

## A PRESENT HELPER

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A SERMON

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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

*“I am with you.”*  
*Acts 18:10.*

THE Apostle Paul was about to be placed in imminent peril. He was to be brought before the Roman governor, Gallio. The Jews, rank and rabble, were hopeful that they would get him condemned to death. In this threatening crisis the Lord Jesus would give him a word of comfort to strengthen him, that his courage might not fail. The best, the most assuring word that the Savior could speak to His servant was this, “I am with you.” Nothing in Heaven or earth could be more fitted to cheer his tried spirit! To know that Jesus was with him, approving, supporting, defending him, was a safeguard against fear. Years afterwards, when Paul had to stand before the Roman emperor whose will was absolute, whose fiat could have put him to instant death, he had no man who dared stand by him. A poor despised servant of a despised Master, he was not, then, cast down or disheartened, for he said, “Nevertheless, the Lord stood by me.” Under the worst circumstances, true Christians find the richest comfort if they do but know that Jesus is with them! When our Lord went away to Heaven and left His disciples on earth, they were like a flock of sheep surrounded with wolves. Just then He would surely give them, as a parting word, the most tender and the most encouraging sentence that could fall from His lips. What do you think He said? Why, one of His farewell words was this, “*Lo, I am with you always*”—a dear and blessed legacy to His children who are still in banishment below! And when John, in Patmos, had a vision of Jesus in His Glory, where, do you think, did he see Him? Did he see Him as standing before the Throne of God, or in any position of Glory? Yes, he did, but first of all he said, “I saw Him walking among the golden candlesticks.” Now, he tells us, these golden candelabra represented the Churches—and Jesus Christ was pictured even as a glorified Savior, holding the seven stars in His right hand and walking among the seven golden candlesticks! Hence I gather that the truest comfort of the Church is for Christ to be with us—and that one of the highest joys of Jesus is to be with His people!

I shall ask you, now, to consider the grateful fact that Jesus is with Believers. The words, “I am with you,” may be taken in three ways—and the three must be combined to get the whole of their sense.

“I am with you.” This implies His *Presence*. That would not be enough—a person is not with us if he is merely in the same place as a spectator. “I am with you” expresses His *sympathy*. He is not here as a stranger, but He is here feeling for us, compassionating with us. “I am with you” has a yet deeper significance. It involves *succor*. He is working with you—on the same side—exerting His power in connection with yours. Put the three together, and you get presence, sympathy, co-operation, to interpret the meaning. We will take the three words, and oh, as we take them, may we realize them as our own! The words, “I am with you” leave no doubt of—

### I. THE PRESENCE OF CHRIST.

Believer, Jesus Christ’s spiritual and most real Presence is with you! This should greatly comfort you because it is the Presence of One whom you dearly love and who reciprocates that affection with an accord so intimate that every hope or fear you feel is reflected in His breast. His heart beats true to you. I might almost say His nerves vibrate in sympathy with you! Oh, how it calms the mind in the midst of difficulty or danger, if we have near us, by our side, One toward whom our heart goes forth and from whom a kindred yearning comes back! The child sleeps sweetly when it is with its mother, watched and tended by her quick eyes and ready hands. The loneliest part of the pilgrim’s road is relieved of its tediousness and its terror when some dear companion is with him, in whose fellowship he can agree, upon whose arm he may lean and whose constancy he can trust to share any danger. A sprightly word, a kindly look, a brotherly act seem like timely aid to us all when we are tired, footsore, out of our course, and out of spirits. Ah, then you could not have a sweeter

Friend with you than you have in Jesus! The society of brother or sister, husband or wife, parent or guardian, can never equal the hallowed peace of communion with Jesus, who loved you, lived for you, died for you, still lives for you, gives His whole heart to you—and only asks that you give your heart to Him in return.

Still more precious does this Presence of Jesus become when we think how ennobling it is. Some people talk all their life of having been once in the society of some great person. That is, indeed, a foolish pride! Very empty! But to have been in the society of Jesus is worthy to be remembered, deserving to be recorded and most desirable to be repeated! I reckon that the angels would look more respectfully towards a man who has had communion with Jesus than they would at a council of kings and emperors, or a parliament of princes and peers! We are made priests and kings who enter into fellowship with our great High Priest and King. His Glory overshadows us. Though He is transfigured in a way we are not, yet we participate somewhat in His honors, now, and we shall be altogether partakers of His Glory, by-and-by. “I am with you,” then, is the voice of a tender Friend, and one of a superior Nature who confers dignity by His companionship!

