

PSALM 50

This psalm, as the former, is a psalm of instruction, not of prayer or praise; it is a psalm of reproof and admonition, in singing which we are to teach and admonish one another. In the foregoing psalm, after a general demand of attention, God by his prophet deals (v. 3) with the children of this world, to convince them of their sin and folly in setting their hearts upon the wealth of this world; in this psalm, after a like preface, he deals with those that were, in profession, the church's children, to convince them of their sin and folly in placing their religion in ritual services, while they neglected practical godliness; and this is as sure a way to ruin as the other. This psalm is intended,

1. As a proof to the carnal Jews, both those that rested in the external performances of their religion, and were remiss in the more excellent duties of prayer and praise, and those that expounded the law to others, but lived wicked lives themselves.

2. As a prediction of the abolishing of the ceremonial law, and of the introducing of a spiritual way of worship in and by the kingdom of the Messiah, ~~see~~ John 4:23, 24.

3. As a representation of the day of judgment, in which God will call men to an account concerning their observance of those things which they have thus been taught; men shall be judged “according to what is written in the books;” and therefore Christ is fitly represented speaking as a Judge, then when he speaks as a Lawgiver. Here is,

I. The glorious appearance of the Prince that gives law and judgment (v. 1-6).

II. Instruction given to his worshippers, to turn their sacrifices into prayers (v. 7-15).

III. A rebuke to those that pretend to worship God, but live in disobedience to his commands (v. 16-20), their doom read (v. 21, 22), and warning given to all to look to their conversation as well as to their devotions (v. 23). These instructions and admonitions we must take to ourselves, and give to one another, in singing this psalm.

~~480~~ PSALM 50:1-6

THE MAJESTY OF MESSIAH

A psalm of Asaph.

It is probable that Asaph was not only the chief musician, who was to put a tune to this psalm, but that he was himself the penman of it; for we read that in Hezekiah's time they praised God *in the words of David and of Asaph the seer*, ~~428~~ 2 Chronicles 29:30. Here is,

I. The court called, in the name of the King of kings (v. 2): *The mighty God, even the Lord, hath spoken* — El, Elohim, Jehovah, the God of infinite power justice and mercy, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. God is the Judge, the Son of God came for judgement into the world, and the Holy Ghost is the Spirit of judgment. All the earth is called to attend, not only because the controversy God had with his people Israel for their hypocrisy and ingratitude might safely be referred to any man of reason (nay, let the house of Israel itself *judge between God and his vineyard*, ~~208B~~ Isaiah 5:3), but because all the children of men are concerned to know the right way of worshipping God, in spirit and in truth, because when the kingdom of the Messiah should be set up all should be instructed in the evangelical worship, and invited to join in it (see ~~301B~~ Malachi 1:11, ~~408B~~ Acts 10:34), and because in the day of final judgment all nations shall be gathered together to receive their doom, and every man shall give an account of himself unto God.

II. The judgment set, and the Judge taking his seat. As, when God gave the law to Israel in the wilderness, it is said, *He came from Sinai, and rose up from Seir, and shone forth from Mount Paran, and came with ten thousands of his saints, and then from his right hand went a fiery law* (~~631B~~ Deuteronomy 33:2), so, with allusion to that, when God comes to reprove them for their hypocrisy, and to send forth his gospel to supersede the legal institutions, it is said here,

1. That *he shall shine out of Zion*, as then from the top of Sinai, v. 2. Because in Zion his oracle was now fixed, thence his judgments upon that provoking people denounced, and thence the orders issued for the execution of them (~~291B~~ Joel 2:1): *Blow you the trumpet in Zion*. Sometimes there are more than ordinary appearances of God's presence and power

working with and by his word and ordinances, for the convincing of men's consciences and the reforming and refining of his church; and then God, who always dwells in Zion, may be said to *shine out of Zion*. Moreover, he may be said to *shine out of Zion* because the gospel, which set up spiritual worship, was to *go forth from Mount Zion* (^{<218B>}Isaiah 2:3, ^{<304B>}Micah 4:2), and the preachers of it were to *begin at Jerusalem* (^{<244B>}Luke 24:47), and Christians are said to come unto Mount Zion, to receive their instructions, ^{<322B>}Hebrews 12:22, 28. Zion is here called *the perfection of beauty*, because it was the holy hill; and holiness is indeed the perfection of beauty.

