

Be Ye Kind Tenderhearted and Forgiving as God

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Everybody, The LORD reigneth, he is clothed with majesty; The LORD is clothed with strength, wherewith he hath girded himself: The world also is stablished, That it cannot be moved. Thy throne is established of old: Thou art from everlasting. He floods have lifted up, O LORD, the floods have lifted up their voice; The floods lift up their waves. The LORD on high is mightier than the noise of many waters, Yea, than the mighty waves of the sea. Thy testimonies are very sure: Holiness becometh thine house, O LORD, forever. Let us pray.

We would this morning, Father, join the psalmist and with 10,000 and thousands of thousands who worship Thee this morning, and with the spirits of just men made perfect, and with the General Assembly in the Church of the Firstborn, whose names are in heaven, we would unite and add our tiny little sound to the sound that's like the sound of many waters, praising and worshipping, Thee, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who made us and who pitied us and Who sent Thy Son to redeem us, and who waits to receive us in the day when we shall have redemption completed in us and Thy work of glorification shall make us worthy to gaze upon Thy face.

Now our Father, we join to ask Thy mercy upon our world. We join to ask Thee, O God, to spare us, to spare the reckless, to spare the worldly and the careless, to spare those who today will not darken the door of any church, who have not thought one holy thought today, and will not, during the whole day. But who will indulge in everything the flesh can offer them and will have no thought of death or judgment or the world to come. We do not scold them, nor do we come before Thee and say we're not as other men. We are just as other men, and we're all like, O God. But Thou hast in great mercy found some of us and made us want to love Thee and made us want to be right and made us want to serve Thee in a world where the service costs us something.

Father, we pray that Thou wilt bless our country. Bless the land that Thou gavest to our fathers, who came from bondage beyond the sea to establish a church here that would be free. Father, we thank Thee for our land. We thank thee for our country and pray that Thou wilt bless it and bless those who are in authority in it.

We pray for the health of the people, the leaders of the church. We pray God for Bible schools and for seminaries and Christian colleges and missions and church schools and great churches and small churches, and celebrated pastors and evangelists and men who are obscure and little heard of, but who love Thee as sincerely and as truly as those whose names are on everybody's lips.

Bless Thou all over to Thee, Our Father. Breathe Thy breath of life-giving power and animating grace upon a church that's fighting and struggling and having a hard time, but still is going on.

Bless behind the Iron Curtain. Bless behind bamboo curtains and all curtains where it's difficult to pray. God bless Thou our Christian brethren who are caught in the terrible grind of communism. We pray, bless the church, Thy church and hasten the hour when Thy Holy Son shall return to glorify the living and raise the dead and make us like unto Himself. This we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

I ask you to notice a verse in the Ephesians epistle, chapter four, verse thirty-two: Be ye kind, one to another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you. Be ye, even as God. Now without anyway doing violence to the syntax, we hear a man say to Christians not too long converted out of paganism, be ye even as God. God was tender-hearted, kind, forgiving. And be ye as God.

Then of course, there's that well-known verse in the Sermon on the Mount: Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect. I know how we try to get around that one. We say that means mature. Be therefore mature, even as God is mature, which is nonsense. Maturity means the arrival at the full possibilities of a growing organism.

And you can apply thought like that to God. You're thinking of some other god, but the God of the Scriptures. God just is. I Am that I Am. God never matures. His Son, the Man, grew up from birth to manhood, increased in wisdom and stature and favor with God and man; with maturity in Jesus, but that was the manhood.

The Godhead does not mature, as He does not grow. He is. I Am that I Am. Can you imagine how the steel beam would go out of the universe if God had said, I will soon be what I hope to become? That's maturity, that's maturing. No, no, that is simply a Greek teacher's way of getting out of the point. Be perfect as your Father which is in heaven is perfect. God calls us to perfection, and we enter perfection, if we ever do, kicking and squalling and begging and saying it's not so. I don't mean to claim perfection, but I mean to claim that God says we are to seek to be perfect as our Father is perfect.

