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SERMON LII.

BY BERIAH GREEN, A.M.

BRANDON, VERMONT.

THE LONG FORBEARANCE OF GOD TOWARD SINNERS.

2 PETER, iii. 9.—*The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some men count slackness; but is long-suffering to-us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.*

WICKED men, in the days of the apostle Peter, perceived that Jehovah long delayed to punish sin. This delay encouraged them to hope, that He would *never* punish it. The apostle viewed the subject in a very different light. He was as forward as themselves to notice and acknowledge the “long-suffering of God,”—the delay of Justice to smite the sinner. But a very different construction did he put upon the divine forbearance. God had not forgotten his threatenings; but, “unwilling that any should perish,” He was waiting, in His “long-suffering to-them-ward,” for transgressors to “turn from their evil ways.”

It is the object of this discourse, to illustrate the affecting truth, THAT GOD WAITETH LONG FOR SINNERS TO REPENT.

I. *At all the different stages of life, through which they pass, God waiteth for sinners to repent and obey his commands.*—Men are capable of obeying God, when they are *very young*. Obedience to His commands is the work of the *heart*; and every body knows, that a little child is capable of exercising the affections of the heart. When little children, then, are capable of knowing, that there *is* a God; that He is their heavenly Father; that He is great, and wise, and good, they are capable of fearing Him, of loving Him, of obeying Him. And at every step of their course through life, from childhood to youth; from youth to manhood; from manhood to old age;—from the cradle to the grave, they are capable of obeying God; and at every step of this course, God is waiting for them to repent and devote themselves to his service.

For the sake of illustration, let it be said, that, at *four years of age*, a child is capable of repentance and obedience to the injunctions of the Bible.—When the sun rises on the day, that makes him four years old—that makes him capable of religious affections and doings—God looks down upon him, and waits for his repentance. Hour after hour slides away, until mid-

day ; hour after hour slides away until the setting of the sun, and God is still waiting for his repentance. He waits till the rising—till the setting of *another* sun. At length the Sabbath comes. The child sees its sweet light—breathes its hallowed air—spends its sacred hours. All the day long, Jehovah waits to see him “turn from his evil ways,” but waits in vain. In like manner, another Sabbath comes ; in like manner it is spent ; till the flowers of summer are exchanged for the fruits of autumn ; till the fruits of autumn are exchanged for the snows of winter ; till another birthday, and a third, and a fourth, are seen and spent ; till childhood is exchanged for youth. All this time, God is waiting for the repentance of that child. And still he waits. That youth grows up to be a man. He is at the head of a family. When a child was first placed within his arms, the eye of God was fixed upon him, to see whether even now, he would repent and “obey the gospel.” He waits upon him hour after hour—day after day—week after week—month after month—year after year, till his children are, some of them dead, and some of them grown up to years of maturity. At length, a few gray hairs are seen upon his head. God waits for his repentance, till they are multiplied—till the snows of age whiten his locks. His memory and understanding become enfeebled—his eye grows dim—his steps falter—he leans upon a staff—he totters upon the brink of the grave ; and still, *still* Jehovah waits for his repentance ! Look at his course from a child of four years old till youth—from youth till manhood—from manhood till old age, and say, as you see God waiting for him to repent and embrace the Saviour, may it not be asserted with strong emphasis, that Jehovah waiteth *long* for the sinner to “hear his voice ?”

II. *Jehovah waits long, to mark the effect of the various and powerful means He employs with sinners, to bring them to repentance.* In the Bible, He urges home upon them the most interesting, striking, and important truths—truths fitted to enlighten the understanding, to arouse the conscience, to reach, dissolve, amend the heart. He speaks to them, moreover, in the arrangements of his providence. Now, He appears before them in the form of “goodness,” and now, of “severity ;” now He causes his sun to cheer, and now the storm to overwhelm them : to-day He causes them “to sow in tears,” and to-morrow, to “reap in joy.”—And then, He permits them to witness the operation of his hand in the conviction and conversion of their fellow-sinners ; and perhaps sends his Holy Spirit, to move upon their souls. *All this time*, He stands *waiting* for them to hear his voice—obey his word—embrace his offers of mercy.