2. That he *shall come, and not keep silence*, shall no longer seem to wink at the sins of men, as he had done (v. 21), but shall show his displeasure at them, and shall also cause that mystery to be published to the world by his holy apostles which had long *lain hid, that the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs* (^{<405B>}Ephesians 3:5, 6) and that the partition-wall of the ceremonial law should be taken down; this shall now no longer be concealed. In the great day *our God shall come and shall not keep silence*, but shall make those to hear his judgment that would not hearken to his law.

3. That his appearance should be very majestic and terrible: *A fire shall devour before him*. The fire of his judgments shall make way for the rebukes of his word, in order to the awakening of the hypocritical nation of the Jews, that the sinners in Zion, being afraid of that devouring fire (^{<234B>}Isaiah 33:14), might be startled out of their sins. When his gospel kingdom was to be set up Christ *came to send fire on the earth*, (^{<212B>}Luke 12:49. The Spirit was given in cloven tongues as of fire, introduced by a rushing mighty wind, which was very tempestuous, ^{<412B>}Acts 2:2, 3. And in the last judgment Christ shall come in flaming fire, ^{<308B>}2 Thessalonians 1:8. See ^{<200B>}Daniel 7:9; ^{<307B>}Hebrews 10:27.

4. That as on Mount Sinai he came with *ten thousands of his saints*, so he shall now *call to the heavens from above*, to take notice of this solemn process (v. 4), as Moses often *called heaven and earth to witness* against Israel (^{<105B>}Deuteronomy 4:26, 31:28, 32:1), and God by his prophets, ^{<302B>}Isaiah 1:2; ^{<302B>}Micah 6:2. The equity of the judgment of the great day will be attested and applauded by heaven and earth, by saints and angels, even all the holy myriads.

III. The parties summoned (v. 5): *Gather my saints together unto me.* This may be understood either,

1. Of saints indeed: “Let them be gathered to God through Christ; let the few pious Israelites be set by themselves;” for to them the following denunciations of wrath do not belong; rebukes to hypocrites ought not to be terrors to the upright. When God will reject the services of those that only offered sacrifice, resting in the outside of the performance, he will graciously accept those who, in sacrificing, *make a covenant with him*, and so attend to and answer the end of the institution of sacrifices. The design of the preaching of the gospel, and the setting up of Christ's kingdom, was to gather together in one the children of God, ^{<416>}John 11:52. And at the second coming of Jesus Christ all his saints shall be *gathered together unto him* (^{<511>}2 Thessalonians 2:1) to be assessors with him in the judgment; for *the saints shall judge the world*, ^{<416>}1 Corinthians 6:2. Now it is here given as a character of the saints that they have made a covenant with God by sacrifice. Note,

(1.) Those only shall be gathered to God as his saints who have, in sincerity, covenanted with him, who have taken him to be their God and given up themselves to him to be his people, and thus have joined themselves unto the Lord.

(2.) It is only by sacrifice, by Christ the great sacrifice (from whom all the legal sacrifices derived what value they had), that we poor sinners can covenant with God so as to be accepted of him. There must be an atonement made for the breach of the first covenant before we can be admitted again into covenant. Or, 2. It may be understood of saints in profession, such as the people of Israel were, who are called *a kingdom of priests* and *a holy nation*, ^{<0216>}Exodus 19:6. They were, as a body politic, taken into covenant with God, the covenant of peculiarity; and it was done with great solemnity, *by sacrifice*, ^{<0218>}Exodus 24:8. “Let them come and hear what God has to say to them; let them receive the reproofs God sends them now by his prophets, and the gospel he will, in due time, send them by his Son, which shall supersede the ceremonial law. If these be slighted, let them expect to hear from God another way, and to be judged by that word which they will not be ruled by.”

