

William Gadsby and His Experimental Preaching

Author: C. VanSteenselen

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Introduction

Elements of Experimental Preaching

In the current day, only a few ministers proclaim God's Word both Scripturally and experimentally. However, there is a distinction between preaching the Bible objectively, which is expounding the text, and preaching it also in an experimental way. Rev. R. Boogaard defines experimental preaching as "that work of the Holy Ghost as it is written in the Holy Scriptures and is worked in the hearts of God's children, and in the preaching receives the necessary attention."¹ In other words, experimental preaching describes the work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of God's people. As Rev. Van Aalst defines it, "Scriptural-Experimental...objectively-subjectively...Subjectively means: subjective, personal, inwardly, what touches me."² In other words, objectively means that God's Word is expounded and subjectively how this Word is experienced in the heart of a child of God. This raises the question how this practically carried out in preaching. In other words, what the distinguishing marks are of experimental preaching.

In this case, Rev. C. Vogelaar defines in a practical manner what is part of such sermon. He says that in this preaching,

The *marks* of true spiritual life are *given*...should *distinguish* between the true work of God and that which is man's own work, between true saving faith and that which is counterfeit religion...*explains the marks* of true spiritual life. There are steps in grace as that spiritual life develops and grows, so there are, as in every life, babes, children, but also young men, fathers, and mothers in grace...and the *subjective* (how those [biblical] *truths are experienced* in the lives of Gods children).³

In other words, experimental preaching discovers the sinner, is preaching Christ, gives and explains the marks of grace, and shows the different steps in the life of a child of God. Also, the sermon discriminates between true and false faith. William Gadsby was one of those preachers that had a very powerful experiential preaching.

¹. P.G. Hogendoorn and P Jansen, "Spreken Naar het Hart van Jeruzalem," *Daniel*, April 30, 1982, 5 - "Dat werk van de Heilige Geest zoals dat in de Heilige Schrift getekend en in de harten van Gods kinderen gewerkt wordt, en in de prediking de nodige aandacht en plaats krijgt."

². Jan de Wildt, "Schriftuurlijk-bevindelijke prediking," *Daniël*, December 1, 2000, 1 - "voorwerpelij-
onderwerpelijk. Voorwerpelijk wil zeggen: objectief, op zichzelf, los van onszelf. Onderwerpelijk wil zeggen:
subjectief, persoonlijk, innerlijk, wat mij raakt."

³. Rev. C. Vogelaar, "What Does NRC Mean," *Netherlands Reformed Church of Sioux Falls*, n.d., <https://www.nrcsf.com/who-we-are> (accessed February 7, 2020) - Emphasis added.

William Gadsby

William Gadsby was born in Attleborough, Warwickshire in 1773 and died in 1844. The first place where Gadsby was a preacher was in Hinckley in 1798. Hereafter, in 1805, he moved to Manchester where he stayed until his death.⁴ Gadsby ministered in the Strict Baptist churches, which are currently known also as the “Gospel Standard Strict Baptists,”⁵ and preached about 12,000 sermons during his lifetime.⁶ John Gadsby writes about his father’s ministry,

The two main features...were the depths of the Fall and the depths and heights of Sovereign Grace...the laying of the sinner and his self-righteousness in the dust and the exalting of a precious Redeemer...The sermons were from his heart, what he had himself tasted, handled, and felt of the good word of life...His heart went, as it were, direct into the hearts of the Lord's people.⁷

Here, John Gadsby reveals that his father’s sermons were full of experience of God’s people, which resonated in their hearts. As some men reported, Gadsby’s sermons were “very simple, and yet very clear, very full of matter, and that of the choicest kind, with the text thoroughly worked out, and that in the *most experimental manner*...His sermons were...rich in *unction, savour, and power*, and possessed a *fulness and depth* such as we find in no other reported sermons that we have seen.”⁸

Therefore, the sermons of William Gadsby are deeply experimental. He preached the work of God’s Spirit in the hearts of sinners: showing misery, drawing to Christ, and speaking about enjoyment in Christ. Also, Gadsby is discriminatory in his preaching in showing the marks of grace and preaching about the different steps in the life of God’s true people.

⁴. William Gadsby and John Gadsby, *Sermons, Fragments of Sermons and Letters* (London, n.d.), 2–3.

⁵. B.A. Ramsbottom, “The Gospel Standard Strict Baptists,” *Gospel Standard*, n.d., <https://www.gospelstandard.org.uk/About-Us-2>.

⁶. Gadsby and Gadsby, *Sermons, Fragments of Sermons and Letters*, 3.

⁷. Gadsby and Gadsby, *Sermons, Fragments of Sermons and Letters*, 5–6.

⁸. John Gadsby, *A Memoir of the Late Mr. William Gadsby* (London: J. Gadsby, 1844), 65 - Emphasis added.

Experimental Element in Preaching

Gadsby's sermons wave various experimental elements together. He was able to speak concerning the deepest feeling of misery in the life of sinners in whom the Lord began to work but also also about the fullness and enjoyment in experiencing Jesus Christ.