A pious mother retired to her closet with her little son. She fixed her eyes kindly upon him, and in a very tender manner—such a manner, as none but a pious mother could adopt—began to speak with him on the interests of his precious soul. She spoke to him of his guilt and danger ; of the power and goodness of his heavenly Father ; of the “grace and truth” of Jesus Christ. She made him kneel by her side—put the words of

prayer into his mouth—and then, with her soft hand gently pressed upon his head, she poured forth “strong crying” and earnest supplication to God for his forgiveness and salvation. And *God* was there, *waiting* for that child’s repentance.

One of the companions of this child, while engaged in sport, was crushed by the fall of a heavy body. He gasped and died. He was carried home to his afflicted parents; laid in a coffin, and borne to the “burial-place.” Around his new-made grave, all his companions were assembled; and just before the coffin was let down into the “dark and narrow house,” the minister spoke kindly, yet earnestly, to the children who stood around him. “Ah, my dear children,” said he, “what if one of you in that unexpected moment had been cut down, and sent into eternity—would you have gone up to Heaven, or would you have gone down to Hell? *You* too, in “such an hour as you think not,” may die. O, then, prepare to die! While you shed tears upon this coffin, see to it, that you repent of your sins, and give up your hearts to the blessed Saviour.”—And while the preacher spoke, *God* was there. His eye was fixed upon the heart of that child, for whom his mother had been praying in the closet, to see if he would *now* obey his voice—would *now* repent.

This child grew up to be a man, without repentance. And now it pleased the gracious Saviour to pour out the Holy Spirit upon the circle of his friends. He saw many of them convinced of sin—stung with guilt—imploping mercy. Some of them he saw, penitent and humble, at the foot of the cross; he witnessed their godly grief, and heard their song of salvation. And now, one and another of these friends urged him with many tears, to forsake his sins and devote himself to God. And *God* was there, *waiting* for his repentance.

As he approached the evening of life, he began to lean upon the arm of a beloved son. That son, he called “his stay and his staff.” Support and solace he expected from him, when the infirmities of old age should multiply. But this expectation was suddenly blasted. And when that son was laid in the grave, he felt, that his own heart was in the coffin. In that hour, a tempest, dark and terrible, beat upon him. And as he turned from the grave, feeling himself bereaved, forsaken, desolate, *God* was there, *waiting* for his repentance.—Who can look upon the *variety of means* which God is continually employing with men, from childhood to old age, to bring them to hear his voice, without perceiving in the strongest light, that He *waiteth long* for their repentance?

III. *God waits for sinners to repent, while they are engaged in laying out and accomplishing various and numerous designs.* How early do men begin to employ their thoughts, and task their powers, in plans and efforts to gratify their wishes and humour their inclinations! How soon, after they begin to breathe, do they fix their eyes upon some object of pursuit, and with what eagerness and zeal do they go in quest of it—how promptly

and perseveringly do they strive to lay their hands upon it! When they find, in obtaining it, that it fails to make them happy, how soon do they discover *some other* object of pursuit! This overtaken, and found to be "vanity and vexation of spirit," body and soul are tasked to obtain a third, and a fourth. And so the man moves on. Disappointed in one design, he engages in another; and, from the cradle to the grave, is *busy*—it may be "out of breath"—in planning and accomplishing a thousand undertakings. And *all this time*, God is *waiting* for his repentance!

Before he repents and becomes a Christian, the child thinks that he must learn to read with readiness and ease; the youth must complete his education, and make his way upon the stage of active life; the man must establish himself in business, build a house, educate his children, and provide for his family; the old man must settle his affairs, and assist his children in happily establishing themselves in the world;—and at every step of this course, while one thing after another seizes on the attention, engrosses the thoughts, drinks up the spirits, and wastes the strength, God is waiting to be heard and obeyed! Does he not, then, wait *long* for the sinner's repentance?

