

Spurgeon and Places of Entertainment

By C. H. Spurgeon

WE HAVE GREAT reason to bless God for the rich mercies we have enjoyed as a church and people for many years, in the unity of the brotherhood, the zeal of the workers, the number of conversions, the success of all our enterprises, and the growth of the whole body.

It is on my heart to say a word upon another subject—a subject which presses heavily upon my heart. I beseech you, by the mercies of God, and by the love of Christ Jesus your Lord, that as members of this church you do nothing which would grieve the Spirit of God, and cause Him to depart from among us.

Remember how Israel suffered defeat because of Achan. One man only, and one family only, had broken the Divine rule, but that sufficed to trouble the whole camp. Achan had taken of the accursed thing and hidden it in his tent, and so all Israel had to suffer defeat. Churches, too, will suffer if sin becomes general among them and is allowed to go unrebuked. At this time many a church is suffering grievously from the sin of its own members—sin in its ranks.

As I look abroad, I am grieved and have great heaviness of spirit at what I see among professing Christians. A very serious matter concerns the amusements engaged in by professing Christians. I see it publicly stated, by some who call themselves Christians, that it is good for Christians to attend the theatre, so that the tone and character of the productions may be improved. The suggestion is about as sensible as if we were bidden to pour a bottle of lavender water into the main sewer to improve its aroma.

“Touch not...!”

If the church is now supposed to raise the tone of the world by imitating it, things have strangely altered since the day when our Lord said, “Come out from among them...and touch not the unclean thing.” Is Heaven to descend to the infernal lake to raise its tone? Such has been the moral condition of the theatre for many a year that it has become too bad for mending. And even if it were mended it would soon become corrupt again. Pass by it with averted gaze, for the house of the strange woman is there.

It has not been my lot ever to enter a theatre during the performance of a play, but I have seen enough when I have come home from journeys at night, while riding past the theatres, to make me pray that our sons and daughters may never go within their doors. It must be a strange school for virtue which attracts the harlot and the debauchee. It is no place for a Christian if it is best appreciated by the irreligious and worldly.

A step to degeneration

If our church members fall into the habit of frequenting the theatre, we shall soon have them going much further in the direction of vice, and they will lose all relish for the ways of God. If theatre-going became general among professing Christians, it would be the death of piety. Yet one finds the taste for such things increasing on every hand.

We cannot even enter places once dedicated to science and art without finding ourselves in the presence of something like a theatrical performance. Such gimmickry, though in itself harmless



enough, has helped foster the taste which leads ultimately to the theatre and its surroundings.

Who can suppose amusements surrounded with the seductions of vice to be fit recreation for a pure mind? Who could draw near to God after sitting to admire the performances of the debauched (and I am told that some who have dazzled London society are such)?

When behaviour is growing every day more lax and licentious, shall believers lower the standard of their lives? If they do so their spiritual power will depart, and their reason for existence will be over. If there ever could be a time when Christians might relax their rigidity, it surely is not now when the very air is tainted with pollution, and when our streets ring with the newsboys' cries vending filthy papers.

It is profoundly saddening to hear how people talk about acts of sin nowadays; how young men and women without blushing talk of deeds which deprave and destroy, as though they were trifles, or themes for joking. It is a great pity that the ends of justice should require the publishing of unsavoury details. As for those who not only commit lewdness, but who take pleasure in those who do it—"O my soul, come not thou into their secret." My heart often cries, "Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest."

It will certainly be disastrous for the church of God if her members should become impure. In these days we must be doubly strict, lest any looseness of conduct should come in among us. Actual sin must be repressed with a strong hand, but even the appearance of evil must be avoided.

My dear brethren and sisters, whatever your deficiencies, be pure in heart and lip and life. Never indulge an evil imagination, or speak about things which are unclean. Let them not once be named among you, as becometh saints. A lascivious glance, a doubtful word, a questionable act must be strenuously avoided. Anything and everything that verges upon the unchaste must be rejected.

Only the pure in heart shall see God. We are all subject to human passions, and this wretched flesh of ours is too easily fascinated by those who would pander to its indulgences. In seconds the soul may be led into captivity. Watch unto prayer, especially in these evil days. Cry, "Lead us not into temptation," and if the prayer is sincere, you will also keep far from doubtful places. Make a covenant with your eyes that you will not look upon that which pollutes, and stop your ears from hearing about it. Watch your lips lest they spread corruption when speaking of sin. I am not afraid that you will step directly into gross sin, but that you may take a very small step on the road that leads to it. Then it will only be a matter of time.

Seduced

Augustine tells a story of a young friend of his who had the greatest horror of everything connected with the Roman amphitheatre. A heathen friend tried to persuade him to enter the Colosseum, and as he was very hard pressed and was under some obligation to that friend, he agreed to go just once, but determined to keep his eyes and ears closed all the time. It would seem to be a very small risk to sit there as one who was blind and deaf, but in the middle of the sports the people so loudly applauded a certain gladiator who had pleased them that he opened his eyes and ears to discover what it was all about. From that moment he was spellbound; he looked on, and enjoyed the sight, and though before he could not bear the very mention of it, he came at last to be a regular frequenter of the cruel sports, and a defender of them, and after a short time he abandoned his profession of Christianity.

Beware of the leaven of worldly pleasure, for its working is silent but sure, and a little of it will leaven the whole lump. Keep up the distinction between a Christian and an unbeliever and make it clearer every day.