The Aspect of Sin and Misery

One key element in Gadsby's preaching was to speak about misery and the feeling of sinfulness in the lives of God's people. Moreover, he fully describes how the Lord works in such a sinner, for instance, he says in a sermon, "When God the Spirit communicates this blessed Christ to the conscience, he communicates *life*, and the sinner begins to feel; and he communicates *light*, and the sinner begins to see. And what does he feel and see? His own emptiness, darkness, blindness, weakness; his own lost condition."⁹ He describes the knowledge of misery as related to "life" and "light." Gadsby relates this to what Christ says: "I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live" (John 11:25-26), and that He is the *light*: "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12). Gadsby connects this to the fact that Christ came into the world, which he argues is the spiritual world. Gadsby says that it is He "that lighteth every (spiritual) man that cometh into the (spiritual) world" (John 1:9). For Gadsby, knowledge of sin and misery is of absolute necessity. He argues that without the true knowledge of self, there is no room for Christ alone as Savior. Gadsby says, "There must be room to realize God's Christ as a perfect salvation; and that will *never be till* we are brought to self-loathing and self-detesting before a heart-searching God."¹⁰ Moreover, Gadsby argues that without this experimental knowledge, one is still on his way to hell and will never be saved: "If God never brings you *feelingly* and *spiritually* to hate sin and love holiness...you will never go to heaven."¹¹ Nonetheless, Gadsby argues that knowledge of sin only is insufficient. This knowledge, worked by the Spirit, should bring one to the point where he has no more hope from the law. He says that the sinner gets to know that God's law is holy and offers no hope. Gadsby says, "He feels, in his very soul, that if God's law is 'holy and just and good,' he must inevitably perish; and he is brought to be as dead to any hope of salvation from the law, or by his works according to the law."¹² Moreover, God make a sinner hopeless in himself. Gadsby affirms that one should become totally hopeless in oneself before the Lord will reveal Christ to the sinner.¹³ Practically, Gadsby explains that God works this by taking away a sinner's feelings. At such times, a sinner feels that he has no feeling at all.¹⁴ Gadsby goes even a step further to say that

⁹. Gadsby and Gadsby, *Sermons, Fragments of Sermons and Letters*, 49 - Emphasis added.

¹⁰. Gadsby and Gadsby, *Sermons, Fragments of Sermons and Letters*, 49 - Emphasis added.

¹¹. Gadsby and Gadsby, *Sermons, Fragments of Sermons and Letters*, 84 - Emphasis added.

¹². Gadsby and Gadsby, *Sermons, Fragments of Sermons and Letters*, 89.

¹³. Gadsby and Gadsby, *Sermons, Fragments of Sermons and Letters*, 162.

such a soul will justify God in condemning him.¹⁵ The reason is because there is nothing in a sinner that he can will nor do. Gadsby draws this from Scripture where is written, “It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy” (Rom. 9:16).

In conclusion, Gadsby preached experimentally regarding sin and misery. This experimental knowledge is necessary and has to take away all hope in a sinner and from the law.

The Aspect of Drawing Sinners to Christ

Another key element in Gadsby’s sermons is to draw true sinners to Christ. Though he rarely calls sinners to repentance or to come to Christ, Gadsby describes Jesus Christ as sweet and fitting that poor sinners will feel themselves drawn to Him. John the Baptist points his disciples in a similar way to Christ, saying, “Behold the Lamb of God” (John 1: 36). His two disciples follow Jesus after hearing this but not when John calls people to repentance. Gadsby draws sinners to Christ when he preaches concerning Christ’s work and the communion with the soul. Gadsby says, “When they are brought to have fellowship with the solemn ‘mystery of Christ,’ in his suffering, death, burial, resurrection, ascension, and exaltation, they will be brought to see that it was for this purpose that his blessed Majesty became poor.”¹⁶ Also, he describes this work with such tenderness that it should draw true sinners. “[Sin] did not trifle with the Son of God. *It broke his heart*, it tortured his soul, and harrowed up his mind...he had but strength enough to bear up under the tremendous wrath that he had to endure for his people”, says Gadsby.¹⁷ Another time, he describes the anxiety and trials which the Lord Jesus Christ had to go through.¹⁸ Moreover, Gadsby speaks specifically regarding the work of Christ in applying his cross work to filthy and loathsome sinners who have nothing in themselves. First, he describes the poor sinners’ circumstances and then that Christ came for such sinners. Gadsby says, “Blessed be his name, it is for the poor burdened, convinced sinner, who is without help, who cannot do any work of his own...the Lord Jesus Christ came to pick up *such as you are*; he came to pick up these nothings in self.”¹⁹ Also, Gadsby encourages such souls to say that Jesus’ blood is for those ones. He says, “The blood of Jesus can cleanse the vilest sinner that ever existed.”²⁰ Furthermore, Gadsby deals pastorally with poor souls that feel themselves helpless. He encourages them by saying that salvation comes from God’s side, but also that the worse they are in themselves, the more God welcomes them: “We have the promises; all the blessings of the oath, of the love and blood of a precious Redeemer; all the blessings of the fulness of his heart;

¹⁴. Gadsby and Gadsby, *Sermons, Fragments of Sermons and Letters*, 72.

