

# SERMONS

ON

IMPORTANT SUBJECTS;

BY THE

REV. GEORGE WHITEFIELD, A.M.

LATE OF PEMBROKE COLLEGE, OXFORD, AND CHAPLAIN TO  
THE RIGHT HON. THE COUNTESS OF HUNTINGDON.

WITH A MEMOIR OF THE AUTHOR,  
BY SAMUEL DREW, A. M.

AND A

DISSERTATION ON HIS CHARACTER, PREACHING, &c.  
BY THE REV. JOSEPH SMITH.

LONDON

PRINTED BY H. FISHER, SON, AND CO., FOR  
THOMAS TEGG, 73, CHEAPSIDE.

1841.

## SERMON LXVII.

### SELF-INQUIRY CONCERNING THE WORK OF GOD.

*According to this time it shall be said of Jacob and of Israel, What hath God wrought!—Numbers xxiii. 23.*

WHEN I read you, my dear hearers, these words; when I consider on what occasion, and by whom they were originally spoken, I cannot help thinking of that triumphant expression of the royal psalmist, “Why do the heathen rage?” When Pontius Pilate and the Jews conspire to destroy the cause of God, “he that sitteth in heaven laughs them to scorn; the Lord not only has them in derision, but over-rules even their malice and violence (no thanks to them) to promote that very cause they attempted to destroy; so that it is a very wrong maxim, and argues great ignorance in us, to imagine that God never brings about his designs by the means and instrumentality of wicked men. This is the Papists’ objection against the Reformation: great pains have been taken to blacken the reformers, and to make it believed that a reformation could not be good, that was begun by people of bad character, and a king of an immoral life. But so far is this from eclipsing, that it illustrates the wisdom and goodness of divine Providence, in obliging the wicked to do what they never designed, and over-ruling their counsels for the fulfilling God’s holy, wise, and sovereign decree. This observation naturally arises from the words of our text, which were spoken by, as far as I can judge, one of the vilest men upon the earth; you doubtless know his name, Balaam, who, though florid in his expressions, and high in profession of intercourse with God, and puts on a fine face of religion, was but a rotten-hearted hypocrite, for he divined for money, made a trade of religion; and so loved the wages of unrighteousness, as to have wished to curse even those whom God had blessed. I need not inform you, that this was the end for which Balak sent for him; and no wonder he was so willing to go, when he knew he was to be well paid for his journey. Achilles, the Grecian hero, is said to be capable of being wounded only in the heel, but bad priests, ministers, and people, have a great deal more dangerous part to be wounded in, that is, the palm of the hand. If you can keep that secure from being wounded with gold, never fear, the devil cannot have his end. Balak promised him great preferment, if he would but come and curse the people of God. A prophet, or soothsayer, is one that pretends to have intercourse with God or the devil, and Balak did not care by which of them it was, so that he could but get the Israelites cursed. Balaam catches at the golden bait, pretends to ask counsel of God, and, what seems strange, God bids him go, and yet sends an angel to meet him in the way, who stands ready to slay

him for going. Does it not seem very strange, that God should bid a man go, and then offer to slay him for going? but people that read this passage, should carefully mind the particulars of it. God said, if the men come and call thee, go; but he did not wait for that, but saddles his ass, and goes: this is called by St. Peter, the madness of the prophet; witness his rising early in the morning, not waiting for the call of the princes, which showed how eager he was to be gone: and though this solution should not be allowed, God was justly angry for his going with an ill design, that is, maliciously to curse a people whom he knew God resolved should be blessed, and that for the sake of the wages of unrighteousness.\* The king and his nobles wait upon him, in hopes this soothsayer will answer their purpose; but after all, he can do nothing without God's leave: however, no cost is spared to obtain the end; so true is it, that the devil's children are ten thousand times more expensive in persecuting the people of God, than God's people are in promoting his glory. This soothsaying priest pretends to go to God, which is permitted, but forced to speak what God would have him; once and again his mouth is stopped, or rather his curses are stopped, and turned into a blessing. Balak, enraged at his repeated disappointment, bids him neither to curse nor bless them at all; and thinking, perhaps, that the sight of the people affected him, carries him to a place where he would see but a small part of them; he goes, and there God made him confirm the blessing instead of the curse, more abundantly than before. Oratory is beautiful, though out of the mouth of the worst of men. "Surely," said he, "there is no enchantment against Jacob, neither is there any divination against Israel. Behold, the people shall rise up as a great lion, and lift up himself as a young lion; he shall not lie down until he eat of the prey, and drink the blood of the slain;" having said just before, "According to this time it shall be said of Jacob and of Israel, What hath God wrought!"

