

A close-up photograph of a hand lifting a vibrant red ribbon from the top of a book. The book's cover is black, and the pages are white. The background is a soft, light grey gradient. The text is overlaid on the upper portion of the image.

The WORDLESS BOOK

CHARLES H. SPURGEON (1834-1892)

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THE WORDLESS BOOK

“Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.”

—Psalm 51:7

I daresay¹ most of you have heard of a little book that an old divine used constantly to study. When his friends wondered what there was in the book, he told them that he hoped they would all know and understand it, but that there was not a single word in it. When they looked at it, they found that it consisted of only three leaves: the first was black, the second was red, and the third was pure white. The old minister used to gaze upon the black leaf to remind himself of his sinful state by nature, upon the red leaf to call to his remembrance the precious blood of Christ, and upon the white leaf to picture to him the perfect righteousness that God has given to believers through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ His Son.

I want you, dear friends, to read this book this evening, and I desire to read it myself. May God the Holy Spirit graciously help us to do so to our profit!

I. The Black Leaf

First, let us look at the black leaf. There is something about this in the text, for the person who used this prayer said, “Wash me,” so he was black and needed to be washed. The blackness was of such a peculiar kind that a miracle was needed to cleanse it away, so that the one who had been black would become white, and so white that he would be “whiter than snow.”

David’s case

If we consider David’s case when he wrote this Psalm, we shall see that he was very black. He had committed the horrible sin of adultery, which is so shameful a sin that we only can allude to it² with bated breath.³ This sin involves much unhappiness to others besides the persons who commit it; and it is a sin that, although the guilty ones may repent, cannot be undone. It is altogether a most foul and outrageous crime against God and man, and they who have committed it do indeed need to be washed.

¹ **I daresay** – it is very likely that.

² **allude to it** – mention without discussion at length.

³ **bated breath** – holding one’s breath in fear or anxiety, therefore, fear of saying something inappropriate.

But David's sin was all the greater because of the circumstances in which he was placed. He was like the owner of a great flock, who had no need to take his neighbor's one ewe lamb⁴ when he had so many of his own. The sin in his case was wholly inexcusable, for he so well knew *what a great evil it was*. He was a man who had taken delight in God's Law, meditating in it day and night (Psa 1:2). He was, therefore, familiar with the commandment that expressly forbid that sin, so that, when he sinned in this way, he sinned as one does who takes a draught⁵ of poison, not by mistake, but well knowing what will be the consequences of drinking it. It was willful wickedness on David's part for which there cannot be the slightest palliation.⁶

Nay, more! Not only did he know the nature of the sin, but he also knew the *sweetness of communion with God*, and must have had a clear sense of what it must have meant for him to lose it. His fellowship with the Most High had been so close that he was called "the man after God's own heart" (Act 13:22). How sweetly has he sung of his delight in the Lord! You know that in your happiest moment, when you want to praise the Lord with your whole heart, you cannot find any better expression than David has left you in his psalms. How horrible it is that the man who had been in the third heaven of fellowship with God should have sinned in this foul fashion!

Besides, David had received *many providential mercies* at the Lord's hands. He was but a shepherd lad, and God took him from feeding his father's flock and made him king over Israel. The Lord also delivered him out of the paw of the lion and out of the paw of the bear. [He] enabled him to overthrow and slay giant Goliath and to escape the malice of Saul when he hunted him as a partridge upon the mountains. The Lord preserved him from many perils, and at last firmly established him upon the throne. Yet, after all these deliverances and mercies, this man, so highly favored by God, fell into this gross sin.

Then, also, it was a further aggravation of David's sin that it was *committed against Uriah*. If you read through the lists of David's mighty men, you will find at the end the name of Uriah the Hittite. He had been with David when he was outlawed by Saul, he had accompanied his leader in his wanderings, and he had shared his perils and privations. So it was a shameful return⁷ on the part of the king when he stole away the wife of his faithful follower who was at that very time fighting against the king's enemies. Searching through the whole of Scripture, or at least through the Old Testament, I do not know where we have the record of a worse sin committed by one who yet was a true child of God. So David had good reason to pray to the Lord, "Wash me," for he was indeed black with a special and peculiar blackness.

⁴ **ewe lamb** – female sheep.

⁵ **draught** – large swallow.

⁶ **palliation** – cloaking or concealing by excuses and apologies.

⁷ **return** – paying back.