¹⁵. Gadsby and Gadsby, *Sermons, Fragments of Sermons and Letters*, 50.

¹⁶. Gadsby and Gadsby, *Sermons, Fragments of Sermons and Letters*, 254.

¹⁷. Gadsby and Gadsby, *Sermons, Fragments of Sermons and Letters*, 159 - Emphasis added.

¹⁸. Gadsby and Gadsby, *Sermons, Fragments of Sermons and Letters*, 103.

¹⁹. Gadsby and Gadsby, *Sermons, Fragments of Sermons and Letters*, 251 - Emphasis added.

²⁰. Gadsby and Gadsby, *Sermons, Fragments of Sermons and Letters*, 243.

all are freely given, ‘without money and without price’...The poorer the wretch, the *more welcome* he is.”²¹ Also, Gadsby expounds the text “Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28) in such a way that Christ sees the burdens of the poor sinner and asks them to come for a light yoke.²² Finally, Gadsby shows the certainty of the elect’s coming. Though unbelief and a carnal heart say this will never happen, Gadsby argues that God’s Word is certain in its promise that it is not a chance of coming but that the elect will certainly come because Christ said that they “shall come”.²³ This reveals that Gadsby encourages the true believer that their coming is in Christ’s hand.

In conclusion, Gadsby draws sinners to Christ not specifically by commanding them to come or believe in Christ, but by speaking with all tenderness about Christ as a person and His work as Mediator. Also, Gadsby encourages the poor and burdened that they are the most welcome, and that those in Christ’s hand will surely come.

The Aspect of Christ’s Revelation

Furthermore, Gadsby speaks much concerning the revelation of Christ by the Holy Spirit to the conscience of a trembling sinner. Though revelation of Christ seems to be passive from man’s side, it is not unscriptural. In Galatians, the apostle Paul writes that Christ was revealed unto him. Paul says, “But when it pleased God...To reveal his Son in me...” (Gal. 1:15-16).

The Fact

Gadsby speaks about the fact *that* Christ and His benefits are revealed. He believes that the basis for this revelation is found in the text, “He [the Spirit] shall glorify me [Christ]” (John 16:14). Gadsby says, “The Spirit takes his stand on Christ; Christ says, ‘He shall glorify me.’ How shall he do this? He takes of the things of Christ and shows them to the poor soul, those things revealed in the Bible.”²⁴ Though here is spoken about “the things of Christ”, Gadsby more says also that the person of Christ is revealed, applied by the Holy Spirit to the conscience of a poor sinner. He says, “The blessed Spirit makes him manifest to the conscience us ‘a very present help in time of need.’ *He reveals Christ in the conscience.*”²⁵ Therefore, Gadsby believed undoubtedly that there is a revelation of Christ to the conscience of a soul.

²¹. Gadsby and Gadsby, *Sermons, Fragments of Sermons and Letters*, 164 - Emphasis added.

²². Gadsby and Gadsby, *Sermons, Fragments of Sermons and Letters*, 167.

²³. Gadsby and Gadsby, *Sermons, Fragments of Sermons and Letters*, 282.

²⁴. Gadsby and Gadsby, *Sermons, Fragments of Sermons and Letters*, 282.

²⁵. Gadsby and Gadsby, *Sermons, Fragments of Sermons and Letters*, 24 - Emphasis added.

The Time

Furthermore, Gadsby shows in his sermons the time *when* Christ is revealed to a sinner. This moment is related to the fact that Gadsby believed that a sinner's hope in himself must be entirely cut off. The revelation of Christ to the soul's conscience, therefore, takes place only after this moment. However, there is a gradual revelation of Christ from that specific moment onwards. He says, "*When the poor soul has been killed out and out, again and again in his own feelings, to all hope and expectation in self or the law, by and by Christ is revealed to him 'the hope of glory.'*"²⁶ In another sermon, Gadsby says this in a different manner: "You will feel yourselves as dead as possible, without any help of your own...you will lay low as a perishing sinner at the feet of Christ, *till* he is revealed in your heart as the hope of glory."²⁷ Therefore, the moment of Christ's revelation is after a sinner has lost all hope in himself.