This—“I am with you”—is an enlivening cry. It inspirits a man, quickens his pulse and enables him to bid defiance to danger. We remember when Paul was in the ship tossed with tempest—what fear seized all persons on board! So much were they discouraged that they would probably have been unable to do anything for their own rescue had not Paul, with the coolness of faith, chided their panic, gave them counsel and bid them to eat, for, as he said, “this is for your health.” After long fasting, he saw the necessity of taking refreshment. And he led the way. He took bread, gave thanks to God in the presence of them all, then broke the bread and began to eat. This manly fortitude, this moral courage of the Apostle, repressed the general agitation and nerved them all with fresh hope, insomuch that they were all of good cheer and they also took some food. This was the turning point in their fortune and, in the end, they, everyone, came safe to land. Thus full often has it been in the time of battle. When the troops have been ready to flee, one able man has stood like a rock, has made caution look like cowardice by his own defiance of danger, has given a word which has made every soldier feel himself a hero, lion-hearted, not milk-livered! And so the battle has been turned. “I am with you,” there, O Christian, is the voice of One whose Presence fills your soul with dauntless courage! No fear when Jesus is near! None can be defeated who have Him to bring them succor. The Presence of Christ with us puts an end to morbid apprehension and ghastly cowardice!

When we are told that Jesus is with us, we remember that His is a Presence which causes intense delight. We have seen men with money, who were not happy. We have seen men with honor, who were not happy. We have seen persons in power, with the command of empires, yet they were not happy. But we never saw, and never will see the individual who has Jesus with him, who is not happy! To be near Him, to have Him with us is to have our fears relieved, our griefs soothed, our wounds healed and all our sorrows turned into joy! One drop of Jesus’ love would turn the whole ocean sweet! Yes, though the bitterness within you seems to have penetrated your whole being, let but Jesus whisper, “You are Mine and I am yours,” and the bitterness would turn to honey at that one single phrase! Only a glimpse from Jesus’ eyes and the darkness is turned to noonday. Only one word from Jesus’ lips, and the tempest that raged becomes calm and the ruffled sea is still! “I am with you” bespeaks the Presence, then, of One who brings you delight.

And this Presence, as I have already hinted, transforms the soul. When Jesus is with us, He makes us like Himself. He that lives near to Jesus becomes so like Jesus that others, “take knowledge of him that he has been with Jesus.” Put these thoughts together and you will see how infinitely desirable and how exquisitely satisfactory the company of Christ is. But, ah, my words cannot tell you, though I had the tongue of the orator or the sweeter strains of the poet. Yes, the inspiration of the muse would fail to acquaint you with it! You must know it for yourself, or else you can never realize how transporting these words are—“I am with you”—Jesus present with His own people!

Now some of you know, by a happy experience, times and seasons when Jesus is specially present with His people. I trust we have often found Him so at the hour of prayer. Rising in the morning, it is sweet to find in those few minutes we give to God before we see the face of man, that, like the Psalmist, we can say, “When I am awake I am still with You.” Then at nightfall, when the day’s work is over, and we are about to lie down and rest, it is good to find, as we kneel before Him once again, that Jesus is there! And, Oh, some of us have proved what it is in the watches of the night to have His sweetest company! When darkness compasses us, silence awes us and sleep has deserted us, our soul has said, “Now will I speak with my Beloved,” and we have always found Him awake! A sigh has reached His ears—the fluttering of an unfledged prayer! A desire after Him has brought Him near to our side, close to our bed, present to our heart. We have

thanked God for sleeplessness when we have had our beloved Master talking with us and indulging us with a blessed sense of communion! And, oh, how near Jesus is to His people when they are passing through the stage of penitential love. I hope you often get there, when sensitive to your own imperfection and unworthiness before God, you are abased and humbled, yet looking up at the same moment to that dear Cross on which He bled because we sinned! You see your pardon and acceptance written in crimson lines on the fair body of the dying Savior! I do not know that I have ever more tenderly felt the Presence of Jesus than when, while my heart has been broken with a sense of my own worthlessness and insignificance, I have confidently fled for refuge to the hope that is set before me in the finished Sacrifice and the perfect Redemption that Christ has accomplished!