Our own case

But now, turning from David, let us consider *our own blackness in the sight of God*. Is there not, my dear friend, a peculiar blackness about your case as a sinner before God? I cannot picture it, but I ask you to call it to your remembrance now that your soul may be humbled because of it. Perhaps you are the child of Christian parents, or you were the subject of early religious impressions, or it may be that you have been in other ways specially favored by God. Yet you have sinned against Him, sinned against light and knowledge, sinned against a mother's tears, a father's prayers, and a pastor's admonitions and warnings. You were very ill once, and thought you were going to die; but the Lord spared your life and restored you to health and strength—yet you went back to your sin as the dog returns to his vomit or the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire. Possibly a sudden sense of guilt alarmed you, so that you could not enjoy your sin; yet you could not break away from it. You spent your money for that which was not bread and your labor for that which did not satisfy you; yet you went on wasting your substance with riotous living⁸ until you came to beggary (Isa 55:2), but even that did not wean you from your sin. In the house of God, you had many solemn warnings, and you went home again and again resolving to repent; yet your resolves soon melted away, like the morning cloud and the early dew, leaving you more hardened than ever.

I remember John B. Gough, at Exeter Hall, describing himself in his drinking days as seated upon a wild horse that was hurrying him to his destruction until a stronger hand than his own seized the reins, pulled the horse down upon its haunches,⁹ and rescued the reckless rider. It was a terrible picture, yet it was a faithful representation of the conversion of some of us. How we drove the spurs into that wild horse and urged it to yet greater speed in its mad career until it seemed as if we would even ride over that gracious Being Who was determined to save us! That was sin indeed, not merely against the dictates of an enlightened conscience and against the warnings that were being continually given to us, but it was what the apostle calls treading underfoot the Son of God, counting the blood of the covenant an unholy thing and doing despite¹⁰ unto the Spirit of grace (Heb 10:29).

Let me, beloved, before I turn away from this black leaf, urge you to study it diligently, and to try to comprehend the blackness of your heart and the depravity of your lives. The false peace that results from light thoughts of sin is the work of Satan. Get rid of it at once, if he has wrought it in you! Do not be afraid to look at your sins; do not shut your eyes to them. For you to hide your face from them may be your ruin, but for God to hide His face from them will be your salvation. Look at

⁸ **riotous** – unrestrained immorality; excessive partying.

⁹ **haunches** – the part of the body of four-legged animals, between the last ribs and the thighs.

¹⁰ **doing despite** – insulting.

your sins and meditate upon them until they even drive you to despair. “What!” says one, “until they drive me to despair?” Yes. I do not mean that despair that arises from unbelief, but that self-despair which is so near akin¹¹ to confidence in Christ. The more God enables you to see your emptiness, the more eager will you be to avail yourself of Christ’s fullness. I have always found that, as my trust in self went up, my trust in Christ went down; and as my trust in self went down, my trust in Christ went up. So I urge you to take an honest view of your own blackness of heart and life, for that will cause you to pray with David, “Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.” Weigh yourselves in the scales of the sanctuary, for they never err in the slightest degree. You need not exaggerate a single item of your guilt; for, *just as you are*, you will find far too much sin within you, if the Holy Spirit will enable you to see yourselves as you really are.

II. The Red Leaf

But now we must turn to the second leaf, the blood-red leaf of the wordless book, which brings to our remembrance the precious blood of Christ.

When the sinner cries, “Wash me,” there must be some fount of cleansing where he can be washed “whiter than snow.” So there is; but there is nothing but the crimson blood of Jesus that can wash out the crimson stain of sin. What is there about Jesus Christ that makes Him able to save all who come unto God by Him? This is a matter upon which Christians ought to meditate much and often. Try to understand, dear friends, the greatness of the atonement.¹² Live much under the shadow of the cross. Learn to—

*“View the flowing
Of the Savior’s precious blood,
By divine assurance knowing
He has made your peace with God.”*

Feel that Christ’s blood was shed for you, even for *you*. Never be satisfied until you have learned the mystery of the five wounds. Never be content until you are “able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge” (Eph 3:18-19).¹³

¹¹ **near akin** – similar or closely related.

