision and the doing of his present duty, and continues to delay, hour after hour.

The crisis is past. He is the same as before, and yet not the same. He knows that he ought penitently to forsake his sins and return to the Lord, and he says: "At such a time I will do it." The time comes, but he feels a stronger reluctance than ever to do it. A feeling of insensibility, if it may be so called, steals upon him. The preaching moves him not as it did. By imperceptible degrees, one impression after another wears away, one fear after another departs, one care after another succeeds, until the very desire of being a Christian seems to have left him. The change is at no time sudden, but like the stealthy approach of twilight, or the flattering advances of the fatal consumption. It comes upon him unawares, "like a thief in the night."

He, of whom I speak, is all this while a most respectful member of the congregation. He believes as firmly as ever in the claims of the gospel, and is as firmly convinced of his need of its gracious provisions. He seeks the house of God on the Sabbath, renders a marked and exemplary attention to the preaching of the word, observes the strictest propriety in his daily conduct, and carefully refrains from all immorality. But he is not converted; he is, to all human appearance, far less likely to be converted, than he was weeks and months ago. He cannot see that he has done any thing to bring about such a result. He has stately and carefully

used the means of grace, has put himself in the way of God's blessing, as he thinks, and wonders at his own stupidity. He rouses himself anew to make another effort for securing his soul's salvation, and says,—“I will go out as at other times before, and stir myself up;” but alas! he finds that he is not now as he was before. He is bound in fetters of brass, and his power is gone. And why? He delayed repentance; he refused to obey the voice of the Lord in “the accepted time,” he grieved the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit is gone. The poor man is left to himself, and “he wists not that the Lord is departed from him!”

Woeful case, indeed! But, my impenitent hearer! is it not your own? I tremble for you lest yours should be this most unhappy state. I pray God that you may never know what it is to be cast entirely away from his presence. Fellow-sinner! I am in great heaviness on your account. I fear that you have thus grieved the blessed Spirit, and put away from you the day of grace. Do you tell me, that you will seek the Lord again, at least on a dying-bed? Do you fancy that your locks will then be grown again, and that you will then have power to burst the bonds of sin and death? Yes, indeed! if you are one of God's dear children. But if not, you have no such encouragement. There is not a single promise to meet your case. The Lord has departed, and, perhaps, never to return. Then, if he returns not, if he answer not when you call, if he turn a deaf ear to your intreaty,—then, alas!—and I tremble to record it, my heart bleeds at the very thought,—then the Philistine will bind you in fetters of adamant; then he will mock your dying agonies, and make sport with your cries and your groans in the world of woe for ever!

Oh! that I could prevail upon you now to receive the Spirit—to listen to his voice—to welcome him to your heart! That Delilah who has so long beguiled you, and kept you from the Lord, will be your ruin, if you suffer her to put you to sleep, if you listen to her, and not to the Holy Spirit. Break away from the syren.—Lose not, I beseech you, your precious soul. I would persuade you, if I can, (and may God help me to prevail with you,) to give all up for Christ, before I leave you. When next we meet, it may be at the judgment-seat. The Lord prepare us now to pass that solemn test, and bring us to see his face in glory.