But, Beloved, Jesus is present to us not only in our acts of penitence and devotion, He is present with His people in the battle of life! Yes, He will go with you to the workshop. The street is not too common for Him to tread side by side with you. Jesus can stand with you in the market. You can as truly maintain fellowship with Christ in your buying and your selling, if your commerce with the world is conducted in the fear of the Lord, as in your praying and your reading, which are of small account, unless “you have an unction from the Holy One.” No kind of labor will ever make Christ take an aversion to you, however humble your toil, however poor the chamber in which that toil is carried on, or however rough may be the garb in which you have to earn your daily bread. Jesus cares not for these. ‘Tis your soul He looks for and if you hunger and thirst for Him, He will go with you into the lowliest places and you shall find it true, “I am with you.”

More especially, beloved Friends, in the ordinances of God’s House, may we look for the refreshment of the Lord’s Presence. Oh, what a beloved place this Tabernacle is when Jesus is here, manifestly in our midst, and witnessed by many hearts! It would be a poor meeting house if only the minister and the congregation, however large, were congregated together within its walls. Poor would it be, notwithstanding all the accessories of worship, yes, even with the bread and the wine, the elements of the Communion Supper, spread in rich abundance, without the Lord, Himself, here to bless the feast and feed the communicants! But, ah, when the King sits at His Table, then our spikenard gives forth a sweet smell and our heart is merry within us, even as the angels that are before the Throne of God! Does He not come to you as you sit in the pews, Beloved, and say to you, “I am with you”? And when you gather yourselves together to partake of the Communion Supper, is He not with you there? Do you join in the solemn hymn, or do you unite in earnest prayer? What is it that makes the service enlivening, elevating, instructive and fruitful but the consciousness of His Presence—this same “I am with you.”

Yes, and when the time shall come for you to have done with ordinances—when the preacher’s voice shall no more reach your ears, when the melody of sacred song shall cease to enter your senses—when you have joined here below for the last time in the fellowship of the Supper of the Lord, for you must bear the clammy sweat upon your brow, and wear the mortal paleness on your cheeks as you are about to pass through what they call the “gate of tears”—even *then* you shall find it a gate of endless joy because this shall be true to your experience in the highest sense, “I am with you.” Fear not the darkness! Dread not the loose pains, shrink not from the weakness, tremble not at the advent of the grim King of Terrors. “I am with you” will change the hue of that affliction and when you are very ill, make you say that all is well!

Oh, if my Lord would come and meet me, my soul would stretch her wings in haste, fly swiftly through death’s iron gate, nor feel frightened as she passed! So it shall be with you. I have but skimmed the surface of this first point—the *Presence* of Christ—“I am with you.” Do not any of you skim it. Go into the depths and enjoy it, Beloved! The words still further express—

## II. SYMPATHY.

Remember that Christ in very deed feels in His heart the sorrows of His people. Are they in the furnace? He walks the fire with them. Are they in the rivers? He says, “When you pass through the rivers, I will be with you.” And this is grounded upon the precious Doctrine of Vital Union. Every Believer is livingly one with Jesus. Jesus is the Head, and the Believer is a member of the one mystical body. Now you see, whenever a member suffers, the Head must suffer, not only because the Head wills to suffer, but because of necessity—if there is a vital union, there must be a real sympathy. Let this be, then, a matter of faith with us. If I have believed in Jesus unto everlasting life, Jesus is one with me as my Head, and He must—whether I apprehend it or not at the time—He must be in sympathy with me. This He shows by the tender pity He has for His people. Do not think He is ever hard or unfeeling towards His poor, His afflicted, His depressed dis-

ciples! No, Brothers and Sisters, the heart of Jesus is full of tenderness! His heart melts with love, as He often proves by the sweet converse He has with them. Though He may leave the strong sometimes to bear, for awhile, the hardships, and grapple, as it were, alone with the troubles of life, He will not leave His tried and tempted ones, or suffer them to faint by the way. Like a mother that lets her full-grown boy alone to shift for himself, but will scarcely go out of doors while the baby is ill, so will He watch over them. And has not Jesus been very, very watchful over us in times of pain, weakness, and serious apprehension? You know He has! He has kept His best succor till we had got into our worst plight. When we had spent all and exhausted every resource, then He has come and brought Himself to our aid—and we found Him our All-in-All. Oh, what true sympathy this is! “A friend in need is a friend indeed.” He treats us better as we grow worse. This is just the Friend we need. One with us by vital union, He proves His oneness by His tenderness.