IV. The statement, laid down in the beginning of this discourse, is strikingly confirmed by a view of *the very short time requisite for the exercise of true repentance*, compared with the everlasting peace and joy which might follow. All His requisitions, Jehovah aims at the "inner man." Obedience must, of course, consist in the exercises of the heart. Grief for sin—confidence in Jesus Christ—love to God, are all exercises of the heart. Now let me ask, How much time is requisite for the exercise of any of the affections?—Is an hour? Is a single *minute*? How much time, think ye, is requisite for an exercise of holy love, or godly fear, or pious confidence? How much time do men require to fasten their affections on their *chosen idols*? When the miser sees a piece of gold, how long may it be before his soul is moved with *desire*? In view of the object of his lust, must an hour pass away before the sensualist can put forth an inward exercise? Amidst obvious dangers, do men wait long before their *fears* are awakened; or their *confidence* is fixed on a known friend, who offers aid? So far as *time* is concerned, the voice of God may be heard—Christian feeling may be exercised "*in the twinkling of an eye*." Had this been their choice, all the inward exercises which sinners have put forth, their life long, might have been in full agreement with the precepts of the Bible. But while they have never had *any* pious feelings, the eye of God has been fixed upon their hearts, *waiting*, from hour to hour, for an exercise of godly sorrow and holy obedience! Has He not, then, *waited long*?

Thus God waiteth for sinners to repent at every step of their course through life; while He employs a great variety of means, which are fitted to bring them to repentance; while they are expending their strength in various and numerous worldly undertakings; and all this, when, in a *sin-*

gle moment, they might hear His voice, obey His requisitions, and secure the salvation of their souls!

In review of the train of thought presented in this discourse, I remark,

1. *God is very gracious.*—While He waits for sinners to repent, He waits for them to accept of the largest benefits which they could receive; and He delays to inflict upon them a punishment richly deserved and terribly severe. This punishment nothing but repentance can avert. Every day—every hour—every moment they refuse to hear the voice of God, they deserve to die; to feel the crushing weight of the Almighty hand. Every hour they refuse to repent, they are increasing their guilt—are more and more provoking eternal Justice to “cut them down.” How *very gracious*, then, is that Being, who can wait—*wait long*—for their repentance! While Jehovah waits for their repentance, moreover, He waits to bestow upon them the *choicest benefits*. The pardon of sin, peace with conscience and with God, “a hope full of immortality,” are benefits unutterably precious. But precious as they are, they are the very benefits which Jehovah offers to every true penitent. And what shall we say of that Redeemer, who not only brings the richest benefits from heaven to earth, to offer to the penitent sinner, but also waits, *waits long*, for him to accept the offer?—waits, till he rises from childhood to youth, from youth to manhood, from manhood to old age?—waits, while the most powerful means are, in various ways, employed to persuade the sinner to repent?—waits, while the sinner spends hour after hour in business or amusement; in making out worldly plans, and prosecuting worldly enterprises?—waits, while “in the twinkling of an eye,” the sinner might hear His voice, and lay hold of “eternal life?” What will you say of a Being, who, so provoked by the very one whom He comes to bless, can wait long for him “to come to himself,” and be blessed? Is He not *very gracious*? Such, poor sinner, whoever thou art, who hast abused the kindness of the Saviour, such is *the patience of thy God*! O, think of this. And while he waits, fly to His feet, cast thyself upon His mercy, and know by sweet experience the riches of His grace.

2. If God has waited long for sinners to repent, *then are they very ungrateful and stubborn in their refusal to hear His voice.*—It argues great hardihood in guilt, for a poor, dependent, dying creature, to turn away from the overtures and threatenings of Almighty God. To do this once, and in *any* circumstances, must be presumptuous and Heaven-daring. The mightiest angel in heaven would tremble at the thought of once slighting the word of God. But impenitent men do this all their life long—in the tenderness of childhood—in the bloom of youth—amid the business of active life—and under the cares and sorrows of old age! Notwithstanding the various and powerful means which are employed to bring them to repentance; the rich instructions of the Bible, the affectionate and earnest

entreaties of Christian ministers and pious friends ; notwithstanding " the goodness and the severity of God ;" all the joys with which He refreshes them, and all the sorrows with which He saddens them ; notwithstanding the remonstrances of conscience, the fear of death, and the prospect of hell, still they refuse to obey the voice of Jehovah. Though they lay out a thousand plans, and accomplish a thousand designs, and meet with a thousand disappointments, they refuse to obey the voice of Jehovah. Within the compass of a single moment, they might, if they would, give Him their hearts ; yet they *will* not. This, fellow-sinner, is to be *set* upon a course of disobedience. This is *stubbornness in guilt*. O think, I beseech you, *how often* you have turned away from Him, who " speaketh to you from heaven ;" think *how long* He has *waited* to be gracious to you ! And can you think of this, and refuse to confess, with a bleeding heart, that you have been indeed *a stubborn sinner* !