IV. The issue of this solemn trial foretold (v. 6): *The heavens shall declare his righteousness*, those heavens that were called to be witnesses

to the trial (v. 4); the *people in heaven shall say, Hallelujah. True and righteous are his judgments,* ~~691~~ Revelation 19:1, 2. The righteousness of God in all the rebukes of his word and providence, in the establishment of his gospel (which *brings in an everlasting righteousness, and in which the righteousness of God is revealed*), and especially in the judgment of the great day, is what the heavens will declare; that is, 1. It will be universally known, and proclaimed to all the world. *As the heavens declare the glory, the wisdom and power, of God the Creator* (~~692~~ Psalm 19:1), so they shall no less openly declare the glory, the justice and righteousness, of God the *Judge*; and so loudly do they proclaim both that *there is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard*, as it follows there, v. 3. 2. It will be incontestably owned and proved; who can deny what the heavens declare? Even sinners' own consciences will subscribe to it, and hell as well as heaven will be forced to acknowledge the righteousness of God. The reason given is, *for God is Judge himself*, and therefore,

(1.) He will be just; for it is impossible he should do any wrong to any of his creatures, he never did, nor ever will. When men are employed to judge for him they may do unjustly; but, when he is Judge himself, there can be no injustice done. *Is God unrighteous, who takes vengeance?* The apostle, for this reason, startles at the thought of it; *God forbid! for then how shall God judge the world?* ~~693~~ Romans 3:5, 6. These decisions will be perfectly just, for against them there will lie no exception, and from them there will lie no appeal.

(2.) He will be justified; *God is Judge*, and therefore he will not only execute justice, but he will oblige all to own it; for he *will be clear when he judges*, ~~694~~ Psalm 51:4.

~~695~~ PSALM 50:7-15

THE INEFFICACY OF LEGAL SACRIFICES

God is here dealing with those that placed all their religion in the observances of the ceremonial law, and thought those sufficient.

I. He lays down the original contract between him and Israel, in which they had avouched him to be their God, and he them to be his people, and so both parties were agreed (v. 7): *Hear, O my people! and I will speak.*

Note, It is justly expected that whatever others do, when he speaks, his people should give ear; who will, if they do not? And then we may comfortably expect that God will speak to us when we are ready to hear what he says; even when he testifies against us in the rebukes and threatenings of his word and providences we must be forward to hear what he says, to hear even *the rod and him that has appointed it*.

II. He puts a slight upon the legal sacrifices, v. 8, etc. Now,

1. This may be considered as looking back to the use of these under the law. God had a controversy with the Jews; but what was the ground of the controversy? Not their neglect of the ceremonial institutions; no, they had not been wanting in the observance of them, their burnt-offerings had been continually before God, they took a pride in them, and hoped by their offerings to procure a dispensation for their lusts, as the adulterous woman, ³⁰⁷⁴Proverbs 7:14. Their constant sacrifices, they thought, would both expiate and excuse their neglect of the weightier matters of the law. Nay, if they had, in some degree, neglected these institutions, yet that should not have been the cause of God's quarrel with them, for it was but a small offence in comparison with the immoralities of their conversation. They thought God was mightily beholden to them for the many sacrifices they had brought to his altar, and that they had made him very much their debtor by them, as if he could not have maintained his numerous family of priests without their contributions; but God here shows them the contrary,

(1.) That he did not need their sacrifices. What occasion had he for their bullocks and goats who has the command of all *the beasts of the forest*, and the *cattle upon a thousand hills* (v. 9, 10), has an incontestable propriety in them and dominion over them, has them all always under his eye and within his reach, and can make what use he pleases of them; they all wait on him, and are all at his disposal? ³¹⁴⁷Psalm 104:27-29. Can we add any thing to his store whose all the wild fowl and wild beasts are, the world itself and the fulness thereof? v. 11, 12. God's infinite self-sufficiency proves our utter insufficiency to add any thing to him.

