

Andrew Bonar:

'Have I not held my peace even of old, and thou fearest me not?

Isaiah 57:11

IT is, as we would say, an old custom of God's to keep silence when we would have expected Him to speak. Of old God's silence was meant to lead men to fear. We need not wonder that when Christ came He acted in the same way.

I. Christ's silence in receiving sinners.Â—The woman who washed His feet with her tears was a great sinner, a notorious sinner, so much so that Simon wondered He could let her touch Him. Christ did not speak about her sins. He allowed her in silence to come and weep at His feet. There was no 'casting up' of her old sins, no upbraiding. Without His speaking a word she knew she was forgiven. All this woman's sinsÂ—and they were manyÂ—He dropped into the deep, and welcomed her to Himself. Does He not do this to us? The fountain opened for sin washes sin away, but there is no voice in the waters. In silence the waters wash the soul. Christ 'held His peace,' and the woman 'feared' Him. Had He upbraided her, her heart might have been broken by sorrow, but would she have been drawn to Him? His silent gentleness drew her with the cords of love. Look at the woman we read of in the eighth of John. When Christ had heard what her accusers said He turned away, and stooping down, began to write on the ground as if to give a silent rebuke to them. When He lifted Himself up and looked at them, He did not say one upbraiding word to the woman, but a searching word to those round her. When He looked up the second time her accusers had all disappeared. Then He said to the woman, 'I do not pronounce condemnation on thee, but pardon. Go, and sin no more.' He did not rebuke her. He was there as the Sin-bearer, and in the very act of saying 'Go, and sin no more,' He was casting her sins into the depths of the sea, and giving her the power to sin no more. It was not because her sin was small. It was because it was such that He turned away His eyes from her, that He hastened to cast it into the depths of the sea. He took it on Himself and so put it out of sight of God and man. It is so with Him still. You may take your sin to Him at once, and He will not reproach you. He will not upbraid you. He will 'in no wise cast you out.' Some of you may think that God does not notice your sin. Do you not know that God is silent that He may give you time for repentance? There will be a day when He will 'speak out,' as there has been a time when He has kept silence.

II. Christ's silence in dealing with His disciples.Â—He did not hasten to speak. It is one thing that can be said of Christ, though it cannot be said of all His disciples, He was not censorious. How He kept silence is remarkable. How often His disciples did inconsistent, stupid things through ignorance, and the worst that Christ said to them was, 'O ye of little faith.' Sometimes He did not speak at all, but only by a sigh showed that He was vexed. We don't do much good by speaking too much about the faults of others. If we could learn Christ's solemn way of speaking a little, we would be much more likely to reach our end. He never talked to others about the faults of His disciples, and, when others tried to find fault with them, He was very quick to defend them. When they were blamed for plucking the ears of corn, He interposed and gave a defence for them. When they were blamed for not fasting, He gave good reasons why they should not. When 'they all forsook Him and fled', He was not offended in them. We never read of His upbraiding them. When Peter denied Him did He utter a word of reproach? He only gave Him a look that was silent, but how it touched Peter's soul! When He said to Him by the Sea of Galilee three times 'Lovest thou Me?' there was evidently an allusion to his thrice-repeated denial. Doubtless Peter longed to have Him speak of it, that he might have the opportunity of confessing his sin and being forgiven. But Christ never said more about it than that. When He speaks about His disciples in the seventeenth of John, you would think these men were faultless! He says they have kept His word, they have believed on Him, they are not of the world, even as He is not. He never speaks of their failures, He just speaks of their faith. O believer, what a Saviour you have! How He will hide all your sins, and speak only of your faith to the Father. It is not that He does not see wherein you fail, but it is just His exceeding loving-kindness. The very height of this is seen in His dealings with the beloved John. Never man had a sorer heart than John when he came back and stood at the Cross for some hours before his Master died. John, who used to lay his head on Christ's bosom, had forsaken Him and fled! But Christ has not a word of rebuke for him. He looks upon him, and before the end comes He says to him, 'There is My mother; she is your mother now. Take her home with you. I forgive you, I can trust you, John.' Such is grace. If it were not that we know all this, I don't know how we could take our places in glory before the throne. Our worst sin will be completely gone, and no holy angel will be more welcome than we will be!