The Content

Moreover, Gadsby also addresses the *content* of the revelation in his preaching. This content consists of two things: First, the content is Christ with His complete atoning work on the cross, and second, the revelation contains the blessings that flow out of Christ's cross work. Gadsby argues that in Christ's work, He "condemned sin in the flesh."²⁸ In the application of this atonement, the Spirit brings the blessings of Christ's "condemnation of sin" into the conscience. At that moment, "It brings pardon and peace."²⁹ Regarding that revelation, Gadsby argues, "The blessed 'body of Christ,' his atonement, his finished work, and the blessings connected with it, *revealed to his conscience*, bring a free pardon."³⁰ Elsewhere, Gadsby puts it differently: At such a moment Christ's cross is revealed to a sinner. He says, "[Sin] is crucified with him [Christ] when *his cross* is spiritually revealed in the conscience."³¹ Therefore, the content of the revelation Christ to a sinner consists of the person of Christ, His atoning work and the benefits that flow from it.

In conclusion, Gadsby believed that there is a revelation of Christ to the soul. This revelation takes place after a sinner has lost hope in himself. The content of this revelation is Christ and His work on the cross and the benefits that flow from it.

²⁶. Gadsby and Gadsby, *Sermons, Fragments of Sermons and Letters*, 90 - Emphasis added.

²⁷. Gadsby and Gadsby, *Sermons, Fragments of Sermons and Letters*, 242 - Emphasis added.

²⁸. Gadsby and Gadsby, *Sermons, Fragments of Sermons and Letters*, 96.

²⁹. Gadsby and Gadsby, *Sermons, Fragments of Sermons and Letters*, 96.

³⁰. Gadsby and Gadsby, *Sermons, Fragments of Sermons and Letters*, 90 - Emphasis added.

³¹. Gadsby and Gadsby, *Sermons, Fragments of Sermons and Letters*, 85 - Emphasis added.

The Blessed Effect of Christ's Revelation

Gadsby's sermons demonstrate that Christ's revelation gives a blessed effect in the life of a sinner, which can be divided in experimental knowledge and experimental feelings.

Experimental Knowledge

In the first place, Christ's revelation gives a believer experimental knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, His work, and the blessings which do flow from it. For instance, Gadsby speaks in a sermon about one who get to know his salvation by Christ's knowledge: "And when his blessed Majesty is thus *made known as your salvation*, O how you will triumph in the glorious 'mystery of Christ!'"³² This shows that the blessing of Christ's revelation is experimental knowledge of the Savior and His work, which revelation is for Gadsby of great importance.

Experimental Feelings

Moreover, Gadsby interweaves experimental feelings remarkably in his sermons. This relates not only to one who is convicted of sin but also in regard Christ's revelation. Gadsby shows that one feels at such moments fellowship with God, joy, sweetness in the truth, love and a blessed shame.

First, one receives a feeling of *fellowship* with God. Gadsby relates this blessedness for the time when salvation is made known to a sinner, saying, "When this salvation is made known and manifest...sometimes there is such a *blessedness in it*, the man feels such *fellowship between God and his conscience*."³³ Even deeper, it is true that "[God] grants the sinner an unctuous feeling of his presence."³⁴

Secondly, a sinner receives feelings of *happiness*, joy and love. Gadsby particularly declares that there is "gladness" in one's heart when Christ is revealed, "When the Lord makes this manifest in us, it is sure to make us *GLAD*...What gladness in the heart when Jesus is thus revealed, and when our souls can sweetly and blessedly triumph in him! 'He hath done great things for us whereof we are glad.'"³⁵ However, if a conscience is disturbed, there is no true happiness. This changes when the conscience receives calmness, then there will come a happiness as well. Gadsby argues "when the Lord reveals this salvation to his conscience, it brings calmness, serenity, holiness, happiness."³⁶

Third, the revelation of Christ causes a blessed *shame* and *humility* in the heart of a

³². Gadsby and Gadsby, *Sermons, Fragments of Sermons and Letters*, 242 - Emphasis added.

³³. Gadsby and Gadsby, *Sermons, Fragments of Sermons and Letters*, 287 - Emphasis added.

³⁴. Gadsby and Gadsby, *Sermons, Fragments of Sermons and Letters*, 158.

³⁵. Gadsby and Gadsby, *Sermons, Fragments of Sermons and Letters*, 25 - Emphasis added.

³⁶. Gadsby and Gadsby, *Sermons, Fragments of Sermons and Letters*, 285.

sinner. The reason is the wondrous love of God for a sinful heart. In one of the sermons is said, “When the Lord brings salvation to the heart...the Lord fills him with a *holy and blessed shame* before God. He is ashamed, on account of his many sins, and he is ashamed that he has so base a heart; and he is lost in wonder at the wonderful love of God to him.”³⁷

Fourth, the sinner feels the *power of the truth*. Gadsby argues, “And when God's Spirit leads the soul into this truth, and he is blessed with vital experience to *feel the power* of it, it causes him to triumph in the riches of God's matchless grace!”³⁸ In Scripture, this can be referred to Corinthians, where is said, that one’s “faith stands not in man’s wisdom, but in God’s power” (1 Cor. 2:5).

In conclusion, Gadsby demonstrates that Christ’s revelation causes experimental knowledge of the Savior and His work. Further, his sermons include different elements of experimental feelings, consisting of feeling God’s fellowship, joy and calmness, a blessed shame because of sin, and feeling the power of the truth.