Now, this word, this verse, declares an most astounding fact, that we have as our example none other than God Himself. He says that we are to take the prophets, for an example, who suffered. He also tells us that we are to keep our eyes on good men and try to be like them. Paul, the man of God, would quote one, something good about one church in order to excite another church to seek to be good also like that church. That is all relative. The absolute and final model for men is God. God made us in His image first. We sinned and spoiled that image. He redeemed us in order that that image might be restored. Conversion does not restore it 100%

It gives us what all Dr. Bach used to call the root of the matter. It puts the seed at the beginning of things in us. And then the work of the Holy Ghost is to mold and fashion and shape us until the image of God is restored to us again. And Paul says, be imitators of God.

If I might quote again what I heard William Jennings Bryan said, you know the size of a man may be known upon him by the impression he makes upon you, having heard him only once. I can easily repeat a sermon I preached two months ago and most of you would not remember it, because I don't impress you.

But this great man impressed me. And I heard him say that the difference between a born again Christian and an evolutionist was this. All the evolutionist had to do on Sunday morning was to go out to the zoo, stand in front of the baboon cage, and congratulate himself upon how far he had evolved upward from his fathers. But he said, the born gain Christian goes to church and sits and listens to the preacher tell him how far he has to go yet before he is perfect as his Heavenly Father is perfect. There's the difference. Take your choice.

We are comforted when we look at the cage of monkeys, but we're a long way from being comforted when we look at what we might become. And yet, I think I quoted this on the air yesterday and I'll quote it again now. Browning's words: What I aspire to be and am not, comforts me. A beast I might have been, but I would not sink in the scale. Thank God, you're as far along as you are. And where unto thou hast attained, there abide and cast not away thy confidence which has great recompense of reward. But never mark a marker there nor drive in a stake nor stake a claim and say, this is where I live. There's perfection yet before you, even as God is the astonishing thing here. We Christians have God as our example.

Now, godliness is attained by first having life. You might just as well try to be, say, Chinese without being born of Chinese parents, as to be a Christian without being born of God. A man may imitate a Chinese, but let's suppose that he's a Spaniard born in Chile, or let's suppose he's a Swede born in Stockholm. And he determines he wants to be a Chinese. And he learns the Chinese language. He shades his eyes to make them slant a little differently or seem to. And he slides around on slippers with no tops to them. And he does everything he can do to be Chinese. But the trouble is, he will live and die a Swede, because he was born one. And so, a sinner may try to imitate God, seek to be God's child, try to be like God, but he'll never be God's child without being born of God any more than a man can be Chinese without being born of Chinese parents.

So, there must be life there. There must be a deposit of life there, given to us by faith at the time of our conversion to and trusting Jesus Christ our Lord. Then we have this deposit of life which Peter calls the divine nature. Then after that, there can be growth unto perfection, just as the Chinese baby born into the Chinese home, that's granted, the culture in Chinese and educated in a Chinese

home. By the time that baby is 20, 24 or five, he probably will have absorbed, that is, in the Old China it would have. I don't know too much about this terrible modern China. But he would have learned the classics. He could quote Confucius and the rest of them, and would have learned all the niceties, social amenities, would be worthy of his parents. So, you and I are God's children, born as God's children if we are Christian, but not fully grown yet. And it is the work of God to make us like God.

Now, there are so many things that could be said about God; and I'm in the process of writing a book about God. But I shall say nothing here today that's going to be in that book. You could pick out, I suppose, 100 qualities in God that you would want to imitate and try to be like and seek to be like, but I want to speak about one, and that is persistence.

Did you ever think about how impossible it is to discourage God? God goes right on persisting. He lays His plans and then He continues right on. So many of us don't know where we're going and if we got there, we wouldn't know we were there because we didn't know where we were headed for when we started. And when we left there, we wouldn't know where we have been. But the great God who made the heaven and the earth moves according to preordained plans which He purposed in Himself before the world began.

Therefore, revolutions and earthquakes and tidal waves and floods and wars and intellectual and theological rebellion, don't mean anything to God. He's undisturbed in these affairs, as a poet said, and cares not what men do. The latest bit of mischief that we've gotten into, we young children of the house, this world we call this playhouse, we call Adam's world, is to throw rocks up toward heaven. And we have gotten an affair that we can shoot them higher. We used to be satisfied just to shoot slingshots at birds, but now man is able to shoot rockets way up into the air.