(2.) That he could not be benefited by their sacrifices. Their goodness, of this kind, could not possibly extend to him, nor, if they were in this matter righteous, was he the better (v. 13): *Will I eat the flesh of bulls?* It is as absurd to think that their sacrifices could, of themselves, and by virtue of

any innate excellency in them, add any pleasure of praise to God, as it would be to imagine that an infinite Spirit could be supported by meat and drink, as our bodies are. It is said indeed of the demons whom the Gentiles worshipped that they did *eat the fat of their sacrifices, and drink the wine of their drink-offerings* (⁴⁵²⁸Deuteronomy 32:38): they regaled themselves in the homage they robbed the true God of; but will the great Jehovah be thus entertained? No; *to obey is better than sacrifice*, and to love God and our neighbour *better than all burnt-offerings*, so much better that God by his prophets often told them that their sacrifices were not only not acceptable, but abominable, to him, while they lived in sin; instead of pleasing him, he looked upon them as a mockery, and therefore an affront and provocation to him; see ⁴¹⁶⁸Proverbs 15:8; ⁴³¹¹Isaiah 1:11, etc.; 66:3; ⁴¹⁶¹Jeremiah 6:20; ⁴¹⁶²Amos 5:21. They are therefore here warned not to rest in these performances; but to conduct themselves, in all other instances, towards God as their God.

2. This may be considered as looking forward to the abolishing of these by the gospel of Christ. Thus Dr. Hammond understands it. When God shall set up the kingdom of the Messiah he shall abolish the old way of worship by sacrifice and offerings; he will no more have those to be *continually before him* (v. 8); he will no more require of his worshippers to bring him their bullocks and their goats, to be burnt upon his altar, v. 9. For indeed he never appointed this as that which he had any need of, or took any pleasure in, for, besides that all we have is his already, he has far more beasts in the forest and upon the mountains, which we know nothing of nor have any property in, than we have in our folds; but he instituted it to prefigure the great sacrifice which his own Son should in the fulness of time offer upon the cross, to make atonement for sin, and all the other spiritual sacrifices of acknowledgment with which God, through Christ, will be well pleased.

III. He directs to the best sacrifices of prayer and praise as those which, under the law, were preferred before all burn-offerings and sacrifices, and on which then the greatest stress was laid, and which now, under the gospel, come in the room of those carnal ordinances which were imposed until the times of reformation. He shows us here (v. 14, 15) what is good, and what the Lord our God requires of us, and will accept, when sacrifices are slighted and superseded.

- 1.** We must make a penitent acknowledgment of our sins: *Offer to God confession*, so some read it, and understand it of the confession of sin, in order to our giving glory to God and taking shame to ourselves, that we may never return to it. *A broken and contrite heart is the sacrifice which God will not despise*, ^{<550>}Psalm 51:17. If the sin was not abandoned the sin-offering was not accepted.
- 2.** We must give God thanks for his mercies to us: *Offer to God thanksgiving*, every day, often every day (*seven times a day will I praise thee*), and upon special occasions; and *this shall please the Lord*, if it come from a humble thankful heart, full of love to him and joy in him, *better than an ox or bullock that has horns and hoofs*, ^{<550>}Psalm 69:30, 31.
- 3.** We must make conscience of performing our covenants with him: *Pay thy vows to the Most High*, forsake thy sins, and do thy duty better, pursuant to the solemn promises thou has made him to that purport. When we give God thanks for any mercy we have received we must be sure to pay the vows we made to him when we were in the pursuit of the mercy, else our thanksgivings will not be accepted. Dr. Hammond applies this to the great gospel ordinance of the eucharist, in which we are to give thanks to God for his great love in sending his Son to save us, and to pay our vows of love and duty to him, and to give alms. Instead of all the Old Testament types of a Christ to come, we have that blessed memorial of a Christ already come.
- 4.** In the day of distress we must address ourselves to God by faithful and fervent prayer (v. 15): *Call upon me in the day of trouble*, and not upon any other god. Our troubles, though we see them coming from God's hand, must drive us to him, and not drive us from him. We must thus acknowledge him in all our ways, depend upon his wisdom, power, and goodness, and refer ourselves entirely to him, and so give him glory. This is a cheaper, easier, readier way of seeking his favour than by a peace-offering, and yet more acceptable.
- 5.** When he, in answer to our prayers, delivers us, as he has promised to do in such way and time as he shall think fit, we must glorify him, not only by a grateful mention of his favour, but by living to his praise. Thus must we keep up our communion with God, meeting him with our prayers when he afflicts us and with our praises when he delivers us.