³⁷. Gadsby and Gadsby, *Sermons, Fragments of Sermons and Letters*, 284 - Emphasis added.

³⁸. Gadsby and Gadsby, *Sermons, Fragments of Sermons and Letters*, 244 - Emphasis added.

Discriminatory Element in Preaching

Gadsby's sermons are also discriminatory in character. He discriminates between believers and unbelievers, true and false believers, and the different groups of believers.

Between Believers and Unbelievers

First, the sermons have a clear distinction between believers and unbelievers. Though Gadsby preaches mainly to true believers, he describes unbelievers in their state and condition, and speaks at times directly to them. Nonetheless, he calls them not to faith nor repentance.

Describing Unbelievers

In applying God's Word to unbelievers, Gadsby describes their current state. He shows that they have a mere head knowledge without feeling or power of it. He says, "A man... [who has] a mere judgmental knowledge of it, can be satisfied with the proclamation made in the letter of the Word; but I believe that any man...who can feel satisfied with that, is a stranger to God... The Gospel of God must come to them, 'not in word, but in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance.'"³⁹ He points unbelievers to their future after death in meeting God. In one sermon, he demonstrates that one without salvation will perish after he has had an "awful meeting" with God. He clarifies, "You and I must meet God and be seen exactly as we are; and if we have not this salvation, what an awful meeting it will be!...Any salvation that does not come to the core, and give us freedom from sin and death, will leave us to perish."⁴⁰ At times, Gadsby uses very strong language, for instance, when someone has no real knowledge of the truth, he will be damned. He says, "If God never gives you an entering into the vitality of this truth, as God lives you will be damned."⁴¹ Nonetheless, it shows that Gadsby does not call him to faith but paints Jesus Christ and His work before him to draw the sinner to Christ.

Describing Believers

Generally, Gadsby preaches to believers, and specifically concerning their condition. He describes who God's children are and which circumstances they can be in. Also, he declares what is necessary to know, of which knowledge of one's own sinful state and God's mercy is an example, "'The Lord hath done great things for us.'...Who are the *us*? They are God's spiritual Zion...brought, by his spiritual power and grace, to know their own ruined condition and the mercy of God in Christ Jesus towards them."⁴² Also, Gadsby has the ability to describe the way of the church in great detail. He paints not only their pleading with God but also their blessed fellowship with God and leadings by the Holy Spirit concerning Christ. He says, "That poor soul

³⁹. Gadsby and Gadsby, *Sermons, Fragments of Sermons and Letters*, 157.

⁴⁰. Gadsby and Gadsby, *Sermons, Fragments of Sermons and Letters*, 286.

⁴¹. Gadsby and Gadsby, *Sermons, Fragments of Sermons and Letters*, 81.

⁴². Gadsby and Gadsby, *Sermons, Fragments of Sermons and Letters*, 11.

is alive that is in such a state that he sighs and groans to God to have this salvation brought down to his conscience...it leads the soul to plead with God; sometimes there is such a blessedness in it, the man feels such fellowship between God and his conscience.”⁴³ Generally, he discriminates the believer from the unbeliever by describing the marks of grace in a believer’s life.

Between True and False Believers

Furthermore, Gadsby discerns between true and false believers. This distinction is made among three different areas. First, the true believer has experimental knowledge and feelings while the hypocrite has head knowledge and no feeling, second, a true believer’s dependency versus a false believer’s self-sufficiency, and third, true piety contrary to unlawful living.

True Knowledge and Feeling versus Ignorance and Insensitivity

Gadsby’s sermons contain a strong element for the necessity of experimental knowledge and feelings. This does not exclude that true believers have times without feelings, but Gadsby refers to religion without feeling at all and that is content with the letter of the Word only. He powerfully condemns such religion, saying, “AN UNFEELING RELIGION IS THE DEVIL'S RELIGION. It is not the religion of Christ; for God brings his people to know what it is to ‘handle and taste and feel of the Word of life.’...If you die without a feeling religion, as God is God, you will be damned.”⁴⁴ Also, he sees experimental knowledge as a distinguishing mark between a true and false believer. He argues that no experimental knowledge of sin results in no experimental knowledge of the Savior.⁴⁵ An example is that people have enough with “the letter” of the law rather than the cause for law-work.⁴⁶ Here, he refers to Romans: “The law was given that every mouth might be stopped and all the world become guilty before God” (Rom. 3:19). He concludes that when one’s mouth is not stopped nor has felt anything, he is still on his way to hell.⁴⁷ In relation to this, he asks the congregation whether they can play with sin. This would mean that one has never had the essential element of godliness,⁴⁸ because the Spirit works in the sinner that he will mourn over his sin as said in Scripture, “They shall look upon Me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him as one that is in bitterness for his first-born” (Zech. 12:10).

⁴³. Gadsby and Gadsby, *Sermons, Fragments of Sermons and Letters*, 278.