What words are here out of the mouth of a wicked man! and yet I hope it will do no hurt to choose them as a proper subject for an evening meditation. Let us leave this profane diviner, and the king his employer, vexed that they could not get their end of the people of God. Let us snatch the words out of the vile prophet's mouth, and see if we can serve him as David did Goliath,—take his sword, and cut off his head. Some people run to extremes, and because some have abased religion, therefore they think there is no religion at all. Perhaps it is for this reason, that so many offences are permitted to happen in the churches, that one of the twelve should be a traitor, and that the devil should come with his Bible under his arm, to

---

\* It is no unusual thing in holy writ, for Heaven to resent and punish even those actions that it has permitted. Witness Deut i. 20–35; comp, with Numb. Xiii; 2, Hos. xiii. 11; comp, with 1 Sam. viii. 7; chap. xv. 23; chap. xvi. 1; Psal. lxxxii. 11, 12, &c.

tempt us to disbelieve or abuse it; by which God stirs up the people of God to watch, fight, and pray.

How should we take the words of our text: by way of interrogation? or admiration? as speaking in a prophetic strain how God had wrought, and did then work, and would afterwards work, for the prosperity of his faithful Jacob and his posterity, the Israel of God. Suppose we take them in the way of question, which perhaps is most agreeable to the context, and it may be most serviceable to you and to me; and in order that I may not run into too great a field tonight, I will confine myself to what Balaam confines himself, "From this time it shall be said of Jacob and Israel," in a way of inquiry, "What hath God wrought?"

If we look round the world, and survey the works of creation, "the heavens declare God's glory, and the firmament showeth his handiwork." If we look further, my brethren, down upon these bodies of ours, if we consider the curious form of them, we may cry, "What hath God wrought?" surely I am fearfully and wonderfully made: and when we consider that we are made up of the four elements; when we consider to what casualties we are exposed, how wonderfully these bodies have been kept up, when thousands have dropped into the grave before us, we may well say, "What hath God wrought?" but I rather choose to confine myself to that better part; and I am persuaded of it, we shall never go to heaven unless God works powerfully on our souls. Supposing you and I now were to forget all created beings, supposing we were to forget our neighbours tonight, and to hear only for ourselves, as the shades of the evening are coming on, and as we are going shortly to rest, may be to rise no more in this lower world, what if we should steal a little time from our shop, a little time from our worldly business, as we know not but we may be called to judgment tomorrow, and ask and say, O my soul, what hath God wrought in thy heart? I am glad to hear you are so inquisitive. Observe, what hath God wrought? now whatever is done in us, is all done by God; it is all done by an almighty power, and it is all the effect of infinite wisdom; supposing then you and I are new creatures, hath God, O my soul, wrought in thee a deep, a penitent, a humbling sense of thy transgressions against his holy law? this is a most important question, this is the very beginning of religion, this is the very first letter of the Christian's alphabet, the first line in his book; with this, Christ himself began to teach fallen man. "Adam, where art thou?" was the first question that the Son of God put to his fallen creatures; what condition art thou in? How art thou fallen, thou son of the morning! and when he came to the woman, he took the same way, he preached, and ministers should preach, conviction first; "What is this (saith God) that thou hast done?" to break thy husband, and bring all thy posterity unto ruin; and it seems to me that there was a consciousness in this; and I wonder sometimes the Deists have not