Have you heard of the minister who complained to the devil for running off with one of his church members? The fiend replied, "I found him on my premises, and therefore I claimed him." I, also, may say, "Stop!" to the arch-deceiver, but it will be of no use if he finds you on his territory. Every fowler claims the bird which he finds in his own net. This is the argument: "I caught him in my net, and therefore he is mine." We shall in vain try to dispute this right of property with the arch-enemy, for possession is nine points of the law.

Too rigid?

Avoid the appearance of evil. "But we must not be too rigid," says one. There is no fear of that in these days. You will never go too far in holiness, nor become too like your Lord Jesus. If anybody accuses you of being too strict and precise, do not grieve but try to deserve the charge. I cannot suppose that at the last great day our Lord Jesus Christ will say to anyone, "You were not worldly enough. You were too jealous over your conduct, and did not sufficiently conform to the world." No, my brethren, such a wrong is impossible. He Who said, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect," has set before you a standard beyond which you can never go.



"Well, but," says one, "are we to have no enjoyments?" My dear friend, the enjoyments which are prepared for Christians are many and great, but they never include sin and folly. Do you call vice and folly amusements?

When I go down into the country, I see farmers carrying out great pails of hogwash for the swine, and I never grudge them their dainty meal. I do not protest against their having a full trough twice over. But do I partake with them? Certainly not! I have no taste for that. Do I therefore deny myself? Certainly not! It never struck me that there was anything desirable in their rich mixture. I have no doubt that it has a fine flavour to the creatures for whom it is prepared. It certainly seems to be appreciated.

If worldlings enjoy the pleasures of the world and sin, let them have them, poor souls. They have nothing else to enjoy. They have no paradise for the everlasting future. They have no Christ and Saviour to lean their heads upon. Let them have that which makes them happy while they can be happy. But when I am talking to the children of God I adopt another tone, since for you these things have no charms if you have truly tasted the high delights of fellowship with God.

"But," you say, "I would greatly enjoy a little of the pleasures of sin." Judge yourselves, then, to be falsely called children of God. "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin," by which is not meant that he does not fall into sin through weakness, but that it is not his desire or plan or delight to commit sin. It is not his way, because he is a new creature, and he finds his joy and pleasure in living as near to God as possible.

"How far may we go in conformity to the world?" is a question that is frequently asked. Have you never heard the story of a lady who wanted a coachman? Two or three called to see her about the post, and, in answer to her enquiries, the first applicant said, "Yes, madam, you could not have a better coachman than myself." She replied, "How near do you think you could drive to danger without an accident?" "Madam, I could go within a yard of it, and yet you would be perfectly safe." "Very well," she said, "you will not suit me."

Care or confidence?

The second applicant had heard the question upon which the other had been rejected, and therefore he was ready with his answer, "Danger! Madam, why I could drive within a hair's breadth, and yet be perfectly safe." "Then you will not suit me at all." When number three came in, he was asked, "Are you a good driver?" "Well," he replied, "I am careful and have never met with an accident." "But how near do you think you could drive to danger?" "Madam," he said, "that is a thing I never tried; I always drive as far away from danger as ever I can." The lady at once replied, "You are the kind of coachman I want, and I will engage you at once."

Get such a coachman as that yourself to guide your own heart and lead your own character. Do not see how near you can go to sin, but see how far you can keep away from it. If you do not take that advice, and if the Spirit of God does not produce in you purity of life, by and by the church will have to hold up its hands and say, "Who would have thought it? These were the nice young people of whom so much was expected; these were the good people who used to say, 'You must not be too strict,' and where are they now?" To avoid the worst keep clear of the bad.

As for your Lord's work, be bound to the altar of Christ and be united for ever to Him, and I am sure you will not find that you are losers by giving up worldly pleasures. The Lord's ways are ways of pleasantness, and all His paths are peace. There is a safe and sweet pleasantness in holy living, and the pleasantness lies very much in the fact that an abounding peace springs from it. God grant us grace to keep in these peaceful paths, even though others should call us Puritans and ridicule our holy fear of sin.

CHARLES HADDON SPURGEON (1834-1892)

C. H. Spurgeon is a most unique minister of the Gospel in English history, often called the "Prince of Preachers." Thousands attended his early ministry in London at the New Park Street Chapel and then later in the new building, Metropolitan Tabernacle (1854-1892). The term "Tabernacle" was selected because "We believe this building to be temporary, meant for the time in the wilderness without the visible King." The commodious Tabernacle was attended constantly by capacity crowds of more than 5,000. Members were encouraged to alternate their visits to accommodate the crowds anxious to hear the lively sermons delivered at the rate of 140 words per minute (20 words more than the average rate for public speaking)! Thousands of hearers testified to having been converted under Spurgeon's ministry, and thousands more told of being saved by reading the printed sermons. Without the benefit of amplifiers, musical attractions, methods of crowd manipulation or any sort of "gimmick," depending solely upon the power of the Gospel of God's grace in Jesus Christ, Spurgeon's ministry was unusually effective.



The Tabernacle was one of the largest church buildings of its time. A few years after Spurgeon's death, it was destroyed by a fire during the pastorate of one of Spurgeon's twin sons, Thomas. It was rebuilt, but in World War II it was again ruined by bombs. It was rebuilt a third time and the ministry of the church continues to this day under the ministry of Dr. Peter Masters (since 1970).

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