⁴⁴. Gadsby and Gadsby, *Sermons, Fragments of Sermons and Letters*, 168 - Capitalization original.

⁴⁵. Gadsby and Gadsby, *Sermons, Fragments of Sermons and Letters*, 11.

⁴⁶. Gadsby and Gadsby, *Sermons, Fragments of Sermons and Letters*, 11.

⁴⁷. Gadsby and Gadsby, *Sermons, Fragments of Sermons and Letters*, 11.

⁴⁸. Gadsby and Gadsby, *Sermons, Fragments of Sermons and Letters*, 160.

Dependency versus Self-Sufficiency

A second aspect that Gadsby uses to discern between a hypocrite and true child of God is self-sufficiency for the former versus total dependence upon God regarding the latter. Regarding hypocrites, he speaks about two opposite marks. The first is that one thinks he is able to be saved by working his own salvation, on the other hand, one's ability to cultivate his own faith. Though these seem to be opposites, both are rooted in a "selfish nature" and not in a reception of salvation as gift of God. "One party says, 'Work;' the other, 'Believe;' and both act from their *selfish nature*. But when the Lord brings his people experimentally to know they can neither work nor believe, they are brought to feel...they have need of this great salvation,"⁴⁹ says Gadsby. The distinction he makes is that the hypocrite has still the smallest possibility in self while a true believer needs to receive all of salvation from God's side. Regarding working one's own salvation, he, therefore, refutes the misuse of the text, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his own good pleasure" (Phil. 2:12-13), arguing that the first clause needs to be connected to the latter. He says, "And if you and I, by the working of the Spirit in us, are working out what God is working in; and God is working in what we are working out...But until God works in us his grace, by the power of his Spirit, there will be no ability in us to work it out."⁵⁰ Moreover, Gadsby proves that one's own possibility to believe is unscriptural by testifying that it is a "gift of God" (Eph. 2:8):

You will find some men...say, "O! You may always believe. Why don't you believe? Simply believe, and be happy." Why, that is creature-merit; it is the old leaven; it is another name, but it is creature-merit. But God's people are brought to feel that they can no more believe themselves...that it must be the Lord himself who must "work in them to will and to do of his good pleasure," and that faith is his entire gift.⁵¹

Also, Gadsby reveals in his sermons that some, even when the Spirit begins to work in one's heart, try to cultivate their own faith, hope and love. For those, there will come a "sentence of death" upon them because they trust ultimately in self and their own strength. He states, "And indeed I do not wonder at this being the case with some of God's people; for the ministers tell them they must do it,—they must cultivate faith...And when we begin to cultivate, instead of, submitting to God's cultivation, why, then the sentence of death must come upon it, 'that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God that raiseth the dead.'"⁵² This reveals that the true believer receives faith and depend for all his salvation on God but a false believer will trust ultimately in himself in one way by works-righteousness or another by cultivating faith.

⁴⁹. Gadsby and Gadsby, *Sermons, Fragments of Sermons and Letters*, 274 - Emphasis added.

⁵⁰. Gadsby and Gadsby, *Sermons, Fragments of Sermons and Letters*, 253.

⁵¹. Gadsby and Gadsby, *Sermons, Fragments of Sermons and Letters*, 166.

⁵². Gadsby and Gadsby, *Sermons, Fragments of Sermons and Letters*, 77-78.

Piety versus Unlawful Living

A third area where Gadsby discriminates between the wheat and chaff in the church is lifestyle. God's children desire to live righteous and deny ungodliness, but there will also be an attitude of humility. He says, "Has not something taught you to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present evil world?...This grace brings humility, humility brings patience, and patience is to have a great deal of tribulation,"⁵³ in application to the text, "That thou mayest remember, and be confounded, and never open thy mouth any more, because of thy shame, when I am pacified towards thee, for all that thou hast done, saith the Lord God" (Ezek 16:63), while he preached on, "Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation" (Ps. 35:3).

Not only the true but also the false believers are known by their lifestyle. They can have "heavenly talk", but their lifestyle is not according to God's word. This means that one's lifestyle is a test to "try the spirits of men whether they be of God" (1 John 4:1). Gadsby argues, "I hear of many people talking of being very heavenly and very blessed in practicing what they call righteous acts, and I believe it has all been a delusion of the devil; their practice has been all the while exactly contrary to God's Word."⁵⁴ Here, he uses Joseph with Potifar's wife as an example from Scripture. She showed her 'love' for Joseph until she recognized his holy lifestyle, after which she accuses him. The same, Gadsby says, is true of hypocrites who are able to speak about the love for Christ until they recognize His holiness.⁵⁵ For Gadsby, it is impossible that one can live in sin and being a true child of God. He basis this on Paul's letter, "What shall we say, then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound...God forbid." (Rom 6:1-2a). In the life of a true believer, there will come a hate to sin and love to holiness because of the love and power of God and not because of the terrors of hell: "If God never brings you feelingly and spiritually to hate sin and love holiness, irrespective of the fear of hell and the terrors of the damned, you will never go to heaven...For wherever the religion of Christ is...that man would hate sin, if there were no hell; and because he feels it as a plague in him."⁵⁶

In conclusion, Gadsby distinguishes between a true believer and a hypocrite. The believer has true knowledge and feelings, while a hypocrite misses the power or feeling of it. Also, a child of God depends fully on God, both in works and faith, while a false believer can work his own salvation or cultivate his own faith, hope or love. Moreover, the believer truly hates sin because of God's love while a hypocrite hates it not or wrongly because of the terror of hell.