run so far as to do it in jest. I do not know that I ever heard of a female child's name called Eve; probably, we are ashamed to call a child by that name, because of the guilt of our mother Eve, that brought us all into sin. Now, has God wrought in you? Has he even given this conviction to you; not a little flight now and then, or a qualm of thy conscience; the devil and natural conscience may do this; but when it is wrought in thy heart by the Spirit of God, it goes to the bottom, the arrow sticks fast, and a poor soul sometimes endeavours to pray, endeavours to pull it out, but in vain. Hath God wrought this in thy soul? Now, when God works this change in the soul, the devil is always busy in tempting the poor convicted sinner to despond, if not despair. Ignorant formalists, who are some of the worst people under heaven, when a person is under conviction, think the devil is got into them, whereas the devil is in themselves; for the devil hoodwinks people, and he endeavours to persuade them, that there is no harm done to God by sinning against him. It is God wounds the soul, and it is he that heals it; has he wrought in thee not only a deep and humbling sense of the outward acts of sin, but a humbling sense of the inward corruptions of thy heart? Has he led thee beyond the streams, through the powerful operations of his Spirit, to the fountain-head? When he has done so, then are we Christians indeed; and this cannot be the work of the devil, who never did, nor do I know whether he can, show a person the inward corruptions of his heart. It must be the Spirit of God. The devil may frighten a person as to outward things, but I very much question whether it is in the power or will of the devil to show a person that he is totally depraved, that the whole fountain is corrupt. This cannot be, because this would make the devil omnipotent, of equal power with the Holy Ghost, who alone shows thee the guilt and corruption of thy heart. This I have found to be the fact, from thirty years' observation and experience of thousands, thousands, thousands, with whom I have spoken about their hearts. So it was, I remember, when I went first to Georgia, when I was about twenty-five years old, I had them day after day, week after week, and night after night, saying, "What shall I do to be saved? O my wicked heart, my deceitful heart!" from morning to night. Hath God wrought this in any of you? Are you complaining of your wicked heart and corrupt nature? Have you found out that your hearts are cages of unclean birds, only a lodging for vain thoughts to dwell in?— O my friends, my dear hearers, O may you turn the question into a note of admiration, and say, "What hath God wrought!" he has not only convinced me of my outward sins, but powerfully convinced me of the corruptions of my heart. Do ask yourselves this question. Has God wrought in me a view of the spirituality of his holy law? Till this is done, you are as fast in the devil's arms as he can clasp you. Of all the children the devil has in the world, I believe he mostly loves his pharisaical children. I was talking with one of them some

time ago, and somebody very innocently asked me where the Pharisees lived? O, said I, they live everywhere. Some people think that they only lived in the times of the apostles. Do you know, vipers and toads have the most eggs and most numerous progeny? If you were to see the eggs of a toad through a microscope, you would wonder at the innumerable multitude; and the Pharisees are an increasing generation of vipers, which hatch and spread all over the world: if you want to know what a Pharisee is, he is one who pretends to endeavour, and talks about keeping the law of God, and does not know its spirituality. They are some of them very great men in their own opinion, and always made the greatest figure in the church. One of them, a gentleman's son, because he had not broke the letter of the law, thought he was right, and without sin: O, says he, if I have nothing else to do but to keep the commandments, I am safe. I have honoured my father and mother. I never stole—what need he steal, that had so good an estate? I never committed adultery; no, no, he loved his character too well: but our Lord opens to him the law, "This one thing thou lackest, go sell all thou hast." He loved his money more than his God. Christ brought him back to the first commandment, though he catechized him first in the fifth. So Paul was a Pharisee; he says, "I was alive without the law once; I was, touching the law, blameless how can that be? can a man be without the law, and yet, touching the law, blameless? says he, "I was without the law;" that is, I was not brought to see the spirituality of it; I thought myself a very good man, no man could say of Paul, black is his eye; but, saith he, when God brought the commandment with power upon my soul, then I saw my specks, and do now. Pray mind and say the commandments. If you go to church you see them, and if you go to meeting I hope you have not forgot them; "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour; thou shalt not covet:" from repeating the last commandment, we are taught that God's law is spiritual, "I should not have known sin, (as the apostle said,) if the law had not said, thou shalt not covet;" now, has God wrought in you these things? Hast thou really seen his law, that it is spiritual? Have you been made to see that the law of God requires perfect, sinless obedience? Have you been made to see that you are under the curse, because you have sinned, by the inward teaching of the blessed Spirit of God? For then, be assured, as sure as thou art in this place, God has wrought this in thy soul, and thou mayest turn the question to admiration, and say, "What has God wrought!" has he wrought in thee a sense of unbelief, that thou canst no more believe, than thou canst create a world? I mention this, because I have told you often, and I am in the same mind; yet there are very few books that talk about unbelief, there is a long catalogue of sins, but not one word about unbelief; why? O, because these good folks, that have wrote communion books, take it for granted, all folks that go to church are believers. I take it, there are more