Now, Beloved, if this is so, the very first sympathy you ought to seek in any time of trouble is that of Jesus. You have not always gone promptly to Him. You have been far more ready to run off to some kinsman or neighbor and ask counsel or succor of an earthly helper. What would you think of a wife—would you think she had much genuine confidence, much good understanding, much true love to her husband, if, on any sudden trouble or anxiety, she left him, fled from her home, crossed the road, entered another person’s house and poured into another man’s ears the story of her plaint or her peril? You would feel convinced that there was a lack of mutual love and reciprocal fellowship! And should it ever be that your soul goes after some poor mortal for consolation—when the Beloved Bridegroom of your spirit can afford you all you need—to ask advice? It is often a helpful means, but go first to Jesus. Tell Him all! Pour out your heart before Him. He is with you. Oh, will you neglect One who is with you, and play Him so ill a part as to seek another’s help when He is ready to give you all His help—His sympathizing help in time of need? The sympathy of Jesus will, in all probability, be most clearly manifested and most richly enjoyed by you at such times as you are most in need of it. Thus, when you are persecuted for His sake, He will not hide His face from you!

We are not likely to be burnt at the stake, or even cast into prison for the profession of His name in these days of civil and religious liberty, but there are divers tortures from which our fine sensibility shrinks, such as household persecutions. Little petty spites are often vented upon Believers for Jesus Christ’s sake. Now do not think a strange thing has happened to you! Take it as a natural consequence of not being of the world—and then hear the Savior say, “I am with you. I am reproached in your reproach. I am scorned in the scorn that is cast on you.” Paul persecuted Jesus when he thought he had only persecuted some poor Jews. And the enemy persecutes Jesus when he persecutes a Believer. “I am with you,” then. Will you not say, “Lord, I will bear it for Your sake, and in Your company. Yes, if it were a thousand times worse, I would feel honored to endure it, if You are with me”? You will find Him with you sympathetically in your common sorrows. Remember, Jesus does not look for extraordinary occasions in which to sympathize with His people, though He will do it peculiarly then. But at all other times He is a faithful, feeling Friend. “Jesus wept.” It was at the death of Lazarus. Lazarus was only an ordinary saint—an ordinary Believer. There was nothing so remarkable about his death as to make it exceptional. Think not for a moment that in the loss you have sustained, Jesus will keep aloof. With the grief that now weighs down your spirit, He fully sympathizes. In the griefs which are common to mankind, He bears you company. But if you should ever come into deeper waters—if you should have to cry, “My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?” then you shall still hear Jesus say, “I am with you,” for He knows what strong temptations mean, and deep depressions and despondence that borders on despair. He has passed through all, that as the Captain of our salvation He might be made “perfect through suffering.” “Tempted in all points like as we are,” there is no grief in which Jesus is not near to us—we have but to open the eyes of faith and we shall see Him with us, even in the worst extremities of grief and pain!

“I am with you in sympathy.” This shall be found true anywhere and everywhere by the Believer—yes, even in death, itself, for Jesus died! He knows the death sweat, for He sweat, as it were, great drops of blood. He knows the fever, for He said, “I thirst.” He knows the fainting, the languishing, for He said, “I am poured out like water; I am brought into the dust of death.” He knows death in its severest form. He died as you will not die. Under the Divine displeasure He passed away, but you shall have the light of the Divine Countenance amidst the shades of death. Fear not, therefore, that Jesus will forsake you! You have Jesus’ sympathy. I want you to feel that. Well do I know what a precious thing sympathy is. A little child’s sympathy will do you good. “Mother,” said a little girl, “I do not know why Mrs. So-and-So wants me to go into her house so often, but she told me, when I came home tonight, to be sure and go tomorrow, for I comforted her

so, now her husband was dead. And do you know, Mother, all I do is, when she cries, I put my face against hers and I cry, too—and she says that comforts her.” And so it does. It is just that. We are not alone. Somebody—somebody cares for me! We shall never despair while we feel that is true.