⁵³. Gadsby and Gadsby, *Sermons, Fragments of Sermons and Letters*, 284–285.

⁵⁴. Gadsby and Gadsby, *Sermons, Fragments of Sermons and Letters*, 42.

⁵⁵. Gadsby and Gadsby, *Sermons, Fragments of Sermons and Letters*, 101.

⁵⁶. Gadsby and Gadsby, *Sermons, Fragments of Sermons and Letters*, 84.

Among Different Believers

Gadsby was capable to discern between different believers. He dealt not only with the various stages that a believer experiences but also the diverse leadings of God with his people. Regarding those leadings, he says, “I do not mean that all God's people are led into the same depth in this.”⁵⁷ Also, he is able to describe the various stages that a believer experiences. These experiences can vary from feeling the bondage of the law, a love and peace which is beyond understanding, or a strive with sin. Generally, he makes a distinction between those under the bondage of the law, that have the revelation of Christ, and those with God’s further leadings.

Those under the Bondage of the Law

The first category is those who are awakened by the Spirit and feel themselves condemned and under the law. He says, “But now; when a poor sinner feels the bondage of the law and feels ‘the sentence of death,’ he finds himself in a captivity, from which he cannot deliver his own soul.”⁵⁸ Also, they become more and more ignorant and a fool according to their own perspective, and find themselves unable to pray.⁵⁹ His basis is that the Spirit helps the believers to pray because they do not know what to say, “For we know not what we should pray for as we ought; but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings that cannot be uttered” (Rom. 8:26). Moreover, one who is stopped by the law can have times that he feels that he cannot feel anymore. He says, “Your mouth will be so completely stopped sometimes, that, when you are praying, conscience, enlightened and quickened by the Holy Ghost, will say, ‘You do not feel *that*,’ and, ‘You do not feel *that*. What a hypocrite you are! You are speaking things to God, and you do not feel them.”⁶⁰ This is, according to Gadsby, necessary because a sinner would otherwise trust in his feelings rather than in the Lord. He says,

But we are as prone, in some of our sweet feelings, to put a little trust and confidence in our feelings as we are to breathe. And then the Lord takes these feelings away, and we have none to trust. Then the enemy tells us it has all been a delusion, all a deception, and we have no real, vital godliness...”We have the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead.”⁶¹

God’s purpose to take away his feelings is that the sinner will trust the Savior alone rather than in himself. Furthermore, among those under the bondage of the law, Gadsby deals with those that dare not to believe in Christ as their Savior. He points them to the history of Joseph who was unknown to his brothers even though he was nigh. Gadsby’s encouragement to those is

⁵⁷. Gadsby and Gadsby, *Sermons, Fragments of Sermons and Letters*, 11.

⁵⁸. Gadsby and Gadsby, *Sermons, Fragments of Sermons and Letters*, 12.

⁵⁹. Gadsby and Gadsby, *Sermons, Fragments of Sermons and Letters*, 71.

⁶⁰. Gadsby and Gadsby, *Sermons, Fragments of Sermons and Letters*, 24.

⁶¹. Gadsby and Gadsby, *Sermons, Fragments of Sermons and Letters*, 76–77.

that Christ will make His relationship to them clear in the future.⁶²

Those with a Free Conscience

Another group described by Gadsby are the ones that have had the revelation of Christ. He demonstrates that they experience the removal of their bondage but also love and peace in their conscience: “When he brings peace to the conscience and pardon to the heart, and sets the soul at liberty, then they are the people that can say, ‘The Lord hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad.’”⁶³ Also, those have a joyful song and a deep sweetness. He says, “The Holy Ghost comes and brings into the soul the pardoning love of Christ, removes bondage, gives a sweet quiet in the conscience, and gives the happy song, ‘In the Lord have I righteousness and strength;’ ‘In the Lord have I mercy; in the Lord I am free.’”⁶⁴ This shows that Gadsby deals also with souls who have experienced Christ and His benefits.

Those who have Further Leadings

A third group are believers who are further led by the Lord. Gadsby clarifies that when a believer receives Christ’s revelation and its fruit of peace in his conscience, he thinks that this will be true for the rest of his life. However, the Lord will lead him further in the knowledge of Christ and their own misery. He says, “Well, by-and by the poor creature is brought to think, ‘Now it will be comfortable all the days of my life.’ But I tell you, if you live long, the Lord will teach you more of Christ.”⁶⁵ God uses for this two means, first, there will be trials and testing faith, and second, there comes a dryness to the soul and further dying to self.