unbelievers in the church than out of it; why, say you, do not they assent to the gospel? So does the devil: do not they assent to all the articles of the Christian faith? So does the devil: the devil is a stronger believer than an Arian: the devil is a stronger believer than a Socinian, he believes Christ is God, for he has felt his power by his damning him to hell: "We know thee who thou art, the holy One of God." But remember, Christ says, when he is gone, the Spirit of God shall come to reprove the world; in the margin it is convince, and not a transient conviction, but a conviction that fastens, that brings salvation with it. If conviction brings its own evidence, surely faith must bring its own evidence along with it too; "now he shall convince the world, (saith our Lord) of sin; (what sin? the sin of unbelief,) because they believe not in me." It is mentioned by the dear Mr. Hervey, by the dear Mr. Marshall himself, and also by somebody else, that when complaining to a minister that he could get no ease to his soul, and told the minister he confessed his sins every day, he put them all down, (a man must have a good memory that can do that,) the minister said to him, I think your catalogue is worth nothing at all, the grand sin is not mentioned; what is that? Sir, said he, the sin of unbelief; a sin the poor creature thought he had never been guilty of. Has God wrought in thee a sense of thy unbelief? What blessed times have I seen in New, as well as Old England and Scotland, when thousands were awakened at Edinburgh, at Glasgow, and many other places, when I have seen them taken out of the congregation by scores, and asked, what is the matter? What do you want? I cannot believe! I cannot believe! I cannot believe! We think we can believe when we will, but the Spirit alone can convince us we have no faith, the Spirit alone can convince us of our want of faith, and can alone impart it to the poor awakened sinner; consequently, you may ask yourselves whether God has wrought in you, not only a sense of your own misery, but also a sense of your remedy; set you upon hungering and thirsting, such a hungering and thirsting as has never been satisfied but by an application of the blood of Christ imputed to you. I do not want to dispute upon the scriptures with anybody: there are a great many good men have been prejudiced by Antinomian principles and practices; and because some people have run to a dangerous extreme, others have not thought proper to make use of the word *imputed* at all. The best truth may be spoiled by bad books; but, for my part, I am more than ever convinced, that the doctrine of imputed righteousness is a doctrine of the gospel; and that as Adam's sin is imputed to me, so the righteousness of Christ must be imputed also. I stand not only as a pardoned sinner, but as a justified sinner. I stand before God justified, and so do all whom Jesus Christ has purchased. Now, has God wrought this in thee, O man; in thee, O woman? I am not going to ask, whether it was wrought in thee by hearing a sermon or reading a book, God may make use of a minister, or of a