Now there may be somebody here tonight who is alone in London—and you had better be alone in the deserts of Sahara. To be alone in London is to be alone, indeed! And you are thinking, “Nobody cares for me.” But if you will take Christ to be your Friend—if you trust in Him—Jesus will care for you and He will surely help you, for He is not one of those who will put you off by saying, “Be you warmed and be you filled.” He will practically show His love to you, and you shall yet rejoice that Jesus is with you! You are not alone, though you seem alone.” There I leave that second point, praying that you may all know the sympathy of Jesus. Once more—

**III. CO-OPERATION** is implied in the words, “I am with you.” This was just what Paul needed. He had come down to the city to preach, and God said to Him, “I have much people in this city. I am with you.” So Paul went to his preaching with a cheerful heart, for he felt that if the Lord was with him, it was good to preach. With good sowing, there would be good reaping. Now listen, Worker—worker for God—and see if there is not music for your ears in this thought. Jesus co-operates with you! How so? Why, He commands Providence! All things are ordered according to His will! The Father has given all power into the hands of Jesus. He regulates the fields of Providence, that they may produce the best results for you. Go on, confidently, then. All things are favorable to you. As Mohammed said, in his way, to his followers, “Swiftly on to the battle, and win! I can hear the tramping of the angel Gabriel’s horse as he rides into the thick of the battle to help you.” They believed it and were comforted. What he said in lies, Jesus says in truth—“I am with you.” You can hear the footsteps of the Prince Emmanuel! His power is ruling all creation to produce the grand result of His Glory in the salvation of souls. “I am with you”—that is, “I will prepare human hearts for your message.” You that talk to others will often find others ready to be talked to! It is a cheering thought to the preacher that he has always a picked congregation, selected by Divine Providence, that out of them Divine Grace may make a further selection! They are prepared. As the rain and the wind and the frost will prepare the clods for the plow and the seed, so do God’s Providence and the work of Grace prepare men’s hearts for the Gospel! “I am with you.”

Moreover, Worker, Jesus is with you, helping you. He will suggest suitable thoughts. He will give you right arguments. He will often guide you to fitting words. Only trust Him and when you go about His business, the Holy Spirit shall be your strength! He will be with you to back up the Word of God you utter, by the power of the Holy Spirit going with it to convince men that what you say is God’s Word to them. Fear not, therefore—if the converting of souls depended upon *you*, it would never be done! If a nation had to be reformed and the whole of another nation had to do it, it would never be achieved! But the Spirit of the Lord is not straitened, and what He wills to do He can accomplish, and none can say no to Him!

Lastly, O earnest Worker, Christ is with you to accept your service. Nobody has taken any notice of you lately. You have gone plodding on at your work with not a creature to help, and none to praise. Even your friend who used to, sometimes, give you a nod of approbation, appears not to have observed you lately. Never mind! Never mind! No servant that is deeply absorbed in his work cares much about what other servants may say about him by way of commendation. But if his master comes along and says, “Well done, good and faithful servant!” that is what he needs to cheer him! Some people will be overhauling your character—I know they do mine—and they are extremely welcome, for I care not as much for their opinion as for the barking of dogs in the streets! If my Master were angry with me, I would mind it, but they are no masters of mine, and they may say what they like. If my Master smiles, all the world may frown, it does not matter! But if my Master frowned, then if all said, “Well done!” it were but a poor, poor recompense to me. Servant of God, be this, then, your joy! “I am with you,” says Jesus, “to see what you are doing—to accept and take your will for the deed full often—to read your real motives where men misconstrue them. I am with you. Therefore, go on your way.” Sunday school teachers, tract distributors, or whatever you may happen to be—in one word, beloved child of God seeking to serve Jesus—take, then, this fresh from Jesus’ lips, “I am with you,” and go your way in the power of this, your might, to serve your Lord without weariness, till He shall say, “Come up higher.” “I am with you”

Oh, you that have not any Savior to be with you, I pity you! But I would say this to you—He is still to be had. There is still—

*“Life in a look at the Crucified One.”*

Jesus still has blood in which to wash the guilty—still has room in His heart for needy sinners—and the way to have Jesus for your Savior is simply to trust Him and to rely on Him implicitly. May God grant you Grace to do this, for His mercy's sake! Amen.

### EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON: *ACTS 18.*

Paul had been preaching the Gospel at Athens to the most famous men of that city gathered at Areopagus.