PSALM 50:16-23

THE CHARACTER OF THE WICKED

God, by the psalmist, having instructed his people in the right way of worshipping him and keeping up their communion with him, here directs his speech to the wicked, to hypocrites, whether they were such as professed the Jewish or the Christian religion: hypocrisy is wickedness for which God will judge. Observe here,

I. The charge drawn up against them.

1. They are charged with invading and usurping the honours and privileges of religion (v. 16): *What has thou to do, O wicked man! to declare my statutes?* This is a challenge to those that rare really profane, but seemingly godly, to show what title they have to the cloak of religion, and by what authority they wear it, when they use it only to cover and conceal the abominable impieties of their hearts and lives. Let them make out their claim to it if they can. Some think it points prophetically at the scribes and Pharisees that were the teachers and leaders of the Jewish church at the time when the kingdom of the Messiah, and that evangelical way of worship spoken of in the foregoing verses, were to be set up. They violently opposed that great revolution, and used all the power and interest which they had by sitting in Moses's seat to hinder it; but the account which our blessed Saviour gives of them (Matthew 23), and St. Paul (~~1~~Romans 2:21, 22), makes this expostulation here agree very well to them. They took on them to declare God's statutes, but they hated Christ's instruction; and therefore what had they to do to expound the law, when they rejected the gospel? But it is applicable to all those that are practicers of iniquity, and yet professors of piety, especially if withal they be preachers of it. Note, It is very absurd in itself, and a great affront to the God of heaven, for those that are wicked and ungodly to declare his statutes and to take his covenant in their mouths. It is very possible, and too common, for those that declare God's statutes to others to live in disobedience to them themselves, and for those that take God's covenant in their mouths yet in their hearts to continue their covenant with sin and death; but they are guilty of a usurpation, they take to themselves an honour which they have no title to, and there is a day coming when they will be thrust out as intruders. *Friend, how camest thou in hither?* 2. They

are charged with transgressing and violating the laws and precepts of religion.

(1.) They are charged with a daring contempt of the word of God (v. 17): *Thou hatest instruction*. They loved to give instruction, and to tell others what they should do, for this fed their pride and made them look great, and by this craft they got their living; but they hated to receive instruction from God himself, for that would be a check upon them and a mortification to them. “Thou hatest discipline, the reproofs of the word and the rebukes of Providence.” No wonder that those who hate to be reformed hate the means of reformation. *Thou castest my words behind thee*. They seemed to set God's words before them, when they sat in Moses's seat, and undertook to teach others out of the law (^{<RB>}Romans 2:19); but in their conversations they cast God's word behind them, and did not care for seeing that rule which they were resolved not to be ruled by. This is despising the commandment of the Lord.

(2.) A close confederacy with the worst of sinners (v. 18): “*When thou sawest a thief*, instead of reproving him and witnessing against him, as those should do that declare God's statutes, *thou consentedst with him*, didst approve of his practices, and desire to be a partner with him and to share in the profits of his cursed trade; *and thou hast been partaker with adulterers*, hast done as they did, and encouraged them to go on in their wicked courses, hast done these things and hast *had pleasure in those that do them*,” ^{<RB>}Romans 1:32.

(3.) A constant persisting in the worst of tongue-sins (v. 19): “*Thou givest thy mouth to evil*, not only allowest thyself in, but addictest thyself wholly to, all manner of evil-speaking.”

[1.] Lying: *Thy tongue frames deceit*, which denotes contrivance and deliberation in lying. It *knits or links* deceit, so some. One lie begets another, and one fraud requires another to cover it.

[2.] Slandering (v. 20): “*Thou sittest, and speakest against thy brother*, dost basely abuse and misrepresent him, magisterially judge and censure him, and pass sentence upon him, as if you wert his master to whom he must stand or fall, whereas he is thy brother, as good as thou art, and upon the level with thee, for he is *thy own mother's son*. He is thy near relation, whom thou oughtest to love, to vindicate, and stand up for, if others abused him; yet thou dost thyself abuse him, whose faults thou oughtest to

cover and make the best of; if really he had done amiss, yet thou dost most falsely and unjustly charge him with that which he is innocent of; *thou sittest* and doest this, as a judge upon the bench, with authority; thou sittest in the seat of the scornful, to deride and backbite those whom thou oughtest to respect and be kind to." Those that do ill themselves commonly delight in speaking ill of others.