I heard last night on the news broadcast that they're going to have two or three monkeys now, I think, and one of them larger than the monkey. And they're going to put them into a space capsule and shoot them up into the air. Really up there, not just 300 miles up and come back, but way out into orbit to see whether they can't recover them. And then the next thing would be a man. Well, this has frightened some people tremendously and they're worrying about it, but it never bothers me at all. If you were to see, if you were to be able to understand or comprehend, even slightly, how vast space is, though the little Sputniks and explorers and monkey capsules that we're sending up on the earth, looked to God like dust.

There's nothing, nothing. God is moving on. His plans are unchanging. His purposes are not in anywise modified. And there's never an instance where an angel rushes into the Holy Presence and salutes and says, O God, you know what's going on? You know what's going on? They're going to be able to go to Venus and Mars. God's eyelids never flicker. The great God who keepeth Israel never slumbers nor sleeps nor does he worry about anything. He came down as a Man and

suffered once. But He is in His holy temple. Let all the earth be silent before Him. He persists. He goes right on. And I believe that you and I ought to catch this from God.

The reason God can be so nonchalant is that He has eternity to work in. There will never be any whistle blowing nor any sundown. And God will never get old and never retire. And they'll never be any stopping because there's no reason to stop. My father worketh hitherto, and I work. And that's how you and I ought to keep that in mind, that we have eternity to work in too.

I said to my friend, Paris Reidhead when he was here the last time. I said, Brother Reidhead, I don't read as much as I used to read, that is, philosophy and all that. I said, you know, when you get along older, I wouldn't have any use for it. Man, he said, how foolish. He said, you're learning for eternity. This is only the kindergarten, and what I learn now, if it's true, I'll have it for eternity. I took the rebuke with a smile and was glad.

Then, the second thing is, well, I think I'd better bear down there a bit and say, that if you're inclined to give up or be discouraged or quit or say, well, what's the use? Remember that we are to be like God, in that, we have our plans before us, divine plans and were to persist in the carrying out of those plans. So, keep on believing,

Then there's magnanimity. That means size. The world is filled with trifles, just filled with trifles. I said to somebody recently, that during the Great War they closed back there in the 40s, one of the things that used to discourage me, would be to ride on a train with soldiers. Now, I often did. In those days you were glad if you could get on at all. And sometimes you got on and stood the entire way halfway across the state, or all the way across the state.

And here were these fine-looking young fellas in their uniforms, the various uniforms of the services. And uniforms always make a fellow look better. I can understand why girls go wild over uniforms. They do improve a man's looks. And here, there were fine looking fellows. But do you know what they were reading? Almost every one of them had a bunch of crumple, limp, wrinkled, badly beaten comic books. And they were young fellas anywhere from 18 to 25 or 30.

Think of the trifle. Think of a man who makes his living sitting down and making up nonsense and building that nonsense into fictitious characters and putting it in a comic book and then selling it to people. And they read it and soldiers read it, maybe on their way to die, but reading comic books. Now, I read Lil' Abner sometimes. I'm not saying that I object if they're decent, you know. I'm not that rough. But I only say that some never get any higher than that, never go beyond it. They live in trifle. Never get out of it. Never have a thought above it.

Dr. Wilbur Smith, one the greatest scholars and bibliophiles in evangelical circles conceived the idea of editing a library of books to be called the Wycliffe series. Moody Press published it. They

brought out some of the finest books of the Puritans, the great books. Great masterworks. Do you know what happened? They sat on the shelf and gathered dust. And the last report I heard, it's not the latest, but the last report I heard was that they discontinued them because they couldn't move the books.

God's people made for eternity, with eternity in their hearts, created to be like God, to move from galaxy to galaxy, to walk with broad-winged angels and stand in the burning presence of Seraphim, are satisfied with comic books and religious fiction, and the great books stand on the shelf and gather dust. We're little, so little. Church quarrels are almost always over little things. I've never known a church division yet, ever, to be over anything big.

Years ago, several years before I came to Chicago, this congregation had divided. There wasn't anger, but there was division. Part of them went one place and parted. And do you know what the difference of opinion was? It was where they should build the building. So, they divided. Part of them went one place and part of them stayed here, and I came to what stayed here.