book; and I do not like people to get above ministers and books, saying, we do not want these. God draws with the cords of a man, and generally draws us with cords by men such as ourselves. Canst thou say, there is the book, there is the minister, in reading or hearing which, Christ's blood was applied, and the Spirit of God witnessed with my spirit that I was one of his children? Now this is all God's working, indeed it is, the devil cannot do this, it is out of his power. He may attempt to persuade them that he has done it, when he has not, and cannot. The magicians turned their rods into serpents, but the rod of Jehovah swallowed them all up. Has the Lord God wrought a change of heart in thee, and a change of life as a consequence of that? I mention this, but I would have everybody that stands up for Christ's imputed righteousness, especially as some good people are apt to speak of it and carry it very high, to be careful in the same discourse to speak as highly of obedience too, to Christ's commandments. I do not like only to mention the word promises; when people tell me they hang upon the promises, I always ask them, How do you hang upon them? Have you got the thing promised? The promise is, that the Promiser should come to my soul; the promise, is,—what, my brethren? The promise is, for this and that good thing; have I got it? How would you do if you were to take false bank-notes, if you were to take false bills? The people generally ask, Is the man that has given me this note worth anything? If you have a bad note, you go to the notary, and note it; you say, I was to have had this note paid ten, twenty, thirty days after sight, or upon sight; where is the notary? They note it and protest it: let us be careful then to see that God pays his notes, as we are that man does. Hast thou got the thing promised? The thing promised, is, all peace and all joy; the thing promised is, a new heart; the thing promised is, a new nature; and therefore David goes to God for the thing promised, and says, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." Now, is this the case of thy heart? The devil never can make a new creature; I am sure nothing but an almighty power can take away the heart of stone, and give heart of flesh: has God wrought this in thee? If he have though it be not come to such a height as thou wouldest wish, yet be thankful for what he has done, and say, What has God wrought in me! Attend to the word, I do not mean lazily, there is not a thing upon the face of the earth that I abhor so much as idleness or idle people; I am so far from having a love to people that are lazy, that if I had the dealing with a number that are called Christians, they should go to bed sooner, and get up sooner; there is one thing that will make people rise sooner in the morning in London, and that is, for merchants to agree to have the 'Change opened at six, and that will make people as much alive in the morning, as the markets are after people have been travelling all night to prepare for them.



Has God wrought in you a spirit of zeal and love? Has he wrought in you a love to his name, a zeal for his cause? Has he wrought in thy heart a deadness to the world, that you can live above it from morning to night, having your conversation in heaven? Has he wrought in thee a love to his people, not people that are Calvinists only; not people that hold universal redemption only? O be careful as to that: O what nonsense is that, for people to hold universal redemption, and yet not love all mankind; what nonsense is it to hold election, and not “as the elect of God to put on bowels of mercy, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, and long-suffering as the woman said, I have a house will hold a hundred, a heart ten thousand. Has he wrought in thee a love to thine enemies, so that thou dost not only love them that love thee, but them that hate thee? What say you? must I put a snake in my bosom, no, no; I may hate the conduct, and at the same time pray to God for them. Enmity is, “an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.” Love as archbishop Cranmer did, that it became a proverb concerning him, that if any man would make him his friend, he must do him an injury. Has he wrought in thee a desire to go to heaven? Has he wrought in thee such a love to Jesus, that you prefer him to the heaven he dwells in? We count heaven a fine place, and we may say, I am glad to see the departed saints and the angels, but all that will be nothing unless I see the Lamb in the midst of the throne. Has God wrought in thee a desire to promote his glory, to be upon the stretch for God, to deny thyself, to take up the cross daily, and follow him? If God have wrought this in thee, and I verily believe from my soul he has wrought it in some degree in many of you, O you may well say, “What has God wrought!” especially if you consider the manner, and the time, in which he wrought it. If you consider the instruments he made use of, when, and by which he wrought it; and if you consider the inestimable price that was paid for it, and the Spirit taking possession of your hearts. One part of our entertainment in heaven will be to count the steps of the ladder by which God brought us there. One will say, God wrought in me when I was young; another, when I had gray hairs. Mary Magdalen will say, God wrought in me when I was a sinner; the expiring criminal will say, God wrought in me just as I was turned off, I was a brand plucked out of the burning. The anthem, as good Mr. Erskine observes, will be in heaven, “What has God wrought!” Curiosity led me to hear the preacher, and God touched my heart; there was a young fellow, called emphatically “Wicked Will of Plymouth,” who came, as he said, to pick a hole in the preacher's coat, and the Holy Ghost picked a hole in his heart. What has God wrought, to work it in you, and not in your father; you, and not your children; work it in you, and not a fellow-servant; work it in one brother, and not in another? all these things will make us cry, “What has God wrought!” Well, I do not want you to rest in this by no means. I do not like to hear people talk and

speak against inward frames and inward works, nor do I like to hear people legal; let every thing have its proper place. It is about thirty-three years ago, or very near, when a man came to me, after I had preached upon marks and evidences, (at Whitechapel I think it was,) and said, I am come to tell you, that I do not choose any marks at all; then, said I, you must be content with the marks of the devil, for you must have the one or the other.