God has two main reasons, according to Gadsby, why He brings trials. In the first place, it is needed to receive more knowledge of Christ’s love, His offices and fullness. He says,

If any one was to ask you what is intended by Christ in all his offices, in all his relations, in his oath and promises, in all his fulness, you would be ready to say, “O! I do not understand all those divisions and subdivisions. I believe he has pardoned my soul, I believe he has loved me, I feel that I love him, and that is enough for me.” O no. You must know more than that; and therefore you shall be brought into straits and difficulties which shall make the offices and relations, the oath and promise and fulness, of Jesus Christ, just suited to your condition.⁶⁶

In other words, Gadsby believes that God leads His people into trials and difficulties to

⁶². Gadsby and Gadsby, *Sermons, Fragments of Sermons and Letters*, 105.

⁶³. Gadsby and Gadsby, *Sermons, Fragments of Sermons and Letters*, 12.

⁶⁴. Gadsby and Gadsby, *Sermons, Fragments of Sermons and Letters*, 23.

⁶⁵. Gadsby and Gadsby, *Sermons, Fragments of Sermons and Letters*, 23.

⁶⁶. Gadsby and Gadsby, *Sermons, Fragments of Sermons and Letters*, 23.

learn more about Christ, His offices and fittingness for a sinner. A second purpose for trials is because faith is victorious and should produce patience. This happens only when battles takes place. Gadsby says, “If he [God] gives patience, it must be tried with tribulation; if he gives us faith, we shall have something for that faith to do; faith obtains the victory; but there can be no victory without a battle, and faith has many battles to fight.”⁶⁷

Furthermore, Gadsby speaks concerning a further dying to self and feelings of dryness in the soul. The believer has still some trust in self, though he felt God’s love. However, God wants the sinner to trust in Him alone, wherefore, He brings death upon all that is of a believer. Gadsby clarifies, “I had had a zeal for God, but it was grounded in self; and I had felt God's free love come to my soul as a matter of free favor, but there was self at bottom thinking.”⁶⁸ It means that Gods takes away all hope and expectation from self: “And thus you go on, from time to time; and the sentence comes upon all your hopes and expectations that spring from self in any bearings of it whatever.”⁶⁹ Related to this, Gadsby believes that there comes a time when all feelings disappear and there is a dryness in the soul. He clarifies,

After we have had our sweet moments, our sweet enjoyments, we must, all of us, have another stroke of death...The Lord tells us a little about it in the prophecy of Hosea: “I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness.” That is another step...after she has tried the trackless desert for a while, is ready to give up, and to look upon all hope as gone, the Lord says, “And I will speak comfortably unto her, and I will give her her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope.”⁷⁰

Nonetheless, Gadsby says to those people that these trials are not happening without Christ knowing about it. They may tell Him concerning their trials and afflictions because Christ has experienced temptations in His life on earth.⁷¹

In conclusion, Gadsby speaks mainly to three different groups among the believers. The first are those that feel themselves under the bondage of the law, the second group are they who have experienced liberty in the conscience and the love of Christ, and the third are believers who are further led by the Lord through trials and dying to self with the purpose to trust in God alone.

⁶⁷. Gadsby and Gadsby, *Sermons, Fragments of Sermons and Letters*, 285.

⁶⁸. Gadsby and Gadsby, *Sermons, Fragments of Sermons and Letters*, 73.

⁶⁹. Gadsby and Gadsby, *Sermons, Fragments of Sermons and Letters*, 75.

⁷⁰. Gadsby and Gadsby, *Sermons, Fragments of Sermons and Letters*, 93.

⁷¹. Gadsby and Gadsby, *Sermons, Fragments of Sermons and Letters*, 104.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Gadsby's sermons are experimental, showing in a pastoral way how the Spirit of God leads sinners from knowledge of sin to Christ and further. Gadsby argues that experimental knowledge of sin is necessary because it takes away a sinner's hope outside Christ. Furthermore, Gadsby draws sinners to Christ. He does not exhort them to believe or repent but displays in all its beauty the blessed person and work of Christ, and he encourages those who feel their spiritual poverty that they are most welcome by Christ. Moreover, Gadsby preaches concerning an experimental revelation of Christ. This revelation gives a calmness and freedom in the conscience, a love towards God, and a shame concerning sin. Also, Gadsby discriminates in his sermons among the various groups of hearers. The first group he distinguishes is between believers and unbelievers by describing the marks of grace. Secondly, he discerns between true and false believers in showing that there has to be true knowledge and feelings, a dependency on God, and a true hatred of sin. Finally, Gadsby makes a distinction between the various believers, speaking to those who are under the bondage of the law, those that have freedom in their conscience with the love of Christ, and those that are lead further by the Lord through trials and dying to self.

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