I remember hearing of a young man. He was a very healthy young man. You can be religious and be healthy, you know. He was a very healthy young man, a young pastor. He went to a new charge, and he just felt so good, you know, that it wasn't lawful. He would get up in the morning and eat and pray and chuck the baby under the chin and then start out for his study. And they had a low white fence in front of the parsonage.

And he felt so good that he had the habit of when he came to the fence, he never stopped to open the gate. He just jumped over the fence and went on whistling. And it wasn't long until he was waited upon by the deacons and elders of the church. They wanted to know how it was, they said, now, Reverend and pastor, we love you and you're doing good work, but we feel that we owe it to you to bring you this word of reproof for you're young. Well, he said, what have I been doing? Well, they said, you have been jumping over your gate instead of opening it. Well, he said, I just feel good and it's a low gate and I've been athletic.

And so, I just jump over the gate. He said, I haven't thought anything of it. Well, they said, Reverend, we're sorry, but we'd like just to ask you kindly to desist. And so, after that, even though he felt so good, he had to walk out there solemnly looking down at his feet, open the gate, walk out, turn around, shut it and go solemnly on to the study. They wanted that kind of fellow.

Well now, if he'd jumped that gate a few times after that, he'd lost his pastorate. Over what? Over jumping a gate. Now, he was a nicer man than I at his age. Do you know what I would have told those elders? I'd have told them to go climb a gate. And I'd have jumped what I wanted to jump, if I had the strength to do it. I don't jump gates now. But it's not religion that keeps me from jumping gates. I was 40 years old before I ever took all the steps on a pair of stairs. I always went up two at

a time. They say that a man reaches middle age when what he takes two at a time is not steps, but pills.

Now, what I'm trying to tell you is that church quarrels come over trifles. I've known of churches that divided and had an ugly time of it, over whether they should take communion out of one cup or have several cups, so it goes, whether they should paint a certain room blue or green--trivialities.

God is magnanimous. God is big. And the saints were big and understanding and raw, and you couldn't lead them into quarrels over things that didn't matter. The great souls knew what mattered and they were willing to fight to the death for what mattered. But there are only a few things matter after all really, only a few things. And if we find those few things that matter and major on them, we'll get large inside. Everybody ought to be bigger on the inside than he is on the outside. Everybody ought to have space and time and eternity in his heart, even while he's limited to a little body that's running around down here on the earth.

Well then, there's what is found in the text, forgiveness. Life is filled with mysteries, but the most astonishing mystery of all is, how can God forgive us? To hear a friend talk to the children this morning made me again take notice of sin--that everlasting, ubiquitous, persistent, perpetual devil that tags the heels of men. How can God forgive us? I don't know. I only know that amazing grace, how sweet the sound.

Did you read that pathetic thing of the boy who had failed in school and was ill, shot himself and asked them, please sing Amazing Grace at my funeral. I only know that I don't feel good about such things. My heart hurts; sympathy and pity there, the poor kid. I don't know. God knows. Let's leave him as the poet said, his frailties and his sins. Who is God? But let us forgive as God forgave. You know, a moral therapeutic that would do you more good than a Turkish bath and a Swedish massage this morning, just forgive everybody, if you just forgive everybody. If you could just start right now. Bow your head while we're singing the closing hymn and say, O God, I hear by now and herewith forgive everybody in the world and set my heart to love them. You know, it would be like a new birth to you if you've got a little malice, a little grudge, a little hard feeling, a little edginess, it keeps you little. It keeps you morally sick. The moral therapeutic of forgiveness; I recommend it to you. Forgive everybody as God has for Christ's sake forgiven you.

Then there's pity. It is vicarious sorrow. In one sense, Jesus died of pity. He died of pity. It was pity that brought Him. It was love that brought Him. It was not only love, but it was love plus compassion. It was loving compassion; compassion and love that brought Him, and He died of pity. I don't want ever to go through the world hard and not pity people. I pity people. I am sorry for how things are going in the world and sorry for those that suffer. When I hear of a little girl who was hit with a car, I'm sorry. You would go crazy if you went to every home and tried to follow it

up all over the United States or wrote to everybody. You can't do it. The world's too big, and there are too many people in it. But nobody can keep you from grieving.