Now, my brethren, if God have wrought this in us, what shall I say? Why, I pray the Lord Jesus Christ that your life and mine may be a life of praise. I would have you not only dwell upon particular words of God set home upon your hearts, but his various providences, the numerous trials he has brought you through. O think how often you have been kept, think how often you would have run away from God, if he had not stopped you. What has God wrought, by preventing me from sin! what has God wrought, by delivering me from blasphemous thoughts! what has God wrought, in snatching me out of the jaws of ruin! even after conversion, when I was damning my own soul, his grace arrested me. Have we brought ourselves into trials, how has he made these very trials work for good; made our scolding husbands and wives, persecuting fathers, friends, and relations, that you have thought would devour you, made the bulls of Bashan, instruments of bringing you nearer to God; and eternity will be too short to cry perpetually, "What hath God wrought!"

And if God have not wrought this in any of you that are here, which perhaps may be the case, though I cannot think what should bring anybody here, if they had not a desire of the salvation of their souls; if God hath not wrought it in you yet, O that this may be the time. O that God may give us some parting blessing; that some poor creatures, that have nothing but the devil's work in them yet, may now seek after the blessed work of the Holy Ghost. If we may ask what God has wrought, let me ask you what the devil has wrought in you? O thou unconverted soul, sin has made thee a beast, made thy body, which ought to be the temple of the living God, a cage of every unclean bird; what hath Satan wrought in thee! but made thee a nest of vile stinking swine; and what will he give thee? hell, hell, hell. The wages the devil gives, no man can live by; "the wages of sin is death:" and here I come to bring you good news, glad tidings of great joy. O that God may now counterwork the devil, and take thee into his own workmanship, create thee anew in Christ Jesus, give thee to feel a little of his Spirit's work on thy heart, and make thee, of a child of the devil, a child of God! Say not, it cannot be; say not, it shall not be; say not, it is too late; say not, it is for others, but not for me; my brethren, God help you to cry, and to try tonight if thou canst turn the text into a prayer, Lord God, I have felt the devil work in me, now, good God, let me know what it is for thee to work in me; make me a new creature, create a new spirit within me, that I may join with thy

dear people in singing, “What hath God wrought!” O remember, if this is not the case with you, you must have a dreadfully different ditty in hell; the note there will be, What hath the devil wrought! what hath sin wrought! how am I come to this place of torment! I sold my birthright for a mess of pottage!—Heaven or hell is set before you tonight; Jesus grant, that the terrors of the Lord may awaken you tonight, and that you may not rest till you have comfort and support from God.

You that have this work begun in you, look still for better things to come, even after death, when our bodies are made like Christ’s glorious body, and our souls filled with the fulness of God, we shall then cry, Churchmen and Dissenters, Methodists and Foundrymen, and the Lock too, we shall all then join without any bickerings, saying, “What has God wrought!”

I could enlarge, but I am afraid I have been too long already; yet as I think the providence of God calls me, and I shall give a particular account of my call tomorrow evening, at the other end of the town, I think if I should keep you a few minutes longer, it might be excused. I begin to feel already it must be executed in a few days. I feel already that I shall soon part from you, and O that God may awaken many of you poor unawakened souls. My heart bleeds for you. O may the oil of the blessed Spirit soften every hard unconverted heart, that we may go away praising and blessing God that we shall at last meet, whether we go by land or by water, before the throne, where we shall ascribe glory, and honour, and power, to him for evermore. *Amen.*