¹² **atonement** – *literally* “at-one-ment”; the condition of being *at one* with another; theologically, atonement means reconciliation with God by removing or covering the guilt of sin; this was accomplished through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

¹³ For more on this, see *The Saints’ Knowledge of Christ’s Love*, by John Bunyan (1628-1688), available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

The greatness of Christ's Person

The Power of Jesus to cleanse from sin must lie, first, in the greatness of His person.¹⁴ It is not conceivable that the sufferings of a mere man, however holy or great he might have been, could have made atonement for the sins of the whole multitude of the Lord's chosen people. It was because Jesus Christ was one of the persons in the Divine Trinity; it was because the Son of Mary was none other than the Son of God; it was because He Who lived, labored, suffered, and died and was the great Creator, without Whom was not anything made that was made, that His blood has such efficacy¹⁵ that it can wash the blackest sinner so clean that they are "whiter than snow." The death of the best man who ever lived could not make an atonement even for his own sins, much less could it atone for the guilt of others. But when God Himself "took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men," and "humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Phi 2:7-8), no limit can be set to the value of the atonement that He made. We hold most firmly the doctrine of particular redemption—that Christ loved His Church, and gave Himself for it; but we do not hold the doctrine of the limited *value* of His precious blood. There can be no limit to Deity; there must be infinite value in the atonement that was offered by Him Who is divine. The only limit of the atonement is in its design, and that design was that Christ should give eternal life to as many as the Father has given Him. But in itself, the atonement is sufficient for the salvation of the whole world; and if the entire race of mankind could be brought to believe in Jesus, there is enough efficacy in His precious blood to cleanse everyone born of woman from every sin that all of them have ever committed.

The greatness of Christ's atonement

But the power of the cleansing blood of Jesus must also lie in the intense sufferings that He endured in making atonement for His people. Never was there another case like that of our precious Savior! In His merely physical sufferings, there may have been some who have endured as much as He did; for the human body is only capable of a certain amount of pain and agony. Others beside our Lord have reached that limit; but there was an element in His sufferings that was never present in any other case. The fact of His dying in the room, place, and stead of His people,¹⁶ the one great sacrifice for the whole of His redeemed, makes His death altogether unique, so that not even the noblest of the noble army of martyrs can share the glory with Him.

His mental sufferings also constituted a very vital part of the atonement, the sufferings of His soul were the very soul of His sufferings. If you can comprehend the bitterness of His betrayal by one who had been His follower and friend, of His deser-

¹⁴ See FGB 219, *The Person of Christ*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

¹⁵ **efficacy** – power to produce the desired result.

¹⁶ For more on this, see FGB 207, *Substitution*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

tion by all His disciples, [and] His arraignment¹⁷ for sedition¹⁸ and blasphemy before creatures whom He had Himself made; if you can realize what it was for Him, Who did no sin, to be made sin for us, and to have laid upon Him the iniquity of us all (Isa 53:6); if you can picture to yourself how He loathed sin and shrank from it, you can form some slight idea of what His pure nature must have suffered for our sakes. We do not shrink from sin as Christ did because we are accustomed to it; it was once the element in which we lived, moved, and had our being; but His holy nature shrank from evil as a sensitive plant recoils from the touch.

But the worst of His sufferings must have been when His Father's wrath was poured out upon Him as He bore what His people deserved to bear, but which now they will never have to bear.

*“The waves of swelling grief
Did o'er His bosom roll,
And mountains of almighty wrath
Lay heavy on His soul.”*

For His Father to have to hide His face from Him so that He cried in His agony, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Mat 27:46), must have been a veritable¹⁹ hell to Him. This was the tremendous draught of wrath that our Savior drank for us to its last dregs²⁰ so that our cup might not have one drop of wrath in it forever. It must have been a great atonement that was purchased at so great price.

We may think of the greatness of Christ's atonement in another way. It must have been a great atonement that has safely landed such multitudes of sinners in heaven, and that has saved so many great sinners and transformed them into such bright saints. It must be a great atonement that is yet to bring innumerable myriads²¹ into the unity of the faith and into the glory of the church of the Firstborn, which are written in heaven. It is so great an atonement, sinner, that if thou wilt trust to it, thou shalt be saved by it however many and great thy sins may have been.

Art thou afraid that the blood of Christ is not powerful enough to cleanse thee? Dost thou fear that His atonement cannot bear the weight of such a sinner as thou art? I heard, the other day, of a foolish woman at Plymouth who, for a long while, would not go over the Saltash Bridge because she did not think it was safe. When, at length, after seeing the enormous traffic that passed safely over the bridge, she was

¹⁷ **arraignment** – calling someone to court to face charges.

¹⁸ **sedition** – the attempt to overthrow an established government.

¹⁹ **veritable** – real; actual.