II. The proof of this charge (v. 21): "*These things thou hast done*; the fact is too plain to be denied, the fault too bad to be excused; these things God knows, and thy own heart knows, thou hast done." The sins of sinners will be proved upon them, beyond contradiction, in the judgment of the great day: "*I will reprove thee*, or convince thee, so that thou shalt have not one word to say for thyself." The day is coming when impenitent sinners will have their mouths for ever stopped and be struck speechless. What confusion will they be filled with when God shall set their sins in order before their eyes! They would not see their sins to their humiliation, but cast them behind their backs, covered them, and endeavoured to forget them, nor would they suffer their own consciences to put them in mind of them; but the day is coming when God will make them see their sins to their everlasting shame and terror; he will set them in order, original sin, actual sins, sins against the law, sins against the gospel, against the first table, against the second table, sins of childhood and youth, of riper age, and old age. He will set them in order, as the witnesses are set in order, and called in order, against the criminal, and asked what they have to say against him.

III. The Judge's patience, and the sinner's abuse of that patience: "*I kept silence*, did not give thee any disturbance in thy sinful way, but let thee alone to take thy course; sentence against thy evil works was respited, and not executed speedily." Note, The patience of God is very great towards provoking sinners. He sees their sins and hates them; it would be neither difficulty nor damage to him to punish them, and yet he waits to be gracious and gives them space to repent, that he may render them inexcusable if they repent not. His patience is the more wonderful because the sinner makes such an ill use of it: "*Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such a one as thyself*, as weak and forgetful as thyself, as false to my word as thyself, nay, as much a friend to sin as thyself." Sinners take God's silence for consent and his patience for connivance; and therefore the longer they are reprieved the more are their hearts hardened;

but, if they turn not, they shall be made to see their error when it is too late, and that the God they provoke is just, and holy, and terrible, and not such a one as themselves.

IV. The fair warning given of the dreadful doom of hypocrites (v. 22): “*Now consider this, you that forget God, consider that God knows and keeps account of all your sins, that he will call you to an account for them, that patience abused will turn into the greater wrath, that though you forget God and your duty to him he will not forget you and your rebellions against him: consider this in time, before it be too late; for if these things be not considered, and the consideration of them improved, he will tear you in pieces, and there will be none to deliver.*” It is the doom of hypocrites to be *cut asunder*, ^{<425>}Matthew 24:51. Note,

- 1.** Forgetfulness of God is at the bottom of all the wickedness of the wicked. Those that know God, and yet do not obey him, do certainly forget him.
- 2.** Those that forget God forget themselves; and it will never be right with them till they consider, and so recover themselves. Consideration is the first step towards conversion.
- 3.** Those that will not consider the warnings of God's word will certainly be torn in pieces by the executions of his wrath.
- 4.** When God comes to tear sinners in pieces, there is no delivering them out of his hand. They cannot deliver themselves, nor can any friend they have in the world deliver them.

V. Full instructions given to us all how to prevent this fearful doom. Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter; we have it, v. 23, which directs us what to do that we may attain our chief end.

1. Man's chief end is to glorify God, and we are here told that *whoso offers praise glorifies him*; whether he be Jew or Gentile, those spiritual sacrifices shall be accepted from him. We must praise God, and we must sacrifice praise, direct it to God, as every sacrifice was directed; put it into the hands of the priest, our Lord Jesus, who is also the altar; see that it be made by fire, sacred fire, that it be kindled with the flame of holy and devout affection; we must be fervent in spirit, praising the Lord. This he is pleased, in infinite condescension, to interpret as glorifying him. Hereby

we give him the glory due to his name and do what we can to advance the interests of his kingdom among men.

2. Man's chief end, in conjunction with this, is to enjoy God; and we are here told that those who *order their conversation aright shall see his salvation*.

(1.) It is not enough for us to offer praise, but we must withal order our conversation aright. Thanksgiving is good, but thanks-living is better.

(2.) Those that would have their conversation right must take care and pains to order it, to dispose it according to rule, to understand their way and to direct it.

(3.) Those that take care of their conversation make sure their salvation; them God will make to see his salvation, for it is a salvation ready to be revealed; he will make them to see it and enjoy it, to see it, and to see themselves happy for ever in it. Note, The right ordering of the conversation is the only way, and it is a sure way, to obtain the great salvation.