I'm sorry for lots of young people who jump over the traces and run away and die on the highway. Or go to the dog some other way. I can't keep them from it. But they can't keep me from grieving. Pity and sorrow of heart for others, God has it. God has it. I don't know how God has it. God is perfect, and yet has pity. Philosophy would say that if God is perfect. He couldn't have pity. I think Spinoza makes that claim. But I know two things: I know God is perfect and I know God has pity. I know two things, not just one. So, we will accept both and if one seems to be contrary to the other, we'll wait until we know as we are known. And then we will understand how the great God can pity us and at the same time be the perfect God that He is.

Then there's tranquility. That's the last word. How we need tranquility in this terrible day. The world is like a spinning top. One out of every four hospital beds are occupied by somebody who is in the hospital for mental trouble. We have invented a juggernaut, a Frankenstein, modern civilization, commercial, materialistic, scientific civilization. And it's busy pulling us, body and mind.

I read the other day there are several kinds of heart trouble and I don't have any, but I wasn't being morbid, but I just haven't read about it. One of them was a strange kind of heart trouble, that you die suddenly, instantaneously, without anything being wrong with your heart. A pile up of electricity, they say. And there's a sudden jump and you're dead. And you are perfectly healthy, nothing wrong with your heart. But they said it was like sticking a needle into your heart, the job of electricity and you're finished.

Well, the world is worried, sick, troubled, even American people. They don't look happy. Go out on the street and see. People don't look happy. You see people driving by in big cars and apparently, they're well off and have comforts, physical comforts with it with a strained look on their face. But there remaineth a rest for the people of God.

See my attorney, you know, that's the expression used by men who can afford lawyers. If anybody comes to them, they don't even answer. They say, see my lawyer. There seateth at the right hand of God, One who has stooped to call Himself our Lawyer and our Advocate. And if you have learned to turn your problems over to Him, all those problems between you and God and those problems between you and men. Jesus Christ is your advocate above, your Savior by the throne of love and He takes care of all that. I suppose that if there were truth, I don't know if things will never work out to the way I plan it, but I'd like to go all over the United States of America and tear down all the grave stones that have lies on them and put the truth there. I would, I'd like to do that just to startle the world and maybe bring them to their knees.

Here's one with a little text on, and if I knew the truth, I would have it chisel on; here lies Henry Jones, died from being henpecked. And then over on across would be another and it would be Mrs. Mary Smith. Here lies Mrs. Smith, died of being brutalized by her gorilla husband. And here lies so and so, died at 32 from her burnt-out fuse. She drove too fast, traveled too fast, stayed up too late, got up at the wrong hours, ate the wrong things, tried to keep up with the Joneses and died of a burnt-out fuse.

I tell you, if all the gravestones of the world told the truth there would be a different face on history, but we don't. We lie when we ask the man with the chisel and the hammer to go to work on the tombstones of our dead. They tell another story, not always, not always. Among the saints it's not so. But out in the world it is.

Well, my friends, I'm telling you, so few things really matter. But I think we ought to get tranquil really, and without any tranquilizers, too, without any tranquilizers. Tomorrow is just a certain and safe as heaven is safe. We sang the church's one foundation is Jesus Christ our Lord. She is His new creation by water and the blood.

And if He is our foundation, then He's all we've got to think about if we've settled it that He's made good and He's what He claims to be. And He is victorious. You and I can't help but be. We're bound to be. So, let's relax and be tranquil and rest. Let's not get disturbed too much about what's going to happen. Because we know finally from prophecy what's going to happen. We know far, far beyond the scientific predictions. We know. He told us. Let's rest in God and wait patiently for Him.

Now, I'll read you this passage of Scripture from Isaiah 32, and that will be the close. Until the spirit be poured upon us from on high, and the wilderness be a fruitful field, and the fruitful field be counted for a forest. Then judgment shall dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness remain in the fruitful field. And the work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness, and assurance forever. And my people shall dwell in a peaceable habitation, and in sure dwellings. And in quiet resting places. Peace, I leave with you, my peace I give unto you, and that peace nobody can take away.