²⁰ **dregs** – particles or impurities that settle at the bottom of a wine barrel; therefore, this means that Christ drank the “entire cup” of God's wrath, that is, He experienced God's judgment upon sin to the fullest extent.

²¹ **innumerable myriads** – countless numbers.

induced²² to trust herself to it. She trembled greatly all the time and was not easy in her mind until she was off it. Of course, everybody laughed at her for thinking that such a ponderous²³ structure could not bear her little weight. There may be some sinner in this building, who is afraid that the great bridge that eternal mercy has constructed at infinite cost, across the gulf that separates us from God, is not strong enough to bear his weight. If so, let me assure him that across that bridge of Christ's atoning sacrifice millions of sinners, as vile and foul as he is, have safely passed. And the bridge has not even trembled beneath their weight, nor has any single part of it ever strained or displaced.

My poor fearful friend, your anxiety [that] the great bridge of mercy should not be able to bear your weight reminds me of the fable of the gnat that settled on the bull's ear and was then concerned lest the powerful beast should be incommoded²⁴ by his enormous weight.²⁵ It is well that you should have a vivid realization of the weight of your sins; but at the same time, you should also realize that Jesus Christ, by virtue of His great atonement, is not only able to bear the weight of your sins, but He can also carry—indeed, He has already carried upon His shoulders—the sins of all who shall believe in Him right to the end of time. He has borne them away into the land of forgetfulness, where they shall not be remembered or recovered forever. So efficacious is the blood of the everlasting covenant that even you, black as you are, may pray with David, “Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.”

III. The White Leaf

This brings me to the white leaf of the wordless book, which is just as full of instruction as either the black leaf or the red one: “Wash me, and I shall be *whiter than snow*” (Psa 51:7).

What a beautiful sight it was this morning, when we looked out and saw the ground all covered with snow! The trees were all robed in silver; yet it is almost an insult to the snow to compare it to silver, for silver at its brightest is not worthy to be compared with the marvelous splendor that was to be seen wherever the trees appeared adorned with beautiful festoons²⁶ above the earth that was robed in its pure white mantle. If we had taken a piece of what we call white paper and laid it down upon the surface of newly fallen snow, it would have seemed quite begrimed²⁷ in comparison with the spotless snow. This morning's scene at once called the text to

²² **induced** – persuaded.

²³ **ponderous** – massive.

²⁴ **incommoded** – inconvenienced; discomforted.

²⁵ **his enormous weight** – the gnat's “enormous” weight.

²⁶ **festoons** – a chain or garland of flowers, leaves, ribbons, drapery, etc. (suspended in a curve between two points).

²⁷ **begrimed** – made dirty; soiled.

my mind: “Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.” You, O black sinner, if you believe in Jesus, shall not only be washed in His precious blood until you become tolerably clean; but you shall be made white, yea, you shall be “whiter than snow.” When we have gazed upon the pure whiteness of the snow before it has become defiled, it has seemed as though there could be nothing whiter. I know that, when I have been among the Alps and have for hours looked upon the dazzling whiteness of the snow, I have been almost blinded by it. If the snow were to lie long upon the ground, and if the whole earth were to be covered with it, we should soon all be blind. The eyes of man have suffered with his soul through sin; and just as our soul would be unable to bear a sight of the unveiled purity of God, our eyes cannot endure to look upon the wondrous purity of the snow. Yet the sinner, black through sin, when brought under the cleansing power of the blood of Jesus, becomes “whiter than snow.”

Permanence of a blood-washed sinner

Now, how can a sinner be made “whiter than snow”? Well, first, *there is a permanence about the whiteness of a blood-washed sinner that there is not about the snow.* The snow that fell this morning was much of it anything but white this afternoon. Where the thaw had begun to work, it looked yellow even where no foot of man had trodden upon it. As for the snow in the streets of London, you know how soon its whiteness disappears. But there is no fear that the whiteness that God gives to a sinner will ever depart from him; the robe of Christ’s righteousness that is cast around him is permanently white.

*“This spotless robe the same appears
When ruin’d nature sinks in years;
No age can change its glorious hue,
The robe of Christ is ever new.”²⁸*

It is always “whiter than snow.” Some of you have to live in smoky, grimy London, but the smoke and the grime cannot discolor the spotless robe of Christ’s righteousness. In yourselves, you are stained with sin; but when you stand before God, clothed in the righteousness of Christ, the stains of sin are all gone. David in himself was black and foul when he prayed the prayer of our text; but clothed in the righteousness of Christ, he was white and clean. The believer in Christ is as pure in God’s sight at one time as he is at another. [God] does not look upon the varying purity of our sanctification as our ground of acceptance with Him; but He looks upon the matchless and immutable²⁹ purity of the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. He accepts us in Christ, and not because of what we are in ourselves. Hence, when we

²⁸ From the hymn, “Jesus Thy Blood and Righteousness,” by Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf, translated by John Wesley.