**Verse 1.** *After these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth.* Another most important city of Greece, where he struck at the very center of the country by preaching the Gospel, since these were the centers of commerce and also of literature.

**2.** *And found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come into Italy, with his wife Priscilla (because Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome) and came unto them.* Lodged with them.

**3, 4.** *And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and worked: for by their occupation they were tent makers. And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks.* He stepped into the synagogue and when the time came for strangers to address the audience, he began to argue that Jesus was the true Messiah. Nor did he argue in vain, for there were some who were persuaded. He endeavored to persuade them all, both the Jews and the Gentiles, who came together to listen to him.

**5.** *And when Silas and Timothy were come from Macedonia, Paul was compelled by the Spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ.* He may not have brought out the whole Truth of God at first, but argued little by little to bring them, as it were, up the steps till they should be prepared to receive the grand Doctrine that Jesus is the Anointed One. His spirit was compelled at last to come to that point more fully

**6.** *And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he shook his raiment, and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles.* Oh, what a blessed, “from henceforth,” that was for you and for me! He no longer confines his ministry to Jews, but goes out seeking the Gentiles—takes up his true commission—becomes the Apostle of the Gentiles. But let all of us take heed of opposing the Gospel, because it is not to be trifled with impunity! A time comes at last when God's Gospel seems to have done with us. Its ministers say, “We are clean.” They shake off the dust of their feet and they go elsewhere to proclaim the Gospel to others who may be less opposed to it. What a thing to be able to say, “I am clean.” I wonder how many in this house of prayer could say that of everybody round about them, “I am clean. The blood be on your own heads. I am clean. I have spoken to you about Christ. I have warned you. I have invited you.” “Night and day with tears,” as Paul says elsewhere, “I have pleaded with you, and now I am clean. I am clean.” You know there is many a man that is clean in the blood of Christ in that sense who has not yet discharged his obligations to his fellow men, and cannot say, “I am clean.” I thought it a grand thing of George Fox, the Quaker, when he was dying, when he said, “I am clean. I am clean of the blood of all men.” To the best of his knowledge he had fearlessly proclaimed all the Truth of God that he knew, wherever he had opportunity. O ministers of Christ, teachers of the young and all you who know Christ, the Holy Spirit be upon you, so that you may speak the Gospel till you can say, “I am clean.”

**7.** *And he departed from there and entered into a certain man's house, named Justus, one who worshipped God, whose house joined hard to the synagogue.* “The nearer the church, the farther from God,” they say—but it was not so in this case. He was one that worshipped God and his house joined hard to the synagogue.

**8.** *And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house. And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized.* That is the old-fashioned way, you know—“hearing, believed, and were baptized.” The new-fashioned way is baptized, *perhaps* hear, and very likely do not believe at all! That is not according to Scripture.

**9-11.** *Then spoke the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not your peace: For I am with you, and no man shall set on you to hurt you: for I have much people in this city. And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the Word of God among them.* Farmers like to plow good soil, where they expect large harvests. So Paul, who was accustomed to make flying visits to places, on this occasion settled down for a long time—even for a year and a half! It would pay to do it, for God had much people in that city!

12-13. *And when Gallio was the deputy of Achaia, the Jews made insurrection with one accord against Paul, and brought him to the judgment seat. Saying, This fellow—*“This fellow,” says our Bible but they did not say that. They had not any word bad enough, so they said “this”—

13-15. *Persuades men to worship God contrary to the Law. And when Paul was now about to open his mouth, Gallio said unto the Jews, If it were a matter of wrong or wicked lewdness, O you Jews, reason would that I should bear with you. But if it is a question of words and names, and of your law, look you to it, for I will be no judge of such matters.* I dare say you have heard Gallio condemned. They used to say in prayer, “Such-and-such a person went on, Gallio-like, caring for none of these things”—but in truth, Gallio does not deserve to be so condemned. It is no business of the civil magistrate to inquire into the religions of the people brought before him. It is out of his province. He was quite right when he said, “If it is a question of words, and names, and of your law, look you to it. I will be no judge of such matters.” If the kings and queens of this world had been half as sensible as Gallio, there had been no stakes in Smithfield, there had been no prisons to lock up the Puritans! Religion would be left alone, which is the one thing it needs—free Church and free State! We want neither the governor’s help, nor the governor’s hindrance. If he will kindly leave us alone, it is all we ask from him—and so far Gallio is to be commended! But I do not think he acted thus out of any intelligent scruples on that point. He is to be condemned because of the motive. No doubt he was indifferent and here may none of us imitate him! That he was indifferent and careless is certain, for he did not do his duty. It was his duty to leave this good man alone, but it was not his duty to allow the Gentiles, on the other hand, to begin beating the Jews. If there is six of one, there should be half a dozen of the other, and so we do not admire him when we read,