3. If God has waited long for sinners to repent, *then they ought to be urged, in the most impressive manner, to repent without the least delay.*—Fellow-sinner, you have long been familiar with the grand features of the Christian faith. Long has the Bible been placed within your reach. Often have you been permitted to visit the house of prayer. Frequently have you been admonished by pious friends, the providence of God, the influences of the Holy Spirit, of your guilt and danger. God hath waited long for you to hear His voice ; to repent and devote yourself to His service. Have you not long refused to examine your own heart—to feel your guilt—to seek forgiving grace ? Ah, sinner, it is *too late* to think of putting off any longer the concerns of your soul—of your eternity ! Already have you travelled fearful lengths in the broad road. Venture not, then, another step ! *To-day*, hear the voice of God. It is at your peril, if you suffer another sun to go down on your impenitence ! *Now*, then, while God is waiting to be gracious, I beseech you, repent and live !

4. If God waiteth long for sinners to repent, *then must the final doom of the impenitent be exceedingly aggravated.*—The day of judgment will be dark and terrible to the fallen angels, for whose benefit no Saviour is provided—no overtures of mercy made. Oh, then, what must that day be—how dark and terrible, to sinful men, who all their life long enjoyed the largest privileges—for whose benefit the blood of the Son of God was offered ! With what agony will they look back upon life, and see that, every step of their course, they abused the grace of God ! How must it cut them to the heart, to remember, that from the cradle to the grave, the voice of eternal mercy was sounding in their ears, and *they would not hear* ! How can they bear to hear the same lips, which a thousand times offered them salvation, now thunder forth the sentence of their condemnation ! O, how deep a hell must be their prison, who scorn the beseeching voice of the great God, and the atoning blood of the LAMB !

Whoever thou art, delaying sinner, it is in my heart earnestly to *plead with thee*. How canst thou go madly on in the road to death! Who can think of thy coming doom, and not feel compassion? O, slight not thy God, thy Saviour, thy Judge, who *waits* for thee to-day. Hasten to His feet; for His brow is gathering frowns: "His wrath abideth on thee:" and to-morrow He may swear, *You shall never see my rest!* O, then, "a great ransom cannot deliver thee!" Then there must be *weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth for ever!*

SERMON LIII.

By BERIAH GREEN, A.M.

EVANGELICAL TRUTHS OFFENSIVE TO THE UNRENEWED BUT JOYOUS TO THE BELIEVER.

MATT. xi. 6.—*And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.*

In the immediate connection of this passage, we are informed, that John the Baptist sent forth two of his disciples, to present to Jesus Christ this inquiry: "Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?" It is not perhaps easy to determine, by what motive John was influenced in sending such a message. Amidst the gloom of the dungeon in which he was confined, some remaining doubts respecting the character of Jesus Christ might have perplexed and troubled him, from which he would gladly be freed; or it might have been his object, to give his disciples an opportunity of listening to the instructions, and witnessing the miracles of Christ, in the hope that they would devote themselves to the person and cause of the Son of God. In reply to the inquiry of his illustrious forerunner, Jesus sent an account of the deeds of power and mercy which were daily wrought by His hand. The blind, He informed him, received their sight; the lame walked; the lepers were cleansed; and the deaf heard; the dead were raised, and the poor had the gospel preached unto them. Works like these most clearly evinced his Messiahship; and, however ill-adapted to the condition of a king, the circumstances in which Jesus then appeared, might seem to be; however His character, and movements, and doctrines might offend Jewish prejudice, and hurt worldly pride; He assured John, that he was a truly happy man, who should cordially confide in Him as the Saviour of the world.—"Blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me."

The only term in the text which requires explanation, is the word "offended." In its literal meaning, it describes the condition of one who has stumbled and fallen upon some object which lay in his way. In the New Testament, it is used in a figurative sense; and describes a state of