²⁹ **immutable** – unchanging.

are once “accepted in the Beloved” (Eph 1:6), we are permanently accepted—and being accepted in Him, we are “whiter than snow.”

Snow only a created whiteness

Further, *the whiteness of snow is, after all, only created whiteness*. It is something that God has made, yet it has not the purity that appertains to³⁰ God Himself; but the righteousness that God gives to the believer is a divine righteousness, as Paul says, He “hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2Co 5:21). And remember that this is true of the very sinner who before was so black that he had to cry to God, “Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.” There may be one who came into this building black as night through sin; but if he is enabled now, by grace, to trust in Jesus, His precious blood shall at once cleanse him so completely that he shall be “whiter than snow.” Justification is not a work of degrees...It is the work of a moment, and it is instantaneously complete. God’s great gift of eternal life is bestowed in a moment, and you may not be able to discern the exact moment when it is bestowed. Yet you may know even that; for, as soon as you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ...you have passed from death unto life; you are saved to all eternity. The act of faith is a very simple thing, but it is the most God-glorifying act that a man can perform. Though there is no merit in faith, yet faith is a most ennobling³¹ grace, and Christ puts a high honor upon it when He says, “Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace” (Luk 7:50). Christ puts the crown of salvation upon the head of faith, yet faith will never wear it herself, but lays it at the feet of Jesus and gives Him all the honor and glory.

Your case

There may be one in this place who is afraid to think that Christ will save him. My dear friend, do my Master the honor to believe that there are no depths of sin into which you may have gone that are beyond His reach. Believe that there is no sin that is too black to be washed away by the precious blood of Christ; for He has said, “All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men,” and “all manner of sin” must include yours (Mat 12:31). It is the very greatness of God’s mercy that sometimes staggers a sinner.

Let me use a homely simile³² to illustrate my meaning. Suppose you are sitting at your table, carving the joint³³ for dinner, and suppose your dog is under the table, hoping to get a bone or a piece of gristle for his portion. Now, if you were to set the dish with the whole joint on it down on the floor, he would probably be afraid to

³⁰ **appertains to** – relates to; concerns.

³¹ **ennobling** – investing with dignity or honor; imparting nobility to.

³² **homely simile** – plain figure of speech that expresses a resemblance between things of different kinds.

³³ **carving the joint** – a large piece of meat cooked whole or ready for cooking.

touch it lest he should get a cut of the whip.³⁴ He would know that a dog does not deserve such a dinner as that, and that is just your difficulty, poor sinner; you know that you do not deserve such grace as God delights to give. But the fact that it is of grace shuts out the question of merit altogether. “By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God” (Eph 2:8). God’s gifts are like Himself—immeasurably great.

Perhaps some of you think you would be content with crumbs or bones from God’s table. Well, if He were to give me a few crumbs or a little broken meat, I would be grateful for even that, but it would not satisfy me; but when He says to me, “Thou art My son, I have adopted thee into My family, and thou shalt go no more out forever”; I do not agree with you that it is too good to be true. It may be too good for you, but it is not too good for God: He gives as only He can give.

If I were in great need and obtained access to the Queen, and after laying my case before her, she said to me, “I feel a very deep interest in your case. Here is a penny for you,” I should be quite sure that I had not seen the Queen, but that some lady’s maid or servant had been making a fool of me. Oh, no! The Queen gives as Queen, and God gives as God; so that the greatness of His gift, instead of staggering us, should only assure us that it is genuine and that it comes from God. Richard Baxter³⁵ wisely said, “O Lord, it must be great mercy or no mercy, for little mercy is of no use to me!” So, sinner, go to the great God with your great sin, and ask for great grace that you may be washed in the great fountain filled with the blood of the great sacrifice. You shall have the great salvation that Christ has procured; and for it, you shall ascribe³⁶ great praise forever and ever to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God grant that it may be so, for Jesus’ sake! Amen.



³⁴ **cut of the whip** – a stinging blow with a whip or lash.

³⁵ **Richard Baxter** (1615-1691): Anglican Puritan preacher and theologian.

³⁶ **ascribe** – assign.