16-17. *And he drove them from the judgment seat. Then all the Greeks took Sosthenes, the chief ruler of the synagogue, and beat him before the judgment seat. And Gallio cared for none of these things.* Perhaps liked it. “You came here,” he said, “to accuse Paul, to get him beaten. Now the mob is beating you, and it serves you right. I shall not interfere. Why did you come here at all to plague me with your questions? Why did you interfere with Paul?” But I should think that this ruler of the synagogue must have opened his eyes when he found himself being beaten, instead of the persons whom he desired to have beaten! It is singular that this name, Sosthenes, should be used, when further up we find another ruler of the synagogue, Crispus, who was a believer in Christ. This was no doubt, one they had set up, instead of Crispus, having rejected Crispus for accepting Christ. And yet this man, Sosthenes, bears the same name as one that is spoken of as a Brother in Christ afterwards. I wonder whether that beating did him good—whether, in the Providence of God, he was led to see the hand of Providence in this beating falling upon him, instead of Paul—and whether this ruler of the synagogue, who ousted a better man, did, himself, become a Christian! Let us hope it was so.

18. *And Paul, after this, tarried there yet a good while and then took his leave of the brethren, and sailed from there into Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila; having shorn his head in Cenchrea: for he had taken a vow.* Most probably not Paul, but Aquila had shorn his head, because usually Luke puts the man first. “Aquila, and his wife Priscilla.” But here, in order to state that Aquila had made a vow, he put it, “Priscilla and Aquila.” I think it very questionable that Paul ever shaved his head in that way. I think it was Aquila. If Paul did it, I think he must have been under a sort of mental aberration, as he once or twice before may have been thought to have been. Even he who, above all men, had *cast* out Jewish rites and ceremonies, yet, you remember, took Timothy and circumcised him—a most extraordinary action to do, as in this case, if, indeed, it was he who had shorn his head.

19. *And he came to Ephesus, and left them there: but he himself entered into the synagogue, and reasoned with the Jews.* Though he had turned away from them, yet still his heart is after his own country.

20-21. *When they desired him to tarry a longer time with them, he consented not, but bade them farewell, saying, I must by all means keep this feast that comes in Jerusalem: but I will return again unto you, if God wills.* Oh, how wise it is to say that when we are making plans and promises, “If God wills.” The short way is to put a little “D.V.,” which means that you are ashamed to say, “If God wills.”

21-23. *And he sailed from Ephesus. And when he had landed at Caesarea, and gone up, and saluted the Church, he went down to Antioch. And after he had spent some time there, he departed, and went over all the country of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples.* For you not only need planting, but strengthening! Young saints, like young plants, need much watering, and Paul took care of them. Evangelists have not half done their duty when they stir

up a community unless they go and seek after those who are converted, to strengthen them. Hence the essential need of a permanent pastorate over churches.

**24-25.** *And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus. This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught diligently the things of the Lord knowing only the baptism of John.* He had not got farther than that, but it is always well to tell out what you do know. It is the way to learn more and we doubt not that many a half-instructed Christian is doing good in his way, and it is not for us to stop him, or to find fault with him, but rather quietly to endeavor to tell him more of the Truths of God. Paul did not say, “Now, Apollos, you must stop this, you know. You had better study. You do not know enough yet,” but he let him tell out what he did know.

**26-28.** *And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Aquila and Priscilla heard him, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly. And when he was disposed to pass into Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him: who, when he was come, helped them much which had believed through Grace: For he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, allowing by the Scriptures that Jesus was Christ.* Now let us sing ourselves an encouraging hymn that as Christ, the Lord, said to Paul, “Fear not,” so His Spirit may say to us tonight—

***“Give to the winds your fears.”***

—Adapted from the *C. H. Spurgeon Collection*, Version 1.0, Ages Software.

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